

## BHA HITS BACK AT THE WHITEHOUSE SMEAR CAMPAIGN

The British Humanist Association has retaliated against the religious smear merchants—particularly Mary Whitehouse and her cohorts—who have been conducting a campaign of vilification and distortion against the Association. Kenneth Furness, general secretary of the BHA, issued a public statement in which he declared that Mrs Whitehouse “has taken over the mantle of Senator McCarthy in a vicious and blatant attempt to smear the British Humanist Association with the label of Communism.”

Mr Furness went on to say that Mary Whitehouse was being supported in her witch-hunting activities by such groups as the Nationwide Festival of Light, Order of Christian Unity and the World Unification Church “as well as a clutch of the eminent such as the Chief Scout, Margaret Thatcher and Edward Short, all of whom really ought to know better.

“The charges made against this Association in literature circulated by the ‘save religious education’ campaign include the statements: ‘The BHA is affiliated to and works closely with Left-wing organisations who see the destruction of the bastion of Christian morality as essential to the success of their Communist strategy’, and ‘dedicated and vociferous minority groups are determined to abolish school worship and to replace religious education with an atheistic philosophy, often with political motives and sometimes with revolutionary intentions’.

“To answer the first charge, the BHA is affiliated to four organisations: the United Nations Association, the National Council for Civil Liberties, the Howard League for Penal Reform and the National Peace Council. All of these have many Christians amongst their members and none can be said to be putting forward a Communist strategy. The BHA itself has no affiliation to any political party and its members cover the whole spectrum of political belief.

“The second charge can be answered by refer-

ence to the full BHA proposals for reform of the 1944 Education Act contained in the booklet *Objective Fair and Balanced—a New Law for Religion in Education*, published in 1975. This booklet makes it perfectly clear that what we are now attempting to do is not to abolish RE from schools—and our proposals refer only to county schools—but to broaden the area of teaching about ultimate beliefs so that children are given an understanding of all the major belief-systems, whether religious or non-religious, which motivate people in their daily lives.

“Naturally this would enable children to make a rational and informed discovery of their own particular ‘stance for living’. Presumably this is what so terrifies Mary Whitehouse.

“Every respectable educational and religious body throughout the country is convinced of the need for change in the 1944 Education Act, and serious discussion now centres not around the necessity for reform, but around what should be put in place of existing religious provisions. Amongst recent outspoken religious comment on RE, the Bishop of Wakefield has said that ‘compulsion should go’, and the Association of Christian Teachers itself, in a recently published leaflet, called for an enquiry into amendment of the Act—a move we strongly support.

### Despicable Tactics

“The attempt by Mary Whitehouse to muddy the waters can only be condemned. Her tactics are despicable. We have long cherished in this country a tradition of free speech, this is now being challenged by McCarthyist smear tactics and by an outrageous attempt to impose a personal and restrictive view of morality on everyone else, regardless of belief. Religious intolerance and thought control as propounded by Mary Whitehouse, is perhaps the most vicious form of discrimination of all.”

In a recent interview—published in *Baptist Times*

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# Christian MPs Defend Compulsory Worship

The House of Commons recently debated a motion which was moved by Michael Alison (Conservative, Barkston Ash), on "the need to maintain and improve the opportunities for religious education and an act of worship in schools." Mr Alison argued that Christianity merited a special place in the school, and he based his case on the results of opinion polls carried out in 1964 and 1968.

Dr Rhodes Boyson (Conservative, Brent North), expressed his gratitude to Mr Alison for introducing the motion. Dr Boyson then told the House of his experience when he went to teach at an East End School: "I was told that there could be no assembly . . . because they could not get the various groups together. If they called a Jewish assembly everyone pretended to be Christian, and if they called a Christian assembly everyone pretended to be Jewish to escape from it, as has been done in the Army."

## United we all Fall Down

Dr Boyson then related how he visited priests and religious leaders in the community. He said: "We agreed to worship one God . . . We agreed on six hymns and a number of readings. For the first time in a number of years there was an assembly. When we came to prayers I said 'We shall all pray to God in the way that our religion teaches us.' One group, the Christians, closed their eyes. Another group kept

their eyes open to see if God was coming. Another group which comprised a certain section from the East, prostrated themselves and knocked the others down. Not only did it do a considerable amount for the moral values of the school, but it also projected a sense of unity in the school."

Norman St John-Stevas (Conservative, Chelmsford), told the House: "It has been alleged that the decline in church-going is a reason for abandoning the provisions for an act of common worship. I believe that the realities are quite different. The fact of declining church-going makes it all the more important to preserve this act of worship in the schools."

Bryan Davies (Labour, Enfield North) asked if it was Mr St John-Stevas' argument "that the Conservative Party, which constantly calls for choice in education, on this occasion suggests that voluntary attendance at church should be substituted for compulsory attendance at acts of worship in school."

In reply, Mr St John-Stevas repeated the standard lie of Christian indoctrinators: "Attendance is not compulsory . . . anybody who wishes may contract out."

## OBITUARIES

### MR P. KANE

Southampton Humanist Society and other Humanist groups on the south coast have sustained a tragic loss by the death of Peter Kane at the early age of 37. Mr Kane underwent an operation last November and he appeared to be well on the way to recovery. His condition then deteriorated and he returned to hospital. It became necessary to administer pain-killing drugs, and he was under sedation for the last two weeks of his life.

Mr Kane was editor of *Rationale*, a journal which has appeared regularly for the last eleven years. It achieved a remarkably high standard, and carried articles covering a wide range of subjects together with news of the Humanist movement in Southampton and other Hampshire and Sussex towns.

Cremation has taken place. There will be a memorial meeting at the Upper Room, Friends Meeting House, Ordnance Road, Southampton on Saturday, 24 April, 2.30 pm.

### MR S. WOODHOUSE

Samuel Woodhouse, who has died at the age of 90, had a varied and interesting life. He travelled widely in the East, and lived in India and Burma. There was a secular committal ceremony at the Crematorium, Salisbury, Wiltshire, on 19 March.

DAVID TRIBE

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## Whitehouse Smear Campaign

—Mrs Whitehouse said: "If there were a frontal attack to train children for Communism there would be a public outcry, so the Humanists attack by the back door." She described herself as "a Christian who has committed my life to the cleansing power of Jesus Christ. I'm an Anglican, a church-goer."

The interviewer informed *Baptist Times* readers that he left Mary Whitehouse knowing that he "had been in the presence of a dedicated Christian."

Church leaders who have been making public pronouncements on social and moral questions clearly expect everyone to accept their dictates. And although three per cent of broadcasting time is devoted to the dissemination of religious views, Churchmen complain that too much publicity is given to "extremists", i.e. anybody whose views are unacceptable to the Establishment. The president of the National Secular Society says it is time that the religious pontificators were slapped down.

The leaders of the major Christian sects have been assaulting us lately with a battery of moral directives.

The Archbishop of Canterbury fired the first volley in October 1975 with his "call to the nation", concerned with Britain's salvation from economic decline to the heaven of capitalistic stability, through sacrifice and discipline. An appendix to this epistle was issued a few days later, jointly with the Archbishop of York. No sooner had all the publicity died down than it was time for Donald Cantuar's New Year message—in which denunciation of extra-marital sexual activity (always a favourite theme with Christian prelates) provided human interest for the media.

The same subject, in greater depth, exercised those elderly, celibate members of the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly the Inquisition) in a global communiqué, *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*, issued in January after abortive attempts by some progressives in the Vatican to consign it to limbo. The document's description of homosexuality as "intrinsically disordered" looks like an indictment of the omnipotent creator with regard to five per cent of his highest species. Masturbation is similarly denounced; though it is difficult, in any commonsense view of morality based on human well-being, to think of any kind of sexual activity that is less harmful. By comparison, the one kind of which the Sacred Congregation approves—that is, straight intercourse between husband and wife without contraceptive precautions—can, and does, cause a vast amount of human misery.

Then it was the turn of the C of E again, with the publication in February of a restatement of the Archbishop's plea on behalf of Christian capitalism, in more subtle and intellectual terms—*The State of the Nation*, written by Canon David Edwards for the C of E's Board for Social Responsibility. It was timed to provide the basis for the General Synod's debate on the subject, so as to draw fire away from the Primate's cruder exegesis.

None of these documents, however, was addressed

merely to the faithful. Each presumed to lay down the moral law for us all, believer and non-believer alike, as though ecclesiastical appointments confer secular authority. This, indeed, is just what the Churches would claim—the Church of Rome because of its special relationship with the godhead, the Church of England because of the historical accident of Establishment. They need to be slapped down. And this secular rejoinder is a contribution to that end.

A common thread running through the documents may be summed up in the words "If it's enjoyable, it's a sin—especially if it threatens the old social order." Thus saith the Lord, through his official interpreters.

What a lucky chance it is that the Divine Will always happens to suit the will of the rich and the powerful, whose plans for the rest of us accord with the cosmic scheme. Thus, it seems, the creator of the universe is primarily concerned at present with the preservation of patriarchal family life on earth and with industrial productivity in the United Kingdom, the main task of his priestly representatives in 1976 being to win over the populace to the law-and-order-and-inequality doctrine.

## The Supremacy of Reason

It was to try to loosen the stranglehold of religious superstition and ecclesiastical power that the National Secular Society, which is associated with this journal, was founded 110 years ago. Our appeal is to the humanity of humanity, guided by reason—not to unreasoning obedience under the yoke of alleged supernatural revelation vested in the Churches in direct descent from the witch-doctor.

We claim no special authority at all—only the inherent authority of reasoned argument based on the ethical principle of Utilitarianism: the principle of deciding whether actions are right or wrong according to their probable consequences for human welfare.

In his call to the nation, the Primate of all England complained "It is the extremists who tend to receive the publicity, and often they win the round." Yet the Churches receive 500 hours of guaranteed broadcasting time on radio and television in this country every week throughout the year, for free propaganda under the auspices of the official Religious Department, while alternative viewpoints have to fight for every minute. And during the one week following the Archbishop's complaint, he—this one man—appeared at peak-time on no fewer than three television programmes (*Nationwide*, *Anno Domini*, and *Stars on Sunday*) and four radio programmes (*It's Your Line*, *Sunday*, *Speakeasy* and

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The celebration of anniversaries, whether personal, national or of world import, religious or secular, has always had a fascination for mankind. They derive from our past of magic and religion; for to record the memory of an event in this way is by some mystical process almost to recreate it. Interest in the calendar is widespread, as shown by popular almanacks from the seventeenth century onwards, and some differing calendars are examined in this article. The author believes them to have always been religious in origin, and that they have developed from the need to perform sacred rites at the correct and propitious times.

The complicated formula for calculating the date of Easter used to be (and probably still is) found in some prayer-books. I well remember as a small boy being fascinated by this, together with such oddities as the Golden Number, Dominical Letters and other esoteric information. Even then I found it perplexing that the exact date of such a world-shattering event was not merely not known, but apparently occurred up to a month apart in successive years.

The real reason, of course, why the date varies is because it is not based on a solar calendar, but derives from an earlier lunar festival. The fixing of religious observances by the phases of the moon is very ancient indeed. It precedes giving fixed dates of the solar year, by some thousands of years. The peculiar method adopted as a means of computing the day of the crucifixion is a relic of Christianity's Judaic origins. It is significant that the early Christians also considered this period of the year as the birthday of their saviour. This is in line with very old superstitions that every event in the life of a god, a prophet or a king must occur on propitious or similar days. Gautama the Buddha is traditionally believed to have been born on, achieved enlightenment on, and died on, the full moon of May. This is still celebrated as the Buddhist festival of Wesak.

Passover, which the first Jewish Christians continued to observe, is also a movable feast, based on the new moon following the vernal equinox. This was originally a spring celebration, and was only later attached to the folk-myth of the Exodus. It is interesting to note that if the escape from Egypt took place at all, the semitic tribesmen who later entered Palestine, forming the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, were probably not enslaved by the Egyptians as such. Their overlords, in fact, appear to have been fellow semites who had conquered the eastern Nile delta area and ruled *circa* 1700-1580 BC. These were the "shepherd-kings", or Hyksos, of Egyptian history. The Jewish religious calendar was developed

from the Babylonian which was a purely lunar one, though the names of their months have an Egyptian origin.

The moon was the first great marker of time used by man because its changes, unlike the sun, could be recognised from day to day. Also, it supposedly had an intimate personal effect, being associated with the monthly female ovulation. It was also believed to be connected with the growth of vegetation. There is a superstition that lingers to this day; that certain crops grow better if planted at the new moon, and others when it is waning. Most lunar deities are female and associated with rivers or water. Venus came out of the sea; Astarte was guardian of the Tigris; Isis, the prototype of the Virgin Mary, was a Nile goddess and the names of both mean "pure waters", Mary being derived from the same root that gives us the word maritime. The Islamic year is still a completely lunar one. This results in the observance of Ramadan wandering through every month. On the other hand, similar moon-based dates such as Easter, the Jewish new year and Passover now only vary by a single month.

## Religious Origins of the Calendar

The variety of dating systems that have been in use at different times in different civilisations is a fascinating subject for speculation on mankind's many aberrations of thinking. Some, the vestiges of which are still with us, like Plough Monday, May Day, Walpurgis Eve, August Bank Holiday and many saint's days are very ancient in origin. They all have their beginnings in magico-religious rites and beliefs. There is little doubt that all calendar systems have first been constructed for religious reasons connected with tribal myths. The need for some fairly accurate method of calculating when rituals and sacrifices were to take place put power into the hands of priests and rulers. That these events coincided with the time of herd breeding, moving to fresh pastures, hunting or the planting of crops, enhanced that power.

One such calendar may have survived for up to ten thousand years. There still exist traceable dates (allowing for calendar revisions and other changes) going back in time to the childhood of civilisation. It is popularly believed a 365-day system with the year divided at the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, and winter and summer solstices with festivals such as Christmas, Lady Day, Midsummer and Michaelmas as the modern focal points, was the earliest. But this is not so, for underlying it can be found the remains of a far older year. This in itself may have given rise to the confusion, argument and counter-argument that have ranged around such Neolithic monuments as Stonehenge and other similar mega-

liths scattered throughout Europe. Although Stonehenge was used to pinpoint Midsummer and to make other celestial observations, it appears to have been altered and re-aligned several times. This has caused much of the speculation and mystical nonsense written about the meaning and purpose of many stone (and wooden) circles. Incidentally, there is no original connection of the Druids with Stonehenge; their annual Midsummer performances are a modern invention, dating from the eighteenth century.

### The Mystique of May Day

From the evidence available, there is some reason for thinking that in early times, the human race may have bred seasonally, as do other animals. If this were so it would account for a calendar, the focal points of which are not the astronomical seasons, but on a rhythmic cycle of fertility. Walpurgis, the modern May Day, is a very ancient celebration. Long before it was adopted as the International Labour Day, it was associated with the annual rebirth of nature. Dancing around the phallic totem, the Maypole, crowning the mother goddess as May Queen, all these form part of very ancient folk traditions. May Day has always been associated with joy and love-making and suggests the existence of a ritual mating season. Indeed, it has been suggested that the words of the old song should read as: "Here we come gathering nuts in May", a reference to the colloquial term for the testes. Everything long associated with this day not only indicates extreme antiquity but also its importance as a day of sexual activity.

Exactly three months further along the year is Lammass, still to be found in the church calendar, but again, so old the origins are forgotten and various explanations given. In Scotland it is still one of the legal quarter-days. It is also the harvest-time and would be a time of popular rejoicing. Perhaps a folk-memory persisted in the institution of the first Monday in August as a public holiday (until transferred to the end of the month).

The next three-month period brings us to Halloween, followed by All Saints Day. This obvious pagan festival was given a Christian veneer because of its antiquity and importance. It was the time for signalling the approach of winter with the lighting of the Beltane bonfires (transferred in the seventeenth century to 5 November as a result of the activities of Guy Fawkes). Again, this time is associated with festivities, pageantry and dancing. The Halloween masks and apple-bobbing would appear to be but remnants of some religious ritual.

At the beginning of February occurs Candlemas, another obscure dating that has been Christianised for no apparent logic. It is certainly another fire or purification ceremony. *Februs*, which gave the month its name was the Roman festival of Purification long before the Christians adopted it for that of Mary. There is also a somewhat similar Jewish festi-

val about this time. I suggest that this would be time the children conceived during the May mating period were born, with consequent religious ceremonies. The ritual use of fire and the lighting of candles as cleansing agents is worldwide and to be found in some form in almost all faiths. It is a remarkable fact that traces of a calendar long predating any based on the solar year can still be found in popular holidays and Church festivals. Thus folk memories persist despite the overlaying by centuries of civilisation.

### An American Oddity

There is one dating system that bears no relationship to any other (even the Chinese who like to be different in most things have their New Year sometime in January). This was the invention of the Toltecs and Mayas of Central and South America. Their calendars appear to be no way connected with any known natural phenomena. Neither solar nor lunar, not seasonal or derived from any known astronomical or sidereal events, these calendars seem to relate recurring periods of many years and were not annual. They consist of 18-month periods each composed of 20 days. The probable reason is some factor unknown to us in the history of these people. Unfortunately there is no Rosetta Stone to facilitate deciphering their script.

So: Easter moves because it neither records an historical event nor has anything to do with Christianity in origin, but results from attempts to reconcile opposing religious beliefs and methods of constructing calendars. If the crucifixion really happened, it is rather strange that the Coptic Church, probably the oldest Christian Church of all, and which certainly existed in Alexandria long before there was one in Rome, views things very differently from all others. For they look upon every Friday as a kind of Good Friday, and celebrate every Sunday almost as a combined Christmas and Easter Day. Is this because, from the very beginning, these festivals were looked upon as merely symbolical?

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**Barbara Smoker, president of the National Secular Society, welcomed guests from many parts of the country who attended the annual dinner in London on 3 April. Edward Blishen, the educationist, author and critic, was guest of honour. Mr Blishen has spoken at the Society's meetings on religion in school, and is a frequent contributor to the columns of "The Freethinker". Diane Munday, a veteran campaigner for abortion law reform, proposed a toast to the NSS and spoke warmly of its opposition to the churches and religious pressure groups during the last 110 years. Nicolas Walter, editor of "New Humanist", responded on behalf of the Society. A full report will appear in the May issue of "The Freethinker".**

# Jesus' Ethical Teaching

In his "Reciprocity and Neighbourliness in Jesus' Teaching", which was published in the February "Freethinker", G. A. Wells dealt with the problems facing Christian apologists when they defend the ethical teachings of Jesus. D. P. Davies, a lecturer at St David's University College, Lampeter, examines the propositions advanced by Professor Wells, who replies.

## D. P. DAVIES

Professor Wells' contention that much of Jesus' ethical teaching offers the promise of reward allied to the threat of punishment is, in my view, substantially correct. He rightly claims that Jesus believed in a reversal of current fortunes at the coming of the reign of God (this is a more accurate description than talk of "another life"). What Wells is saying is that Jesus' ethical teaching is based on his eschatological message and this is widely recognised by New Testament scholars in the twentieth century.

Similarly there is little doubt that parables, such as the Good Samaritan, contain a polemic against certain of Jesus' contemporaries like the priests and Levites. There is a similar polemic in the parable of the prodigal son, where the attitude of the elder brother reflects the self-righteousness attacked by Jesus in other places, e.g. in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18). The father's attitude is entirely consistent (*contra* Wells) since what matters to Jesus is that all men, righteous and sinners, acknowledge that they have no claim on God. Jesus' teaching is aimed in two directions: it attacks the self-righteous and it encourages the sinner who repents.

One of our main problems is identifying the different stages by which our gospels have reached their present form. We need to distinguish between Jesus' own teaching and the evangelist's interpretation of it, which may or may not be historically accurate. The invective of Matthew 23, for instance, probably reflects the intense hostility between Christians and Jews late in the first century when the gospel was written rather than the situation of Jesus' ministry. Even though Jesus himself did attack attitudes characteristic of certain contemporary Pharisees, there is evidence that he was not at enmity with *all* Pharisees (see Luke 7:36). Some of the apparent inconsistencies in Jesus' teaching as it is recorded in the gospels are therefore to be attributed to the evangelists rather than Jesus himself.

No one in the society in which Jesus lived would have been concerned with doing good for its own sake. If a man did his neighbour a good turn he would automatically expect it to be reciprocated at some future date and until then the neighbour

would be in his debt. Even acts of charity to the poor who lacked the means to reciprocate would be reciprocated by God "who cared for the fatherless and widow." Not surprisingly, Jesus' ethical teaching reflects these contemporary attitudes.

His belief that the reign of God would soon come in power governed Jesus' attitude to ethical issues. What mattered most was a man's willingness to acknowledge his indebtedness to God. All who repented would be accepted into God's kingdom, however late their act of repentance (this is the point of the parable of the labourers in the vineyard in Matthew 20). If Jesus' teaching was distinctive, its distinctiveness lay in his assurance that *all* who repented would be forgiven. A man's place in the kingdom did *not* depend on his building up credit like the Pharisees strove to do, but on his attitude of mind. This brought the offer of salvation even to those beyond the reach of God in the sight of orthodox Jews.

The dilemma for present day Christians is that they have by and large ceased to believe in the element of divine judgment central to the teaching of Jesus. Consequently, since they no longer share his presuppositions they have sought to base their Christian ethics on other more general principles, such as altruism or doing good for its own sake. Professor Wells rightly protests that such concepts are by no means distinctively Christian. They are humanist both in origin and in application and no one should claim that Christians alone are aware of their neighbour's need.

To be true to their name Christians must recognise afresh the central importance of eschatology and work out what they believe about the future. A man's view of his ultimate destiny, either in this world or in some other order of existence, inevitably governs his approach to ethics. This is true even of those who have no future hope at all. Jesus who believed in the imminent advent of the reign of God was no exception and his eschatological expectation coloured his view of ethics.

His purpose was not to lay down general ethical principles, but to warn his contemporaries that they needed to remove all barriers that kept them from God, the chief barrier being sin or conscious rejection of God's call. What God required from rich and poor alike was a humble attitude of obedience and trust and total abnegation of the claims of self. This means turning the other cheek and giving your coat to him who takes your coat—something the reasonable man, quite naturally, cannot accept. Indeed, it was precisely those who supposed themselves to be virtuous (and reasonable) and who saw the kingdom of God as their exclusive preserve whom Jesus warned that, for all their righteousness, they would in no way have a share in the saving power of the reign of God.

## G. A. WELLS REPLIES

Dr Davies has taken considerable trouble to specify what in my article he can agree with, and he has also made a reasoned case over our points of difference. He observes that the eschatology of the New Testament is no longer acceptable to many Christians, and he argues that they should work out a new eschatology on which to base their ethics. But can a new eschatology, which by hypothesis is to be different from the eschatology plainly expressed in Christian scripture and tradition, really be "Christian" at all?

He has also reminded us how difficult theologians have found the task of distinguishing Jesus' original teaching from what the evangelists have made of it. To my mind, the fact that Christian writers earlier than the gospels do not ascribe to Jesus the ethical teachings they inculcate (even though much of the same doctrines are delivered by Jesus in the gospels) suggests that Jesus gave no ethical teaching.

Paul, for instance, says "bless those who persecute you", but he says this on his own authority, with no indication that Jesus had taught it. Sometimes early Christian writers even urge ethical views which contradict those which later came to be ascribed to Jesus in the gospels. Thus the author of the second epistle of John stipulates that those who do not bring the true doctrine should not be received into one's house, nor even greeted. Ignatius says much the same. Could such writers have known anything of Matthew's Jesus, who tells his audience (Matthew 5:43-8) that they must greet and even love their enemies? And is it not likely that Matthew has simply put this doctrine into Jesus' mouth, since—in arguing against the Pharisees of his own day, and against their interpretation of the Jewish religious law—he stamps the Levitical command to love one's neighbour as the law's most imperative stipulation, in the light of which some of its others must be reinterpreted? Furthermore, although he thus posits love of neighbour as the essence of the law, Matthew goes on (in chapter 23)—in the interests of his polemic against the Pharisees' interpretation of it—to ascribe to Jesus' unqualified hatred of his neighbours, the Scribes and Pharisees!

Dr Davies points to Luke 7:36 as evidence that the historical Jesus did get on well with some Pharisees. This incident is peculiar to Luke, and it comes as a surprise after the negative way in which he usually treats Pharisees. It was, then, probably taken by him from some source which represented Jesus as in harmony with them. The evangelist quickly adapts it to his own anti-Pharisaic views by making the Pharisee behave in an unfriendly manner. The source tradition on which Luke here drew is one of the many-stranded Jesus traditions, not necessarily more reliable than others. Paul and other first-century epistle writers know nothing of any relationships, good or bad, between Jesus and Pharisees, or

indeed any other Jewish groups.

My article, on which Dr Davies is commenting, was about neighbourliness in the New Testament, and his comments are accordingly focussed on this issue. But I must not lose sight of the fact that what is most stressed in the New Testament is not neighbourliness but belief: *Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me . . . Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me* (Matthew 25:40 and 45).

It is for men's behaviour to Jesus, or to his Father, that, in the context of this passage, they are sent to heaven or hell, not for their behaviour to their fellows (cf. Matthew 10:42). The cardinal crime is unbelief (Mark 16:15-16; John 3:15, 18 and 36) and whole communities will be most frightfully punished for it (Matthew 10:15). In Luke's story of Mary and Martha (10:38-41), Martha was doing all the housework, and Mary was attending to Jesus, who thought her justified in paying all her attention to him. The moral seems to be that the slightest service to Jesus is more important than any service to a friend or relative. A little later (14:26) Jesus is represented as telling a vast multitude that they must hate their parents in order to be his disciples.

If belief is all-important, then leading others into unbelief is unforgivable: *"Who so shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck"* (Matthew 18:6). The little ones who do not believe are, perhaps, of less consequence. The conviction that the faithful must be protected at all costs from unbelief has led to ferocious persecution of the unorthodox.

In I Corinthians 13 we have happily (and without ascription to Jesus) another doctrine: "I may have faith strong enough to move mountains, but if I have no love I am nothing."

● See Letters, page 62.

G. A. WELLS

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## RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

The annual reports of two exceedingly pious Christian organisations have reached us, and, although they emanate from groups whose histories and membership are dissimilar, these documents reveal the pettiness, intolerance and daftness that is common to both.

*Fearless Witness* is the title of the Order of Christian Unity report. This organisation, founded in 1955, is led by Lady Lothian, the upper crust's Mary Whitehouse. There are the usual warnings about the Humanist enemy: "Look at the tactics of spiritually evil forces and organisations, which are militantly and powerfully anti-Christian . . . The belligerents represent a variety of ideologies whose main strategy is to destroy from within our moral fibre." The Order of Christian Unity sees its contribution to the moral fibre of the nation as ensuring "that school children in Britain retain their right to specific Christian instruction."

OCU members, like their allies in the Festival of Light, appear to be greatly agitated by what Burns' Holy Willie complained of as "this fleshy thorn". Sex rears its beautiful head on virtually every page of their annual report.

It is not clear if the Lord's Day Observance actually bans sex on Sunday, but after reading their annual report it would not surprise us if they did. *Time to Awake*, described as "another account of the stewardship of the Lord's Day Observance Society", is an uplifting saga of the sabbatarians' resistance to such wordly activities as Sunday markets. It condemns evasions of the law (like describing such markets as clubs), and sternly reminds local authorities of their duty to curb these excesses. There are even some unsporting cads who take advantage of a clause in the Shops Act which allows Jews to trade on Sunday.

Worst of all, it is reported that when the septennial poll on the opening of public houses in Wales took place last November, nine areas voted to remain "wet" and three changed from "dry" to "wet", thus leaving only six districts where public houses are closed on Sunday. Prior to the poll, prayers and supplications to The One Above arose from Lord's Day House, chapels and meeting halls throughout the land. But it seems that the Christian deity is either stone deaf or an incorrigible boozier.

**Fr Giles Hibbert, OP, has been forced to resign his post as head of theological studies at the Blackfriars Priory of the Holy Spirit, Oxford. His resignation was demanded by the prior following a newspaper interview in which Fr Hibbert described the Vatican's recent declaration on sexual ethics as "a frightening example of misinformed delusion, ignorance and bigotry."**

# NEWS

## ANGLICAN SUPERSTITION

The National Secular Society issued a statement at the beginning of the recent national week of prayer ("in commemoration of the million foetuses aborted since the 1967 Abortion Act became law") in which it described the Archbishop of Canterbury's sponsorship of this pious orgy as "the latest indication of medieval superstition lingering on in the Established Church." To regard a foetus as though it were a human person with a stake in life, which can only be the outcome of human relationships, is sheer superstition. In practice, the chief effect of the Abortion Act has been to substitute safe, legal abortion for dangerous illegal abortion.

The NSS asked if "the Archbishop be happier if women still had to pay dearly for their unwanted pregnancies by putting their lives at the mercy of back-street abortionists. The only alternative consistent with his opposition to legal abortion is that he would prefer the population to be increased by a million unwanted children.

"Since, according to medical research, most pregnancies end in early, spontaneous abortion, usually before the mother even realises she is pregnant, there obviously cannot be a God who disapproves of abortion, as the religious anti-abortionist lobby would have us believe. Indeed, if their God existed, he would be the greatest abortionist of all, since the number of spontaneous abortions far exceeds all the induced abortions put together."

The NSS pointed out that on the very day that the week of prayer was announced, a national report was published on the number of children maimed and killed on the roads. By far the highest figure in Europe, the number of road accidents involving child pedestrians in this country is described as having reached epidemic proportions. Unlike foetuses, which are no more than potential human beings, these children are actual human beings, and every one of them maimed or killed represents a human tragedy. Had the Archbishop of Canterbury called for a national week of prayer on *their* behalf, it might at least have had some publicity value in the cause of road safety.

The statement concluded: "Though the National Secular Society is in favour of legal abortion, we would naturally prefer unwanted pregnancies to be avoided as far as possible. Indeed, the Society's

# AND NOTES

*Humanae Vitae*, the 1968 papal encyclical on birth control, led to a substantial decline in religious practice by Roman Catholics in the United States, according to a report published at the end of March. The report is based on research carried out by the National Opinion Research Centre on a sample of 1,128 Catholics in Chicago.

founder, Charles Bradlaugh, was a pioneer of family planning, and in 1877 was convicted of obscenity for publishing a pamphlet on the subject. At that time the Church of England was firmly opposed to contraception, which it did not finally accept until after the last war. Its traditional opposition to contraception must have driven millions of women to abortion and many of them to subsequent death.

"Now that the Church has lost most of its credibility among the people of this country, we trust that Parliament will not succumb to its all-out efforts for restrictive amendment of the abortion law."

The encyclical is described as the worst catastrophe in American religious history; it undid the effects of the Second Vatican Council. The report concludes that "far from asserting the teaching authority of the Church and the credibility of the Pope, it has led to a deterioration among Catholics in respect for both. It seems to have been the occasion for massive apostasy, and for a notable decline in religious devotion and belief."

The report finds that over a ten-year period weekly attendance at Mass dropped from 71 to 50 per cent, monthly confession from 38 to 17 per cent, and daily private prayer from 72 to 60 per cent. The number of families which favour a son going into the priesthood fell from 63 to 50 per cent.

## SECT OF TERROR

Belgian police investigating the bizarre deaths of two young men are studying a report on the Children of God sect which was compiled by Scotland Yard. The bodies of Michel Piersotte (21) and Jean-Paul Meurice (20) were found at abandoned fortresses near Namur and Dinant. They had no apparent injuries, but when a post-mortem examination was carried out on Piersotte it was discovered that his internal organs had been crushed. It was then decided to resume the investigation into the death of Meurice whose body had been found last December. He, too, had what a police inspector described as "amazing injuries . . . It looked as though he had been in a vice."

Inquiries have revealed that the youths were close friends, and that they were trying to break away from the Children of God. It is known that the sect uses hypnotism at indoctrination sessions and that one of its texts reads: "Oh Lord, help us to accept the pain of being crushed and beaten . . ." Detectives believe that the victims were hypnotised and led to a ritual killing.

The Children of God sect was started in California eight years ago by David Berg (know as Moses David) whose parents were full-time Christian evangelists. The FBI started to investigate the sect following accusations of fraud, forgery and kidnapping. They moved to Britain and recruited members from the more unstable elements of the "Jesus movement". It was registered as a religious charity.

An *exposé* of the sect's activities and fund-raising techniques was published in *The Freethinker*, May 1974.

The report has been criticised by the Archbishop of Cincinatti, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. But the priest who was director of the report said: "It is rare for a social researcher to be able to explain a correlation completely, but this turns out to be one of these cases. Support for the Vatican Council correlates positively with religious devotion, and the decline in the birth control position and respect for papal authority accounts for the whole deterioration."

## THE FREETHINKER

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An appeal by Bishop Martensen of Copenhagen that charges of blasphemy should be brought against a film director who plans to make a film on the sex life of Christ, has been turned down by the Attorney General. A script of the film has been published, and the Attorney General said in an interview: "The blasphemy clause of our criminal code has not been invoked for the past 50 years."

**VOLTAIRE** by John Hearsey. Constable, £8.

Voltaire remains a great and familiar name, but not many of his writings are read, fascinating as they are to students of the eighteenth century. I asked several friends, who are generally well-read, and they knew only *Candide*. But his impact on his world was profoundly liberating and pervasive, and the story of his life deserves to be well-known. Drawing on the devoted labours of Theodore Besterman at the Institut Voltaire, John Hearsey tells it with verve, in a fast-moving narrative that at the same time manages to bring out the significance of his challenges to his society, and their lasting effects. The biographer demonstrates incidentally, how important were the years of Voltaire's exile in England, where he discovered how a middle class could stand up against the aristocracy.

What is striking is Voltaire's capacity for development within a certain set framework. Many of his characteristics, such as his witty responses to everything he felt as an affront, persisted from start to finish; but the scope of his views steadily developed. The defiant wit of middle-class origin, determined to make his mark in a dominantly aristocratic world, never ceased to humanise and deepen his outlook. The personal and wayward impulses which earned him as a child the nickname of Little Wilful (*Volontaire* apparently becoming *Voltaire*) never quite left him; but they were more and more directed against injustice, cruelty, irrationality. Hence the mixture of mischievous and erratic responses with a growing seriousness and sense of responsibility that gave a light-hearted and yet passionate vitality to his writings.

Hardly any of his works were not banned and burnt in his own country; yet he went on all the while effectively building up his reputation, his power to affect the situation and to widen his audience. The actions of State and Church in seeking to destroy his work boomeranged and helped to strengthen the name they wished to destroy. When one follows his career, with *lettres de cachet* hanging over his head and driving him into various exiles, one wonders how he managed it all without falling into the various pits that surrounded him. He needed a lot of luck, but he earned it by his dauntless and irrepressible activities. The government had reached the stage where its repressive aims were larger than its capacities, and Voltaire, more than anyone else, was the adroit creator of a public opinion that could effectively impede the wishes of State and Church, imparting a new direction to things.

Hearsey gives us all the details; the love affairs, the battles of wit, the relations with Frederick and Catharine, the splendid series of defences of victims of oppression. The entangled story has its fine con-

# FREETHINKER

clusion of triumph, when Voltaire returned to Paris in 1778 and killed himself off with the strains of the event. In a way it was a rehearsal in miniature of the revolution to come a decade later, this victorious return of the man who had so long fought the authorities.

Oddly, though not afraid of what would happen to his soul after death, he was much worried about what would happen to his body. remembering Adrienne Lecouvreur, the actress to whom the Church had refused burial rites and who had stirred the first of his all-out social protests. His efforts to negotiate with the Church led to the myth of his death-bed repentance. (I was delighted when on the one occasion I sat through a Roman Catholic service, years ago in Brisbane, the priest in his sermon gave a lurid account of Voltaire struggling with devils as he died.) What happened was that his friends smuggled away his body and had it secretly interred at Scellières, whence in 1790 the revolution had it brought back with enormous pomp to Paris. But in the end what he had feared came about. With the Restoration, a group of reactionaries broke open the coffin, threw the bones in a sack, and emptied them into a hole outside the city—an act only discovered in 1864 when his tomb was opened.

His deism, his rationalism, his work in championing Newtonism, his writings in history, all have their place in the history of ideas. But for the general reader what most matters is the spirit in which Voltaire attacked evil wherever he found it, his mixture of tolerance and unrelenting hatred of cruelty and obscurantism, of seriousness and gaiety. Luckily his best qualities are concentrated in the eminently readable *Candide*.

JACK LINDSAY

**FILM CENSORSHIP** by Guy Phelps. Gollancz, £5.50

This book is a thoroughgoing account of film censorship in Britain. After a brief survey, the author goes straight into a discussion of the way in which censorship is operated as between the British Board of Film Censors, local authorities and the law courts. He outlines the criteria which the BBFC use, and lists the numbers of films banned (22 in 1974) and cut (nearly 50 per cent), and the numbers graded for the four kinds of certificate. He discusses the role played by the press and by pressure groups, and the influence exercised by distributors, exhibitors, television companies and departments of government.

Guy Phelps' account of the BBFC is largely a

# REVIEWS

sympathetic one. He describes the Board as "a conscientious but unqualified body with no special skills at grappling with the legal, psychological and sociological problems that constitute such a large proportion of its role", but nevertheless "the Board, for all its faults, offers experience and independence." He is more critical of the role of local councillors in film censorship which he finds "hard to defend", and he opposes recourse to law as a replacement of prior censorship. He would like to see the BBFC exercise sole censorship powers but with "greater accountability." This in his account would largely be exercised by publishing an annual report explaining the Board's policy and decisions; and "an opportunity to defend and analyse controversial incidents could only foster greater faith in and appreciation of the Board's work."

Guy Phelps' description of film censorship shows up the contradictions inherent in the whole grisly and sad system, although he himself does not seem to realise that his evidence, far from justifying the Board's work, condemns it as outrageously irrelevant. He cites the Board's three aims as the protection of children, the protection of audiences from anything which may "deprave or corrupt or have any undesirable influence", and from "material that would be greatly and gratuitously offensive to a large number of people." Yet he admits that the Board is ill-equipped to deal with certifying films as suitable for children.

In a useful chapter summarising research results on the effects of viewing films on audiences, Mr Phelps concludes that sex films have only a transient effect and do not radically alter peoples' sexual behaviour, while films of violence are likely only to affect those already predisposed to violent or disturbed behaviour. Nevertheless scenes involving violence and drugs (but evidently not including alcohol) are all thought by the Board to be "personally or socially harmful" and cut. In the case of sex films, it is claimed on the one hand that the Board seeks to reflect "intelligent, contemporary public attitudes", and "makes no claim to set itself up as a guardian of public morality." But Phelps then lists the sex sequences cut as including undefined "perversions", "certain positions in intercourse" (including the woman being on top of the man) and "over-indulgent orgasms"! Even Guy Phelps concludes that the standards on sex used by the Board should be "re-evaluated" to take account of the preponderance of young adults at the cinema today.

Finally the author recognises that censorship is basically authoritarian and calls for more openness at the Board. But his faith in this remedy later falters

as he recognises that "there is some evidence that it cannot be successfully organised on a democratic basis."

If the merit of this book is the information it gives, its weakness lies in its flabby justification of the present system of film censorship. While all his facts and arguments point in one direction, Guy Phelps continues to urge us to go in the other. He has, however, performed a service in providing an understanding of how the present system works. Censorship can operate only in an atmosphere of ignorance, fear and secrecy. Once enough people know exactly how absurd, archaic and repressive is the system of film censorship, they will surely be unwilling to suffer it to continue.

ENID WISTRICH

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**CAPITAL** by Maureen Duffy. Jonathan Cape, £3.50.

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Not too often, I think, has London been celebrated as beautifully, wryly, lovingly, uneasily, confidently as in this novel. You could say roughly that it's about Meepers, an eccentric pursuing an idea. The idea is that if he can prove that the Dark Ages are a pessimistic fiction, that after the going of the Romans London didn't become unoccupied—there was continuity of occupation and use and so of civilisation—then one would have reason to believe that our present despair (or our tendency to despair) was ill-rooted. We have come to think that we are near the end—of, that is, that continuous accumulation of organised and reasonable life of which London is such a veteran symbol. But damn it, says Meepers—perhaps there are human gifts of recuperation and persistence that we underrate. Or perhaps (he seems to say at one point) we have had those gifts driven out of historical memory by the triumph of a fundamentally craven Christianity. There was Morgan the Briton who went to Africa "to talk Augustine out of the unreason of original sin." He failed in his mission. Suppose he had not failed? Suppose that the sense of human defeat that sprang from Augustine's teaching had been replaced by the notion: *If I ought, I can?*

I make the novel sound like a treatise and it's most readably, most entertainingly, *not* that. Meepers is a sort of comic hero: he lives where he can, in gardeners' huts in London squares and similar highly individual squats (so echoing one of the themes of the novel, which is that of the improvisatory forms of occupation and residence that have been the mark of the Londoner through the ages). Meanwhile, he insinuates himself into Queen's College, London, his eye on the computer into which he means to feed the evidence he gathers. His search for that evidence, under the sleeping teeth of bulldozers, forms another strand in the comedy. There's an orthodox academic who is haunted by Meepers—a nut, the academic begins by feeling, who appears everywhere in the college building and must

be scheming to avenge the rejection of his thesis about the persistence of the Romano-British civilisation: someone, the academic ends by feeling, who demonstrates that reason has its limits and enthusiasm its uses. Part of the liveliness of the novel rests on Maureen Duffy's enjoyment of Meepers as a sort of blundering embarrassment to sensible, conventional thinking.

The novel ends, as I imagine it could hardly avoid doing, in alternate visions of survival and collapse. We do not know—and poor Meepers, for reasons I shan't reveal, cannot know—what the computer might have concluded, had the fruits of all those nocturnal diggings and obsessive collectings been fed to it. I can't say, much though I want to say it, that Maureen Duffy's novel is one that offers hope. (Anyway, it's soothsayers who do that . . . But I must be careful not to be too rational.) In fact, what the novel offers is a good tough feeling of courage, based on love of the human story represented so richly by the story of London. It offers us the important cautionary notion that (in Meepers' words) "what might really destroy us is human self-disgust." It offers us the perception that such self-treason has its footings in doctrines built on a desperate lack of confidence in the human spirit.

And now I've made it sound like a treatise with a stiff upper lip. So I ought to add (or repeat) that *Capital* is very good and lively and stimulating to read. Maureen Duffy is one of those rare novelists with the gift of making stories out of the stuff of ideas. There are memorable passages: this, for example, about tourists in modern London: *They come to gape at the remains of this vast tel that's like a highdressed wig, powdered and bejewelled but where the mice have nested, undermined, heartless and the lice run among its remaining hairs and drop from the thin ringlets on to the dirty tidemarked neck, the suburbs.* My own pleasure in *Capital*—greater, I think, even than my pleasure in the main story—is in the vignettes of London life along the course of the city's history that pace through the book, bringing us nearer to the present as the main tale brings us nearer to Meepers' triumphant defeat. Maureen Duffy has obviously worked on these vignettes with great love (and, here and there, some loving sense of mischief). The earliest draw their strength from an adroit use of anachronism. How oddly moving the effect is of reading of Stone Age Londoners walking along the Piccadilly that is thousands of years in the future! "They left Heathrow in the morning . . ." Maureen Duffy has never used her favourite device of sexual confusion better than in the passage which celebrates King Elizabeth. Watch out for Lear, Mayhew, Oscar Wilde . . .

It's a book to draw courage from. It's also, I think as a Londoner, a novel no one should miss reading who has love of any sort for that extraordinary battered village.

EDWARD BLISHEN

### Bishops' Bluff

*Thought for the Day*, every day), as well as covering miles of newsprint. What other extremist came anywhere near this amount of publicity?

The Archbishop asserts in his original statement that "the only creed that makes sense is: God first—others next—self last." The National Secular Society puts God where he belongs—with goblins and Santa Claus—and makes self and others equal. Anyone who really did put others before self would have to starve to death, being unable to eat as long as there was anybody in the world without food.

In his next few paragraphs, however, Dr Coggan makes it clear that his "others" do not include the starving millions in the poorer countries of the world—his concern is that Britain should retain her place among the richer countries: "I am concerned for the spirit which is abroad in the country, because our national problems will not be solved unless we improve it . . . As a means of getting our country on its feet, materialism is out. Moral and spiritual issues must come in." Not a word anywhere about getting the under-developed countries on their feet. What really seems to be bothering His Grace in this year of grace is Britain's balance of payments problem. But we can hardly expect any miraculous intervention in our favour when most of us do not even say our prayers!

### A Change of Direction

Canon Edwards, in his more carefully written re-statement of the same message, does remember to mention the rest of the world: "Industrial renewal leading to a substantial growth in the British economy during the 1980s could help to make the world a safer and happier place during the twenty-first century."

There are even some professional economists who, less cynical than that, are questioning the morality of orthodox expansionist economics that rest on the doctrine of eternal growth. These economists are uneasy that the international industrial market economy is manifestly based on the criterion of monetary gain rather than human benefit; but our spiritual leaders apparently have no such moral qualms.

What we really want, for the long-term benefit of humanity, is planned birth control now throughout the world and a judicious change of direction towards a society geared to intermediate technology, with the emphasis on quality of life rather than standard of living.

Squandering the earth's fossil fuels on the nuclear arms obscenity, supersonic air-travel, private motor-ing (particularly the wasteful transportation of a solitary, able-bodied person), and the manufacture of equipment with deliberately built-in obsolescence—that is the real immorality of our age. We are robbing the future. We must begin to eke out what remains of the fossil fuels to the best advantage,

giving priority to the production of equipment for extracting energy from alternative sources. Our present prodigality is like eating all the seed-corn and leaving none for sowing.

"What sort of society do we want?" asks the Archbishop—almost as though he expects all the diverse people of Britain to want the same sort of society. In recognition of diversity, secular humanists favour "the open society": a society in which complete freedom for all adults of sound mind is restricted only by the claims of reciprocal freedom and rights for others including protection for children and animals.

### The Humanist Answer

We are thus opposed to censorship. We are opposed also to the inherited privileges of religion, race, and sex; to militarism; to the reintroduction of capital punishment; to punitive prison sentencing; to blood sports; to compulsory Sabbatarianism; to religious indoctrination and worship in state schools; to the proliferation of divisive church schools; and to the threatened restrictive amendment of the Abortion Act. Not only do we uphold this Act, which, by making some abortions legal, made them safe; we would also legalise abortion on request during the first three months of pregnancy. We stand for civil liberty; free speech; participatory politics; conservation; and peaceful negotiation between nations and ideologies. The sort of society we want would include the provision of adequate housing, welfare, medical care, and public transport; more nursery schools and better education; and ample sporting, entertainment, and cultural amenities.

We do not share the Archbishop's faith that it is possible to attain social objectives by personal exhortation; it can be done only by restructuring society and its institutions. If, for example, it has become necessary for us all to turn vegetarian so that the planet may support its human population without hundreds of millions suffering from malnutrition, merely exhorting people to give up eating meat will not suffice. First there must be a well-planned switch in our national agricultural policy from the production of animal feed to human food.

The Archbishop's message, however, is primarily an exhortation to hard work and self-denial—the traditional emphasis of the established Church as the spiritual arm of the ruling class. "A good day's work for a fair day's pay" is the motto he quotes, adding "But pay isn't everything"—which rather implies that work is! Not for nothing is this attitude known as "the Protestant work ethic". (Ironically enough, the first book of the Bible says that work is a curse on man, not a blessing!)

Work, especially in modern times, may do social harm as well as good: the greater the output of a munitions factory, for instance, the worse it is likely to be for somebody somewhere. Apart from the wasteful production of armaments for our own

so-called "defence", Britain exports some £6,000 million of armaments a year, which puts us in fourth place in the death and destruction league, behind the USSR, the USA, and France. To the Archbishop of Canterbury, however, the only moral issue this raises is whether the armaments-factory worker is idling.

The two words "God first" are the only supernatural reference in his entire message. In these post-Christian days, the established Church is playing down its spiritual claims in favour of making a fourth in the power game with the Government, the CBI and the TUC, to win a wider constituency through consensus politics.

● "Bishops' Bluff" has been published as a leaflet by the National Secular Society, 698 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL. Special rates (including postage) for quantities: 10 for 15p; 20 for 30p; 35 for 50p; 50 for 75p; 100 for £1.50.

Barbara Smoker

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The head of the British section of the Worldwide Church of God, a Christian sect whose leader is the American religious entrepreneur, Herbert Armstrong, has resigned with two other leading officials. They claim that the sect has deprived followers of thousands of pounds. One of them said: "We have come to see the whole organisation as damaging to people's lives." The sect has thousands of adherents throughout the world—1,800 of them in Britain—and is extremely wealthy. It distributes, free of charge, 380,000 copies of its glossy magazine, "The Plain Truth", in Britain alone. Its British headquarters are at Ambassador College, Bricket Wood, but it has not taken any pupils for two years and is up for sale. It is a registered charity.

# LETTERS

In his article, "Reciprocity and Neighbourliness in Jesus' Teaching" ("The Freethinker", February), Professor G. A. Wells shows that the ethical teaching of Jesus is more complex and less easily assimilated than many allow. A large number of Christian students of the New Testament, who are well aware of these difficulties, would, like him, find problems in the use of the ideas of rewards and punishments which form one part of Jesus' teaching and which, taken in isolation, would seem to encourage expediency based on a self-centred hope of gain. Nevertheless, even on this point it has to be said that it is hard to see how any proclamation of good news which offers an opportunity of fulfilment and freedom for the individual can be entirely devoid of statements which are open to the charge of encouraging some measure of self-benefit.

However, Professor Wells goes further in his search for unsatisfactory elements in the teaching and finds some in Jesus' use of the parables of the Labourers in the Vineyard and of the Prodigal Son. I find it hard to understand his point of view that these present a God who is "arbitrary", "who favours whom he likes", and who is "not a God of justice but a rewarder of favourites." It is true that neither the owner of the vineyard nor the father of the prodigal are motivated by justice, neither could their attitude be described as completely fair, but this does not mean that it is partial, vindictive, unjust, or arbitrary. Their actions are motivated, not by favouritism, but by generosity issuing from understanding, acceptance and forgiveness. Generosity may not be consistent with an attitude based on law, but, rather than sinking below the level of law, it breaks through the latter's limitations and must enlarge the legalistic outlook. After all, all the labourers received a full day's pay and the elder son was assured of a permanent place in the father's affections.

In the light of these parables, it is easy to see why Jesus' opponents were outraged by him—why he offended all who felt secure in their own position and in their superiority over all whom they regarded as alien. I can understand why those wedded to the rigidly respectable systems of those or any day would be scandalized, but I find it very hard to see how anyone who is committed to a freedom of outlook can use this particular teaching of Jesus as a point of attack upon him.

Again, isn't Professor Wells being less than fair in his discussion on the parable of the Good Samaritan? He is, of course, quite right to see that Jesus' own question, "Who was neighbour to him who fell among thieves?" and his command, "Go, and do likewise" are not in the same terms as the lawyer's original question, "Who is my neighbour?" Like Wells, I find Professor William Barclay's exposition unsatisfactory in that it does not take this change into account. But Wells' own judgment that the story, thus re-oriented, "offers a very restricted definition of the word 'neighbour'", arises more out of prejudice than of examination of the text. A Jew is told to learn a lesson from the behaviour of a Samaritan who had helped a Jew—from a Samaritan who had overcome his deep-rooted prejudices, who could have expected no thanks (there is no hint of the possibility of reciprocity here since the Jew would have spat upon a Samaritan who had dared to help him), who would himself have been revolted by what he felt compelled to do, who could have found no cause for self-satisfaction or self-congratulation in his deed. That was the outlook that Jesus demanded of his hearers. His answer went to the heart of the matter, to basic principles, to a revolu-

tion in his listeners' standards, rather than to the conventional outlook which was implicit in the lawyer's question. What Jesus did was much like asking a strict member of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa to enter into the mind and outlook of a coloured who came to the rescue of a white in a whites only area. The priest and the Levite are mentioned in order to heighten the drama and to emphasise the nature of the Samaritan's act. It is not a simple case of the story-teller's prejudice.

These parables together express teaching which both deepens the demands of the law yet offers the total grace of forgiveness and acceptance. This is a paradox, yet it is one which, so far from being arbitrary, unjust, or merely absurd, for many of us represents the basis of that liberation which we find at the heart of Jesus' teaching. The ideal remains an ideal, one after which we strive even though we know that it is incapable of total realisation. That, we hope, keeps us in a true humility which arises, not from a despair which belittles man's true nature, but from our unity with all who inevitably come short of the perfect. But the God of Jesus is not a God primarily of judgment but of grace, who accepts and receives the prodigal and gives total acknowledgment of the one hour's work. God therefore accepts us as we are and our striving remains the outcome of that acceptance rather than its condition. In this, to answer Wells' question, we do not strive in order to gain a heavenly reward.

Modern study of the New Testament has shown that Jesus' ethical teaching can be understood only within the context of his proclamation of the coming of the kingdom of God. It is here that an assessment of his ethical value must begin—the mythology cannot be avoided, and it is here that interpretation must start. At this point of course we come face to face with the basic problems that the fact of Jesus puts before us. But it is just these problems that must be tackled if anything like a true assessment of his value is to be made.

ERIC FRANKLIN

## NAME-CALLING

Peter Cadogan seems to have written the reply of the year, if not quite the century ("The Freethinker", March). In my letter (February) I listed some of the absurdities in his article (January), giving evidence for each of them. He replies: "This is name-calling and doesn't merit an answer." Is he seriously suggesting that to show with evidence that a series of statements is absurd is nothing but name-calling? And does he really mean that it doesn't merit an answer—any answer at all—or just that he can't manage an answer?

But let me list a few more absurdities in his letter. It is absurd to say that "a full-dress treatment of the Positivist churches might be very worthwhile", when the point is that his own original reference to them has been exposed as inaccurate and misleading. It is absurd to say that "humanism centres on the critique of religion", when for most humanists it surely centres on the affirmation of humanity. It is absurd to say that "we need a new humanism that is multi-dimensional", after suggesting that the present multi-dimensional nature of humanism "is rooted in the past and is not even interesting any more" and after stating that humanism is somehow essentially religious. It is absurd to say that this "new humanism" should be based on the work of such writers as Huxley, Whitehead, and Cassirer (what happened to Durkheim?), when his own reliance on a partial reading of them has led to the confusion of his contributions to "The Freethinker" during the past year. It is absurd to say that "propositions can be different and still true", when the

point is that he is repeatedly asking us to believe propositions which are in contravention of known facts and in contradiction with each other.

The only way to face the "challenge of the future" is to face reality, use our reason, and tell the truth. Humanism cannot be both non-religious and religious, whatever the past sequence which led to the present situation, and if it is to mean anything in the future we shall have to decide what we are.

NICOLAS WALTER

In the February "Freethinker" Nicolas Walter listed 16 statements made by Peter Cadogan which he characterised as absurd; it is to be noted that each of these judgments is supported by a reason. One may think that Mr Walter is too uproarious in his use of the word "absurd"; one may think that some, or even all, of his reasons are inadequate. But to reply, as Peter Cadogan does, "This is name-calling and doesn't merit an answer", is to abandon one's claim to rationality.

Later in his letter Mr Cadogan writes: "All the letters end up in the sad point-scoring bracket of third rate dialectics." To make this remark in juxtaposition to the other is to show the lack of another aspect of rationality—namely, self-criticism.

Personally, I think that quite a number of Nicolas Walters' points are definitely cogent. It seems to me that Peter Cadogan's arguments do sometimes, and at critical points, lack cogency, and that they do sometimes distort and confuse. Perhaps you will allow me space on some future occasion to elaborate on these matters of substance.

My concern now is solely with certain aspects of the manner of Mr Cadogan's argument as shown in the letter before me. It is a discredited Humanism.

HARRY STOPES-ROE

Peter Cadogan's arguments have been demolished, not by name-calling, but by bluff-calling.

R. E. ELTHORNE

## FUNERAL FEES

The statement on funerals in the February issue of "The Ethical Record" was not a reprint of anything, nor did it "emanate" from me as J. M. Alexander suggests ("The Freethinker" March). The General Committee of South Place Ethical Society set up a sub-committee to do some further thinking about funeral facilities. A draft was prepared, carefully considered by the General Committee, considerably amended and then published.

The statement your correspondent refers to was carefully worded and he omitted to quote it. It reads: "The officiant's fee (where the ceremony is more a professional than a personal service) is £10." This is not unreasonable partly because, in part due to rising interest in humanist rituals arising out of radio, TV and press publicity, we are beginning to be asked to conduct ceremonies for people who have never been members of SPES nor had any personal connection with the wider movement.

We have decided to tell undertakers about our funeral service because that knowledge meets a real need. There are still a large number of people who would much appreciate help of that order but who just do not know that it is available. We have produced three documents calculated to help people to conduct their own ceremonies among themselves and this is now beginning to happen.

Where there is no personal or "movement" connection with the deceased it is quite fair and proper to charge a fee. A funeral involves an officiant in several

hours work, seeing or telephoning relatives and friends of the deceased to put a life-history together, writing a personalised form of ceremony, conducting the ceremony itself, and the time and expense of travel.

Some two to three years ago a joint working party of kindred societies considered the question of the fee and came up with the figure of £10. At the time I thought it was high but in the meantime inflation has changed the picture. At South Place seven years ago the suggested fee was £3. Three or four years ago the figure was set at £7 and now it has gone up again.

As the principal officiant of SPES I have conducted dozens of funerals in the past six years and never asked for a fee yet. If one is offered I accept it, if it is not then that is the end of the matter.

PETER CADOGAN, General Secretary, SPES

## Freethinker Fund

The continual increase in production and distribution costs is the most serious problem now faced by *The Freethinker*. In addition to publishing the journal we use it extensively for public relations purposes, and every month copies are sent to individual journalists, newspapers, radio and television producers. Postage charges are now preventing an extension of this vital aspect of our work. The annual deficit becomes larger, and we are more dependent than ever on donations to the Fund to keep the paper in existence. Our thanks are extended to those who sent donations during the period 21 January until 21 March. Anonymous, 50; J. Amos, 40p; A. Armstrong, £1.50; R. Ashton, 50p; A. E. Avery, £1; N. Barr, 50p; H. Bradshaw, £3.50; J. L. Broom, £1; C. Byass, £1; A. E. Carpenter, 25p; G. H. Childs, 50p; H. L. Clements, 50p; R. Clements, £2; A. Cook, £2.05; Mrs J. B. Coward, £1.50; R. T. Craxton, 50p; M. Davies, £3; A. W. J. Dennis, £5; Mrs Follett (in memory of H. Follett) £2; Mrs P. A. Forrest, £4; W. J. Glennie, 50p; L. Goldman, £1; Miss P. Graham, £4; W. R. Grant, 50p; E. Greaves, £4; Mrs Grimley, £2; Mrs M. Groome, £4; D. Harper, £4.25; E. J. Hughes, £2; H. J. Jakeman, 50p; R. Jeffard, £1.50; Miss C. Jeffery, £1; M. S. Joy, £1.50; F. W. Jones, 50p; G. E. Keggan, 50p; E. Lewis, 25p; J. C. W. Lewis, £1; C. Lovett, 50p; P. Macaire, £3.50; G. A. Mawer, £2; A. J. Martin, £1; J. McCorrisken, 50; H. M. Merrill, 50p; P. Natal, £1; P. Neilson, £2; G. Orchard, £3; K. C. Orr, £1.50; D. Parker, £1.50; F. J. Pidgeon, £1.50; A. Row, £1; N. Sinnott, £1; D. Smith, 25p; C. Stephenson, 50p; T. Stevenson, 50p; P. J. Taylor, 50p; Miss M. Toll-free, £2.50; Mr and Mrs Van Duren, 50p; Mrs Vaughan, 50p; J. R. Watson, 28p; J. C. Webb, 50p; Mrs Wightmore, 50p; C. Wilshaw, £1.50; Mrs A. Woods, £1.50; G. N. Wright, £1; I. Young, £1. Total: £92.23.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY  
MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES to the General Secretary,  
698 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

### PUBLIC MEETING

#### RELIGIOUS OPPOSITION TO SEXUAL FREEDOM

Diane Munday  
Renée Short, MP  
Barbara Smoker  
and others

Caxton Hall, London  
(nearest Underground: St James' Park)

Friday, 7 May, 7.30 pm

Organised by the National Secular Society  
698 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

### BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS

Copies of our list are available on request

G. W. Foote & Company  
698 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

We are pleased to report that Len Ebury, the veteran freethought propagandist, is now recovering from an illness that kept him in St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, for a spell. Happily he was allowed to leave hospital in time for him and his wife, Eva, to celebrate their golden wedding at their home (11 Glengall Road, London NW6). Mr Ebury has been speaking at meetings in London's streets and parks for the last 50 years. Mr and Mrs Ebury, together with a band of helpers, also sell a substantial quantity of books, pamphlets and copies of "The Freethinker", throughout the year.

## THE FREETHINKER

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## EVENTS

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove. Sunday, 2 May, 4.30 pm. Tea Party; 5.30 pm Annual General Meeting.

**Humanist Holidays.** Easter, 15-20 April at Worthing. Summer, 7-21 August at Weston-super-Mare. Details from Mrs M. Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey; telephone 01-642 8796.

**Independent Adoption Society.** Gregory Hall, Thomas Coram Foundation, 40 Brunswick Square, London WC1. Saturday, 24 April, 2.45 pm. Annual General Meeting. Guest speaker: Barbara Jackson (author of "Adopting a Black Child").

**Lewisham Humanist Group.** Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 28 April, 8 pm. F. H. Amphlett Micklewright: "The Decline of Protestantism".

**London Young Humanists.** 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8. Sunday, 18 April, 7.30 pm. Roy Alexander: "Transactional Analysis and Astrology".

**Merseyside Humanist Group.** Lecture Room, 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. Meetings held on the third Wednesday of the month, 7.45 pm.

**Muswell Hill Humanist Group.** 46 Windermere Road, London N10. Wednesday, 21 April, 8 pm. Graham Perry "Education in China".

**South Place Ethical Society.** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday meetings at 11 am. 11 April, Nicolas Walter: "William Godwin—Man of Reason". 25 April, Richard Clements: "Shakespeare's Religion of Humanity". Tuesday meetings at 7 pm.

**Waltham Forest Humanist Group.** Ross Wyld Hall (corner of Hoe Street and Church Hill). Walthamstow. Friday, 14 May, 8 pm. Diane Munday: "The Case for Abortion on Request".

**West Glamorgan Humanist Group.** Friends Meeting House Annexe, Page Street, Swansea. Friday, 30 April, 7.30 pm. Nicolas Walter: "Humanism and the Media".

**Worthing Humanist Group.** Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade, Worthing. Sunday, 25 April, 5.30 pm. J. H. Sang: "Heredity and You".