

The Freethinker

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LABOUR GROUP BACKS RELIGIOUS AND RACIAL SEGREGATION IN CLASSROOM

The minority Labour group on Brent Borough Council in north London has produced a charter advocating the establishment of a voluntary aided school for Muslim children in the borough. Pupils will wear traditional dress and receive Muslim religious education. There will be separate physical education and swimming lessons for girls. And it is likely that if such a school is opened in Brent, Sikhs and Muslims will pressurise authorities elsewhere to provide segregated education.

Educationists and Labour councillors in other areas have serious misgivings about such schemes. Muslim, Jewish and fundamentalist Christian schools have already been strongly criticised by HM inspectors. Inadequate premises and equipment, poorly trained staff and unimaginative teaching programmes are listed among the shortcomings of such schools.

Referring to the way in which some religious groups seek to indoctrinate and rigidly control young people's views, one inspector said that in Britain it is generally thought that young people should be allowed freedom of choice. "But Muslims, orthodox Jews and Plymouth Brethren don't see it that way", he added.

In Muslim schools the girls' education is usually regarded as being secondary to their training as good Islamic wives and mothers. Sex education is a taboo subject, and Islamic teachings pervade all aspects of school life.

Muslim schools would in practice mean segregation of children according to religion, colour and gender. The products of such schools will have a narrow view of life, and although born in Britain, they would be ill-prepared for surviving in a competitive, racist society.

In the 1960s the National Secular Society warned that the existence of State-financed Catholic and

Anglican schools would prompt Muslim zealots to campaign for Islamic ones. It was argued then by supporters of church schools that the rights of parents must be respected. The same argument is being used today by religious leaders and politicians who are falling over backwards to defend the religious privilege of adults rather than the rights and education of the young.

Commenting on the current demand for voluntary aided Muslim schools, NSS president Barbara Smoker said that this may seem a progressive step, in line with multi-racial education and bi-lingualism. "But in fact it would be a most divisive and irresponsible course, which the National Secular Society views with alarm.

"Muslim and Sikh schools would not only segregate the children of Asian origin from the host population; they would also divide them one from another, importing to this country the religious strife and bitterness that exists on the Indian sub-continent.

"It is surely bad enough that we should already have Anglican, Roman Catholic and Jewish schools, segregating children according to their religious background. The divisiveness that this causes, as is seen at its worst in Northern Ireland, would be exacerbated by the propagation of denominational schools for immigrant religions.

"In the case of Islamic schools, the sex of the child would be an additional factor for segregation, condemning Muslim girls to total isolation, even from male members of their own religion.

"The NSS, which has always urged the abolition of church schools, points to the added danger they pose today, making it impossible, in the name of equity, to refuse Muslims and Sikhs the same rights as Christians and Jews to State-subsidised segregated schooling, with all the social harm that such a policy is sure to build up for future generations".

The Freethinker

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NEWS

"FOR ALL THE SAINTS"

Freethinker readers will appreciate this thoughtful reminder that Friday, 1 November is All Saints Day.

Although their number has diminished through demotions and redundancies, the list of saints of patronage and invocation is still a lengthy one. Some of their names are familiar enough, even in this post-Christian era, although a large number remain unknown even to those who enjoy their patronage. Musicians, artists, librarians and even tax collectors have their patron saints. So have less exalted members of society like junk dealers (St Sebastian), rag-and-bone men (St Roch) and those who follow the unlifting trade of truss making (St Lambert of Maestricht).

How many spies realise that they are under the patronage of St Guido? Those who do so may have serious reservations about their patron, who may turn out to be a double agent. Organ blowers, playing card manufacturers and pawnbrokers will feel more secure with Saints Genesisus, Balthasar and Nicolas of Myra, respectively.

Labourers and editors share the patronage of St John Bosco; journalists and the deaf that of St Francis de Sales — interesting juxtapositions.

The first-century St Joseph is the patron of house-hunters. This, in theory, should put them in an advantageous position when dealing with landlords and estate agents who are not similarly favoured.

Bakers and pastry-cooks also have their patron saints, as do those ladies who, in a different sense, have a bun in the oven.

The faithful have recourse to the saints on all manner of worrying problems, ranging from fear of mice (St Gertrude of Nivelles) to eruptions of Mount Vesuvius (St Januarius).

St Wilgefortis, who must be the original "agony aunt", may be invoked "by maidens who wish to be rid of unwanted suitors", and St Gangulf by unhappily married husbands.

St Agia can be invoked by those who are involved in lawsuits, and will presumably act for all the parties concerned.

Saints Titus and Maurice have the special responsibility of dealing with invocations against freethinkers and enemies of religion.

For many centuries the Church taught that prayer, penitence and veneration of holy relics were efficacious remedies for mental and bodily ills. So it is not surprising that many saints are invoked on health problems. Cancer, asthma and all types of

S AND NOTES

fever are high on the list. But petitions are also made for relief from stiff neck, carbuncles, chilblains, sneezing, knee troubles and piles.

And what a comfort it is to know that the obscure but worthy St Bibiana (also called Vibiana) may be invoked against hangovers.

• **Thousands of pilgrims seeking miracle cures at the most famous of all Roman Catholic shrines had their hopes dashed on arrival at Lourdes recently. There was a serious shortage of "holy water" at the shrine. The source of supply had partly dried up because of drought.**

BALLINSPOOFLE

The Roman Catholic Church is, in the words of one commentator, "still vociferously quiet" about the odd goings-on at the village of Ballinspittle, Co Cork, in the Republic of Ireland. But despite the Church's cautious attitude, thousands of pilgrims have travelled to a grotto outside the village where a statue of Our Lady is allegedly performing marvels.

The first report of the statue moving came from four young girls. As they passed it one night the girls claim that the statue swayed and the facial expression changed. Word spread, and before long devotees of Our Lady were thronging the roads and lanes that lead to the grotto.

In no time there were claims that an arm of the statue moved, and then a leg. In the atmosphere of fervent piety that quickly developed, few would have doubted reports that Our Lady and St Patrick had been seen dancing a jig at Ballinspittle crossroads.

The State-run transport authority laid on special buses, supplies of Guinness ran out, and within a few weeks Ballinspittle, unmarked on most maps, was on the international shrine circuit.

However, Ballinspittle already has competition from other villages where holy statues have been swaying, speaking, blinking, bleeding and changing shape. Children are usually the first to witness these phenomena, and Our Lady, like Count Dracula, does not bestir herself until after nightfall. So it is not surprising that the Church is cautious and the sceptics are scornful.

Nevertheless the pilgrims continue to arrive in droves. They have to be fed and watered, and many will no doubt wish to acquire souvenirs of their visit. So while the faithful recite "Our Lady of Ballinspittle, pray for us", rumour has it that the local shopkeepers' and publicans' invocation is "Our Lady of Ballinspittle, sway for us".

WORM IN THE BUD

The scandalous recruiting and fund-raising methods of religious sects like the Moonies, Children of God and Divine Light Mission have been the cause of much public concern and the formation of anti-sect groups, some of which have done excellent work, particularly in the field of research.

Recent developments in the United States must be disconcerting for many anti-sect activists. Christians have in the past rightly denounced Moon's Unification Church for the racket it is. But Moon is gradually being brought into the mainstream religious fold. Honours have been conferred on him by established and respected Christian institutions. Religious leaders, Christian and Jewish, black and white, liberal and fundamentalist, attended a "welcome home" party for the top Moonie on his release from prison. He had served a term for tax fiddling.

The Rev Jerry Falwell, of Moral Majority infamy, is now Moon's most influential ally. The Rev Joseph Lowery, a Methodist leader, has urged that a pardon be granted. It is not only Moon's pathetic dupes in the Unification Church who have placed a martyr's crown on his brow.

What has changed the churches' attitude to their rival whose teachings have caused family break-ups, wrecked lives and suicides? Always ready to grab any benefits they can from the State — and there are plenty with a born-again yahoo like Ronald Reagan in the White House — they resent government "intrusion" into their affairs. Insistence that churches and religious leaders conform to the law and pay their taxes is denounced as "religious persecution". Bringing the Rev Sun Myung Moon in from the cold is yet another example of how Christians will make common cause with any quack if they think that their interests are threatened.

Anti-sect groups are extremely indignant at any suggestion they are in competition with other religionists, maintaining that their sole interest is helping the (mainly young) victims to escape the clutches of charlatans like the Rev Sun Myung Moon and Moses David. However, such freedom is often a case of out of the frying pan and into the fundamentalist Christian fire.

The basic weakness of most anti-sect groups is that they have been set up by successors to those responsible for establishing the most successful and in historical terms the most harmful sect of all — the Christians.

The skittles competition at Bisley, Gloucestershire, annual village fete was won by Baptist teetotaler George Rushton, who is general secretary of the Band of Hope. The prize: a bottle of whiskey.

CENSORS AT LARGE

The self-appointed guardians of public morals and taste have been hard at it on both sides of the Atlantic.

Censorship of school textbooks has increased significantly in the United States, largely because of a crusade by Christian pressure groups. Books banished from school libraries include *Of Mice and Men*, *Catcher in the Rye* and *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Even Shakespeare has not been spared. Passages have been excised from *Romeo and Juliet* because of "sexual innuendo".

In many cases objectors have not even read the books they want banned. One such censorious prude recently came unstuck after furiously demanding the removal of a book entitled *Making it With Mademoiselle*. This piece of "disgusting pornography", as the objector described it, turned out on examination to be a collection of sewing patterns compiled by *Mademoiselle* magazine.

Our home-grown censors have not been idle either. A recent example of their activities comes from the Midlands where car stickers sold by members of a fire brigade company have been banned. The 45p stickers, in the style of the seaside comic postcard, sold like hot cakes at fetes and other social functions, the proceeds being donated to charities.

That was until a sourpuss, Councillor Trudy Bowen, branded the stickers as "sexist and offensive". Because of her position on the West Midlands fire authority, further sales were forbidden. As one local newspaper put it, Trudy Bowen's attitude "makes such women a bigger laugh than the jokes they try to hide from a more broad-minded public".

Censorship is no laughing matter, whether it is exercised by Right-wing Christian prudes or Left-wing feminist miseryguts.

Freethinker Fund

Donations to the Fund are much appreciated. The latest list of contributors is given below.

A. D. Gore, £1; G. H. Williams, £2.65; A. Jagger, £3.40; W. Irvine, £4.40; A. N. Blewitt, K. H. Bardsley, W. Beninson, A. M. Chapman, N. V. Cluett, H. N. Feather, F. C. Hoy, C. Jones, D. T. Kear, S. D. Kuebart, L. Lewis, D. G. Mitchell, J. E. Morrison, P. Proctor, D. Whelan, A. B. Williamson and R. G. Wood, £1.40 each; E. L. Deacon, H. Edmunds, P. Forrest, J. Lippitt and J. Simpson, £5 each; O. Thompson, £6.40; F. Howard, £10, and S. G. Little, £20.

Total for the period 10 August until 3 September: £96.65.

WEATHER BEATEN

Newspapers frequently report examples of the divisions and squabbles for which Irish Christians are notorious. So it must have astounded The One Above when identical supplications from his quarrelsome Catholic and Protestant worshippers on the Emerald Isle recently wafted to the heavenly throne.

This turn of events occurred when the Roman Catholic Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich and the Protestant Rev Ian Paisley urged their respective flocks to pray for the same boon — better weather. They both agreed that if the celestial waterworks were not turned off for a time, the prospect of even a modestly good harvest was remote. In fact the situation was potentially disastrous.

"We should humbly ask God to improve the weather", whined Cardinal O'Fiaich.

"We need to pray for good weather, stopping of the rain, so what is left of the harvest will be salvaged", bellowed the Rev Paisley.

Cardinal O'Fiaich suggested that a campaign of self-denial might persuade God to send better weather. The Rev Ian Paisley announced that he would preach a sermon entitled "An Awful Sword".

The cause of Christian unity has taken a mighty step forward.

Public Meeting

THE EMBRYO RESEARCH DEBATE

Frank Dobson, MP
Dr Peter Misch
Barbara Smoker

Monday, 28 October, 7.30 pm

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
London WC1

Organised by the National Secular Society,
702 Holloway Road, London N19,
telephone 01-272 1266

Linda Tiller, aged 15, was put on a life support machine at Kettering General Hospital after being knocked down by a car last month. Her father, a Jehovah's Witness, told doctors not to give any blood transfusions, although his daughter was critically ill. He said: "My wife and myself are quite prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice. Linda is a Jehovah's Witness as well. Our religious beliefs forbid us having blood transfusions".

Controversy

The Society for the Protection of Unborn Children recently held a rally in London at which Alison Davis, an atheist and Organiser of the Society's Handicap Division, was one of the speakers. She now joins issue with Barbara Smoker, whose impressions of the "Pro-Lifers' Tally-Ho", as she described it, were published in our July issue.

ALISON DAVIS

In her enthusiasm to ridicule the content of my speech at the recent SPUC meeting about the Powell Bill, Barbara Smoker appears to be guilty of the very thing of which she accuses me — namely, letting emotion and fantasy prevail over reason.

She seems to be completely unable to differentiate between a human being who exists and one who does not; yet it strikes me as being about as far as one could get from "realism" to plan policy and ethics in the best interests of those who do not actually exist.

It is of course true that I might never have existed. My parents might not have decided to have sex that particular night, or they might never have met each other at all. It is of course quite ludicrous to suggest that "every fertile person should copulate without contraception on the anniversary of the day one was conceived — or indeed as often as possible — because one's own conception might so easily never have occurred". The only rationalisation I could possibly imagine for such a view is a kind of ultra-naïve religious idea of babies lined up in the great nursery in the sky awaiting the happy meeting of the precise egg and sperm that will enable them to be born — hardly the realm of realism and logic, I think.

Just as we do not normally accord rights to those who are dead, so we cannot construct sensible ethics and social morality around "rights" for those who have never existed. It would be impossible, and quite futile to attempt to do so in any case. How could we possibly predict and make allowance for the sudden appearance of a Napoleon, or Hitler, or Nelson Mandela, or anyone else who fundamentally changes the fabric of the society in which they live.

My own standpoint is really rather simple. It is not based on fantasy or emotion, but on common sense and logic. I do not think human beings should be allowed to deliberately kill each other. Surely Barbara Smoker knows enough basic biology to be aware that the human embryo is *not* a "mere egg", but the result of the union of the egg and sperm to produce the unique individual cluster of cells from

which we all began. Age has nothing at all to do with the species an organism belongs to, and an embryo is no less human than a foetus, neonate, toddler, teenager, etc. One does not suddenly become human at a precise point on a precise day. Indeed such a view smacks again of the religious "ensoulment" idea which is so anathema to any freethinking person, unfettered by religious belief.

Obviously I agree that if I had never existed I would have had no opportunity to contribute to this or any other debate — a point so banal it hardly seems worth stating. Likewise if I were to die I could no longer contribute, nor could I had I been aborted. But these are hypothetical situations that have no existence in present reality.

For the moment I am a thinking, rational human being who currently exists. Until I expire and thus cease to exist, I will continue to argue from the position of sound rational Atheism that it makes sense to oppose the killing of our fellow human beings whatever their age. There is undoubtedly an element of self-interest in this, but I dare say Miss Smoker herself might be glad to invoke the current prohibition against murder if someone were to decide arbitrarily that such as she would be "better off dead".

BARBARA SMOKER

As Alison Davis says, "An embryo is no less human than a foetus, neonate, toddler, teenager, etc" — but equally, the embryo is no *more* human than any cluster of living human cells, to be found, say, in a drop of blood, in a piece of skin from a grazed knee, or in the body of a recently dead person. The point in dispute, however, is not whether a human embryo is *human* (which no one denies) but whether it is a human *being* — a *person*.

No one, in fact, really believes that an embryo is a person. Is there anyone who, if faced with the dilemma of being able to save only one thing from a fire — the choice being between a human embryo in a test-tube and a child — would find it a difficult choice?

To prevent an egg or an embryo or a foetus from developing into a person cannot possibly be murder, since murder requires the prior existence of a person as victim.

Personhood is the only possible criterion for human rights. The question of fertilisation is neither here nor there. Supposing a human being were (as is quite possible) produced as a result of cloning: though no fertilisation would have taken place, that human being would obviously have to be accorded full human rights.

Religion Kills in Iran

TERRY LIDDLE

The recent escalation of the four and a half year long Gulf war between Iran and Iraq, including the bombing of civilians and the employment of outlawed chemical weapons, once again demonstrates the murderous nature of fundamentalist Islam. Nor does it end there. For as the recent execution of opposition leader Asghar Nazemi shows, the theocratic dictatorship of the ayatollahs is waging war on its own people. Khomeini has at his command 180,000 clerical cadres, heirs to 1,300 years of struggle for a religious State. It is they who are the frontline troops in this war. "For all things concerning man and society, Islam has teachings", says Khomeini. And for those who dissent, Khomeini's interpretation of Islamic doctrine is imprisonment and death.

The Iranian legal system is now based on traditional Islamic codes which are divided into four sections — Ghesas, Dije, Hadd and Tasir. Ghesas is revenge for murder or bodily harm, the culprit can be legally killed, wounded or mutilated. Dije is blood money paid when Ghesas is impossible or not allowed. Hadd are the penalties for lewdness, drinking alcohol, homosexuality and rebellion which are seen as acts against Allah. These penalties are viewed as Allah's commands and therefore cannot be remitted. They include stoning, whipping and cutting off of hands and feet. Tasir is the penalty for minor offences and includes imprisonment, banishment and corporal punishment.

Criminal procedure has also been Islamicised. The court consists of a single judge who also acts as the prosecution. Lawyers are no longer allowed and prisoners have to defend themselves. Trials are held in camera inside prisons and judges can convict on the basis of personal "knowledge", irrespective of the evidence. There is no right of appeal and sentence is carried out at once.

Political offences are dealt with by the Islamic Revolutionary Courts, the defendants being charged with rebellion, war against God or causing depravity. The penalty for all these offences is death; "... the reward of those fighting against Allah", says the Koran, "is that they are killed or crucified or mutilated reciprocally on hands and feet. . .". If that isn't enough they will also be grievously punished in the next world. Not only pro-Western modernisers, Communist and Kurdish separatists, but also the Islamic Leftists of the Mojahedin have suffered such dreadful punishments.

Women have suffered particularly badly at the hands of the fundamentalists. Under the terms of the 1979 Islamic Constitution, living and working areas are sexually segregated and women treated as second-class citizens. Thousands of women have been driven out of their jobs in offices, factories and public

institutions. Divorce, except at the initiative of the husband, is illegal. Women teachers have been removed from the universities and few women can become students. Those that do must sit at the rear of the class and are separated from the men by a curtain. If a woman student wants to ask a question she must give it in writing as Islamic women cannot speak to "unknown" men.

The wearing of the veil and the traditional garb which hides the shape of the body is strictly and violently enforced; absence of the veil is seen as the mark of a prostitute. Women who failed to adhere to this dress code have been beaten up and had acid thrown in their faces. Women whose hair has protruded from their veils have had them fixed to their heads with drawing pins. Women have been sacked from their jobs for wearing perfume or shaking hands with a male colleague. Yet while women who defy the Islamic code are branded as whores, "marriage on account", an Islamic form of prostitution has been legalised.

Members of the Bahai faith, founded in 1844, are being severely persecuted. Because they hold that all religions come from God and must be treated as part of an on-going revelation, they are seen as heretics. Seven hundred leading Bahais have been imprisoned and 195 officially executed. Of the 27 people who have served on the Bahai's ruling national assembly since 1979, 25 are now dead. Because their headquarters are in Israel, the Bahai's have been branded as members of a "Zionist espionage group". Ten women and young girls were hanged for teaching Bahai children.

As the cost of the Gulf war in money (at least 251 billion dollars) and human lives (at least 300,000) the situation is likely to get worse. Already Iran has become the first country to repudiate the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to its ambassador to the United Nations, Iran "would not hesitate to violate the declaration" because it derives from the "Judeo-Christian tradition".

Under the influence of the Iranian theocracy, fundamentalist groups in Lebanon have launched suicidal attacks on the occupying Israelis and the rival Christian paramilitaries. Iran Radio beams hate-filled propaganda into the Islamic Republics of the Soviet Union keeping alive memories of bloody holy wars against the Russians — Tsarist and Communist alike. Wherever fundamentalist theocracy of the Khomeini type has power—religion kills.

● **The People's Mujahedin organisation has published a list of over twelve thousand people who have been executed in Iran since June 1981. The average age of those on the list is 23.**

Free Will and Determinism

KARL HEATH

The Free Will versus Determinism argument began during the early history of Christianity, partly as an attempt to solve the problem of evil. Pre-Christian thought had tended to be determinist. The Greeks had a profound belief in Justice, Fate, "Logos", Balance, Retribution — the idea that the Universe and the Gods themselves were controlled by a universal principle. Within such a concept, misfortunes, tragedies and even catastrophes, wickedness could be accepted because the balance was always restored and restitution made — the crime of Laius is extirpated by his death at the hands of his son Oedipus, who then marries his mother Jocasta, fulfilling the prophecy, which somewhat unfairly, we might think, led to Jocasta hanging herself and Oedipus putting out his eyes.

St John's Gospel begins with "Logos", but ends, like the other Gospels, with the Crucifixion and Resurrection. This is far from the Greek idea, and involves a new view of evil. Jesus sacrifices himself in a war against evil. The Devil had already tempted him. Manichaeans took the straight-forward view of a struggle between Good and Evil, the world of matter being evil. Gnostics saw a struggle between the Christian God of the New Testament, and the evil God of the Old Testament, Ialoabaoth or Jahveh, who created the world, even to the extent of asserting that the Serpent was doing his best and trying to warn Eve against the evil Creator's deceptions.

But all this was heresy. So too were the views of Pelagius who took a common-sense view of Free Will and held that people were responsible for their own sins, but could not be held responsible for predestined sins. *Si necessitatis, peccatum non est; Si voluntatis, vitari potest*. Freely translated, this means that no-one should be blamed for anything that cannot be avoided. In a world of predestination there can be no guilt, except in the Deity who predestined it.

Omar Khayyam, a few centuries later, wrote:

O' Thou who did'st, with Pitfall and with Gin,
Beset the Road I was to wander in,
How can'st Thou with Predestination round
Enmesh me, yet impute my Fall to Sin.

This is far removed from the 18th-century conceit that "all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds", including the Lisbon earthquake.

It seems that the trouble lay in the sins of childhood. St Augustine, in his "Confessions" writes seven obsessed chapters about a boyhood prank of stealing pears from a neighbour's tree. What made the crime so heinous, far more so than his later fornications as a young man, was that the neighbour's pears were inferior to his father's, of which he could have his fill. A rational explanation of his conduct might suggest mitigation. In its absence, the explanation must be some terrible sinfulness. And so, into this

tortuous story creeps Original Sin. No longer the simple Manichean notion of wrestling with the Devil, Fallen Angel and Lord of Darkness. Nor the straightforward Pelagian notion of wrestling with one's self, and at least being credited with overcoming one's baser instincts. No. We are all born with Adam's Sin, except Adam himself, and presumably Eve. Adam alone had complete Free Will and chose to sin.

We, on the other hand, are sinful from birth. Unbaptised babies will go to Hell, even though there is nothing they can do to deserve escaping it. Even baptism is not, itself, enough. Many of the baptised will also roast. Only the "elect" will escape: "Many are called, but few are chosen". Where is the "Free Will" in this savage doctrine of predestination which leads straight to the excesses of Calvinism? Vaguely, there is some way of securing Divine Grace and, thereby, Salvation. Is it belief, is it faith, is it good works? Or is it doing what the Church tells you? Does the Church sell insurance policies, and are they guaranteed?

Nevertheless, Free Will had to be maintained, though not with the Pelagian consequences, in order to absolve God of responsibility for evil.

In logic, and I think, in science, Free Will is nonsense. The Will is neither free nor unfree. A person may will anything he likes, possible or impossible, but his estimate of possibility is likely to influence his decision.

Thomas Hobbes wrote in *Leviathan*:

No liberty can be inferred of the will . . . (it is) . . . the liberty of the man, which consisteth in this, that he find no stop in doing what he has the will, desire or inclination to do.

John Locke, in his *Essay on Human Understanding* is more caustic:

Whether man's will be free or no? The question itself is altogether improper; and it is as significant to ask whether man's will be free, as to ask whether his sleep be swift, or his virtue square: liberty being as little applicable to the will as swiftness of motion is to sleep, or squareness to virtue.

Freedom is a question of choice, of alternatives, of opportunities. In an area in which a man has no choice he is totally unfree, e.g. unfree to avoid ultimate death. Avoiding death has never been thought the mark of a free man. A choice of two alternatives makes a man more free, a choice of a hundred still more. Freedom is not so much the negative business of removing restraints, but the positive business of providing opportunities. This is the difference between the affluent man's conception of liberty and the poor man's. The rich man may think his liberty increased by the abolition of income tax, the poor man by the provision of food or schools. There is no doubt that poverty and illiteracy have ever proved more powerful fetters

than stone walls and iron bars.

To return to Free Will and Determinism: it seems odd that 20th-century minds should still not see the point, as Hobbes and Locke saw it three centuries ago, and Heraclitus 2,500 years ago. Freedom and compulsion are two aspects of the same thing. A seared leaf falling from a tree is both free to fall, when detached from the branch, and compelled to fall, by gravity. One man's right, his liberty, for example his right to free speech or to go unmolested, is another man's duty, a restraint upon him, to exercise tolerance or to refrain from violence.

Hegel said "Freedom is knowledge of necessity".

FORGOTTEN FREETHINKERS (2)

Martin Boon

ANDREW WHITEHEAD

Never quite in the mainstream of the freethought movement, Martin Boon was briefly an important figure within radical and rationalist circles in London in the early 1870s. He was in some ways an unattractive figure, intensely idiosyncratic, and—following his emigration to South Africa—an advocate of white racial superiority.

Martin Boon was only in his twenties when he established the National Rational League. It was not the most substantial of his achievements — the League never became of any importance — but it was testimony to his enterprise and to the views he promoted. The League's programme was "based upon the social system of Robert Owen and the political programme of Bronterre O'Brien". The objects of the League illustrate the influence of Owenite rationalism on Boon. "First: To secure the association of those persons who, being free from the evil spirit of creed, Sectarianism and Priestcraft, will respect the Authority of Reason, and reverentially accept the decrees of Conscience. Second: To discover Truths connected with the Laws of Nature, the progress of Thought, or the Lives of Good Men of all ages and countries, so that they may be rendered of practical value as guides to a healthful, moral and manly life".

Bronterre O'Brien, the other intellectual influence on Boon, was probably the most important of the political thinkers thrown up by the Chartist movement. His programme of action gave prominence to two issues, land and currency. Boon took up cudgels on these same two issues, advocating nationalisation of the land and "home colonisation", that is the settlement of the unemployed on uncultivated land as smallholder tenants of the State; reform of currency away from a metallic base to paper money; and the financing of public works such as railways

This is more than a paradox; it is a fact of life. The more we accept the realities of nature, and understand them, "knowledge of necessity", the greater our freedom in charting a course through life.

Finally, I have some difficulty in understanding the religious attitude to Free Will and the criticism of determinism. Surely a God-orientated universe is more determinist than one merely subject to scientific laws? And if God, through his Free Will, meddles capriciously with these laws, we are even less free. Our own freedom is not enhanced by disobeying scientific laws, but by exploring the possibilities which lie within their limitations.

by notes to be redeemed out of the income produced by the enterprise. This last project was the goal of another of Boon's ephemeral organisations, the Costless Public Works Association.

O'Brien died in 1864, but his influence persisted. His followers maintained an organised political presence for another twenty years. The O'Brienites, although small in number, were in a sense "defenders of the faith". They kept alive the socialist ideas of the Chartist era, and infused them into the new socialist movement which developed in Britain in the 1880s.

Martin James Boon was a product of the same rich tradition of artisan radicalism in Clerkenwell as Dan Chatterton, the subject of the first in this series of articles. He was born in 1840 near to what is now the site of the *Guardian* offices on Farringdon Road. His father was a shoemaker. He married in 1866 to Eleanor Ridley, the daughter of a gunmaker. She seems to have shared her husband's political outlook for she was at one time the secretary of a Ladies' Secular Club. At the time of the marriage, Boon and his father were working as ironmongers in Exmouth Street, Clerkenwell. Martin Boon later ran an ironmongery business on Clerkenwell Green.

Boon was the most prolific of the O'Brienite pamphleteers of the day. His earliest surviving titles appeared in 1869, one being published by the renowned secularist bookseller, Edward Truelove. He argued against the emigrationists who, prompted by economic depression, peddled emigration as the panacea for social problems. The idea had caught on within the radical movement, and had been adopted by the most influential of radical journals, *The Beehive*, and indeed by many O'Brienites who, despairing of achieving social justice in England, intended to establish a settlement of smallholders in Kansas. Boon sought to demonstrate that Britain

was not over-populated, and that distress was due to the inequity of the existing form of land tenure. If all land was owned by the people, he argued, and this land properly cultivated, then everyone would be able to live in comfort and there would be no need to emigrate.

Even at this early age, there were signs of the social conservatism which was to become more pronounced in his later years. "There cannot be a more delightful spectacle", Boon averred, "than to see an industrious farmer with busy wife and healthy family living in a comfortable house, rented by himself from the State, cultivating his little territory with his own hands, and enjoying the produce raised by his own labour and industry".

London radicalism received a tremendous boost early in the 1870s from events across the Channel. The declaration of a Republic in France, and then the instigation and crushing of the Paris Commune, charged the political atmosphere. It was during this period that Boon achieved greatest prominence. He had been the founding joint secretary in 1869 of the Land and Labour League, and later became its president. This was the foremost standard bearer for both Republic and Commune. Boon and his crony William Maccall, a former Unitarian minister, effectively ran the League's paper, *The Republican*.

Boon's influence within extreme radicalism was heightened by his membership of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association, now better known as the First International. The O'Brienites had affiliated to the International, but were often at odds with Karl Marx. The sharp differences within the International between Marx and Bakunin which eventually led to its dissolution were reflected in a modified form in divisions within the English section. Some O'Brienites factionalised with Communard refugees who criticised the International for lack of vigour. Boon and another O'Brienite were apparently in touch with dissidents in the New York section of the International, prompting Marx to record that both "belong to the sect of the late Bronterre O'Brien, and are full of follies and crotchets, such as currency quackery, false emancipation of women, and the like".

All this propagandist endeavour did not do much for Boon's ironmongery business, and it was apparently business problems which, early in 1874, prompted the anti-emigrationist to set sail with his family for South Africa. They eventually settled in Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State where Boon ran a grocery store. He wrote copiously about his impressions of South Africa and his prescriptions for its future, in all more than a thousand rambling and opinionated pages. The tone of his writing became increasingly bitter and resentful. Boon did not get on with his neighbours. And he described Bloemfontein as "the home of the vilest and most contemptible of human wretches. . . Drinking and

smoking had so eaten up, and into the nature of this Bloemfontein, and the Free State in general, that they have become, like the Kaffirs, mere animals".

Boon took the concept of race as a cornerstone for his plans for the development of South Africa. He asserted that the "Saxon or Scandinavian" race "is to become the dominant race of the earth. . . Generally, it is the fact that the dark races are inferior, and that no amount of civilisation, or even Christianisation, will ever make them equals. The dark race must ever be subject to the superior, notwithstanding all that may be said to the contrary". He kept to his beliefs in currency reform and reformed land tenure, and saw the vast uncultivated lands of South Africa as the ideal site for small homesteads for the unemployed of Europe. Boon had little scruple about depriving black South Africans of their land and exacting forced labour: "Why should the negro be allowed to own the best portions of the earth, and be content to be up to his chin in pumpkins and yams, that take only half-an-hour a day to procure, or be allowed to hold lands that alone produce mealies and milk?"

After ten years in South Africa, Boon returned to London where once more he took up the role of political propagandist. He republished many of the works of Bronterre O'Brien, but he did not regain his past prominence, and the monthly paper he started, *The Propagandist*, seems to have been a modest affair. Boon was an outcast within the free-thought movement, and he railed against those "Freethought and Progressive Publishing Companies" which boycotted his paper. He teamed up again with William Maccall, one of Bradlaugh's most strident opponents within the secularist movement, and the two produced a savage satire of Bradlaugh's and Besant's views on population and birth control, depicting them as "the two primordial skunkites, Brassy Cheek and Breezy Bouncer". Boon was repelled by the notion of contraception and deeply offended by Bradlaugh's advocacy of it. His outlook appears to have stemmed from personal experience. His wife, he explained, was delicate. "I felt it necessary to guard against and abstain from adding to the number of the living; and in so doing, led a most unnatural existence, which after sixteen years of wedded life, I felt was the greatest purgatory of our natural lives". In spite of her delicacy, Eleanor Boon bore three sons.

It's difficult to know why Boon remained so briefly in London. It may well have been the exploitation of gold in the Rand which prompted his return to South Africa. He was certainly back there by 1887, when he applied for permission to transport dynamite and percussion caps to Johannesburg.

It must be presumed that Boon's commercial

(continued on page 158)

BOOKS

A PATH FROM ROME, by Anthony Kenny. Sidgwick & Jackson, £15

One of the many paradoxes of the religious impulse is that its most preposterous manifestations have to be taken seriously, if only because of their potential for social and individual damage. Within Christianity the Roman Catholic Church has always been the most audacious, and for Western Europeans the most emotionally compelling, in its historical and intellectual claims to absolute authority and abject obedience. So it is not surprising that it attracts some of the acutest minds in our cultural tradition, which it has itself done so much to mould. As the author of this book says, "even from the point of view of a secular historian of ideas, the Christian and Catholic system, if not a revelation from God, is one of the most fascinating inventions of the human spirit; a construction erected by the best minds of many generations".

Anthony Kenny, lapsed Catholic priest and now Master of Balliol, is one of our foremost philosophers. This account of his life up to the point when he left the Church twenty-two years ago is not only fascinating as intellectual autobiography but also a revealing inside view of what it was like to grow up as a devout Liverpool Catholic boy destined for the priesthood.

Unlike their European counterparts, English Catholics are very conscious of their minority status and of their unique mission to reverse the Reformation. (Kenny's uncle, a lifelong priest and notable biblical scholar who translated the English Jerusalem Bible, wrote home from the English College in Rome in the 1930s: "If Protestant England knew what a spirit there is here for the conversion of England, it would quake in its boots".) Under the influence of his pious mother and grandmother, the juvenile Kenny soon convinced himself that he was in constant inner dialogue with Jesus. As a young priest "it was touching the body of Christ, the closeness of the priest to Jesus, which most enthralled me. I would gaze on the Host after the words of consecration, soft-eyed like a lover looking into the eyes of his beloved".

Doubts, however, crept in early. When he was two-and-a-half, Pius XI asked him (at a private audience) how old he was, and in later childhood he puzzled over why the Pope, who was infallible, didn't know? An early and abiding interest in philosophy led him to study theology, and especially the logical status of proofs for the existence of God, with particular earnestness. Even before he was ordained, he was becoming disenchanted with the Church's doctrines and pretensions.

Like so many intelligent Catholics educated in

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the scholastic tradition, he endeavoured to make a virtue of casuistry and paradox, accounting it meritorious (with Chesterton and Lewis Carroll's Red Queen) to believe at least six impossible things before breakfast. But transubstantiation stuck in his gullet and proved an abiding stumbling-block. Later, influenced by Oxford philosophy and Wittgenstein, he came to doubt the possibility of disembodied intelligence.

When he started working as a young parish priest in Liverpool he was shocked to find that a major preoccupation of the clergy was collecting money from their poor parishioners, while they themselves lived in comparative luxury. The partial way in which the spurious maxim that "religion and politics don't mix" (though religion is of course an aspect of politics) was applied also disconcerted him. Even as a junior seminarian, he had been incredulous to be told, at the 1945 general election: "You may vote for anyone you like, but the Pope has ruled that no-one may vote Socialist". On being asked whether this meant that voting Labour was forbidden, the Rector replied: "I don't know what the Pope means; I've told you what the Pope said".

In the later '50s and early '60s, Father Kenny's departure from the priesthood was accelerated by the curbs imposed on his expression of anti-nuclear views. His transcripts of conversations and correspondence with Cardinal Heenan about this are most revealing of the hierarchy's contemptuous attitude towards their sheeplike flock:

"I think you probably do not realise" (the Cardinal wrote) "how different it is writing for the kind of semi-literate public which reads the (*Catholic*) *Pictorial* and, for example, the *Tablet*, or *Clergy Review*. Educated readers will dismiss the view of a priest if they do not agree with him. The simple Catholic is likely to accept whatever a priest writes in a Catholic paper as part of the teaching of the Church. . . Many of the readers of the *Pictorial* are uneducated. They cannot make distinctions between facts and comments on fact. . . To these simple people I have in mind we of the clergy are all infallible".

By the time Father Kenny made for the exit, he no longer had faith in God but could continue praying "only in the way that someone stranded on a mountainside might cry out for help without knowing that there was anyone within earshot". He now calls himself a contingent agnostic who says "I do not know whether there is a God, but perhaps it can be known; I have no proof that it cannot be known". As for the Church, "I am old-fashioned enough to believe that if the Church has been as wrong in the past on so many topics as forward-

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looking clergy believe, then her claims to impose belief and obedience on others are, in the form in which they have traditionally been made, mere impudence". Rationality, he thinks, consists of "the virtue of right belief, standing between the opposed vices of credulity (which believes too much) and scepticism (which believes too little)".

The intrinsic interest and intellectual honesty of this book make it essential reading for unbelievers and believers alike.

ANTONY GREY

NUCLEAR WINTER, by Owen Greene, Ian Percival and Irene Ridge. Basil Blackwell, £15 and £4.95

As I write on the 40th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima, the direct effects of nuclear bombs — the destruction, fire and radiation damage — are in the minds of every civilised person. It seems scarcely worth thinking about secondary effects when we have now "progressed" to the point where every town in the world can be atomised eight times over. But that is not so, for an even greater disaster than we ever imagined will befall the world should these accumulated bombs be used. This book sets out the arguments which suggest that the secondary effects of a nuclear war, largely ignored until recently, will be even more devastating than the direct actions of the bombs themselves, which are terrible enough.

The story starts in 1982 when two scientists (one Dutch, the other American) overstepped their brief, which was to look at the effects of nuclear war on the atmosphere, and calculated the amount of smoke likely to be generated by the fire-balls. Their sums showed that this smoke would be of sufficient density to black-out nearly all the sunlight from half the earth for weeks or even months on end. Nuclear war would create a sunless nuclear winter of terrifying proportions, and no one would escape its consequences. The bunkers of Whitehall, of the Pentagon and of the Kremlin would become tombs in a frozen, dying world, a world of ecological catastrophe. The bomb-child of Hiroshima is, possibly, the end of the world as we know it.

Nuclear Winter shows that this prognosis is not just a back-of-an-envelope calculation by two scientists coming to the subject late in the day. It sets out a possible — indeed probable — nuclear war scenario, and then examines, step by step, its consequences.

First, the effects of local fires and the influence of season, bomb size, etc, are detailed; then the

cumulative effects of the spread of this smoke through the upper atmosphere, blocking out the light and heat of the sun, first in the Northern Hemisphere and then possibly spilling across the Equator. Temperatures could drop by 15-20 degrees centigrade (which is nearly double the winter-summer difference in the United Kingdom), with lethal effects on sensitive plants and on harvests generally. There are great uncertainties in some of these calculations which are carefully explained. But let us hope that the hypotheses on which they are based will never be tested by a real war.

The essential additional horror predicted by these calculated secondary effects, supported by sophisticated analyses of the American Academy of Sciences and Russian scientists, as well as by others, is the world-wide changes caused to all living things due to lack of light and heat, and possibly also by damaging ultra-violet irradiation. A short review cannot do justice to the carefully detailed data presented in support of the arguments about this. Think, for example, of the effects on our crops if the pollinating insects should be immobilised by cold, or if there is too little light for our cereals to set seed. The sensitive balance of the ecological network of plants and animals would be damaged, often irreversibly, and many species — possibly including mankind — would decline in numbers to levels from which they could never recover.

The only probability I have noted which is not considered in any detail is the likelihood that many pathogens (bacteria, viruses, etc) to which we are adapted would be changed to forms lethal to us by the radiation and fallout. But then ordinary pathogens would kill weakened and starved survivors. We need not add horror to horror.

Nuclear Winter is a cool, scientific assessment of an unexpected aspect of nuclear war. It is clearly written and deliberately presented so that it can be understood by the layman as well as by the concerned scientist. Details, some of which may be difficult for the non-scientist to follow (though most are not), are set aside in "boxes" in the text or in appendices. The book can therefore be read at a popular level, or it can be used to follow up the latest details of some very sophisticated arguments, which are adequately referenced. This careful presentation matches its purpose to inform; it removes the excuse of ignorance from all of us, politicians included.

Humanists should read this book, which confronts them with the problems of their priorities of action. If the bombs go off, our technologies, our history and our churches will all be destroyed. Old arguments become irrelevant when confronted with the urgent need to eliminate nuclear weapons from the world. Ex-President Nixon recently emphasised that urgency by recording how he considered dropping the bomb on four occasions during his five years in

office.

We stand at the edge of catastrophe, and we each have to decide what we can do to pull back. Is it enough to go through the almost religious ritual of floating candles in memory of Hiroshima? I think not. The problem is neither emotional or ethical, but

political. And it is too important to leave to politicians.

What we need is a real popular front against the Bomb. This book provides the arguments to support such a broad campaign.

JAMES SANG

“Education” as Indoctrination

MICHAEL DUANE

Education and Indoctrination is a 64-page report from the “Education Research Centre” — a name that implies an institution with facilities for research, but is not.

“Research” used to mean “controlled experiment and assessment, setting out precise objectives, carefully described methods that could be replicated, and with conclusions drawn from the evidence”. Now, often Americanised as “ree-surch”, it has become a word to include any collation of facts, opinions or prejudices.

The report, compiled by Roger Scruton, Angela Ellis-Jones and Dennis O’Keefe, is described as “a study”, but turns out to be a re-hash of older material by Scruton, with additions. The “analysis”, as it is now called, is not a “survey” and the examples are not “representative”. The “argument” is neither an “accusation” nor a “warning”, but is “a preliminary definition of terms”. I have highlighted the “scholarly” terms used by the authors who disdainfully refer to the “benighted language” of those whom they attack.

Ten pages headed “The Problem” quote five short passages from three writers to illustrate (despite the previous disclaimer) the politicisation of the curriculum for the purpose of indoctrination.

Roger Scruton is an art historian with pretensions to be a philosopher (viz “a lover of wisdom”; “one who acts calmly and rationally”). But see what he does next. He starts: “The ease with which the subject of English can be made into an instrument of the crude propaganda that (Mr Searle) advocates, and the fact that English is the first requirement in anything that might be called British education, must therefore give serious cause for concern”. He continues: “Examples may be multiplied. However, *the two that we give* (my emphasis, M.D.) may be easily extrapolated”. Note that he refers to “two”, i.e. *not* those he has used already.

He then quotes Bridget Baines as a writer “advocating ‘anti-sexist’ education”. Throughout the remainder of this section he mentions no specific British writer or quotation. In the next paragraph he writes, “the politicised world-view . . . is associated with the Left. But it is not necessary that this should be so. Such a world-view was active in Germany during the days of National Socialism . . . an ideology, not of the Left, but of the Right . . .

the Nazis had exactly the same uncompromising attitude to education as is revealed by Nicholson and Richardson in the quotations above”.

So “philosopher” Scruton, the “careful scholar”, is not above using the methods of the gutter press — the snide association of the writers mentioned with the burning of books and the murder of millions of Jews. In the same paragraph he accuses his opponents of acting “without respect for all normal scruples and decencies when this seems to them to be expedient”.

Throughout the rest of this section the reader is dragged into a verbal bog in which “classical Marxism” and “neo-Marxism” are (I was about to write “briskly” but that economy and precision are not to be found in this tract) ham-fistedly crammed into Scruton’s jumble-sale of fuzzy concepts. Language is used like a muck-spreader or a church bell — you hope that what is sent forth will reach its intended goal, but you can’t be sure. The use of “extrapolate”, for example, is typical of the many words that seem to have been pulled out of a bran tub. “Extrapolate” means “finding by calculation based on known terms, new terms in a series”, whereas the sense of his phrase demands “collect other similar examples”; but, of course, it *sounds* so much more academic. Imprecise thought is none the less imprecise for being polysyllabic.

Section 2 has the title “Indoctrination”. In the first note on page 62, Scruton dismisses as “sober, academic and slightly tedious” the reflections of such usually respected authorities as R. S. Peters, Paul Hirst, R. F. Dearden and J. P. White, whose language is at least precise and carefully defined where it is used in other than the accepted manner. Scruton may find it “tedious” if he is unused to absorbing complex ideas in a sustained argument; perhaps that is why he omits John Dewey whose ideas on education and indoctrination command respect to this day. Scruton prefers to sally forth with the ineffective weapon of his own distaste rather than the sharp edge of philosophical analysis. The core of his message is that the London University Institute of Education and the North London Polytechnic — his *bêtes noires* — ask loaded questions in their examinations.

Up to page 22 it is obvious that the examples are taken only from “leftist” writers. Now, in a generous

burst of impartiality Scruton actually manufactures a "rightist" example — not a real example that the reader might be able to check for himself, but a *papier-maché* figure of the Right — no less than "the typical blimp (of whom a few remain)" — note the endearing demurrals, lest the reader be misled into thinking that Scruton had any serious anxieties about the possibility of indoctrination from the Right.

Having thus made a bow to equity Scruton pushes on to conclude with five characteristics of indoctrination — an astonishingly crude attempt to deal with a set of attitudes and processes that emanate from the psyche itself. At this point the reader may feel that he is observing a three-card trickster rather than a scholar at work. Not a spark of genuine doubt; not a tweak of uncertainty. It is wrapped up, bundled together and seeking to be, if not, slick. No "ifs" or "buts". We may begin to ask: "But what of the ways in which the young child is indoctrinated into the 'right' attitudes to, e.g. the monarchy? How the National Anthem is played on solemn and joyous occasions to associate strongly the monarchy with the great and good things of life. How the monarch is associated with the armed forces to create the image of the powerful protector of the people and the terrible destroyer of their enemies. How by continual association with only the most wealthy and the most powerful — except for the occasional "walk-about"—the monarch is kept at a distance from common intercourse and made to appear qualitatively different from the ordinary people". As the popular myth has it, they have "blue blood". How many schools encourage their pupils to question the relevance of that and other feudal relics to the fact of a technical democracy?

The eighteen pages spent on "Education" is a continuation of the bash at politicised subjects, especially sociology, Mrs Thatcher's bogeyman, and the "less contentious" social sciences like economics. Books written with a Marxist slant "juggle with discredited notions . . . 'labour theory', 'class struggle'", and so on. "It is as though geography were to be taught by 'experts' all of whom believed that the earth is flat".

When he draws on his own field — as in the examination of the concept of a painting, much of what Scruton writes is fairly obvious—p133. But the material on pages 32 *et seq*, which includes allegations unsupported by evidence is simply wearisome to read. Look at the tedious pursuit of the obvious on pages 35 and 36, a pursuit that leads to neither clarity nor insight — "Everything worthwhile in education stems from . . . the question 'Why?'" (page 39)—a dry-as-dust approach to art that is stupefyingly insensitive. Why didn't Shakespeare add a commentary, to be spoken from the wings, showing why Lear's "Never, never, never, never, never" drains the audience of every irrelevant preoccupa-

tion. Why did not Virgil add a footnote to explain the poignancy of *infandum regina iubes renovare dolorem*? Does Scruton not allow for the experience itself: for the cumulative saturation of the psyche in the play, the poem or the building? Of course there is place for rational analysis, but it has to be on the foundation of experience. How can a study of a cathedral from film or drawings compare with the actuality of being and moving in the building, absorbing its forms, spaces and resonances as well as the human activities for which it was designed?

Two pages are devoted to "Morality and Religion" — in a tract on indoctrination! Again, surely he means "parameters" where he writes "paradigms"? The third paragraph fails to dispel the fog that so often surrounds such a discussion and avoids definitions. For him "religion reminds us we are mortal . . . gives sustenance . . . by parables and symbols. . . The true difference between religious and political indoctrination lies here. The enthusiasms and emotions that are stirred by religion are, *if properly directed* (my italics, M.D.), gathered up in worship and prayer. They are not let loose . . . to carry out a vain and destructive work of earthly redemption".

There we have it! The function of religion and morality is to protect the status quo. Indoctrination is legitimate there — they *need* to be rooted in the psyche through indoctrination. The five characteristics are now, by the miracle of political partiality, rendered not only innocuous but essential to the maintenance of good order and discipline. Alarm bells need not ring in the seats of education for the rich: legislation is directed only at LEA schools — the State system.

To any reader accustomed to taking the bones out of polemical tracts from Left or Right it must seem that I have spent too long on low-grade stuff. My justification is that this report has been praised as an important addition to educational debate. That ills exist in our system few doubt, but that they can be discovered and excised by such turgid preciousness is as likely as that The Leaderene's megalomania can be cured by a wave of the Court Jester's bladder.

For an effective caricature of the "leftist" academic that is both convincing and incisive, Scruton should read Malcolm Bradbury's *The History Man*.

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Atheists on Tape

The National Secular Society has produced a cassette recording of a simulated open-air meeting on atheism entitled *Atheism on a Soap-Box*, copies of which are available from the NSS office (702 Holloway Road, London, N19 3NL) at £1.50 each, post free (with quantity discounts). And if you don't want to keep it, you can re-use it.

The script is a lively one — written by NSS president, Barbara Smoker, and based on her experience as an open-air speaker. While covering a wide range of serious issues, it has some laughs in it too.

The cassette, which runs for one hour, was made for the NSS by a Talking Newspaper association, which will be distributing copies through the usual catalogues issued to the blind. Since one such catalogue contained no fewer than nineteen propaganda cassettes prepared by religious groups, and there were no secular humanist ones at all, the NSS decided it was time to do something about it. But the cassette is not, of course, only suitable for the blind. It is suitable for general use — whether for convinced atheists or religious believers willing to listen to another view, and whether for home listening or group meetings.

A printed version of it will be published shortly, either for people who prefer to read rather than listen (or who like to do both together) or for groups whose members would like to produce a DIY "play-reading" (for six voices) rather than have the canned variety.

Israeli's first football match of the season got off to its scheduled start last month despite opposition from religious parties to it being played on the sabbath. The Israeli Football Association had threatened to cancel the entire programme if they could not play on Saturday. The religious parties have threatened retribution.

Martin Boon

endeavours were again unsuccessful, for he died by his own hand at Christmas 1888. A South African paper reported the circumstances of the discovery of his body in a mine shaft. "Mr. Boon . . . disappeared from his home at Rietfontein on December 26th, and his hat being seen floating on the top of the water in the shaft, with his spectacles and umbrella lying at the mouth of it, led to the belief that the rash act had been committed. Search being made, the body was found in the shaft".

It is indicative of the obscurity into which Boon had fallen that his death was scarcely noted.

LETTERS

PRESBYTERIANS—FREE AND OTHERWISE

I realise it must be almost impossible for Sassenachs to disentangle the complicated strands of Scottish church history (it is difficult enough for most Scots), but the writer of "News and Views" (August) is wrong in equating the Free Presbyterian Church and the Wee Frees.

The term "Wee Frees" is applied exclusively to members of the Free Church of Scotland, the Free Presbyterian Church seceding from that body in 1893, because, believe it or not, they believed the Wee Frees had become too liberal in their beliefs and practices. The Wee Frees had seceded from the Church of Scotland 50 years previously for much the same reasons. An Article of mine, attempting to explain the often subtle theological differences between the various Scottish Protestant denominations, was published in "The Freethinker" in 1956.

JOHN L. BROOM

TRIBUTE TO CAMERON

The hysterical twitterings of your correspondent Margaret Molton might have been better left unsaid. There is no attempt to substantiate the allegations; as the letter is printed, truth has been trifled with.

The tribute referred to, far from being "fulsome", was, if anything, inadequate. James Cameron was of course a true Freethinker; his life was his best testimonial — and, in any event, "good wine needs no bush".

PETER COTES

THE JESUS STORIES

It is clear that Robert Morrell has been bewitched by G. A. Wells. If there is "nothing inherently implausible" in my hypothesis there certainly is such in the Jesus Myth Theory (JMT) which Wells revived. Advocates of the JMT need to show that it offers the simplest explanation for the origin of Christianity, but this they have failed to do. The JMT is an extremely complicated hypothesis, and as such it is most unlikely to offer the true explanation.

We may take the story of the empty tomb and Jesus' resurrection as an example (to which to apply the two hypotheses). There is no reason why Christianity should have invented such a tale, implying as it did the death of the Messiah! Orthodox Judaism had no vision of the death of the Messiah, let alone his resurrection. However, Jesus appears to have belonged to a Jewish sect which did believe that the Messiah should die. Moreover they seem to have believed that he would be replaced by a second Messiah! This belief was based on little-known and/or ambiguous verses in the Jewish scriptures.

Morrell himself claims that a dead Messiah was "a fake" (so undermining his own case). This was true for the orthodox but not for the unorthodox. Advocates of the JMT cannot have it both ways; they cannot claim that the myth was constructed from the Jewish scriptures if those scriptures do not contain the necessary material.

Morrell claims that the concept of two Messiahs "does not fit in with the [orthodox] Jewish conception of what the expected Messiah was". This is meaningless. Although the first Messiah did not fit, the second one did. It is true that he was thought to be a political and military leader, but he was also to be the religious leader. In Israel politics and religion were inseparable.

However, I did not claim that he was "a god". The Messiah was not God, or even a god; he was to be a man chosen by God. It was the Christian Church which changed the Jewish Messiah into a god, the universal saviour so obviously modelled, as Morrell states, on Mithras.

The Suffering Servant may, as Morrell suggests, be derived from other Near-Eastern religions, but he is to be found in the Book of Isaiah. Jesus' concepts of the Messiah derive not directly from other religions but from the Jewish scriptures. If Jesus is a myth these scriptures must be the source of the myth. It is known that the late Jewish beliefs in spirit beings, the Devil, after-life and resurrection came from Zoroastrianism after the Jewish scriptures had already been written. Nevertheless, the Pharisees (a name that may be related to "Parsee"), the sect to which Jesus belonged, had adopted these beliefs and set great importance by them. It may be true that the concept of resurrection originated in Egypt, but that is not the point. It does not matter where Judaism found its beliefs; it only matters that it possessed them. Even if Jesus is a mythical figure, the myth must have been constructed by Jews out of Jewish beliefs. I propose that Jesus did exist and that his (necessarily Jewish) beliefs were in fact borrowed from those of adjacent civilizations. In particular, his belief that the Messiah could die and rise again as another Messiah comes from the common idea of the death and resurrection of the king in a fertility rite. In the Egyptian religion the dying Osiris is re-born as Horus.

The fact that the stories about Jesus bear a relation to the beliefs of contemporary religions is not evidence that Jesus himself is as mythical as (say) Mithras. It is only evidence that Judaism has much in common with other religions. Morrell has jumped to the wrong conclusion.

STEUART CAMPBELL

Koestler Appointment

Dr Robert Morris, senior research scientist at the School of Computer and Information Science, Syracuse University, New York State, is to be the first holder of a research chair into parapsychology at Edinburgh University. The eminent writer Arthur Koestler and his wife, who both committed suicide three years ago, left £500,000 endowment for the post.

Dr Morris, who will take up the appointment on 1 December, says that many of the claims made by psychics can usually be found to have a rational explanation. Much of his early work at Edinburgh would concentrate on ways that people can mislead themselves or be deceived by others.

Although he has been closely involved in parapsychology for many years, Dr Morris says that he has never had a personal experience of an undisputed abnormal event.

He added: "We usually find that when people who claim remarkable powers are tested in controlled conditions they cannot do it.

"There are many tricks of the trade which can be learnt by reading books. One must be very careful in one's approach".

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. York Hotel, Botanic Avenue, Belfast. Meetings on the second Tuesday of the month at 8 pm.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. The Prince Albert, Trafalgar Street (adjacent to Brighton Station). Sunday, 3 November, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. James Hemming: The Origin of Goodness. The Freethinker editor will be guest of honour at the Group's annual dinner on Saturday, 16 November, Langford's Hotel, Third Avenue, Hove. Tickets £6.50 each from Peggy Ratcliffe, 11 Powis Grove, Brighton, telephone 723475.

British Humanist Association. Annual dinner, Saturday, 16 November, Restaurant L'Hermitage, 19 Leigh Street, London WC1. Speaker: Diane Munday. Tickets £10 each from BHA, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8, telephone 01-937 2341.

British Humanist Association. Holborn Library Hall, 32-38 Theobalds Road, London WC1. Three public meetings, Wednesdays 6 November, 27 November and 18 December, 7 pm. Subject: Freedom and Information. Publicity leaflets obtainable from BHA office.

Edinburgh Humanist Group. Programme of Forum meetings from the secretary, 59 Fox Covert Avenue, Edinburgh, EH12 6UH, telephone 031-334 8372.

Gay Humanist Group. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Meetings on the second Friday of the month at 7.30 pm.

Glasgow Humanist Society. Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Norman Macdonald, 15 Queen Square, Glasgow G41 2BG, telephone 041-424 0545.

Havering and District Humanist Society. Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road, Harold Wood. Tuesday, 5 November, 8 pm. Kathleen Frith: Surrogate Mothers — Good Girls or Bad Girls?

Humanist Holidays. Christmas at Folkestone, Kent. Details obtainable from Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12 ONA, telephone 01-673 6234.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 31 October, 7.45 pm. Terry Liddle: Ezra Pound — Madman or Genius?

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Swartmore Centre, Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Monday, 11 November, 7.45 pm. A speaker from Leeds Community Relations Council: The Ethnic Minorities — Religious Issues.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 13 November, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. Christine Bondi: The Case Against Denominational Schools.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House, Hill Street (off Corporation Street), Coventry, Monday, 21 October, 7.45 pm for 8 pm. Public Meeting.

Worthing Humanist Group. Trades Club, 15 Broadwater Road, Worthing. Sunday, 27 October, 5.30 pm. Diana Rookledge: Our Troubled World—Has Humanism the Answer?

Civil Rights Opposed by Authoritarian Church and Dictatorial Pope

"By the creation of a Roman Catholic State here, we have complemented and completed the work commenced by the British in their Protestant Plantation of Ulster, designed to create in Ireland a two-nation state, divided by religion", declared Dr Noel Browne, the former Irish Minister of Health, when he spoke at an educational conference in Glenties, Co Donegal.

Dr Browne was a central figure in the 1951 controversy over a Mother and Child scheme which was fiercely opposed by the Roman Catholic Church. He resigned, and remains the bishops' bitterest foe in the Republic.

In his latest speech, Dr Browne said that since the 19th century the Roman Catholic Church had controlled Irish schools. And there was plenty of evidence showing Rome realised that those who controlled the schools also controlled society.

Dr Browne said that the Roman Catholic Church was authoritarian and anti-democratic. As for Pope John Paul II: "Unashamedly, he is a dictator".

Describing the Irish bishops as "regional colonial governors" who are not even permitted to choose their own successors, he said that in no part of Ireland did the people govern themselves.

"In the South they are governed by a politico-religious authority, whose secretariat, governing bodies, the whole apparatus of government, with its

supreme head, the Pope, lies in a faraway Italian state, the Vatican City. It is a country in which few Irish people have ever visited, and fewer still speak the language, Latin".

Dr Browne attacked Sinn Fein's failure to promote civil rights for women in divorce, abortion and contraception. This failure had been defended with the trite excuse that the Irish have a separate culture and are not English.

"As if such rights are not common throughout the civilised world", Dr Browne commented. "They are not the exclusive monopoly of the English". The true reason why Sinn Fein had not supported the campaign for these civil rights was that they had been condemned by Rome.

Dr Garrett Fitzgerald had abandoned the campaign for constitutional reform in the face of Church opposition, Dr Browne declared. "And yet another veto by Rome, on abortion, has joined that on divorce which was written into the Constitution in 1937".

Referring to the problems which the Catholic nationalists in the North had to endure, Dr Browne said: "This is mainly because every single Roman Catholic Republican leader in the South can readily be shown invariably to have given his first loyalty, not to the Republic or to a united Ireland, but to Rome".

Christian Terrorists' "Birthday Gift" to Jesus

Heavy prison sentences have been imposed on two anti-abortion campaigners in the United States. James Simmons and Matthew Goldsby each received a ten-year term of imprisonment for bombing three abortion clinics in Florida. Simmons' wife and Goldsby's girl friend, Kaye Wiggins, were each fined \$2,000 and put on probation for five years.

The bombings took place last Christmas and were described by the Christian terrorists as "a gift to Jesus on his birthday". Simmons told reporters that nobody should carry out such attacks "unless God tells them to".

Patrick Monahan, a defence attorney, said: "My clients are with the unindicted conspirator. And that's God". Paul Shimek, who defended Kaye Wiggins, said that he too would blow up a building "if God told him to do it". He added: "God cares, and he controls everything in the universe".

Faye Wattleton, president of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, said the organisation hoped that the outcome of the trial "will serve as a

deterrent to others who are contemplating violence as a means of imposing their religious beliefs on others".

She called for a federal investigation into threats of violence by an anti-abortion coalition headed by ex-monk Joseph Scheidler. Speaking to a group of his supporters in Wisconsin, he proposed causing "a year of pain and tears for women seeking abortion".

Faye Wattleton commented: "We believe this signals a new wave of violence that has already resulted in the bombing and burning of abortion and family planning clinics. This is terrorism by anyone's definition".

Dr Douglas Chambers, the St Pancras coroner, has revealed that a report has been sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions following the death of a two-year-old boy who had a circumcision operation. The boy, whose parents are Muslims, underwent the operation on religious grounds.