

The Freethinker

secular humanist monthly

founded 1881

Vol. 107. No. 3

MARCH 1987

30p

SEX EDUCATION: NEW STUDY DEBUNKS THE "LEAVE IT TO PARENTS" LOBBY

The Policy Studies Institute's "Education in Sex and Personal Relationships" contains little of comfort for those religious and Right-wing political pressure groups campaigning against sex education in school. Their confident claims that parents prefer to impart sexual knowledge to their children, and that pupils are in danger of being exposed to unmentionable horrors during sex education lessons, are debunked by the independent research organisation's thoroughly researched study, published last month. It involved over four hundred interviews with parents and children in the 14-16 age group.

In the first detailed survey of its kind for nearly a decade, the Institute's researchers reveal that the overwhelming majority of parents (96 per cent) and pupils (95 per cent) believe that schools should be responsible for sex education. These and other facts are in marked contrast to the misleading but well publicised statements which emanate from puritanical sources.

The report also shows that parents have almost as difficult a problem about discussing sexual matters as do young people. Many parents said the inadequacy of their own sex education has resulted in an inability to discuss the subject. They were anxious that their children did not grow up in the same atmosphere of ignorance and embarrassment.

Nearly 75 per cent of the young people interviewed said they had never spoken to their fathers about sex or contraception. Boys appear to receive less information about sexual matters than do girls.

The myth of pupils being encouraged to indulge in premature sex through lax and irresponsible teaching is also exploded in the PSI study. Many of the teenage interviewees regarded their teachers with confidence and trust. They were often doubtful if their parents were as well informed on sexual matters or could discuss them without embarrassment.

The researchers point to "considerable evidence . . . of teenagers who were not 'sex mad', who were concerned about the feelings and emotions of others, who were interested in a wide variety of academic and sporting pursuits, who were balanced and deeply responsible individuals with strong affection for their parents, loyalty to their friends, and good relationships with their teachers".

The PSI report declares that "the importance of educating young people about AIDS cannot be over-emphasised". Shortly after it was published, the Government announced plans for a campaign to warn young people of the AIDS threat. Ignoring the Right-wing moralists, a high-powered committee has approved the distribution of explicit video programmes and booklets. These will stress the dangers of casual sex and recommend young people, including those under the age of consent, to use a condom as a precaution against AIDS.

The integration of sex education into a programme of personal and social education is recommended by the PSI study.

Other recommendations include the use of films and television programmes in explaining sex. Class discussions under the guidance of teachers should be encouraged.

Expert speakers should be invited to address pupils on their special areas of interest.

The PSI recommendations will inevitably be opposed by those groups campaigning to undermine the 1967 Abortion Act, discredit the family planning movement and prevent effective programmes of sex education in schools. If they have their way, we will see yet another generation of the sexually ignorant adding to the rates of unwanted pregnancies and abortions.

It is imperative that the authorities ignore the clamourings of a vociferous, puritanical minority.

The Freethinker

UK ISSN 0016-0687

Editor: WILLIAM McILROY

The Freethinker was founded in 1881 by George William Foote and is published mid-monthly. The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Publishers or of the Editor.

Articles, Reviews, News Reports, Obituaries, Letters and Announcements should be sent by the 10th of the preceding month to the Editor at 14 Coundon Road, Coventry CV1 4AW, West Midlands (telephone Coventry 20070). Unsolicited reviews should not be submitted.

Vol 107 No 3 CONTENTS March 1987

SEX EDUCATION: NEW STUDY DEBUNKS THE "LEAVE IT TO PARENTS" LOBBY	33
NEWS AND NOTES	34
Jesusites in Jackboots; Sloane Square, Jerusalem; A Man of God; Church Commandment; Called to Account	
A LATE CONVERSION	37
Barry Duke	
WHAT FUTURE FOR THE FOURTH R?	38
Clifford Longley	
EVOLUTION AND CHRISTIAN BELIEF	39
James Sang	
SWINBURNE — A POET OF LIBERTY	40
T. F. Evans	
FREETHINKER REVIEWS	42
Anti-Racism — an Assault on Education and Value Reviewer: Karl Heath Sorry — You've Been Duped Reviewer: Barbara Smoker	
SIR HUGH GREENE, 1910-1987	44
Peter Cotes	
LETTERS	45

Postal subscriptions, book orders and donations to the Freethinker Fund should be sent to:

G. W. FOOTE & COMPANY,
702 HOLLOWAY ROAD, LONDON N19 3NL
(Telephone: 01-272 1266)

SPECIAL POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

UK and overseas: twelve months, £3.60. (UK six months, £2). USA: twelve months, \$8. Overseas subscribers are requested to obtain sterling drafts from their banks, but if remittance is in foreign currency (including Republic of Ireland), please add the equivalent of £5 sterling or USA \$7 to cover bank charges. Alternatively, send at your own risk currency notes convertible in the UK, plus bank charges equivalent to USA \$2.

 David Nell & Company Dorking Surrey

NEWS

JESUITES IN JACKBOOTS

During his recent visit to Australia, the ever theatrical Pope John Paul II was, of course, the star turn at Masses and rallies of the faithful. Not surprisingly, he attracted large audiences — the organising talents of Glen Wheatley, who staged the Bruce Springsteen show, and Gary Edmonds, the Dire Straits promoter, were engaged (at a price) to merchandise the Pontiff.

A *Freethinker* reader who watched the Pope's first "ecumenical" Mass on television reports: "Conspicuous in the crowd were people waving Ustasha flags". Such enthusiasm from Croatian émigrés is quite understandable. John Paul II is an ultra-reactionary, traditionalist Pope whose teachings appeal to Europe's most fanatical Catholics.

Two questions arise from this Ustasha demonstration of loyalty to the Pope. First, what are followers of the Ustasha movement doing in Australia? Secondly, how many of those ecumenically-minded Christians who attended the Mass realised they were rubbing shoulders with perpetrators of the most evil atrocities that took place in wartime Europe?

The Church-backed Ustasha Nazis set up the "independent State" of Croatia in 1941, under the leadership of Ante Pavelic who had returned to Yugoslavia from Italy. Even before Yugoslavia capitulated to the Axis powers, Alojziji Stepinac, Catholic Archbishop of Zagreb, had made contact with Ustasha leaders and met Pavelic. Stepinac described the establishment of the new puppet State as "a long-cherished wish . . . a work of God that arouses our admiration".

A leader of the Catholic Crusaders organisations wrote in the journal *Nedelja*: "God, who directs the destiny of nations and controls the hearts of Kings, has given us Ante Pavelic and moved the leader of a friendly and allied people, Adolf Hitler, to use his victorious troops to disperse our oppressors and enable us to create an independent State of Croatia. Glory be to God, our gratitude to Adolf Hitler".

Archbishop Stepinac had no qualms about the racial legislation that was immediately introduced by "God's gift to Croatia". In fact he wrote to Andrija Artukovic, the Interior Minister, supporting the "racial purity" laws, with the proviso that "Catholic non-Aryans be treated in a respectful manner". He did not utter a word of protest when the Ustasha forces massacred nearly 200 priests and bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Stepinac regarded the Orthodox as "schismatics", bracketing them with

S AND NOTES

Communists and Freemasons as enemies of the Roman Catholic Church.

A programme of forced conversion to Catholicism was launched. Ustasha soldiers, accompanied by Catholic priests and monks, rounded up inhabitants and told them they must convert to Rome. Those who refused were either sent to concentration camps or executed on the spot. A priest named Father Bujanovic had a set speech for such occasions: "Up to now we have fought with the cross and the Bible. Henceforth our weapons will be the dagger and the revolver".

At a higher level, Dr Mile Budak, Minister of Public Education and Creeds, told a meeting on 21 July 1941: "We shall kill one part Serbs, we shall transport another, and the rest will be forced to embrace the Roman Catholic religion. This last part will be absorbed by Croatian elements". Dr Mirke Puk, Minister for Justice and Religion, endorsed this scheme for the puppet State "to become 100 per cent Catholic in ten years".

After the war "converts" to Catholicism returned to the Serbian Orthodox Church in large numbers. Patriarch Gavriilo, who spent several years in concentration camps, including Dachau, refused to meet Pope Pius XII. He criticised him "for not having condemned the conversion of Orthodox Christians in Croatia, and for not having defended the Serbs when they were threatened with extermination".

The collaborator Stepinac was sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment, but was released after five years on condition that he remained in Krasic, his home town. He was made a cardinal in 1956 by the pro-Nazi Pius XII.

Thousands of Ustasha members fled abroad. They established Croatian centres in many countries and for over 40 years have churned out lying propaganda. "Religious persecution" is one of their stock excuses for seeking asylum in other countries. Certainly there was religious persecution and mass murder of Orthodox, Serbs, Jews and "undesirables". But the reign of terror in Croatia was condoned by the Roman Catholic hierarchy and carried out by priests, monks and Ustasha forces.

Many of the Ustasha terrorists have died or are past further evil-doing. But it is very likely that some of them were among the flag-wavers who greeted Pope John Paul II in Australia.

Mary Whitehouse has criticised the Associated Examining Board's plan to use extracts from Bob Geldof's autobiography in A-level examinations.

SLOANE SQUARE, JERUSALEM

Ken Loach, director of Jim Allen's play, *Perdition*, is reported to be looking for a theatre "with the guts to stand up to the organized Zionist lobby". Performances of the play were cancelled 24 hours before it was due to open at London's Royal Court Theatre.

Perdition deals with Zionist policy towards the Nazis in 1944 Budapest. It has been criticised for being inaccurate and anti-semitic. One of the most trenchant criticisms came from Lord Goodman, writing in the London *Evening Standard*.

Ken Loach commented: "What outrages me, and the cast, is that we have been smeared with anti-semitism without the play being seen. Goodman's piece in the *Standard* was the writing of a thug . . .

"Banning a play is the equivalent of burning a book. *Perdition* asks questions about what happened.

"Zionists aren't prepared to face the issues from their own political past. They seem to think they speak for all Jews. They don't, but what we got from the press was straight propaganda from the Zionist lobby. This is a major issue of freedom of expression".

A MAN OF GOD

Mrs Edwina Currie, the junior Health Minister, mistimed a recent tribute to "good Christian people" by making her fatuous statement on the very day that a "good Christian" evangelist was found guilty at the Old Bailey of unlawfully administering drugs, indecent assault and rape. The following day, still clasping a copy of the Bible, he was given a 16-year prison sentence.

No doubt it is being claimed that Cecil Gilbert, the globe-trotting South African evangelist, is not a "real" Christian. Gilbert claimed he had experienced a supernatural visitation when he was surrounded by a "holy, clean, atmosphere of roses". A voice said: "I have chosen you. Take the message to the nations and by my word cast out demons and heal the sick". It all sounds so familiar.

During his career, the Rev Cecil Gilbert, alias Bishop Gilbert, alias Apostle Enoch John, set up a string of religious organisations. They went under impressive names like Worldwide Mission, Divine Life Institute, Living Water Mission and Feed the Lambs Institute.

Cecil Gilbert's trial highlighted once again the mawkish credulity that the "born again" state induces.

The parents of two of his victims trusted the servant of the Lord so implicitly that they allowed

their young daughters to spend the night with him. One Christian couple helped to finance something called the "Christ For All" crusade, and trusted him with the care of their 14-year-old daughter who was drugged and sexually assaulted. The girl's mother, a "born again" Christian, explained to the court that Gilbert knew his Bible. She added: "You don't question people like that".

CHURCH COMMANDMENT

Ian Jenkins, who worked as a gardener at a Church of Scotland old people's home, has been sacked — for refusing to work on Sunday. He had been employed at the home in Sandbank, near Dunoon, for ten years and lived in a tied house. He and his wife have moved to a council house.

Although his Church employers wanted Mr Jenkins to work on the Sabbath, they did not want him to be seen doing so. He said: "Kirk officials explained it would be embarrassing if a minister visiting the old folks' home where I worked complained that I wasn't observing the Sabbath".

Mr Jenkins was told that under the terms of his contract his hours were being changed to include Sunday working. He protested, and was ordered to attend a disciplinary hearing in Edinburgh.

"I didn't go", he said, "because I couldn't see how a hearing could change my beliefs".

Mr Jenkins was sacked and tried to get compensation through an industrial tribunal. But he decided against taking action when the Church of Scotland warned that it would claim full costs if he lost the case.

CALLED TO ACCOUNT

The Roman Catholic weekly *Universe* recently carried a report concerning the Vatican's financial plight. It appears that the papal power-house of religious superstition is, financially speaking, in the mulligatawny. This year's deficit is £36 million.

The Universe enquired of the faithful what they were prepared to do about this distressing state of affairs. There was an encouraging response from a Mr Sullivan of Liverpool: "I certainly would be willing to help the Vatican to reduce its debts", he wrote. But being an Old Age Pensioner, his mite will not make much impact on the current deficit.

As *The Universe* caters from more traditionalist Catholics, the general reaction to the begging bowl was rather surprising.

Reader P. Biggs, of Carmarthen, laid it on the line: "Until the Vatican comes up with answers to the claims made by David Yallop in his book *In God's Name*, and until it stops giving refuge to Archbishop Marcinkus, Pellegrino de Strobel and

Luigi Mannini, who I feel bear some responsibility for the extraordinary activities of the Vatican Bank and its connections with the Banco Ambrosiano, I wouldn't give the Vatican one penny.

"The cardinals can ask until they are blue in the face, but my contribution will be nil.

"I have seven, soon eight, mouths to feed and any surplus goes towards the millions who are really poor".

A Sussex reader wrote to say that she would be willing to contribute. "But having read David Yallop's very disturbing book *In God's Name*, the accounts should definitely be published", she added somewhat tartly.

Even Irish Catholics are less compliant than of yore. A Limerick lady said that in no way would she be willing to help reduce Vatican debts. But she offered free advice to the Church: "If it has debts let it sell some of its assets, tighten its belt like the rest of us, and live more frugally".

In God's Name is certainly attracting a wide and varied readership. It is on sale at bookshops throughout the country, or may be obtained from G. W. Foote and Co Ltd, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL, price £2.95 plus 50p postage.

Freethinker Fund

Once again the Fund has got off to a splendid start. We warmly thank all contributors, in particular an extremely generous supporter who prefers to remain anonymous.

The first list of donations for 1987 is given below. C. O. Taylor, £1; A. C. F. Chambre, J. A. Charman, D. Coupland, J. Dobbin, J. E. Dyke, H. H. Fearn, D. Flint, H. Gurney, J. Holland, S. Kuebart, R. Lawton, P. MacDonald, P. H. C. Maguire, W. Millard, M. O'Brien, E. Wakefield, P. K. Willmott and J. Yeowell, £1.40 each; N. Barnes, D. Berman, I. Bertin, N. Bruce, T. J. Peters, D. C. Taylor and D. Wright (Ipswich), £2.40 each; F. Munniksmma, £3; A. A. H. Douglas, M. Fox and E. A. Napier, £3.40 each; P. Brown, £4; J. Hazelhurst, J. Lippitt and D. Wright (Ilford), £5 each; C. P. Tott, £6.35; R. W. Aldridge, D. Behr, E. M. Hay, F. C. Hoy, P. Kennedy and C. Wilshaw, £6.40 each; N. F. Wray, £8; G. L. J. Lucas, £13; A. E. Woodford, £14; P. G. Wrightson, £20; W. Scott, £21.40; E. J. Little, £25; Iconoclast, £1,000.

Total for January: £1,221.35.

Christopher Richmond, of Dibden Purlieu, Dorset, was sent to prison for 18 months at Southampton Crown Court for burning down a Jehovah's Witnesses hall. The court was told that he blamed his wife's membership of the sect for the breakdown of their marriage.

A Late Conversion

BARRY DUKE

In much the same way that Dr Frankenstein chose to disown the monster when he perceived the personal danger his creation began posing, the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa is now frantically trying to distance itself from the doctrine of apartheid which it spawned as far back as 1857.

Today the Church, which until very recently had demanded that the Nationalist regime enforce apartheid with every means at its disposal and irrespective of cost in terms of cash or human life, is insisting that the Bible-based doctrine of forced racial separation has all been a dreadful scriptural mistake.

This extraordinary *volte-face* was detailed recently in Channel 4's "Beyond Belief" programme, when the newly-elected Moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church — Johan Heyns, head of the Department of Dogmas and Ethics at Pretoria University — faced questioning by Dr Anthony Clare. Asked how he could explain this remarkable change in attitude, given that the Church had always been "the religious and moral bedrock of apartheid", Heyns replied — somewhat sheepishly — "I can only say that it must be a miracle". Miracle? Much more a case of Advanced Brown Trousers Syndrome.

Faced with the spectre of the likely destruction of Afrikanerdom in a revolution which looks closer now than ever before, frightened Dutch Reformed leaders have been tripping over themselves to ditch lifelong-held convictions in a bid to safeguard their futures under impending black rule. This, naturally, has left the Church with a Synod many perceive as cowardly hypocrites — and a credibility gap wide enough to drive a whites-only municipal bus through.

For it cannot confess to its congregations — which include 80 per cent of the National Party cabinet, and 70 per cent of MPs — that it had been forced by no higher a motive than naked fear to abandon its traditional stance on apartheid. (Translated into some of the most inhuman laws seen since Germany's Third Reich, the old theology aimed to keep blacks in a perpetual state of serfdom. This was most clearly spelled out by Dr Hendrik Verwoerd in 1954 when, as Minister for Native Affairs, he stated: "There is no place for the Bantu in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour".)

But on the other hand it can never convince those who have, understandably, always regarded the Church as a racist institution, every bit as evil as the Ku-Klux-Klan, that it now supports black liberation.

Left wriggling on a theological hook of their own devising, the Church hierarchy did the only thing they could in the circumstances. They scuttled back to their bibles in search of loopholes. And surprise,

they found a sufficient number to allow Heyns to declare that the resultant "ongoing study of scripture has brought about a change in the Church, which must now proclaim the message that forced separation of people of different colours is wrong".

He also said that the "Afrikaner people, taken as a whole, are very religious, and would not go on with certain practices if they were not theologically justified".

Does this mean that, given the Dutch Reformed Church's nice new humane theology, Afrikaners will now humbly beg forgiveness for the killings, the torture, the grinding poverty and the unrelenting abuse of human rights which typify life in South Africa? Will the Church now use its tremendous political clout to force reform?

No. Just as man created God in his own image, so did the Afrikaners create a church to accommodate their warped ideologies and reflect their deep-seated hatred of the black "pagan". And what better way of demonstrating their contempt for blacks than by converting them to Christianity — then forcing upon them a sense of inferiority by denying them the right to worship alongside white congregations. Hence the establishment of three subservient daughter churches — one for blacks, another for "coloureds" and the last for Asians — and the birth of what was later to develop into the monster of the modern apartheid State.

The old White Supremacist theology, buttressed by Bible, bullwhip and gun, has served the Afrikaner well, and if Heyns believes for a moment that the hard-line rank and file will abandon it without a fight, he gravely underestimates the depth of their racism, and their desire for bloody confrontation. He would also do well to remember their capacity for viciously punishing heretics. Despite sanctions, there are still plentiful supplies of tar, feathers and rope in South Africa.

ATHEISM, FREETHOUGHT, POLITICS, HISTORY

Books, pamphlets, and back issues of
"The Freethinker".

For full list write to:
G. W. Foote & Co, 702, Holloway Road,
London N19 3NL.

Scottish MPs have urged the Government to publish a secret report into alleged misuse of public funds in Paisley. Ministers were accused of a cover-up following an inquiry into a Manpower Services Commission scheme. A Glasgow newspaper revealed that over a million pounds was channelled through the Renfrew Evangelist Association.

The Religious Affairs Correspondent of The Times considers the changes that have undermined faith in religious education.

Sir Winston Churchill once dismissed the proposals in the 1944 Education Act for religious education in state schools as "Zoroastrianism" or the "County Council Creed". Nobody heeded his warning, of course, and it came to pass. Education authorities now routinely draft religious syllabuses "for a multi-cultural society", which means offering a bit of everything and encouraging children to feel "respect" for it.

But as everyone in the business really knows, RE in the state system is a disaster area, and nobody has much idea what to do about it, or even whose fault it is.

The law, which no party feels bold enough to want to change, lays down that the one compulsory subject in every school in the land should be religion, which the Butler Act called "religious instruction", and that every school should hold compulsory worship. The term "instruction" reveals how far the climate has changed in 42 years, and points to the false expectations of the churches, educationalists and politicians who made the compromises on which that part of the Act was based.

They were designing a deal that would bring the churches' big investment in education into one overall system. And they assumed they were legislating for a society which took it for granted that Christian belief was part of the basic order, and that school was the natural place to pass it on.

It is a normal English instinct to make a virtue out of a system that was originally a compromise, has long since ceased to be relevant, and was based on an entirely false prediction of the way society was likely to move. And so the present arrangement for religious education has its staunch defenders and vested interests. Conscientious teachers do their best with it, often bearing supreme professional frustration; and local and central government tinker and adapt it year by year.

But it is an open secret that most pupils regard RE as the most boring subject of all, that teachers of it are on a professional hiding to nothing, and that it is failing even in the modest aim of teaching children to know and respect any sort of religion.

Religion in state schools is taught according to a local agreed syllabus, as it is known, which is drawn up and revised by a carefully balanced committee whose composition is laid down by the Act. Early on, the main criticism was that it presented a lowest-common-denominator Christianity that nobody actually believed, and which concentrated on the

parts that caused no denominational friction. It tended to dwell excessively, in other words, on the better-known Bible stories and maps of the eastern Mediterranean. It was certainly taken for granted that the only religion of interest was Christianity.

A process of evolution over four decades, and changes in society, have now produced a very different agreed syllabus designed to "equip pupils for life in a multi-racial, multi-cultural society", to use a standard phrase. At the higher academic levels, for those few who are taking the subject in public examinations, pupils are still expected to have a good descriptive knowledge of Christianity, and probably reasonable familiarity with other major faiths. But the great majority of pupils do not take RE as an examination subject, and so most teachers do not feel the need to be too confined to the official course.

RE becomes, in such cases, an illustrated guide to other people's strange customs and beliefs, Christians not excluded; or a rudimentary course in ethics with the emphasis on pupils working things out for themselves. It is easy to mock; but it is not clear what else pupils are supposed to do with their 40 minutes a week. Nothing more detailed is possible.

Modern RE has been likened to teaching mathematics without ever asking pupils to do any calculations, or teaching art without paint and paper. The modern professional teacher's attitude is summed up by the universal horror at the concept of "indoctrination", which means teaching religion as if it were true rather than teaching it as something other people think is true. But this outsider-looking-in approach to religion is all a teacher can do, for that is all society — and the teaching profession — is prepared to sanction.

The more optimistic or naive religious educationist may justify this as preparing children to make free choices of their own, and such sentiments often appear in modern agreed syllabuses. But it is a loaded choice.

Children know they are not allowed to make such choices of their own concerning the date of Waterloo, the wives of Henry VIII or the solution to algebraic equations. For only one answer is true. In religion, therefore, they are pointed towards the conclusion that all answers must be equally true — or equally false.

And this approach to the teaching of religion ignores the fact that other people's beliefs, set down and described in the cold light of the classroom day, are bound to sound altogether improbable if not ridiculous. That is not the route by which religious commitment arises. It can induce, instead, a condition of disinterested or condescending immunity.

There is no turning the clock back, and whatever politicians may say for public consumption, religion

is never going to figure in the classroom timetable as the key subject the drafters of the 1944 Act said it was. But if the present state of RE is actually damaging to the cause of religion, the churches themselves have grounds for alarm. To get to that point, however, they will have to face honestly more than a generation of failure and false hopes, and abandon their excuse that RE was somehow doing

their job for them.

There is undoubtedly a place for genuine classroom instruction "to equip pupils for life in a multi-cultural, multi-racial society". But there is no good reason to call it religious education.

Re-printed by kind permission of Clifford Longley and The Times. © The Times 1987.

Evolution and Christian Belief

JAMES SANG

The upsurge of creationism in the United States is an aspect of Christian fundamentalism that threatens the country's educational system. In Britain, where the evolution theory was developed by Charles Darwin, Christian apologists are attempting to equate acceptance of evolution with belief in God. James Sang, Emeritus Professor of Genetics, University of Sussex, argues that this position is untenable.

A Louisiana law called "Balanced Treatment for Creation Science and Evolution Science Act" is currently under review by the United States Supreme Court. Although there is no such thing as creation science, the Act may be supported by the Court which is now biased by Reagan nominees, and the fundamentalists will then be happy to see the teaching of evolution still further reduced in American schools. Nothing to do with us, you may say. But our children suffer from a different kind of deprivation which is just as bad. The churches of England and Rome accept evolution, enfold it in their embrace, and encourage you to believe in both natural selection and God. While fundamentalist groups properly fear evolution theory, our more sophisticated churches (and states) trivialise it into acceptability. It is clear that the millions who watched David Attenborough's television series, *Life on Earth* — a graphic exposition of evolution — failed to relate its meaning to their religious beliefs, just for that reason.

Despite the Church, there is really no argument about the incompatibility of evolution and God (with a large or a small g). *The Origin of Species* gave us sound scientific reasons for knowing that life, and the world, had evolved, and was not the handiwork of some god or other unnatural force. Darwin himself, trained for the Church, accepted the logic of his own arguments and became an agnostic. Today, with a more extensive understanding of evolution theory deriving particularly from genetics and molecular biology, there is really no argument left against atheism, and we can ask: how does the Church manage to ignore all this? But first let us look at some of the recent advances relevant to our under-

standing of evolution.

There are three essential aspects of evolution: (1) there must be sufficient time for it to occur, (2) there must be enough variability, (3) natural selection must be capable of acting on it so that organisms with heritable advantageous variants can pass them on to their descendants. The problem of time scale worried Darwin because Lord Kelvin gave him what we now recognise as a gross underestimate of the life of the earth at one million years. We now know that living organisms have existed here for considerably more than 3,000 million years, and that is more than enough to satisfy all evolutionary criteria.

Variability is more difficult to assess, because most heritable changes (mutations) are likely to be detrimental, but it can be done for experimental organisms. For example, the range of change for some particular hereditary units (genes) in plants exceeds 100 but is apparently near 0 in others. If, in general terms, we strike an average of about ten possible variants for each hereditary unit, we shall probably underestimate the range. However, as humans have about 50,000 genes, the possible variants exceed the number of atoms in the universe! Unless you are an identical twin, you really are unique; but the point of this trivial calculation is to emphasise the almost unbelievable range of variability available to selection.

Mutated genes have first to function in the environment of other genes, and about 80 per cent fail to survive this primary test (at least in *Drosophila*). Put another way, new mutations are continually testing and refining the adaptation of whole organisms (the whole population gene complex) to its environment. Thus the very precise adaptation of an organism to its environment reflects the available variants and the generation by generation testing of genes which improve survival potential, including those which adapt organisms to environmental changes, or permit competitive success in the so-called struggle for existence, in all its many forms. Darwin's thesis of the origin of species by means of natural selection is thus supported. But it has another important implication.

Natural selection has no end in view; its only role

is to make the most of heritable variability so that advantageous genes are perpetuated. Since today's advantage may be tomorrow's disadvantage, the great majority of organisms which have graced this earth are now extinct, and it is as well that we should remember this. Arguments which imply design by a designer, apart from being illogical as Hume pointed out, are irrelevant to evolution.

Modern biology supplements and elaborates the older data based on structural relationships between organisms and on their fossil history. The most important single discovery is that the hereditary material (DNA) and its functional organisation (the genetic code) is universal. This is the basis of all genetic engineering whereby a human gene (say for insulin) introduced into a bacterium makes an authentic "human" product, and so on. In other words, only one strand of living material extends without a break from the simplest to the highest organisms we know. And the amount of this DNA increases, roughly, with organism complexity. All of this is as we should expect; but note that we are now describing evolution in terms of physics and chemistry, and that we can now follow the evolution of particular proteins by finding how alike they are among species which separated hundreds of millions of years ago. These new evolutionary patterns, some showing molecular stability, others adaptive change over thousands of millions of years, confirm the significance and precision of natural selection.

How does the Church come to ignore all this? We can neglect arguments like "God . . . through that sacramental act of the restored humanity 'in Christ' . . . is achieving his purpose for protons, atoms, molecules, proteins, amoeba, mammals and humanity" (A. Peacocke, *God and the New Biology*, 1986, J. M. Dent). We can also forget Teilhard de Chardin's picture of "a God of cosmogenesis, a God of Evolution", a sort of teleological force, rejected even by his own Catholic Church. And we are left with little other than Canon Raven's view of God's transcendence or immanence, which says, in plain English, that since God is everywhere he must be in evolution. This kind of illogical rubbish may keep the clergy going, but surely no one else!

So we are forced to conclude that the contradiction between the understanding of evolution and a belief in a god of any religious denomination is just ignored by most people. Somehow they can keep their understanding and beliefs in separate mental compartments; they have been brainwashed by Church, school and home not to transgress the boundary of faith. But surely it is time that they did.

Next month Helen Haste and Beverly Halstead analyse creationist propaganda that is being circulated in Britain.

Next month marks the anniversary of the birth (5 April 1837) and the death (10 April 1909) of the poet, Algernon Charles Swinburne. His family was High Church, with aristocratic connections, but as a young man he became an ardent rationalist and republican. Although Swinburne had politically conservative leanings, which became more pronounced in later life, his poetry has always had a strong appeal for radicals and free-thinkers.

"The poetry of Swinburne", wrote the American critic, Edmund Wilson, in 1962, "is now so out of fashion that it seems to have become very difficult to interest people in him at all". Perhaps things have not changed very much since Wilson wrote those words, but the year of the 150th anniversary of the poet's birth provides an excellent occasion for a note on one of the most original and surprising writers of the 19th century. Indeed, at a time when we are being advised to return to so-called "Victorian values", there is an added interest in looking again at Swinburne, of whom Queen Victoria is reported to have said in 1892 to Gladstone that she had been told he was "the best poet in my dominions". It is highly unlikely that Queen Victoria ever read any Swinburne herself, or that she would have approved had she done so. Gladstone who, at this time, was looking for a Poet Laureate to succeed Tennyson, wrote to Lord Acton that, despite "Swinburne's pre-eminence as a poet", he was "absolutely impossible". Gladstone regretted this, for he had always been deeply impressed by Swinburne's "genius".

Algernon Charles Swinburne was born on 5 April 1837. His father was a captain in the Royal Navy who later became an admiral, and his mother was a daughter of the Earl of Ashburnham. Those who attach great importance to heredity have found it odd that a naval officer and a child of the nobility should have united to produce a poet whose work was marked by great extravagance in style and technique, and by outrageously revolutionary sentiments in content. Those who seek clues to a writer's development in other family circumstances may attach significance to the absence for long periods of the father while on service duties, and the fact that the young Algernon was subjected to an excess of female company, being followed by four girls and thus always having younger sisters as his playmates in childhood.

There were French influences in the family and Swinburne always felt a great affinity for French writers. In addition, his mother taught him Italian (as well as French) and he claimed later that he knew Italian writers before English. In fact his family environment gave him, in early youth, a most

valuable artistic and generally cultured background.

After a preparatory school, he went to Eton. Not all literary men who went to that establishment have afterwards admitted to having enjoyed, or profited from, the experience. Swinburne certainly made progress in his education, but there were other influences at Eton that have always interested his biographers. Thus, he was flogged, although it is not certain for what offences. The punishment made a great impression on him, in more senses than one, and he was always to be obsessed by the subject of flagellation. He left Eton at the early age of 16, and it has been suggested that his rebelliousness, combined with some strangely compulsive mannerisms and his peculiar attitude to punishment, might have persuaded the authorities to advise his parents to remove him.

When he was 19 Swinburne went to Balliol College, Oxford, where he developed strong views. He became a republican and firmly renounced the Christian faith in which he had been brought up. He nourished a passion for the cause of Italian liberty, and greatly admired the Italian patriotic leader, Mazzini. Among literary interests, he became devoted to Victor Hugo and this writer was always to mean much to him. He became friendly with some of the leading pre-Raphaelite painters and, like them, was captivated by the Arthurian legends.

Swinburne left Oxford earlier than expected, without taking his final degree. His behaviour while at Balliol was extravagant and erratic in several ways. It was difficult for him to remain. The authorities were not unsympathetic, but their position was not to be envied. Another Oxford college had achieved notoriety by expelling the poet Shelley some years previously, and Balliol did not wish to emulate this. As at Eton, the suggestion appears to have been put that Swinburne's parents should withdraw him.

After leaving University, Swinburne threw himself into the literary life with great energy and most fruitful results. Beside poetry, he wrote poetic dramas, novels and literary criticism, chiefly on French authors for the *Spectator*. With the publication in 1865 of the Greek-based poetic drama, *Atalanta in Calydon*, Swinburne first achieved real fame. It was the rhythms and the music of the verse generally that first won him a wide public, especially in the great chorus that begins with the line: "When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces".

Next year there followed the first collection of *Poems and Ballads*. Those who had been delighted with the new poetic style of *Atalanta* were now matched by those who were appalled at the 'nameless and abominable' subject matter of the fresh volume. So shocking were the poems that, after a pre-publication review by John Morley, who, in

addition to using the words already quoted, said that the book was "crammed with pieces which many a vendor of filthy prints might blush to sell". The publishers withdrew the book before the due date. Swinburne was furious, but another publisher brought the book out. As might have been expected, interest in the poems was quickened by the controversy. The poems were subjected to continuing attacks, many of them ferocious. But there were also many defenders and Swinburne soon had a large circle of devoted admirers. Oxford undergraduates were reported to have chanted his verses in the High Street at night.

The poems included in this volume contain several famous Swinburnian passages, which both explain the enthusiasm that was engendered in younger readers and the sense of outrage that sprang from the bosoms of some of the more conventional readers and critics. Thus in "Dolores", a hymn to the goddess of pain, there occur the lines:

Could you hurt me, sweet lips, though I hurt you?
Men touch them, and change in a trice
The lillies and languors of virtue
For the raptures and roses of vice;
These lie where thy foot on the floor is,
These crown and caress thee and chain,
O splendid and sterile Dolores,
Our Lady of Pain.

Swinburne wrote several poems on the theme of Proserpine, the goddess who became queen of the lower world. In these, he advanced a philosophy that was anti-religious and humanist in general tone, although it may be almost pretentious to give it such a title as a philosophy. It was this, combined with a sort of world-weariness (he was not yet 30), that made his verses attractive to so many young readers, whatever may have been the view of John Morley who was, in fact, younger than himself. One stanza from "The Garden of Proserpine" is particularly well-known:

From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be
That no life lives for ever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest rife
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

In another poem, "Hymn to Proserpine" which, as did the others quoted, appeared in the first series of *Poems and Ballads*, Swinburne wrote two of the most famous lines which are still remembered when much of his other verse is forgotten:

Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has
grown grey from thy breath;
We have drunken of things Lethean, and fed on the
fullness of death.

(continued inside back page)

BOOKS

ANTI-RACISM — AN ASSAULT ON EDUCATION AND VALUE, edited by Frank Palmer, The Sherwood Press, £9.95

The first essay in this deplorable and depressing collection is by Antony Flew, a Vice-President of the Rationalist Press Association. His readers may judge whether he is a rationalist, but is he a humanist? And if not, why does his name grace every issue of *New Humanist*?

A coterie of contributors have consulted together to produce this attack, not upon racism, but upon those who condemn it. Three techniques are employed. The first is illustrated by the title. "Anti-racism" is a term not normally employed by the opponents of racist attitudes and practices. It is used in this book deliberately in order to advance the thesis that anti-racism is as bad as racism. This enables the editor, Frank Palmer, to profess a lofty moral neutrality. "The writers in this book", he says (p. 3), "are non-racists". What on earth is a non-racist, unless akin to the Grand Old Duke of York when his ten thousand men were only half-way up? Palmer offers enlightenment in a further essay (p 153): "The true non-racist is more properly considered as a person for whom the racial difference between himself and another person is not of overriding importance, or for whom the issue might not even arise". Try telling that to the family of Steve Biko, to Winnie Mandela or to Martin Luther King's widow!

The second technique is to substitute for the real horror of racism an innocuous kind of Aunt Sally which its opponents are then accused of exaggerating. Palmer says (p 6): "The word 'racist' is little more than a sophisticated device, a mechanism for instilling irrational and unproductive guilt into the white majority". Comfort, no doubt, to the victims of "Paki-bashing", or those whose families have been burned to death through letter-box insertions of paraffin-soaked rags in Ealing and elsewhere.

The third technique is to portray anti-racism as a Marxist conspiracy. David J. Levy writes (p 120): "Anti-racism increasingly provides a morally acceptable cloak for the pedalling (*sic*) of tendentious Marxist history". Palmer (p 2) speaks of "activists who seek a charter for revolution in the guise of anti-racism", and promoting "a cynical, if not openly hostile, outlook on British society and all major British institutions, including the forces of law and order". The words "Marxism" and "Marxist" appear 63 times in this book, almost always as labels of abuse, unsubstantiated and generally irrelevant.

Antony Flew argues against what he calls equality of outcome for minority ethnic groups. His state of mind is illustrated by the parallel he draws: "What, for instance, should we think of what called

FREETHINKER

itself a system of criminal justice yet demanded that convicted criminals be treated in all respects like everybody else?" There seems little doubt which members of our society Flew has in mind when he draws this analogy with "convicted criminals".

Flew ends his essay with a tortuous passage in which he teeters on the brink of alleging genetic inferiority in minority ethnic groups — the hallmark of the genuine racist. He talks about "gene pools" in a manner so slipshod that he would be well advised to consult some elementary primer on genetics. He would find, for instance, in Julian Huxley's *We Europeans* that the term "Race" lacks scientific definition. He would find in Anthony Barnett's *The Human Species* that superficial differences of skin colour, shapes of eyes, lips and noses etc. are of little scientific interest, and that, in any case, there is no correlation between these differences on the one hand, and intelligence on the other.

Linda Hall, in her essay, "Language, Race and Culture", makes some valid criticism of excessive attempts to censor the word "black". Her efforts are undermined by A. C. Capey ("Reading and Discrimination") who devotes four pages (110-113) to justifying the word "nigger" in *Huckleberry Finn*.

The book seeks to have some pretensions to scholarship; it falls sadly short. Frank Palmer appears to have been instructed by Mrs Malaprop. He calls "social justice" a "solecism". (p 6). Of course, I may be doing him an injustice. Perhaps in his circle of acquaintances it is indeed bad taste to mention social justice.

Tom Hastie, in his essay, "History, Race and Propaganda", refers (p 50) to what he calls "Newsam's Law", which, he says, runs as follows: "The incidence of alleged racism in a given society will vary in a direct proportion to the number of people handsomely paid to find it". Since Peter Newsam is Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, this juxtaposition verges on the libellous. A more charitable view would simply treat such writing with contempt, dismissing it as public schoolboy humour of the kind which emanates from fat, round faces at Tory conferences.

The final essay is called "Preference or Prejudice", by Dennis J. O'Keeffe, a lecturer at the North London Polytechnic. He attempts to demonstrate that what is regarded as racial prejudice is often innocent "preference". Mr O'Keeffe has an engaging way with footnotes. On page 192 appears the following: "Liberals are held to be worse than the National Front (11)". On turning to footnote number 11 we read: "I have heard this said by a sociologist

REVIEWS

at a departmental staff meeting". The next sentence in the text reads: "Liberal society is held to be more intolerable for non-whites than apartheid South Africa (12)". On turning to footnote number 12 we read: "I have heard this, too, at the same meeting". Scholarship indeed!

The contributors to this book are either ignorant of, or wilfully blind to the real horror of racialism. Nowhere in this book is there any recognition that ethnic groups in Britain have been subjected to prejudice, discrimination, intimidation, terror, violence and murder. Racialism is not the innocuous paper tiger presented in this book. It is a fundamental evil.

Humanists, not least for the very name they have chosen for themselves, can have no doubt where they stand.

Where does Antony Flew stand?

KARL HEATH

SORRY — YOU'VE BEEN DUPED, by Melvin Harris.
Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £9.95

Sub-titled "The Truth Behind Classic Mysteries of the Paranormal", this book is well researched and conclusive. It would, if reason prevailed, surely be the last word on the subject — but of course it won't be.

One paragraph, in a chapter on spiritualists, really sums up the situation:

Am I being unfair? Hardly! The claims these people make violate all logic and are at loggerheads with everyday experiences. If they are true, then it is up to them to demonstrate that truth. Yet none of these claimants ever submitted themselves to informed and impartial examination. They reserve their antics for the believers. And, tragically, believers have a terrible tendency to go on believing, come what may.

Unrelenting, however, the author pursues the facts behind the fantasies.

One of his methods is to show how the early versions of a story become more and more sensational with each telling. Such is the case with the alleged horrors of Amityville (Long Island). Based on little more than a window that (having counterweights that were too heavy) appeared to open of its own accord, the story was built up by an imaginative home-owner into a best-seller and a money-spinning film, the latter being billed as "more hideously frightening than *The Exorcist* because it actually happened!"

"Cryptamnesia" is shown to be a far more likely explanation for "past life regressions" than is "the extravagant notion of reincarnation".

Spiritualist claims — including such phenomena as spirit healing, voice mediums, clairaudience, clairvoyance, the once-popular slate-writing, materialisations, apports, and spirit photographs (of which a number of instructive and amusing examples are reproduced) are all dealt with. And it is clear that spiritualists themselves admit freely that there is both fraud and self-deception in their ranks, yet they cling to belief in a few "valid" cases — meaning those that have not yet been exposed. And even when a medium is caught out, the claims of validity are still made for him or her on other occasions.

One famous spirit photographer who got away with it during his lifetime was discredited 60 years later, when his spirit photograph of a little girl was found to be a blurred copy of a sentimental Victorian poster.

The most cruel practice of mediums, dowsters, and other such charlatans is in connection with missing children. The father of Genette Tate is quoted as saying:

"We discovered that the work of the psychics was not just ludicrous and laughable. It was sinister and evil. Once we got into that web of deceit — and that was what it was — we found it very hard to struggle free. None of it ever led anywhere except to despair and disappointment, misery and confusion".

A series of sex murders, such as those of Jack the Ripper and the Yorkshire ditto, will always attract these psychic sleuths "with pendulums and maps, crystal balls, trances and seances and group meditations, to list just some of the strange methods employed", and they are loud in their later claims of success, though they have actually succeeded only in wasting police time and resources. Melvyn Harris takes us through the data.

War, too, breeds psychic phenomena. Like the gospel stories, the story of the ghostly regiments of the Dardanelles campaign in 1915 was, it transpires, not written down for 50 years! The legend of the angels of Mons in 1914 was more contemporary, but Mr Harris shows how it began as a patriotic short story about St George materialising with a large company of archers to help the English soldiers, and how the story was soon being retold as fact by the religious press. In later versions, the bowmen were transformed into shining angels, and in that form the story persists to this day.

Nostradamus, alleged apparitions at the exact moment of a violent death, the curse that sank a battleship, and the myths surrounding assassinations are all grist to Mr Harris's meticulous mill. Crashed planes invariably give rise to psychic stories of precognition — but here the stories are investigated and exposed for the lies they are. And during the first eight months of 1939, it seems, spirit guides galore were busy forecasting that there would be no war against Hitler!

I find the style of the book rather too tabloid for my taste, but that might be all to the good if it is to be read by the people who really need to read it. Speaking for myself, I must admit that, since I have never placed any credence in any of this nonsense,

I find even its exposure somewhat tedious, but the book will certainly be useful for reference the next time someone challenges me to explain one of these "true" stories.

BARBARA SMOKER

Sir Hugh Greene, 1910-1987

PETER COTES

Hugh Carleton Greene, as he was most often known, was one of four sons, all of them distinguished either in medicine or literature, of Charles Greene, headmaster of Berkhamstead School.

Becoming a journalist — he was proud of that title — he enhanced the reputation of the foreign correspondent, first in his writings (during his years in Germany he reported the rise of Hitlerism for the *Daily Telegraph*) and subsequently when, in 1940, after service in the RAF, he joined the BBC as German editor of the European service, a job he did until the end of the war. After a short spell with the Control Commission, he returned to the BBC as Head of the East European services.

His organisational talents were given full play against terrorism in Malaya when he was seconded for special duties in 1950. He came later to describe that period in his eventful life — now it was psychological warfare, like a character in one of his brother Graham's novels — as "that peculiar and bloody war".

Greene's own wars at the BBC were different, but in certain ways only a little less bloody. He had become known as a forceful character when, after climbing the ladder that led to serious authority, he became Director of Administration, making his biggest impact of all, perhaps, through his direction of News and Current Affairs. Never afraid to speak his mind, he saw the pressure groups being assembled by elements we now term the "moral majority" for what they are, and would have no truck with either repressive agents of and Government in whichever guise they came to coax and cajole and finally to threaten, or the show-off antics of sensation-mongering producers and scriptwriters.

He was a man of principle who, as Director General, stuck to his guns and laid down a code of conduct that was never written edict, coming as inter-office memoranda from the Chief. Persuasion was preferred to directives, but he saw it as his duty to stand four square against what he would dismiss as "disguised censorship". His guidelines were stated simply and clearly, and he practised what he preached when stating that relevance was the key — relevance to the audience and the tide of educated and cultivated opinion in a democratic society. No subject was barred by him "simply for what it is", he would emphasise; and although outrage, simply for the sake of being outrageous, was wrong, he felt

that shock may be good. His rallying cry was the one that made the satire shows of the 60s possible to present in the first place — "Provocation can be healthy and, indeed, socially imperative" — and paved the way for the progressive thought and writers of the calibre of Dennis Potter to follow.

Indeed it was largely due to the critical stance Greene adopted during his reign as DG and in the years that followed his retirement — much of it in the 70s, when he attacked BBC programme standards and "playing for safety and the stifling of enterprising standards", that in the 80s we have been able to see television drama's greatest breakthrough since writing solely for the small screen first appeared. Potter's *Pennies from Heaven* and, even more so, his masterpiece, *The Singing Detective*, now proclaim that the box-in-the-corner has grown up at last. It has come of age.

Hugh was a shy man but more approachable than he looked from afar. He has been quoted as saying publicly of the puritanical antics of Mary Whitehouse and her campaigners, several of whom he regarded as prurient busybodies hardly worth powder and shot: "Mrs Whitehouse always hated me when I was at the BBC, but I always refused to have anything to do with her". If the truth be told, though, he found her "a rather silly woman", brushing the Saint Mary aspect aside in a discussion we had at a press reception of Norman Swallow's impressive 13-part series, *Television*, made by Granada and transmitted in 1985. However, was it not a celebrated past editor of *The Freethinker* who contended that fools are sometimes more dangerous than knaves? "One never knows what they are going to do next . . .".

THE FREETHINKER

Volume 106 1986

Bound in dark blue hard covers
with title and date.

Price 7.95 plus 90p postage

G. W. Foote & Co,
702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

LETTERS

UNCONVINCED

I did not find Norman Bacrac's reply to Rabbi Berkovits (February) very convincing. I agree with him that to postulate the existence of a "god" does not answer the question, "Who then determines what is moral?", nor, I would add, "Why be moral?" To state, however, as he does, that "each human being has to set up his own criterion for good (i.e. moral) actions" does not establish a basis for being "moral", but cuts the ground from under morality itself, since a consistent carrying out of this injunction would lead to a dissolution of morality into a multiplicity of competing individual "goods" which could change from moment to moment according to circumstances.

No moralist can accept this result without ceasing to be a moralist. When most people say that some act is a "moral" act they usually mean that it is an act that ought to be done, and this is not an **indicative** statement such as "you ought to do this in order to get that", but an **imperative** statement that "you ought to do this because this is right in and of itself". In other words, it is not "moral" to point out how a specific goal can be achieved, or the consequences if something is not done. ("You will go hungry if you do not eat" is not, as Max Stirner said, a moral statement). Morality is a system of conceptual imperatives which prescribes for me what I ought to do. It is not a leaving it up to me to decide according to a particular situation and my interests. Moral behaviour is behaviour according to a **fixed idea**, not according to individual subjectivity.

Mr Bacrac, however, appears to want to have both the penny of morality and the bun of subjectivity. Thus he writes of "the desire to inflict pain or suffering" as being "quite impermissible", as if such a desire was immoral in and of itself. But what if those who wish to inflict pain and suffering upon others claim that their wishes are "good" according to their "own criterion" as set up by themselves? Would Mr Bacrac brand them as "bad" without qualification, or would he, in keeping with his own criterion, say that although they were "immoral" as far as he was concerned, they were acting in the light of their "own criterion"?

I cannot see how he can answer except "yes" to the latter part of the foregoing question if he believes that what is moral is determined by "each human being(s) . . . own criterion for good". If he does so, however, his only consistent course would be to abandon morality altogether and become an amoralist. This I have done and feel the better for it. Mr Bacrac, on the other hand, has thrown away the core of his morality, but still wants to keep the husk. He will have a tough job stopping it from disintegrating in his hands.

S. E. PARKER

COLD COMFORT HUMANISM

In his article, **Divine Authority and Morality** (February), on the basis for morality outside a Christian or religious world-view, Norman Bacrac finds the presence of injustice in the world and the existence of "gratuitous pain" a reason for not believing in God. But surely from a secularist point of view there is no such thing as injustice? In the upward and onward progress of evolution, the fittest and strongest survive, and the weak are crushed. The weak may not like this state of affairs and complain of injustice, but really they are just impeding progress.

The concepts of right and wrong are borrowed by secularists from a Christian world-view. We are quite happy to lend them if only to slow down the inevitable

and depressing slide from secular humanism to Anarchy and Nihilism. If secularists were consistent with their world-view it would not lead to the gentle philanthropy Mr Bacrac describes in his last paragraph, but to a cold, detached indifference. I am thankful that most of them are not consistent!

The only way to make sense of our world is to accept the Bible's great presupposition, "In the beginning God . . ." It may not answer all our questions, but it does provide the only basis on which we can begin to think rationally — albeit as dependent creatures.

S. NICHOLLS

"NON-POLITICAL" RAMBO

I can't help thinking that the article **Rambo on the Rampage** (January) slipped into the pages of **The Free-thinker** by mistake. To criticise this particular film simply because it portrays crude Right-wing values may soothe the sensibilities of Left-wingers, but it does so at the cost of undermining Christopher Dunkley's article in the same issue on violence and the media.

We freethinkers have campaigned for years for the abolition of censorship on the grounds that the link between behavioural patterns (and by extension social values) and what is viewed on the screen has yet to be established. In what way, then, does the **Rambo** film contribute to America's "mad dash to the Right"?

In any event the criticism is nothing new. For years now the American entertainments industry has debased itself with vulgar and stereotyped gung-ho adventure productions, for both cinema and TV consumption, to cater for the immense adolescent market. Indeed many of them have a strong occultic and surrealistic flavour, with the leading protagonists performing literally impossible deeds using absurdly magical technology. Such films are little more than motion-picture comics. One would be naive indeed to believe that film moguls do it for any other reason than to make money, or to perceive hidden political messages in them.

ANTONY MILNE

READING LIST

I would like to take up a point from Antony Milne's article, **Creationism — Back to the Dark Ages** (January). There is nothing wrong with attacking Darwinism as a theory on rational grounds. As Milne points out, the dangerous aspect of creationism is that its attack on Darwinism is irrational as well as reactionary. However, those who take the view that Popperism marks out the methodology of science, don't know what they are talking about. They have generally read very little, if any, of the philosophy of science. I think that Antony Milne is also mistaken in his comments on Popper's criticism of Darwinism, and on natural selection.

Popper's view of science is criticised on the ground that it excludes from the realm of science matters that are validly scientific. Milne would do well to read a beginner's textbook such as R. Harré's book, **The Philosophies of Science — an Introductory Survey** (Oxford University Press, 1972). The British Society for the Philosophy of Science could undoubtedly recommend a list of books for Antony Milne to read when he is ready to progress further. The works of Kuhn, Lakatos, Suppe, Toulmin and many others could be read with profit.

Another pamphlet which would repay study is David Tribe's **The Open Society and its Friends** (National Secular Society, 1971). It is not for nothing that Popper's most famous book is known as **The Open Society, by One of its Enemies**.

COLIN MILLS

THE ETHICAL MOVEMENT

I feel I must offer a footnote to David Tribe's review of *The British Ethical Societies*, for the record. Coit was not "Felix Adler's disciple". Emerson had formed Coit's outlook before he heard of Adler, who opened the way for him to turn this to account. It was not "perverse", but exact, to derive the Ethical Church from Emerson, whose essay *The Sovereignty of Ethics*, with its glance at Stoicism as practised in antiquity, was the direct inspiration of Coit's excursion. The last ten short paragraphs, particularly the first of these, often quoted, made the script of the play.

On another point, Hynd was in America when I came to London, and did not appear on the English scene till after his retirement, when I was engaged in liquidating the Ethical Church, which he did his best, deviously and openly, to stop. I found this more annoying than threatening.

H. J. BLACKHAM

ORIGINS

In his otherwise excellent article (February) Stuart Campbell fails to adequately explain the origin of two old superstitions.

One explanation for the lucky horseshoe superstition is as follows. Saint Dunstan, who later became Archbishop of Canterbury, was an anchorite at Glastonbury with a smithy from 935 to 939. The devil visited the forge to have his cloven hooves shod. With blacksmith's tongs Dunstan grabbed the devil's nose (or testicles according to one tradition) and forced him to guarantee that, in return for being shod, he would never enter a place where a horseshoe was displayed.

Unlucky 13 surely must be connected with the story, common to both Christianity and Norse mythology, of a meal eaten by 13 people which is followed by the killing of one of them (Baldu, in the Norse story).

Both the lucky horseshoe and unlucky 13 superstitions exist in Iran, where their origins must be different.

TED GOODMAN

CHRISTIAN ARROGANCE

How presumptuous of the Gay Christian Movement's General Secretary, the Rev Richard Kirker, to lecture Humanists on compassion (Letters, February) when so many of his fellow Christians are using AIDS as an excuse for intensified "queer-bashing". The Gay Humanist Group's postbag provides ample evidence of the cruel attacks on gay people coming from religious sources, with scant regard for the feelings of AIDS sufferers, their families and friends.

For some time now GHG has been receiving numerous cuttings from the correspondence pages of local newspapers up and down the country in which Christians of one sort or another have been relentlessly promoting the notion that AIDS is God's wrath and, in line with the Judeo-Christian tradition of hostility to all but a strictly controlled sexuality, calling for a return to "sex as God planned it, within the structure of marriage".

The well-publicised and totally abhorrent pronouncements of Greater Manchester's Chief Constable (Methodist turned Roman Catholic), which he defended by claiming "I was moved by God to say exactly what I did", produced an even greater surge of self-righteous venom, notably from clergy writing to support him in "Christian comment" columns. And this was accompanied by the denigration of the safer sex measures recommended by the Terrence Higgins Trust and the Government as essential in the fight against AIDS.

There was no suggestion in the *Freethinker* editorial, *Plain Speaking on AIDS* (December 1986) to which Richard Kirker refers, that AIDS patients should not be cared for by Christians or people of any other faith when appropriate and in any case. And though I'm sure they like to think so, Christians have no monopoly of compassion for AIDS sufferers or any other people in distress.

What the article did refer to was the increasingly intrusive religious element in the Terrence Higgins Trust's public events, such as the candlelight gatherings held in Trafalgar Square in recent years. Similarly it was thought appropriate at the THT Conference last year to lay on a Mass as an official part of the event. Delegates of other faiths "or none" (I) were invited to attend and pray for the souls of AIDS victims. There was of course no provision made for non-believers to express their feelings. It was just taken for granted that they would be quite happy to participate in a Christian ceremony.

By all means let Christians and other religionists hold their own services to demonstrate their care and concern for the victims of AIDS, but why should their viewpoint be deemed to represent all those taking part in such events? It is this kind of arrogance on the part of many Christians towards those who don't happen to share their beliefs which Humanists and other non-believers find particularly objectionable.

GEORGE BROADHEAD
Honorary Secretary, Gay Humanist Group

INVENTED, STOLEN, OR HIDDEN

I did not claim to "know" anything about the life of Jesus; we only know what the received gospels say. It is up to us to determine to what extent (if at all) the gospel accounts reflect history.

John L. Broom (illogically) accepts that Jesus' body was placed in a tomb but not that the tomb was later found empty! In that case the body must still have been in the tomb when, later, there were claims that Jesus had risen from the dead. Why then could the priests not have quashed this story by opening the tomb and showing Jesus' body? It is not the story of the empty tomb that is "implausible", but the idea that the body remained in the tomb, contrary to expectation and forecasts. No sense can be made of a scenario in which Jesus expected his body to rot in a tomb!

If the story of the empty tomb was invented why did the evangelist have Jesus forecast that he would be entombed for three nights when he was only entombed for two (or perhaps only one)? It is not true, as Broom claims, that Jesus' forecast in this respect was fulfilled. If the story of the empty tomb is an invention, is the story of the bribing of the guards (to say that the disciples stole the body while they slept) also an invention? Guignebert concluded that it was an invention, but to counter the accusation that the disciples stole the body (Jesus, p 495). In that case the evangelist cannot have invented the accusation, and the body must have disappeared! Sceptical Strauss, although he concluded that the story that the disciples had stolen the body and the counter-argument were both invented, did not doubt that the tomb had been found empty.

Broom claims that Guignebert anticipated his idea that Jesus' body was never removed from the tomb, but this is not true. Guignebert allowed only two possibilities; either the tomb was empty (and he examined six possible explanations) or there never was a tomb (full or empty). Personally he preferred the latter. Among those who accepted that the tomb was found empty, and who attempted to explain it, were

Annet, Woolston, Reimarus, Muggeridge, Whitaker, Klausner, Morison, Moorcock, Voysey, Moore and D. H. Lawrence (some in works of fiction). Only Gull ("Guy Thorne") came near Broom's idea in suggesting that the body was later hidden in a secret inner tomb.

If, as Broom claims, the tomb was not empty then Jesus' body was still in it on the Monday morning. Since the women were intent on having it opened the body must have been recovered and been given proper burial. It would then have been impossible for the disciples to claim that Jesus had risen from the dead. Anyone could have pointed to Jesus's tomb as refutation and Christianity could never have started. The existence of Christianity is itself evidence that Jesus' body disappeared!

STEUART CAMPBELL

CAUSE FOR CONCERN

E. Chambers (Letters, February) accuses The Free-thinker of "attacks on fundamentalist preachers and doorstep evangelists", and further states: "who cares what doorstep fanatics are saying? No one ever listens to them anyway".

Fundamentalist groups in this country and in the United States are attracting members at a greater rate than the combined recruitment figures of all the conventional churches. So somebody is listening to the doorstep fanatics.

"Humorous onslaughts" (Mr Chambers' words) are an effective means of causing people to think. Please keep it up!

GEORGE VALE

poet's gradual decline. It is true that he was able to rejoice at the downfall of one who was the object of his greatest hatred, the French Emperor Napoleon III, and to welcome the establishment of the Third Republic. Yet, Italy did not become a republic, but was united under the royal house of Savoy. Swinburne's own poetic powers began to fall away, but a sense of humour, not always apparent in his work, did not desert him; he was able to parody his own work in a poem called "Nephelidia", in which he showed how clearly he could see his own tendencies to verbal excess. The first lines are:

From the depth of the dreamy decline of the dawn
through a notable nimbus of nebulous noonshine,
Pallid and pink as the palm of the flag-flower
that flickers with fear of the flies as they float,

and it continues for 24 of these strange double lines, with their compelling alliteration and their hypnotic, narcotic, intoxicating rhythms, containing so little suggestion of meaning and, yet, so wickedly hard to distinguish from the real thing.

Interest in Swinburne in recent years has tended to by-pass his poetry, concentrating on his prose and criticism, and more especially on the details of his life. He never married, and it is doubtful whether he enjoyed satisfactory relations with any woman. On the other hand, although he has been suspected of homosexuality, there appears to be no evidence of this. He was haunted, as already mentioned, by flagellation, and students of different forms of sadism can find much in him to stimulate, if not satisfy, their enquiries. He may have taken drugs; he certainly drank too much. In later years, saved from the worst effects of alcoholism by the devoted Theodore Watts-Dunton, he lived a quiet life with him in Putney where he died at the age of 72.

Swinburne's political opinions varied in later years. While his earlier principles remained firm in his castigation of the Czar of Russia and the German Kaiser, he developed a great antipathy to Gladstone — ironically ungrateful, it seems — and for the Gladstonian policy of Home Rule for Ireland. He became something of a Jingo in his support for the Boer War. Yet we may choose by which works and which period we may remember a man and a writer. When the Vatican Council was preparing its dogma of papal infallibility and other utterances that condemned liberal doctrines of any kind, Swinburne wrote: *The Liberty we believe in is one and indivisible; without free thought there can be no free life.*

Rabbis have forbidden women to attend funerals in a northern Israeli town. They say this is to ward off the evil eye and end a spate of deaths in the community.

Swinburne — a Poet of Liberty

In this poem he calls for the abandonment of beliefs in the

... ghastly glories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted Gods!

and cries for the return to the old Gods of the ancients with the belief in life, not death.

At the end of the later poem, "Hymn of Man" (published in *Songs before Sunrise* in 1871), Swinburne, with a fine flourish of rhetoric, declared:

Glory to Man in the highest! for Man is the master of things.

This poem was written "during the session in Rome of the Ecumenical Council". Many years later, G. K. Chesterton, not yet a Catholic, was to write of this line that after it "there is evidently nothing to be said except that it is not true".

Perhaps one of the most impressive of Swinburne's poems on the theme of religion is "Before a Crucifix", which is also in the 1871 collection. Here, he does not so much condemn the crucified God, but scorns those who purport to espouse "Christian creeds that spit on Christ".

Swinburne's political eloquence is much in evidence in *Songs Before Sunrise*. But as has often been pointed out, the optimistic title heralded the

EVENTS

THOMAS PAINE

born 1737

250th anniversary lecture by

TONY BENN, MP

THOMAS PAINE —

THE DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGE

Friday, 27 March, 7.30 pm

The City University,
Northampton Square, London EC1
(Farringdon Underground)

A FESTIVAL OF LIBERTY

on Saturday, 25 April

at THETFORD, NORFOLK

birthplace of Thomas Paine

Special coach from London,
return fare £5

Details from:

The National Secular Society,
702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL,
telephone 01-272 1266

National Secular Society

ANNUAL DINNER

speakers include

ALASTAIR SERVICE

DIANE MUNDAY

EDWARD BLISHEN

NIGEL SINNOTT

BARBARA SMOKER

The Coburg Hotel,

Bayswater Road, London

Saturday, 4 April, 1987

6.30 pm for 7 pm

Vegetarians catered for

Tickets £12 each

NSS, 702 Holloway Road,
London N19 3NL, telephone 01-272 1266

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. New Venture Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton. Sunday, 5 April, 5.30 for 6 pm. Nicolas Walter: Anarchism.

Edinburgh Humanist Group. Programme for 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.

Harrow Humanist Society. Programme of meetings obtainable from Rosemary Bennett, telephone 01-863 2977.

Havering and District Humanist Society. Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road, Harold Wood. Tuesday, 7 April, 8 pm. Annual General Meeting.

Humanist Holidays. Information regarding future holidays is obtainable from Gillian Bailey, 18 Priors Road, Cheltenham, GL52 5AA, telephone 0242-39175.

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Leeds University, Sunday, 15 March, 2.15 pm. Training session for funeral officiants. Secretary: R. J. Tee, telephone 577009.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 26 March, 7.45 pm. Richard Johnson: Transcendental Meditation.

Norwich Humanist Group. Programme of meetings obtainable from Philip Howell, 41 Spixworth Road, Old Catton, Norwich, NR6 7NE, telephone Norwich 47843.

Scottish Humanist Council. The Cowane Centre, Stirling, Saturday, 11 April, 10 am - 5 pm. Annual Conference. Information obtainable from Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire, KA3 2DJ, telephone 0563 26710.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 8 April, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. Robin Chambers and Barbara Baughan: Developing a Moral Ethos in Schools.

Thomas Paine. 250th Anniversary Exhibition at the Ancient House Museum, Thetford, Norfolk.

Thomas Paine. 250th Anniversary Conference at Sheffield University, 10-12 April. Information obtainable from John L. Halstead, Division of Continuing Education, 85 Wilkinson Street, Sheffield, S10 2GJ.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House, Hill Street (off Corporation Street), Coventry. Monday, 16 March, 7.45 pm for 8 pm. Public meeting.

Worthing Humanist Group. Trades Council Club, 15 Broadwater Road, Worthing. Sunday, 29 March, 5.30 pm. The Life and Work of Thomas Paine, born 1737.