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SCHOOL RELIGION: TEACHERS CALL FOR REVIEW OF 1944 EDUCATION ACT

In response to members' requests for guidance on plans by Muslim community organisations to establish their own schools, the National Union of Teachers has issued a discussion document on the theme, "Religious Education in a Multi-Faith Society". It points out that under the 1944 Education Act there is nothing to prevent the establishment of such schools. Attempts have already been made to do so in Bradford and Brent. The NUT is concerned that opposition to them might be interpreted as a denial of religious freedom to minority groups. But it "would not wish to encourage the setting up of separate Muslim schools, principally because of the likely divisive effect of this step, which would separate Muslim young people from their contemporaries".

The NUT document points out that, according to Islam, after puberty Muslim girls should not be allowed to mix freely with the opposite sex and that their sexual identity must be cherished and preserved. Orthodox Muslims believe that only separate, single-sex educational facilities will ensure this.

The Union asserts that this is the belief "of the more strict sections of the Muslim community, and it is from the conservative elements that requests for separate schools appear to have arisen. Some Muslims, and particularly those of the younger generation, see dangers inherent in completely separate schooling, which would make the adjustment to living in Western society more difficult, particularly for young women, and might 'ghettoise' the Muslim community . . .

"Further, most of the pupils at present in schools or entering them in the future, will probably stay in Britain to live and work, so it will be necessary for them to achieve some accommodation with the

society around them and its different values, whilst they grow up and leave school to live in the society outside. What is important is that their faith should be protected, preserved and respected, while they share with other students the same opportunities to participate on equal terms in school life, academic achievement and social life of the community".

The NUT suggests that "with appropriate and sympathetic support from the local authority, there is no reason why schools could not meet the reasonable demands of Muslim parents for the fostering of their children's faith and cultural practises, within the present arrangements in the state education system, without the need to establish separate schools". Local education authorities might wish to consider the retention of some single-sex schools in reorganisation schemes. However, "it might be argued that single-sex schools are not consistent with the comprehensive principle, nor with policies on equal opportunities for girls".

Several other concessions to religious minorities are proposed by the teachers' union.

"Arrangements should be made, in consultation with the parents, for appropriate food to be provided at lunchtime. Requirements regarding dress for girls, particularly with regard to physical education, could be catered for by providing single-sex games and swimming lessons in which the Muslim girls could participate.

"Local education authorities should respond sympathetically to requests for students to be absent on religious festival days . . . and permission should be given for those students who wish to attend the mosque on Fridays.

"A school's occasional closure day could be used to coincide with a religious festival when many

(continued on back page)

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NEWS

HOW ODD OF GOD

The IRA bomb explosion at Brighton, clearly aimed at wiping out the Prime Minister and many of her ministers, was followed by inevitable demands from MPs and others for more police powers and the restoration of capital punishment. Such elements on the far Right of the Conservative Party and beyond are not going to be deterred by the warning from David Harris, MP (Conservative, St Ives), that "it would be appalling bad taste, and worse, for any party or politician to look for a crude advantage from the dreadful events of Brighton". "Law-and-order" crusaders are not noted for their sensitivity, and the Grand Hotel outrage was a gift-wrapped presentation which they did not spurn.

Another predictable and tasteless reaction was the Christian churches' dedication of Sunday, 21 October as a National Day of Thanksgiving for limitation of the effects of the bomb. It is very likely that many people—including Christians—were, like the National Secular Society, appalled by this ludicrous exercise.

Barbara Smoker, president of the National Secular Society, appeared in the BBC Radio 4 programme, *Sunday*, with Harvey Thomas, organiser of the Conservative Party conference. He is a born-again Christian who was injured in the explosion. *The Freethinker* congratulates Mr Thomas on his escape from more serious injury or even death. But when he defended the idea of thanking God for sparing him—while allowing others to suffer ghastly injuries and death—Barbara Smoker carried out a more effective demolition job on his argument than the IRA bomb did on the Grand Hotel.

Before the broadcast, Miss Smoker issued a Press release on behalf of the NSS.

"If the supposed almighty is to be thanked for the narrow escape of the Prime Minister and most of her Cabinet, then—in all logic—he/she/it must be blamed for not having extended the same protection to those who were actually killed or injured in the explosion.

"Even if this god had prevented the bomb from going off altogether—an intervention that would appear to be more praiseworthy—this would still have raised the question of there having been no such divine intervention in other similar terrorist incidents. As it was, for the alleged creator to intervene on behalf of Mrs Thatcher but not of Mrs Tebbit smacks of caprice if not favouritism. And any such intervention seems to belie the Christian doctrine of human freewill. If, on the other hand,

AND NOTES

there was no divine intervention at all, what is the nation being asked to give thanks for, and to whom?"

Thanks and praise are of course due for the limitation of the bomb's effects. So let us thank and praise the Victorian architects and builders of Brighton's Grand Hotel.

The Baptist Home Mission Office managed to combine incongruity and pious plagiarism in a recent appeal for funds. The appeal was headed: "It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees — Dolores Ibárruri". It would be interesting to know how many of those who were inspired to cough up "to win our land for Jesus Christ" realised that Dolores Ibárruri was a famous Communist and atheist.

CHRISTIANS IN CONTROL

Councillor Gordon Collett, Conservative leader of Rugby Borough Council, and other religious bigots at the Town Hall have launched a crusade against homosexuals. Their first step has been to impose a ban on their employment by the council. Councillor Collett admitted: "They may have excellent qualifications, they may be the best applicants, but they will not get the job".

Councillor Collett makes no secret of the fact that such bigotry is rooted in Christian beliefs. He said: "This country's principles are based on Christianity, and in my view homosexuality does not conform to Christian principles. Homosexuals are responsible for the decline of Christian morality and we in Rugby have decided that this is enough".

There has been wide critical reaction to Rugby council's decision which a local Conservative newspaper described as "blind bigotry". John Daly, general secretary of the National Association of Local Government Officers, said that his union will fight to protect the rights of its members.

George Broadhead, secretary of the Gay Humanist Group whose national office is in the area, wrote to Jim Pawsey, Conservative MP for the Rugby-Kenilworth constituency: "Councillor Collett apparently feels that his Christian beliefs entitle him to discriminate in this way. We say that while he is entitled to his own beliefs, he has no right to enforce those beliefs on other people and that to do so is a gross abuse of his authority as leader of Rugby Council".

Mr Broadhead also published a letter in the

Coventry Evening Telegraph pointing out much of the prejudice and hostility against homosexuality originates from Christians.

"Regrettably it is not only Christian bigots like Councillor Gordon Collett . . . who direct their venom at gays. Anti-gay sentiments also come from more brilliant stars in the Christian galaxy such as Pope John Paul II who has made his antipathy to homosexuality very clear in a number of speeches. . .

"However, given the many hostile references contained in the Christian Bible, given the fact that homosexuals have often been persecuted by the Church along with other so-called heretics, it is hardly surprising that such religious-based antagonism still survives even in these generally more enlightened times".

Councillor Collett and his colleagues are not without their supporters. The *Sun* newspaper is backing their crusade. You can't get much lower than that.

THE VICTIMS

Darlene and Jeremy Cons are members of a small American-based sect known as Fill the Gap Mission, which has a group of members here in Britain. It advocates natural childbirth, and Mr Cons told the Brighton coroner that when his wife became pregnant they prayed "and the Lord spoke to us and told us to do it ourselves". They were assisted at the birth by their pastor whose only experience in helping at a birth was in the back of a taxi 30 years ago.

Shortly after the child—a girl—was born, she developed breathing trouble. Experts told the court that the problem was a minor one and could easily have been dealt with by a doctor, nurse or midwife.

Ten hours after the birth the couple sent for an ambulance. Ambulanceman Peter Hazletine said: "I was shown upstairs to a front bedroom where there was a group of people. They were muttering phrases I could not understand". The baby was taken to hospital where it was found that she had irreversible brain damage.

It was stated that Mrs Cons told the police that she was responsible for what had happened. "There was a fault in me that let the devil in", she said. Her husband said: "I think doctors do a good job, but they are there to keep the lost alive until they believe that Christ is their saviour".

The coroner ruled that the baby died through lack of attention at birth. Throughout the inquest the parents sat with bibles in their laps.

"Islamicising" the Sudan proceeds apace, the latest move being to make it illegal for men to be women's hairdressers. In future only females will be allowed to undertake this work although there are virtually no women trained in modern hairdressing in the country.

CHRISTIANS AND THE LAW

There has always been a close affinity between the compulsory pregnancy lobby and devotees of law and order both in Britain and the United States. The same strident voices that constantly denounce contraception, abortion and sex education are also raised in demands for stronger police measures against and tougher prison regimes for law breakers. But they are not themselves averse to bending or even breaking the law when it suits their purpose, whether by attacking family planning clinics in London and elsewhere during the 1920s or in the United States at the present time.

The current campaign of vandalism and terrorist attacks on American clinics started on Independence Day when the Washington offices of the National Abortion were fire-bombed.

Three days later the Planned Parenthood clinic in Annapolis, Maryland, was bombed, with damage of \$50,000 being caused. A member of an anti-abortion group known as the Army of God boasted of committing this offence. (Last year two members of the same organisation were convicted of kidnapping a doctor and his wife.)

The clinic has been in a state of siege since last November. Two anti-abortion activists, Norman Stone and Jerry Horn, set up the Valley Christian Centre and declared war on the staff and patients. They were prosecuted for trespass and harassment, but although they and a third defendant were found guilty they received only a short suspended sentence and the trial judge's encouragement to carry on as before. Judge Shaefer said: "I know that the defendants have made and are making an important contribution to the welfare of the community . . . the defendants are dedicated to the cause, the cause being the saving of the lives of unborn children. I am satisfied that it is a sincere dedication".

At a rally on the courtroom steps after the trial one of the defendants thanked the judge for his ruling and said that his comments were "almost a recommendation" to repeat the offence—which is exactly what they did.

Active workers in the family planning and abortion law reform movements are, for the most part, tough and resourceful. They have to be, particularly in the United States. But women who choose abortion are often under great stress and unable to cope with the vilification and harassment they are subjected to by religious zealots. One of the anti-abortionists' victims in Annapolis was a 17-year-old student. Afraid to face the Christian mob that assembled outside the clinic, she self-induced an abortion. Complications followed, and she eventually had to have a hysterectomy.

The clinic director had good cause to comment: "President Reagan spends a lot of time in the media

talking about human rights issues and terrorism in other parts of the world, but he has done nothing to stop the terrorism right here in America, and it's happening to women".

RELIGIOUS MUTILATION

Religious pressure groups which are constantly trumpeting their concern for children's protection and welfare are curiously silent about a cruel assault that is perpetrated on thousands of babies every year. But being a religious ritual, the circumcision of Jewish boys is unlikely to cause much concern in such quarters. Support by the Chief Rabbi or the *Jewish Chronicle* for some future "pro-life" or "pro-family" exercise might be put at risk.

Israel Berkovitch's recent article in the *Sunday Observer* is a chilling reminder of a gruesome operation that is carried out on babies by tradition-observing Jews. Mr Berkovitch had attended such a ceremony "and came away sickened and depressed by this primitive rite". His reaction is understandable. An hour after the operation he went in to see the baby who was "still shocked and crying, with the father trying to comfort the poor victim".

Mr Berkovitch recalls how as a boy he enquired if it was not cruel to cut a baby without an anaesthetic. He was informed that "the baby does not know where the pain is". But whether the baby knows where the pain is or not, "it clearly is a shocking, traumatic experience. Everyone can hear him scream as the religious official (known as the Mohel) starts his work. . .

"I do not know if a pain suppressant is used, but if so it is clearly ineffective. The baby screams as his flesh is cut. The baby is obviously hurt badly and in a sensitive area.

"If it were not 'sanctified' by being a religious rite, the humane, caring people present would denounce circumcision as a cruel mutilation of a helpless, innocent baby".

Mr Berkovitch asserts that witnessing the assault by a religious official on a defenceless baby "is a kind of sexual experience"; "the little 'congregation' smirks in the way that people do at risqué jokes". If that doesn't stir the Order of Christian Unity, Life and SPUC into action, nothing will.

Sutton Humanist Group is selling greeting cards to raise funds for the Humanist Housing Association. There is no reference to Christmas in the message. The cards have been printed at the Industrial Therapy Unit of Long Grove Hospital, Epsom. A descriptive leaflet is obtainable from George Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, telephone (01) 642 8796.

Britain a Christian Country? "Believers Delude Themselves"—Ludovic Kennedy

"For me Christianity has not been a light that failed but one that never even managed to splutter", said Ludovic Kennedy when he gave the 1984 Voltaire Memorial lecture, "An End to Belief?", in London last month. The famous broadcaster and author told his audience that "although from early childhood I suspected that the tales my mother and the headmaster and the local parson told me were at best speculation and at worst moonshine, it was many years before I found the courage even privately to reject them". Rejection of religious teachings brought a sense of liberation, "knowing that I would no longer have to pay lip-service to a lie. Even then it was several years more — because in those days it did not do to question the received wisdom — before I felt able to state publicly what I felt".

Ludovic Kennedy said that belief in the continuance of the Christian ascendancy dies hard.

"If one were to take the correspondence columns of *The Times* and *Telegraph* as one's guide, one would doubt that Christianity had suffered any kind of setback at all. Hardly a day goes by without letters in one or other of those two influential and widely-read papers assuring us that we are living in a Christian country which is upholding Christian values — though where Christian values differ from human values their authors never pause to explain. . .

"Also earlier this year, *The Times* published a mind-boggling correspondence as to whether or not the Christian god had deliberately struck York Minster with lightning; and last year, I seem to recall, there was an even madder correspondence as to whether this same god was a woman".

Mr Kennedy said that many believers delude themselves into thinking that Britain is still a Christian country. But the facts are otherwise.

"Statistics since the turn of the century show a continually dwindling number of baptisms, confirmations, communicants and clergy, and one has only to use one's own eyes to observe the number of city churches that have been turned into warehouses or dwelling-places or bingo halls, and the number of country churches where services have either ceased or are held but occasionally. Practising Christians in this country are in a minority, and a decreasing minority at that. Non-Christians therefore need not be on the defensive as they sometimes are".

Within the last hundred years there have been striking developments in human knowledge which have changed man's view both of the natural world and of himself. Until the beginning of this century there had always been new frontiers to cross and new lands to discover.

"But as European explorers made their way across

the continents and found no King-Kongs living in island fastnesses, the world was becoming increasingly knowable, increasingly tameable. Hand-in-hand with this mapping of desert and jungle, science was beginning to peel back many of the mysteries of the natural world: to explain things formerly inexplicable, to cure diseases hitherto thought incurable, to make discoveries in the fields of evolution, communication, transportation and consumer goods as to make for less hazardous living; and the more all this happened, the less hostile the outside world seemed, and the less hostile the outside world, the less reason for gods. Gods inhabit the unknown. Where there be dragons, there also be gods".

Another great advance was in the world of the mind. Religion as a legislator of morality and a check on man's licentiousness is a strong element of most religions, particularly Christianity.

"But the radical ideas of the school of Viennese psychiatrists who were active at the turn of the century persuaded man to look at his own nature in a rather different way. They taught that good and evil should be seen less in terms of black and white than in varying shades of grey, that our pasts condition our futures more than we know, that our motivations are often other than what they seem, and that while it might be wrong to sin against the Holy Ghost, it was a worse sin to act against one's own nature, to accept any orthodoxy whether temporal or spiritual which the heart rejected as false. And so the psychoanalyst came into his own as a new-style confessor, not like the old to absolve venial sins but to resolve psychological problems; not to forgive or redeem but to help people discover their own natures.

"One result of this was that the word 'sin' gradually fell into disuse. Today it has a curiously old-fashioned ring to it, so that the idea of abasing oneself in public by declaring, as for many years many of us had to, that we were miserable sinners who had erred and strayed in our ways like lost sheep and had no health in us, is seen to be not only demeaning but fatuous. If one is going to sin, one at least ought to do it with conviction".

Ludovic Kennedy said that mass air travel had contributed to the erosions of Christianity. It enabled the Westerner, who was either a Christian or brought up in the Christian tradition, to come into direct contact with people of other religious faiths.

"He has met people of those faiths, and of no faiths at all, who seem to be leading useful and contented lives, people who have never heard of John the Baptist or Mary Magdalene or Simon Stylites, and seem none the worse for it. And many have

come to realise that the claim of Christianity to be the one true faith is at least questionable; that other faiths and dogmas are for their followers equally true. . .

"For surely the only true and safe thing you can say about the concept of a god is that it is an idea that exists in the mind, and that our interpretations of it will be as different as there are minds to consider it".

Ludovic Kennedy referred to steps which the churches have taken to arrest the decline of Christianity. The ecumenical movement encouraged the denominations to share facilities and expenses, to hold joint services and endeavoured to show that there is little to choose between them.

"This is a far cry from the days, not so long ago, when members of each sect or denomination — strong in numbers, finances, and convictions — sniped at one another from a distance and would as soon have been seen in the town brothel as in one another's churches".

Despite the decline in adherence to the Christian faith, Ludovic Kennedy asserted that "the idea that any of the principal Churches are likely to go out of business in the foreseeable future is simply not credible. One reason, of course, is their immense

wealth — the legacy of bygone supremacy, tithes and standing orders wisely invested — which gives a totally false impression of their standing in Britain today. Without it, the Church of England would not be able to play the part it does in the national life; indeed, would make little more impact than that of any other minority activity. In addition, and despite continued contraction, there will always be a hard core of the faithful".

LUDOVIC KENNEDY

AN END TO BELIEF?

THE 1984 VOLTAIRE MEMORIAL
LECTURE

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A Crack of the Whip

MICHAEL DUANE

Always loud in her protestations about evil and suffering in the world, a recent statement by The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith revealed that the Roman Catholic Church is not concerned about the causes of poverty, injustice and ignorance that blight the lives of millions. But although the hierarchy is fiercely conservative and autocratic, there is ferment over the "Theology of Liberation" which is regarded by many as the most significant development in theology for many years.

Three days before Father Leonardo Boff (the Brazilian theologian held to be influential in the re-shaping of the Church's message in South America) was to be questioned by the Sacred Congregation, that body issued *Instruction* or the official title *Libertatis Nuntius*, the opening words of the original Latin version. The political and psychological effects of publishing such a document before the questions had even been asked, let alone answered, have been discussed elsewhere, so I will confine myself to making a brief summary of the main contents and looking at some of the implications.

A brief Introduction asserts that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of freedom (*Libertatis Nuntius*) and a force for liberation, "first and foremost liberation from the radical slavery of sin".

There follows 11 Sections which explore and pronounce upon certain issues.

The first theme accepts that the demand for liberation from oppression is valid and is rooted in the message of Revelation as interpreted by the Church; in the Old and New Testament message of liberation as freedom from the slavery of sin; in the meaning of Exodus, the liberation of the Jews from captivity; and in the message of the Sermon on the Mount — the renewal of man from within in the requirement of universal fraternal love.

The second theme revolves around the castigation of certain (unidentified) theologies of liberation as being not rooted in the word of God "correctly interpreted". The theology of liberation specifically attacked is condemned for departing from the faith of the Church. This theme is linked with criticisms of "marxist analysis" which, however shrewd it may appear to be, is false because it rests on tenets incompatible with Christianity, e.g. the atheism that lies at the core of marxist theory.

Marxism is denounced as a "subversion of the meaning of truth and violence" and its claim to be scientific is invalid because it denies the distinction between good and evil. Further, the theology of liberation and the practices that flow from it are a perversion of the Christian message, viz that love can conquer the primary structural law of capitalism

— the class struggle. Marxist analysis reduces the Church — “the gift of God and mystery of faith” — to an institution “subject to those laws which are supposed to govern the development of history”.

A third theme attacks the politicisation of the gospels and in particular the identification of “the poor” of the gospels with the proletariat of industrial society, and the casting of Christ in the role of revolutionary. Such politicisation reveals the theology of liberation as a theology of class, with only the oppressed entitled to a true point of view. The Eucharist thereby becomes a Eucharist of one class and not the symbol of universal unity, reconciliation and communion in love.

The final theme argues that the attacks contained in the previous themes are not to be taken as approval of those who oppress the poor, who profit from them or who remain indifferent to their misery. The Church “hears the cry for justice and intends to respond to it with all her might”. One might here legitimately ask for how long the Church “intends” to respond. During the two thousand years or so of the Church’s history the poor have been oppressed without respite, except, more recently, in those few countries where socialism has not been perverted by minority interests into fascism under another name. In support of this “intention” *Instruction* reiterates the programmes for reform stated in those official publications which deal with social injustice and oppression.

Structures which “conceal poverty and which are themselves forms of violence” have to be reformed, but we must be clear that the roots of these structures lie in “the hearts of man”. One has to agree that “the overthrow by means of revolutionary violence of structures which generate violence is not *ipso facto* the beginning of a just regime”, but one does not have to agree with the implication of this statement that revolution must of necessity itself become oppressive.

Of course the roots of structures lie “in the hearts of men” because they express and facilitate the will of those who make them. But they also induct into those who live and work in them the habits and attitudes that led to their foundation in the first place. A child does not design or build a church or school, but compulsory attendance, together with the beliefs and attitudes that are taught there, build into the child the habits of thought, values and behaviour that suit the intentions of the founders of those places. Hence the claim attributed to the Jesuits: “Give me a child until he is seven, then you may do with him what you will”.

There is a primary difficulty in getting to grips with the meaning and intention of *Instruction*. Latin is a dead language in that it belongs to a culture that has almost entirely disappeared. Only with the most artificial circumlocutions and great vagueness can it attempt to render current issues. A translation,

if it is not to be a wooden and crude rendering of each phrase, has to depart substantially from the text to get the wider meanings. Now while this may be justified, as in Rieu’s brilliant translation of *The Odyssey*, by the overall effect of a work of art, it cannot be justified in a theological or philosophical treatise where precision of language must be the central criterion if meaning is to be accurately conveyed.

A good theological treatise, like a good philosophical paper, sets out its terms and defines them. Within the limitations of their period the Schoolmen attempted to do this. Each assertion had to be assented to or challenged by the opponent until agreement was reached before the next step could be undertaken. Sadly *Instructions* is a tatty parody of this method. No “Section” depends on the argument of the preceding “Section”. Assertion and reason are not woven together to make a convincing whole.

Within the first two paragraphs we have “The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of freedom and a force for liberation”. It then labels “liberation” as “liberation from the radical slavery of sin”. What is “radical slavery”? If sin is “at the root” of man’s being are we to presuppose a Creator with something of a sado-masochistic streak? Perhaps that is why the Church has been so persistently and determinedly opposed to psychoanalysis?

There is another substantial difficulty that makes questionable this most recent document as well as the other official pronouncements of the Church. Christ, we are told, was a man. His message appeals directly to the everyday experience of his listeners and to their intuitive response. But the Church is a massive bureaucracy, packed with specialist committees of experts who examine, discuss and pronounce on whatever is drawn to their attention. The language they use — quite apart from its social relevance — bears no resemblance to that of Christ, and the Church has ordained that only what has been “correctly”, i.e. officially, interpreted is the truth.

In effect the vast bulk of Catholics (either in South America or in the industrialised conurbations of Europe and North America) are peasants in terms of understanding official handouts. They are therefore led by the nose, principally through the fear that has been instilled into them by their “religious” upbringing. It is no accident that in London only Church schools are permitted to retain corporal punishment.

There is no close examination of what is meant by “fraternal love”; no understanding that, in both the sexual and the community manifestations, love is a direct evolutionary imperative resting on the fact that among creatures that are faster, better armed and better equipped for individual survival, man is a frail and incompetent individual whose very existence depends wholly, not only on a stable environ-

ment, but on the continuous and active care of fellow humans. Love is not an invention of Christ's even though his intuition revealed its importance. "If ye love not one another, ye shall perish" — an observation, not a command.

Rendered into non-philosophical/theological language, the message of *Instruction* is: *Man is evil because evil is of his very nature. Sin is sin and cannot be explained away or the sinner made less responsible by any sociological analysis of society, nor (by implication) by any psychoanalysis of the influences shaping his character in childhood. The Church is the final authority on matters of good and evil and on matters of belief. Its authority is not to be questioned nor its officials attacked or categorised as part of the oppressive class in a capitalist system.*

Time and again *Instruction* refers to official documents setting out the Church's attitude on issues of grave social and moral concern, as in unemployment and the right to work, abortion or the right to life, the scandal of the discrepancy between rich and poor individuals and nations, and the obscene expenditure on armaments in a hungry world. One can only applaud such sentiments, but one is forced to ask "What have you the Church, actually done about it? If you have not been able to influence the policies of those governments with whom you are so closely identified as 'Church and State', what, of your vast wealth in estates, buildings, art treasures and investments, have you sold and given to the poor?" More recent events, including what looks inescapably like the *murder* of the last Pope, the scandalous activities of P2 (Masonic Lodge) and the role of the Mafia in the Holy City, suggest that the Vatican is sited right in the middle of the Augean stables.

If one tried to read *Instruction* — the style of which is astonishingly like that of the many turgid pamphlets published by the Communist Party of Great Britain between the wars — and if one can wipe from one's memory the Church's long history of political interference with democracy; its persistent attacks on intellectual activity from Galileo to Freud; the massive discrepancy between the doctrine of love and poverty and the practice of intolerance and affluence; then one might be able to see *Instruction* as a cautious warning to members of the Church not to lose the spiritual baby with the revolutionary bathwater.

The crucial fact is that the Church is a club which makes its own rules. So long as you obey the rules, at least in public, you are a member and receive whatever spiritual and moral sustenance the Church can give you. If you do not obey, or if you publicly question the authority of the Church then you are punished or expelled — as from any club. Most clubs, however, have some democratic control by the members over the officials: the rules have to receive at least the approval of the majority, by vote. Not so in the Church. Its hierarchy has abrogated to itself

the power to make dogma, to interpret the bible in its own way and to punish or expel the members if it chooses. It is fascist in the real meaning of that word because not only is it undemocratic in theory as well as in action but it demands from its members the total subservience that is a denial of humanity.

Unfortunately its members number many good pastors and people whose lives are an exemplar of the doctrine of fraternal love and material poverty. In effect they act, however unwittingly, as a smoke-screen to the leather-faced prelates who actually wield power in the establishment. Without those good people the real character and function of the Church would long ago have been exposed.

Superstitions

GOVIND N. DEODHEKAR

Although we live in an age of remarkable technological and scientific achievement, superstition flourishes in most parts of the world. The writer of this article gives an account of irrational practices — comic, bizarre and tragic — which he encountered during a recent visit to India.

During my stay in Bombay earlier this year a number of ghastly accidents took place in different parts of India. Country coaches shot over a parapet and fell into a stream or canal below, killing between 40 and 50 people in each case. These tragedies occurred with shocking regularity every eight or ten days. Discussing the matter with a friend I was told confidently that he was not surprised. It was predicted when the almanac makers named this "The Year of Blood".

Astrology, palmistry and other superstitious beliefs continue to influence large numbers of Indians, particularly the Hindus. These superstitions are being reinforced by gullible Westerners who are searching for the occult, satiated by the affluence brought to them by modern science. It is interesting to note that not only the illiterate, but a substantial section of educated Hindus cling to these ideas. The achievements of a skilled trickster who "materialises" gold rings out of thin air by sleight of hand impresses them more than the advances of modern science.

I can only offer one explanation for the tenacity with which educated Hindus hold on to irrational and superstitious beliefs. Proud as they are of their ancient civilisation, it is galling that nearly all the remarkable advances of modern science have been achieved by Western scientists. They are therefore ready to believe that there is some hidden knowledge of which India or the Hindus are the repository.

Since the occult cannot be demonstrated or tested by experiment, there is plenty of room for intuition, acts of faith, charlatany and deception.

But the Hindus cannot put the clock back or undo history. They have to be content with the fact that a fair number of Indians have been active in the scientific world in the 20th century, and that the Indian numerals which replaced the Roman ones were a most useful contribution to the progress of modern science. From this point on, they can regard science as the achievement of all humanity, put aside past inadequacies and look forward to the common future.

Just as dry-as-dust republicanism does not appeal to the British mind, which insists on a bit of pomp and ritual, so the Hindu mind requires some ritual and poetry in life. Muhoort, or auspicious time, is a constantly recurring concept, particularly for embarking on serious ventures such as marriage or laying the foundation stone of a building. Even those who are not entirely superstitious fall in line with the idea of "erring on the safer side". The argument runs thus: in a way of course any time is good enough, but why not check the position of Saturn or Venus and adjust the actual time of the ceremony or the initiation of a project.

If the Hindus must have an "auspicious time", they might retain the poetic idea that the actual time the sun sets is a "good" time. After all, it takes us back to the ancient days when our caravans descended on the Indus, and our entire bank balance returned home, on hoof, at sunset. This would dispense with the need for priests and astrologers. But as it would provide only one "good" time during the day, perhaps they should accept the triple unity of the hour, the minute and the second hand as a "good" time. This would correspond to the modern age of the machine and offer 24 auspicious moments each day.

Before I am shot down by rationalists, let me emphasize that this triple unity is a concession to the need for ritual for superstitious Hindus, and the cow-come-home time is only poetry.

Astrology plays hardly any role in the life of India's Muslims. The concept of Towheed (the oneness of God) so concentrates their minds on the power of God that Mars or Saturn could hardly make any impression on them. Even so, the idea of seeking intercession through the saints has a powerful influence on Muslims. Superstitious though this is to the rationalist, it is also heresy in the eyes of the really orthodox who argue that only God has the power of performing miracles. Most shrines of Muslim saints are those of Sufi teachers who softened the rigours of Islam by preaching a religion of devotion and ecstasy somewhat akin to the Bhakti (devotion) schools among Hindus.

While the Catholic Church declares in Rome who is elevated to sainthood, Muslim saints grow organic-

ally. The followers must have enough resources to put up a shrine. Tales of wishes granted and miracles performed spread and grow among the credulous. Hindus, being the original ecumenicals and willing to see the divine in all creation, also flock to Muslim shrines, although there is no reciprocity.

At the centre of the shrine is the grave, covered by a characteristic green Islamic shroud. For the truly superstitious it is the green tomb that matters, not the saintliness or otherwise of the occupant.

Although Mars and Saturn hold no terrors for Muslims, jinns and devils are another matter, being mentioned in all the revelations accepted by Muslims. Women especially will take no chances; they turn their prayer-mats upside down after prayers in case devils start dancing on them.

With the current fashion for astrology and the zodiacal zoo, the very Indian speciality of the Evil Eye is less commonly heard of these days. But the idea still appeals to the poetic imagination — so beautiful and faultless is my darling child or lady-love that I fear someone's Evil Eye is bound to cause some harm to it or her. Modern film songs (though written usually by Left-wing or Communist-inclined Muslims) continue to indulge in this compliment to the beloved. Little heed is given to the monstrous idea behind the concept of the Evil Eye. It is not the owner of the eye who is evil or nasty; in fact he may be a perfectly kind and considerate person. But somehow or other he or she is cursed with an eye which when it falls on a good object is sure to damage it. Cows running dry prematurely, a calf dying or a child suffering from tummy-ache surely have been observed by the Evil Eye. Rumour and fear point the finger at some harmless person who is then feared by others.

There is a parallel in this, of course, to the medieval European fear of old women suspected to be witches. To deceive the Evil Eye, a blemish in the form of a black spot is added to the child's face. This is rather like the Roman Catholic churches in Malta, hoping to confuse the Devil when he returns to earth, by having two clock towers on the church — only one showing the correct time!

One of the quaintest and most gruesome superstitions was reported recently and deserves being recorded. The story concerns a small gypsy tribe called Phasepardhi (hunters with the noose) who roam in Western India and used to make a living by trapping birds. Two brothers had a row and were joined by their respective wives. The older brother's wife, enraged by the intervention of her younger sister-in-law, decided to teach her a lesson, once for all. So she collected her own urine in her palm and threw it over the other woman. It transpires that the Phasepardhis believe that a person who has been humiliated and defiled in such a manner must

(continued on page 175)

BOOKS

ALAN TURING: THE ENIGMA, by Andrew Hodges.
Burnett Books, £18

If the code-breaking carried out at Bletchley Park during the war was as vital to our war effort as is now, more than 40 years later, being suggested, then Alan Turing is one of our great unsung war heroes — his importance comparable to a Mountbatten or even a Montgomery. He is also an important figure in modern mathematics and a founding father of the modern computer. At the same time, he was an open atheist, and an acknowledged homosexual, long before being gay was publicly acceptable, and if this were not enough, he was deeply eccentric and unworldly. It did not occur to him to conceal his views or his sexual tendency, unlike his smoother and more sophisticated post-Bloomsbury Cambridge contemporaries. Their homosexual proclivities were discreetly concealed except among their nearest and dearest. Turing, however, was all his life an awkward outsider who never learned how to adjust to the demands of convention.

His genius was recognised early. Even his nursery school teacher remarked on it. But, being “too clever by half” is no sort of recommendation to the English Establishment. In consequence, he had the usual sort of miserable public school career at Sherborne that we are familiar with from countless inter-war biographies. His headmaster wrote of him: “He should have more *esprit de corps*” — something Turing was never able to acquire. His headmaster also observed: “If he is to be solely a *Scientific Specialist*, he is wasting his time at a public school”. Which was probably true, and an indictment of the public school system.

By comparison, Cambridge was sweetness and light. His eccentricity was well enough tolerated there and his genius rewarded with a King's Fellowship. But only during the war were the rules cast aside and space created in which he could flourish and use his mind and talents to the full. The national emergency was sufficiently desperate to overlook his oddness in return for his genius. But once the crisis was over, there was really no proper place for him. He was involved in a homosexual scandal, had to appear in court, was advised to plead guilty, received very dubious “hormone therapy”. (Who were the doctors who were prepared to administer this quackery? They are not named and should be.) Soon after, Alan Turing committed suicide.

Once his homosexuality was known, he was regarded with the greatest suspicion. To be fair to the authorities, it was perhaps less his gayness than his rather unsavoury habit of picking up young men in public places that was so damaging to his reputation. Burgess and Maclean had betrayed their

FREETHINKER

country. Perhaps Turing would too. In fact, he was astonishingly apolitical, and, politically speaking, honourable to a degree. But he knew too much, having worked in the most secret section of the war effort. Even now, probably only little of what really went on at Bletchley Park has been released. A US Senate Committee around this time concluded its investigation with the words: “Indulgence in acts of sex perversion weakens the moral fibre of an individual to a degree that he is not suitable for a position of responsibility”.

This was written in 1950, not 1850. We have come a long way since then. One lesson of this fascinating biography is that tolerance actually pays and is efficient. If Turing had not been driven to suicide, his genius might have served his country in peace as well as in war.

About one quarter of this book can be read with profit only by mathematicians and logicians. But this should deter no one. The other three quarters constitute a fascinating piece of social and intellectual history, and draws a sympathetic portrait of a remarkable man, whose religious scepticism was an integral part of his character and intellect.

MADELEINE SIMMS

THE BROTHERHOOD, by Stephen Knight. Granada.
£8.95

In the prologue to his fascinating, but ultimately somewhat disappointing, book, Stephen Knight states that “Freemasonry . . . is a secret society that, originating in Britain, now has independent offshoots in most of the non-Communist world”. He claims that his book is neither a commendation nor a condemnation of Freemasonry but says that, as a journalist, he has thought of his investigation into the subject as “an extended piece of journalism”. He concentrates on the place of Freemasonry in modern society and on the influence which he suggests it may have, usually in high places, but finds it difficult to go deeply into the precise nature of the “craft”.

It is for this reason that the book may leave the reader with some feelings of disappointment but the author is not at fault. It lies in the very fact of the secrecy that surrounds the whole subject. Thus, even when speaking of the way in which the book ultimately came to see the light, Mr Knight relates how a letter was written to a newspaper that had serialised his first book:

“The London *Evening News* . . . received a letter from the Freemason director of a chain of book-

REVIEWS

shops, stating that he was so enraged by evidence I had produced linking Freemasons to the Jack the Ripper case that not only would he physically attack me if we should ever meet (referring to me as 'this specimen'), he would never stock the book and would do all in his power to wreck its distribution to shops not owned by him. To some extent he succeeded. . . . Despite continuing demand for the book . . . it cannot be found in branches of this particular chain. Many Freemason managers of other bookshops refuse point-blank to stock it".

When *The Brotherhood* had been accepted for publication and the author had received an appropriate advance in respect of royalties, the firm that had taken it decided that it would not proceed with the publication. The reasons, which were personal, may not have been entirely unworthy. But they indicate the power that Freemasonry can exert.

The book begins with some historical details but the difficulty here is that, without much more research than the author was able to undertake — and he is frank about this — it is extremely difficult to give a satisfactory history of Freemasonry on even a brief scale. A reviewer finds himself in an awkward position as a result. From the information that is available in public works of reference — and Freemasons see to it that not a great deal is to be found — it is impossible to judge the accuracy or otherwise of what is said in *The Brotherhood*. Fortunately, where it is possible to check, even roughly, the account in its pages fits what is to be found elsewhere. However, while the question must always remain why such a society came into existence, a society that purports to have no political aims and that, at different times, appears to put itself forward as a religious or an expressly non-religious organisation, the book is of considerable value for the way in which it looks at the influence of Freemasonry today.

The author admits readily that Freemasonry is responsible for a great deal of good. The amounts given to charities, while admittedly and understandably most of these are masonic charities, are impressive. Yet, it is hard to resist the conclusion that, important as are the good works and deeds of masonic lodges, there are other objects that loom just as large, or even larger, in the minds of those that join. The book contains many passages that underline this. Thus: "As the recruiting ground for Freemasons is primarily the not directly productive middle and professional classes, it is clear that a very high proportion of these people occupying key roles in British society — lawyers, civil servants, bank

managers and so on — are Freemasons. In many fields nowadays the disadvantages of being left out of the club are perceived as being too serious for a great many people to contemplate, whatever they may feel personally about the morality of joining a secret society, or about the misty tenets of speculative Freemasonry".

The book contains many quotations, most — but not all — necessarily anonymous, indicating beyond doubt the strength of masonic membership in the law, the police, the City of London and some political areas. Lest it may be thought that Freemasonry has a predominantly conservative tinge, it has to be stated that, even if it appeals primarily to the "establishment" mind, there are masonic connections on what could be called the other political side. Thus, Labour ministers, such as Attlee and Lord Gardiner, are said to have been members of the craft; Freemasonry is stated to be very strong among French socialists and President Mitterand's success in the 1981 election is thought by some to owe much to influential Freemasons. The impressive list of American presidents who were Freemasons includes, as might be expected, a large number with close big business connections. Still, "liberal" Americans, such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Truman and the recent candidates Adlai Stevenson and Hubert Humphrey, are also in the list. Such figures from other fields as Garibaldi and Winston Churchill were Freemasons, and the list of names in the highest ranks of British society, up to the throne itself (although here there are strange inconsistencies), is very long. Because the rules of the craft do not permit women to be members, neither the present Queen nor the Prime Minister can belong.

There are chapters at the end of the book which indicate that there is strong, if not necessarily conclusive, evidence of masonic connections with both Fascist and Communist organisations in other countries. It is contended that the Russian KGB has made consistent use of Freemasonry as a means of weakening the political structure in other countries, but possibly this particular line of suggestion would have to be supported by much more thorough research than is likely to be possible. On a lower level, what the book has to say about the police in particular is disturbing enough to shake all but the most complacent. In fact, it could well be that the publication of *The Brotherhood* has contributed to the general sense of disquiet about the influence of Freemasonry that has become apparent in the last few weeks. A positive result has been the advice given at a high level in the Metropolitan Police to the effect that membership of a masonic lodge is inconsistent with the best interests of the public service. It is now gradually becoming accepted far more widely than before that membership of a secret society with all the possibilities of improper influence and even blatant corruption, should be

severely restricted.

What the book does not do is to make it clear why grown men, not otherwise deficient in intelligence, should wish to belong to an organisation which seems at times childish rather than anything else. It could be that there is, in many men, a deep-seated love of the mumbo-jumbo, which sometimes shows itself in religious ritual and sometimes in Freemasonry (at times, both simultaneously). Kipling, not mentioned by Stephen Knight, was a Freemason, and his love of societies and mysterious brotherhoods is well known, strange though it be in a great writer. When one learns of masonic oaths and rituals, it is the "Oth of Deth" (*sic*) sworn by Richmal Crompton's William that comes to mind. Fortunately, William and his young friends did not have it in their power to appoint members of their gang to high places in the public service or private enterprise.

T. F. EVANS

The Autumn issue of the "New Humanist" is now available (£1, Rationalist Press Association, 88 Islington High Street, London N1). It contains an exclusive interview with Lord Houghton, recounting his reasons for opposing the Video Recordings Bill. Two well-known philosophers, A. J. Ayer and Antony Flew, provide book reviews on philosophical topics—as does the distinguished humanist, H. J. Blackham. The Channel Four commissioning editor for religion and Northern Ireland, John Ranelagh, writes about "Objectivity in Broadcasting". There are articles on the Warnock Report and Religious Education in London, and essays on "The Future of Humanism" and "Humanism and Literary Theory Today". Also included is comment on the historicity of Jesus, the pronouncements of Bishop Jenkins, and the "faith" of Don Cupitt.

R. J. CONDON

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Stewart Headlam—

This month marks the 60th anniversary of the death of Stewart Headlam (1847-1924), the eccentric Anglican curate who combined a love of High Church ritual with a passion for free speech, radical reform and secular State education. He befriended music hall artists, Charles Bradlaugh and other secularists, and stood bail for Oscar Wilde.

"Newman wondered if it were wise for the masses to be taught the Nicene Creed; Headlam taught the Athanasian Creed to working-class atheists in Charles Bradlaugh's Hall of Science."—J. R. Orens.

For more than a century religious apologists have conjured up chimerical figures in the hope of drawing the claws of militant unbelief: they began with Christian freethinkers and went on to Christian secularists, Christian rationalists, and in latter years have pulled Christian humanists and even Christian atheists and agnostics out of the hat. Most of these chimeras were, of course, figments of the imagination, but the odd Christian humanist, nay, secularist, really has existed, if only in the personality of Stewart Duckworth Headlam.

Headlam was born in 1847, educated at Wadhurst, Eton and Cambridge (Trinity College), was ordained in the Church of England in 1870 and thereafter dressed like a Nonconformist minister and conducted services like a Catholic priest. He virtually appointed himself chaplain-cum-missionary to the National Secular Society. Something like three generations of freethinkers disagreed with him on theology and applauded him to the skies on almost everything else. He was one of the great figures in British social reform whom George Bernard Shaw called "the Knight of the Unrepresented".

Headlam was cultured, charming, eccentric and intractably stubborn. He had a gentle, humorous, childlike nature that revolted against cruelty and exploitation. His efforts to improve the lot of working men knew no limit of convenience or comfort; his chivalry towards women and his kindness to children were boundless. Unlike most Anglican curates he was a high ritualist in theology, an incorruptible radical in politics, and an unflinching civil libertarian who believed in freedom of speech—not least for atheists.

Headlam ran into members of the National Secular Society while he was curate of St John's, Drury Lane (1870-73) and St Matthew's, Bethnal Green (1873-77). Instead of treating these predominantly working-class radicals with contempt, he befriended their "chief", Charles Bradlaugh, and later Annie Besant, and asked leave to address free-

Ritualist, Radical, Libertarian

NIGEL H. SINNOTT

thought gatherings at the famous Hall of Science in Old Street, London. He was given his wish and obviously enjoyed every opportunity: his audiences argued with him, but they liked his style. In a characteristic manner he commented: "How much nearer to the Kingdom of Heaven are these men in the Hall of Science than the followers of Moody and Sankey". And of the president of the NSS he remarked: "Bradlaugh may not know God, but God knows Bradlaugh." Like the late Mae West (another ardent anti-puritan), he left a rich fund of throw-away lines. "We Christians," he declared in *The Freethinker* (11 January 1891), "owe much to the National Secular Society in the past; it has helped us overthrow many idols and sweep away much rubbish."

On 7 October 1877 Headlam lectured to the (radical) Commonwealth Club on "Theatres and Music-Halls"—and in very approving tones. He naively lent his notes to a member of the audience and the text eventually appeared in the newspaper *Era*. This was an age whose "respectable" guardians regarded acting and dancing on the stage as immoral occupations, so in January of the following year Headlam was removed from his curacy at Bethnal Green. Bradlaugh and the freethinkers immediately organised a testimonial for him—they remembered his support for Bradlaugh and Annie Besant when they had been prosecuted for republishing (1877) Charles Knowlton's birth-control pamphlet, *Fruits of Philosophy*.

Headlam's removal from his curacy did nothing to dampen his courage. He formed the Church and Stage Guild (May 1879-1909) which helped to remove the social stigma attached to music-hall artists. Earlier (1877) he had founded the Guild of St Matthew (known flippantly as "the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Atheists") whose objects included social change, reform of the Church of England, and overcoming secularist "prejudices" to that Church's sacraments and doctrines. For about twelve years Headlam was editor of the *Church Reformer* (heavily subsidised from his own pocket). He was an active member of the National Association for the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, and served on appeal committees or at protest meetings during blasphemy proceedings against G. W. Foote, Harry Boulter and J. W. Gott — in the last case despite failing health.

Stewart Headlam showed how not to succeed in another curacy (St Michael's, Shoreditch) when he accepted the post of chairman of the Hall of Science School Committee so that its classes could secure a government grant. He was also a member of Charles Bradlaugh's election committee and when Bradlaugh

was excluded from the House of Commons and locked in the clock (St Stephen's) tower Headlam sent a telegram of sympathy in the name of "Jesus Christ, the Emancipator".

Headlam was, furthermore, a tireless enthusiast for the spread of learning among working people. He was a member of the London School Board from 1888 to 1904 and later served for Bethnal Green on various education bodies responsible to London County Council. Dr Scott Lidgett of the LCC Education Committee spoke of Headlam's work as "an imperishable monument in the history of London education". Headlam ended as he began—unlike most clerical spokesmen—an ardent and indefatigable advocate of secular education in state schools. Needless to add he was on the general council of the Secular Education League.

In 1895 one of the great scandals of the nineteenth century broke and culminated in the trial of Oscar Wilde. Headlam's friend Selwyn Image was approached about standing security for Wilde, but Image lacked sufficient funds. The ever generous Headlam stuck his neck out and went down in history as the man who sheltered and stood bail for Oscar Wilde. "I lost a housemaid," he recalled, "who fled at once. I was also threatened with stoning in Upper Bedford Place." Headlam's motto was "Till we have built Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land"—there were waggish mutterings about Gomorrah, if not Sodom, first. When Wilde was finally discharged from prison, Headlam, true to his promises, was there to collect him. Headlam's sympathy was not shallow notoriety seeking, for it has been suggested that Headlam's short-lived marriage foundered because his wife was probably a lesbian.

If Stewart Headlam was a staunch friend of freethinkers, it would equally be unfair to play down his deep personal religious convictions, which were very high Anglican. One of the jokes he used to tell, with impish glee, was about the greeting of the incumbent of a church where—rather gingerly—he had been invited to preach: "I am very glad to welcome you here, my dear Headlam, but I do implore you to avoid two subjects in your sermon. I do beg you not to talk about Bradlaugh or Our Lady".

In 1904 an anonymous complaint was made to the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline about Headlam's conduct at a choral communion at All Souls, St Margaret's-on-Thames. Headlam of course demanded the right to cross examine the complainant. When this was denied he defended himself in characteristic style:

"The writer says he could not hear the words of my private prayers, neither could I hear his. . .

Afterwards the writer says, 'I appeared to kiss the Holy Table'. I am sorry I only 'appeared' to kiss it, for I really did kiss it. A beautiful action on the part of a priest who loves the altar."

Then he went over to the offensive:

"Whether I was right in leaving out the two long exhortations or in making the sign of the cross in the air, or in kissing the altar, are matters of infinitesimal importance compared with the facts that in the London diocese and the Canterbury province so many little children have no clean beds to sleep in, so many of our dearly beloved brethren have not healthy homes to live in, so many are out of work, so many are overworked, so many are underpaid."

His religious vision transcended the grimy, repressive and poor conditions with which he had to contend: John Orens suggests it might be summed up in Headlam's own interpretation of the Nicene creed, *Credo in vitam venturi saeculi* (I believe in the life of the age to come).

Headlam's publications were numerous. They include *Lessons from the Cross*, *The Meaning of the Mass*, *Priestcraft and Progress*, *The Ballet: theory of theatrical dancing*, *The Place of the Bible in Secular Education*, and *The Socialist's Church*—in addition to the pages of the *Church Reformer* and contributions to freethought journals.

Stewart Headlam died on 18 November 1924 and was buried at East Sheen Cemetery, London, on 24 November. F. G. Bettany, his biographer, commented that Headlam "lived long enough to hear the Archbishop of Canterbury in a City church not only commend the London Shakespeare League [Headlam was president], but praise the work of his Church and Stage Guild, once the victim of episcopal frowns. Times had changed, but not Headlam."

Headlam once claimed:

"I value few compliments I have received so highly as one paid me in a *Freethinker* pamphlet, which exonerated me from the charge so often brought against professing Christians that they did not live up to their principles. It marked a turning point in controversy. The Church itself has gained from my Bradlaugh campaign."

It is doubtful if he ever convinced any NSS members that "the Christian Church is the great Secular Society", but Headlam left his mark among them. *The Freethinker* gave him a lengthy obituary, almost certainly written by Chapman Cohen, which stated, "There is probably not a child or teacher in London's Council Schools who does not feel that they have lost the best friend they ever had. . . His opponents were among his greatest admirers. His love of liberty was all-embracing." The present general secretary of the NSS, Terry Mullins, writes proudly of once winning a Stewart Headlam award for public speaking at Toynbee Hall; and a

Bethnal Green child who never forgot the old man's kindness is now Jack Abrahams, president of the New Zealand Rationalist Association.

Headlam was at ease with atheists, actresses and socialists probably because his combined principles repudiated any passive acceptance of one's lot or of the *status quo*. "It is difficult," he said, "to be angry and sin not; it is much easier not to be angry at all." Alas, Headlam's brand of anger is still in short supply.

It is perhaps fitting to close with an anecdote about a public meeting Headlam chaired. An old freethinker was digressing too far, and at too great a length, from the subject, so Headlam called him to order, whereupon the speaker complained that "like all parsons" Headlam would not let a man have his say. The rebuke was immediately denied by another member of the audience, a Hyde Park atheist orator:

"You let him alone. I've been turned out of every public-house debating society in London for saying things this here parson let me say at his meetings without a murmur. He is fair, this man, and don't you forget it".

Indeed we don't, which is why these pages remember him once again.

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The writer gratefully acknowledges the kind assistance with this article of Hedi and Jack Abrahams, Eva Ebury, Terry Mullins and David Tribe.

Jubilee Group in East London.

LETTERS

STIRRING THE POT

As a lifelong secularist I am glad to see that Julia Pelling of the British Humanist Association has won the editorial place (October) in an item headed "Plain and Simple". This is precisely what she is urging by her abundantly plain and simple accusation that many of us "hide our meanings in clouds of self-indulgent wordiness and arrogant intellectualism".

Do you not agree that our language does often shut out; particularly the language of what you describe as "dishonest humanism, afraid to say what it is and do what it says"—which Julia Pelling herself might have written? Do you not agree that we amateurs of average, if not lower than average intellect, do need to unite under "almost anything except a stance for

living'?

I am sure we all, Julia Pelling included, are aware of the hard spade-work that you and others and your 19th-century predecessors have done and continue to do to clear the ground. But we all must eat from time to time, and Julia Pelling's fork suppers are, not surprisingly, deliciously plain and simple.

DENIS CAMPBELL

AN IMAGINATIVE RESOURCE

Barbara Smoker (in her "The Faith all at Sea", October) ridicules Don Cupitt for liking to use ritual and symbolism. Though undoubtedly dangerous (as your columns clearly show), the usage seems to provide for an essential human need which, up to now, humanism has failed to meet. For lack of a Metaphor to trust, ought we to deify Barbara Smoker?

H. G. EASTON

NO SMOKING

Would Tim Thompson (October) please favour readers with an outline of his intended course of treatment of smoking addicts, should he and his cohorts succeed in prohibiting the use of tobacco?

R. J. M. TOLHURST

Freethinker Fund

Once again an anonymous supporter has sent a substantial donation to the Fund. Our warm thanks are expressed to him and to all on the latest list of contributors.

C. F. Ablethorpe, £1.40; G. A. Airey, £6.40; M. Ansell, £2.40; S. W. Beer, £6.40; W. Beninson, £1.40; D. Bressan, £6.40; J. L. Broom, £1.40; E. L. Deacon, £11.40; J. Dwyer, £7; S. Exley, £10; E. R. Gomm, £1.40; A. D. Gore, £1; W. J. R. Grant, £1.40; E. S. D. Haslam, £3.60; J. R. Hutton, £2.40; Iconoclast, £125; H. Jack, £2.40; C. F. Jacot, £5; L. T. Johnson, £1.40; T. Liddle, £1.40; A. M. Marshall, £1.40; W. F. Negus, £1.40; C. G. Roberts, £5; V. Rose, £1.40; J. Simpson, £10; P. Somers, £5; O. Thompson, £6.40; R. G. Urwin, £1.40; J. Warren, £6.40; P. Willig, £12.40.

Total for the period 6 September until 3 October: £250.

Superstitions

be wiped out entirely, along with any progeny. The husband of the poor woman was petrified and offered no protection to her while the other two and the father (who was a passive spectator so far) set about to kill her. She managed to escape, whereupon the assailants seized her little daughter and killed her by smashing her head against a stone while the child's father looked on helplessly.

It is easy enough to bring the benefits of modern science to large populations; but to illuminate those minds with the light of reason and knowledge is an uphill struggle indeed.

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Annual Dinner, Langford's Hotel, Hove. Saturday, 17 November, Guest speaker: T. F. Evans. Tickets £6. Bookings: Fleur Jacot, 11 Slonk Hill Road, Shoreham-by-Sea, Sussex, telephone Shoreham 61404.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. The Prince Albert, Trafalgar Street (adjacent to Brighton Station). Sunday, 2 December, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. Bob Potter: The Psychology of Fundamentalist Christianity.

Gay Humanist Group. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Friday, 14 December, 7.30 pm. Barbara Smoker: An Atheist's Impressions of America. Saturday, 15 December, 7 pm. Celebrate "the origins of Christmas". Punch and Mince Pies. Admission £1.

Glasgow Humanist Society. Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Norman Macdonald, 339 Kilmarnock Road, Glasgow, G43, telephone 041 632 9511.

Humanist Holidays. Christmas at Bournemouth. Details from Betty Bear, 58 Weir Road, London SW12, telephone 01-673 6234.

Leeds and District Humanist Group. The Swarthmore Institute, 4 Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Tuesday, 13 November, 8 pm. Patrick Leach: Human Rights in Islamic States. Tuesday, 11 December, 8 pm. Speaker from Leeds Addiction Centre: Drink and Drugs.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 29 November, 7.45 pm. Graham Bell: Politics for Life. Thursday, 13 December, 7.45 pm. Saturnalian Party and book auction.

Merseyside Humanist Group. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. Friday, 16 November, 7.45 pm. Norman Marsh: Animal Experimentation—Can Practical Regulation Serve Ethical Principle? Friday, 7 December, 7.45 pm. Ann Coombes: The Garden Festival in Retrospect.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 14 November, 8 pm. Bernard Fisher: Acid Rain. Wednesday, 12 December, 8 pm. Robert Bridge: The Influence of Greek Thought on Early Christianity.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Details of activities from Roy Saich, 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth, telephone Kenilworth 58450.

Worthing Humanist Group. Trades Club, 15 Broadwater Road, Worthing. Sunday, 25 November, 5.30 pm. John White: Humanism and the Arts.

A group of parents in the Finsbury area of London have protested to the head of Moreland Primary School against the Lord's Prayer being omitted from morning assembly. They want the traditional form of religious education to be observed. A representative of the group said: "Moreland was a good school based on traditional lines serving a working-class area. But over the past few years we have had an influx of trendy Left-wing teachers. We first noticed what was happening when instead of bringing home books about Janet and John they were all about children with Asian names".

Charity Law: a Case of Poetic Injustice

"It is a blatant injustice that organisations based on a religious faith—even the most harmful of the religious cults—should, even though non-charitable in their aims, enjoy the privileges of charity status, including tax exemption, while similar organisations without a religious basis do not", Barbara Smoker declared in her presidential address to the National Secular Society on 3 November.

School Religion

children were likely to be absent, so that their education was not duly interrupted.

"An opportunity should also be given for the Imams to visit the school . . . visits to the local mosque could be made by the non-Muslim as well as Muslim students".

It is also proposed that local education authorities "should make sure that parents from ethnic minorities are aware of their rights to withdraw their children from religious assembly and religious education lessons". Similar requests for the benefit of non-religious parents have invariably been rejected in the past. And secular humanist campaigners against school religion—while agreeing that parents should be aware of their legal rights—are generally agreed that only in exceptional circumstances should children be withdrawn from assembly and religious education classes. When parents exercise their right to do so, it is nearly always on religious grounds.

The NUT document reflects its members' dissatisfaction with the religious clauses of the 1944 Act. Many teachers "find the . . . provision for each school day to begin with an act of worship (presumably Christian) and compulsory religious education, inimical to the spirit of multi-cultural education.

"They see these requirements as fostering a tendency towards either neglect and disaffection because of lack of commitment, or towards the possibility of indoctrination.

"They argue that the responsibility for religious instruction in particular faiths lies with the churches and parents, and that this should take place outside school. Some minority groups might feel more comfortable about schools' attitudes to their own religious beliefs, if religious education was not compulsory as it is at present, but instead took its place as an accepted part of the curriculum which reflected Britain's current cultural diversity".

The NUT, Britain's major teachers' union with a membership of around 235,000, concludes that the time has come for serious discussions "with a view to possible amendment of those sections of the 1944 Act which pertain to religious education".

"It is also a blatant injustice", she added, "that churchmen are allowed to make political statements (such as the recent pronouncements of bishops on the miners' strike), while secular charities with genuine charitable purposes would soon be threatened by the Charity Commissioners with loss of charity status if their spokesmen, speaking as such, were to indulge in similar political statements, or even political statements relevant to their charitable aims".

There is nothing new in any of this, Miss Smoker told the NSS annual general meeting in London. "But with the spread of atheistic theology among C of E prelates, and all the recent publicity this has received, the injustice takes on a new dimension of absurdity.

"The criterion of a religious charity now seems to rest on nothing but a choice of words. In order to qualify for complete exemption from direct taxation and local rates, it is necessary only to use religious terminology for everyday concepts. If, for instance, you are discussing human values, but, instead of calling them 'human values', you use poetic symbolism and declare, as Don Cupitt did in *The Sea of Faith*, that the word 'God' actually means 'the sum of human values', that linguistic idiosyncrasy is enough to entitle the organisation on behalf of which you are speaking to be accorded charity status, with all the fiscal privileges that implies.

"If, moreover, you have the nerve to declare that, though you have eschewed all belief in things supernatural and regard Jesus as no more than a man, you remain a loyal member (for poetic reasons) of the established (or any other mainstream) Church, this will make you eligible for the television and radio budgets allocated to the Religious Broadcasting Department.

"Above all, if your organisation happens to be the established Church, this poetic language will entitle you to a share in billions of pounds' worth of historical buildings, prime property sites, and monetary investments donated (often compulsorily) by the ancestors of us all—a share that may be a personal stipend or merely a say in how these assets are used. Such material perks for a poetic turn of phrase certainly add up to colossal values—human or inhuman".

Bishop Pietro Fiordelli, who has special responsibility for family matters for the Italian bishops' conference, has declared that Italy has the second highest abortion rate in Europe. For every 1,000 live births there are 404 abortions. In Spain, Roman Catholic groups are campaigning against television advertisements for contraceptives.