

LADY BIRDWOOD STANDS UP FOR JESUS BUT LOSES BLASPHEMY CASE

Well known personalities from the entertainment world were amongst those who assembled in the number one courtroom of Bow Street Magistrates' Court on 18 February, when Eleanor Fazan and Jack Gold faced a total of four summonses alleging "that they did ribaldly vilify, ridicule and scoff at the Christian religion and did in like manner impugn its doctrines". Miss Fazan and Mr Gold directed *Council of Love*, a play by Oscar Panizza which had a short, and apparently unprofitable, run in the West End last year. The summonses, which were brought by the Dowager Lady Jane Birdwood, were withdrawn after the Court heard evidence that neither of the defendants had been connected with the production after 1 October. After a short recess, Lady Birdwood's counsel declared that she had decided "that it would not be right" to press the prosecution. He then asked for summonses against the actors who appeared as God, Jesus and Satan in the play. Sir Frank Milton, the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, refused to issue the summonses, saying they could have been applied for in the first place.

Demonstration at the Criterion

Lady Birdwood told the Court that she heard of *Council of Love* from a friend, who advised her: "For God's sake, don't see that play; it will destroy you". Her ladyship's reaction to this dire warning was to make a pilgrimage to Piccadilly Circus where, at the Criterion Theatre, she paid good money to see not one, but four performances of *Council of Love*.

She said the representation of God ("coughing, spluttering, wheezing") was a complete caricature; Jesus was emaciated, screaming, whining; the Virgin Mary appeared to be a voyeuse. In one scene, Satan appeared smoking a cigarette and offered Jesus a gasper, saying: "Can I tempt you?" Not surprisingly, Lady Birdwood was unable to sleep after seeing the play for the first time.

Lady Birdwood then related how she and a group of friends went to a performance "to make witness of our faith". They stood with their backs to the stage and rendered a verse of the hymn, *At the Name of Jesus, Every Knee Shall Bow*. Lady Birdwood's description of this touching scene resulted in several heads being un-prayerfully bowed in the courtroom.

Lady Birdwood has, in recent months, gained a reputation as a dauntless opponent of "permissiveness". She goes forth with missionary zeal from the genteel environs of Kensington to do battle with the enemies of Christian morality. She braved the full frontal nudity of *Oh! Calcutta!*—and then complained to the police about it. She is reported to have visited Ann Summers' "sex shop" at Marble Arch. She saw a play entitled *Umbilical*, in which two of the characters are a woman and her canine lover. Truly, Lady Birdwood mortifies herself continually.

Eleanor Fazan

Eleanor Fazan is best known in the theatre as a dancer and choreographer. She trained at the Sadlers Wells Ballet School, and was principal dancer in several shows at the London Hippodrome. She co-directed many musicals including *Beyond the Fringe* and *Blitz!*, and has been responsible for the choreography of over 50 television productions.

Miss Fazan has been previously associated with the Criterion Theatre. It was there she appeared in the revue, *Intimacy at 8.30*—a title to arouse suspicions in censorious, prudish minds!

First Stage Production

Council of Love was Jack Gold's first stage production. He has worked with the BBC as a film editor and director, and was associated with Lindsay Anderson and Tony Richardson in the Free Cinema Movement, for which he directed *The Visit*. Along with John Schlesinger and Kevin Billington, Mr Gold made a series of documentary films which won wide praise and various international prizes. He also directed *The Bofors Gun* and *The Reckoning*.



Eleanor Fazan

THE COMMON MARKET AND THE RC CHURCH: A NEW HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE?

F. A. RIDLEY

On Christmas day 800, the Pope solemnly announced the restoration of the old Roman Empire in the West, and crowned Charles, King of the Franks, the first Roman Emperor of the new dispensation. The "Holy Roman Empire", as universal history distinguishes it from its secular classical predecessor, lasted for just over a thousand years (800-1806), when it was abolished by Napoleon. (He no doubt intended to refound it with his capital in Paris, where he had taken the secret archives of the Vatican.) During this millenium, the Holy Roman Empire pursued a very chequered career, and at the time of its abolition, had largely come to correspond with Voltaire's famous definition, that it was "neither holy, neither Roman, nor an Empire".

Europe and the Common Market

At the present time, a new attempt is being made to reunite a Western Europe that has lost even the pretension to political unity as represented by the Holy Roman Empire. As befits a social order like capitalism, in which economic motives are primary (the Marxist "economic interpretation of history" actually originated merely as a generalisation of current capitalist practice, this current movement begins under an economic pseudonym as the Common Market. However, in ultimate perspective this goal far transcends the sphere of pure economics, and aims at some species of European political unity. To that extent, it seeks to reduplicate the theory and practice of the old "holy" empire throughout the course of the millenium between Charles, the "Great" Emperor, and Napoleon, "the little corporal". The final goal of the Common Market as envisaged by its leading exponents undoubtedly presupposes some kind of eventual European unity, probably on a federal basis. There is nothing new in striving for such an aim. Ever since the collapse of Napoleon's empire attempts to reunite Europe have been two a penny, ranging from Hitler's New Order, a Europe forcibly united by German imperialism, to the post-1945 Left-wing movement for a "United Socialist States of Europe" represented by a committee in Paris to which I had the honour to belong.

The present movement, however, differs from the Nazi New Order in the sense that it represents an attempt on the part of the several national governments, of the famous Six (France, Italy, West Germany, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg), and of their respective adjuncts to bring about some kind of voluntary unity. It also differs from the so far unsuccessful attempt to create a united socialist Europe, by being primarily the work of governments rather than of private individuals or of political parties.

A War on Two Fronts

It is the fundamental premise of the philosophy of historical materialism that abstract formulae eventuate only, and because of, concrete circumstances. In the case of the present movement towards European unity such external factors are, of course, operative and indeed ultimately decisive. In the last resort, any future "European Community" can only represent a political "war on two

fronts"; since it represents an attempt by European capitalism, at present simultaneously threatened with elimination by Russia in the East and by subordination to America in the West, to establish itself as "the rejoicing third" "between American capitalism and Russian communism.

Such was undoubtedly the leading aim of the statesmen of the six, in particular General de Gaulle, and was the motivating cause behind the tortuous manoeuvres conducted by that Macchiavellian politician with the object of playing off the two super powers, the USA and the USSR, against each other, with the ultimate object of establishing a "balance of power" in which a united Europe could again play a major independent role. De Gaulle's successor, Pompidou, Brandt, etc., are still at work on the same essential theme; cultivating Russia in the East as a balancing force against any renewal of the post-war American domination of Europe. The primary aim of the present leaders of capitalist Europe is precisely the creation of such a balance of power.

The Vatican and Europe

So far, I have confined myself to a brief survey of the secular, political and economic forces currently working for the re-establishment of the Europe hopelessly divided since the passing of the Holy Roman Empire. But what about the "Holy" aspect of that millennial empire? It is still there—very much so indeed just now! Despite all its successive storms and stresses; despite two world wars and world revolution; despite the century of science and its resulting technology; the Vatican is still a major force in European affairs.

The Papacy, which initially created the Holy Empire, is still in business even in this loudly proclaimed "century of the common man"! Actually, the present embryo Europe of the initial Six is predominantly a Catholic Europe. If Britain joins eventually, she would be the first Protestant land (if she can still termed such in these ecumenical days) to enter a united Europe. All her prospective colleagues look to Rome for spiritual guidance, as do such countries as Spain and Ireland, both also on the waiting list. Nor are the present Six merely Catholic in the religious denominational sense. They all are, or have been recently, governed by aggressively Catholic political parties. Again speaking politically, "Christian Democracy" (political Catholicism) represents the most important residual legatee of Hitler's "New Order"!

Vatican diplomacy is hard at work in the West German Republic (conceived in the Vatican and born on the Rhine, as a current German saying goes), with the late master of Jesuitical statecraft, Adenauer, as its major architect; or in Spain, nowadays apparently run by the Catholic free-masonry Opus Dei in the name of the ageing Franco; or Italy, on the Vatican's own doorstep and now engaged in a ferocious struggle with the Papacy over the recent secular divorce law.

It is perhaps significant that the Pope has recently made

(Continued on next page)

EXPLOITING SOCIAL PREJUDICES

W. B. L. POOLE

As a homosexual I deplore the uncritical admiration Bob Broeder gave David Reuben's book *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex*. In a review characterised by surprising inattentiveness and insensitivity, Mr Broeder alleges that "homosexuality is explained as far as is humanly possible", but all that Dr Reuben in fact does is to reject theories of causation which he thinks homosexuals have tended to adopt. Bob Broeder also failed to notice the double standards applied by the author in relation to the subject. What is all right for heterosexuals is made to seem squalid, unsatisfying and dehumanised in a homosexual context. Lesbianism is dealt with under the chapter heading *Prostitution*, and for male homosexuals "... the primary interest is the penis, not the person".

The most blatant instance of these double standards is the treatment accorded to sadists. In a heterosexual setting, "... generally they are harmless folks who have fun with each other. In spite of the whips, belts, ropes, and leg irons, it is rare for anyone to get hurt. If they did, they wouldn't come back next week for more games". Or again, "... prostitutes worry about (them) and with good reason ... bruises are bad for business". In contrast with these engaging if eccentric types, homosexual sadists are "... among the cruellest people who walk this earth", and found congenial employment in Hitler's Gestapo. In an encounter with one of them, "... unfortunately the outcome is unpredictable. Occasionally the torturer gets carried away, the evening escalates and ends in mutilation, castration, and death. Sadly, that's all part of the homosexual game".

Lurid Caricature

These are typical specimens of the unrepresentative, misleading or tendentious material on the subject, and of the flavour and tone of the book, which Mr Broeder nowhere adequately conveys. The author does not hesitate to cash in on other social prejudices. "Some of the fattest people are homosexuals", we are told as the prelude to an irrelevant digression on some bizarre uses to which food and kitchen equipment can be put. A lurid caricature of a meeting in a gay bar ends with the comment: "... homosexual romance begins to blossom. A pastry-chef has just picked up a used-car salesman". Why not "the managing director of a publishing firm has just picked up a psychiatrist"? The topic concludes with one particularly vicious anecdote: "Recently, in England, two homosexuals who had undergone these (sex change) operations ... succumbed to cancer of the breast—their new female breasts. Ironically these men who wanted to be women died of a woman's disease. That's as close as they came".

Are these the sort of passages the publishers had in mind when commending Dr Reuben for "using the latest medical and psychiatric research material"; "avoiding any moral judgment"; and "replacing ignorance with knowledge, and fear with confidence"? Liberated homosexuals are likely to acquire a general distrust of the book and to treat it with the ridicule and contempt it merits, but the young, ignorant and inexperienced who turn to it for advice will more probably come away bewildered, frightened or filled with self-disgust. On the other hand, if you enjoy sniggering or sneering at other people's sexual incompetence or misfortunes, if you relish gloating pruriently over the details of impersonal sexual activities many of which are likely to be outside your own experience, if

you are weak on imagination but strong on credulity where medical matters are concerned, or if, quite simply, you have a healthy appetite for salacious trash, then W. H. Allen have published just the book for you.

Valid Expression of Human Feeling

In the present climate of opinion it needs to be stated publicly and often that homosexuality is not an ingenious striving to imitate something else, but is as valid an expression of human feeling as heterosexuality, and can afford its participants as deep and lasting satisfaction. I cannot do better than quote the National Secular Society sex education pamphlet, so much more enlightened and perceptive than Bob Broeder's review: "If you are attracted to a member of your own sex, and if you both want to give physical expression to your feelings, then do so; and we hope you enjoy it ... Discard any false sense of guilt which has been imposed on (you). If society does not yet accept (you), it is society that it at fault".

(Continued from Previous page)

a Frenchman Secretary of State. One can in fact say that if the Common Market of today eventually became the European community of the future (envisaged by its more far-sighted sponsors), the Pope will be Europe's Chaplain tomorrow, and perhaps her master the day after, much as in the days of the Holy Roman Empire. Rome has few equals when it comes to playing power-politics. Whatever the Vatican may not know about the next world, it undeniably knows a great deal about this one! Only Chairman Mao's "little red book" has a longer political tradition behind it.

Whither Europe ?

I am, I hope, "a good European"! As such, I consider that the unity of Europe is on the order of the day. The trouble is not that Europe is being united, but that it is being united by the wrong people for the wrong reasons. As at present constructed, the current process can only end in a capitalist, Catholic, and conservative Europe. It is now surely incumbent upon all forward-looking "good Europeans" to seek for better alternatives: the secular, socialist, and anti-clerical Europe of the future.

MEMORIAL EDITION

**WHY I AM NOT
A CHRISTIAN**

BERTRAND RUSSELL

Preface DAVID TRIBE

Introduction Professor ANTONY FLEW

PRICE 15p (plus 2½p postage)

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

FREETHINKER

editor: **WILLIAM McILROY**

103 Borough High Street,
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Telephone: 01-407 1251 (editorial)
01-407 0029 (business)

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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 St., 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 Mout, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

EVENTS

Humanist Holidays. Easter Holiday at the Belgravia Hotel, Bournemouth. Details from Mrs. M. Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone: 642-8796.

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester, Sunday, 28 February, 6.30 p.m. Edmund Taylor: "Man as a Discoverer and Inventor".

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, 28 February, 11 a.m. D. B. Halpern: "An Economist Looks at the Twentieth Century". Tuesday, 2 March, 7 p.m., Stewart Cook and Mrs N. R. Botterell: "Fundamentalism and the Jehovah's Witnesses".

Worthing Humanist Group, Morelands Hotel, The Pier, Worthing, Sunday, 28 February, 5.30 p.m. A Humanist Symposium (discussion led by Group member).

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY**ANNUAL DINNER**

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NEWS**THE ARCHBISHOP'S LETTER**

Archbishop Murphy of Cardiff, in a pastoral letter read in the churches last Sunday, said that one of the tragedies of the day is that just when the world needs the Catholic Church, Catholics seem to have lost their nerve. This is not because they have lost their faith: "It is just because, at the moment, there is such an atmosphere of tolerance and love, that any firm pronouncement on the moral law, whether we like it or not, seems to be provocative, insulting and interfering".

The archbishop claimed: "Reason demands that there shall be one mode of conduct and responsibility for men, and only one". Does it, indeed? It is more reasonable to assume that human beings have different, but reasonable and acceptable, standards of conduct to meet the requirements of the age and circumstances in which they live. What may be an excellent mode of conduct in a village on the banks of the Amazon may be totally unacceptable in Cardiff.

The archbishop's letter contained exaggerations of the proportion we have come to expect from the more hard-line, fundamentalist followers of Rome. He said: "In a permissive society which has abandoned all repression, all restraint, we are meeting with more neuroses, more anxieties, more stresses, more unhappiness and more despair".

One of the current myths popular amongst religionists (and particularly those of Archbishop Murphy's outlook) is that neuroses and anxieties thrive in a tolerant, "permissive" society, and that true happiness and contentment is to be found in rural communities where the family recites the Rosary, pictures of the saints (bogus and otherwise) adorn the cottage wall, and the priest is part of the local Establishment.

How can Archbishop Murphy tell if there is, proportionally, more neuroses today than 50 years ago? Is there any reason to suppose that, proportionally, there is more neuroses in an English city than in a Spanish village?

It is impossible to make any scientific assessment of the amount of neuroses in the past compared with the present. But, to give only one example, historical records of the witch hysteria of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (which led to hundreds of thousands of deaths in Europe) show that the "age of faith" not only bred neuroses as horrible as any that could be imagined, but allowed the miserable victims of neuroses and hallucinations to torture and murder each other.

It is palpable nonsense to describe our society as one which has abandoned "all repression, all restraint". True, some humane law reforms have been achieved, mostly in the teeth of fierce opposition from the Roman Catholic and other churches. A large number of Catholics now use reliable forms of contraception and ignore the purile rubbish churned out by the Catholic Truth Society and similar organisations. Increasingly, Catholics are questioning the wisdom of sending their children to church schools. Irish immigrants are beginning to abandon their traditionally servile attitude towards the clergy. All this may be very upsetting for Archbishop Murphy, but that is not sufficient reason to cause such drivel to be read in his diocese last Sunday.

AND NOTES

NO DEFENCE

The Women's Commission of the Italian Communist Party has issued a statement on the defence of the family which is, in many respects, in line with Vatican thinking. They are opposed to the legalisation of abortion saying that such a law would encourage "the already strong male mechanism of irresponsibility", and would be damaging for the woman.

Abortion is not to be lightly undertaken, but it is an unhappy fact of Italian life that 4,000 illegal abortions are carried out every day. One of the reasons for this is that the advertising and sale of contraceptives is illegal in Italy. But even if they were freely available there would be some demand for abortions, and it is preferable to have such operations carried out by qualified people in hygienic conditions than by those operating outside the law.

Italy's women Communists have evidently fallen for the Pope's nonsense about "creating more bread for the world's table", instead of the adoption of rational and responsible population policies. They say that instead of birth control being Government policy but should be practised by responsible couples in specific cases.

One of the major problems facing organisations and authorities which do promote birth control is that the less responsible members of the population are the most prolific breeders. They are too poor or feckless to buy contraceptives; they find Vatican roulette and other primitive methods inhibiting; millions still believe the ignorant claptrap of celibate priests who say that contraception is sinful. Domiciliary family planning is often the best hope, but this can be carried out on a wide scale only with local and national Government support.

There are formidable problems facing Communist parties in countries where there are large numbers of Catholic voters. The Italian Communists have an honourable anti-fascist, anti-clerical record. But if they start taking short cuts to electoral success by adopting social policies which are acceptable to the Vatican, they will become a sterile, vote-collecting party.

ODD PROTECTION

The upsurge of "purity" organisations continues, the latest being the National Youth Protection Movement. I am not certain just what it aims to protect Britain's innocent youth from, but it is probably significant that its first demonstration last week was against "sexy plays" on television.

Fifteen members assembled in the foyer of Thames Television's London headquarters to complain about television's encouragement of a "brothel-bred" nation. Those taking part included some of Mary Whitehouse's disciples, and a lady whose chief claim to fame is that her father was the military governor of Malta during the last war. A gentleman of the cloth, in the person of the vicar of Woodford Wells, Essex, was also present. After being told they were "cluttering up" the place, they were unceremoniously ordered off the premises.

The director of NYPM is a gentleman named Paul Daniels, aged 54, married with four children. Several years ago he tried to launch a military volunteer force to fight

on the American side in Vietnam. Mr Daniels believes the media is turning young people into "ferocious", over-sexed animals". Perhaps he has evidence to substantiate this, but there are many who will argue that whatever effect the Vietnamese war has had on the sexual prowess of young Americans, it has turned thousands of them into drug addicts and ferocious killers. It has also turned a large number of them into corpses.

If Britain's youth needs protection, it is from self-appointed recruiting sergeants and guardians of morality like Mr Daniels.

REFORMER

No one in Parliament is more qualified to review Madeleine Simms' and Keith Hindell's book, *Abortion Law Reformed*, than Renée Short, MP. (The review is published on page 70). She introduced an abortion law reform Bill under the ten-minute rule in 1965; a Roman Catholic MP shouted "Object!" and she was unable to proceed. But it was a significant move, and Mrs Short later played a notable role in the battle for success of David Steel's Bill.



Renée Short, MP

Renée Short has a splendid record of work in local government and at Westminster. She joined the Labour Party in 1948, and after unsuccessful contests at St Albans (1959) and Watford (1959) was elected MP for Wolverhampton NE in 1965. She retained the seat at the last election.

Mrs Short's main interests are housing, education, the health services and East-West trade. She is a member of the Humanist Parliamentary Group.

A DAY TO REMEMBER

On the day film director Jack Gold appeared at Bow Street Magistrates' Court on a blasphemy charge, it was announced that a BBC Television programme he directed had won the premier award in the international Television

(Continued on back page)

BOOKS

ABORTION LAW REFORMED

by Madeleine Simms and Keith Hindell.

Peter Owen, £3.25.

As one who was closely involved in the battle for Abortion Law Reform and the parliamentary processes in getting David Steel's admirable Bill through all its stages, I can thoroughly recommend this book. It provides a well-written account of the whole saga from the early years when a group of dedicated women met in London in 1936 to form the Abortion Law Reform Association, to the triumphant conclusion of the final stages in the Lords and Commons. In the chapter, *The Early Years*, the authors pay tribute to those pioneers, including Alice Jenkins, Janet Chance, Stella Browne, Lord Horder and many others who courageously fought against religious dogma and prejudice to change the mid-Victorian Offences Against the Person Act of 1861 which prescribed penalties of up to life imprisonment for the "crime" of abortion. Alice Jenkins lived to see her life's work crowned with success though most of those early pioneers died before her.

Reference to abortion as a "crime" hardly appears in legal literature before 1803, when it was made a statutory felony—with less severe punishment for abortions carried out early in pregnancy than for those in the later stages. The 1861 Act remained the statute on abortion for more than a hundred years but after the Bourne judgement in 1938, it was disregarded by many progressive, humanitarian doctors, and abortions were carried out increasingly in order to preserve the health as well as the life of the mother.

The legal controversy was started off, however, in 1931 when Mr Justice McCardie, trying a series of abortion cases in Leeds, said: "In my opinion the law of abortion ought to be substantially modified". He denounced it as "out of keeping with the world around us" and said the law as it stood "did more harm than good". He made the famous statement later saying: "I cannot think it right that a woman should be forced to bear a child against her will", which about sums up the sentiments of women on this question, though as we have seen, many bigoted men try to compel us to think otherwise!

In the summer of 1931, the centenary meeting of the British Medical Association carried a resolution requesting the Council to reconsider the abortion law but it was not until 1935 that the committee was set up. Its report appeared a year later and came out clearly in favour of legalised abortion on grounds of the physical and mental health of the patient. The Committee also had this to say about rape which led to pregnancy under the age of consent (then 16): "Whether the severe mental injury caused by an experience so dreadful as child birth at a tender age, should not be accounted an ever greater indication than physical danger is a point to be considered very seriously". This was an aspect of abortion to which many members of the House remained singularly stony hearted during the long battle for the Bill but as the overwhelming majority of its opponents were men, perhaps this is not surprising! Fixed indelibly in my mind is the story that appeared in the national press while we were engaged on the Bill, about the little Italian girl aged eight years who had become pregnant as the result of rape and instead of taking her to hospital at once for a termination, the Roman Catholic authorities preferred to bend the law of marriage so that the child and her assailant could be joined together in "lawful" wedlock! The Committee also considered that abortion was indicated where there was "reasonable certainty that serious diseases will be transmitted to the

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child", and reached out to a cautious view about the social grounds for abortion with these words, "while the Committee has no doubt that the legalisation of abortion for social and economic reasons would go far to solve the problem of the secret operation, it realises that this is a matter for consideration by the community as a whole and not by the medical profession alone". Less than two years after the publication of this report, the famous Bourne trial took place which certainly changed case law on abortion.

The Roman Catholic Church was particularly alarmed about one section of Mr Justice Macnaghten's opinion: "There are others, who for what are said to be religious reasons, object to the operation being performed at all in any circumstances . . . A person who holds such an opinion ought not to be a doctor—practising, anyhow, in that branch of medicine. Indeed, in a case where the life of a woman could be saved by performing the operation, if a doctor refused to perform it on the ground of some religious opinion and the woman died, he would be in grave peril if he were brought before this court on a charge of manslaughter by negligence".

The Catholics in the twenties and thirties, were campaigning against birth control—Marie Stopes was a target for their virulent opposition—and even though the Minister of Health was persuaded by persistent pressure to issue a circular in 1930 permitting Local Authorities to offer birthcontrol advice to women who wanted it, they still opposed it. And when the campaign for abortion law reform was stepped up after the Bourne judgement, they continued to fight to impose their views on the majority of women (and men) who were striving for a saner approach—even after opinion polls in the mid-1960s had shown clearly that the *majority of Catholic women and men voters* were in favour of abortion law reform, just as they were in using "forbidden" methods of birth control.

The authors remind us of events, tragic and terrible, that helped to swing public opinion to the side of the reformers. A *Daily Mail* opinion poll after the thalidomide tragedy in the early 1960s showed that 80 per cent of the public was in favour of reform. The introduction of the pill also caused disarray in the Catholic ranks but even in 1964, Cardinal Heenan could say: "Contraceptive pills are no more acceptable than contraceptive instruments hitherto in use". Hardline Catholic MPs continued to oppose all attempts in Parliament to reform the law—and even today, they are still at it!

It has always amazed me that the Catholics can make such lurid statements about abortion law reform and "the murder of unborn children", but remain silent in the face of grievous atrocities to living children in Vietnam, to starvation and worse in India and elsewhere where the population growth outstrips the nation's chance to survive.

The Church of England was divided on the issue of reform but in 1965 the Church Assembly Board for Social Responsibility published *Abortion, an Ethical Discussion*, which provided a lucid and important addition to public debate on this matter. It recognised that humane anxiety for the mother lent most strength to the campaign for reform, that there are circumstances where the killing of an unborn child does not come under the general condemnation attaching to murder, that there can be no verification of the relation between the soul and the embryo, that even the Catholic Church did not regard *all* abortion as murder for even a Catholic gynaecologist would be

REVIEWS

allowed to terminate an anencephalic pregnancy, even though strident Catholic voices were still saying, "All destruction of life in the womb is immoral". Finally, the report concluded that abortion should be permissible when there was a threat not only to the mother's life but also to her well-being and her health if she were obliged to carry the child to term. This report undoubtedly had great influence on the campaign for reform even though it did not go as far as the Bill itself did eventually. Of course, new organisations like SPUC (Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child) were formed, there were great Press campaigns against the reformers and for the opponents and all their stunts, comedians like Sir Gerald Nabarro and Mary Whitehouse got in on the act. Norman St John-Stevas poured out his torrents of purple prose to whip up the Catholic clergy, but all to no avail. The Bill became the law of the land and thousands of women have benefited from it.

The blow by blow account of the numerous Parliamentary battles is very well written and provides a valuable record of the struggle. Some of the most useful parts of this record answer the irrelevant and dishonest arguments put up by opponents of the Bill, especially the ploy about the "consultant amendment"—that one of the two doctors required to certify an abortion must be employed under the NHS as a consultant. As there are only about 740 consultants with the relevant skill and training to do this—i.e., gynaecologists and psychiatrists—this would have provided a built-in bottleneck that would have restricted the number of abortions that could be carried out. Although this clause was accepted in the Lords, it was thrown out when the Bill came back to the Commons when the Minister of Health, Kenneth Robinson, a keen supporter of reform, made it clear that he could not draw up a list of suitable consultants, choosing who should perform certain operations and who should not. This has always been, and should remain, a matter for doctors themselves to decide and it really was unthinkable that Parliament should attempt to dictate to the medical profession in this way.

The authors have done well with this book. It should give new heart to all those who still have battles to win—especially those who are still fighting for women to be treated as equal citizens.

RENEE SHORT, MP

PRAISE THE LORD AND PASS THE CONTRIBUTION

by Alan Bestic. Cassell, £2.10.

In the United States religion is Big Business. With all the resources of the modern publicity machine preachers are promoted like film stars. On radio and television they command audiences of millions, and an appeal for a dollar for the Lord can bring in nearly enough for a moon-shot. In *Praise the Lord and Pass the Contribution*, Alan Bestic examines a world in which science and superstition go hand in hand; where Prayer Plans, Blessing Pacts and personal miracles are proffered by honey-tongued operators whose business premises are equipped with the latest electronic marvels.

Do you want your teeth miraculously filled? It happened to two clients of A. A. Allen Revivals, Inc. Send for one of the Rev Allen's specially annointed Prayer Cloths—free of charge but enclose an offering if you can. Or you

can have a recording of music which will drive devils out of your body. Brother Allen's outfit, a relatively small-time one, has an annual turnover of two to three million dollars.

The Rev Herbert W. Armstrong would consider that peanuts. His World-Wide Church of God rakes in 34 million dollars a year, much of it in tithes from church members. For the rest it relies on the broadcasts of the Rev Herbert's son and deputy, Garner Ted. Not that Ted does anything so crude as appeal; his extreme Right-wing political views, and his racism, bring the money in unasked.

American evangelists have built some grandiose colleges. The Armstrong Church has three which, despite Garner Ted's racial views, do admit negro students. The Bob Jones University does not. If the late Dr Jones hated anything worse than negroes it was Catholics. When Governor Al Smith, a Catholic, was a Presidential candidate in 1928, Bob Jones emerged from his cloisters to give battle. "I'd sooner see a nigger in the White House than Mr Smith", he roared in one speech. Today the academy he founded has 3,800 students, and every year sends an army of missionaries into the world to combat, among other things, liberalism, alcoholism and evolutionary teaching.

The Rev Ian Paisley is closely associated with the Bob Jones University, of which he holds an honorary degree. He is a member of its Co-operating Board, and broadcasts regularly from its radio station. Paisley has degrees from two other seats of learning in the States, both black-listed as "degree-mills" where bogus qualifications are awarded for cash. The proprietor of one of them, Mr Bestic discovered, once faced a charge of mailing obscene literature and photographs.

The book gives some staggering estimates of US church wealth. Real estate alone is worth around 80,000 million dollars, while donations amount to a tenth of that sum annually. What do the churches do with the money? A few help the underprivileged. "Most", says the author, "put it into stocks and shares and property and banks and watch it breed. Talk to them about hungry children or sagging slums and they will weep but seldom will they help".

There is a chapter on one of the few, the Delta Ministry, which is achieving remarkable results in raising to human dignity the undernourished and illiterate negroes of the Mississippi Delta. Its devoted workers face opposition and obstruction, not only from wealthy plantation owners and the Ku Klux Klan, but from some of the white clergy in the area. One minister who was sympathetic told Mr Bestic: "The white Church in America has become decadent and irrelevant because of its avaricious pursuit of wealth. It is closing its eyes to the malnutrition, the hunger, the discrimination . . ."

American clergy enjoy even more privileges than their opposite numbers in Britain. The Very Rev Dr Kirby J. Hensley, Bishop of the Universal Life Church, doesn't hold with it. He told the author: "The sooner we get rid of the big churches the better. I don't believe in preachers, sittin' thar, earnin' soft livin's . . . So I'm going t'make everyone a minister—men, women, children, cats, dogs, monkeys. I'm goin' t'cut the ass out of this whole preacher business". In nine years he has ordained 250,000 ministers, and is currently sending out 500 ordination certificates a day. Dogs and cats are ministers, and it is all perfectly legal. Bishop Hensley's fee is 20 dollars, but more often than not he ordains for nothing; sometimes he holds "ordain-ins" at which thousands of ministers are created. His magnificent send-up of the US clerical scene is not, of course, relished by authority, and there has recently been

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LETTERS

A letter published in the *Freethinker* recently suggested that part of the programme put on at the NSS social was unsuitable for a function to which non-members were invited. As a non-member friend of the NSS, I find Mr Miller's attitude difficult to understand, since I enjoyed it very much and found none of it offensive or inappropriate. Perhaps he thinks freethinking applies only to religion.

ROSALIND TILEY.

I fail to see why Mr Miller should object to the programme offered at the recent NSS social. The organisers might reasonably wonder how many NSS members and friends would enjoy folk singing or romantic arias, but I would have thought they could safely assume that most, if not all of them, would appreciate blasphemous sex.

Since David Tribe's contribution was clearly announced by the compere, the onus was on anyone who thought himself likely to be offended to withdraw temporarily (this was quite feasible). If Mr Miller was offended, not by the subject but by the terms in which it was expressed, I would remind him that happily the usefulness of words like fuck and cunt is being more widely recognised, and it is appropriate that the NSS should continue to assist their rehabilitation.

Clearly there are several very capable poets in Birmingham who share this view, and it is a pity that the attitude of people like Mr Miller should prevent their finding expression elsewhere than on lavatory walls.

C. J. MOREY.

I do not belong to David Tribe's "more intimate circle" and therefore it may be a long time before I have the pleasure of listening to his splendid reading of his own works or those of Ted Hughes and John Wilkes. How fortunate the users of Birmingham's lavatories are!

Your correspondent, W. Miller, seems to be worried in case non-members may get a bad impression of the National Secular Society because of the poetry read at a recent social. As a non-member, let me assure Mr Miller that I (and probably the majority of those likely to be attracted to the Secular Society) am more likely to be put off by prissy, prudish objections to "blasphemous and obscene" verse.

D. W. LLOYD.

As a reciter of lavatory wall poetry may I through your columns express my dismay at the disappearance throughout the metropolis of suitably productive walls. Turning up hopefully with my notebook I find that, one by one with the inexorability of population explosion, they are falling before the callous hand of the developer and the revamper. The most literary of London's loos have already vanished without trace, and others that yielded the occasional inspirational offering are now tiled or splurged with stippled stucco that either resists the cunning hand of the versifier altogether or succumbs to regular washing by the attendant. The mush-rooming of this bureaucracy, installed in new rooms with cinemascope glazing, is an added disincentive to poetic endeavour.

London is becoming such a dead loss that I shall soon lack material for further recitals. Perhaps I should go exploring elsewhere—Birmingham, for example.

DAVID TRIBE.

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a tightening-up over half-fare and tax concessions. So many ULC ministers have avoided the Vietnam draft that now only full-time clergy are exempted.

Other sects surveyed include Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormon Church, and some interesting details are unearthed which will come in handy when those doorstep nuisances call.

Written in a slightly sardonic style, this is a very entertaining book. But it does offer some unpalatable food for thought. Lunatic fringe religion, already a formidable power in the USA, is growing rapidly both there and in Britain. If the human condition needs that much illusion, we live in a very sick society indeed.

R. J. CONDON

LIONEL BRITTON

Raymond Douglas writes: Lionel Britton, who died recently at the age of 84, was almost forgotten except for a few friends. Yet, in 1930 with his play *Brain*, and in 1931 with his great novel *Hunger and Love*, he made such a dynamic impact as to set the intellectual world talking. *Brain* was given a Sunday night performance in London at the Savoy Theatre, and created a sensation. At the time, C. E. M. Joad said: "The play is undoubtedly a work of genius", and Hannen Swaffer stated: "I prophesy for Lionel Britton a brilliant future—a remarkable contribution to drama by an unknown man".

Britton wrote many plays, but only two others were published. They were *Spacetime Inn* produced at the Arts Theatre, London, and *Animal Ideas*. He read the latter to audiences in halls and small theatres. He would take every part, and had a kind of hypnotic power to people the stage with characters and bring the play to life. He gave similar performances of another play, *How to Make God*, in which the idea of a supreme deity is divested of all spirituality.

Hunger and Love is, to say the least, thought-stimulating even to the most unimaginative readers. The *New York Saturday Review of Literature* said of this philosophical novel: "This is, with all its errors, an amazing piece of work . . . and one well worth reading". Among Britton's unpublished works, and the last he completed, is *The Deeper Philosophy of Mathematics*, which he claimed would simplify mathematics for everyone.

Britton, like many of his intellectual contemporaries, was a conscientious objector during the 1914-18 war, and he suffered many of the gross indignities that were inflicted on them by hysterical people. There was nobility in certain branches of his ancestry, of which one was the Baron Erskine who defended Thomas Paine, as a young man, against the Crown.

Lionel Britton spent most of his life living frugally and on the brink of starvation, because the world was not ready to accept his works at their true value. We can, with reason, expect them to be revived at some time, so that the philosophical approach to life that he has given us will not be lost. In his writings one is conscious of this approach which expresses the view that the vital necessity is the survival of consciousness through brain.

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Festival at Monte Carlo. The entry, *Mad Jack*, was from the Wednesday Play series, and the prize was for the programme that contributed most to the ideal of international peace. This is the first time a British programme carried off the award since its inception in 1961.

The play is based on a true incident in the 1914-18 war when Siegfried Sassoon, then a serving officer, wrote a letter to a newspaper condemning the wastage of human life, and the continuation of the war. It required courage of a high order to do this in the atmosphere of war hysteria which then prevailed.

The Wednesday Play series was one of the most stimulating and provocative on BBC Television, and the plays frequently stirred the "cleaner-uppers" and patriots to fury. The BBC have no immediate plans for repeating *Mad Jack*, but in view of its success at Monte Carlo, it is almost certain to be screened again.

Last weekend Jack Gold flew to Hollywood where he is to make a documentary for Thames Television.