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LATEST ENTRANCE FOR LAST EXIT

IT is now generally known that the Appeals Court quashed the conviction of Calders and Boyars brought against them by Judge Rogers for publishing the controversial novel "Last Exit to Brooklyn". It is probable the novel will now be republished.

The conviction was quashed on the grounds that Judge Rogers had inadequately advised the jury in his summing up. As Lord Justice Salmon remarked, "... it is perhaps of particular importance to explain to the jury what the defendants allege to be the true effect of those words and descriptions within their context in the book ... but ... in effect, he [Judge Rogers] threw them in at the deep end of the section and left them to sink or swim in its dark waters'.

Earlier, Lord Justice Salmon said: 'We have been told on behalf of the company that the determination of this appeal may affect the whole future of literature and the right of free speech in this country' but it is important to note that he went on to say: 'This court does not, however, propose to express any opinion as to whether this book or books like it are obscene—still less as to whether their publication is justified as being for the public good'.

Afterwards, Mr John Calder said: 'We and other publishers, and writers generally, can now breathe a little more easily'.

But can they? The fact that Mrs Mary Whitehouse and Sir Cyril Black may not have cheered at the Appeal Court's decision is not necessarily any call for freethinkers to do so. Legislation has not changed; the law stands as it did before the appeal was heard; it is possible such a book—even the same book—could be prosecuted again, and on the same grounds (obscenity).

Calder and Boyars had their conviction quashed on a technical point. Had Judge Rogers summed up the case more appropriately for the jury, the jury could still have decided against *Last Exit's* publication on the grounds that it was not for the public good.

We may have gained some reassurance from the Appeal Court's decision:

we should not be mistaken into believing that free expression has taken any major step forward.

* * *

CATHOLIC INCONSISTENCY

THE Pope's recent encyclical, reaffirming the Roman Catholic ban on artificial birth control, came as little or no surprise to the average secular humanist; we are more surprised that it should have come as such a surprise to so many prominent Catholics.

The Pope's decision was perfectly in accord with previous doctrine; did the bishops, priests and laity really expect the Pope to do an 'about turn' thereby declaring previous teachings as wrong? Can they seriously imagine their Pope condoning the use of condoms and permitting Pills and pessaries?

It is true the Vatican has changed its stand in the past, and that the Pope had been advised by the Study Commission on Birth Control to take a more tolerant line, but that this could bring the Pope to re-interpret 'a teaching founded on the natural law, illuminated and enriched by divine Revelation' to align with the mere needs of mortals was, clearly, wishful thinking.

Many committed Catholics, who have previously accepted the absolute authority of papal utterances and who have faithfully swallowed, hook-line-and-eucharist, the whole corpus of their church's teachings, are now questioning and dissenting thereby contributing to a schism which may shake the foundations of St Peters itself. Why now, on this point?

Perhaps the answer is that the average Catholic is very little troubled by papal pronouncements on Mary's virginity, on the Pope's infallibility or on any matter which seems hardly to touch him personally, but that when

any pronouncement hits him where it hurts—and this one will hurt—then that is a different matter altogether. It may be just as easy to swallow the wine and wafer after being told it's the actual blood and body of Jesus, but when the Pope pokes his nose in the marital bed—that's different. Then the average RC may feel (as the humanist does on all moral issues) that it is a matter for the individual conscience to decide.

But this is unfair to some of the Catholics who object to the encyclical, many of whom are celibate clergymen. These, we may allow, are moved by worthier sentiments, not least of which is concern for the two-thirds of the human race afflicted by hunger resulting from over-population. Each week thousands of babies are born destined to die weeks or months—rarely years—later of slow and painful hunger. The ban on birth control if obeyed, will considerably worsen this appalling problem. The Pope has appealed not only to Roman Catholics but to all Christians and to 'all men of goodwill' to comply with his decision, but, far worse, he has made a special appeal to all rulers and authorities, saying:

'... do not permit that by legal means practises contrary to natural and divine law be introduced into that fundamental cell, the family'—a clear instruction to governments which will listen to him to outlaw the manufacture and sale of contraceptives. Few governments will act on this advice, we may expect, but were it otherwise such an appeal could immeasurably increase suffering throughout the world. Naturally, many Catholics feel they must protest.

For those who find this ruling 'difficult' to obey, the Romish response is to urge their members not to leave the Church (presumably in the hope that other orders may be obeyed) and to pray for forgiveness and strength; but many Catholics will not be mollified by such advice even though it comes from the He-nun himself.

However worthy and reasonable these protests are, the question remains:

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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 MCRAE.

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.

CATHOLIC INCONSISTENCY

(Continued from front page)

aren't Roman Catholics being logically inconsistent by challenging the Church's authority on this issue while acknowledging it on all other points? Either the Church has absolute authority or it has not; if it can be challenged on one point it can be challenged on others also.

An individual may choose to devote himself to what he believes to be God's will as interpreted for him by other men (perhaps at the expense of mankind's well-being) or he may choose to devote himself to the betterment of life for all mankind (perhaps at the expense of religion), but, whichever is chosen, it is reasonable to expect consistency to follow. Most of the Catholics who protest at the Pope's ruling do so on humanitarian as distinct from theological grounds, which is equivalent to a humanist chucking contraceptives out of the window on theological grounds. The gulf between the Roman Catholic and the humanist is immense but it is possible many Catholics will have moved very slightly closer to us as a result of Pope Paul's encyclical. Conversely, it may still prove to be a mere nine-days-wonder.

BLASPHEMY

Correspondence concluded

THIS must be postively the last time that I correct Jean Straker's misapprehensions on the law of blasphemy and my observations thereon:

- (1) "Blasphemy", like "obscenity" and "indecenty", features in many statutes.
- (2) In addition there is the common law offence of blasphemy, outside statute law.
- (3) In 1967 the most outrageous Act was repealed. This was a perennial affront not only to freethinkers but to all non-Christians, and we are naturally delighted it has gone. But it has not appreciably altered the situation regarding "communications", as it does not appear that anyone has actually been prosecuted under this measure. With the repeal was abolished only the offence of blasphemy AS DEFINED IN THAT ONE ACT (FREETHINKER, August 2), which is not what anyone would regard as "blasphemy" today.
- (4) In my short statement *Religion and the Law* for the National Council for Civil Liberties I naturally concentrated on what was then, on paper, the gravest injustice.

Mr Straker has raised one interesting new point, and in a sense he gives the answer to it. Why did I wait till 1968 to link indecency and obscenity with blasphemy?

Blasphemy is an old issue. It has been academically respectable (though not officially blessed and still unresolved) and led to draft Bills for a century. Today it is less newsworthy than nudes. Besides with its absurd compartmentalising the press associates the one issue with the NSS and the other with the Academy of Visual Arts. Further, Jean Straker has been ahead of us all in the indecency-obscenity campaign. He tells us why. Freedom of Vision is, very properly, "amoral", solely concerned with the dissemination of information. The NSS and NCCL are, on the other hand, "moral". I don't mean anything sanctionious about this (though you will find prudes in the halls of free-thought), simply that we cannot afford to be too far in advance of accepted conventions among generally liberal people.

In a democracy censorship is directed towards social cohesion. Two questions are asked: (1) Will this piece of information harm our citizens? (2) Can we by social action prevent or significantly limit its spread? It is only when enough people answer "No" to both questions that liberalisation takes place. This is what the permissive society is about. Indignation against the *Last Exit* case (whose successful outcome we rejoice at), a certain anxiety in the theatre as the Lord Chamberlain's clean bill of health is removed, growing irritation at the Whitehouse and Blacks of this world, the underground movement in the arts, all these both reflect and generate warmer social rays in which "indecenty" and "obscenity" in media of arts and communications melt like other phantom fears. DAVID TRIBE.

NOTE FOR NEW READERS

THE FREETHINKER may be ordered through any reputable British newsagent. The newsagent may order it through most of the larger wholesalers and distributors (Marlborough, Menzies, W. H. Smith, Wyman, Marshall, etc.)—though some newsagents are not yet aware of it and may need it to be pointed out to them. If you wish to order through a newsagent (rather than subscribe to the publishers) please notify your newsagent of this; you will be helping yourself, and helping widen the FREETHINKER's circulation.

UNIVERSAL AFFIRMATION

David Tribe

The following article is available in leaflet form from the National Secular Society.

THERE may have been a time when witnesses in a court of law saw anxiously above them a vengeful God weighing their words in his balance and beneath them the flames of hell if the result were unfavourable. It is over a hundred years since the Privy Council 'dismissed hell with costs', and "I swear by Almighty God" is simply the first lie that the hardened perjurer is prepared to utter. Probably he tells it with the least misgiving as it is not subject to cross-examination.

Not only is the oath the first lie of the scoundrel, it may be the only lie of otherwise honest people. For its great vogue among citizens at large and its apparent universality among police officers are in striking contrast with actual religious beliefs as revealed by public opinion polls and private statements. The oath is little more than a convention, a mindless routine. Many ordinary people and some court officials in backward areas seem quite unaware that there is an alternative.

Some witnesses are well aware of the possibility of affirming but are afraid of availing themselves of it. With good reason. The National Secular Society has received many complaints over the years of judges warning juries to be cautious of evidence not given on oath, and on November 8, 1961, at London Sessions, George Clark's witness Trevor Hatton was not allowed to give evidence at all when he sought to affirm. Such interventions are quite illegal and may be grounds for successful appeals (as in George Clark's case). They have not been reported recently. Lord Chancellors are sensitive and it would appear the courts have been warned. But the absence of unfavourable comment by magistrates or judges does not mean that they or juries are no longer prejudiced in this way. Even in this "post-Christian" age witnesses affirm in the interests of truth but seldom in their own best interests.

For many centuries oath-taking was regarded as a sign of political reliability as well as of theological orthodoxy, and was universal. From 1696 Quakers, who had biblical support in their objection to taking oaths, were granted the privilege of affirmation, and Moravians were included the following century. By the 1838 Quakers and Moravians Act former members of these sects still "entertaining conscientious objections to the taking of an oath" were exempted. With the upsurge of religious scepticism in Victoria's England came the 1869 Evidence Further Amendment Act:

If any person called to give evidence in any court of justice, whether in a civil or criminal proceeding, shall object to take an oath, or shall be objected to as incompetent to take an oath, such person shall, if the presiding judge is satisfied that the taking of an oath would have no binding effect on his conscience, make the following promise and declaration:

"I solemnly promise and declare that the evidence given by me to the court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth".

So vaguely drafted was this act that the following year another Evidence Amendment Act had to be passed to explain that "court of justice" and "presiding judge" "shall be deemed to include any person or persons having by law authority to administer an oath for the taking of evidence".

For the first time this gave secularists the right to admit unbelief and removed the fear of being unable to give evidence at all if they were challenged when about to take

the oath. But the formula "An oath would have no binding effect on my conscience" was calculated to send prejudicial shivers down the spines of pious jurors. Certain promissory oaths were not covered by these acts and in 1880 Charles Bradlaugh, founder of the National Secular Society, found they did not give him an unchallengeable right to affirm before taking his seat in the House of Commons. In 1886 a new Speaker allowed him to take the oath, and two years later he brought in his universal Oaths Act, which is still in force.

This gives the right of affirmation to "every person upon objecting to being sworn, and stating, as the ground of such objection, either that he has no religious belief, or that the taking of an oath is contrary to his religious belief". The form of words he then uses is based on that in the 1833 Quakers and Moravians Act: "I, A. B., do solemnly, sincerely, and truly declare and affirm" and then proceeds with the words of the oath "omitting any words of imprecation or calling to witness". Strange, unlawful forms of the affirmation may still be found. Till very recently one such was in use at London Sessions until the NSS drew their attention to it.

Bradlaugh was an astute politician anxious to get his measure on the Statute Book by placating those religionists who feared it would allow believers to perjure themselves without injuring their consciences by invoking the Almighty. Their lies would apparently cause them no moral trauma and they were still subject to the same legal penalties as if they had taken the oath. So the Act gives the court the right to find out the reason for affirming. It does not give the right to stage a theological inquisition. **A freethinking witness should simply state "I have no religious belief" and the court must accept this.** He should not get involved in a disputation—or dispute—with the magistrate or judge over what portions of Holy Writ he might have some belief in. Teenagers who have been brought up as Christians are often bullied into taking the oath in contravention of the Act, though it is a nice legal point whether any of the Children and Young Persons Acts could be held to modify it.

Today most people are apathetic to religion. Some are actively hostile. Now a few evangelical Christians join with Quakers and Moravians in regarding the oath as unscriptural. On the other hand, some magistrates and judges are Roman Catholic. Most are establishmentarian. Though criticised by Morley for timidity, the 1888 Oaths Act was a great reforming measure in its own day. Today its usefulness is long outlived. It is intolerable that before he can give one word of evidence an affirming witness must reveal himself as an unbeliever or an unconventional religionist. What an outcry there would be were his policies thus dragged out into the open. And there are practical difficulties.

With immigration there are now in Britain representatives of most of the world's religions. It is quite unrealistic to expect the court usher to be familiar with the religious customs of all of them. Indeed many courts do not even contain the scriptures of the major world religions. Bringing out religious differences while the pantomime of the oath is gone through will simply fortify the racial prejudice we already know to be widespread, just as the production of head coverings and Old Testaments for Jews has always alerted anti-semites in court.

(Continued on back page)

R.E. IN STATE SCHOOLS

Ray Bott

A transcript of Roy Bott's contribution to the debate "Should there be Religious Education in State Schools?" held at Portsmouth College of Education.

THERE are a number of ways in which this question may be interpreted. It might imply 'Should the existing set-up in State schools continue?' or 'Should there be any religious teaching at all in these schools?' Then again it might be interpreted as an appeal to some future state of affairs, i.e. the assumption that religious education was not now taking place, but ought to be. We can see, therefore, that how this question is answered depends largely on how the term 'religious education' is interpreted. Both Mr Mitchell and I may well answer 'yes' to the question, but I suspect we would be answering different questions.

The question is, as a matter of fact, almost identical with the first one that appears in a recent questionnaire distributed by the C. of E. Commission on Religion Education. Being ambiguous, woolly and capable of various interpretations; it is in consequence admirably suited to generate various ambiguous and woolly responses. This seems to be an occupational hazard of many Christian institutions who conduct such and similar surveys. They may know their theology, but miss out on awareness of the pitfalls in the fixed alternative type questionnaire. This is characteristic of the much publicised May and Johnston survey, which is criticised for this reason by Maurice Hill in his document *RI and Surveys*.

However, I do not think we need concern ourselves unduly with the label, it is the content of this meeting that matters. I propose therefore, to offer what I consider to be severe criticisms of the existing set-up in State schools, and to suggest principles upon which a change in the *status-quo* should be effected. It is, in short both a moral and a practical issue.

It is of course, common knowledge that there is a current controversy over this matter of religion in schools. In general the orthodoxy assure us that it is all brought about by a very small but vociferous humanist faction. However, whether this claim be true or not, the issue is more fundamental than a mere exercise in the counting of heads. There is though, a much larger truth not normally disclosed by the Christian churches who have a predilection for ignoring the less palatable events in their history.

Paradoxically, if we look at the historical account over the last one hundred years, we can see that most of the storm and anxiety over religion in schools has been engendered by the churches. Yet this was not always so. The explanation for this phenomenon of relatively sudden clerical interest lies in the nature of the transmission of custom and tradition. If we look back to the eighteenth century and before we see that the perpetuation of religious belief was secured by social life as a whole. The Church did not need to concern itself with considerations of whether the child would grow up religious. The child could not well do otherwise. Social life as a whole guaranteed the perpetuity of religion. There was no difficulty in keeping people religious. The difficulty would have been to prevent them from being so.

Changes in the nature of the social environment brought home a recognition of the fact that the Church's hold on society was weakening. The problem became—'How can we protect the children from the non-religious influences of their environment? It also became a question for society whether the school should be completely affiliated to modern life and thought, or whether it should permit

sectarian interests to retain a hold. The churches were forced to fight for existence—'Give us the child or we perish'.

The situation is peculiar to religion. Outside this field no sensible person is in a hurry to force instruction on the child. If a child is slow or backward, education can wait on opportunity. It is realised that teaching without understanding on the part of the taught is useless. For Christian institutions, the concern has been that the instruction should be of the right brand, or that not enough of it was being administered. The capture of the child is an essential preliminary to the retention of the adult.

Without going into all the ramifications of the struggle for the privilege to indoctrinate children in schools with religious beliefs, suffice it to say that the present Education Act of 1944 *requires* a daily collective worship in schools and some religious instruction. This latter is administered throughout the country's local education authorities through the various so-called Agreed Syllabuses: agreed that is, between Christians. A similar unprincipled manoeuvre took place in the formation of the 1870 Act. There was an arrangement between two Christian bodies, and no one else mattered. Everyone is required to pay for the State schools, and thus for the religious instruction that goes on in them. Everybody is to be taxed for teaching the religion of other people. The only concession is the notorious conscience clause, which permits the withdrawal of the child and/or the teacher from religious assembly or lessons. Thus the State compensates people for making them pay for a dinner they don't have, by not compelling them to eat a dinner they don't like.

What is it at which education should aim? The passing on of knowledge seems intrinsic to this. But the training and development of character seems crucial too. Much good of course, is often associated with religious instruction. No religion has ever been able to live for long without coming to terms with Man's social nature and needs. There are teachings that are common ground within most democratic societies; there are forms of conduct upon the performance of which the very existence of a civilised human group depends. Does anyone seriously contend that to these ends the teaching of religion is essential? It is an incredible vanity that permits the view that Christians enjoy a monopoly of morality.

We might seriously ask ourselves whether lessons on gods, angels, heaven and hell, the miracles of Jesus or the plagues of Egypt have, in these days, any real bearing on the cultivation of conduct. It might be argued that a more abstract account in line with say, the Bishop of Woolwich, would be acceptable. But what the Primary school child is to make of it all is anybody's guess. Certainly what often happens is that the child has to painfully unlearn in its later years what it has been indoctrinated in earlier. For though it may be possible to put over an Agreed Syllabus impartially, this cannot be said of the worship. You cannot impartially praise the Lord, perform rituals, say prayers, sing hymns to God without the authority of the schools lending itself to the notion that there is a deity to be worshipped and invoked. The Plowden Report, with transparent naivety reveals this in the recommendation that doubt should not be introduced until faith has been established.

Very largely, the motivation behind the orthodox view is the belief that the moral standards of society depend

ultimately on maintaining its Christian beliefs. This I claim just cannot stand up as a valid argument. It is quite unrealistic to argue that religious beliefs that are widely ignored or rejected in our society can ever be effective instruments of education. In fact, it can be shown that the real moral education that goes on in the school stems from the social life of the school in general. Most of the moral learning that goes on, both at school and at home, is rationally based.

A further important point of course, is that religion is a matter of opinion, of belief—not of public knowledge. There seems justification for discussion of comparative religion and philosophical discourse at the upper end of the secondary school, but with younger children it seems to me that religious instruction cannot consist of education at all. It inevitably takes the form of a feeble kind of indoctrination; for the young child has not the concepts to handle such metaphysical notions. All the time the RE teacher is pursuing his task, he should be haunted by a consciousness that what he is teaching as unquestionable truth is largely at variance with modern thought. He stands with his back to the sun teaching his pupils to worship the shadows.

The teacher, as educator, should aim at making the child independent of him. The aim of the clergy everywhere is to keep the child, and afterwards the adult, in a state of complete dependence on him, functioning as an indispensable mediator between Man and his gods. Religious instruction stresses human weakness, where a sound education stresses innate human intellectual strength.

In this fight for the child, it is not common to hear much about the child's own individuality. We do hear of the rights of the State, the rights of the parents, the rights of the teacher. In the quarrel between adults, the child is overlooked. We have forgotten who it is we are supposed to be educating. When we are properly alive to the fact that here is a child involved, that all the rights lies with it, and all the duties with us, then a saner view will obtain.

The vast majority of children are eager to know, their curiosity is insatiable. Why not encourage it? Why this continuous aim at turning out children as mere copies of ourselves? In how many homes do children get the mental freedom they ought to have? In how many homes is it not the case that they are forbidden to read this, or think that? It is time that parents awakened to the fact that none of us is so perfect that one's children may not make an improvement. Progress rests upon the variability of human behaviour. That is our strength and weakness. For it means that the newly-born child may, within the limits of its native capacity, become anything. It may become a vital factor in the progress of the race, or it may be turned out a mere conveyor of outworn ideas and primitive superstitions. The churches are always alive to this fact; why cannot all of us be equally alive to it?

It is useless saying that the child must choose for itself when it is old enough to do so, and at the same time so train it that when it does grow up it is incapable of forming an opinion that is worth bothering about. Independence of mind is just a habit, and that habit must be formed at an early age if it is to function affectively in later years. Unfortunately it is a sad commentary on what goes on in the name of religious education in schools, that the pupils very largely end up with a cynical apathy towards the whole business. The irony of it all is that a fear of pupils' possible objective criticism determines that the adolescent's intellectual life is stultified from the start. This is further exacerbated by insistence on conformity to the compulsory requirements of the 1944 Act. The children, certainly at

secondary level, are frequently unwilling conscripts; for the right of withdrawal is vested in the parent and not in the child.

I have said nothing about the psychological objections that are derivative from the practice of withdrawing children from religious instruction in schools, nor of the enforced hypocrisy of teachers who are only half-committed or totally uncommitted, but who for other reasons go through the motions of conformity. But these considerations alone should give us serious food for thought as to the desirability of the present state of affairs.

The main obstacle in the way of secular education is that the churches and their lay supporters have persuaded themselves that it is their right in the very nature of things, to have special consideration shown to them. All the controversy has sprung from this cause, and the conflict will continue until the public and their State representatives recognise the fact that members of churches, however powerful and distinguished, should be treated only as citizens just like everybody else.

The interests of special religious organisations have nothing to do with the State. It should be concerned only with the duty of seeing that every child, as best able within its area of administration, inherits the culture of society. It has no right to impose upon everybody the burden of teaching and supporting the religion of a section. I am not impressed by pleas that Western democratic culture is permeated with Christian values, and so are an essential part of the tradition that should be passed on to children. Certainly, children should receive, when old enough, some education in the role of religion in social development, and in the particular role of Christianity in European history. But that is not what is intended by the plea. In any case, anyone with half an eye for history can see that the influence of Christianity has not all been for the good. The inhumanity and viciousness of the Ages of Faith emanated from a fanatical concern for the soul, coupled with an almost complete indifference for the material welfare of the community. But it is convenient to gloss over the unpleasant. We hear much of Wilberforce, Livingstone and Shaftesbury, but little mention of the bishops rough handling of the nineteenth century Child Labour Acts.

Fortunately adaptation is essential to survival in a changing world. We live in a more enlightened age where children are concerned. These days we hear less of the avenging angel, and more of the loving shepherd.

I am not persuaded that parents in general are particularly concerned about RE in schools. Naturally enough, they have the impression that what goes on in school is designed for the benefit of the children. They have some vague idea that what goes on in relation to religion has a beneficial effect on their child's behaviour. During twenty years of teaching in Primary schools I have had frequent enquiries about how Johnny is getting along with his spelling or his sums. 'Will he get to grammar school?'—'Why aren't you teaching him his tables?'—'Does he do as he is told now?' But I have never been asked once in all those years, questions such as 'How is his relationship with God these days?'—'Is he saying his prayers?' or 'I'm worried about his interpretation of the New Testament, can you do anything to help?' Such an experience can be multiplied countless times the length and breadth of the country. No, they are not very interested; I wish they were, we might get something done to improve matters.

Moreover, what passes off for religious education is frequently dull, unrealistic and misdirected. It is not sur-

(Continued overleaf)

prising that the more far-seeing members of the Christian community are threshing around, looking for ways of making the message stick or the meal more palatable. The more daring even talk in terms of school becoming an open society in this respect. But upon scrutiny this doesn't seem to amount to much more than the singing of a few self chosen hymns and prayers written by the children. The whole pill is sugared with a rather tame discussion about the significance of what they have been doing. While the 1944 Act ensures a privileged position for the Christian churches, who show a marked reluctance to relinquish it,

GRAY INTOLERANCE

MICHAEL GRAY, in the FREETHINKER of August 2, page 244, rejects my Social-Survival theory of ethics without valid reason, simply by labelling it an 'absolute' standard of morality. Of course I cannot reply to this charge unless he informs us what he means by 'absolute'. I presume he means 'universal'—universal with respect to time and place rather than to acts and agents, absolute as opposed to relative, or perhaps he intends all four; applicable to all acts of all people in all times and places. This is precisely what the Social-Survival theory does claim to be, but why this is a reason for rejecting it out of hand rather than for welcoming it he does not make clear, unless he desires to be restrained by no ethics at all, so as to be free to act selfishly, as many do who have rebelled against authoritarian imposing of arbitrary rules. The theory is surely not subjective, as he asserts, for it is capable of objective proof and is, in fact, opposed to Subjectivism; and it must form a correct basis for the morality of the future because it can be demonstrated, by strictly *a priori* proof, to be logically necessary.

Gray then points out that implicit application of the Social-Survival principle has motivated intolerance, and he instances Mediaeval persecution of heretics. This I do not deny. In fact, I even cite such evils as contributory evidence in support of the theory that the survival of society has been the motivating force in moral conduct throughout history, for it is common that people seek to destroy anyone who introduces new ideas that may disturb the *status quo*. Whether intolerance does actually preserve a society, or whether people have been mistaken in supposing it does, is a question, not of principle, but of fact. I am contending for a principle, and must leave fact to scientific or historical investigation. Gray goes on to contend that if some people have applied the Social-Survival principle mistakenly, as by assuming as fact that intolerance is a way to preserve a society, this proves that the principle must be false. This I do not accept.

Here, Gray himself is guilty of the very same fault that he is deploring. He is intolerant of me, of my ethical theory and my Church. He calls my movement dangerous. Witness that he puts my title, which is a legally valid one, in inverted commas. I doubt not that if today's law would let Gray have his way, he would have me burned to death at the stake. He is as intolerant towards me as any Inquisition ever was to any heretic. Gray is here proving my point for me by providing himself a modern example of one of those who, as he puts it, seek "to justify their persecution of any social reformers and revolutionaries whose ideas on changing and improving the social structure might endanger their society. It is a corollary of the Social-Survival theory that people like Gray, who complain loudest about the intolerance of the Middle Ages to new ideas, are themselves just as intolerant, and for the same

talk of an open society in school is just cant and humbug. It is one thing to have it squeezed out of you at a public meeting, and quite another to adopt the consequences of the view and openly advocate secular education. There are quite a number of Christians doing the former, but precious few the latter.

Those of us who argue for secular education say to the Christians who don't—you have your churches and Sunday schools. If you want your children to be like you, use those. If you can't fill them, that is your concern not ours: don't batten on the schools in consequence.

Rev. J. J. Thompson

reasons. But while he is not able to condemn me to be burnt alive for daring to suggest a new theory of ethics, the most he can do is exert every effort to suppress my movement and to dissuade others from supporting it.

The principle is universal, dear reader, that whenever anyone conceives himself to be acting morally, he is acting for the survival of what he conceives to be his society. This principle applies to every human moral act without exception. In this present case, Gray is writing for what he conceives to be the survival of the National Secular Society, and indeed he says so in his article. In establishing my Church, in making recommendations for free thought, for true understanding of the divisions of society that turn man against man, for the common bond that can prevent future war, I am acting for the survival of a larger society—the human race, which includes the National Secular Society. To the same extent that the Holy Inquisition was wrong in supposing that free speculation on religion would destroy society, Gray is wrong in supposing that free speculation on ethics, or the Philosophian Church, "is as dangerous a threat as the traditional Church not only to Humanism but to every human being".

I do not oppose the NSS, but instead I have announced NSS meetings to my congregation and urged them to attend. Indeed I have offered to bequeath my Church, my entire organisation, in my will, to the NSS to employ as an additional instrument for furthering their cause after my death.

I see little profit in Freethinkers fighting against one another, endeavouring to exclude new effort towards rationality. When I approached the Humanists (I have been on the Executive Committee of the local Humanist branch) with my idea for a Church, their reaction seemed to imply, "How dare you try to set up a group for freedom of thought without first securing a licence from us, and pledging to enforce our approved doctrine, for we by right enjoy a monopoly on all independent thinking?" In my view, there should be not competition but co-operation among us, and the more movements for freedom of thought, all working together, the better. Our movement has more chance for survival if we do not close our minds to new ideas as Gray does to the Social-Survival theory. I ask everyone, "What do you say it is that makes the difference between right and wrong?" and when inevitably everyone, even churchmen, are unable to reply, I explain the Social-Survival theory. Everyone so far who has heard my theory has agreed with it; no one has ever refuted it. I challenge anyone at all to debate it.

The rest of Gray's article lists evils of the Church. Yes—I want the Church to reform it all. I should be very interested if Gray will delineate for us the sex standards he recommends for society, including provision for care of the child.

THE CRISIS CALLED DEATH

Corliss Lamont

(Author of *The Illusion of Immortality*)

NO philosophy, religion or overall way of life can be judged complete or adequate unless it includes a definite position on whether or not the human personality can surmount the crisis called death and continue its career in another and immortal realm of existence. Without being dogmatic about it, naturalistic humanism does give an answer on this issue.

Humanism, in line with its rejection of belief in any form of the supernatural, considers illusory the idea of personal immortality, or the conscious survival of the self beyond death for any period of time whatsoever. The basic reason for regarding a hereafter as out of the question is that since a human being is a living unity of body and personality, including the mind, it is impossible for the personality to continue when the body and brain have ceased to function.

The sciences of biology, medicine and psychology have accumulated an enormous amount of evidence pointing to the oneness and inseparability of personality and the physical organism. And it is inconceivable that the characteristic mental activities of thought, memory and imagination could go on without the sustaining structure of the brain and cerebral cortex. The only possible way for a man to achieve immortality is to carry out its original meaning, "not-death", by keeping alive his natural body forever. Although such an outcome is extremely improbable, the average span of life, at least in the United States, has been increasingly extended during this twentieth century. I can imagine my own this-earthly "resurrection" taking place some 20 years hence at about the age of 85 when I shall go for a week or so to the hospital and have my tiring natural heart replaced by an inexhaustible mechanical heart.

Paradoxically enough, traditional Christianity supports the humanist position on the unity of body and personality by insisting that man can gain immortality only through the literal resurrection of the physical body. The promise of this resurrection was, according to the New Testament, the wonderful, world-shaking message that Jesus brought. Undoubtedly the best chance for personal survival after death is precisely through this resurrection route of old-time religion. The trouble here for humanists is that they cannot possibly accept the resurrection doctrine.

Since the humanist thinks that his one and only life is in this here and now, he aims to make the best of it in terms of attaining happiness for himself, his family, his countrymen and all mankind. Accordingly, the humanist is a militant fighter for social justice, racial equality, higher living standards and world peace. And he remembers that faith in immortality has often cut the nerve of effective action for improving the lot of humanity on this earth.

For example, during this crucial era when the folly, horror and tragedy of international war continue to afflict mankind, we find the following gem of supernaturalist apologia in *The New York Times* of September 11, 1950, at the height of the Korean War: "Sorrowing parents whose sons have been drafted for combat duty were told yesterday in St Patrick's Cathedral that death in battle was part of God's plan for populating the kingdom of heaven". A Catholic prelate, Monsignor William T. Greene, offered

this extraordinary form of consolation, but both Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI would surely have winced at it.

The humanist faces his own death and that of others with more equanimity than the average person, because he realizes that in the processes of nature death is a necessary corollary of life and has played an indispensable role in the evolution of the higher animals, including man. Death has rid the earth of unprogressive species and has given full meaning to the Darwinian doctrine of the survival of the fittest. Without our good friend death, the race of man would never have come into being at all.

Biologically speaking, nature's method with the more complex forms of life is to discard the old and faltering organism at a certain stage to make way for newborn and lustier vitality. As the American novelist Anne Parrish says, each one of us "must die for the sake of life, for the flow of the stream too great to be dammed in any pool, for the growth of the seed too strong to stay in one shape. . . . Because these bodies must perish, we are greater than we know. The most selfish must be generous, letting his life pour out to others. The most cowardly must be brave enough to go". So it is that death gives the opportunity for the largest possible number of human beings, including our own descendants, to experience the joys of living. And in this sense, death acts as the firm ally of future and unborn generations, through the simple procedure of making room for them upon this planet.

To philosophise about man's mortality, as I have been doing, or to take seriously religious promises of an after-life, may soften slightly the impact of death; but in my opinion nothing can really counteract its bitter sting. The humanist believes that death is a blow of such magnitude and finality that it is always a tragedy, either for the deceased or the survivors who were close to him, or for both. Even when dying puts an end to a painful and incurable illness, it remains tragic that extinction of the individual should be the only cure. Of course, the tragedy is greater when a person dies in youth or the prime of life.

But it is always too soon to die, even if you are three-score years and ten, even if you are four-score years and ten—indeed, no matter how young or old you may be. Hotspur's cry in *Henry IV* resounds down the ages, "O gentlemen! the time of life is short". I myself am almost 65 and have the familiar experience of looking back on my life and finding that it has all gone with appalling swiftness. Days, years, decades have slipped by so quickly that now it seems I hardly knew what was happening. Have I been daydreaming all this time?

Today, more than ever, I feel the haunting sense of transiency. If only time would for a while come to a stop! If only each day would last 100 hours and each year 1,000 days! I sympathise with everyone who ever longed for immortality and I wish that the enchanting dream of eternal life could indeed come true. So it is that as a humanist I deeply regret that death is the end. Frankly, I would like to go on living indefinitely, providing that I could be assured of continued good health and economic security. And I would be most happy if anybody could prove to me that there actually is personal survival after death.

(Continued on back page)

NSS PROTEST MEETING

THE National Secular Society held a protest meeting against Pope Paul's encyclical on birth control at London's Caxton Hall on Thursday, August 8. Among the messages received were the following from Paul Johnson, Editor of the *New Statesman* (and, himself, a Catholic):

"The encyclical of Pope Paul, reaffirming the traditional papal ban on contraceptives, is a disaster for the Roman Catholic Church, and the poorer peoples of the world. It will be a bitter blow to Catholic mothers in those countries where the secular law still reflects the official teaching of the church. It will make the struggle to overcome poverty and the evils of over-population in the Third World more difficult. And it will strike hard, even in this country, at many poor Catholic mothers who, in their innocence, still believe that the Pope has the right to interfere in their most intimate domestic arrangements. Fortunately, the great majority of educated Catholics no longer acknowledge this right. They will not accept the Pope's *diktat*, and will continue, in this matter, to follow their own consciences, and to urge others to do likewise. In the end, I believe, this ruling will be reversed; and in the meantime the chief casualty will be the authority and reputation of the papacy itself."

from Bertrand Russell, the veteran philosopher:

"The Pope is advocating a policy which, if carried out, will bring misery and ruin both to the Catholic Church and to the world. The misery will result from the practice of birth control by millions of Catholics against the instructions of the Pope. The ruin will be the result of the population explosion and the starvation that will follow. The Pope's views are derived from an aversion to sex which is to be expected of professional celibates, but cannot be expected of other mortals."

and from William Hamling, MP, well-known for his support of humanist campaigns:

"The Pope's Encyclical is backward looking; artificial means of birth control have given women for the first time in the history of mankind the opportunity to emancipate themselves from the burden of excessive childbearing and the opportunity to care properly for the children that are born. To rely on blind faith and chance to control population is an insult to our intelligence."

Messages of support were also received from playwright John Mortimer and Michael Foot, MP.

A full report of the meeting will appear in the next issue of the FREETHINKER.

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Letters to the Editor

NOTE: Letters exceeding 200 words may be cut, abbreviated, digested or rewritten.

Agreement with Michael Gray

I AM in complete agreement with Mr Michael Gray's excellent article "Mr Thompson and His Un-Ethical Church" (August 2). Secularists and Humanists should be promoting the cause of atheism by exposing religious superstition and by helping to liberate the minds of their fellow citizens from thralldom. Helping to give the doctrine of the Church a 'new look' is not the way to bring about a more enlightened and ethical society.

S. C. MERRYFIELD.

Keep attacking fundamentalism

I was alarmed by Clive Godfrey's letter (August 2). The contemporary Christian ideas do not reflect the attitude of the general populace. Fundamentalist ideas, thoughtlessly tolerated by many adults, are what indoctrinate children. Modernist Christianity is a movement of a small minority of specialists. A powerful group, yes, and we must try to accelerate their progress towards reason. But when I pass the FREETHINKER to Christian friends I like it to contain some shattering of fundamentalism (*a la* F. H. Snow and A. J. Lowry).

To free society of parasitic religion will require removal of infant indoctrination and of parental condoning of it. We should continually present, in slightly varying aspects, not only the fallacy but also the inhumanity inherent in (fundamental) belief in God and in life after death. We should aim at weakening the popular support and finance for Christian causes in general, for indoctrination in schools and for pretty coloured Jesus-story nursery books.

M. J. O'CARROLL.

UNIVERSAL AFFIRMATION

(Continued from page 259)

In the interests of both convenience and justice it is essential to substitute universal affirmation for the present chaos and hypocrisy. Truth will no lapse but will take on new strength. No doubt courts would be sympathetic to anyone who, as he recited the words of affirmation, held aloft scriptures or any other work of literature and placed a hand on his heart or any more intimate part of his anatomy. It is unlikely however that believers would feel the necessity for with, as the form of affirmation in no sense undermines their religious position. Universal affirmation would emphasise our common humanity and citizenship in a way the present system does not. The National Secular Society has already gained the support of other humanist bodies and liberal Christians in the National Council for Civil Liberties and hopes that all men of goodwill will join in a national campaign to reform the law.

THE CRISIS CALLED DEATH

(Continued from page 263)

Humanists try to look death in the face—honestly, courageously, calmly. They recognise that it is one of the basic tragedies inherent in the great gift of life. We do not agonise over this fact, nor are we preoccupied with it. Our main antidote for death is **preoccupation with life**, with manifold enjoyments that it brings and with creative work that contributes to the progress of our country and the welfare of humanity. We know there can be no individual immortality, but we have hopes that once global peace is permanently established, international co-operation and the steady advance of science will secure the immortality of the human race in this infinitely varied and beautiful world of nature.

(N.Z. Rationalist and Humanist)