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## SEX-OBSESSED CELIBATES DENOUNCE "SINS" OF THE FLESH

It is not surprising that the latest pronouncement on sexual ethics and behaviour to emanate from the Vatican has caused consternation amongst Roman Catholic "progressives". For it is clear that the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, unlike a large section of the laity and the priesthood, is determined to uphold the traditional and cruel attitude of the Church to human sexuality. And this "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics" is certain to accelerate the present decline in adherence to the Church that was started by the 1968 papal encyclical "Humanae Vitae". The voluntary celibates who prepared the document refer constantly to the teachings of St Paul, who set the tone of sexual repression that has characterised Christianity throughout its history, and to the encyclicals of the last four popes. Predictably, the only form of sexual activity which they approve is intercourse, without contraception, between male and female within marriage.

*Caroline Deys writes:* Many people would agree with the assertion that "the corruption of morals has increased and one of the most serious indications of this corruption is the unbridled exaltation of sex". But others will argue that the world today is more, not less, moral than it was even ten years ago, and that our increasing awareness of the many immoralities still around can do nothing but good.

It is difficult to fight an enemy one has not seen. Many are unconvinced that sex is more exalted in 1976 than it was 50 or even a hundred years ago. Certainly it has become more open and acknowledged. But Dickens' London—and Dickens' America—was as full of sexual immorality as Saigon a few months ago. The Holy Roman Church's pronouncements on sexual morality would be less irritating and offensive if she pronounced with equal gravity on the morality of homelessness, illiteracy, child abuse and pollution, to name but a few contemporary problems.

The text of the Declaration needs careful reading.

As an exercise in logic a child of ten could improve it; as an English essay it leaves much to be desired. Such declarations are presumably for the humble flock of the Church to read and understand; to shed light on the teaching of the Church and to clarify difficult points. Indeed the Sacred Congregation notes that the faithful have growing difficulty in obtaining knowledge of wholesome moral teaching. But this document is quite incomprehensible; I do at least have a dictionary to check whether or not I am a licentious hedonist. But how many humble Catholic homes possess one?

Even those who question the existence of God can nevertheless agree that "man cannot make value judgements according to personal whim", and that certain ideals should transcend changes even of civilisations. But there is no logic in suggesting that because one does not believe in Christ's ability to reveal all to his Church we should therefore be unable to discern these laws for ourselves.

It is reasonable to suggest that the Church should take account of the equal dignity of man and woman, and that it is hardly scientific to suggest that human sexuality "wonderfully exceeds the dispositions of lower forms of life". Have the bishops never watched a female cat teasing a male, or the courtship dances of many wild birds?

### Peculiar Logic

The Church stresses that the moral goodness of acts proper to conjugal life must be determined only by a respect for its finality. In plain English, we may have sex only for procreation. The logic of allowing a Catholic couple to continue having intercourse during menstruation, pregnancy or lactation, and after the menopause will escape most readers of the Declaration. If the finality of sex is its power to bind a couple together for the good of the family then indeed these things are licit—but then so is unnatural birth control.

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# Fighting Fit at 95

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

1975 was *The Freethinker's* 95th year of publication. The twelve issues of that year are now available as a bound volume and its pages show that, so far as content is concerned, it was one of the best years that this paper has had for quite some time.

Almost all secularists will have welcomed the increasing attention which *The Freethinker*, under the present editor, has given to the wide range of social issues in which we have a special interest. This paper has a unique and valuable role to play, not only as an anti-clerical platform but also as a counterblast to obscurantism and irrationalism in general. Volume 95 of *The Freethinker* shows just how well that role can be fulfilled, even on a limited budget.

One of the most important tasks of *The Freethinker* in 1975 was the countering of the propaganda of the anti-abortion lobby. This work is not space-wasting preaching to the converted, because one of its most important functions is to alert secularists to the danger which the opponents of abortion continue to represent, despite the 1967 reform. The allegations made by the authors of *Babies for Burning* received enormous publicity—far more than the subsequent exposures of these scare-stories. The threatened libel action which resulted from this paper's review of the book may well have come to

nothing, but *The Freethinker's* legal expenses came to considerably more.

*The Freethinker* may not have been crippled by that threat, but unless people continue to support the paper and unless that support grows, every financial set-back must bring the possibility of eventual closure much nearer.

That would be a tragedy not only for those Humanists who buy it for its secularist views, but for all those with a commitment to freedom and thought—which, as Brigid Brophy reminded us at *The Freethinker's* 90th birthday celebrations, are two qualities sadly lacking in our society.

This volume shows that as *The Freethinker* approaches its centenary its relevance and importance are not diminishing but increasing. The paper's future depends on readers, and if the recent improvements in the quality of articles and reporting is sustained, then *The Freethinker* will continue to deserve its readers, not in their hundreds but in their thousands, for many years to come.

● "The Freethinker", Volume 95, 1975, is obtainable from G. W. Foote & Company, 698 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL, price £2.60 plus 30p postage.

## Sex-Obsessed Celibates

Marriage is defined as a conjugal contract sanctioned and guaranteed by society; for the faithful marriage is a sacrament of Christ. This is the clearest part of the text, and we can only agree with the conclusion that Catholics should not indulge in premarital sex. But that should not prevent those who feel they have a stable union from indulging in sex outside marriage.

It is very difficult for those with no understanding of the concept of original sin to follow the reasoning of the bishops on masturbation. It is difficult to believe that a boy or girl who achieves sexual relief in this way has committed a mortal sin. The bishops' lack of understanding of childhood sexual development is excusable; it is a subject poorly taught in medical schools and not understood by the majority. Next time my young son gets out of his bath with an erection I will have to suggest that he should study the "necessary means, both natural and supernatural, which Christian asceticism recommends for overcoming passions".

Homosexual acts, like masturbation, are condemned as "intrinsically disordered". Some of us can recall our own homosexual phase when we loved passionately, but most of us grew into the delights of heterosexuality and remember the old joys only at times of loneliness or unhappiness. To suggest that

homosexuality is the sad consequence of rejecting God makes all Humanists gay.

The bishops' discussion of mortal sin may be hard to follow but it has a certain logic. Switching suddenly from Christ's teaching—which is indeed crystal clear—to Christian tradition and the Church's teaching, with no link but St Paul, brings us back to murky confusion. St Paul was a hard taskmaster; if a man even looked at a woman lustfully he is condemned. Does the same rule apply the other way around?

## The Creator Boobs?

The Church believes that mankind was created by a god of love who nevertheless gave his creatures a strong sexual appetite whilst denying them any outlet for it. If married couples are to have the monopoly of sexual satisfaction, what about those people who, through no fault of their own, have no marriage partner. Why, if all homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered, did this perfect creator make five per cent of his beings homosexual?

Masturbation is specifically denounced, but it is difficult, in any commonsense view of morality based on human welfare, to think of any kind of sexual activity that is less harmful. By comparison, the one kind of sexual activity of which the Church approves can, and does, cause a vast amount of human misery.

Dr Stopes-Roe was one of those responsible for writing the British Humanist Association booklet "Objective, Fair and Balanced" which was criticised in our December issue. He writes this article in an individual capacity, not as a formal reply, but he maintains that the critics have been careless in their reading and that they seem more interested in polemic than in education.

First and foremost, your contributors do not seem to have noticed that we were explicitly concerned with reasoned argument and the fundamentals of good education, not with polemics. And we attempted to set out the basic requirements, not solve all the problems—that would require a book, not a booklet. The basic necessity is to remove the present compulsion; and to require that if anything is done, then non-religious stances shall be treated fairly and in balance with the religious stances. Exactly what stances merit treatment is a matter for further discussion. Actually Brigid Brophy's examples—fascism, flat-earthism and astrology—are not stances for living at all, but she is right to recognise a problem. However, the problem is not really so very serious, because it concerns marginal cases which will, as such, receive only minor consideration, and because the duty is to represent the range of systems, not each individual system. In any case, the answer to her question "Who is to judge?" can only be "The consensus of those concerned with education—under the influence of Humanist pressure." This is a basic point: the only way we can achieve anything is by reasoned argument. This is supremely true in the classroom and in Parliament. We lose all influence if we make ourselves absurd by our wild claims.

G. N. Deodhekar seems not to have read our booklet. We explicitly condemn school worship. We did not forbid it in the Bill, for two reasons: first, we did not feel we had proved it to be educationally absurd; secondly, there was no need to forbid it, for it would die a natural death. Mr Deodhekar expresses some of the reasons for expecting this, though the ones he chooses might perhaps have been better left unsaid.

Michael Lloyd-Jones' remarks are sound and fury, but he has signified nothing. He says we ignore and gloss over things—but gives no examples. He has such an urge to fabricate a case, however, that he turns coat and says that the hypothetical Christian claim that we sanction Christian domination is "not without justification". His absurdity is quite unbelievable. Presumably he supports the line of the other contributors, who ask for the simple repeal of the 1944 religious provisions, with-

out putting anything in their place. The choice, therefore, is between our proposal, which requires the fair and balanced treatment of non-religious alternatives (if either is tackled at all), and leaving the teachers free. The question arising from Mr Lloyd-Jones' claim is not "Which is the better strategy?", but "Which outcome can more plausibly be said to sanction the continuation of the *status quo*?" Can an honest man say other than "The Freethinker's proposals"?

Michael Lloyd-Jones makes two points; and both leave one gasping. He reads with a squint, and forgets even the little he read before he writes the next sentence. Our aim is not "a programme of instruction in many . . . decadent superstitions," but an education that includes Humanism as a life stance, fairly treated. Except that the situation is much more complex than that, for reasons we hint at but do not develop in the booklet.

### Privilege and Prejudice

Why is it that your writers refuse to come to terms with the concept of a "life stance"? Brigid Brophy resorts to ridicule of the words because, presumably, she has no coherent thought to offer on the actual matter. It is interesting that here extreme secularists unite with religious bigots. One understands why the latter do whatever they can (overhand, underhand or downright dishonest) to destroy the recognition that Christianity and Humanism are both stances for living; what motivates Miss Brophy? The concept of a stance for living is in the process of destroying their privilege; would it destroy her prejudice? In our booklet we are concerned to understand questions: what is she trying to do? She professes not to understand the examples we gave of some of the fundamental questions that can trouble children. Their questions don't come neatly packaged, and if one is to catch the movement of a child's mind one must exercise intelligence and good will. Miss Brophy, of course, is well endowed with the former, though at this point she gives a passable imitation of lacking it.

Brigid Brophy is not so slovenly a reader as are Messrs Deodhekar and Lloyd-Jones, but she makes one bad boob. Our central clause requires that if a school discusses religious or non-religious belief systems, then it must discuss both, fairly and in balance. She seems only to have read the first half. On the general question of continuing abuse, she is not consistent in supposing that those teachers who are more biased (the Christians) will be less at risk than those who are not (the Humanists). In general, the BHA policy is in a position to incorporate any strategy or tactic, based on reason, that the National Secular Society or anyone else may sug-

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# Reciprocity and Neighbourliness in Jesus' Teaching

G. A. WELLS

Is Jesus' ethical teaching superior to that of earlier moralists? Is it consistent? Is all of it even acceptable? This article shows some of the difficulties which Christian apologists face, and to which some of them admit, on these matters.

Everyone knows that Jesus' teaching includes the so-called "Golden Rule" namely "Do to others as you would wish them to do to you." Confucius, the Rabbi Hillel, and the book of Tobit (4 : 15) had already given this doctrine in a negative formulation: "Do not do to others what you would not wish them to do to you." Christian moralists commonly claim that the negative formulation is inferior. But what would be the difference between: "Treat people kindly if you would like them to treat you kindly"; and "Do not treat unkindly if you would not wish to be treated unkindly"? In fact, neither the positive nor the negative formulation can invariably be entirely trusted when it is couched in general terms.

All depends on the act in question, and it is obvious that people would not always be pleased for us to do what we should like them to do to us: "Do as you would be done by" would, for instance, make sexual behaviour rather difficult. I am not being facetious; sexual behaviour is but one example of behaviour where the relation between the parties is complementary (the one complements the behaviour of the other, and does not imitate it). The same is true of the relation between adult and child, doctor and patient, teacher and pupil. In sum, "do as you would be done by" is a rough and ready rule, and does not hold generally. Furthermore, it depends on the peculiarities of language whether a particular "action" is expressed by a positive or a negative. Thus "release" means "not to hold captive". If we insist on the "positive" form of the precept, what shall we say about persecution? Perhaps: "persecute those whom you would like to persecute you"! We can avoid the negative particle by saying: "Refrain from persecuting those . . ." But is this any better than: "Do not persecute those who . . ." The supposed superiority of the positive formulation (the one given in the gospel) is merely a forlorn attempt to uphold the uniqueness of Christian ethics.

Furthermore, in Luke the context gives the rule a rather egoistic tendency; for it is followed by a passage in which the generous action is advocated as a means of ensuring similar treatment for oneself (Luke 6 31-5, RSV): "As you wish that men

would do to you, do so to them . . . And your reward shall be great, and you shall be sons of the most high." Thus an exceptional reward is promised to those who follow this and other rules specified by Jesus. The Greek and Chinese philosophers could offer no such inducements.

In the intervening verses (Luke 6 : 32-4), no reward is implied. The writer is obviously putting together a number of common maxims, only some of which imply that generous behaviour will be rewarded by similar behaviour in return. But this, though it is of course often true, is open to notorious exceptions. But then it is said that the reward is not now, and not at the hands of one's fellow men, but hereafter and from God. Indeed, it is recognised (verses 32-3) that to do good merely in the hope of reciprocal treatment is not exceptionally virtuous.

## The Good Samaritan

Let us further study this question of reciprocity by looking at the parable of the Good Samaritan. In Luke 11 : 25 a lawyer asks Jesus what he must do to have eternal life. Jesus tells him that he must love God and his neighbour. The lawyer then asks "who is my neighbour?" In reply Jesus tells the story of a man who is set upon by robbers who leave him half dead. A priest and a Levite pass by without going to his assistance, but a Samaritan binds his wounds, takes him to an inn and pays the innkeeper to look after him. At the end of the story Jesus asks: "which of these three . . . proved neighbour unto him that fell among the robbers?," The lawyer replies: "He that shewed mercy on him." Is this the answer to the lawyer's question? Is it the man who aids and looks after him that he must love, and not the priests and Levites who pass by on the other side? We have just seen that earlier (Luke 6 : 32) Jesus is reported to have said: *If ye love them that love you, what thank have ye? for even sinners love these that love them. And if ye do good to them that do good to you, what thank have ye? For even sinners do the same . . . But love your enemies and do them good.* However, the last words of Jesus, when he has told the parable are: "Go, and do thou likewise." So the action of the Samaritan is an example to be imitated.

Thus the question which gave rise to the parable has been forgotten. Commentators, such as Professor R. Barclay, say: "The question . . . was 'Who is my neighbour?' and the answer of the parable is 'Anyone who needs your help'" (*And Jesus Said*, Edinburgh, 1970, p.82). But it was the Samaritan who was the neighbour according to the lawyer. It was the victim of the robbers who was the neigh-

hour according to Barclay. The lawyer should have replied: my neighbour is anybody who needs my help. As it is told, the story is not apposite, and offers a very restricted definition of the word "neighbour." Part of its real aim is to cast a slur on priests and Levites. Jesus' blatantly unjust attitude to such orthodox Jews is far more suggestive of sectarian hatred than of the kind and generous disposition with which he is conventionally accredited. The whole of Matthew 23, for instance, is inexplicable except as the invective of a rival sect.

Does the devout Christian in fact disregard the consequences of his behaviour? Does he do what is right simply because he believes it to be right? Or does he do it to please his God, to earn a heavenly reward? *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you . . . Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: (Matthew 5: 12—Luke 6: 23). For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward. (Matthew 10: 42). But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great . . . Luke 6: 35).* He who believes in another life in which one's behaviour in this one will be rewarded or punished, will be indeed ill-advised not to take this into his calculations of expediency. The divine rewards are worth much more than human ones. It is therefore the part of a sensible man to work for the former. This is mere business. Jesus teaches poverty, renunciation, abandonment of friends and relatives, universal abnegation. These are the ideals, and for these the reward will be power, majesty, authority, in short everything that on this earth has been renounced, but multiplied a hundredfold.

Other passages contradict this doctrine by alleging that God is arbitrary, and favours whom he likes. For instance, in Matthew's parable about the labourer in the vineyard we read (20: 15): "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" This seems to mean that God is accountable to no man, that he must not be expected to follow the same principles which he enjoins on men: if he chooses to treat some with special favour, so much the better for them. He is not a God of justice but a rewarder of favourites. It is easy to see how this led to the belief in salvation by predestination. Some God intends to save, whatever they may say or do. Others are doomed.

In Luke 17: 9 Jesus says that a master can scarcely be expected to thank his slave for his services. So, apparently, the Christian who has done his duty can expect no thanks from God. We can expect nothing and be grateful for anything we get.

One must, of course, be careful before accusing Jesus of inconsistency. Admittedly, "to him that hath shall be given . . ." (Matthew 13: 12) is not

easily reconcilable with "many that are first shall be last" (Matthew 19: 30). But the vagueness of such sayings saves them.

The arbitrariness of God emerges again from Luke's parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15: 11-32). The attitude of the father towards his repentant son is understandable. It is a human reaction with which we can sympathise. But if God does in fact especially favour those who have spent a life in self-indulgence and repent on their death bed, this is surely not what we should call justice.

Christian commentators admit to serious problems here. Professor H. Braun of Mainz, for instance, notes that on the one hand Jesus is not content with the stipulations of the Mosaic law, but demands "a righteousness exceeding that of the scribes and Pharisees" (Matthew 5: 20) and accordingly sharpens the requirements of the Jewish law. Yet, on the other hand—side by side with this radicalised Torah—he offers an equally radical grace: God "rejoices particularly in the dissolute man's change of heart." So we can only be saved by being ever so holy; yet it is the dissolute whose repentance gives God most pleasure. Braun calls this a "paradox," and decides that it is "typical of the life of the historical Jesus."\*

#### Reward for Humility

Some of the rules which Jesus proposes as revision of the Mosaic law are scarcely reasonable. They include: *Turn the other cheek (Matthew 5: 39); Give your coat to him who takes your cloak (Matthew 5: 40); Give to everyone that asks (Matthew 5: 42).* Relatively reasonable Christians seem never to have taken these maxims seriously. Commentators say, concerning, e.g. turning the other cheek, that we are not to take Jesus literally. But it is difficult to see how we are to know when to take him literally unless we have some independent criterion of what is really right and wrong. And, if we do have such a criterion, if we know, independently of Jesus, what is right, then we do not need him as an ethical guide. Furthermore, it is not reasonable to take words of Jesus literally where we approve of them, and non-literally when we don't, and then pretend that his teaching constitutes the ethical ideal.

These rules (inculcating as they do an extreme of humility and non-resistance to evil) can come naturally only to the poor and the depressed classes—to those who have no power anyway. And it was to such people that Christianity originally appealed. It did so by promising a great heavenly reward for the humility on earth which it enjoined. It is a source of comfort to believe that the injustices of this life will be compensated in another. But religious beliefs do not invariably afford solace. In so far as Christian dogmas promise rewards to the virtuous and punishment to the wicked, belief in

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# Charity Law: Time for a Radical Change

ANTONY CHAPMAN

Last September, the Education, Arts and Home Office Sub-Committee of the Expenditure Committee of the House of Commons (to give it its full name) published a report on "The Charity Commissioners and Their Accountability". This was the first of two eagerly awaited reports on Charity Law; the other is being prepared by a committee set up by the National Council for Social Service under the chairmanship of Lord Goodman, and whose report is expected soon. The Charity Law Reform Committee made submissions to the Home Office committee, and in this article Antony Chapman, a solicitor and treasurer of the CLRC, examines the Committee's findings.

The Expenditure Committee took a mere seven months to consider a subject of considerable complexity and of which most of its members clearly had very little knowledge at the outset. Predictably, the result was an ill-researched report in which the arguments are poorly thought out.

Two examples of this will suffice. The first, admitted by the Committee itself, is that although investigating the position of the public schools in some depth (and some Committee members seemed more interested in attacking the public schools than in improving Charity Law), it did not consult the Department of Education and Science. The second is its recommendation that when the Chief Charity Commissioner retired in the autumn, "there should be a wide field of choice for his successor, including the Civil Service, private industry, the professions and the voluntary and social services." Unfortunately no-one told the Committee that the identity of the new Chief Charity Commissioner was announced as far back as April, and that "the invariable practice of selecting the Chief Charity Commissioner from senior Home Office Staff," which it recommended should cease, had again been followed.

The title of the report, limited to the Charity Commissioners and their accountability, belies the wide scope of the subject that it covers. The Committee, not surprisingly, found it impossible to stick to its narrow brief, and the topics covered include a wide range of laws and conditions relating to charities.

This is a subject that has attracted increasing attention over the last two or three years, thanks partly to the striking off the Register of Charities of the Rationalist Press Association and the Humanist Trust. This action led to the formation of the Charity Law Reform Committee, which has several

Humanists among its membership, and which has been in the forefront of moves for reform in this field. Its two leaflets were considered by the Home Office Committee, and the influence of these publications can be seen in the report. Unfortunately, the main plank of the CLRC platform, the creation of a new category of organisation to be known as the Non-Profit Distributing Organisation, has been rejected.

The report falls into two parts, one of which deals with administration and the other with the definition of charities, including political activity. On the administrative side the Committee makes a number of sensible proposals, e.g. that the procedure for the registration of charities should be speeded up; that accounts should be submitted regularly; that a standing panel should advise on the selection of all Charity Commissioners; and that the Home Secretary should answer parliamentary questions on charities and on the Commissioners.

## What is a Charity?

The section of the report that is of most interest to Humanists is that dealing with the definition of a Charity. There are references to humanism and the Humanist Trust on the one hand, and to the Lords Day Observance Society on the other.

The Committee agrees that there is no clear, up-to-date, legal definition of charity, and that clarification is needed. It rejects the retention of the *status quo*. The Charity Law Reform Committee's main proposal, which the Home Office committee describes as "the most radical" it received, is rejected on the grounds that there would be considerable scope for abuse and that "it would create even more difficulties, particularly from the supervisory aspect, than at present."

Perhaps I am biased, but this criticism seems to me to be superficial and to have been made without a thorough investigation of the details and likely effects of the proposal. Perhaps the Committee took fright at the thought of recommending this "most radical" solution, or perhaps a desire for unanimity between its Labour and Tory members prevailed.

Having got this far, the Committee's only avenue of escape was to suggest amending the present definition "in terms more appropriate to the present day", thus arriving at a formula which would admit development and deal with redundancy, obsolescence and abuse. The Committee admits that, being neither lawyers nor parliamentary draftsmen, it would be foolhardy for them to attempt to draft a new definition themselves, but of course experts would have no difficulty given appropriate guide-

lines. The experts themselves, having tried for many years to produce a viable definition, know better!

The guideline it suggests for applying to every charity is the fourth part of the existing definition, that of "purposes beneficial to the community." The superficial attraction of the approach aimed at removing organisations such as the Divine Light Mission from the Register of Charities, soon vanishes when one examines it. Nearly all of the old problems remain; much will depend on who is to administer the law and apply the new definition. But inevitably it will result in uncertainty and dissatisfaction, for there will remain a strong element of subjectivity in arriving at decisions. Agreement on a term as vague as "purposes beneficial to the community" is well-nigh impossible (each reader of this journal, for instance, would probably give it a different meaning). If there is flexibility there will be uncertainty, and if there is certainty there will be rigidity. In this context flexibility and certainty are opposite sides of the same coin.

### Pioneers of Social Reform

For well over a century charities have pioneered social reform: prison visiting and adult education are just two examples. At the outset many of these reforms would undoubtedly been considered of no value, or even detrimental, to the community at large. Few would have passed the test of being "beneficial to the community", but they became charities because they came within one of the three other definitions.

Recently a number of organisations formed to promote new ideas and activities in the field of social reform have been refused charitable status. The proposed new definition would make things even more difficult for this kind of pioneering organisation. They should be actively encouraged; under this proposal they will continue to be discouraged.

The Committee considers how its proposals would affect those charities which are for the advancement of religion, and starts with a highly dubious premise: "The traditional role of the Church in the field of charity, its guardianship of the moral order and the historical fact that it was primarily due to religious teaching that society became increasingly conscious of the need to provide for human needs require no elaboration from us."

There is a straightforward acceptance of the statements made in evidence by representatives of various churches—that the doing of good works is part and parcel of religion, and that the thousands of charities which cater solely for the benefit of the Church are justified because "the whole purpose of the Christian Church is to serve the community." No comment!

The lunatic fringe religious groups, such as the Maharashi Mahesh Yogi and the Lords Day Observance Society, present an easy target and take a lot

of stick. The latter is, in effect, recommended for removal from the Register.

Humanism receives considerable comment, mostly sympathetic, but again characterised by a series of incorrect assumptions largely derived from wrong statements given to the Committee in evidence and which it did not attempt to verify. There is no appreciation of the difference between the Humanist Trust, which is a genuine educational organisation and should never have been struck off the Register of Charities, and organisations like the Rationalist Press Association and the National Secular Society, which are avowedly propagandist. The former should be a charity both under the present law and under the new definition. The latter cannot be at present; what are the chances that in the future their objectives will be accepted as "beneficial to the community"?

The Home Office committee has produced an unsatisfactory report. It is wide open to criticism because its statements are often incorrect and the arguments shallow and naive. Anyone hoping for radical, or even acceptable, solutions to the many problems which bedevil charity law will be disappointed.

Let us hope that the Goodman Committee's report will avoid the pitfalls referred to; its frequently postponed publication date indicates that it is aware of the shortcomings in the first report. But, having personally given evidence to the Goodman Committee, I am far from optimistic that its report will be sufficiently radical either.

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## OBITUARY

### CECIL MILLARD

Humanism in Sussex has lost a stalwart with the death of Cecil Millard. He was aged 79. Despite failing health and almost total blindness he maintained his interest in astronomy, mathematics, and music until the end. His spirit was indomitable, and he was cared for with great devotion by his wife and family.

Cecil Millard was a highly qualified engineer and had served in the army for many years. He joined the Humanist movement in Edinburgh where he also spent much of his time at the Royal Observatory and was a member of the Society of Musicians. Mr Millard joined the Brighton and Hove Humanist Group when he moved to Sussex. He became secretary, and took a keen interest in group affairs even when he could no longer attend meetings.

The committal ceremony at Woodvale Crematorium, Brighton, consisted of a speech by Mr J. V. Sandground and excerpts from Bach's third Brandenburg Concerto.

## THE CONSCIOUS HUMOUR OF MR JOHN TORODE

Compared to columns like "London Day by Day" (*Daily Telegraph*) and "The Times Diary" (*The Times*), John Torode's "London Letter" which appears in the *Guardian* is small beer indeed. But Mr Torode must have been really pressed for copy when he wrote a piece entitled "Spirit Level", in which he had fun and games with an obituary which appeared in *The Freethinker*. Our report that Barbara Smoker conducted a committal ceremony at a South London crematorium prompted Mr Torode to inform *Guardian* readers that "*The Freethinker* is famous for its unconscious humour."

For those who find it difficult to understand how a straightforward report of a funeral could be seen as an example of unconscious humour, the explanation is: Crematorium—smoke—Smoker. Get it? I couldn't start laughing.

Barbara Smoker's uncle is a Roman Catholic priest whose duties, no doubt, include conducting funeral services at crematoria. We cannot help feeling—and indeed sincerely hope—that Fr Smoker's name would not result in him subjected to the ill-mannered sneers of a smart-aleck columnist.

Despite his calling, John Torode may not be a nasty, insensitive creep. But on the occasion referred to, he appears to have had little consideration for the feelings of bereaved people who may have read the *Guardian*, including this sample of his conscious humour.

## A TRUE BELIEVER

The recent television programme on William Joyce (Lord Haw-Haw of broadcasting fame) revealed two of his chief characteristics—a pathological hatred of Jews, and his strong religious convictions. Joyce was educated at St Ignatius College, Galway, where a contemporary remembers him as "an arrogant, ill-tempered youngster." His principal tutor, a Jesuit, predicted that he would "finish up a genius or at the end of a hangman's rope."

Father Edmund, a Cistercian monk who lives in Wales, knew Joyce and visited him in the death cell. He gave a blessing, and Joyce knelt and made the sign of the cross.

Shortly before his execution, Joyce wrote to the priest: "At the time of transition I shall have the immense help of your prayers. In the calmness of the grace which He has given me I shall think of your friendship until the last here, and then beyond."

# NEWS

## VIETNAM TODAY

An Italian social worker who visited London recently spoke approvingly of the way in which the Communists have handled the situation in Ho Chi Min City (formerly Saigon). Onesta Carpena, who spent seven years in the city, said: "There was no bloodbath . . . no one has disappeared. The panic rumours spread before the Americans left have not come true." Miss Carpena now lives in Paris and works for Fraternité Vietnam, a private welfare organisation which has close links with religious groups.

Questioned about what freedom meant in Vietnam today Miss Carpena replied: "In terms of being able to say what you wish, there is more freedom now than under the Thieu government." The government had no specific policy on missionaries. Whether they stayed or not depended on the work they were doing. Most missionaries had, in fact left Vietnam.

Madeleine Simms, co-author of "Abortion Law Reformed" and a contributor to "The Freethinker", was one of the speakers at the Abortion Law Reform Association conference in London last month. She said: "Where were James White, MP, Leo Abse, MP, and the Catholic pressures groups a decade ago, before the Abortion Act, when there were real abuses to be dealt with, and when there was real exploitation of women in the private sector? I have no idea where James White was then. Wherever he was, he doesn't seem to have been gathering much experience of the exploitation of women. I deduce this from his statement made on 30 December that his female constituents 'didn't seem to mind the odd whack round the ear on a Saturday night'. This may not tell you anything about the women of Glasgow, but speaks volumes for James White. And where were the Catholic pressure groups in the early 1960s when abuses against women were rampant? Were they demonstrating in the streets on Holy Innocents Day, wearing white flowers in memory of the 40 women a year slain by the criminal abortionists? Not at all. They were fighting their last ditch battle against birth control. It was only when they lost this battle, in Britain at any rate, that they were free to find another shameful cause to champion."



# AND NOTES

## Freethinker Fund

There has been a marked increase in donations to the Fund. Thanks are expressed to those readers who sent contributions between 17 December 1975 and 20 January. Anonymous, £1.50; Anonymous, 50p; F. A. Alexander, £1; M. A. Ali, £3.50; W. Armstrong, £1; W. Atherton, 50p; N. G. Baguley, £1; E. Barnes, £1; I. Bertin, £1; R. D. Birrell, £1.50; J. W. Buck, 50p; D. C. Campbell, £1.75; A. C. F. Chambre, 50p; R. J. Dale, 50p; S. R. Dalton, 50p; H. Davies, 50p; A. F. Dawn, £1; H. W. Day, £2.50; A. A. H. Douglas, £1; A. Ellisdon, £1; Mrs Follett, £2; R. A. D. Forrest, £5; R. Gerrard, 50p; E. Gomm, £3.25; O. Grindahl, £2; J. D. Groom, £1; L. Hanger, 25p; A. Henry, 25p; J. G. Hillhouse (in memory of W. Ingram), £3; H. Holgate, 25p; W. G. Holland, £1.50; D. Hopkins, £1.46; E. J. Hughes, £1; Miss G. M. Jones, £1; J. A. Kane, 50p; G. A. Kirk, £1.50; Mrs P. Knight, £1; I. S. Low, £1.25; H. Madoc-Jones, 50p; C. W. Marshall, 50p; Mrs W. Mawson, 50p; E. McGue, £2.25; J. C. Millett, 50p; J. W. Mooney, 50p; D. N. Montague, £1.50; Mrs J. S. Murray, 50p; M. H. Nash, 50p; A. Oldham, £2.50; Mrs K. Pariente, £3; Miss W. Peters, £1; G. Raphael, 50p; N. E. Smith, 50p; Mrs W. Standfast, £1.50; D. C. Taylor, £2.50; J. Vallance, £3.50; N. Walter, £1; D. T. Wood, £2; D. Wright, £1; J. S. Wright, £1; I. Yettram, £1. Total: £77.71.

The Freethinker Defence Appeal closed on 31 January. A full list of subscribers will be published in the March issue.

Speaking recently at a meeting in Reading, Miss Barbara Smoker, president of the National Secular Society, declared: "A heavy responsibility for the current wave of sectarian murders in Northern Ireland, and beyond its borders, must be laid upon the Christian churches. It was they who created the bitter interdenominational hatred in the first place, and they perpetuate it still through their insistence on their monopoly of religious truth. It was not until the violence got completely out of control that many of the Ulster clergy began to condemn the acts of terrorism and murder committed by their own followers."

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### *Education or Polemic?*

gest. But in addition we have the powerful stick wherewith to beat the reactionaries: "If you do anything, let it be objective fair and balanced!" On the "complete and perfect bolt hole" that we allow, in exempting work for external examinations, she is of course correct; she takes this point from page 34 of the booklet.

Your editorial comments make again the same sort of unsupported charge as does Michael Lloyd-Jones, namely that we "avoid basic issues." Again I can make no reply, for so far the claim is only hot air, and of no substance. The real points of policy that distinguish the BHA from those who you describe as "secular elements", is that we are concerned to pursue a policy that has a fair chance of achieving the desired aim, and is based on reason and educational principles. This is the strategy that really will shatter the front of religious prejudice: reason and good education. There is still a very long way to go, but the religious front is already cracking. We distinguish between what can be looked upon as established, and what is still subject to reasonable dispute. Above all, our booklet is concerned with reasoned argument, not mere "rumbustious controversy".

Finally, though rumbustious controversy has its place (hence this article), may I thank Margaret Knight for her kind courtesy. It is sweet balm in these columns, and I much appreciate it. And may I suggest that those who are interested in education should read our booklet, which she does describe as having "force and clarity".

# BOOKS

ROBESPIERRE by George Rudé. Collins £4.95

Although historians, French, English and Russian, have across two centuries painstakingly sifted the material regarding the enigmatic character of Robespierre, this leader of the French Revolution is still, where general readers are concerned, the victim of one of the blackest legends in history. In part, it is a legend deriving from a totally melodramatic conception of the Revolution itself, which began as an essentially bourgeois step towards democracy by a country still dominated by an aristocratic feudal system, and only after three years of constitutional monarchy moved, via a "second revolution" on 10 August 1792, into a genuine revolutionary system attempting far-reaching social reforms. It was only then that Louis XVI was tried and executed on a well-substantiated charge of treason; for the State was threatened by the pressures of war, and there is no doubt the king was an active participant in encouraging the country's invasion. In addition there was an inflation problem and civil revolt in the provinces, and fear drove men into a reign of terror mainly based on suspicions of the enemy within.

Robespierre was not the principal architect of the Terror and indeed, although now a powerful figure among the Jacobins, he was never a dictator in the modern sense of the term. He was a late member of the Committee of Public Safety and never at all involved in the notorious Committee of General Security, the instrument of the police state; although George Rudé in his new book makes clear (which other recent historians have not) that the Public Safety Committee did, under the pressures of danger to the state, itself develop a police section which helped to bring suspects to the tribunals.

It was nevertheless still government by committee, and there is every evidence that Robespierre, although he supported the Terror as long as it used proper legal channels, had no hand in its final acceleration. In fact he criticised and recalled to Paris the worst terrorists from the provinces (who survived to blacken him) and his last speech in the Convention seems to have been recognised as a threat to those who wished to perpetuate the Terror. Napoleon was certainly among those who believed this, and that Robespierre was maligned by worse men who survived him. It became a question of who struck first; and, deserted by the populace who might have saved him, it was Robespierre, his brother and friends like St Just who went to the guillotine. Their enemies, as Professor Norman Hampson has pointed out, had every opportunity to destroy records in his favour and apparently did so.

The Marxist Professor of the French Revolution at the Sorbonne, Albert Soboul, in a book on the

# FREETHINKER

Revolution published here recently, has exhaustively analysed the social and economic factors that eventually lost Robespierre, their champion, the people's support; and George Rudé, himself author of a book on the revolutionary crowd, has here re-emphasised the effects of the Maximum laws on wages and Robespierre's own inability, as a bourgeois lawyer, fully to understand the wage-earners' point of view. He never, like Marat, moved among the people as one of them, although he lived frugally with a master carpenter and fully earned his title of "the incorruptible" (he left only just over £100).

Unlike Lenin, with whom Professor Rudé makes some interesting comparisons, Robespierre took no active part in insurrections and basically remained a theorist feeling his way into a new political system. As a young lawyer, deserted by his father, he had won his way on scholarships, supported his brother and sister, and given his services freely to the poor; and once in the Convention his 900 speeches ranged over a wide vista of reforms, a few of which (like his opposition to capital punishment, his advocacy of press freedom, and preference for a limited monarchy) he modified or abandoned later. He first lost some popularity by opposing the Girondins' war; and to the end he deplored property qualifications in the franchise (instigated against his wishes), claimed civil rights for Jews, actors and Protestants, and supported the social welfare programme (including old age pensions, family grants, unemployment benefit and education for all) introduced, but never fully implemented, by the new revolutionary Convention. His real difficulty, as Rudé makes clear, was his being born into a pre-industrial society, and as Soboul has also pointed out the Revolution in the end failed through inflation, war and economic forces it could not control. The additional burden of growing anarchy through counter-revolution, double-agent spying and suspicion has been most grimly painted by Professor Hampson.

Of the enigmatic, withdrawn man behind the mask Rudé gives us only glimpses; his is "a political portrait rather than a personal biography", like Hampson's study last year. One of its greatest values is in tracing the whole course of Robespierre's fluctuating reputation after his death, according to the political impact of the times in which the historians wrote. He also gives a clear account of Robespierre's cult of the Supreme Being ("Let us abandon the priests and return to God"), deriving partly from Rousseau but also from a shrewd realisation that atheism was alienating Catholic revolutionists at a time when the State needed every support it could get. The

# REVIEWS

third Article of the cult ("... to assist the unfortunate... to defend the oppressed, to do all the good one can to one's neighbours, and to behave with justice towards all men") is, in fact, although Rudé does not notice this, an echo (perhaps conscious?) of Thomas Paine's creed in *The Age of Reason*, recently published in France. "My religion is to do good", wrote Paine; and "I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures happy." (Ironically, Paine in 1794 was in a French prison, having voted against the death penalty for Louis XVI. Rudé does not notice he was one of the Committee of Nine appointed to consider a new Constitution in 1792, giving its composition as Sieyès, six Girondins and two Jacobins. But Paine, although he had Girondist friends, was a foreign Deputy and a number of his ideas were Jacobin, socially akin to Robespierre's).

The prints of that strange ceremony, the Festival of the Supreme Being, led by Robespierre only a few weeks before his death, show, however, that it attracted no large crowd. Robespierre was losing his grip, and Rudé even suggests a death-wish through disillusion.

No political figure has aroused more controversy, and this is the third English book on Robespierre during the last three years, not counting Soboul's monumental *French Revolution*. Rudé includes a helpful Glossary, Chronology and even attempt to unravel, in tabular form, the complexities of the new French calendar invented by the actor Fabre d'Eglantine (whose corruptibility, like Danton's, was disastrous to himself in the end). Yet Danton's cheerful profligacy and pocket-lining have a humanity many have found hard to find in Robespierre, who for all the books remains ambiguous and remote. But enigmas have their fascination too, and Rudé's book will not be the last.

AUDREY WILLIAMSON

AUDREY WILLIAMSON

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This book is written from a committed standpoint, but it is a reasonable account of the place of Christianity in the "pop culture" and of the relevance of pop culture to the church. Tony Jaspers is critical of some aspects of the scene, speaking of "the deluge of 'feel-with-it' religiosity"; he is equally critical of the established churches' resistance to new forms and to new media and ecumenical moves. He remains nevertheless convinced of what are for him the positive aspects of Jesus in pop. Even though he admits that there are many aspects of the counter-culture which he neglects, it is important to emphasise how marginal a part of the pop scene the Jesus movement is: Woodstock and Windsor are remembered where Spree '73 has been quite forgotten.

One of the strengths of the book is the author's extensive knowledge of the pop scene, even if this can at times lead him to long lists of groups and records tedious to all but the aficionado. He would not deny the commercial interest behind some ventures, mentioning £10 million plus aspect of *Jesus Christ Superstar*. I would like to learn much more about the financing of religious pop events. However, the quality of the music is what counts first for most people, and Tony Jaspers recounts the failure of religious songs of little musical vitality. He writes: "One suspects that the rock world has long forgotten *Jesus Christ Superstar* unlike, say, the Who, the Beatles and Dylan". He does not draw the further conclusion that my own observation suggests, that a record may sell *despite*, not *because of*, its religious echoes. How many people who bought *Amazing Grace* were aware of any implication of transcendence? I also think he underestimates, with his own interest in religious traits in lyrics, the importance of the sound alone to many in the pop scene.

One of the more interesting aspects of the book is its insight into the consternation with which many of the established churches have reacted. Fear of long hair, "loose morals" and Left-wing ideas have caused a flurry in many well-feathered flocks. It is mentioned that the *English Churchman* classified *Jesus Christ Superstar* as Satan-inspired, Tony Jaspers is at one point led to speak, in his evident irritation with the Church's failure to come to terms with the modern world, of a new type of "secular Christian"; in view of his admirable preference for love of the individual to the "disease of soul-winning", I wonder why he wishes to bother with the Christian half of this peculiar phrase?

I think it is fair to say that much youth culture is concerned with a quest for meaning and identity, which sometimes takes the form of vaguely religious interests ranging from Hare Krishna to Jesus. Equally, it is intensely dissatisfied with the world and sometimes drawn to revolutionary or messianic

groups. But in their attempt to question and change I would hope that young people are coming to find maturity without dogma and moralising. A book which has not been written is *Humanism in a Pop Culture*—maybe because it is too obvious to need any special pleading.

JIM HERRICK

**RELIGIOUS SUPERSTITION THROUGH THE AGES by Don Lewis. Mowbrays, £3.75.**

The title is only one of several unfortunate groupings of ideas to be found in this book by an Anglican vicar. Unfortunate, that is, from a religious point of view. For as Mr Lewis says, "Like Christianity, superstitions are caught and not taught." Unintentionally his book shows only too clearly that the difference between the two is merely one of organisation. He even includes prayer under the heading of religious superstition.

The hundreds of superstitions dealt with here include many unfamiliar ones. Explanations appear adequate on the whole, but there are a few surprising exceptions. Horseshoes, for example, are said to be lucky because they are made of iron, whose magical attributes date from the time when it was first realised that weapons made from it were superior to those of wood or stone. Maybe, but that does not explain the horseshoe shape, which is quite another story.

As the author says, the Church Christianised many of the old superstitions rather than ban them, as well as bringing in a whole crop of new ones. One of the latter was based on the belief that when the devil left a possessed person he cried out. A screaming infant at baptism was therefore audible—Mr Lewis says visible—proof that the devil had departed. To facilitate his egress from the church the north door was left ajar, the north being peculiarly the realm of Satan.

My own favourite from this collection is the Irish belief that when two burials took place in a churchyard on one day, the second corpse to arrive was obliged to carry water to allay the thirst of all those already buried there. This naturally caused trouble between rival burial parties. One such occasion became a race, won by the party which succeeded in throwing its coffin over the churchyard wall before the other could get in by the gate. Followed, of course, by a battle to vindicate the honour of the slighted corpse. It seems incredible that even the Irish should take such nonsense seriously, but that is only one example. They also believed that anyone dying on Christmas Eve was spared the rigours of Purgatory. That led to many a case of what one can only hope was euthanasia.

"The early history of man was shaped and dominated by supernatural beliefs", we are told. "They

(Continued on back page)

## LETTERS

In the review of "The Life of Bertrand Russell" by Ronald W. Clark, which appeared in the December issue of "The Freethinker" over the name Dora Russell, there are some inaccuracies and misunderstandings which require correction.

The reviewer states that Mr Clark was "the first person allowed by the Russell Estate and McMaster University to make use for publication of the Russell archives". The journal of the Russell archives regularly reports the dozens of scholars using the archives at McMaster University for the purpose of publishing theses, essays and books on my late husband, McMaster University, and not the Russell Estate, owns and controls the archives. At the express wish of my husband, no *bona fide* student may be excluded from the archives.

The reviewer states that Mr Clark "has also the correspondence between Russell and . . . Lady Constance Malleson". Any correspondence between Bertrand Russell and Lady Constance Malleson which Bertrand Russell sent to McMaster University is embargoed until five years after the death of the survivor, i.e. until 1980.

The reviewer states: "As I indicated in my autobiography, Russell left his papers to two Trustees." Bertrand Russell disposed of most of his papers in his lifetime. Any remaining papers were left to two Literary Executors to deal with subject to consultation with his general Executors.

The reviewer states that she does "not know if any letters of mine to Russell exist; if so, I have been informed that, on Russell's orders, they are not to be published till five years after my death". Bertrand Russell instructed that all letters between him and his wives, children and grandchildren and other named individuals were to be embargoed until five years after the death of the survivor in each case in order to protect the privacy of the other parties. The reviewer is not the only person to benefit from Bertrand Russell's thoughtfulness for all his relatives.

EDITH RUSSELL

Dora Russell writes: Referring to Edith, Countess Russell's comments on my review of Ronald W. Clark's biography of Bertrand Russell, it is obvious that any writer dealing with literary material—as I was—can be informed only by what is made public.

At the time when Mr Clark began work on his book, there was a statement in the Press that, while this work was not "official", it was being sanctioned by the Russell Estate and that he would be allowed by McMaster University to make full use of the archives for this publication. In spite of access to the archives, I do not think that, so far, any other researcher has been permitted to publish information derived from the more intimate papers.

Whatever embargo has been placed as to dates of publication, it is quite clear that a very great deal of Clark's narrative over a long period of years derives from study of the Lady Ottoline Morrell and Lady Constance Malleson correspondence. From time to time sentences are quoted verbatim. Nor are we told, except occasionally, what other people may have said.

Countess Russell explains that McMaster University, and not the Russell Estate, owns and controls the archives and, presumably, the copyrights. I am glad to see this publicly stated. Russell's Will does say that his literary Executors were to be Countess Russell and Anton Felton. Many people were in doubt as to where to apply in respect of copyright. The usual assumption

is that this passes to the natural heirs. Consequently now and then my son, the present Earl Russell, has been applied to by people seeking permission to use material by his father, having tried elsewhere without reply or success. Apparently it was not known that the copyrights had been sold to McMaster University.

So far as any personal letters of mine are concerned, I have no anxiety as to their publication, whether before or after my death. But, as regards what Mr Clark professes to derive from perusal of the letters of others, he pays little or no regard to the privacy or feelings of myself or Russell's family. In this matter I think Clark should have received more guidance at this particular date. And for this, those who sanctioned the book must be held responsible.

### HUMANISM—RATIONAL OR RELIGIOUS?

In the article "Our Sense of the Sacred" ("The Free-thinker", January), Peter Cadogan writes: "Nicolas Walter could take my weight, my height, my temperature, my pulse, and even my photograph, but that's about it. What goes on inside my head, and his, is something else." Yes, indeed—and after knowing him for 15 years I still don't know what goes on inside his head. But let me list some of the worst absurdities in his article.

It is absurd to pretend that the debate about religious humanism is either a new debate or "the real debate", when it is both rather old and rather unreal. It is absurd to suggest that the case for religion has been ignored in the humanist movement, when it has always been maintained by some organisations (such as the Ethical Union and the South Place Ethical Society) and by some individuals (such as Julian Huxley and Peter Cadogan). It is absurd to suppose that "organised humanists" pretended that Huxley's "Religion without Revelation" "did not exist", after noting that two editions of the book were actually published by the organised humanists of the Rationalist Press Association.

It is absurd to say that "poets and artists" and "religious prophets" have "often proved to be right", without mentioning which ones have been right about what things, or to say that "it is time we took the artist and religious person seriously", without mentioning the damage such people have done to human thought when they have been taken seriously. It is absurd to insist on "the extraordinary promise of primitive Christianity", when there is so little evidence and when what evidence there is suggests that the Church was disastrous to human progress from the start.

It is absurd to say that "our humanism will only have depth and significance if it is the same humanism that moved Socrates and Erasmus", when both men believed strongly in an external deity and in the right of the State to regulate opinion. It is absurd to pick More as the ideal humanist, when he was not just a "good Catholic" who "chose death" but a powerful politician who sent heretics to torture and death; if it is true that "there was no contradiction between his religion and his humanism", then so much the worse for his humanism—it is surely possible to appreciate "Utopia" without admiring its author.

It is absurd for Peter Cadogan to say that he isn't concerned with what I say Durkheim believed, when it was he who invoked Durkheim in the first place. It is absurd to attack the Positivist Churches as a failure of rationalism, when they were derived from Comte's "religion of humanity" and when Positivism was one of the first attempts at religious humanism (what T. H. Huxley called "Catholicism minus Christianity"). It is absurd to say that "things are not as they were 50 years ago", when what is being advocated is precisely

the ethical religion of 50 or even a hundred years ago. It is absurd to say that humanism is "in danger of slipping into nothingness", when what is being advocated is precisely nothingness—neither real belief nor real unbelief. It is absurd to say that the humanist organisations face bankruptcy because we fail to "break new ground and back our hunches", when the main reason is that inflation is reducing the money accumulated by our predecessors (the South Place Ethical Society will survive, if it does survive, not because of its principles but because of its premises).

It is absurd for Peter Cadogan to describe concepts he doesn't like as "appalling clichés" and to declare that "it is time to ditch labels and get through to reality", when his whole argument is based on old clichés dressed up with new labels in complete isolation from and ignorance of reality. It is absurd for him to admit that the sacred is created by society, without realising that our movement has always depended on individuals freely and rationally rejecting what society calls sacred. It is absurd to say that "our sense of what is important to us" is the same as "our sense of the sacred", when what is important to many of us is precisely that we have no sense of the sacred, or indeed to talk about "our sense of the sacred" at all, when what he means is *his* sense of the sacred.

Above all, it is absurd to say that "the non-rational" is as important as "the rational", when it is only by using our reason that we can distinguish between them. It really is time for the whole humanist movement to put away childish things and grow up.

NICOLAS WALTER  
Managing Editor, Rationalist Press Association

Peter Cadogan's article "Our Sense of the Sacred" contained so many sonorous but largely meaningless phrases, vague abstractions and outworn clichés, that it would require a letter of equal length in reply. However, I will limit this to a few factual matters.

He gives what is apparently a dire warning of what to expect for Humanism if we persist in our rationalism, heedless of the saving gospel of St Peter (Cadogan), by recounting the fate of the Positivist Church in London. In fact this institution vanished not so much through preaching "reason" as Mr Cadogan asserts, but from a surfeit of would-be popes and self-appointed Messiahs. Richard Congreve quarrelled with Comte's successor, Lafitte, and invented the title "Church of Humanity" for his chapel near Conway Hall. Very soon Frederic Harrison, Dr Bridges, Professor Beesly and others split again to form the congregation in Newton Hall, Fetter Lane.

The Positivist Church in Rugby Street, far from being rationalist in outlook, had some very irrational beliefs that would probably have appealed to Mr Cadogan with his Christmas fairy queens and lighted candle processions. Around the walls at Rugby Street were busts of the 13 Comtist "saints", including Moses, Caesar, St Paul, Aristotle, Charlemagne, Shakespeare and Frederick II. This mixed bunch gave their names to the months of the Positivist calendar. There was also an engraving of Shakespeare wearing earrings, a bust of Heloise as the Ideal Woman, a Madonna and child Jesus and an altar. (Wouldn't Mr Cadogan have liked that for his gimmicky pseudo-religious wedding services.)

The absurd calendar of 13 months they observed had an era commencing not with the birth of Christ, but with the French revolution which Comte supposed had inaugurated a new era for humanity(!) and also from the founding of Positivism in 1854. This resulted in dates like "the tenth of Gutenberg in the year 188-122" (1976).

These institutions became extinct not because of practising "reason" as Mr Cadogan claims, but for adopting pathetic, feeble imitations of Christian ritual and beliefs, as he desires of the Humanist movement, and from having "too many chiefs with too few Indians."

JAMES M. ALEXANDER

In his article "Our Sense of the Sacred" Peter Cadogan extols the humanism of Thomas More. But More put his religious creed before ordinary human welfare (even including his own), and that is certainly not humanism in our sense. The article appeals for us "to ditch our labels and get through to realities"—which may sound very progressive but does not bear analysis, for "labels" are needed if we are to identify different views of reality. Without "labels", verbal communication would be impossible.

Peter Cadogan also states that "in a very few years the bailiffs will move in on" the National Secular Society, the British Humanist Association and the Rationalist Press Association. The fact is, however, that the NSS, unlike the other two humanist organisations and South Place Ethical Society, does not indulge in annual expenditure that exceeds its annual income (including investment income) so we need fear no bailiffs.

Moreover, until recent years, SPES also had a policy of keeping within its income—and it should be easier for them than for any of the other organisations in the movement, since, long before Peter Cadogan's association with the Society, they acquired a hall which brings in an ever-increasing income. The credit for this, however, is not his to claim.

BARBARA SMOKER  
President, National Secular Society

## SOURCES

In his review of my book "For Christ's Sake" ("The Freethinker", January) Professor G. A. Wells has given the argument with reasonable accuracy, but his comments reveal an unfamiliarity with the techniques of historical inquiry.

For example, that one source is later than another does not necessarily mean that it is less reliable. It may have had access to more primitive factual material. Also anthropomorphisms do not imply actual physical organs and capacities in deity, only the limitations of human language for descriptive purposes when dealing with the non-human.

HUGH J. SCHONFIELD

G. A. Wells writes: I am well aware (and have illustrated the phenomenon in "The Jesus of the Early Christians", chapter eight) that a later writer may use more reliable sources than an earlier one. But this does not justify Dr Schonfield's method of drawing freely from any documents—early or late—to construct what he regards as a plausible biography of Jesus. In "The Passover Plot", for instance, he concedes that the fourth gospel is unreliable. But as he needs it for evidence of much that he regards as genuinely Jesuine, he simply supposes that its author "had access to some genuine unpublished reminiscences of the unnamed Beloved Disciple".

As for the limitations of human language, is the ferocity of Yahweh in the Old Testament to be thus explained away? And if these limitations make it impossible to talk (as opposed to think) of a Deity without form or substance, then pagan religious talk is not (with Dr Schonfield) to be set aside as idolatrous and as inferior to its Jewish equivalent.

## PORNOGRAPHY AND CENSORSHIP

Ethel Mannin is wrong in attributing to me the view that pornography does no harm ("The Freethinker", January). Some of it—especially the pornography of violence—undoubtedly does. But censorship, which violates the freedom of human thought, does infinitely greater harm, because it is always and everywhere the arbitrary exercise of political power by a dominant social group over dissident minorities—and sometimes over majorities too. With Voltaire, I would defend the right of free speech even for the most detestable doctrine. Freedom only for what Ethel Mannin or I consider to be harmless would be a hollow sort of liberty.

Since I reciprocate Miss Mannin's admiration, one can only deplore that she has marred her letter with the ludicrous assertion that I "seem to regret" the capture of the Cambridge Rapist. In fact I rejoice in it: though whether his incarceration, or that of anyone else, in an English prison, is a matter for equal rejoicing is another question.

ANTONY GREY

Obeying Antony Grey's injunction to stand up in defence of free speech, I agree with the sentiments he expressed in the article "Pornography and Rape", and declare that censorship and tyranny go hand in hand. I therefore completely disagree with Ethel Mannin. People who want censorship of sex are opening the back door to political censorship, whether they wish this to happen or not.

That pornography incites crime certainly can be disputed, and Mr Grey referred to two sources. And I really do object to being told that, as a normal person, my brain is being "polluted" by something as pleasant as erotica. Of course I am affected by it—a diet of reading and viewing that does not affect one will turn one into a cabbage, a fate I would not wish on anybody but unfortunately many others would like to inflict on me.

I think that young people are capable of making up their own minds—I recall my own teenage rejection of religion, for example—and suggest that they do not feel attacked by pornography, though they may feel resentment against those who try to "defend" them from it. The older generations would be better occupied in investigating if this wish to circumscribe the experiences of the young is really a manifestation of their own inhibitions, prejudices or lost opportunities. I find Ethel Mannin's remarks about pornography in her review of Gordon Rattray Taylor's book ("The Freethinker", January 1976) significant since she admits there were only two brief references to the subject.

Finally, the idea that pornography is the negation of the good life is absurd. Viewing two excellent blue films in France with my wife were just two incidents in a very pleasant Christmas holiday when our relations were enhanced, as they were also by reading Sinclair Lewis's "Babbitt" and the January editions of "The Freethinker" and "Forum".

P. L. LANCASTER

I have been an admirer of Ethel Mannin for many years, but I cannot agree with her views on the effects of pornography.

Ethel Mannin claims that it cannot be disputed that pornography incites pathological cases like the Moors murderers and the Cambridge rapist. Yet in his summing-up in the Moors murder trial the presiding judge remarked, referring to the fact that Brady and Hindley read de Sade: "If the accused are the sort of people the prosecution says they are, then this is the sort of thing you could expect them to read." In other

(Continued on back page)

# PUBLICATIONS

The Jesus Hoax, Phyllis Graham, (hard cover) £3.95, (breakaway edition) £2.25, (42p). *Honest to Man*, Margaret Knight, £3.75, (24p). *Humanism*, Barbara Smoker, 40p, (9p). *The Longford Threat to Freedom*, Bridgid Brophy, 10p, (7p). *The Right to Die*, Charles Wilshaw, 25p, (9p). *An Introduction to Secular Humanism*, Kit Mouat, 45p, (9p). *What Humanism is About*, Kit Mouat, 53p, (24p). *From Jewish Messianism to the Christian Church*, Prosper Alfarc, 5p, (7p). *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, John Allegro, 55p, (16p). *Did Jesus Christ Exist*, Chapman Cohen, 5p, (7p). *Morality Without God*, Chapman Cohen, 5p, (7p). *Woman and Christianity*, Chapman Cohen, 5p, (7p). *Materialism Restated*, Chapman Cohen, 50p, (21p). *Thomas Paine*, Chapman Cohen, 15p, (6p). *Religious Roots of the Taboo on Homosexuality*, John Lauritsen, 20p, (9p). *The Absurdities of Christian Science*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *The Jesuits: Religious Rogues*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *Christianity and Slavery*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *Phallic Elements in Religion*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *Did Jesus ever Live?*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *Pagan Christs*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *The Fraud of Spiritualism*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *Legends of Saints and Martyrs*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *Morals in Ancient Babylon*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *Life and Morals in Greece and Rome*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *Revolt Against Religion*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *Psychology of Religion*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *The Sources of Christian Morality*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *How Man Made God*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *The Futility of Belief in God*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *The Horrors of the Inquisition*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *The Moorish Civilisation in Spain*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *The Degradation of Women*, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). *RI and Surveys*, Maurice Hill, 5p, (7p). *The Cost of Church Schools*, David Tribe, 20p, (7p). *Religion and Ethics in Schools*, David Tribe, 8p, (7p). *The Case Against Church Schools*, Patricia Knight, 20p, (7p). *The Little Red Schoolbook*, S. Jansen, 30p, (11p). *Why I am Not a Christian*, Bertrand Russell, £1, (16p). *On Education*, Bertrand Russell, 65p, (19p). *Education and the Social Order*, Bertrand Russell, 75p, (16p). *Unpopular Essays*, Bertrand Russell, 45p, (19p). *Roads to Freedom*, Bertrand Russell, 60p, (19p). *Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*, Bertrand Russell, 30p, (16p). *Principles and Social Reconstruction*, Bertrand Russell, 75p, (19p). *Mysticism and Logic*, Bertrand Russell, 50p, (19p). *Marriage and Morals*, Bertrand Russell, 55p, (19p). *Legitimacy versus Industrialism*, Bertrand Russell, 50p, (19p). *In Praise of Idleness*, Bertrand Russell, 70p, (19p). *Authority and the Individual*, Bertrand Russell, 60p, (14p). *Common Sense and Nuclear Warfare*, Bertrand Russell, 40p, (14p). *The Conquest of Happiness*, Bertrand Russell, £1, (16p). *Impact of Science on Society*, Bertrand Russell, 60p, (16p). *Political Ideals*, Bertrand Russell, 50p, (14p). *Bertrand Russell's Best*, Robert E. Enger, £1, 16p. *Bertrand Russell: a Life*, Herbert Gottchalk, 25p, (16p). *Bertrand Russell: the Passionate Sceptic*, Allan Wood, 50p, (19p). *The Origins of Christianity*, G. A. Wells, 20p, (7p). *The Jesus of the Early Christians*, G. A. Wells, £2.95, (42p). *Broadcasting, Brainwashing, Conditioning*, David Tribe, 25p, (7p). *Nucleoethics: Ethics in Modern Society*, David Tribe, 90p, (24p). *Questions of Censorship*, David Tribe, £4.75, (48p). *Religion and Human Rights*, David Tribe, 3p, (7p). *President Charles Bradlaugh, MP*, David Tribe, £4, (62p).

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words, people like the Moors murderers and the Cambridge rapist do not read pornographic books and become sexual sadists. They read pornographic books because they already are sexual sadists.

Far from there being any evidence to show that pornography incites people to commit rape or murder, it has long been the opinion of many psychiatrists that pornography reading may act as a powerful safety valve to potential murderers and rapists. The dramatic decline in the sex crime rate immediately following the abolition of censorship in Denmark surely cannot have been pure coincidence.

As for the argument that pornography readers become "morally polluted", this is surely a highly subjective matter. The reading of almost any book dealing frankly with sex could be regarded as resulting in "moral pollution". Some critics include in this category even such an excellent work as *Commonsense and the Adolescent*—by Ethel Mannin.

JOHN L. BROOM

### *Reciprocity and Neighbourliness*

them will bring comfort and satisfaction only to those who suppose themselves to be virtuous. But the beliefs may also be encouraged, even by those who do not believe, in the hope that they restrain others from evildoing. It is possible that in this country the strong opposition sometimes shown to irreligion is prompted more often by the wish to discourage crime in others than by any consciousness of virtue.

\* ("Der Sinn der NT Christologie," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 54 (1957), p.347.)

Sir John Langford-Holt, Conservative MP for Shrewsbury, is to introduce a Private Member's Bill in the House of Commons which is intended to allow shops run by their owners to open on Sundays. He will seek leave to introduce the Bill under the ten-minute rule later this month. It defines an owner as someone who owns 25 per cent of the business, and would enable a family of four or under who run their own shop to open and close when they wish.

## EVENTS

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove. Sunday, 7 March, 5.30 pm. Mrs D. Voller: "The Magistrates' Court".

**British Humanist Association.** Exhibition: "Expressions of Humanism", at annual conference, Walsall, July. Send stamped, addressed envelope for details to Margaret Chisman, 50 Tuddenham Road, Ipswich.

**Leeds Humanist Group.** City of Leeds School, Centre Block, Great George Street. Wednesday, 3 March, 8 pm. A meeting.

**Leicester Secular Society.** Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Sunday meetings at 6.30 pm. 8 February, F. A. Ridley: "The End of the Borgla Era". 15 February, J. Crocker: "Studying Spiders". 22 February, John Llewellyn Jones: "Collecting and Identifying British Sea Shells". 29 February, Frank Hansford-Miller: "A Crusade for an English Renaissance".

**London Secular Group** (outdoor meetings). Thursdays, 12.30-2 pm at Tower Hill; Sundays, 3-7 pm at Marble Arch. ("The Freethinker" and other literature on sale.)

**Merseyside Humanist Group.** Lecture Room, 16 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. Meetings held on the third Wednesday of the month, 7.45 pm.

**Muswell Hill Humanist Group.** 43 Pages' Lane, London N10. Thursday, 19 February, 8 pm. Hector Hawton Memorial Meeting.

**South Place Ethical Society.** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday meetings at 11 am. 8 February, H. J. Blackham: "Towards Self-Management". 15 February, W. H. Liddell: "Lessons of Jeffersonian Democracy". 22 February, Ninian Smart: "Exploring Religion in a Plural Society". 29 February, Peter Cadogan, "The Myth of the State". Tuesday meetings at 7 pm.

**Worthing Humanist Group.** Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade, Worthing. Sunday, 29 February, John Marshall: "Freud's Psychoanalytical Theory".

### *Religious Superstition*

did not pretend to be able to explain or understand them. It was enough that there was an inherited tradition . . . as these superstitions were believed in they did, in moments of crisis, lift men's hearts to deal with particular situations." One wonders if modern man has progressed all that much.

R. J. CONDON

## THE FREETHINKER

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