

Freethinker

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ROMAN CATHOLICS, NIL—PROTESTANTS, NIL

WHAT MAY NOWADAYS be termed the escalation of the conflict in Northern Ireland is achieving nothing beyond underlining the problem's insolubility. A just peace is as unforeseeable in Ulster as it is in Palestine.

But, whereas in the Middle East there is room for argument over what should constitute justice, in Ulster there can be little doubt where the grievances lie, and they have in fact been recognised by the Stormont government. The problem is simply that inherent in any parliamentary democracy, namely that the majority can instruct, and in Northern Ireland is instructing, its elected government to repress the minority. The Ulster crisis is an excellent example of the best argument which can be put forward in favour of a system of proportional representation. Were the Catholics to have a number of MPs at Stormont comparable to their numbers in the country at large, then the dominance of the Unionists would be to some extent mitigated. The unhappily beleaguered Liberal party at Westminster would do well to make capital out of this.

after a number of deaths have been caused in the riots, Stormont has not the courage to place a ban on the known trigger points, the traditional processions of the Orange Order and those of the Civil Rights marchers, is a damning measure of its weakness. In such circumstances it is the duty of the government at Westminster to enforce their will on Stormont. If the lives of Ulstermen do not matter to them, then at least those of British soldiers deserve their protection.

In the long run too, it is now evident that either the Westminster government must put considerably more pressure on Stormont to the extent at which Stormont holds little more power in Northern Ireland than the GLC in London, or the Union must be ended. Since the new British government is officially made up of members of the Conservative and Unionist party, there can be little doubt which line it should take. If it fails to do this in the relatively near future, the death and misery toll can do nothing but mount, while the Stormont government can only ease their consciences by sending more and more people to join unfortunate Bernadette Devlin in gaol.

About the only people who have in any way benefited from the Northern Ireland conflict are humanists. It has been set out plainly for all to see that religion is nothing laudable, does not make people any more loving or considerate towards their neighbours, and indeed is cruelly and mortally divisive. An interesting and welcome development therefore is the way that the national press and the broadcasting networks have of late begun to term the two sides in this conflict simply Protestants and Catholics. We do not read so much now of Unionists, Nationalists and Civil Rights demonstrators. Religion is for once being recognised for what it is.



That the trouble is caused by the weakness of the Chichester-Clark government in the face of the threat to its existence by the Paisley inspired Protestants, whom it is now quite clear make up majority opinion in Ulster, is horrifyingly evident despite the government's gestures in the direction of reform and despite the fact that having severely breached the rules Paisley was ejected from the debating chamber at Stormont, while shouting to the Sergeant at Arms: "If you lend me your sword, I would decapitate a few of these people before I leave". That even

PROGRESS IN AMERICA

AT A TIME when America and the majority of Americans are generally held in disfavour, it is pleasing to be able to report a piece of progressive and humane legislation which was recently passed by the New York State Assembly, and which came into effect on July 1. By one vote the Assembly passed a new abortion law which places no restrictions whatever on abortion operations, save that they must be performed within 24 weeks of conception. Nor does the new law contain any residence qualifications. Although doubt has been expressed in some circles as to whether the New York hospitals will be able to cope with the enormous increase in demand which is predicted to

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occur, there can be little doubt that the new law will alleviate much suffering and it is to be hoped, will set an example to other states and other countries, including our own.

The law only got through the Assembly after one member changed his vote at the last moment. He has since lost his seat in the recent state elections "apparently as a direct result of his conscience vote", according to *The Times*. Despite official condemnation from Roman Catholic and Jewish religious leaders, who have urged doctors and patients to ignore the law, the American Medical Association has come out in support of it, on economic and social grounds as well as medical ones. The hospital insurance companies, which bearing in mind that there is no National Health Service in the US are roughly the equivalent of the British BUPA, have said that their schemes will cover abortion operations for unmarried as well as married women.

The realism of the New York State Assembly and their just insistence that an abortion is to be treated as a serious matter, despite the new liberal law, is shown in their stipulation that doctors must issue a death certificate for each foetus removed. This underlines the fact that must be recognised by British Humanists who campaign for liberalisation of our abortion laws, that there is nothing rational about abortion, or for that matter contraception, beyond expediency.

It is expedient in 1970 to permit abortions to those women who decide responsibly that they want one, not just for the sake of the individual woman herself, but for all our sakes, since the threat of over-population is already on top of us. But we must never lose sight of the fact that abortions are merely a stop-gap measure. In time, when contraceptives are more efficient and more widely available, understood and used, the abortion rate will sink until abortions are only necessary for those women who intend to become pregnant but who encounter medical difficulties after conception. Thus, let it be recognised in Britain, as well as in New York State, that though the liberalisation of the abortion laws is desirable at this point in time, what we are really aiming at in the long term is such progress with contraception as will render liberal abortion laws unimportant.

MEMORIAL EDITION

WHY I AM NOT A CHRISTIAN

BERTRAND RUSSELL

Preface DAVID TRIBE

Introduction Professor ANTONY FLEW

PRICE 3/- (plus 6d postage)

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

THE NSS IN LIVERPOOL

MARTIN PAGE

THE 1970 AGM of the National Secular Society was held in The Temple, Dale Street, Liverpool, Saturday, June 27—Sunday, June 28. The Temple (perhaps sociologically the most interesting venue for an NSS AGM in recent years) might conceivably at one time have been a temple of love: for a few hours at least it was a temple of light. In Nietzschean terminology, the Dionysian gave way to the Apollonian.

After a social gathering on the Saturday evening, the Meeting began in earnest on the Sunday morning at 10 a.m.—an hour that some might consider ungodly! The Minutes of the 1969 AGM were read and accepted. The Executive Committee's Review of the Year at home and abroad was received with acclaim and the Hon. Treasurer presented his Financial Report. The AGM then went through the motions (in at least one sense!). David Tribe was re-elected President; Mr William Collins and Mrs E. Venton were re-elected Vice-Presidents; and Mr Govind Deodhekar was re-instated Honorary Treasurer of the Society. Messrs A. G. Brooker, R. J. Condon, Maurice Hill, S. D. Kuebart, Michael Lloyd-Jones, W. Shannon, Nigel Sinnott, Mrs M. McIlroy, Miss Barbara Smoker and Mrs E. Warner, were elected to the Executive Committee. Messrs Wright, Fairbrother and Steel were re-appointed Auditors.

The AGM urged the NSS to press on with its campaign

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

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

Humanitas Stamps: Help 5 Humanist charities. Buy stamps from or send them to Mrs. A. C. Goodman, 51 Percy Road, Romford, RM7 8QX, Essex. British and African speciality. Send for list. Humanist Holidays. Youth Camp, the Wye Valley, late July and early August. Family Centre, Aberystwyth, Monday, August 17 until Tuesday, September 1. Full board just over £2 per day with reductions for children. Details from Mrs Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone 01-642 8796.

COMING EVENTS

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.

INDOOR

Bournemouth and District Humanist Group: Dolphin Hotel Club Room, Holdenhurst Road: Tuesday, July 14, 7.45 p.m.: "The Humanism of Confucius", E. Waring, MA. (Tutor in Philosophy, University of Bristol).
South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, July 12, 11 a.m.: "The Law and the Prophets", T. F. Evans, LL.B. Admission free. 3 p.m.: Humanist Forum: "World Government—Formula or Fetish?" Tony Mills (of 'Q'), Peter Cadogan, Peggy Crane (UNA), Bruce Ritchie (British Association for World Government).

THANK CHRIST FOR SCIENCE

LUTHER RIGG

SCIENCE, has dealt a blow at religion which, like the pebble in the water, will extend in ever widening circles, all the time robbing the church of a power it has held for far too long. I recall the days when Dr Marie Stopes was doing her damndest to bring some light into the darkness of working class sexual life, both married and unmarried.

Birth control in itself has robbed the church of its most infamous forms of heaping ridicule, fear and humiliation upon the working class housewife, as I remember that sector of the people in the early days of my youth.

The church could always see who the culprit was in this question of sexual intercourse, because of the usual bulge of the belly, the sign of damnation and sin according to the church and the minister. That is now over—for good I hope.

Today, any woman can indulge in sexual intercourse even with a man not her husband—because the bulge need not stand out in front. This is a reversal of the early years of this century. Not that I would recommend promiscuity as a matter of policy. But the woman of today can kid her husband, the minister and the church, all at the same time because she has at her disposal some very good birth control methods. The men and women in the wealthier classes have always been permissive in all senses of that word, and a whole theatre grew up around such a code of conduct making it delightful and witty to many wishing to do the same thing—but afraid because of God and church. But let us take a look at this married life the church is supposed to sanctify in the case of the working class woman.

I recall in the early thirties asking my doctor for the address of the firm supplying him with his contraceptives. He gave it to me and I received a booklet on the front page of which was printed in large letters, *'Not for use outside the Professions, particularly among the working class and other manual workers'*. My doctor gave me a certificate, and by the merest stroke of good luck I was able to obtain one supply only. After recommending the system to over one thousand people—I found that not one received a supply, as they were all manual workers, thus proving that in those early days authority, no doubt strongly influenced by the church, did not mind contraception within the higher social groupings, but nevertheless resented the same among ordinary folks, on the basis that God accepted contraceptives for high-flown parasites, but not for poor, underfed, underpaid and almost starving parents of impractically large families.

The permissive society, sexwise, always existed in the top bracket of income earners, therefore sin abounded where it ought not to have been seen. The complaint against permissiveness is that it has spread to a wider section of the people, many of them not so privileged as their promiscuous predecessors. Hence the church is being mown down now by a general permissiveness which it cannot control, but which demonstrates that God is no longer of any value in the life of the majority of the people.

When I was young, many years ago, there existed a form of slavery which the church had no right to accede to. That slavery was for the working housewife to submit to her husband's embraces knowing that an extra mouth would have to be fed in consequence; that slavery was to eternally try to keep a decent house, in slum areas with

increasing children who could not in any way be fed or clothed; that slavery was to be pulled down by the insatiable appetite of a drunkard, idiot, pervert, idle, lazy and good-for-nothing husband—just because the church sanctified the marriage. Just because the law said the woman was tied to the man, and to God, the force no man has yet proved; that slavery was to have one's will subjected to that of another, the general meaning of marriage in the working class, now, I hope for ever ended; that slavery was to be perpetually forced into confinements one could not in any way avoid; that slavery was the lack of tidiness or cleanliness in the home without which a wife cannot maintain pride in her surroundings, her environment which she has to struggle to hold together every day of the forty or so years of married life; that slavery was knowing that no matter what one did, the church, the minister, and the husband all agreed that because two people were married in church then to catch syphilis from a wayward husband, to produce unhealthy or backward children was the very thing God had arranged when decreeing that marriage in church was superior to that in the state buildings, known as the registry office, now the common nuptial centre.

The church enforced by its attitude to sex, a lack of beauty and a denial of pleasure upon women because it refused to recognise that limiting children was far better than indiscriminate breeding with no chance of successful adulthood in the future, leading in the end to the early death of the mother and a father who could not care less. Any church standing for such ideas must be a charnel house. But that is how it appeared when I was young, the unfairness of it all being represented by the fact that wealth could take its sexual pleasure by not paying for it healthwise.

Women, for years, were trapped by the church. It first made contraceptives sinful, and penalised those who in a form of desperation sought abortion round the back streets of the town. Terrors in this world for using contraceptives were offered, followed by horrors in the next for having resorted to abortion unlawfully.

Thank Christ, the church has lost its hold on the sexual life of the nation, and that the young of today are throwing off the hypocrisy of two or three decades ago.

In the spring of 1937 the Pope issued an encyclical, of much the same nature as the recent one. Birth control is wicked. Marriage is a sacrament, divorce sinful. Wives should obey their husbands, and be subject to them in any reasonable way. This included sexual intercourse, I presume, since that is reasonable in marriage. So a wife then, not so much so now, was one of those people who had no free will, despite the church crying out that God had bequeathed such a benefit.

No wonder the church is afraid of science, for it now has made possible the elimination of many of the above cruelties in the life of modern women. And sexual intercourse can for the first time be enjoyed, knowing that unnumbered children will not result in poverty, tiredness or sickness.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY: Applications are invited for the position of Lettings Secretary/Hall Manager at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL; the appointment to take effect from the beginning of September. Full details from the General Secretary.

THE FOURTH R

DAVID TRIBE

The Fourth R: the Report of the Commission on Religious Education in Schools appointed in 1967 under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Durham (National Society and SPCK, 40s) is one of the most lucid and readable reports on education, or for that matter on any other subject, I have read. Perhaps modestly the bishop himself disclaims any credit for its composition and tells me that, with the exception of the historical chapter, which was largely the work of the commission's secretary, the Rev. A. G. Wedderspoon, the document is a joint production of the commissioners. If so it is one of the most successful committee compilations since the Authorised Version. To complete the theological analogies, it compares very favourably with Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* in its willingness to study its opponents' case and its generally fair presentation of their arguments. NSS publications are well represented in the bibliography, secularist writers cited in the text, and the evidence submitted by both the NSS and the BHA quoted in full in Appendix A and referred to throughout the work.

Those who welcomed the recent report on moral and religious education in county schools prepared by a working party of the Social Morality Council, on whose executive Dr Ian Ramsey (the Bishop of Durham) sits, are likely to be enthusiastic about the recommendations in *The Fourth R*, which spells out what the other report left vague. To secularists, however, after they have made due allowance for literary and presentational qualities, the book is likely to be about as congenial as the Authorised Version or *Summa Theologica*. For the inescapable view dawns—at which no one need be surprised—that its conclusions are derived not so much from the logic of arguments as from deductions from a quite unsubstantiated world-view. I think it important to stress this, for there have been many recent attempts, on both the Christian and the humanist side, to blur the edges of the controversy and debate the issue entirely in terms of civil liberties, political compromises, parental wishes, historical precedents and the like. However important these questions may be, at the end of the day the real conflict is between those who believe Christianity to be both true and useful and those who believe it is not.

I say 'Christianity' advisedly and not 'comparative religion' or the 'comparative study of religion', for it is clear that new swinging RE is just as committed as old fuddy-duddy RI to the fundamental proposition of Christianity: that man is 'created in the image of God, redeemed by Jesus Christ and destined for eternal life'. Little attention is given to the other world religions, or to immigrant children except to say that they 'should be the subject of a separate inquiry'. Apart from the familiar argument that Britain is—or was—a Christian country, the excuse given for the special position of Christianity ('not in an exclusive uniqueness but in an inclusive uniqueness' is the way the Church effectively crucifies language) is as follows: 'The argument for religious education depends heavily upon the fact that it can be fashioned upon the open basis of the Christian's contemporary theological commitments. Whether such an exploratory approach can be advanced upon the basis of, for example, contemporary Islamic theology would be open to question.' Presumably this is because the commissioners have little or no knowledge of the latter, for as much Muslim modernism proceeds from

the mosque at Woking as ever Christian modernism came from the South Bank in its heyday.

This statement appears in the chapter on 'Theology and Education', which outlines rival modern views on Christian belief. In a footnote I am cited as an example of those critics who 'ignore in a conservative and obscurantist way developments over the last decade and more not only in theology but also in philosophy'. This is because I once wrote in a pamphlet that 'Christian theological ideas are suppositions which lack independent verification, and so properly come into the same category as astrology, spiritualism, and demonology'. Independent readers of this chapter are likely to think, I imagine, that the only way in which my comment might be questioned would be by coming to the conclusion that professional theologians had no ideas or suppositions at all. That isn't however what Christian teachers think, as the view on man quoted above indicates. I still submit that any account of Christianity which is more than word-play is no more plausible or self-consistent than astrology, spiritualism or demonology. The only difference is that votaries of the last three seem more united on their ideological basis than Christian theologians.

Now, this may be used as an argument for the 'openness' of modern Christianity, and it may be that in some of the more liberal university schools of divinity the utmost freedom of discussion and agnosticism prevail. But when we speak of school religion we aren't thinking of senior common rooms on gracious campuses but of dragooned worship and indoctrination from the age of five, or even two. How can it be otherwise? For how many adults are *au fait* with the gamut of theological disputes in Christianity, let alone in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Parseism, and so on and on and on? Every religion is itself a lifetime study in all its aspects. Who can be familiar with the thousands of world cults, or even the top ten? And if they aren't all taught with equal competence and impartiality—together with non-religious alternatives like secular humanism or marxism—then special pleading is the result. Naturally, with its entrenched political, social and economic position in Britain compared with other religions, Christianity is going to foster a continuing special status for itself. If one political party were to gain a privileged role in education, would it encourage the unbiased presentation of all political views? Of course not. And no one would pretend that it did.

So long as religion is an integral part of school life, many of the recommendations in the report must be welcomed: that 'Hebrew history and Syrian geography' should yield to matters of real social and personal importance, that it must not be suggested that only Christians can be good people, that Agreed Syllabuses vetted by the local churches should be scrapped, that it must be conceded that some biblical heroes were immoral, that in single-school areas aided should become controlled schools if there is strong local feeling, that vicars appointed to parishes with church schools should have some educational experience, that RE should share in the new educational techniques. The danger of these liberal proposals is however that people may be beguiled into thinking that religion itself has intellectual and moral credentials, so that more money should be spent on it, the status of RE teachers should be raised, integrated syllabuses (where it is more

difficult to exercise the conscience clauses) should be extended, and young people who escape to colleges of further education at 16 should be dragged back into the religious net. It is interesting to note that these very proposals figure among the recommendations.

The Fourth R does not claim to be the last word on school religion. Apart from the position of immigrant children, RE for children aged 5-13 and for less able pupils of all ages, the training of religious specialists, the

financing of church schools and colleges of education, and the role of diocesan directors of education are controversial subjects committed to other investigations. Some general observations on education—that it is possible to have personal convictions and still teach in an ‘open’ way, that nursery schools should be expanded and that special attention should be given to educational priority areas—I would agree with. On many scores this document is worth reading. But humanists should not, in my view, be hasty in agreeing with it.

CONSERVATION 1970s: Decade of Decision

MARTIN PAGE

THE CONSERVATION SOCIETY recently held a conference in London as part of its contribution to European Conservation Year 1970. This conference bore the same title as that at the head of this report. In his opening remarks, the Society's Chairman, Dr John Davoll, apologised for the fact that one of the conference's two major speakers, Professor P. J. Newbold, of the School of Biological and Environmental Studies, New University of Ulster, had been detained in the “Emerald Isle”—not by rioting mobs, but by fog. Dr Davoll was consoled, however, by the presence at the conference of three of the Society's Vice-Presidents: Jacquetta Hawkes, Archbishop Roberts and Professor E. N. Willmer. After pointing to three main dangers—the population explosion, pollution, and the exhaustion of natural resources—in the “decade of decision”, the Chairman took great pleasure in introducing the first speaker: Dr Malcolm Caldwell, University Lecturer in South-East Asian Economic History.

Dr Caldwell's address on “World Resources and the Limits of Man” was an intellectual treat—weighty, informative and scrupulous, in the finest traditions of Scottish scholarship. Progress in the West, he said, had come to mean tolerable living standards for all; but how feasible was this objective, how far could—and indeed, should—Western standards be generalised? He pointed out that the gap was widening, not only between “developed” and “developing” countries, but also between rich and poor in Western-style developed nations: on a global scale, real affluence was still the prerogative of a small—and, in absolute terms, decreasing—minority. In some of the richer countries, life-expectancy rates were in fact declining; this was due, at least in part, to social problems flowing from sprawling urbanisation and environmental degeneration.

The speaker then turned to consideration of the economic position of the United States—partly because of the availability of the data, partly because of the influence of Americanisation. An outstanding American aim in World War II was to seize much needed raw materials because of the effects on America of French and Dutch autarkism and of English “imperial preference” in the inter-war period; and the continued dominance of the American economic and military elite depended on continued access to raw materials, most of which came from “areas of political instability”: significantly, iron ore deposits lay beneath the battle-scarred Plain of Jars in Laos. The US aristocracy was prepared to use appalling methods to retain its power, as recent history had shown. “Third World” countries were still colonial-type suppliers; and it was difficult for them to industrialise when markets were largely dominated already

by Western-style industrial nations. Indonesia's raw materials, for example, had been auctioned and bought by the West.

The West seemed to visualise human progress as forged in the white heat of a technological revolution, with an implicit faith in the availability of new sources of energy; both Einstein and Bertrand Russell had subscribed to the no doubt largely utopian concept of “a new Paradise”—in contrast to the Manichean doctrine (which enjoyed widespread currency in the East) of the eternal co-existence of good and evil. The limits of man were defined by the imperfections of his own nature no less than by the external constraints posed by finite resources such as minerals: technological “solutions” often had unforeseen adverse effects, while the peasants, with their profound dependence on, and love of, the soil, were archetypal conservationists. The emergence of “Third World” freedom-fighters, determined to resist Westernisation and to use and control their own national resources for their own people, indicated the decline of Western hegemony.

Dr Caldwell was followed by Mr Colin Hutchinson, who had been asked, almost literally at the eleventh hour, to stand in for Professor Newbold. Mr Hutchinson began his polished address by quoting U Thant's warning words of May 1969 about the grave dangers confronting mankind:

I can only conclude from the information available to me as Secretary General that the members of the UN have perhaps 10 years left in which to subordinate their ancient quarrels and launch a global partnership to curb the arms race, to improve the human environment, to defuse the population explosion and to supply the required momentum to world development efforts.

Mr Hutchinson then identified seven major variables which needed to be brought into balance within a rational framework set against a time-scale of the kind that U Thant had mentioned. These seven factors were: food, energy, minerals, population, land, water, and waste/recycling. Even today little attention was given to ecology in schools; and efficient administrative machinery was essential to co-ordinate action and responsibilities to respond effectively to changing circumstances and to relate to both causes and effects of environmental degeneration.

Mr Hutchinson's address was followed by a wide-ranging discussion, ostensibly of Mr A. J. Booth's draft document *Conservation and the Environment*, which had been prepared for the Conservation Society and previously circulated to all participants as a basis for comment and

(Continued overleaf)

(Continued from previous page)

analysis at the conference. Mr Booth's document was generally welcomed by Mr Martin Page, who represented the National Secular Society and who, in the course of referring to specific sections of that document, made the following points, *inter alia*: the Conservation Society—if it had not already done so—could well consider how far the subjects of conservation and ecology could and should be incorporated in schools' curricula under any new Education Act; the CS could act in greater concert with the newly formed British Society for Social Responsibility in Science; local groups of the CS could act as "environmental watch-dogs" at the grass-roots level to put pressure, if necessary, on local councils and local MPs; it was highly regrettable that Mr Anthony Crosland (the then Minister concerned with pollution and regional planning) appeared to scorn the invidious consequences of continuing population growth so cogently described in the CS's statement "Why Britain Needs a Population Policy"; rational policies on environmental pollution should form an integral part of regional structural plans relating to a comprehensive National Plan; in view of the flagrant dereliction of duty by a considerable number of local authorities through their refusal to implement the provisions of the 1967 Family Planning Act, there seemed a good case for the mandatory establishment of local family-planning services; and the CS could well consider submitting to the Annan Committee on Broadcasting that it should be a statutory duty of the BBC and ITA to provide balanced information on environmental problems. On the other hand, Mr Page questioned the historical accuracy of the statement in Mr Booth's document that "the general rise in material prosperity has freed man from the shackles of slavery and has led to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (section 19); he doubted the aptness of Mr Booth's phrase "this lovely planet" (section 35) following a grim account of the grave dangers already posed by man's unprecedented population growth and spoliation of his own environment; he regretted that Mr Booth did not explicitly advocate greater research into synthetic foods such as Chlorella and into mass cultivation of mushrooms as a neglected source of high quality protein to mitigate problems of malnutrition, particularly in the developing countries. Indeed, mushrooms may once again become "sacred" for man, though in a slightly different sense from that suggested by John Allegro in his recent imaginative work on *Amanita muscaria*!

Notable among subsequent contributors to the discussion was Dr Maurice Marois (Professor at the Faculty of Medicine in Paris), a man of considerable charm, who in exquisite French combined a description of the practical internationalist work done by the scientific *Institut de la Vie* (of which he was founder and director) with a rigorous and inspiring philosophical analysis of man's responsibility for his own life and his own destiny: *il faut tenter de vivre* may be regarded as the humanist motif of his symphonic poem. By comparison, some of the later speeches seemed small beer indeed. Yet whatever doubts one may have about any of the contributions (not least about one's own), this was a conference from which anyone would gain in knowledge, understanding and insight. Just as individual men can rise to the occasion, so can organisations: I believe that the Conservation Society deserves the active support not only of great affiliated organisations like the NSS, not only of its own members, but also of men of good will everywhere, if the race is to surmount and solve the gigantic problems that confront it in an age of turmoil and revolution.

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against religious indoctrination in schools, with special attention to State-maintained denominational schools, and asked all members and friends to contribute generously to the Secular Education Appeal. The Meeting called upon the Secretary of State for the Social Services to introduce, as a matter of urgency, free contraceptive advice and materials under the NHS as a personal service and a social need for all married and unmarried people over 16. The government was urged to make available sufficient parliamentary time to reach an early decision on the Sunday Entertainments Bill and also on Bills to outlaw cruel sports. Unanimous support was expressed for the immediate repeal of all archaic laws which make it an offence to publicise facilities for the proper medical treatment of venereal diseases. The Home Secretary, the Commissioners of the Metropolitan Police, Chief Constables and the Director of Public Prosecutions were urged to give their attention to combating the serious rise in crimes of violence and not to prosecuting the producers of allegedly obscene literature and art.

The AGM expressed concern at any keeping by educational institutions of dossiers concerning the political and religious activities of students and staff, and called upon the Government to allow the immediate entry into Britain of all East African Asians who did not become African nationals because they relied on British guarantees of British citizenship when the African territories concerned became independent. (It is significant that Dr John Robinson, who became famous as Bishop of Woolwich and who called himself "a radical humanist", resigned from the Labour Party over the Kenya Immigration Bill, which he described as "a clear case of deliberate breach of promise"—yet he did not resign from the Anglican Church when, in *Honest To God* and after, he seemed to go beyond its creeds and dogmas.)

Five emergency motions were also passed. One such motion, having regard to recent reports, urged the new Conservative Government not to resume the sale of arms to the racist régime in South Africa, in view of: (i) the likely adverse effect on racial harmony at home and abroad of such a resumption; (ii) the United Nations ban on arms to South Africa; and (iii) the Conservative Party's pledge in the June General Election: "Our policies will reduce the causes of racial tension" (*A Better Tomorrow*, p. 7). The new Government was also urged: (a) to devote not less than one per cent of Britain's Gross National Product up to 1975 as aid to the developing countries, in accordance with the target set by the UN Pearson Commission; and (b) to give serious consideration to extending the powers of the Parliamentary Commissioner (Ombudsman) to local and regional government, so that any abuses of responsibility by public representatives may be corrected. The AGM welcomed, and looked forward to the implementation of, the pledges on housing and on pollution and environmental degeneration in the Conservative Party's recent General Election manifesto (*A Better Tomorrow*, pp. 17 and 27, respectively).

The AGM was followed by a "brains trust", after which members dispersed to re-assemble next year at a venue to be decided upon by the Executive Committee. For those present, this annual reunion was a memorable experience, graced by the presence of old friends and enlivened by the vigour of good-humoured debate and discussion.

Theodorakis at the Albert Hall

EUSTACE MAITLAND

THIS WAS a concert given, not to music lovers but to an audience whose emotional involvement was explosive from the beginning. Even the complacent must have been moved when Christos Pittas, with extended arms and oscillating hands, suddenly clutched the air and drew music from the Greek Folk Orchestra.

The evening started with a short speech of gratitude and the dedication of the concert to his fellow prisoners, by Theodorakis. The first part of the concert comprised five songs from a poem by Yiannis Ritsos followed by two written by Theodorakis and, completing the first part a brilliant, long and moving rendering of "State of Siege", a poem by 'Marina', a young female political prisoner. The simplicity, the fear and anger of this poem are, to me shown in the line: *They can't kill me can they they can't kill me can they.* The power of this poem comes over when it is sung with as much strength and with as much emotion as that put into it on this occasion by Maria Farandouri.

Into all these songs the incredible atmosphere of the beauty of that artistic creation, which incorporates the purpose of expressing and initiating ideals, was magnificently instilled and was to be maintained and fulfilled throughout the evening.

Immediately following the interval Maria Farandouri sang seven songs to the brilliant guitar accompaniment of John Williams, who resolutely refused to take any credit even following Maria's encore, for which she did a number from Z—a sign I felt of the respect of other musicians for the interpretation and use of their art by Theodorakis and his colleagues.

The excitement of the audience was supreme when Theodorakis, a rather ashamed smile on his face, made his way to the rostrum before the string section of the London Symphony Orchestra. During his first piece, "Cantata Oedipus Tyrannos", one had an uneasy suspicion that the experienced LSO were tending to play mechanically and that Theodorakis' use of the baton was more emotional than technically correct. This might have been upsetting, but as the piece progressed, the incredible sensitivity of the music became evident and seemed to come from Theodorakis himself as he dominated the rostrum. The piece itself was slightly anomalous set against the rest of the works performed in this concert. It is one of his earlier works which culminated in "epitaphios", the musical setting of another poem by Ritsos. There is less emphasis on melodic quality as compared with, for instance, "State of Siege" and thus "Oedipus Tyrannos" was not so easily acceptable at this concert.

The evening culminated with the powerful and tragic "March of the Spirits", written (together with "State of Siege") in reaction to the Greek dictatorship. It has a most arousing march beat, enacted by Theodorakis swinging his arms. With the use of different solo singers backed by a full choir, the piece is exceptionally moving.

It is very easy to allow men such as Theodorakis to pass unnoticed in a generation, to be dismissed with such comments as "He is exploited in this country—people are making money out of him". While the truth of this might be debated, in recognition of the fact that this was an idealistically orientated audience of admirers, it is an unjust point of view. It is Theodorakis who has made the contemporary poetry of Greece available and acceptable to the largest possible audience. He has given the general public songs, in which are expressed the incentive and hope to, in his own words, "create a desire for a more beautiful life".

The success of this concert by whatever standards you may apply, was evident from the long and enthusiastic standing ovation which greeted its finish. It was very exciting. However, characteristically this humble and fine man would not give an encore.

LETTERS

World Government

MR S. E. PARKER'S letter (June 27) contains the same peculiar element of fallacious reasoning as that of Barbara Smoker. He says that I depend on pious wishes and equally pious promises and if world government cannot be compared with government as we know it today, with what can we compare it? I stated in my letter what I think of government as we know it and experience it today, and Mr Parker does not appear to disagree with me in this respect. Yet he cannot see how a world government (for which, of course, we have no standards of comparison as there has never been one) can fail to behave in the same manner as the total number of governments are known to behave towards each other. Mr Parker is really being naive if he cannot see the difference between a government acting on behalf of a group whose interests are opposed to most of all the others and a government whose only interest would be to try to preserve peace and settle the differences between the present divided peoples of the world. It may well be that in hoping for this eventuality to become a reality I am being "pious", but Mr Parker does not suggest what he proposes to the alternative of our arriving at a stage when our confidence in each other is justified by the way in which we conduct our affairs, and that of allowing history to repeat itself once too often. H. RICH.

S. E. PARKER says I use "dubious arguments" in support of World Government. Funny he doesn't answer them! Perhaps "dubious arguments" means arguments he's dubious how to answer!

Whether Hitler came to power legally or not is beside the point. The point is he at once started to raise an armed force to carry out aggression. A world government would have stopped that at once. But since we had an out-of-date system of national sovereignty (and still have) he got away with one aggression after another and it all ended in six years of bloodshed.

S. E. Parker complains that if a World Government dealt firmly with a government like the present Greek one, people would get killed. I'm afraid they get killed anyway if you've a government like the Greek one and according to S. E. Parker we were wrong to overthrow Hitler. But under national sovereignty the killing goes on—under World Government you get it over with.

(I note S. E. Parker objects to my calling the present Greek government a gang of militarists—how tender he seems to governments like the Greek one and Hitler's!)

S. E. Parker says national governments blow up their own country men in civil wars. But civil wars happen less often than wars between nations and tend to get less. In this century civil wars have caused less damage than international ones, and in the two main civil wars (the Spanish and Russian) one party, if not both, was backed by the Governments of other nations, (and in the Finnish and Biafran ones) so they were largely international ones.

(By the way—in both the English and American civil wars and others both sides did "hesitate"—might I advise S. E. Parker to read some history?)

About that "smaller administrative units will lessen the risk of war" caper: as usual S. E. Parker doesn't answer my argument. I said quite clearly that if we had these "smaller administrative units" some would conquer others and we'd soon have big nations again, able to "command the capital needed to construct a nuclear war apparatus".

He also says "It is only possible to speak of government as we have known and do know it". In other words—he can't think of new ideas! If we all had this weakness we'd still be in caves! (Perhaps that's what S. E. Parker wants—he admits he doesn't mind the risk of "every man for himself"!)

The reason why national governments "shed rivers of blood" is that they have to keep up armed forces and use power politics to stop other national governments pushing them about, and to get the economic resources they need. A World Government wouldn't need to do this. I. S. Low.

A couple more hornets

WHETHER OR NOT Claud Watson has "stirred up a hornet's nest over this Vietnam business", he does appear to have netted a fine confusion of red herrings. For anyone seeking some of those 'authentic blue mackerels', the following quotations would seem to offer the most promising fishing ground.

(Jan. 24)—"Most of us detest tyranny of any sort—and this goes for communist tyranny as much as any other form!"

(March 7)—"Why on earth should the Vietnamese, or anybody else, be forced to accept a Communist government if they don't want it? Why should they not be allowed free elections such as is enjoyed by Western nations?"

(April 11)—"Perhaps Ho Chi Minh and Co. *might* have got into power in a free election in Vietnam (although I very much doubt it!)—but you *can* fool most of the people *some* of the time; and peoples in backward countries are apt to behave foolishly through sheer ignorance."

CHARLES BYASS.

AS FREETHINKERS we must be grateful that the editor of our journal allows all and sundry to freely express their views and to present facts, as they see them.

Is it not time however, that we ceased to give space—valuable space—to Claud Watson? Are we not allowing the FREETHINKER to become a vehicle for his lies and for the distortion he puts upon factual evidence concerning Vietnam?

I am not concerned here with defeating non-existing argument, only that the paper shall not accommodate a mentality which is so capable of cruelly condoning mass murder, torture, rape, wanton destruction and inconceivable horrors—all perpetrated upon a peasant nation, asking only freedom, perpetrated by a modern technological society, which lives in affluence on the blood and mangled bodies of its victims.

Is it trite to remind ourselves, that this mighty nation still has the blood of the indigenous peoples of America on its hands? Will Vietnam be colonised by Americans, when the native population has been decimated or depleted beyond recognition? Will the cowboy and Indian entertainment (?) of today be Vietcong and GI tomorrow? Will the death throes of the Vietnamese be glamourised in epic films?

Sir! I beg of you! Do not let the Claud Watsons of this world gaily, laughingly, mockingly, facetiously spit in the eye of this tortured people.

I feel totally inadequate to help them; the few miserable pence I can afford for their relief, is of precious little help—but one thing I can do, I can speak out against all those who mock at their suffering and ridicule the determination of the Vietnamese people, in their desperate fight for freedom from perpetual slavery and ultimate extinction.

KENNETH J. EAD.

THE SACRED MUSHROOM

IN MY REVIEW of John Allegro's book *The Sacred Mushroom* ("Amanita in excelsis" June 27) I gave the scientific name of ergot as *Cordyceps*; it should, of course, have been *Claviceps*.

Also for "hycoperdons" (Note 10) read "Lycoperdons".

The final paragraph, "... I agree with the book's conclusions" should have read: "Yes, Mr Editor, Jesus was a mushroom."

NIGEL H. SINNOTT

BALAG ?

Ballocks !

BRIAN KHAN

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OBITUARY

WE HAVE HEARD from Mrs Kathleen Smith, the granddaughter of the founder and first editor of this paper and one time President of the NSS, G. W. Foote, that her mother, Mrs Florence Pauline Walter, who was Foote's second daughter, has died in Sydney, Australia, at the age of 82. Mrs Smith tells us that her mother "always deeply revered and honoured her father's memory and brought me up to do likewise". Our sympathy is extended to Mrs Smith and other relatives of Mrs Walter.

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