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FAMILY PLANNING AND ABORTION

AMID THE GLOOM generated by his recent announcements on such subjects as spectacles, false teeth and insurance stamps, Mr Richard Crossman, the Secretary of State for Social Services has made some statements of a less depressing nature. First, he has publicly encouraged the teaching of sex in our schools, and secondly he has stated that he considers it unwise to have an early amendment of the Abortion Act. This latter was part of a reply to a question in the House of Commons from Sir Gerald Nabarro, and referred to the proposal for amendment put forward by Mr Norman St John Stevas. Happily, therefore, it seems that the government will protect us from the unreason of the Conservative member for Chelmsford.

Despite this, one is bound to urge that Mr Crossman and his colleagues go further in this field. In a recent statement David Tribe, the President of the national Secular Society, said:

"... it is a pity that neither he (Crossman) nor the Government as a body is bringing more pressure to bear on local authorities in the matter of setting up family planning clinics and on hospitals to curb the power of their senior consultants to ban abortions under the NHS."

"The women of Britain would benefit if a handful of gynaecologists, whose patronage of hospital beds is almost medieval, joined the 'brain drain': we recommend Italy or the Irish Republic."

This might be done by giving them the choice of permitting abortion or giving up medical practice in this country. For though the freedom of individuals to act as they please should be a priority in any society, this freedom is granted subject to the individual's actions not harming anyone else. These medical men would no doubt maintain that they are withholding abortions for the benefit of mother, child and all concerned. However, it is clear that society, as represented in parliament, does not hold this view. Thus it would be in order for the freedom of the doctors to be curtailed on the grounds that in exercising that freedom they are restricting the freedom of a far larger number of people. After all it is only the freedom to refuse to recommend an abortion that would be withdrawn—not the freedom to refuse to perform the operation.

Tribe goes on to show that the government, even if unmoved by the actual suffering caused by ignorance of contraception and inability to obtain abortions, would be acting in their own interest were they to take action:

"In the first place there is an accelerated demand on the hospital service for abortion. If this is frustrated the maternity services and Ministry of Social Security have to step in with financial support. As the child grows up in difficult and/or unloving home circumstances, there is a greater than average chance that a panoply of school attendance and child care officers, policemen, magistrates, hostel and approved school staff, probation and prison officers will be forever on call to try to mend a damaged life. If the anguish of all this fails to impress, perhaps some municipal accountants will tot up how much it costs."

UNDERGROUND PAPISTS

OCCASIONALLY I have heard it suggested that in order to gain publicity for the movement, humanists should take militant action. Suggestions have ranged from daubing the altar at Canterbury cathedral to ostentatiously removing one's trousers during mass at Westminster cathedral. Obviously such suggestions are made lightheartedly. For humanists to actively try to disrupt the churches' rituals would serve only to discredit us in the eyes of the apathetic majority, and to invoke sympathy for the benign men of God.

However, for the churches' day to day functions to be disrupted by adherents to the faith is another story. In America, Black Power advocates have been interrupting church services with demands for \$500,000,000 "reparations" to the negro. This activity was unwittingly started off by the inter-religious 'Foundation for Community Organisation', when it launched the 'National Black Economic Development Conference' last month in Detroit. Mr James Forman, a 40-year-old black militant and now leader of the church disruption campaign, proposed a manifesto for "reparations", which the conference accepted. Since then various incidents have taken place. Mr Forman himself has on two consecutive Sundays appeared at the non-denominational Riverside Church in New York. Dressed in pale blue robes, he has stood throughout the sermon leaning on a cane amid the seated worshippers, in what *The Times* described as "silent, but dramatic, protest".

In New Orleans, at a Presbyterian church, a negro belated the reparation demands as the church organ vainly endeavoured to drown his voice. He was arrested with five others. In Los Angeles, at a Methodist church, two men, a woman and seven children were arrested, when they tried to block the entrance and demanded to speak to the congregation. And across the ocean in Paris, two well-dressed negeresses interrupted the morning service at the American church to read the reparation manifesto.

In recent times the odd maniac has been known to interrupt a church service (a certain Northern Irishman comes to mind), but the church has been considered far too hallowed an institution to be systematically subverted. It

(Continued overleaf)

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(Continued from front page)

may be thought that the Black Power advocates are an undesirable group of fanatics and that their policy is not likely to be reiterated by any 'sane' organisation anywhere, let alone in Britain.

However, whatever might be thought of Black Power—and here it is worth mentioning that the 'National Council of Churches' in America has recorded its "deep appreciation" to Mr Forman and stated that "it shares the aspirations of the black people" of America—there can be no argument about the conventional desirability of the members of Unitas, the lay Catholic organisation in this country, which strives to defend Catholic orthodoxy. At the moment Unitas is not planning anything so daring as the American Black Power advocates. Characteristically they are organising their activities in a far more subtle fashion. They are grouping themselves into parish cells "to defend the Pope and the faith by overcoming false teaching and false practice". Unitas has stated that it is important for cell members to condition themselves to work independently from headquarters and "even underground if required". The most militant order, that Unitas members

COMING EVENTS

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 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.

INDOOR

Bristol Humanist Group: Room 3, Colston House, Colston Street: Monday, May 26, 7.30 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.

Glasgow Humanist Group: Sunday, May 25: Outing to Linn Park and Busby Braes. Meet 2 p.m. at Eglinton Toll, or 2.30 p.m. outside main Clarkston Road entrance to Linn Park. Return 6 p.m.

Humanist Housing Association: The official opening of Rose Bush Court, 35 Parkhill Road, London, NW3, will take place on Saturday, June 7th, at 3.30 p.m. The ceremony will be performed by the Minister for Housing and Local Government, the Rt. Hon. Anthony Greenwood, MP.

Admission will be by ticket only because of limited accommodation. Applications for tickets should be sent to the Secretary, Humanist Housing Association, Rose Bush Court, 35 Parkhill Road, London, NW3. Please enclose a stamped, addressed envelope.

North Staffs Humanist Group: Cartwright House, Hanley (near Cinebowl): Friday, May 30, 7.45 p.m.: Meeting.

have received from HQ, is that, where a parish priest is encountered who stubbornly refused to co-operate, they must protest by walking out of the church.

Thus, we have British Roman Catholics behaving like the British Communist party before the war, and American negroes using the opposite tactics to get hold of 500,000,000 richly deserved dollars. These two examples reveal the two chief weaknesses of organised religion in the West and lend weight to the theory that the churches will eventually crumble of their own volition. The Catholics are suffering from the onslaught of science which has clearly demonstrated that their religion relies on falsehood. Thus there emerge progressive and reactionary Catholics, who already are prepared to fight each other with "underground" methods. Science is gradually taking its toll in the same way all over the western world.

The American churches are, in this instance, suffering from the alliance between the churches and the establishment. Quite rightly the American negro is beginning to fight back against his exploitation by the state. In every western country dissatisfaction with the establishment is being made manifest. Religion is everywhere inextricably allied to the establishment and thus suffers with it.

Science and dissatisfaction with the established order are spreading every day. In this light it does not seem unduly optimistic to express the view that organised religion may die completely, in many parts of the world, before the century is out.

SUNDAY ENTERTAINMENT BILL

THE NEWS THAT the government is to provide parliamentary time on June 12 for the Divorce Reform Bill, is much to be welcomed. This action is the product of sympathy towards the Bill amongst members of the government, and pressure on the Home Office from private citizens who are concerned that the Bill should get through.

The government has also expressed its approval of the Sunday Entertainments Bill, and thus it would seem well worthwhile for those in favour of the bill to write to the Home Office expressing their wish that this Bill too, should be given more parliamentary time.

FATUOUS BUT DEADLY

THE ANNOUNCEMENT from the Vatican that certain 'saints' were to be 'demoted' and the ensuing debate as to who is now to be the patron saint of what, not to mention "What is to happen to George's dragon?", is hard to beat as an example of the fatuousness of religion.

However, Brigadier General Sarwo Edhie, the President of Indonesia, has ordered the dropping of leaflets on the rebel policemen of West Irian, a province of his country far removed from the capital Jakarta. The leaflets read: "Remember St Luke's gospel, chapter 15, verses 11-32: 'Do you not love and cherish your wife and property? Return to the correct road. Report immediately to the nearest army post and surrender your weapons and ammunition.'" Of this Stewart Harris, *The Times* correspondent in Jakarta, wrote: "Most of the primitive West Irianese are animists, but Christian, not Muslim, influences are dominant. So the invocation of St Luke was not a bad idea."

Perhaps not, but what sort of idea is the religious-minded general's statement that the alternative to obeying the demands of the 'Christian' leaflet is, in his own words, "destruction".

FROM FOREIGN PAPERS

OTTO WOLFGANG

From the Soviet Monthly *Nauka i Religya* (Science and Religion).

ON THE OCCASION of the 50th anniversary of the Revolution, a special article titled "Atheistic Education Today" analysed the present-day position. After a self-complimentary part on the victory of atheism in the Soviet Union thanks to what is presented nowadays as Socialism, the writer admits that it is not all plain sailing. "Unfortunately religious fanaticism can still induce people to acts incompatible with Soviet law and morale". The spreading of wrong, unscientific theories still hinders people from recognising the proper mission of man to form a happy community. What is to be done? In 1844, Marx wrote:

"Religious misery is at once the expression of real misery and a protest against the real misery. Religion is the sigh of the hard-pressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, as it is the soul of soul-less circumstances. It is the opium of the people. . . . The criticism of heaven thus transforms itself into the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law, the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics." (On Hegel's *Philosophy of Law*, p. 14 of the English edition.)

But, of course, far from admitting that religion is surviving in the Soviet Union because there still exist fear and inhuman living conditions "in which man is a degraded, enslaved, abandoned and contemptible creature", the article harps on the need for more scientific enlightenment in press, school, cultural organisations and radio. This was the simple formula of the 18th century, invalidated by the fact that there have always existed and still exist highly educated men, and even scientists of renown, who are religious.

Our teachers and youth leaders—complains the writer—are in many instances not sufficiently briefed to counteract the religious influence on children within their families. It is not enough to treat religious ideas in an abstract way, without connecting instruction with the real problems of man in everyday life. It would be necessary to build up properly educated cadres for the fight against religious survivals. Far too many atheists believe in an automatic withering away of religion and are waiting for it to happen of its own. At the other pole are those who try to kill religious beliefs by brutal force. But intolerance against believers in reality only leads to apartheid and segregation. Its result is obstinate obstruction on the part of the persecuted.

Very true—but unfortunately these words will remain empty words in the conditions of Neo-Stalinism.

(A translation of the original text appeared in the German *Freidenker* of February 1969.)

From *La Ragione* (Rome).

Under the heading "Disappointed Hopes" the November issue gives a synopsis of world opinion of the Papal Encyclical "Humanae vitae". Hardly ever before has the Holy See had a similarly 'bad Press' and even *Osservatore Romano* had to admit that the Papal ruling had raised "a lot of doubting among Catholics the world over".

Among outspoken negative comments are mentioned those of John Nunni, professor of law at Harvard University—"a mistaken document"; Dr Thomas Bartsch of Georgetown University—"permeated with the spirit of

obscurantism"; Cardinal Döpfner—"It must result in lowering the authority of the RC church, making it more difficult for the clergy to explain".

In the face of such verdicts among Roman Catholics it is not surprising that other denominations hold even harsher views; the Archbishop of Canterbury called this encyclical "a slap in the face of Christian Unity".

The paper underlines the fact that not only in this respect but also in regard to celibacy the Pope has kept within the borders of strict conservatism.

Replying to a radio address on "Death and Immortality" by the Orthodox Archbishop of San Francisco, the Religious Commentator of the "Voice of America", I. Franov, writes in the October issue that nowadays all sensible persons know the interrelation between psychological phenomena and material processes. Findings in Medicine, Biology and Psychology corroborate the fact that religious exaltation—for which certain types such as persons suffering from neurathenia or paranoia have a particular tendency—is correlated with both suggestion and auto-suggestion; the psycho-physiological content of hypnotic influences has essentially been exposed by I. P. Pavlov's theories, and nowadays science has penetrated the hidden mechanism of the sub-conscious. The fantastic, religious illusion about life has been shattered by proved knowledge of human nature, the essence of mind and the prospects and potentialities of a person. The hope of an afterlife is nothing but an immature expression of protest against cruel fate in this life. It is the dream of persons unwilling or unable to face and master the inimical forces in nature or society. Utopian Paradise is one of the many unnatural dogmas of religion resulting in man's alienation from his real, social tasks. To overcome ills and epidemics, war, natural catastrophies and other causes of premature death—in short, the creation of a condition on this earth, worthy of modern man and allowing him to reach a healthy old age—will destroy his fear of death. He who has been able to live a full life, knowing that he has done his best in the interest of mankind, is no longer afraid of the conclusion of an active and fully-enjoyed life.

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THE LIFE OF BERTRAND RUSSELL

G. L. SIMONS

THE FIRST OF A SERIES OF ARTICLES

ON MAY 18, 1969, Bertrand Russell was ninety-seven years of age. His grandfather, Lord John Russell, was a Whig prime minister and was born in the early days of the French Revolution; when Napoleon was still Emperor, Lord John Russell was a Member of the British Parliament. This point serves to indicate how Bertrand Russell's remarkable longevity links him with the existence of significant historical figures of many years ago. Russell's early social and political awareness was generated in the tranquil atmosphere of the Victorian aristocracy, and much of his political philosophy has to be understood against this background.

In Russell's own words he was "a solitary, shy, priggish youth". He was an orphan at four, and led a somewhat lonely childhood—"I had no experience of the social pleasures of boyhood and did not miss them". At fifteen he began to doubt the validity of the religion in which he had been brought up, and recorded his doubts in a diary, using Greek characters lest it be discovered. Many of these thoughts are printed in Chapter 3 of *My Philosophical Development*. He also doubted Euclid, not liking the necessity of having to assume certain axioms, and was delighted when he first came across non-Euclidean geometry.

At 18 he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, and for the first time found that his type of intelligence was not regarded as odd. In his *Autobiography* (Vol. 1, p. 56) he remarks: "From the moment I went up to Cambridge at the beginning of October 1890 everything went well with me". It was at Cambridge that he met the men who, with himself, were soon to dominate English philosophy and mathematics. In his *Portraits from Memory*, Russell recalls and describes some of the important and interesting men whom he met—such men as Wittgenstein, G. E. Moore, McTaggart, the Trevelyan brothers, Lytton Strachey, Keynes, and others. Russell has more than once remarked that he gained more from conversation than tutorship; his Cambridge lecturers temporarily diverting him from empiricism, and for a brief period he became a follower of Kant, Hegel and Bradley.

In 1895, when 23, he went to Berlin and studied German politics at first hand; at that time both Communism and extreme right-wing politics were active in Berlin. Russell condemned what he thought was Prussian arrogance and although expressing admiration for the *Communist Manifesto*, made his first (of many) hostile criticisms of Marxist philosophy. A year later his first book appeared—*German Social Democracy*, and in the same year, at 24, he lectured in America on the logical nature of geometry; a second book appeared the following year. Three years later he lectured at Cambridge on Leibniz, and true to form a book subsequently appeared on Leibniz. This work led him to reject Hegel and Bradley and he began to organise a new philosophy based on "common sense tempered by mathematical logic". In his own words "The change in these years (1899-1900) was a revolution; subsequent changes have been of the nature of an evolution".

At the turn of the century he decided that the whole of mathematics was an extension of logic, and in a large prose work, *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903), began to establish this theory. Its importance in the philosophy of mathematics was enormous. And in 1903, with Professor

Whitehead, Russell started on what was to be the greatest creation of his life. *Principia Mathematica* took Russell and Whitehead ten years to write and is universally acknowledged as one of the great achievements of the human mind. In three volumes it runs to almost 2,000 pages and is largely cast in logical symbology, being an attempt to derive the whole of mathematics from the propositions and principles of pure logic. Russell comments ruefully on the financing of *Principia Mathematica*:

"When we finally took it to the University Press, it was so large that we had to hire an old-four-wheeler for the purpose. Even then our difficulties were not at an end. The University Press estimated that there would be a loss of £600 on the book, and while the syndics were willing to bear a loss of £300, they did not feel they could go above this figure. The Royal Society very generously contributed £200 and the remaining £100 we had to find ourselves. We thus earned minus £50 each by ten years' work. This beats the record of *Paradise Lost*." (*Autobiography*, Vol. 1, p. 152.)

Despite the time taken up in producing *Principia Mathematica* (the writing out of the book took Russell "from ten to twelve hours a day for about eight months in the year, from 1907 to 1910"), Russell somehow found time for other writings and activities. In 1907 he stood for Parliament as a Liberal and was defeated. In 1908 he was made a fellow of the Royal Society. (How many men have been an FRS for over sixty years?) In 1912 he wrote *The Problems of Philosophy*, and at that time numerous articles appeared in *Mind* and similar publications.

In 1914 Russell was again lecturing in America, this time at Harvard on philosophy: the lectures formed the basis of *Our Knowledge of the External World* which appeared in the same year and consolidated his position as a philosopher. Then came the First World War, and on returning to England Russell plunged into pacifist activities. (These are recounted in the *Autobiography* and in *Portraits from Memory*.) (In 1918, for criticising the government, Russell was committed to Brixton for six months—but the time was not wasted. He wrote *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* and did other important work. Because of his pacifist activities he was also dismissed from Cambridge.

In 1920 he visited Russia and China; in Russia he met Lenin and Trotsky; in China after lecturing in Peking, he contracted acute pneumonia and almost died. Professor Dewey wept at his bedside, and when Russell finally returned to England he had the pleasure of reading his obituary. In the nineteen twenties Russell wrote 15 books on such diverse topics as Bolshevism, relativity, morality, nuclear physics, philosophy, China and education. He also stood as a Labour candidate in two General Elections, being defeated each time but reducing a Conservative majority. In 1924 he again lectured in America, and predicted the future rivalry between America and the Soviet Union. He also predicted the use of atomic power in his *ABC of Atoms* (1924). In 1927 he founded Beacon Hill school, an experimental venture embodying his progressive ideas on education; it failed for a number of reasons which he has candidly outlined. His experiences in the field of practical education led to a questioning of Freud, and two further books.

In the nineteen thirties Russell wrote another ten books, largely on moral or sociological questions. His awareness of an impending world conflict stimulated him to write two highly relevant books—*The Way to Peace* (which he

would not now be keen to defend) and *Power*, which in some circles is regarded as a classic.

In 1940 Russell was invited to lecture at the College of New York, but Catholic opposition succeeded in achieving a judicial verdict that Russell was unworthy to teach, and the College subsequently refused to engage him. This is perhaps the unhappiest period in Russell's life, and the whole shabby affair is well described in an appendix to the book, *Why I am not a Christian*. Russell was supported by all leading academics and even by some progressive religious leaders; his final rejection was based largely on his innocuous *Marriage and Morals*, although he would have been engaged to teach mathematical logic and philosophy.

In the nineteen forties three of Russell's most important books were to appear—*An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, based on his recent Californian lectures, the *History of Western Philosophy*, and *Human Knowledge—Its Scope and Limits*, which is regarded as the last full-scale treatment of his philosophical position. In 1944 he was invited back to Cambridge to lecture. In 1948 he lectured in Norway, and again nearly died. His plane crashed in the sea and at 78, in an overcoat, he had to swim until he was picked up by a boat. A short time later he lectured as if nothing had happened.

In 1954, although in his eighties, he started his work for nuclear disarmament (which was later to involve a second

visit to Brixton) by founding the Pugwash Committee—an international group comprising world-famous scientists and philosophers who were prepared to take a stand against nuclear weapons. One of Einstein's last acts was to express support for Russell's work in this field. But Russell's work in other fields did not diminish. In the fifties, twelve new books appeared, including a brilliant philosophical autobiography (*My Philosophical Development*) and two lively works of fiction of which Russell said "I do not think the reader's surprise . . . can be greater than my own". And in the sixties Russell addressed himself to some of the great political events which shook the security of the world—Cuba, the Sino/India conflict, Vietnam, Greece, the Arab/Israeli conflict, and Czechoslovakia. Of all these, Russell's work on Vietnam is the most significant and will be given a separate article later in this series.

It is inevitable that the present article should be quite inadequate. There are many important aspects of Russell's work which I have not mentioned. I have said nothing about his chairmanship of the India League or his support for such things as family planning, equality for women, democratic socialism, world government. I have not mentioned most of his popular works, or indicated the wit and beauty in his prose. There is incredible intellectual depth and moral passion in Bertrand Russell. I hope that some of this will emerge in the following eight articles.

WILLIAM "STRATA" SMITH

ROBERT W. MORRELL

OF THE VARIOUS bi-centenary celebrations which fall due in 1969 I doubt very much that one, that of William "Strata" Smith, will receive much publicity outside scientific circles. However, Smith through his work on fossils established geology as an exact science. He brought an orderly sequence into our knowledge of the earth and thus his pioneering work was of great value to the later development of evolutionary ideas.

Along with Cuvier and Lamarck, Smith stands out as one of the pioneers of scientific palaeontology. Though Robert Hooke (1635-1703) and later Thomas Paine (1737-1809) suggested the use of fossils in working out the chronology of strata, it was Smith who produced the evidence and first worked out the details in a convincing manner through his dedication to the collection of fossils from different strata, keeping them apart and later undertaking a comparative examination of the material. Part of Smith's collection can be seen today at the Natural History Museum in London.

William Smith was born on March 23rd, 1769, at Churchill in Oxfordshire. His father was a small farmer who was anything but wealthy, thus William received little formal schooling, however, he did spend a large part of his time when a boy examining the fossils which could be picked up on his father's land, an interest he was later to put to good use. At 18 Smith was apprenticed to a land surveyor and engineer and thus began a career which was to lead to scientific fame. In his day there was little formal training available to the budding geologist and his apprenticeship was perhaps the best the period could have provided. It was to take him out and about, and for the geologist now as then there is no substitute for seeing the actual exposures from which his material comes.

The England of the 1790's was the period in which the cutting of canals boomed. Employment for men such as

William Smith was thus ensured and Smith, in view of his geological knowledge, was very much sought after. This could have made him wealthy yet he spent his money in travelling the country in order to work out the relationship of the strata, map areas and collect fossils. He died a poor man in 1839.

William Smith's first geological observations were circulated in manuscript in 1799 among a small group of interested individuals. His first published work appeared in 1815 and was a large geological map of England and Wales accompanied by an explanatory text. This was the first such large-scale geological map of any country or area to be published in the world. In his later works Smith gave a detailed exposition of his theories and through them directly or otherwise influenced a rising generation of geologists, many of whom were to establish for themselves international reputations.

The importance of Smith's ideas to evolutionary studies requires little comment. Darwin in his popular account of the voyage of HMS Beagle certainly uses stratigraphic palaeontology, though Smith himself is not mentioned. Huxley, for his part, managed to find fault with the use of fossils to establish the contemporaneous nature of similar systems of strata in various parts of the world. In this debate he was, unlike that with Bishop "Soapy Sam" Wilberforce, not on the winning side.

Though Smith took no part in religious controversy and even managed to steer clear of the Neptunist-Vulcanist debate of his day by insisting that the practical uses of geology made such controversy irrelevant, his work nevertheless is another nail in the coffin of superstition. We have good cause to remember with gratitude the work of scientific pioneers such as William "Strata" Smith.

THE MILITARY MIND

S. A. JOSEPHS

(The following extracts are from *The Chicken and the Chalk Circle: The Philosophy of Logical Existentialism*, a complete manuscript for which the author is now seeking a publisher.)

THAT PEOPLE can believe in the idea of a god has always struck me as fantastic. Religion must be the only area of human thought in which the more stupid a man's beliefs, the more reverently he is regarded. Believers are always ready to attack the so-called 'modernists' in their midst, but never, never do they attack the fundamentalists. The theist who moves forward a quarter of an inch by suggesting that perhaps some of the stories in the Bible might not be true is fair game for anyone; but the obtuse fool who insists that the universe was created by God in the year 4004 BC is held up as a model of piety, someone to be respected! . . .

The social (as opposed to psychological) power of established religion was first really brought home to me during my period of compulsory military service. To my surprise, I was accepted for aircrew and posted to RAF, Cranwell, as an officer cadet and trainee pilot.

On the day that I arrived I was summoned to the CO's office. 'What's all this bloody nonsense about you being an atheist?'

I look blank, not sure how to answer.

'On your form it says "Atheist". What do you mean by it?'

Still not sure how to answer, I continued to look blank.

'If you think you're going to get out of church parade you're bloody well mistaken!'

And, sure enough, I was detailed for church parade every Sunday for the entire eighteen weeks of the course, although the other cadets were only caught, on average, once a month. Despite the weather (it was winter) I refused to compromise and week after week, when the squad arrived at the church, I requested permission to fall out, and for the two hour duration of the service I would stand outside the church, stamping my feet to keep warm.

After a few weeks the various NCOs who escorted us knew all about my 'peculier ideas', but at the beginning there was a very real problem of communication. The first time I requested permission to fall out the drill corporal in charge asked why.

'I'm an atheist, corporal.'

'That's OK. It's a non-denominational service. As long as you're not a Jew or a Catholic you'll be all right.'

'No. You don't understand. I'm an atheist: I don't believe in the existence of a god.'

'Cor f . . . me. Never heard of them before!'

Hopefully, at some future point, atheists will be able to make the same comment about believers . . .

LOOK BACK IN ANGER

F. H. SNOW

WHEN A YOUNG MAN, I kicked against society in general. I was an angry young man. I wasn't entirely against law and order; in fact, I believed in God and his commandments, though chafing against very many of the regulations of men. As a not-so-young, I now kick at many less of society's restrictions, realising that the accepted values of centuries should not be lightly disregarded. At the same time I see, as I have long seen, that some customs and usages of my boyhood were unwarrantably arbitrary—that to obey them without reason was as foreign to my nature as it is foreign to it to accept all that the popular voice advocates. I do not believe in God; haven't for more years than I can correctly assess.

I look back in anger at the barbarous conditions permitted by our Victorian ancestors, and their unrealistic attitude towards traditional trivialities. Take, for instance, the religious—and not only the religious—view of the precepts of Jesus Christ. Even today those precepts are, by the majority of folks, looked on as pearls of wisdom for which nobody prior to him was responsible. Eminent Christian apologists, against their latent good sense and normal shrewdness, often ascribe to Christ's sayings an unparalleled and unprecedented wisdom and splendour.

As instance, Beverley Nichols' remark upon the self-styled Son of God's statement that 'he that hath, to him shall be given: and to he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath'. Nichols asserted: "If Christ had said only that one sentence, he would have said more than most men in their passage through the world. For this sentence is not only an epigram, and not only a shrewd criticism of the prowess of contemporary capitalist society, but the formation of a natural law".

Ignoring the ridiculous of the statement that a person who has nothing can have anything taken from him, I contend that there is not the faintest ground for the assumption that Jesus had in mind any society, contemporary or other, when making that pronouncement. He was, of course, hyperbolising the individual plight in all generations. The more of wealth, goods, comforts one had or has, the far less likelihood there was, or is, of having little or nothing of those things, and vice versa. And that truism had been voiced by many sages before the swarthy visionary who called himself the world's Redeemer. A good man? Very possibly. A profound thinker? Hardly, at the best estimate. An extraordinary product of his time, quite certainly—if, indeed, he ever lived—if, indeed, he was the image of goodness, wisdom, compassion, divine might that the restless and comfort-starved yearned for, all down the centuries, to get them through this Tearful Vale. And of those who 'had and hath', the need to continue 'hathing' required and requires, it seems, some sort of God and some sort of ambassadorial Redeemer, to get them into the place where, at least, they would be no worse off than their terrestrial slaves, and, at the best, in a highly enjoyable state.

I am sometimes choleric over the modern morons who should have just that little better reasoning power than their ancient prototypes whose ire-provoking inhibitions and heaven-inspired assumptions have reperculated right into our age, and yet, even while Venus is in peril of coming under the aegis of the Hammer and Sickle, and other constellations of being, albeit slowly, colonised by ideological opposites from across the colloquial Pond—proclaim the reality of the winged Person in the ether who glories in their worship.

I react strongly to a not too recent statement by our paramount national hero, that Wynwood Reade, in his *Martyrdom of Man*, was right to think as he did, but wrong to put temptation in the way of readers to do so. The likely weakening of their loyalty to God and State through abstinence from further partaking of the divine drug, was, to Churchill, a major and untenable risk. I look back in anger at his 1944 religious instruction act, reversing the wheel of freethought, and ensuring successful indoctrination of millions of schoolchildren. The moral teenage laxity of today may well be associable with instinctive rebellion by the growing mind against tutorial dominance in this as in most other fields, and, as most growing, even if naively uncritical minds, see in the new behavioural freedom they visualise, a sweet relief from observance of the more restrictive of the social values of yesterday, the metaphorical baby is in danger of being thrown away, and the metaphorical bath-water mysteriously and unhealthily retained!

If youth were happy in its new-found permissiveness, we of the old school—at least those of us who try to be rational—would be happier about it, but the increasingly evident restlessness of today's adolescents causes us to rightly look back in anger at our predecessor's blindness to the shape of things to come, morally essential to the greatest good of the greatest number of people.

Until the cobwebs of religious doctrine are swept away, though without too great a swing from the moral values still cherished, fortunately, by society, there can be no real philosophical advancement, and our secularist goal of a brotherly, well-ordered world community will remain nebulously distant.

THEATRE

SIMON HAMMOND

In Celebration by David Storey: Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square, London, SW1: Until June 30.

A FORTIETH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY, a family reunited for the occasion in a small house in the northern suburbia of a mining community—for most families a time of happy reflection but for the Shaws there exists a repressed element of the past that dominates this clan gathering. Mr Shaw, a miner all his life, had married the daughter of a man who bred pigs, a girl it seemed who had come from a relatively richer background. Only three months after they had married, a son, Jamie, was born to them (which makes certain implications about why they were originally married), but by the age of seven he had met his untimely death. Two more sons, Andrew and Colin, had been born before Jamie died, and Steven the fourth son, was on the way. The parents had done very well for the last three sons since they had all been able to go to university, and had had far greater an opportunity to get on in life than had their father.

Andrew had been a solicitor but had recently given this up to become an artist, a career one gathers for which he seems to have little inclination and certainly little hope of success—a burning vibrant character of witty eloquence; Colin, now a successful business executive, the most orthodox of the three brothers, with rather an obvious line in conversation is nevertheless kind-hearted and generous with his success; Steven, the youngest, is a school-teacher, quiet and serious—he seems to be the parents' favourite son.

Underneath the casual frivolity of the occasion the question of Jamie's life and death burns steadily like a fuse to a bomb—I felt not disappointed. Andrew is most clear in his memory of Jamie, remembering him as a quiet withdrawn boy with an obvious artistic talent such as he had not got, who would spend much of his time in his room alone, seemingly outside of his parents' love which like some huge blanket appeared to cover the other sons; in a phrase Jamie's rejection had left Andrew with a bitter memory. He could obviously never forget this and his mocking, cynical tongue seemed set to exact some revenge for the past. Colin is also aware of the situation but in his orthodox way he is prepared to let bygones be bygones—he does not want to burden himself with the yoke of past unhappy memories. Steven, who

never knew Jamie seems, incredibly, to be the most affected by his death—the atmosphere of the house casts a mantle of gloom over him, and he remains during most of the time silent and evidently in the grips of a great mental struggle which has a profoundly depressing effect on him. (It emerges that Andrew, through letters has supplied Steven with most of the fire for his anguish.)

The play develops in several themes most of which have a direct bearing on the main theme—most important is the inter-relationship of the brothers. These inter-relationships make a very important impact on the final part of the play when the bomb, to which I referred earlier, explodes and the matter is finally drawn out into the open. The scene is one of devastating intensity, and was followed by the last scene, rather quiet in contrast, which takes place over breakfast the morning after the celebration the day before, when the final attitudes of the characters movingly evolve. Intermingled with these main ideas are other themes arising against the family background, from the individual's attitudes to each other.

Lindsay Anderson's superb direction is too full of subtleties and innuendo to draw any definite moral out of the play. I think this openness to interpretation is a sign of the great depth of this very moving piece of work—wonderfully written, it captures the Northern character, passions, mannerisms and way of life beautifully. The acting was indeed perfection with Bill Owen as Mr Shaw, Brian Cox as Steven James Bolam as Colin and Alan Bates as Andrew turning in wonderful performances. As a spectacle of acting ability it has to be seen to be believed, as a production, it emphatically underlines Lindsay Anderson's talent, as a play it is thought-provoking in the extreme, and as entertainment really first class.

REVIEW

DAVID TRIBE

IT ISN'T OFTEN that an Agreed Syllabus of Religious Education (i.e. Instruction or brainwashing) makes much of a stir. *Learning for Life* (Inner London Education Authority, 15s) is an exception. Admittedly it was launched with a press conference which emphasised that probably for the first time Muslims (it would have been a Muslim but the first one resigned) were on the drafting committee, together with Jews, Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholics and mainstream Protestants. A provocative statement was made that humanists hadn't taken part, though they weren't invited and have no status under the 1944 Act. But the document is an interesting one and by far the most objective in this genre I have seen.

To say this is, of course, like lycicising over the athleticism of the over-eighties nudist leapfrog team. One is inclined to feel that before Christians gather round to 'agree' on what other people's children should be taught they should agree among themselves what Christianity is. While trying to present a picture of harmony and continuity, the syllabus cannot conceal that every aspect of Christian doctrine is in dispute and disarray, and its section on 'Teaching about Miracles' is a masterpiece of equivocation. Jesus may or may not have been resurrected but he is 'alive today'. "Brainwashing" and "indoctrination" are to be repudiated, but young children are to concentrate on 'God: the Maker of all things', 'Responding gratefully to God's world' and 'Discovering the goodness of God'. Comparative religion is saved for the 17-19-year-olds, when most children have left school and all have had ten years' Christian indoctrination. Throughout the book teachers are given urbane warnings and advice which in the other age ranges they will be unable to carry out.

The non-Christians on the committee were presumably persuaded to sign by carefully vague statements about Christ. Even a mythicist atheist might agree that the Gospel Jesus 'was no ordinary man'. It is interesting that the only religionists who took part were in the Judaeo-Christian-Muslim tradition, and the only other religion which gets a potted account (quite a good one) is Hinduism. Perhaps it will be argued that these communities cover the overwhelming majority of religious children. They also happen to be the theistic religions; and the only rocks of belief among all the shifting sands of qualifications in this syllabus are that somewhere there is a God of some sort and that worship should foster 'a relationship with God and the recognition of his work, his nature and his self-revelation'. Buddhism and Confucianism are as much beyond the fringe here as secularism.

It will come as little surprise to find a pious tribute to the 'degree of common ground' between humanists and Christians shown by *Religious and Moral Education*. There is naturally no mention of the NSS, though it is clear that the committee is familiar with secularist literature and has borrowed almost as heavily from it as from Piaget. Nevertheless the resulting document is one which no secular humanist could honestly have signed.

LETTERS

Participate

MR F. H. SNOW'S letter (FREETHINKER, May 3) concerning Secularist-Humanist propagation has prompted me to put forward my recommendation.

I suggest that all freethinkers should, while still keeping up the good work by writing to the FREETHINKER take more interest in the correspondence columns of the daily press and the (Radio) programmes of the BBC. Atheists seem to be poorly represented in the popular press. Much as I like the FREETHINKER, it can hardly be said that its readers are a cross section of the public, so it would, I think, be desirable for the views of freethinkers to be broadcast and published where they are likely to be read or heard by the as yet undecided.

Although, as freethinkers will be well aware, newspapers are more likely to publish freethinkers views than the BBC, I would like to suggest a Radio programme in which there is plenty of scope for argument, called "Listening Post" (10.30-10.45 p.m., Monday to Thursday inclusive, Radio 4) and "Sunday Listening Post" (12.10-12.45 p.m. Radio 4). This is one long correspondence about anything you care to write about. There is at the moment a correspondence about my favourite subject, RI. I would be pleased if freethinkers made a special effort to participate.

MICHAEL HUGHES (aged 14).

The Plight of the Aged

I AM WELL AWARE of the problems faced by the aged today—my mother is 90. However we shall not help their case by quoting as a sign of poverty the making of jam from dried apricots. I make jam from them every year but because they are so expensive I add equal weight of cooking apples. Never have I thrown away vegetable water which is the main ingredient of vegetable soup. Perhaps those brought up on the packet stuff all their lives do think it a sign of poverty to make soup of the genuine article!

In 1966 I suggested that readers should draw public attention to some of the immediately remediable frustrations of the elderly—long flights of steps and heavy swing doors at public buildings, round doorknobs one cannot grip, impregnable sardine tins, screw caps requiring sufficient strength to break a metal ring, instructions on medicine and foods in unreadably small print, canned music in shops, hotels and restaurants which makes the use of hearing aids a misery. I could list 100 more small inexpensive things that would make everyday living less difficult for old and not-so-old alike.

ISOBEL GRAHAME.

The historicity of Jesus

I CONGRATULATE Martin Page on the excellence of his article "Robertson and the case against Jesus" (15.3.69). In the short space allotted, he has done remarkably well in presenting the arguments against the historicity of Jesus.

However, there are a few points in connection with this subject which I have never seen dealt with by the exponents of the Mythicist school of thought on Christian origins.

If Christ was not just another sun-god in the same category as Mithra, Osiris, and others, what is the explanation for the description in the Gospels of incidents such as when Jesus was being pressed by a large crowd around him, and he is stated to have asked "Who touched me?" when a female admirer, unknown to him, had touched his garment; or on another occasion, according to the Gospels, when he returned to his home town, Nazareth, and preached in the local synagogue, and started abusing and castigating his audience for their alleged sins, being chased out of the town by a hostile crowd as a consequence; or when Christ was said to have been strongly criticised locally for walking through the corn-fields on the Sabbath Day, and plucking the corn, or when some tricky questions were put to Jesus by the Sadducees (I believe it was), according to the Gospels, in order to "catch him out" for political reasons?

Any of these incidents, if told about any historical person, would be accepted as historical without question. They are certainly, or so I would have thought, not the sort of things one might expect to be told about mythical sun-gods; nor are they for that matter, the alleged sayings of Christ such as "Love thy neighbour as thyself" or "I give you a new commandment—love one another".

The trouble with so many mythicists is that they are so right up to a point, but they leave a few awkward and difficult questions, arising from their arguments and premises, unanswered, when they must be dealt with as well if a well-balanced case is to be presented, and this sort of criticism can be directed against people such as Robertson, Cutner, Rylands, to name a few.

As a student of history, in my spare time, I am already aware that the year, and sometimes the day, of events in history of any great significance are usually known, having been recorded, or the knowledge of such facts has been passed down from father to son through the centuries to the present day.

Even if one deletes the miraculous parts of Christ's life as described in the Gospels, and admits that "great crowds followed him", that he was the centre of controversy amongst the priests and elders, and the various sects in Palestine at the time, that his crucifixion caused a great stir, and that rumours existed that he had been seen alive, and spoken to, after his death; and that he was said to be a great faith healer, and is accepted as the founder of what is still the world's greatest religion, as far as the number of the adherents is concerned, I would have thought that the day, and year, of his crucifixion in Jerusalem would be accurately known.

The fact that they are not suggests, surely, either that he is not a historical figure at all, or that he was of such small importance during his life-time, and for years afterwards, that no one bothered to record, or to pass on the knowledge of, the year and day of his death. In other words, Jesus was just another of the numerous Jewish messianic claimants, or Jewish rebels in Palestine during the period in question, either as members of the Zealots or other religious sects in opposition to Rome.

It is worth recalling that excavations in Rome's catacombs revealed wall-writings of the second and third centuries such as "pray for us, Peter and Paul", and even pictures of the two on memorial tablets, but neither the name of Jesus, nor some presumed representation of him was ever, I believe, found scratched, drawn or depicted on the walls or memorials of these underground cemeteries to which early Christians resorted.

Recently, however, underneath St. Peter's in the former Roman cemetery, mostly destroyed when Constantine I built the first St. Peter's over it, a picture now called Christ-Helas (Christ the Sun-God) was discovered on the wall of one of the tombs (I have seen it myself). So, perhaps, after all Christ was indisputably the sun-god of those days, but the questions I raised in the third paragraph of this letter still remain unanswered, however.

EDGAR M. KINGSTON.

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