

ANGLICAN AND SECULARIST DEBATE MAN'S NEED FOR GOD

Last December the National Secular Society organised a public meeting in London as part of the campaign for a free and comprehensive family planning service. It was the Society's contribution to European Conservation Year, and some speakers, who represented a wide range of religious and political opinion, had adopted the same line as Sir David Renton, MP, who said: "I am not in agreement with the National Secular Society's attitude towards religion, but I am prepared to co-operate with people of any religion or of none, who wish Parliament and the Government to act now to uphold the quality of life in the face of 'a plague of people'". Sir David went on to say that he would be prepared to debate the question of religious belief with a spokesman of the NSS on another occasion. The result was that he and David Tribe, former president of the NSS, debated the motion, "That Man Needs God", at Caxton Hall, London, on 14 September. Edward Blishen, author and educationist, was in the chair.

Circumstantial Evidence

Sir David Renton said he is a middle-of-the-road Anglican who believed in God and considers he needs his help. Posing the question, "Is there a God", Sir David said mankind has always assumed there is. He is the creator, the orderer, the giver of life, who has made man the master of all other creatures. Man is also the master of his own destiny, with opportunities to display his qualities and defects. God, not having physical form, did not make man in his own image. Atheists explain evolution as chance, but many scientists were not atheists. The circumstantial evidence for the existence of a master-mind is overwhelming.

Sir David Renton argued that man is imperfect and needs constant help and guidance. Therefore he needs God. He also needs reassurance, and this is often achieved through prayer, even when prayers are not answered. Sir David believed that the Gospels added to the weight of circumstantial evidence, and that the life of Christ is recorded history. Belief in God is the best way of teaching morals, and gives to children a sense of responsibility to their neighbours and to their creator.

David Tribe said that religious arguments are always circular; if there was a creation evidently there must be a creator. But religious apologists do not give definitions, or do so in terms which imply the desired conclusion. The philosophical argument of Aquinas had been strongly refuted by Kant. Belief in God throughout history was not proof of his existence nor of all men's need for him. The God a "middle-of-the-road" Anglican is now a mixture of the Jewish tribal Yahweh, a hot gospelling Jesus and the Holy Ghost. Man needed God at certain periods in history when it was necessary to have an idea as a political unifier of territorial areas.

Consolation

It seems strange to be talking of a great designer when it is evident there is a lack of design in many spheres. If a supreme being had created all, then he must also have created those things which have plagued mankind.

We all have illusions, and an infinite capacity for self-deception. There are many pathetic ways in which people try to cope with sorrow, disappointment, frustration and loneliness. They may get consolation from belief in God, but that should not blind us to the historic role of religion and to the fact that today, in most of the world's trouble spots, religion is an important factor.

Mr Tribe concluded: "The idea of God has always obstructed progress. We unbelievers do not need God. Indeed, we are glad to be rid of him".

FREETHOUGHT HISTORY SOCIETY FORMED

There is little consciousness of the importance of freethought history to contemporary society even among members of the various organisations which comprise the movement. Perhaps the formation of the Freethought History and Bibliography Society at a meeting in Conway Hall, London, last Saturday, will change this. Nigel Sinnott, who convened the meeting, was appointed honorary organiser. A nominal fee of 20p was fixed for members and supporters.

Members of the National Secular Society, British Humanist Association, South Place Ethical Society, the Trade Union, Labour and Co-operative Democratic History Society and the Thomas Paine Society attended. It was agreed to write in the first instance to the relevant organisations seeking their co-operation in making their collections available for cataloguing and proper preservation of archival material. Later it is hoped that research bodies such as American universities will provide finance for seminars, projects and perhaps the purchase of material to fill gaps in existing collections.

Another meeting will be held within two months to outline further plans. *Freethinker* readers who would like further information about the Freethought History and Bibliography Society should contact Nigel Sinnott, 6 Amherst Road, West Ealing, London W13 8ND.

ANOTHER IRISH HERETIC: JOHN TOLAND, THE FIRST PANTHEIST

NIGEL SINNOTT

This is the second, and last, part of an article on John Toland (1670-1722) whose writings deeply offended the orthodox. He was described by Swift as "the great oracle of the anti-Christians".

In 1702 Toland went to Berlin, and in 1707 visited Hanover, Berlin, Düsseldorf, Vienna and Prague. He ended his tour, almost penniless, in the Netherlands at the end of that year, and there he stayed until 1710. Whilst in Holland, Toland met up with a man who had stolen an old "Saxon" manuscript, written in Latin, from the Royal Library in Paris. Toland's knowledge of Gaelic stood him in good stead; he realised that the document was written not in Anglo-Saxon lettering, but in the Irish style, and from the colophon,¹⁹ written in early Irish, he found out that the work had been written by the monk Maolbrigte²⁰ at Armagh. Toland's patron at the time, Robert Harley (Lord Oxford), bought the manuscript for £20, and it is, now in the British Museum (Harleian 1802).

During his stay in the Netherlands, Toland published (in Latin) his *Adeisidaeman*, "the man without superstition" (The Hague, 1709), which was dedicated to Anthony Collins, the Deist. Its general theme was that superstition was worse than atheism. The book was promptly banned by papal decree.

On returning to England (1710) Toland continued writing. In 1713 he attacked his erstwhile patron, Harley (who had formed a Tory ministry suspected of Jacobite sympathies) in *The Art of Restoring*, which ran through ten editions in three months. In it, Toland compared Harley with General Monk, who had restored Charles II after the death of Cromwell. In 1718 he published *Nazarenus . . .*, which included an account of Maolbrigte of Armagh's manuscript; the "Gospel of Barnabas", a forgery of about the fifteenth century²¹; and arguments on early Irish ecclesiastical history, and the Irish colonies in Scotland. In the same year he wrote *The Destiny of Rome*, the collapse of the Papacy based on a prophecy of St Malachy.

The Last Years

In 1720, Toland (using the *nom-de-plume* Janus Junius Eoganesius²²) published *Pantheisticon; sive Formula Celebrandae Sodalitatis*, dealing with the rites of a hypothetical pantheist, or Socratic club. It was very popular in France, where is stimulated the masonic movement, and duly "gave great offence" to the orthodox.²³

Among Toland's other writings may be mentioned *An Apology for Mr Toland* (1697); *Memoirs of Denzil, Lord Holles* (1699); *The Art of Governing by Parties* (1701); *Vindicius Liberius* (1702); *A Phillipic Oration . . .* (1705; anti-French propaganda based on a MS of 1514 by Cardinal Matthews); *An Account of the Courts of Hanover and Prussia* (1705, 1706); *Origines Judaicae* (1709; a defence of Strabo's account of the Jews); *Reasons for naturalising the Jews in Great Britain* (1714; dedicated to "The Archbishops and Bishops of both Provinces"); *Tetradynamus* (1720; which included "Hypatia; or the history of a most beautiful, most virtuous, most learned,

and every way accomplished young Lady, who was torn to pieces by the clergy of Alexandria, to gratify the pride, emulation, and cruelty of their Archbishop, Cyril, commonly, but undeservedly styled St Cyril"); and *A Critical History of the Celtic Religion . . .*, published posthumously, and which also includes Toland's Gaelic/Breton word lists. In 1720 he wrote a treatise against a proposed Bill to make the Irish Parliament more dependent upon that of Britain.²⁴

Despite his massive literary output, Toland never really made his living from his writing. Throughout his life he depended on the patronage of men such as the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Lord Oxford and finally an Irish "Commonwealth Man", Robert Molesworth. He also dabbled in the "South Sea Bubble" affair. After 1718, Toland's final years were spent in reduced circumstances at Putney, and he suffered considerably from rheumatism. In 1721, "his health went into a rapid decline, abetted by the inept treatment of a physician, which inspired the indomitable Toland, ill as he was, to write a tract entitled *Physic without Physicians* ("They learn their art at the hazard of our lives, and make experiments by our death")"²⁵ The next year he was attacked by jaundice. "He behaved himself throughout the whole course of his sickness with the greatest calmness and fortitude; and looked upon death without the least perturbation of mind, bidding farewell to those about him, and telling them he was going to fall asleep."²⁶

He died at 4 a.m. on Sunday, 11 March, 1722, having written his own florid Latin epitaph a few days beforehand. In it, he describes himself as a cultivator of every kind of learning, and claimed a working knowledge of ten languages; "The Champion of Truth and the Assertor of Liberty, but the follower or client of none; nor was he ever swayed either by menaces or misfortunes, from the path which he had marked out for himself . . ." He concludes: "*Ipse vero aeternum est resurrectus/At idem futurus Tolandus nunquam*" (He himself will undoubtedly rise to eternity, but will never be the same Toland) . . . "*Cuetera ex scriptis pete*" (Seek the rest from his writings).²⁷

A Pioneer of Freethought

Toland's influence has been considerable. For many years after his death Toland's name persisted, despite clerical anathema, in Inishowen where he was known as *Eoghan na Leabhar* ("John of the Books"). Voltaire said that "he could have risen to a fortune had he been more moderate". Both d'Holbach (who translated *Letters to Serena* into French) and Diderot were influenced considerably by his writings—"arguments later exploited by materialists" as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says of *Letters to Serena*,²⁸ and Swift called him "the great oracle of the anti-Christians".²⁹

Sir Leslie Stephen said of Toland: "He showed . . . an acute perception of the importance of historical inquiries into the origin of creeds, though his precarious circumstances prevented him from carrying out continuous

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A. N. WHITEHEAD'S HUMANISM?

PETER CADOGAN

Concern about the Open Society policy of the British Humanist Association seems to be pretty widely spread and a great debate about that is probably more important for us (as organised humanists) than is the other debate about the Common Market. About the definition of our own outlook we can do a great deal; about the Common Market we can do very little. It may be a pity that it is so, but that is how it is.

Barbara Wootton writes in the August issue of the *Humanist*:

But I do not agree with the Humanists that we should be right to adopt a complete political programme, covering the educational system, international relations, attitudes to abortion and everything else. If you want a political programme, go and join a political party. I do not think it is the business of the RPA or the BHA or any of the Humanist or Secular organisations to run a detailed political programme. The particular programme that the Humanists have adopted, as I have pointed out to them, practically matches that of the Liberal Party.

That, I am sure, is our first task—to fill that vacuum (left by the demise of organised Christianity—P.C.). Next we have a second task which is even more difficult. Having adopted our ethical standpoint, we must invoke our reason . . .

This would seem to be fair comment, but some comment on the comment is called for. She does not say what "our ethical standpoint" is, presuming apparently that we all know, and proceeds on the assumption that the focus of Humanism should be "on matters of social welfare".

This is just the trouble. If ethical humanism (or religious

humanism, call it what you will) is to stand up in the present vacuum then it needs to be well defined at considerable length and in the greatest imaginable depth. We have a philosophy or we have nothing. And if things are allowed to drift, as they seem now to have been drifting for some time, we may indeed have nothing.

A Neglected Philosopher

The correspondence on this subject in the *Freethinker* was a little ominous. I hope we are not going to have a personality war. May I make a suggestion? I have just spent a very pleasant fortnight in Devon with the Summer School of the Extra-Mural Board of London University. The working part of it, in my case, was concerned with reading and discussing the philosophy of A. N. Whitehead. It was something of a revelation to me. Here we have the man who was Bertrand Russell's tutor (and later joint author with him of the *Mathematica Principia*) but who, at the age of 63, went back to square one and lived a second life at Harvard. He died at the age of 87 having broken with empiricism and written a series of extraordinary books on the nature of human experience.

He seems to me to have provided new insights into what life is all about and yet he is almost entirely neglected in the country of his birth. No University Department of Philosophy features his work, except quite marginally, and

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studies . . . He is generally noticed . . . as the object of the contempt of respectable divines, but he deserves real credit as a pioneer of freethought".³⁰

What is truly astonishing about Toland is that, despite his fierce support of the Whig cause, he retained a great love for, and made a major contribution to the study of the Irish language at a time when his fellow Whigs were reducing the Gaelic-speaking Irish to poverty and illiteracy by means of the Penal Laws, and Toland's attitude to the Catholics remained unquestioningly Whig. In 1714, he was trotting out the "terrified-Irish-Protestants-in-fear-of-imminent-massacre" story,³¹ in face of the harsh reality of the Penal Laws against Catholics. Otherwise, he was a democrat in the Leveller tradition: "I have always been, am now, and ever will be persuaded that . . . magistrates are made for and by the people, and not the people for and by the magistrates, . . . and that it is lawful to resist . . . tyrants of all sorts . . . I am therefore and avowedly a commonwealth's man".³² Despite his dislike of the name, there was never man born more aptly named Janus, for Toland contained within him the two faces of Irish Gael and historian, and British Whig and polemicist. "He was, and remained Janus", said Heinemann, "exaggerated fighter without; indolent peacemaker within".³³ Summing him up, Heinemann says: "we must allow him to be seen from a straightforward standpoint, beyond good and evil, beyond the battle of parties and sects, of tribes and nations. Then he, a great European, appears astonishingly modern. Then his invective against tyranny and prejudice sounds

as though it were spoken not yesterday, not today, but tomorrow".³⁴ His life's work was a major contribution to the Enlightenment, to heterodoxy, and to rationalism. In his own words: "You may reason yourself into what religion you please; but pray, what religion will permit you to reason yourself out of it?"³⁵

NOTES

¹⁹ A postscript serving the function of a modern title page or foreword.

²⁰ In modern Irish *Maol Brighde*, "devotee of (Saint) Brigit". (There was a pre-Christian goddess of the same name.) Modern scholars date the MS as 1138 AD (see Simms, loc. cit.: pp 316, 317).

²¹ Simms, loc. cit.: p 316.

²² *Eoganesius* is a Latinism meaning "man from *Insula Eogani* (Irish: *Inis Eoghain*; "Inishowen").

²³ Simms, loc. cit.: p 318.

²⁴ Anon. 1815 b, loc. cit.: p 29.

²⁵ Mossmer, loc. cit.: p 141.

²⁶ Anon. 1815 b, loc. cit.: p 33.

²⁷ Anon. 1815 b, loc. cit.: p 33.

²⁸ Anon. 1967 ed., *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 22: p 59.

²⁹ Simms, loc. cit.: p 319 (several quotes).

³⁰ Stephen, loc. cit.: p 921.

³¹ Simms, loc. cit.: p 315.

³² Toland, J., 1702. *Vindicius Liberi*, pp 126-127.

³³ Heinemann, F. H., 1944. "John Toland and the Age of Enlightenment", *Review of English Studies* 20, p 132.

³⁴ Heinemann, 1944, loc. cit.: p 146.

³⁵ Quoted by Mossman, loc. cit.: p 142.

FREETHINKER

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The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Board.

The *Freethinker* can be ordered through any newsagent, or obtained by postal subscription from G. W. Foote and Co. Ltd. at the following rates: 12 months, £2.55; 6 months, £1.30; 3 months, 65p; USA and Canada: 12 months, \$6.25; 6 months, \$3.13.

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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 5p stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

EVENTS

Ashurstwood Abbey Secular Humanism Centre (founded by Jean Straker), between East Grinstead and Forest Row, Sussex. Telephone Forest Row 2589. Meeting every Sunday, 3 p.m.

Humanist Holidays. Details of future activities from Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, Telephone: 01-642 8796.

Humanist Holidays. Long weekend in Holland; either four days from 21 October or three days from 22 October. Cost of flight from Southend to Amsterdam and bed and breakfast: £21 or £18. Can be arranged if 12 people apply immediately to Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone 01-642 8796.

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester, Sunday, 3 October, 6.30 p.m. F. J. Corina: "Have we Gone Sex Mad?"

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, 26 September, 3 p.m. Annual Reunion. Guest of Honour: Michael Lines.

Worthing Humanist Group, Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade, The Pier (West), Sunday, 26 September, 5.30 p.m. Aled Rhys Williams: "Communication and Comprehension".

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NEWS

NEW IDEAS ON IMPRISONMENT

"Prisons are not only inhumane in their present form: they actually encourage crime", says Radical Alternatives to Prison, an organisation which is campaigning for a totally new approach to the question of dealing with offenders who come before the courts and are committed to prison although in many cases imprisonment is an unjust or unnecessary form of punishment. The rebuilding of Holloway Prison is of immediate concern. It will accommodate 500 women and girls and cost £6 million to build. The cost of keeping each prisoner inside, including supervision, will be £40 a week.

What is society getting for this money? Of the 3,700 women and girls who were sent to prison in 1969, only 1,600 had been convicted. The remainder were remanded in custody awaiting trial. Of these 2,100, some 1,500 were later dealt with otherwise than by imprisonment, or else acquitted entirely. Thus nearly half of those sent to prison were never given a prison sentence.

The Howard League for Penal Reform states that 98 per cent of the people in Holloway on remand could safely have been given bail. Susan Dell's report, *Silent in Court*, has shown that in 1967 only 17 per cent of females appearing before magistrates courts before going to prison had legal representation. About one third of girls sent to Borstal by higher courts had no legal help.

Of the 1,600 women and girls who were given prison sentences in 1969, 600 were convicted of theft (mostly from supermarkets) and fraud. A further 600 were convicted for offences such as drunkenness and prostitution. Less than 150 were convicted for indictable crimes of violence, these being the only ones who might be considered dangerous.

One of the most pernicious aspects of prison is the effect on prisoners' children. This is often more serious when it is the mother who is imprisoned. In 1967, over 1,000 children under 16 who were living with their mothers were deprived of her care through imprisonment. Fourteen per cent of such children had to go into the care of the local authority, and another 11 per cent had to go to a new situation. Such disruption of children's lives has been conclusively shown to have long-term harmful effects on children, and can only contribute to the next generation of mental patients and prisoners.

Freethinker readers who would like to know more about RAP should write to the secretary at 104 Newgate Street, London, EC1.

LIBERATION

It seems there may soon be a revival of the cult of the Virgin Mary. Two conferences on the worship of "Our Lady" have just been held in, of all places, Yugoslavia. They were attended by over 100 Catholic theologians, and members of the Eastern Orthodox and Protestant churches, who were welcomed by the Communist deputy mayor of Zagreb. It is believed that such gatherings are also aimed at speeding the ecumenical movement between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches.

AND NOTES

Here in Britain, Archbishop Murphy of Cardiff made a call to bring back the devotion of Mary into the mainstream of worship. He told those attending a pilgrimage at Walshingham: "I am agitating for Mary's Lib. For some unknown reason there has been a soft-peddalling of devotion to the mother of God".

The archbishop and his colleagues cannot have failed to notice mounting opposition among the faithful to celibacy and the Church's anti-sex, anti-pleasure attitude. In the atmosphere now prevailing it will be hard going to work up enthusiasm for virgin worship. More and more Catholics are being liberated from such nonsense, and they are not likely to accept it again.

POPE WARNS OF "A TERRIBLE TRUTH"

Pope Paul VI unwittingly paid a tribute to the forces of secularisation when he recently told his weekly general audience that modern man seemed to be losing sight of "the frightful danger of eternal doom". After warning his audience that hell is a grim reality the Pope declared: "Secularisation is causing us to lose the awareness of the frightful danger regarding our future life. Few speak about these last things, and what they say is little. But the Ecumenical Council reminded us of the truths affecting us, including the terrible truth of a possible eternal punishment including hell, about which Christ minced no words".

The Pope said the last things were shrouded in mystery and it was hard for man to imagine them. Even the lyrical attempts of poets and artists fell short of reality.

THE DEVILS

Ken Russell's film, *The Devils*, has been banned in Italy following a complaint to the authorities by a Verona bank clerk. The film, which stars Vanessa Redgrave and Oliver Reed, had been playing to packed houses.

Attempts are also being made to get the film banned from London cinemas. One of the people behind the move is a Conservative councillor and lay preacher who complained to the police after attending the first performance of *Oh! Calcutta!* He and his friends got themselves a lot of publicity. It was shared by *Oh! Calcutta!* which recently celebrated its first anniversary at a West End theatre.

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BOOKS

THE PERMISSIVE SOCIETY: FACT OR FANTASY?

by John Selwyn Gummer. Cassell, £2.25

This very interesting and very readable book by the Conservative Member for Lewisham West is, despite a declaration that it is impartial in its assumptions, a piece of polemical warfare in the non-progressive cause. Mr Gummer is a member of the Southwark Diocese Pastoral Reorganisation Committee, has been a member of the Education Committee of the Inner London Education Authority and is a publisher by profession.

With his attitudes he clearly cannot discuss the rise of sexual permissiveness in terms of increasing knowledge leading to saner sexual behaviour. For him the story is that the advertisers and the marketeers seized on the growing independence of the young and exploited the appeal of newness and change to such an extent that, inevitably, the moral field as well became ripe for redevelopment, and the permissive society was born. On the "life" issues of suicide, abortion and euthanasia he is, predictably, not on the side that qualifies "Thou shalt not kill" with a different kind of deep compassion for humanity. On television ("Television does not instruct, it impresses" is good) he worries, on behalf of all of us, round the problem that TV is run by a metropolitan minority whose record has not yet earned them our total confidence. His principle themes, however, are sex, pornography, drugs and religion.

On what to do about sex today Mr Gummer is at least realistic. "Western societies must proceed on the assumption that the majority of young people will sleep together outside the marriage bond", and to refuse to provide the sex education and contraceptives needed "is the sort of double standard that must destroy society". Very brave words indeed from a sexual non-liberal who two pages later refers to "superficial cant put out by Martin Cole and organisations like the National Secular Society", and goes on to rebut at length the sex education views of Brigid Brophy, to deplore "progressive claptrap in the classroom" and to say, in a later chapter: "It is again a curious morality which accepts as axiomatic that sexual relations are so important that if marriage is impossible then fornication is better than nothing". There is a clear undercurrent of belief in this and other chapters that society must live by the values it has inherited, because their incorporation into society has made them true for society, so that to seek to change them is, in the first instance, wrong. Thus for this reason, although it is clearly, he agrees, no longer civilised to imprison homosexuals, Mr Gummer insists that society has a right to refuse to do anything which would encourage homosexuality to increase, such as allowing it to become more socially acceptable.

On pornography in all its forms he is extremely interesting, particularly in describing the way big business is waiting to flood us with pornographic books, films and TV cassettes the moment the blue light is given. He reacts to the porn trade statistics of Denmark and USA with all the vigour and anti-porn facts and theories he can muster, including comments which, if valid, question the integrity of the Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography whose report was thrown out by President Nixon. With crude porn containing no trace whatever of non-genital values, with deviations latent in all of us, and with profiteers on the prowl, his total opposition to legislation of porn is completely understandable. But another view of

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the evidence coming out of Denmark is that here is a society which in this and other ways, such as sex education, is successfully throwing off the enormous burden of that *thing* about sex. One can believe, with conviction equal but opposite to Mr Gummer's, that once that burden on all age groups has been removed, most facets of sex will click naturally into beneficial places, and that those which don't will be well within our power to deal with.

With no moral issues supervening, the chapter on drugs is a totally compassionate outline of the problem. Mr Gummer puts the arguments for and against legalising cannabis very clearly. On addictive drugs, he roundly puts the blame for the urge to "drop out" on the increasingly demanding nature of society. Addiction, even unto death, is seen by him as above all a cry for help from the growing number of people for whom modern life is just too much to live with. He describes the rehabilitation centres run by ex-addicts which have achieved many successes in bringing addicts back to themselves and to society. We should allow him the comfort he finds in the fact that these centres only work when they are hierarchical, rule bound, and sexless.

I (a member of a Nonconformist church) read the next chapter, "Meanwhile, where was the Church?" with *total* disbelief. If this is Christianity, then the sooner Christianity dies out the better. Mr Gummer ranges over the debate in which the traditional Church teachings of timeless law and timeless ethics are ranged against the forces of changes—permissiveness, situation ethics, and radically new theology. He is very clearly indeed looking for an opportunity to shut the door firmly in favour of the side that is his spiritual and mental home, the old morality and timeless law side. He finds his chance in a theory that the Church must always lean away from the demands made by the world in order to restore the balance. If our society today becomes dedicated to newness, from the slogans of advertisers and the experiments of permissiveness to the new conclusions of ethical thinkers, then *slam*, home and dry at last. It is, thank Heaven, Christian duty to argue on the side of the old ways, the old standards, and the old social order. The State should allow permissiveness and divorce in this secular age, but the church can demand of Christians chastity and indissolubility of marriage; "it can outlaw homosexual practices as sinful, when the state can legalise them", and, to complete the quotation above that sex being so important that sex outside marriage is justified if marriage is not available: "That may well be the view of the permissive society and of the misreaders of Freud. It cannot reasonably be the view of the Christian".

For one paragraph I am going to cease to be reviewer and return to being a Christian Lib polemicist. If the Christian God exists as the source of all being in all time (and I personally am interested in humanising Christians, not in the-ising Humanists), then he is God of the new as well as of the old. With a theological permissiveness today in which, from the Robinson views downwards "anything goes" in revising our honest views of the nature of God and the life and death of Jesus, and with, down the centuries, "absolute" Christian belief after "absolute" Christian belief being discredited, discarded or developed as society has changed, I have not yet seen a single argument that convinces me that "no sex before marriage" is an essential tenet of Christianity that must be regarded as

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totally unalterable. On what text or interpretation of the Gospels do I base my belief that it could, in fact, be alterable and should be altered now? I would not have a Gospel interpretation as an ally if it came to me on a silver dish with strawberries and cream round it. Nothing in 2,000 years of history leads me to believe that in interpreting the Gospels the churches have a trustworthy record in any way. We regard as "trustworthy", advice which in the past has seemed to have a success record of at least 80-90 per cent. I would put the churches' failure record at 80-90 per cent. Look at the following: the original unholy alliance between Church and State to support each other and subjugate the citizens, sex equals sin, Christians burning Christians over religious differences, women not being sexual beings, sect after sect after sect claiming the only true interpretation, intellectual thinking rebuffed, group righteousness carried to the nth degree, and today's ministry of total irrelevance. Insitution religion has been a disaster that should never have happened. For those who do like Gospel references there are many, such as "Lo, I am with you always", in which there is a hint of a possibility that a little credence may be put in atendency to accept in part that with a late twentieth century Holy Spirit present among us right now, there is no need whatever for the churches to look back 2,000 years and nowhere else for ideas about modern ideals.

Mr Gummer ends his book with a chapter on community in which he lists many things society should do to make itself livable-in again, with the trend to alienation and separation of the age groups reversed and with the present harshness softened. He also makes interesting points about education. With educational emphasis on expression and project work at the expense of knowledge and standards: "We must beware of creating a generation which is able to criticise and challenge, not from knowledge, but only from ignorance". On student unrest: "Education is essentially undemocratic in practice, yet profoundly democratic in outcome". We must hope that as an MP Mr Gummer will not interpret these thoughts against the interests of new co-operative outlooks in education, which are often producing two blades of grass where, not three, but one or none grew before. Finally, more and more people today will find themselves in complete disagreement with his book's conclusion: "That the permissive society ought to be but a passing phase".

JOHN NICHOLSON

THE TRIAL OF LUTHER

by James Atkinson. Batsford, £2.50.

We have biblical authority for the statement (made long before the invention of printing) "of the making of many books there is no end". Acting presumably in accordance with this divine precept, James Atkinson, Professor of Biblical Studies at Sheffield University, produces yet another book; one at that, on the German reformer Martin Luther, the founder *par excellence*, or so he claims, of the historic movement known collectively as Protestantism. This book is not, one should perhaps add, a biography in the technical sense, but as its title indicates, deals primarily with the trial and condemnation of Luther at the imperial Diet of Worms in 1517, perhaps the most dramatic and decisive turning point in his stormy career.

Why, one has to begin by asking, was it really necessary to write this book at all? This question is no disparagement to the author's knowledge and ability, since the book represents an able and well documented presentation of the main facts, in particular relationship with the spectacular events, that marked the highlight of his career and connection with the *cause celebre* at Worms. But why rehash it all over again? The life and times of Martin Luther have been written up time and again, by all kinds of people, at all possible levels and from every conceivable point of view. And nowhere more so than in connection with the spectacular defiance of Luther at the Diet of Worms, addressed to the assembled authorities of Church and State, Pope and Emperor: "Here I stand, I can do nought else, God help me. Amen". This historic defiance has been held to mark the end of the Middle Ages. "Every schoolboy" (in Lord Macaulay's cliché) has surely heard the story of Worms; including presumably the anonymous author of that notorious howler: "Luther was a very wicked man, whom the Emperor put in prison, and fed on a diet of worms"! Actually, the saga of Luther has become common knowledge universally, even to the point of eclipsing perhaps more important reformers, and the only apparent justification for retelling the old, old story would presumably be to approach the whole problem of the German Reformation, along with Martin Luther's own place in it from a new, and if possible, previously unknown angle. This task was performed a few years ago with outstanding ability by Archibald Robertson in his book *The Reformation*, perhaps the most permanent work by that most able author. Robertson approached the whole problem afresh from a Marxist and humanist angle. But there is nothing at all novel in Atkinson's purely traditional approach from the angle of orthodox Protestantism.

Perhaps, however, the author might claim novelty for his suggestion, made explicitly, that our own generation has still a long way to go before it catches up with Martin Luther? This sounds a rather doubtful compliment to our no doubt imperfect generation, which at least no longer rejects Copernican astronomy as Luther did, nor puts witches to death, of which authentically biblical practice Luther apparently still approved. It would seem then, our generation can only "catch up with Luther" by advancing —backwards?

Professor Atkinson is no doubt a learned man, and he sets out the well-worn facts about Luther at Worms with adequate academic knowledge. His book is readable and well produced, and no doubt still useful to anyone not previously acquainted with the life and times of Martin Luther. But what he appears to lack, apparently completely, is any real historical sense, including the sense of period. The German Reformation of the sixteenth century was the outcome, and on the whole and despite the criticisms of contemporary liberals like Erasmus, the progressive outcome of its time and place. As was Luther himself. But to try to turn it into a universal moral, as our author does, for all future ages including our own, is to reduce universal history to a meaningless chaos, and the German Reformation itself to a meaningless event.

Both Luther, and the movement of which he was the historic initiator, were the tools of universal history in a particular place and time. But their problems were not ours, and our now long overdue reformation cannot possibly be theirs. With these reservations, this is an able and well documented book.

F. A. RIDLEY

LETTERS

Protecting the Badger

The announcement on Monday that the League Against Cruel Sports has bought the famous St Gorran Badger Wood, near the Lizard, Cornwall, launched "National Badger Week". This new drive by the League aims to increase public awareness of the need to protect this delightful and harmless animal from senseless cruelty and persecution to which it is frequently subjected, particularly in the name of sport. We believe that this is the first ever badger sanctuary in this country and that we are the only organisation to have spent a substantial sum of money specifically for this purpose. We feel sure that this positive contribution to conservation of the badger will receive wide approval.

The public can contribute to the success of the Badger Week by ensuring they do not buy articles made from badger hair or skins, by refusing to buy badger cubs as pets (they are usually obtained by digging out, at which time the mother is killed, and are quite unsuitable as pets), and by reporting to us, giving date and place, any known recent killing of badgers, including those killed on the roads, and any wrecking of setts.

We shall be pleased to supply free to *Freethinker* readers who are further interested in the badger, our booklet *The Cast Against Badger Digging*, on application to the undersigned.

MARK DAVIES, Secretary,
League Against Cruel Sports,
17-21 Chandos House, Buckingham Gate, London, SW1.

Opportunity Knocks

Julius Lewin refers cautiously to the possibility of humanists exporting their beliefs "beyond the frontiers of Europe". The prospect of Britain's entry into the Common Market surely presents secular humanists in this country with the rather more immediate concern of "enlargements" within the frontiers of Europe. Indeed, as against the undesirable importation of Catholicism, there may well be the stimulation of exporting freethought to places amongst the most needy in this God-fearing world.

CHARLES BYASS.

Bradlaugh and his Critics

In his letter (*Freethinker*, 11 September) Nigel Sinnott informs us that his clearing of W. Stewart Ross' grave was a tribute to the man as a poet. Oh dear! Has Mr Sinnott ever read any of Saladin's poetry? If he has, then surely his taste is lacking in certain elementary discrimination. For, although I am an admirer of Saladin's work in the educational and freethought fields, I would be the first to admit that his verse is hackneyed and melodramatic, a third-rate imitation of Sir Walter Scott. If the Young Humanists wished to scrub the tomb of a freethought poet, then certainly they could have found a worthier marble than that beneath which Saladin's remains lie.

In his second paragraph Mr Sinnott hints at Saladin's rumoured part in the compilation of Charles R. Mackay's libelous life of Bradlaugh. Before he pursues this line further, will he please furnish evidence for this suggestion? If one is interested in the matter, however, it is worth reading the annotated edition of the *Life* in the British Museum; libelous some of it might be, but it also contains some lively truths about the Bradlaugh nobody knows (or about whom nobody wishes to be told). Strange that the great champion of the freedom of expression should be so swift to put down a work which contained criticism of himself. Strange too that the only partner of any merit with whom Bradlaugh was consistently able to work happened to have been a woman who was in love with him. Is it just coincidence that all other freethinkers with minds of their own found him an impossible partner?

J. STEWART ROSS.

Press Freedom

In recent months we have witnessed the gradual emergence of a backlash by Right-wing elements against the free expression of radical views and liberal sentiments. Nationally, the courts have prosecuted and severely punished those responsible for producing *The Little Red Schoolbook* and *OZ*.

This highly disturbing trend has now been followed by certain local newspapers such as the *Bromley Times* (one of the *Kentish Times* series) which recently suppressed two letters which I wrote as Press officer of Bromley Young Liberals. The letters, criticising the local Conservative MP, the Tory-controlled Bromley Council and the political bias of the paper itself, were refused publication.

The *Bromley Times*, though claiming to be completely impartial and independent of all political parties, could not give a satisfactory explanation of why it had refused to publish these particular letters while publishing those on behalf of the Conservative Party and other respectable organisations. The freedom of expression at local, as well as national level, is in danger of being steadily eroded.

KEVIN PAGE.

DAVID TRIBE'S PRESIDENT CHARLES BRADLAUGH, MP

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"Thorough" was one of the great nineteenth century praise words. He earned it and was much loved and admired, not only in England. David Tribe, who has inherited some of his place as top freethinker, has certainly done a thorough job.

—Times Educational Supplement

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his books are almost unobtainable in the shops. His critics get by by murmuring that he is "difficult" or "obscure" and this is nonsense.

He has probably been neglected by humanists because he calls his philosophy metaphysics (which simply means "after physics") and because at the end he invokes something he call "God". However, he defines God as "the sum of all potentialities" much as the ancient Greeks did. He discounts the whole of the history of organised Christianity except as a means whereby the great achievements of antiquity reached the modern world. It seems to me that his philosophy stands up perfectly well without his "God" and in his later work he did, in fact, tend to let his "God" drop.

It is quite impossible to try to do justice to Whitehead here. All I want to suggest is that we do some serious homework on humanism as philosophy and take a long hard look at what Whitehead, doubtless unwittingly, does for us.

YOUR 1972 POCKET DIARY

This year, for the first time, freethinkers, humanists, rationalists, secularists, or whatever, can have their own pocket diary, containing 16 pages of specialised information (mainly useful names and addresses, plus a few forward dates of 1972 events in the humanist movement), as well as the usual week-to-an-opening diary pages and all the usual features, including London theatre and Underground maps. All this, incredibly, in a small pocket size (4.1" x 2.8") diary that won a design award last year. Just the thing for your own use, and that of like-minded friends to whom you may (dare we suggest it?) send Xmas gifts.

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