

OBSCENITY LAWS: BOTH SIDES OF THE QUESTION AT YOUNG PUBLISHERS' CONFERENCE

The Society of Young Publishers organised a conference on *Obscenity and Censorship—the Publisher's Responsibility?* in London last week. The speakers included Sir Cyril Black, Conservative Member of Parliament for 20 years until 1970 and a prominent defender of Christian morality, Ed Victor, director and editor of *Ink*, David Cooper, author of *Death of the Family*, and the Bishop of Hereford. The intention of the conference organisers was to help each publisher to decide where his responsibility lies when the climate of opinion is changing so rapidly that a position taken up a year or two ago may now have become quite irrelevant. They aimed to get suggestions for practical action over the present obscenity laws and their application. They also hoped that by bringing together the two sides in reasoned debate some common understanding between them would be established.

Pushing Back the Limits

David Tribe writes: In opening the conference John Trevelyan recalled the tribute of an Austrian sociologist, "In your country you can discuss the most fundamental things—the meaning of life or religion—and then go away and have a drink together. That is something which is impossible in Central Europe". It seemed to me that John Calder and Sir Cyril Black, sitting tensely side by side, discreetly winced, but the issue did not arise as Sir Cyril left early.

Any debate on obscenity and censorship readily falls, as Ed Victor observed, into cliché and "Sir Cyril gave a good list of clichés". But they were well strung together and presented in the benevolent manner of a family doctor prescribing cascara for his patient's good. He too began with a quotation, from an old Chinese proverb: "If only those people would speak who were qualified to do so the world would be full of a profound silence". And he admitted that, as neither a lawyer nor a publisher, he had "no qualifications for speaking on such a subject". But Mrs Mary Whitehouse, who was scheduled to speak but prevented by illness, will be delighted to hear that disqualification did not deter him and he spoke rather longer than anyone else. (This did not matter as the platform, and particularly the floor, was weighted against him.) In tracing the history of the obscenity laws he noted, the "considerable achievement" down the years of the libertarians, who have turned from lawyers to "ordinary people", and from them to panels of experts to decide what is obscene, and now wish to abolish these laws altogether. And, though the chairman kept assuring us that it was a polite occasion, Sir Cyril introduced the first impoliteness: "It is in my opinion a fact that most if not all the agitation for repeal of the obscenity laws has come from those people financially interested, directly or indirectly, in publication of obscene books or doubtful books that some people could call obscene". While he "couldn't give the name and address of someone corrupted by pornography with the same proof as I could show that two and two make four", he had "no doubt" that such corruption occurred and cited the rise in crimes of violence, sexual offences, illegiti-

mate births and VD—"the lot"—since the 1959 Act was passed. He also cited Lord Hailsham to the effect that if literature were held not to deprave it could not be said to uplift.

The 1959 Act did not help the two lion-hearted Richards, Neville and Handyside, observed Ed Victor, one of the editors and directors of *Ink*, whose printers and distributors are being harassed and which he believes to be "next on the list" for prosecution. He had just returned from Jim Haynes's second Wet Dream Festival in Amsterdam, and feared that the only hazard of pornography was that it might bore people with sex itself. In the Netherlands he found that laws against porn and soft drugs—kept on the statute book to satisfy international conventions and the WHO—were not being enforced, and that as a consequence porn merchants were having to remainder their stock. What he admired about the underground Press was that in fields like this it was helping to "push back the limits" so that publishers no longer had to think about sending a MS containing "fuck" to the printers. But he—and John Trevelyan, who thought the judicial shooting of a Nigerian soldier before the world's television cameras the most obscene thing he had seen—was disturbed to read that Americans are likely to be exposed in childhood to 18,000 murders on the box. "I firmly believe in no censorship but I do have personal reservation about violence."

"The Christian Conscience"

Though its Board for Social Responsibility has published a statement on obscene publications the Church of England has, the Bishop of Hereford said, "no particular view" on the subject. His personal view was that "well-adjusted people seem to come to no harm" from cannabis or porn, but a disturbed person may come to grave harm. Porn merchants were hypocritical when they said they acted for the public good. But he was no authority and declined to make his maiden speech in the Lords during the Earl of Longford's debate because he "didn't want to

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GOD GETS ON MY NERVES

CHARLES BYASS

It is a very human idea that there surely "must be" some superhuman power responsible for the universe in which we live. It is an idea which the majority of humans seem to associate with a "meaning" and a "purpose" of life. This superpower is generally expressed more specifically in the convenient ambiguity of the word God. Moreover, those who concentrate in the appropriate manner can pick up messages relayed from the said god. These messages keep their human receivers informed as to the godly ways to live their lives, die their deaths and live their after-lives. When one considers the uncertainties involved in such a communication system, it is hardly surprising that not every human appears to have picked up the same messages—or, more reverently, message.

From messages received, we are offered a startling variety of interpretations concerning absolutely godly ways of behaving. There are, currently, a wide range of competing godly dogmas which have been experienced and are being expressed. Moreover, belief in a religious ideology apparently carries with it the godly duty of indoctrinating all and sundry (children first) with absolutes enshrined in that belief.

(Continued from front page)

spend the rest of my life with my name associated with the subject". During that debate he was shocked when Lord Platt (whom he did not name) drew attention to "obscenity" in the Bible. His own definition of the word was restricted to what was "intended to be pornographic" and clearly this was not true of the Bible. He noted with pleasure that there was little complaint over the hundreds of thousands of porny magazines destroyed every year by the Customs and assumed—wrongly as it happened—that "this is an area in which surely we're all agreed". For this reason he wanted, like Charles Curran, "clear" obscenity laws to be used only when the "Christian conscience", which should be the "only criterion", failed.

Looking like a blend of Russian Orthodox patriarch and hippie guru, the psychiatrist David Cooper felt "a bit deprived of real ignorant reactionary opposition" and regretted the absence of Mrs Whitehouse. It was unfortunate, he said, that works of literature should be examined by "unsuitable judges, browbeaten juries and magistrates with kinks". (At least this is what I *think* he said, for I found him very difficult to follow.) If obscene literature "teaches us to make more love to more people or even to masturbate properly—i.e. without guilt—might this not be better than encouraging violent repression in Northern Ireland, Vietnam and South Africa?" The books that he believed should be burnt were statute books of unjust laws. "There is a clear ethical imperative to break the law now." As for television violence, that is the "product of capitalist society at a certain stage". The Moors murderers Brady Hindley should have read more of de Sade to understand him better.

Sexual Outlets

Describing himself and Marion Boyars as "the most puritanical publishers in Britain", John Calder said that it was the function of publishers to "open minds to a wider world", not to concentrate on a disturbed minority

Thus some superpower becomes a god; god becomes the living message; the message becomes the meaning and purpose of life. In short: meaning and purpose become superimposed on the original idea that these surely "must be" some superpower . . .

Protection

Now whether humans (or any of their "one true gods") like it or not, the human nervous system reveals its potency at the time of human birth. The first shriek of the new born is a sign—as far as babies are concerned—which holds the promise of "all systems go". The shriek expresses an experience of discomfort (if not pain) which is a vital condition for staying alive. The new born's need is not so much for any god but for air to breathe, milk to drink, heat to keep warm. If there is any lack of such essentials, a healthy nervous system will experience discomfort and react in favour of acquiring whatever goes towards a sense of wellbeing. It is in this way that nervous systems, in general, protect their owners from physical

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which needs psychiatric help. Because of Sir Cyril Balck, Calder and Boyars spent two years and £20,000 defending *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, and Mr Calder was as ready to speculate on the motives of his opponents as was Sir Cyril. If the Rev. David Sheppard felt "not unscathed" by the book, perhaps it was because "it made him aware of something in himself he wasn't aware of before. I hope this made him a better Christian. . . . I'm not bitter against Sir Cyril; I'm very sorry for him—the way he was brought up, his experiences". Just as a lot of the backlash today is the result of provocation of the old by the young, so "simple sexual envy is the core of censorship". He wouldn't censor anything at all. "How will anyone know anything is bad, wrong, evil unless it is questioned?" The racialist literature in Hitler's Germany was the product not of freedom but of repression; it was promoted while answers to it were banned. All "violence stems from frustration . . . when people can't get what they want in another way". In Ireland there is violence because people can't find an answer to their problems. And there are many outlets for sexual energy. "Leading campaigns to clean up TV is also a form of sex."

In the long discussion which followed the political origin of censorship was stressed. John Trevelyan said that it was ironical that Lord Goodman should have the "reputation of being responsible for all the filth in London" when he "may have been embarrassed" by the report of the Arts Council Working Party which advocated the repeal of the obscenity laws. The Bishop of Hereford feared such an attempt would lead to a backlash. In taking a libertarian view because she believed that censorship arose from a desire to find a scapegoat, that this arose from guilt and guilt from fear, the editor of an Anglican magazine admitted that her attitude was a minority one within the Church. Members of the audience seemed generally to consider that while there might be evil in the world it was impossible to define obscenity in any way that could be applied legally and that literature did not have a simplistic effect on behaviour.

THE MISERY OF CHRISTIANITY

JOACHIM KAHL

The English translation of Joachim Kahl's book "The Misery of Christianity: A Plea for a Humanity Without God" was published last week by Penguin Books. An extract is printed below, by kind permission. Joachim Kahl was once a Protestant pastor in Germany. He graduated at the University of Marburgh in the faculty of Protestant theology. He left the Church in 1967. He strongly attacks Christianity, and argues in his book that man's only salvation is in rational thought.

What about the common Protestant assertion that the "secularity of the world" is a direct consequence of the Christian faith, explaining, for example, why it is only in the Christian west that technological progress could have been so great?

This argument fails completely when confronted with the absurd inference that Christianity was, for the eighteen or so centuries which preceded the secularisation of the world, living continually in total contradiction to its own aims and intentions. It is, after all, a simple and undeniable fact that, during this long period lasting hundreds of years, the Churches did everything but secularise the world. Both the world of nature and human society were believed to be full of occult and sacral powers—they were certainly not freed from the grip of demons and spirits by the Churches. There was deep and widespread belief in spirits and devils throughout the Christian centuries and this belief is still with us today. Those who denied that witches existed were branded as atheists, because faith in God and faith in demons were inextricably interwoven. Those who opposed the monarchy were also condemned as atheists, because faith in God and faith in feudalism were inseparably entwined.

All movements or books which sought to remove God from the world and secularise it in any way were ruthlessly condemned. Giordano Bruno was burnt to death on 2 February, 1600. Galileo was forced in 1633 to recant his teaching, which contradicted the biblical image of the world. All the books which taught the new cosmology were placed on the Index of Forbidden Books. It was not until 1822 that the Holy Office in Rome consented to allow the Copernican cosmology to be disseminated among Christians.

Education: The Church's Record

Darwin's teaching was rejected vehemently. Even as late as 1925, a trial was held in the State of Tennessee at the instigation of a group of fervent Protestants—the so-called "ape trial"—in which a teacher was condemned for teaching the theory of evolution at his school. The law on the basis of which he was condemned has not yet been repealed. Pope Pius XII was also opposed to the theory of the origin of the species (see the encyclical *Humani Generis* of 1950).

Another fact which radically refutes the favourite Protestant argument that Christianity is ultimately responsible for the secularisation of the world is the chronic Christian deficiency in the sphere of education. It is certainly true, of course, that schooling and university educa-

tion originated in the Church. But, although Christian apologists are always claiming this as an honour, the Church cannot really be proud of it. On the contrary—Christianity is directly responsible for the appalling ignorance and lack of education which is one of the most striking aspects of the history of the west. Whereas in pagan Greece and Rome people even at the lowest social level were generally able to read and write, and scientific studies were pursued at the academies, the overwhelming majority of people living in the Christian west have been illiterate throughout the centuries.

The idea of giving a basic education to all people did not even arise in more than fifteen hundred years of Christianity. It was not even envisaged as an ideal worth striving towards, let alone putting into effect. Even today, there are countless Christians living in Italy, Spain and Portugal who can neither read nor write. The Christian west has not produced any real education at all, either for the mass of the people or for the intellectually gifted—if there are good Christian educational institutions today, they are directly or indirectly based on the secular model.

Faith Against Rationalism

Even the much-praised medieval universities of, for example, Paris and Bologna cannot be used to correct the miserable picture of Christian ignorance as soon as it is remembered that it took Christianity twelve hundred years to produce them.

My contention that Christianity has brutalised men and kept them ignorant, rather than educating them and raising them up, is not based on some bold but false claim made by a handful of outspoken freethinkers, but on a historically demonstrable and bitter fact. This fact is not the result of the chance failure of a long succession of popes who were hostile to learning and limited in their vision to provide any suitable education, but of the irreconcilable opposition of faith to rational thought.

THE MISERY OF CHRISTIANITY

JOACHIM KAHL

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The first couple in Britain to have music at a register office wedding left a Brighton ceremony last Saturday as a record of Mendelssohn's Wedding March was played. They were the first to benefit from the victory of Brighton council and its registrar, Frank Harris, after a ten-year battle with the Registrar-General to allow music at such ceremonies.

FREETHINKER

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

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

The *Freethinker* is obtainable at the following addresses. London: Collets, 66 Charing Cross Road, WC2; Housmans, 5 Caledonian Road, King's Cross, N1; Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street (Angel Alley), E1; Rationalist Press Association, 88 Islington High Street, N1; Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC2; Freethinker officer, 103 Borough High Street, SE1. Glasgow: Clyde Books, 292 High Street. Brighton: Unicorn Bookshop, 50 Gloucester Road, (near Brighton Station).

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.

Belfast Humanist Group, War Memorial Building, Waring Street, Belfast, Monday, 8 November, 8 p.m. Film on Abortion.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Imperial Centre Hotel, First Avenue, Hove (sea front), Sunday, 7 November, 5.30 p.m. Richard Clement: "Robert Owen, 1771-1858".

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Empire Grill, North Street, Brighton, Saturday 20 November, 7 p.m. Annual Dinner. Tickets £1.10 from Mrs Pariente, 97 Valley Drive, Brighton, or Mr Millard, 142 Western Road, Hurstpierpoint, Sussex.

Croydon Humanist Society, Wednesday, 17 November, 7.45 p.m., Fairfield Halls, Croydon. Public Meeting: "Secular Education Now!"

Freethought History and Bibliography Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Saturday, 6 November, 5 p.m. A Meeting of members and friends.

Guildford Humanist Group, Guildford House, Guildford, Thursday, 11 November, 7.45 p.m. Grace Berger: "Moral Judgements and the Law".

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

Leicester Secular Society, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester, Sunday, 7 November, 6.30 p.m. Martin Page: "The Role of Secular Humanism Today".

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, 7 November, 11 a.m. John Lewis: "The Philosophy of Sir Karl Popper". Tuesday, 9 November, 7 p.m. Charles Marshall: "Cars, Lorries, Noise, Smell and Congestion".

LEGALISED BROTHELS?

Paul Daniels, founder and chairman of the National Youth Protection Movement, who announced some time ago that he was emigrating to New Zealand because of lack of support, has decided to remain in Britain to conduct a campaign for the establishment of legalised brothels. He said last week that prostitution in this country, being illegal, results in exploitation and great danger for young girls.

Mr Daniels regards our national attitude on this question as hypocritical. We prefer to ignore the fact that there are over 30,000 prostitutes in what has become a million-pound-a-year industry. No doubt there will be many critics of Mr Daniels' scheme which would "approve" prostitution.

Mr Daniels and his colleagues have not produced any detailed plan, but they have turned the limelight once again on the question of legalised prostitution. Although many people find the idea offensive, surely we should be prepared to face the matter realistically. If brothels were established by the national or local authorities, a great deal of human misery would be averted. They would do much to curtail racketeering, coercion and violence. It would not be necessary for girls to find "protectors" to whom they usually finish up handing over most of their earnings. Certainly they would be protected from violence from their customers. The prostitute runs a far greater risk of being murdered than a policeman or any other member of society.

One of the very real benefits of a legalised brothel system is that it would facilitate health checks. The dangers of venereal disease were ignored by those respectable Victorians who regarded prostitution as a socially useful profession; unmarried men could satisfy their sexual appetite with prostitutes, and still be able to lead a virginal bride to the altar. The aftermath was often disastrous, with wife and offspring also affected by the disease. Today some of the dafter exponents of sexual freedom attempt to minimise the dangers of VD claiming, or implying, that modern methods of treatment have made it little more serious than a bad cold. Medical experts—and they are not all Moral Reformers or Roman Catholics—are less optimistic. Any scheme which would reduce the incidence of VD is surely worth considering.

Another advantage of a legalised brothel scheme is that there would be considerably less annoyance of women pedestrians by men looking for prostitutes. And it would be possible for girls to retire from the profession at any age without fear of being roughed up by a ponce or a gang.

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S AND NOTES

FREETHINKER FUND

Our gratitude is expressed to those readers who sent donations during September. Mrs C. N. Airey, 45p; Anonymous, £1; R. Brownlee, £1.70; W. Collins, £3; C. C. Coombs, 45p; G. Cunelli, 35p; T. H. Grimley, £1; A. Henry, 25p; Christine Hyatt, £1; J. Kent, 35p; R. Mathewson, £1.45; Mrs J. Monrad, 35p; S. C. Merrifield, 35p; V. C. Mann, £2; H. Newman, £1.40; J. Polak, £1.45; T. Stringer, 27p; Mrs L. Vanduren, 25p; D. Wright, 45p. Already acknowledged: £162.97; total to date: £180.49.

HYPOCRITE

For five years Italy's neo-fascist party, the Italian Social Movement led by Signor Giorgio Almirante, resisted all attempts to reform the country's divorce laws. They were solidly backed by the Vatican party, the Christian Democrats, and by a number of Church organisations. But the Divorce Bill came into effect earlier this year. Now comes the news that Almirante is seeking a divorce, much to the embarrassment of his party which expected to gain seats in parliament at the next election.

Almirante married Gabriella Magnatti at a civil ceremony 20 years ago. She had been previously married but had obtained an annulment. They had a daughter, but several years later Almirante met an attractive widow whom he married in a religious ceremony valid only for Roman Catholics. This marriage was allowed under canon law as "a matrimony of conscience". But, according to State records, Almirante is still legally married to his first wife. And so the Catholic politician who relentlessly opposed the introduction of Italy's Divorce Bill will be one of the first to take advantage of it.

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ROBERT OWEN AT UNITY THEATRE

London's Unity Theatre and the London Co-operative Education Committee are presenting a joint production of *Robert Owen*, a play by R. Gregson, to mark the bicentenary of Robert Owen, one of the founders of the Co-operative Movement. The play opened at Unity on Friday, 29 October, and will be performed every Friday, Saturday and Sunday at 7.45 p.m. until Sunday, 5 December.

The story covers Robert Owen's life and the development of his ideas including the New Lanark experiment, the formation of the early Co-operative shops at Toad Lane and Rochdale and the attempts that Owen made to improve conditions in factories and spinning mills. Gregson's original script has been specially adapted for Unity by Arnold Hinchliffe, and the play is directed by Declan Mulholland.

PAINÉ BIRTHPLACE

The Secretary of State for the Environment has decided against the total demolition of Grey Gables, a house in Thetford, Norfolk, which is associated with the birth of Thomas Paine. It had been argued by the Thomas Paine Society, and others, that a cottage where Paine was born in 1737 was incorporated into the larger house. A Department of the Environment inspector had recommended complete demolition.

A local firm of solicitors who want to develop the site for their offices have been told they may pull down one wing of the building, but special care must be taken to keep demolition machinery away from the part to be preserved.

GOD GETS ON MY NERVES

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harm. A healthy nervous system does indeed sometimes send urgent messages apropos of such things as ulcers, appendices, etc. Also, if a hand touches the flame, the owner feels pain and withdraws the hand; further, the pain is expressed by the uttering of one, or more than one, exclamation—whether sacred or profane is neither here nor there. The sense of pain protests against injury and protects against further damage; without this sense, our bodies would hardly survive for very long.

Thus, physical wellbeing depends on a healthy functioning of the nervous system. In the same way, emotional wellbeing depends on an experience of emotional discomfort, or pain. If another person is seen, or known, to be in distress (whether physical or otherwise), the healthy nervous reaction is to feel emotional pain towards that person's distress. This emotional pain reacts in favour of doing something to relieve the other person's distress. An absence of this feeling is as dangerous to a person's general wellbeing as that of an absence of sensing physical pain. Moreover, just as we utter an exclamation when the flame touches our hand, so we express our indignation against another person's distress. In this way, our physical and emotional wellbeing is related to our mental wellbeing; the wellbeing of all three depends on a healthy functioning of the nervous system.

It could perhaps be suggested that both the meaning and the purpose of our senses are to be found in the values we experience in the struggle for wellbeing. This struggle can never be won, for life can never be static or absolute. Something is always happening. We remain alive through picking up the messages relayed from our healthy nervous systems.

BOOKS

CHRISTIANITY AND EVOLUTION by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Translated by Rene Hague. Collins, £2.25.

This is a collection of manuscripts most of which have not before been published, written between 1920 and 1953. It includes the note on *Some Possible Representations of Original Sin* sent to the Superior General of the Jesuits in Rome in 1922 which probably led to Chardin's exile from the Institut Catholique in Paris to China where he engaged in archaeological work. The papers and notes were written mainly to fellow theologians to persuade them that Catholicism needed rejuvenating, particularly in the light of evolutionary theory. How successful he was can be gauged from one note written from New York: "Four years ago I sent to Rome, under the title *The Heart of the Problem*, a short report in which I tried to make my superiors understand what seemed to me to be the real source of modern religious restlessness". He received a cold answer from Rome to the effect that "my diagnosis did not coincide with the ideas currently accepted in the Eternal City".

In evaluating this book it is necessary to keep in mind the kind of people to whom the items in the collection were addressed. A book written on theoretical physics for professional physicists would have much in it that would baffle the layman. But it would be inappropriate to complain of this. Similarly, these notes and papers directed to people steeped in the subtleties of theological disputation will have passages of obscurity for the general reader.

Chardin saw evolution as a movement from a material stratum of relatively simple particles through the emergence of life and consciousness, to the present level at which human beings are capable of becoming ever more conscious, of reflecting about themselves as conscious beings. This is a picture of evolution, in general outline, that most people, who think in evolutionary terms would broadly accept. But Chardin did not rest there. He wanted evolutionary theory to fit in with Church dogma and had therefore to give it a theological setting which, he hoped, would make it acceptable to the guardians of Catholic dogma. He had to find a place for such concepts as Original Sin, Incarnation, Redemption and so on. He accomplished this by regarding evolution as a movement directed by God as immanent in the process, as animating it towards ever distant heights of consciousness and freedom. For the naïve idea of a God above the world he substituted the idea of a God ahead of the world, acting as a peak of attraction, towards which evolution converges: "By disclosing a world-peak, evolution makes Christ possible, just as Christ, by giving meaning and direction to the world, makes evolution possible".

No arguments for this view are offered. It is, as he acknowledges, an effort to make the facts of evolution fit in with theological dogma—"to conform to the facts of experience and at the same time to meet the demands of faith".

The article of faith with which he seemed most concerned and figures in most of these notes—he seems haunted by it—is original sin. He has some scathing comments, touched with a biting sarcasm, to make of the traditional notions of original sin and the fall of man. Original sin, he wrote, is "a static solution of the problem

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of evil"; it is "constricting and debilitating". Of the fall he wrote: "Finally, if we accept the hypothesis of a *single, perfect* being put to the test *on only one occasion*, the likelihood of the Fall is so slight that one can only regard the Creator as having been extremely unlucky". In an interesting discussion on the possibility of life elsewhere in the universe, he asked whether original sin and incarnation are to be thought of as only having occurred on earth—"the other mankinds being, in addition, duly 'informed' of it in some way (!?)". He finds this a ridiculous postulation and quotes as "embarrassing" the advice given by a teacher of theology "to be wary of pilots of 'flying saucers': if they landed from a planet not affected by original sin, they would be *unkillable*".

In place of these naïve ideas Chardin suggests that we think of original sin as expressing the difficulties and tribulations that an evolving universe must encounter. It expresses the imperfections of man in process of development. Chardin thus empties the concept of its theological meaning based on the idea of the disobedience of Adam but in so doing he makes it redundant. His superiors probably realised this; hence the pressure on him to leave the Institut Catholique where he had been presenting his ideas to young seminarians. They could see that his retention of the official jargon did not lessen the danger of his ideas.

Chardin's was a troubled mind. He showed this in a paper *How I Believe* in which he spoke of his doubts. He wrote: "Certain though I am—and ever more certain—that I must press on in life as though Christ awaited me at the term of the universe, at the same time I feel no special assurance of the existence of Christ. Believing is not seeing. As much as anyone, I imagine, I walk in the shadows of faith. The shadows of faith: to justify this dimness—so strangely incompatible with the sunlight of the Godhead—the doctors of the Church explain that the Lord deliberately hides himself from us in order to test our love. One would have to be irretrievably committed to mental gymnastics, one would have never to have met in one's own self or in others the agonies of doubt, not to feel the hatefulness of this solution". It is true that in a note to this statement of belief, the translator or some other person, claims that Chardin's doubts diminished—"The mists were later to clear". Nevertheless, I think his words probably accurately reflect the anguished feelings of many sincere Catholics who, perhaps in the night's stillness, question the fundamentals of their faith. This is a book for such people. It can serve them as a stepping stone to the freedom from dogma and superstition that Chardin never quite reached.

REUBEN OSBORN

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REVIEWS

THE THOUGHTS OF PETER SIMPLE: EXTRACTS FROM "WAY OF THE WORLD" COLUMN IN "THE DAILY TELEGRAPH", 1969-1971.

Johnson Publications, £1.75

I, who am generally regarded by my friends as a good, iconoclastic, right-thinking liberal progressive, have a confession to make. For a number of years I have nursed a secret, illicit and revanchist pleasure in reading Peter Simple's "Way of the World" column, in which he records the day-to-day lives of my old favourites like Mrs Dutt-Pauker (the Hampstead thinker) and her descendant Bert Brecht Mao Che Odinga; Dr Castrumba (the freelance revolutionary leader), Rentacrowd, Dr Heinz Kiosk, Clare Howitzer, Godless Jack of Simpleham; and those eminent trendy ecclesiastics, the Rev John Goodwheel ("Apostle of the Motorways") and Dr Spacely-Trellis (producer of the "avant-garde, pornographic diocesan magazine, *Sex-tuagesima*") . . . these, and a host of others, not forgetting the Department of Applied Vandalism at the University of that "Samarkand of the North Midlands", Stretchford.

My main crisis of conscience has been to read Peter Simple without actually having to purchase the filthy fascist rag in which he usually publishes. Now my years of shame are ended—no more nocturnal grubbing in dustbins for sticky pages of the *Telegraph*, reeking of chips; no more furtive visits to public library reading rooms and the degradation of having to scavenge for newsprint in London Underground carriages. Peter Simple has emerged as an anthology between plain, hard covers, suitable for reading by consenting adults in private.

It is probably a truism to say that Peter Simple is a mixture of the perceptive and the wilfully blind; the witty and the utterly infuriating, as so are the rest of humanity in varying proportions. The present anthology is a *cri de coeur* against "old-school tie strangled bureaucrats", the Mammon of industrial "progress" and "productivity", mass manipulation by television and the media, and "Western liberalism, goggle-eyed, inane and sometimes curiously moving". I was kept both uproariously entertained and infuriated by this book: Simple's attitudes to birth control and race raised my hackles so often that they fell off about half-way through. The high-flying twaddle that the author trots out will, fortunately, be obvious to any reader to the left of the Monday Club, but I fear that some of the home truths will be as easily overlooked. Like Oscar Wilde, Peter Simple can be both witty and profoundly serious in the same breath; like Betjeman, his protest against blind industrialism is hilarious, but a grim warning. I particularly enjoyed Simple's comments on the Common Market, the republication of *Mein Kampf*, and the death of Bertrand Russell.

The politically naïve will, I fear, be inclined to suppose that the characters and places portrayed in this book, such as Bert Brecht Mao Che Odinga, General Nidgett, and "sex-maniac haunted Sadcake Park" are merely figments of our author's reactionary imagination. I admit that I once thought so myself until three years ago when, in a single Hampstead liberal/humanist household I was introduced to a homosexual dog and a Siamese cat called Che-Guevara-Trotsky! I now know better.

I can, therefore, hardly be expected to agree with all the views presented in this anthology, but I salute the author as a courageous, campaigning neo-Luddite, defending the fading flowers of Empire from all comers, assisted only by his Tory cunning, a water-pistol, a lady-typewriter, and occasional administrations of Madeira and seed-cake. It is, like most romantic causes, a lost one; even if Mr

Simple can hold off the progressive fifth column already in our midst, it is only a matter of time before he is overrun by the steady march of reform (or, failing that, by the Bolshevik hordes now massing in the foothills of the Urals), and his bones moulder beneath the seven-lane Stretchford to Soup Hales Superhighway. At any rate, unless the entire stocks of this work are burned before the gates of Conway Hall by the Bloomsbury Urban Guerrillas, at least Peter Simple can say that posterity was duly warned.

I recommend this book to all trendy leftists, anarcho-syndicalists, and would-be subversives. It provides excellent material for breaking windows and heads, starting fires, or can be worn as protective riot-proof padding. It can even be read. In the last case, for the more timid liberal, or for those running for office in the Stretchford Rationalist Circle, the Soup Hales Iconoclasts, or the Hampstead Humanist Society, it is of suitable size to be discreetly perused between the covers of the current number of the *New Statesman* or the *Freethinker*.

NIGEL SINNOTT

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(One minute from Trafalgar Square)

PUBLIC LECTURES

Friday, 19 November, 8 p.m.

RICHARD HANDYSIDE

THE LITTLE RED SCHOOLBOOK AND RELATED ISSUES

Friday, 3 December, 8 p.m.

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

SEXUAL MYTHOLOGY

Friday, 17 December, 8 p.m.

R. J. CONDON

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LETTERS

National Sovereignty and Aggression

S. D. Kuebart, in his review of *The Appeal of Fascism* (*Freethinker*, 16 October), says: "One cannot help feeling that had Mussolini been left to his own devices, his life might not have ended the way it did in front of that Milan garage. His type of fascism never stooped to anti-semitism, genocide and the brutalities associated with the Hitler regime".

Didn't it? What about the murder of Matteotti, and the concentration camps in the Lipari Isles and the sadism practised on Left-wingers and opponents of the regime described in the novels of Ignazio Silone? Mussolini started aggression before Hitler. The attack on Ethiopia came before the Fuehrer attacked any other country. And even in the 1920s Mussolini committed aggression—for instance, the Corfu affair. And he pushed Yugoslavia around and established a sphere of influence in Albania before Hitler was elected Chancellor.

Anyway—under national sovereignty (a state in which the world is divided into different nations and no real world government) you don't get "left to your own devices". You have to watch out or someone does you down. And one important result of national sovereignty is that many nations don't have the raw materials they need. This was the case with Italy in the 1930s. So national sovereignty would have driven Italy to aggression and imperialism if Hitler had never lived. And Mussolini believed keenly in national sovereignty. I. S. Low.

Political Dogmatism

Philip Hinchliff's warning to humanists that "the political irrationalism of the political dogmatists ought to be anathema" may be answered by a *tu quoque*: "The political irrationalism of humanist dogmatists ought to be anathema". Hinchliff's anti-Marxist dogmatism leads him into such irrationalities as equating Bukharin's reference to statistical "indications" as being the equivalent of "dictates". May I point out that statistical "indications" are used everywhere nowadays, but we don't speak of the "dictates" of a Public Opinion poll, for example.

It leads him into such distortions of fact as the statement that Lenin envisaged "socialising the country virtually overnight", as that class society was "instantly abolished by the Bolshevik triumph", and to his ignoring of the fact that Marx, Engels and Lenin all saw the "withering away of the State" as a long process associated with the transition to a fully developed Communist society.

Philip Hinchcliffe is at least right when he points out that "Marxists are in fact committed by their ideology to the eventual abolition of all central coercive authority". But his anti-Marxist irrationalism is revealed when he clearly treats "overnight" and "eventually" as synonymous whenever this suits his political dogmatism. PAT SLOAN.

Religious Persecution in Hyde Park

Paul Pawlowski, who was in the (small paragraph) news a few months ago, for making an official application to the Board of Trade for a monthly import quota of marijuana "for religious purposes", is at present in Pentonville Prison, serving a three-month sentence—not for smoking pot, which at least we know to be against the law, but merely for using a word that can be found in great authors from Geoffrey Chaucer to Henry Miller, not to mention the graffiti of every schoolboy.

It was on Sunday, 10 October, that he was arrested on that spot dedicated to British freedom of speech—Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park. As founder of the Church of Aphrodite, Mr Pawlowski has given himself the title of "The Reverend Father Fuck", and it was because he described himself by this title and eulogised the human genitals that a police-sergeant in the park took him into custody. Whether or not we subscribe to his creed or approve of his liturgical language, we must surely protest at a three-month prison sentence for something so harmless. So amusing, too; and, moreover, with the serious social purpose of preaching the philosophy underlying the slogan (now too hackneyed to serve any effective purpose without amplification) "Make Love, Not War". The real obscenities, as Paul Pawlowski was trying to convince the strolling populace, are war and big business and enforced poverty—but no one ever gets arrested for promoting that sort of obscenity.

As usual—for he is no stranger to British police courts—Paul Pawlowski refused to acknowledge the authority of the court or to comply with court procedure. Had he deigned to defend himself, he might have pointed out that another man who had recently been charged with using the word "fuck" in public (and admitted

doing so) was acquitted of any offence—a precedent of which the magistrate in Mr Pawlowski's case may well have been unaware. But to play the game by official rules is against Pauline principles.

During earlier spells in prison, way back in the days of the Committee of 100 of which he was an active supporter, Paul Pawlowski, who has a conscientious objection to the wearing of any kind of uniform, always refused to wear prison clothing. The prison authorities were equally adamant in their refusal to allow him to wear his own clothes, so he generally spent the whole sentence "starkers", in solitary. Whether this "cold" war between him and the Establishment still pertains, or whether the deadlock has been resolved over the year—by means of capitulation by the authorities or (less likely) by the prisoner—is not known. If it has not, let us all pray (to all the gods) for mild weather, for the sake of this eccentric religious martyr. BARBARA SMOKER.

Unreliable Evidence

I thank Nigel Sinnott for the abundant evidence that he offers with regard to the part played by W. S. Ross ("Saladin") in the compilation of Charles Mackay's libelous life of Charles Bradlaugh (*Freethinker*, 16 October). I have looked it over carefully and would point out that the *National Reformer* is a biased source. After all, it was Bradlaugh's own paper, and "Iconoclast" was hardly likely to publish information in it that would do other than support his own libel suits. For every piece of evidence cited from its pages one can reply with one from the *Secular Review*. Both are equally unreliable. One can read what one wishes into such pamphlets as *Ananias . . . the atheist's god. Addressed to Mr C. Bradlaugh, MP*. The "advertising pages" of Mackay's book are also shaky evidence. The preface to the same work states that not only "Saladin" but Foote, Holyoake, Joseph Barker and many others helped in the compilation.

Now to the most recent appraisal of the matter. David Tribe's "most plausible construction from many conflicting versions" (*President Charles Bradlaugh, MP*, pp 264-8) is the work of a man so inextricably wedded to the cause of his dead Chief as to wither his critical faculties. I need hardly labour the point, as it has been made by virtually all the reviewers. The book is in the true nineteenth century freethought tradition, and page after page the author appears to find it his duty to vindicate every action of his lost hero. This results in some evidence not being given the full attention it deserves.

I cite a letter to the *Agnostic Journal* of 16 June, 1906, pp 381-2, by Edytha H. Marson (née Johnson). In this she states quite clearly that her father, W. H. Johnson ("Anthony Collins"), wrote the *Life* for Mackay, continuing: "I can say in the most positive manner that I had charge of all the documents used in the work, which was actually written in my presence, and that during the inception of the *Life*, and until after its publication, my father was never in communication with Mr Stewart Ross, either upon this or any other subject".

In pen-written notes (pp 356-9) of an edition of the *Life* in the British Museum we have a signed declaration by W. H. Johnson to the effect that he certainly wrote the book, except for a few libelous passages (pp 355-9) about Alice and Hypatia inserted by Charles Mackay. Johnson says that he had been prepared to defend all that he had written and made a signed affidavit to this purpose. Bradlaugh did not take up the challenge.

Of course this may all be forgery and humbug. Quite frankly, in the last instance, it does not matter, and I think that Mr Tribe is at fault in not standing far enough back from his subject to recognise this fact. Both "Saladin" and Bradlaugh were extremely ambitious men; neither was wholly scrupulous. On the other hand, I have in my possession an unpublished *Life* of "Saladin" along with various other material, and from scrutiny of these and related works I cannot believe the man to have been as evil as the Bradlaughites would have us believe. At the same time I have a great admiration for Charles Bradlaugh—the man, not the saint. He had greater qualities than "Saladin" could ever have hoped to possess.

Finally there is, I believe, an important lesson to be learned from the whole issue. I first raised the matter of Saladin's character because I was disappointed that the historian who has most recently approached the subject did so with the old chips on his shoulders, and therefore found it difficult to see beyond immediate personal conflicts. "Chips with everything" must not again be allowed to become the hallmark of freethought writing if it is to live up to its professed ideals. At the end of the last century secularism was sinking; as historians we should be more concerned with the reasons for this fact than with the petty squabbles of those who gnawed at each other in the floundering vessel.

This correspondence opened with W. S. Ross and Charles Bradlaugh lying peacefully in freshly scrubbed graves. Shall we leave them there? STEWART ROSS.