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NSS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

SUNDAY, June 30, was the hottest and muggiest day, to-date, this year; it was also the day all trains came to a stand-still following the recent 'work-to-rule'. National Secular Society members attending their Annual Conference at London's Conway Hall, some already tired after a difficult journey, knew they were in for a long and gruelling session.

The Conference had been arranged to open at 10 a.m., but it was decided to delay another fifteen minutes, in view of transport difficulties, for late arrivers. The meeting, which began with 26 members, finally reached a total of 36; a "very disappointing attendance" as the President said, but perhaps understandable in view of the difficulties mentioned.

The platform comprised David Tribe (President) and William McIlroy (Secretary) alone; the remainder of the Executive Committee being seated here and there with other members.

No objection was raised to signing the Minutes of the 1966-67 Annual Conference which was taken as read; no objections were raised, though many observations were made and questions asked, re the Financial Report which was read by Mrs Venton; neither were any objections raised at West Ham Branch's Motion that David Tribe be re-elected as President, nor were there any other nominations.

Election of Mr G. N. Deodhekar as the new Treasurer, and re-election of the Society's Auditors, similarly met with no opposition; Mr Deodhekar, in fact, was thanked for taking on such an unenviable and difficult task.

The Executive Committee were each re-elected individually and Maurice Hill was elected as a new EC member. The EC now comprises Mr W. Collins, Mr R. Condon, Mr M. Hill, Mr K. Hyde, Mr S. D. Kuebart, Mrs M. McIlroy, Mr W. Miller, Mr W. Shannon, Mr N. Sinnott, Mrs E. Venton and Mrs E. Warner. Five Resolutions (appearing in full on page 218) were carried, and a London venue was agreed upon for the next meeting (which will be the first to be called an 'Annual General Meeting' as distinct from an 'Annual Conference').

So much for those parts of the Agenda which were carried with little or no argument. The Executive Committee's Report, the election of two Vice-Presidents, and Amendments to the revised Constitution and Rules were quite another matter, and were largely responsible for the meeting being prolonged until 6.15 p.m.

The Executive Committee's Report appeared to comprise two sections, though read without pause by the Secretary. The first section, referred to as a "general view of the world", was composed by the President, while the second section, a straight forward account of the Society's progress over the past year, was composed by the Secretary. The latter seemed to be generally acceptable.

A number of objections were raised, however, to the first section, not least by Executive Committee members. There was a long argument about Muslims and Jews between Mr Deodhekar, Mr Samuel and others, and a number of minor amendments were agreed upon. Mr Hyde suggested that it may be considered in the future removing contentious material from the Executive Committee's Report; that, since it appeared hardly representative of EC members' views, it lost its purpose. Others, feeling that it had real value, felt that it should not be published on behalf of the EC but only under Mr Tribe's own signature. The President said this change might be considered for the next Conference. Mr. Collis rose to point out that, if it was permissible to amend words, sentences and paragraphs it was also permissible to amend whole sections; that, since it seemed the general wish to not have this section in the EC's Report, it could and should be removed. The President, however, would not permit this, and prevented Mr Collis from speaking again, finally ruling that he would only permit Mr Collis to challenge the authority of the Chairman (President); Mr Collis "with great regret" then moved that the Chairman be replaced; Mrs Venton opposed the Motion, which, on a show of hands, was defeated. The Executive Committee's Report was then voted upon in its entirety, and only Mr Hyde opposed it.

A Motion from West Ham Branch that Mr William Collins and Mrs E. Venton be re-elected as Vice-Presidents was carried only after considerable debate.

A radical revision of the Rules and Constitution had been circulated to all members, and amendments which had been moved were listed on a paper given to each member present. By far the greatest argument raged around the duties of the Vice-Presidents. Mrs McIlroy rose to give the view that only the Secretary was in a position to properly take the President's place in the latter's absence; only he, as the nerve-centre of the Society, knew what was in the Society's best interest; it was often necessary to act quickly and without conferring with others; she did not wish to say that if this power was not given the Secretary that he would leave the Society, nevertheless he would have to consider it very carefully in deciding his future career; he was still young enough to change his job though too old to give much more time to the Society if it did not show this confidence in him. Mrs McIlroy was tired of hearing her husband referred to as a "paid servant of the Society"; he was far more; he was a committed member who worked very long hours.

Executive Committee member Mr W. Miller next rose to say "This is blackmail!" "It is not! How dare you! Sit down", interjected Mr Samuel who was going on to qualify his interjection when Mr Collis brought the Chairman's attention to the fact that Mr Miller had the floor.

(Continued overleaf)

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1. Telephone 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 6d stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN and MCRÆ.

Manchester Branch NSS, Platt Fields, Sunday afternoon, 3 p.m.: Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Lewisham Humanist Group, The Saville, 436 Lewisham High Street (near the hospital), Lewisham, Friday, July 12, 8 p.m.: GERALD SAMUEL, "Is the Battle Won?"

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, July 14, 11 a.m.: J. STEWART COOK, "Politics and Reality".

NSS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

(Continued from front page)

Mrs McIlroy's view and Mr Miller's view both gained a measure of support. Mr Hyde said he thought too much power was going to the President and Secretary; that he wished to see more democracy in the Society; that, as it was, the President and Secretary were a self-perpetuating and mutually entrenching duo. A little later, Mr Hyde added that the Vice-Presidents could give the Secretary *carte blanche* authority in all practical affairs, but they rather than a staff member, should retain final authority in the absence of the President. One of the Vice-Presidents, Mr Collins, said this was perfectly true, and the other Vice-President, Mrs Venton, agreed that this is what would

happen in practice. But support was greater for those who felt it necessary or desirable for the Secretary to represent the Society in the President's absence, a vote showing 19 in favour of this arrangement and 13 against; there were some abstentions.

The proposal to have a "Council of Honour" or a "Distinguished Members Panel" was carried, and the latter description most favoured. Election of EC members was not to be by ballot, but by a show of hands at the Annual Conference. The quorum for the EC was to be a third of its members.

The NSS was no longer to have branches; only affiliated groups. Area representation by EC members was also ended. These were the most radical changes, ending a system as old as the Society.

The new *Rules and Constitution* was voted upon: 24 supported it, 2 opposed it, and there was one abstention. Several members had left the Conference at this time.

With the temperature in the nineties and the inadequate ventilation for such weather, it may be considered little wonder that sparks were flying. But, for sticking it until the end and for retaining a semblance of sanity—in view of the hot air—a tribute is deserved by all members, from the President all the way down to the FREETHINKER'S editor.

CONFERENCE RESOLUTIONS

THE following Resolutions, as amended, were carried at the 1967-68 Annual Conference of the National Secular Society.

- (1) This Annual Conference urges that contraceptive services be freely available under the National Health Service.
(*Motion by the Executive Committee*)
- (2) This Annual Conference approves the campaign for the abolition of compulsory RI and worship in State schools. It suggests concentration upon the abolition of compulsory worship, as while RI could be gradually transformed into teaching about and understanding of religion, compulsory worship cannot be other than pernicious.
(*Motion by the West Kent Branch*)
- (3) This Annual Conference calls on Hospital Management Committees to forbid the holding of religious services in hospital wards, and provide facilities for chapel services which can be relayed to patients who are confined to bed. It urges hospital and local authorities to take action to encourage retired people and others to undertake hospital visiting.
(*Motion by the Executive Committee*)
- (4) This Annual Conference urges the Society to continue its efforts to publicise the unwarranted charge on the National Health Service of the cost of hospital chaplains.
(*Motion by the West Kent Branch*)
- (5) This Annual Conference calls attention to the natural right of individuals to seek euthanasia for themselves when their lives become intolerable, and for their doctors to be able to help them without risking a criminal prosecution.
(*Motion by the Executive Committee*)

CONVERSION TO ATHEISM

Peter Crommelin

WHEN after fifty years of blind faith, I finally excommunicated myself from all membership of the Catholic Church, I felt no real desire to exchange the errors of Rome for those of any other religious sect or denomination. Nor did I feel any kind of obligation to profess atheism. On the contrary I felt that it was still possible to recite, without intellectual dishonesty, the first article of the Christian Creed, "I believe in God the Father Almighty Creator of Heaven and Earth". I felt that by retaining a "belief in God" I could maintain some kind of contact or communication with religious persons of all sects, not excluding my former friends and colleagues the RCs.

In actual fact I fairly soon discovered, somewhat to my surprise, that an abstract "belief in God", while it tends to separate one from professed atheists, does not create any kind of sympathetic understanding with those who profess a religion. On the contrary, those who profess a religion, seem to take it for granted that if a "belief in God" is sincere, it must lead to some religious sect or church, preferably their own. The notice of a purely private and personal monotheism does not seem to be acceptable to anyone.

As a consequence of this discovery, the writer has been compelled, gradually but inexorably to move in the direction of atheism, as the only intelligible way of expressing the total rejection of all organised religion. The compulsion of facts leads to one inevitable conclusion, that religious rites and sacraments have no valid connection with any intellectual "belief in God" or any reasoned conviction that the rites practised are Divine in origin. I am now fully prepared to accept the title atheist as a relative term, expressing the unwillingness of the subject to acknowledge "belief in God" as the product of some supernatural revelation or incarnation of Deity. The evidence provided for any such revelation or incarnation in a past that is for ever growing more and more remote from us, is totally unconvincing.

But atheism is not only a rebellion against ecclesiastical authority—a refusal to acknowledge the supernatural claims of popes, bishops, priests, Billy Grahams, etc.—it is far deeper than that. Atheism is an intellectual rejection of any kind of theological utterance that attempts to divide things into natural and supernatural. To an atheist nothing ever has been, and nothing ever can be supernatural. Everything that happens, happens according to a natural sequence of events that is necessary and inevitable. Even human freedom or volition, is the necessary product of a certain kind of physical mental development. "Free Will" is not a mystical or supernatural power enabling its possessor to rise above and beyond the order of nature. Much human suffering has been caused by this entirely erroneous doctrine of "Free Will", and any moral theology based on such a concept is bound to be misleading.

Atheism then, the atheism that I now accept, excludes the use of any word that is normally taken to indicate belief in the Supernatural. Not only is the word God excluded but many other words associated with the word God, such as "Grace", "Sin", "Eternal Life", etc. and to a large extent Free Will which, as used theologically, virtually becomes a supernatural entity. Even the word "Soul" has been endowed by religion with a mystic, supernatural significance that justifies atheism for anyone who desires to maintain a sane relationship to the physical facts of human nature.

Call me then an Atheist! The public profession of atheism by ordinary respectable citizens has become now a matter of much greater social importance than the public profession of Christianity by bishops and archbishops. As the rational defence of Christianity becomes daily more difficult, so does the rational presentation of a socially responsible atheism become daily more urgent. We have reason to believe that the so-called "Worship of God" even at its best is a waste of time, while at its worst it provides a façade for a much more sinister and malevolent use of power. For example, think of the Pope: as a private individual he could be regarded as a harmless old man with peculiar ideas, but, as Pope, he constitutes a very positive danger to the peace of the world and to the happiness of all except those who have been infected with the dogmas of Roman Catholicism. The Pope makes frequent public professions of the Papal desire for the peace and happiness of all mankind. But behind this public profession of peace, there lurks the hidden threat, the veiled menace that in Papal eyes anything is lawful so long as it deters hostile forces from attacking what the Pope would call "Christian Civilisation".

All social life involves restriction of individual liberty and there is absolutely no reason why religious opinions should be exempted from this general principle. I am perfectly willing to sacrifice all religious or metaphysical speculations if the sacrifice will help to promote better human relationships. For the present it may be true to say that some toleration of religion is a social necessity (even within the Soviet Union), but what is far more important—within "The Free World"—is that there should be a continuous and ever growing outpouring of sincerely felt and deliberately cultivated atheism. This atheism cannot be half so offensive to Christians, as Christian churches have been and still are to those who attempt to guide and regulate life according to the light of reason. Religion is frequently presented as one of the unalterable things of life, on the same level exactly as race, colour, or the place where you were born. In actual fact religion is nothing of the kind. This habit of mind—as I know very well from personal experience—is not unalterable. The time has now come when atheists must make an all-out attempt to convince religious persons that they must be willing to sacrifice their favourite religious dogmas, their most sacred cows, for the sake of a more united world, a less divided humanity. We have reason to believe that religion, or a false theocracy, is the root of all those evils and discontents against which there is a growing feeling of impending revolution.

\$11 Charge Abolished

FREE birth control services were introduced at New York's municipal hospitals on June 18 for both married and unmarried women. Until now a \$11 (£4 11s 8d) fee has been charged.

The services will cost the city an estimated \$3 million (£1,250,000) a year but Dr Edward O'Rourke, Health Commissioner, said this was minimal compared with the \$34 million (£14 million) cost of hospital, medical and welfare services for unwanted pregnancies.

Report in the "Daily Telegraph" (June 18).

95 THESES FOR A SECOND REFORMATION OF THE CHURCH

continued

Part 10: The State

50. The Social-Contract theories of government of Hobbes, Locke, Spinoza, Rousseau and others are erroneous. The concept as a legal fiction is unjustifiable, for nothing can be justified by a fiction.

51. Government is a device employed by those who are mindful of the need to preserve their society both to restrain those who imperil it and also to create institutions which are helpful or needful to survival of society. Government is society's instrument and those who serve in it are society's agents; a master-servant relationship holds with society the master, able and entitled to act for its survival.

52. The concept of law as essentially will—of a sovereign, of legislators, of a people, of God, of someone presumed sufficiently supreme for his will to prevail over those of all others, the "Imperative School" of jurisprudence, the definition that law is hence a general rule of conduct laid down by a political superior to a political inferior with threat of appropriate punishment for disobedience—is an invalid one, for there remains ultimately to justify the will. The doctrine that law derives from custom is likewise invalid, for it deprives law of rationality and makes of it the unreasoned taboo-like practices of a primitive ancestry who had not the racial experience of a maturer generation and were unable to declare any principle for their morality. Law is to be regarded rather as reason, based upon the nature of man and of society. Human law should be nearly what law is in science, a matter of philosophic analysis and scientific discovery rather than for volition or opinion. The will of a majority is not necessarily right. Voting is expressing egoism, and it assumes that a majority has always the right to oppress a minority.

53. The concept of sovereignty (not to be confused with independence) is a mistaken one because it attaches, by implication, authority to a personal power in society that naturally deserves obedience. What commands obedience is the logical necessity of the law, and if such necessity is recognised, the concept of sovereignty is superfluous. The duty of obedience to law arises from a cause-effect sequence of the survival of society from universal obedience.

54. The inability of legislators to foresee all of the nearly infinite combinations of circumstances which may bear upon cases covered by the law may cause literal interpretation of the law sometimes to work injustice and for this reason courts of justice require a basic principle of morality and justice to guide administration of the law, and this principle Permanism can supply.

55. The State is not justified in interfering in conduct which does not affect the survival of society. The State has the right to command its citizens to do or to refrain from doing only when acting otherwise would be morally wrong for a logical and natural reason which is separate from and which justifies the command of the State and which must be founded ultimately on the survival of society.

Part 11: Sex

56. Without moral principle, future generations may have scant sex morality except that which is based on

jealousy and enforced by physical violence. The Church must support the moral foundation of society on a basis of true moral principle as it adapts to over-population and to scientific advance in contraception. Spurious supernatural ethics is impractical for relations between the sexes today.

57. Society has an interest in the sexual activities of its members insofar as the survival of society depends on the reproduction and care of its new members of the next generation; and there is no other justification whatever for the law's regulation of love and sex. Sexual morality and the law must fix responsibility for the rearing and education of children, who are an indispensable necessity for the propagation of society.

58. There are known three possible forms that society may take for the propagation of children: monogamic, polygamic and free-love forms. The polygamic form is practical when there is grave disparity in the numbers of men and women as when many men have been killed or captured in war; but for nearly equal numbers of men and women polygamy becomes unjust. In a free-love society in which law recognises promiscuity and not the family, fathers do not care for children, in fact are not identifiable, the children are wards of the State and are deprived of the benefits of the family; males must support all the children, but not each father his own; and our racial experience as well as psychological findings attest that children progress better with love and care of both parents. If society is based on the monogamic family, all sex morality must be based on monogamy. If it is the parents, rather than the State, who are to have primary responsibility for children, society must demand that prospective sexual unions be publicly declared and recorded, and births also, so that neither parent may easily neglect the child; and since human children require for maturation a substantial portion of an adult lifetime, society cannot tolerate irresponsibility in begetting children. There is no illegitimate child, but only illegitimate parenthood.

59. In a monogamic society, clandestine fornication and adultery are hence morally wrong. But it is the Church rather than the State that can uphold sexual morality because degrees of culpability depend so much on circumstances that it has been difficult to lay down rigid laws and because the law is not able to provide suitable sanctions while the Church can exert personal influence.

60. Every sane, normal human being should enjoy a natural right to mate and reproduce and voluntarily to choose or accept a sexual partner. Society therefore has an obligation to permit marriage and to protect its members against rape or other sexual assault, although it may retain in institutions persons who by reason of insanity or criminality are unfit to rear children. Contraception is not only moral, but proper and often necessary. Abortion is morally evil, for it denies right to life to a potential human child. Society has no defensible right to forbid sexual stimulation, particularly of those who desire and enjoy stimulation, by literary, dramatic or artistic productions with sexual themes, or by voluntary exposure of the human body. Since solitary sex-gratification is non-social, it is amoral. When the population requirements of society are satiated, homosexuality is amoral. No one has a right to require of another a vow of celibacy, and one who has made such a vow cannot be bound to it.

Part 12: Education

61. The primitive reason for education was the individual aim of perfection of the student. This motive has been superseded by the social aim of the preservation of society. Society educates children because it must do so in order to maintain itself, for without education its people would revert to barbarism. Industry, commerce, the professions, the arts, defence and progress demand education of the people. The individual aim is now a secondary one.

62. Throughout all history, teaching has been based on indoctrination. Education has universally been a process whereby children or other persons "learn", which has meant to commit to memory, uncritically, a mass of information and to remember it as long as possible or to understand information or principles which are accepted uncritically. The word "teach" has meant to present the information or principles which are to be memorised or understood uncritically, and a good teacher is one who so elucidates the data as to facilitate their comprehension of memorisation or who is able to exact from students their maximum effort in comprehending and memorising uncritically. The alternative is an undogmatic education which develops open-minded independence of thought which is the key to all human progress. Intellectual freedom should mean freedom to learn; it should not mean freedom to teach, in the sense of indoctrinate. Actual methods of thus teaching children to think independently and creatively are now available, and schools should adopt them.

63. Children, even those grouped by tests or examinations into separate streams, classes or schools, differ in specific abilities, interests and their future vocations and needs. Traditional methods of education make too little provision for individual differences. Methods of teaching are available which provide for these differences to an extent that all children can develop to their full potentialities, and these methods ought to be adopted by schools.

64. All children should have moral education, sex education and education for world peace. The school has a duty to teach truth, not falsehood; when the truth is unknown or disputed, it is the duty of the school to declare this in all honesty; and the teacher who does not respect truth is not worthy of his calling. Religious instruction should not be religious indoctrination. Moral education should be free of the dogmatic element, faith. The child's education may well consider the fundamental mystery of the origin of the universe and the possibility of an intelligent cause. It will surely portray the influence that religion has had upon the making of the modern mind and culture. But the children must be intellectually free. Supernatural moral theory may be taught but alongside it should be the ethical thought of the world including the new Permanism with its *a priori* and *a posteriori* proofs and its application to the whole of human relationships. Young people in their education today are given no reason for morality; yet they require reasons more than did the children of past generations.

Part 13: Intolerance and Integration

65. The gravest moral error of all time is the misinterpretation of the extent of one's society which is implicit in conventional thinking. Customary conceptions of society are too narrow to be practical in the modern world. Racial groups, religious sects, trade unions, youth gangs, tend to regard themselves as diminutive societies with their own peculiar interests and loyalties, which often clash, sometimes violently. The traditional view of society as identical with a nation is becoming less and less valid.

Many interests, especially tolerance and peace, can be better served by enlarged conception of society which would in fact conceive it as identical with the human species. No other body but the Church can so effectively unite people everywhere into an inclusive society on a basis of common understanding without stereotyping people with sacrifice of existing difference. People cannot be made alike, nor is it desirable that they be alike; but the Church can make them mutually acceptable.

66. It has developed historically that human societies are less than the whole human race. It is separate societies or divisions of society that hate and fight one another. The reasons for divisions are predominantly geographic, sexual and ideological as well as economic and political. Because the various religions excommunicate one another, it is religion most that causes war directly but that contributes to fragment mankind into separate societies, and it is among separate societies that hatred, suspicion, war and threat of war occur. In ideological conflict it is not the truth or falsity of the ideology that matters so much as division by ideological difference of people into separate societies.

67. People are agitated for the survival of their fragment of society because of the uncertainty of their acceptance by members of other societies. They thus strive to form their own society with people with whom they are assured they can interact, and to mark this society with tribalisms, creeds, traditions, barriers. Understanding of this can go far to eliminate racialism, apartheid, group conflict. Prejudice is difficult to abolish by law. The Church is better able to cure prejudice, but only if it is itself tolerant to all people and all beliefs and especially if it searches and teaches the moral ground of the fragmentation of society.

68. Many have recognised a desirability of uniting all humanity in a single society. Many have looked to membership of all people in a common religion as a way to universal brotherhood. But this is a mistake; there cannot be unity of all under a creed, for many dissent. Such unity is possible only with freedom of thought. The man who preaches against intolerance and at the same time demands faith in a creed is a hypocrite. The most effective way by which all may be united in a common society without sacrifice of national difference is through a common Church which excludes no one because of his racial, national, cultural or ideological difference and which permits everyone to believe what convinces him. Faith must go.

Part 14: War and Peace

69. Permanism has demonstrated a logical moral necessity why men wage war. The traditional view that the cause of war is simply human wickedness—greed, cruelty, lust for power, etc.—is inadequate. People who wage war think they are right in so doing. People wage war for the survival of their societies, and this can be maintained to be the universal cause of war. Fear of a real or imagined threat to one's society suffices to cause war. Much fear, distrust and hatred between people can be traced to the failure of humanity explicitly to recognise the true nature of morality and of society.

(To be continued)

The Rev. Thompson holds his Philosophian Church (secular-) services every Sunday at 3.30 p.m. Those who may be interested in attending (perhaps in order to hear the 95 Theses defended, or to be given an opportunity to declare their own views upon them) should make for the Rosslyn Chapel in Hampstead which is on the corner of Rosslyn Hill and Willoughby Road.

CONFRONTATION II

1. Would you reject our claim that the Bible derives from manuscripts originally composed—for the most part—prior to A.D. 150? (In short, would you deny the Bible's antiquity?) If so, upon what grounds?
2. Would you reject our claim that the Bibles we have today are—for the most part—true to the original manuscripts? If so, on what grounds?
3. Would you reject our claim that historical evidence firmly supports and attests the existence of the Gospel Jesus? Is so, upon what grounds?

C. Black.

M.M. (Baptist).

I.N.L. (Church of England).

F.Y. (Christadelphian).

THESE questions from **Confrontation 1**, posed for non-believers by believers, brought as may be expected quite a lively response. As may be seen, the questions call for a simple "Yes" or "No" and, in the case of an affirmative answer (meaning "Yes, we do reject your claim"), grounds for rejection. Unfortunately, some non-believing contributors have added much to their affirmatives far removed from "grounds for rejection"; others have qualified their negative answers at some length; while one or two answered neither "Yes" or "No" but gave their reasons for not being Christians, or not believing in God, and many other things quite irrelevant to this stage in the confrontation. Much of this may be useful at a later stage, but it cannot be published now. It is important to understand that, here, non-belief is in court, and that 'counsel for the prosecution' demands a *simple and directly relevant answer only; this is a strict ruling*. Similarly, believers' questions should logically and consistently follow the previous questions and answers.

The appearance of the non-believers' answers below

THE US OBSCENITY COMMISSION

AS the Arts Council of Great Britain sets up its working party to investigate the working of the Obscene Publications Acts, and other relevant Acts, it is necessary to examine the position in the United States, which is in some respects in advance of that in the United Kingdom in regard to freedom of expression in the arts.

The Supreme Court addressed itself to the obscenity issue for the first time in 1957, when it held that the 1st Amendment guarantee of a free press protected all printed matter save for that which was genuinely obscene. It defined obscenity:

"Whether to the average person, applying contemporary community standards, the dominant theme of the material taken as a whole appeals to prurient interest".

In subsequent cases, the Court held that to suppress literature, it must be established that the

"dominant theme of the material taken as a whole appealed to a prurient interest, that the material was patently offensive and that it was utterly without redeeming social value".

The obscenity rulings were also applied to films.

Congress in 1967 enacted a bill, which was signed into law by the President last October. Its provisions established a Commission on Obscenity and Pornography consisting of 18 persons appointed by the President from among such groups as psychiatrists, sociologists, psychologists, criminologists, jurists and lawyers. Ten members constituted a quorum, but any five could take testimony or interrogate witnesses.

throws the ball back into the believers' camp: believers who wish to ask further questions to test the case for atheism should write immediately.

Non-believers' contributions (answers to the questions above):

1. No.
2. No.
3. Yes; we reject your claim that historical evidence firmly supports and attests the existence of the Gospel Jesus.

No mention is made of the Gospel Jesus in any other contemporary writings, so for our knowledge of him we are dependent entirely upon the Bible. If what is said about Jesus in the Gospels is true—his birth, his miracles, his death and his resurrection—we should expect to find it recorded by contemporary historians, and to have become known and believed all over the Roman Empire within a very short time, but we find no evidence for this. Then again we should expect the Gospels to be in agreement about him, but they are not. History shows the Bible to be a very unreliable account of events and people.

Since the Bible is historically unreliable, and since our account of Jesus (as written by those who are said to have known him) is found only in the Bible, this seems sufficient grounds upon which to reject your claim that "historical evidence" firmly supports the existence of the Gospel Jesus. (It may be worth adding that some of us are inclined to believe it probable that a revolutionary called Jesus/Joshua did live about the beginning of the Christian era an account of whom may have been absorbed into the account of the Gospel Jesus).

"Atheist".

Roy Beardmore.

Collin Coates.

L. Finders.

S. C. Merrifield.

Mr and Mrs B. Overton.

Barbara Smoker.

Jean Straker

The Commission was instructed:

"With the aid of leading constitutional law authorities, to analyse laws on obscenity and pornography and to evaluate and recommend definitions of obscenity and pornography.

"To determine the methods used in distributing obscene materials and to study the nature and volume of traffic in such materials.

"To study the effect of obscenity and pornography on the public, and particularly minors, and the relationship of such materials to crime and to other antisocial behaviour.

"To recommend legislative, administrative or other action to regulate effectively the flow of such traffic without interfering in any way with constitutional rights.

"To report to the President and to Congress no later than January 1, 1970".

Congress authorised the Commission or its committees to hold hearings in any place deemed advisable and to consult with federal, state and local agencies to the extent feasible as well as obtain data from executive agencies and to contract universities, research institutions, foundations, laboratories, hospitals or other public or private agencies to obtain scientific data on the causal relationship of obscene material and antisocial behaviour.

The resolution adopted by the Arts Council conference was as follows:

"This Conference, convened by the Arts Council of Great Britain, wishes to resolve that a Working Party be set up to investigate the working of the Obscene Publications Acts 1959 and 1964, and other relevant Acts, with special reference to

(Continued foot of page 223)

THE HUMANISM OF GENIUS

R. Stuart Montague

THE young Karl Marx aged six years stood at the font of the National Evangelical Church in the ancient city of Trier with his brother and five sisters. At the end of that summer day in August, 1824, all the Marx children had become Christian like their father who adopted the Christian religion in the autumn of 1816.

Little is known of Marx's school days but some idea of his developing character can be glimpsed from an essay he wrote on leaving his college in August 1835. The subject set was: "The Reflections of a Youth Before Choosing a Profession". He wrote: "When we have chosen the position in life in which we can best work for humanity, then burdens cannot crush us, for they are sacrifices for all. Then it is no poor, narrow egotistical joy which we experience; our happiness belongs to millions, and our deeds live on, silently and effectually, and our ashes are watered by the glowing tears of noble men".

A prophetic if somewhat picturesque expression of his future gifts and self-sacrifice in the cause of mankind. In April 1841 the young Marx received the diploma of Doctor of Philosophy from Jena University. While studying all the philosophies and histories of the world he wrote poetry and translated the classics into German. He led a gay and merry university life.

While at Bonn University, Marx, at the age of seventeen, became secretly engaged to Jenny von Westphalen whom he had known since childhood days. She was four years older than Marx, had plenty of spirit, strength of character and a brilliant mind.

When Marx had to leave to enrol at Berlin University he filled three exercise books of poems all dedicated "To my dear and ever beloved Jenny von Westphalen". She was descended in the female line from the family of the Dukes of Argyll. Marx was extremely proud of her beauty and intelligence. "I can assure you without any romanticism that I am head over heels and in all seriousness in love", he wrote to Rouge in July 1842. They were married June 19, 1843.

Altogether Marx had seven children but only his three daughters reached maturity. Three other children, two boys and a girl were buried in Whitefields Churchyard in Tottenham Court Road, London.

Marx was extremely fond of children. Eleanor, his youngest daughter, relates how, as a little girl of five or six, her father took her to a Roman Catholic Church to hear the beautiful music. She had certain religious qualms and confiding them "to 'Mohr' he quietly made everything clear and straight, so that from that hour to this no doubt could ever cross my mind again". Marx related to his small daughter the story of the carpenter whom the

rich men killed saying: "after all we can forgive Christianity much because it taught us the worship of the child".

In August, 1849, Marx moved to London where the family lived in extreme poverty. Often Marx had to visit the pawnbroker to obtain money for such things as food and to pay doctors' bills. When on one occasion a thick-set foreign looking man of dark complexion, long hair and black beard entered the shop the pawnbroker became very suspicious. For Marx was carrying pieces of rare and valuable antique silver plate bearing the coat of arms, crown and crest of the Argyll family with the family device, 'Truth is my maxim'.

With such amazing energy and capacity for work his inexhaustible search for truth and knowledge soon began to undermine Marx's robust physique. He suffered bouts of illness, a liver complaint and carbuncles. Sometimes Marx's carbuncles were situated in most inconvenient places. In a letter to Engels on the conclusion of the first volume of *Capital*, Marx wrote: "But to finish it I must at least be able to sit down". Engels was of the opinion that "the second printer's sheet of *Capital* especially bears rather strong marks of the carbuncles". In reply Marx wrote: "At any rate I hope the bourgeoisie will remember my carbuncles all the rest of their lives".

Marx plodded on in poverty and poor health. It has been said that genius is ninety per cent sweat and ten per cent brains. This may be true to a great extent in the case of Marx. The day following his death, March 14, 1883, Engels describes Marx as "that mighty genius". An intellectual giant—but he was always a very human being. In April, 1867, he wrote: "If one chose to be an ox one could of course turn one's back on the agonies of mankind and look after one's own skin". Franz Mehring in his *Karl Marx*, the standard biography, wrote: "No man has done so much as Karl Marx to destroy the root causes of the suffering of humanity". His favourite maxim was: "Nothing human is foreign to me".

Of the seven published photographs I have discovered taken of Marx between the years 1863 and the late 1870's, in only one is he without the familiar monocle on the black cord resting on his chest. He was not a good orator and would frequently drop his monocle which he would slowly replace in his right eye. Marx took an interest in everything and when he was particularly attracted to anyone or a witty remark was made he would adjust his monocle and survey the person in question with friendly interest.

G. V. Plekhanov wrote of him: "The appearance of Marx's materialist philosophy was a genuine revolution, the greatest revolution known in the history of human thought".

THE US OBSCENITY COMMISSION *(Continued)*

literature, drama and the visual arts, and to consider such changes including the repeal of any such Acts as in their opinion shall be expedient, and to report back to this Conference with such recommendations as they deem necessary".

Whereas the US Commission is official, the Arts Council's working party is not, although the Arts Council itself is a quasi-official body in receipt of public subsidy. In some respects the US enquiry parallels that recently undertaken by the Danish Ministry of Justice (see FREETHINKER, May 25 and June 7) for, it is to be noted, the Commission is instructed to 'study the effect of obscenity and pornography on the public, and particularly minors. In this

provision the instruction may be related to the recommendations of the advice of the Danish Committee in favour of liberalisation for all over 18 years of age.

Caught between competing publishers of the Scandinavian countries and the United States, the British creative artist and writer find that the operations of the UK laws are such as to put them out of business. The amazing intractability of the Home Secretary's refusal to propose any amendments to the Obscene Publications Acts (Dick Taverne's reply to William Hamling's question, March 28, 1968) is another instance of a growing administrative indifference to reasoned public protest.

REVIEW

David Tribe

THE keynote of *Religion and the Secondary School* (SCM Press, 50s) is:

"What are the principles upon which Christians ought to stand in stating the case for the maintenance of an act of worship as an integral part of the life of the school? Clearly there are certain claims which cannot be surrendered without selling the pass to a secularist view of education. Equally we shall do no service to the Christian position by trying to insist on a position of privilege which reasonable opinion within, and outside, the teaching profession is no longer willing to accord."

Most of the book is devoted to RI rather than 'collective worship', but this paragraph best sums up the attitude of the Education Department of the British Council of Churches, which, in trying to stand on both traditional soil and liberal ground, has succeeded in rupturing itself on the fence.

In the short Report of the Special Committee under the chairmanship of D. G. O. Ayerst, which introduces the book, the schools are assigned a duty to make their pupils aware of 'the strength and the challenge' of the tradition that 'God is active in human experience', but also to help them in 'forming discriminating intellectual and moral judgments in ethical and religious matters'. But what if these judgments should make them aware of the weakness and the irrelevance of the Christian tradition? We are likewise told that pupils 'have a right to be put in a position where they can make up their own minds about the faith for which so much is claimed and in which so many find satisfaction and inspiration. This right is however dimly perceived where other world religions and non-theistic humanism are concerned, and seems to be entirely unrecognised in the case of political faiths like marxism. Teachers are supposed 'to address themselves scrupulously to the whole of the evidence, following where the argument leads'; but 'those who are not aware of a personal God' need Christians to dominate the assembly and give it 'more profound significance in the light of their religious understanding'.

The committee lays its cards on the table:

"We are aware that a good many teachers and older pupils regard religious education with some suspicion and contempt as a kind of admittedly ineffective brainwashing. Our desire is to make it at once more effective and less suspect."

In other words, the hard sell has failed: let's try the soft sell.

It must be said that in the course of the book Colin Alves, who has conducted and written up the research on which the report is based, concedes the main secularist criticisms and says much that will offend traditional Christians. Indeed, the committee itself admits that whereas in the past the church directed its main attention to the 99 sheep in the fold, it has recently found that 99 have strayed and in flustering over them has tended to overlook the one left. But if the church has neglected this pious 1 per cent, no community has ever pampered a minority to like extent. RI, the only compulsory subject in the curriculum, has been put in the hands of teachers of whom 51 per cent regard the inculcation of 'personal Christian dedication' as their aim (though this is a drop of 15 per cent on what Harold Loukes found in 1965). Seen from the viewpoint of students, the indoctrinating aspect is well illustrated by the fact that sixth formers record lower figures than fourth formers in Christian knowledge, attitudes and practice, and that where discussion is encouraged attitudes are less favourable than where it is not. It is universally agreed that below the fourth form teaching is almost entirely dogmatic—and this is in secondary schools. Most of the children withdrawn from worship have sectarian parents, and it is made clear that both pupil and staff excusals on the grounds of no religious beliefs bear absolutely no relationship to their numbers in the school.

The NSS has been saying all this to the world for a very long time, and these long, expensive and disrupting surveys are hardly needed to provide further documentation. One certainly sympathises with the 11 out of the 155 LEAs invited which declined to participate. No subject has been so investigated—always by tendentious teams trying either to prove the value of religion today or to show how to make it seem valuable tomorrow. There comes a time when sociology is just a tedious way to demonstrate what everybody knows already. This is no way to make RI under Christian auspices objective. The 1944 Act must be amended. Mr Alves is himself a liberal in theology, and if his co-religionists

heed his words the worst excesses of the present system will be removed. But he has no suggestions on how to improve the moral and social life of the school for all its members other than the building of a 'focus room' for the arts, meditation and voluntary religious groups. Though this isn't envisaged as a chapel, it should however be pointed out that the present sacerdotal class of head-teachers would probably soon turn it into one.

The book is attractively written, though the diagrams and statistics require some specialist knowledge. At the price it should have an index. The bibliography includes *Religious and Moral Education*, not *Religion and Ethics in Schools*. This is interesting, for the author rightly points out that much modernist Christian and reverent humanist guff (the impious word is mine) about the 'open society' ignores the fact that the official structure of society isn't anarchistic and on some matters inevitably takes up views of 'commendation' or 'dismissal'. Though the Pied Pipers of No-man's-land try to whistle it off, though it can and should take place with courtesy and generosity, there is a conflict between belief and unbelief and it is neurotic or worse not to know where one stands.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thoughts on Karl Marx

A RECENT article in the FREETHINKER gave an interesting account of the use of the terms humanism, secularism, rationalism, etc., but did not tell us that another name for all these is communism. Mr Crommelin now tells us that "communism or, if you prefer the term, secular humanism" is the only real cure for world poverty! "Secular humanism" connotes at least freedom of thought but in communist countries free thought (or rather free expression of thought since even communist countries cannot prevent people thinking) is a dead letter. Writers are imprisoned, books impounded, opposition parties forbidden, and limited attempts at greater freedom (cf. Czechoslovakia) repressed. This article states that "millions of individuals subject themselves to a communist discipline and do not regard such subjection as degrading to human dignity or as being anti-social or anti-democratic". I state that "millions of individuals will *not* subject themselves to a discipline and *do* regard such subjection as degrading, etc., etc."

The fact that such an article as Mr Crommelin's can appear in your journal speaks for itself. Will Mr Crommelin tell us in which periodical in the USSR an article would be allowed on the benefits of capitalism, liberalism, true democracy or which contained a sentence such as my alternative rendering of his, quoted above.

J. W. NIXON (Geneva).

Secular employment

IN a friendly review of my contribution to a book entitled *Journeys in Belief*, Mr David Tribe writes "The NSS has publicly offered to help ex-priests who have left the church for ideological reasons to find alternative employment. This may not be an easy matter in practice, for the church sees to it that most priests are trained to be nothing but priests".

In reply to this I can only say that at the time I left the RC Church, more than ten years ago, I was totally unaware of the NSS or of its public offer to help ex-priests. With regard to this help not being "an easy matter in practice" I feel that the challenge should be boldly accepted, not so much for the sake of the ex-priests as for the progress of secular humanism. An all-out effort should be made to ensure that any man who for the sake of intellectual honesty is prepared to sacrifice a lucrative religious profession, can be offered some more attractive alternative than secular unemployment. It must surely be true to say that the very human qualities that make a man an acceptable minister of religion, should make him a very useful member of a purely secular society.

PETER CROMMELIN.

Illustrations

THE correspondence in your issue of June 28 could make your readers assume that Jean Straker had succeeded in creating a rival to *La Vie Parisienne*.

If any further letters are sent on this subject might I suggest that they be accompanied by illustrations. This would, no doubt, place a heart transplant in the breast of your circulation manager.

G. M. C. DOWMAN.