

# The FREETHINKER

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Founded 1881

Secular Humanist Monthly

Vol. 96, No. 7

JULY 1976

10p

## ANGLICANS DEMAND FURTHER CONCESSIONS FROM PARLIAMENT

The Prime Minister's insistence that the State will continue to play an important role in making appointments to the archbishoprics and bishoprics in the Church of England has caused resentment and dismay in some Anglican circles. Mr Callaghan's proposals were outlined in a plan which was presented to the House of Commons last month and which will be submitted to the General Synod when it meets at York on 12 July. Dr Leslie Paul, an authority on the Church of England, commented: "The Prime Minister's reply on the Church's request for a 'decisive voice' in the appointment of bishops was reasonably worded, but the basic demand was refused." The Reverend Kenneth Leech, a leading Anglo-Catholic, said that "the Prime Minister's proposals have nothing to do with God or Christianity . . . his statement is in line with those of emperors and politicians throughout time who want to keep the Church under control."

It is likely that Mr Callaghan's proposals will be accepted by the General Synod. For there is nothing in his plan that will effectively restrict the power and privilege enjoyed by the ecclesiastical department of the Civil Service.

But many Church members will continue to consider it inappropriate and anachronistic that mere politicians, albeit through the Sovereign, should have any say in choosing the dignitaries of an institution whose *raison d'être* is (allegedly) spiritual. They would like to see the Church freed completely from Parliament. Their views were reflected in a recent *Church of England Newspaper* editorial: "Should a Prime Minister who may be an atheist, a humanist, a Roman Catholic or a Jew have the power to recommend episcopal appointments to the Queen as head of the Church of England? We believe that the Church of England should assume responsibility for its own appointments and the rest of its affairs."

Humanists and other libertarians agree that Parliament should not interfere in the affairs of the

Church of England. The appointment of personnel, liturgical changes and management of Church affairs should be the concern of Church members. Anglican clergymen should be allowed, if elected, to sit in the House of Commons.

But those Anglicans who would endorse such proposals want to have their cake and refuse it. They wish to be free from the restrictions arising from establishment; they also want to hold on to the privileges and wealth that have resulted from it. How many Anglicans are prepared to contend that their Church should be disestablished and disendowed?

By the time of the Reformation the monolithic Catholic Church had established a financial stranglehold on England. This it did through political connivance, spiritual bribery and grants of land by Crown and Parliament. Much of this wealth was channelled off to the Pope. The Reformation broke Rome's grip, but the new Church took over the established position—and despite the dissolution of the monasteries most of the endowments as well.

Over the centuries the Church of England amassed considerable wealth by way of gifts from the political establishment, rates, taxes, tithe payments, land ownership, investments and the benefits of charity status. Another advantage of establishment is that the Church has been able to perpetuate the myth that Britain is a Christian country.

### Declining Support—Increasing Wealth

The Church of England must be one of the few institutions that has become wealthier as its numbers and influence have declined. The number of Easter Day communicants in Anglican churches just before the first world war was approximately 10 per cent of the population. It had fallen to 5.6 per cent in 1968 and by 1974 it had declined to 4.7 per cent.

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# Martin Heidegger, 1889-1976

*H. J. Blackham writes:* The death of Heidegger a few weeks ago removed one of the most remarkable philosophers of our time, an original, formidable, and controversial thinker who profoundly influenced the atheist Sartre as well as Bultmann, Tillich, and the more adventurous theologians. His early work *Sein und Zeit* (1927) made a world-wide reputation in spite of its obscurity of style because of its striking originality. It was intended as an introduction to a modern metaphysic, yet what actually followed has seemed fragmentary, thin, and eccentric by comparison. However, his general intention was to show the limits and mistakes of philosophy, and this he did in his own way.

Heidegger succeeded Edmund Husserl (another seminal thinker of our time, by whom he was influenced) as professor of philosophy at Freiburg in 1929, and became Rector of the University in 1933, having embraced the Nazi cause. This was a deplorable mistake, for he had no real affinity with Nazism, and he resigned in 1935. Thereafter, his life was spent in solitude and meditation in the mountains of the Black Forest.

He was a stimulating teacher, and elaborated in his lectures and repeated revisions of them his view of the nature of truth, after the description of the human situation in his major work. It is this description that fascinated Sartre, whereas it is his critical rejection of the pretensions of Western philosophy and return to the aphoristic intuitions of the pre-Socratic Heraclitus and Parmenides or to the poetry of Hölderlin which is the clue followed by the theologians looking for rational justification of beliefs that have no ground in reason. If Being can be only addressed not expressed, waited

for not spoken for, propositional statements, doctrines, are not what faith is about. This is virtually to quit the Western tradition of philosophy and theology, and turn to the East. (I have heard one impatient critic of Paul Tillich aver that he was a Hindu, not a Christian.)

His description of the world in his major work, which is his starting point, is an account of the world as it is intelligible to us in the meanings we give it in our daily doings—the needle implies the thread, the garment, the sewer, and the wearer. This primitive meaning of objects is their fundamental concrete meaning whose references ramify into the world we construct and inhabit, and it is this general inter-subjective description of the world of common meaning which Heidegger gives. This world in which we are cast and engaged is a world in which all these meanings given by our engagements mean in the end—death. This final meaning is the clue to the meaning, or absurdity, of all other meanings. But this is only a position from which to raise again age-old questions.

The originality of Heidegger's thought, his mastery of Western philosophy in order to put it all in question with a reminder of what it fails to do, uncovering the basic ignorance which knowledge conceals; none of this can be conveyed in a few sentences meant to salute his memory at the close of a long life. Although he taught philosophy in a university, he was not an academic. He lived what he thought in the strenuousness of his meditations in the solitude of the Swabian hills. Like Kierkegaard or Nietzsche or some of the Greeks, he had to think to live, and therefore demonstrated what he thought.

## *Anglicans Demand Concessions*

Up till the end of the 1960s there were around 700 ordinands a year; by 1974 the number had almost halved. The number of active Anglican clergymen had dropped by over 2000 during the period 1969-74.

None the less the Anglican Church remains established and endowed. It conducts most of the national ceremonies. Its chaplains (paid for by the State) are to be found in prisons, hospitals, embassies and the armed forces.

The National Secular Society concluded its Submissions to the Archbishops' Commission on Church and State (1967) as follows: "Whatever their views on theology, all libertarians should demand the immediate disestablishment and disendowment of the Church of England. This would entail legislation to

give religious freedom to the Sovereign and Lord Chancellor, secularise the Coronation (performed, perhaps, by the Lord Chancellor) and all official national, civic and legal ceremonies, remove the Bench of Bishops from the House of Lords and civil disabilities from Anglican clergymen, abolish the statutory position of church courts so that they may become simply internal disciplinary bodies, restrict the appointment of Anglican chaplains to the voluntary provision of those where there is a definite need, abolish the right of Parliament to control worship or personnel of the Church, and disendow (perhaps by nationalising the Church Commissioners, many of whom are already officers of state)."

The NSS proposals should be endorsed by all who believe in democracy, equity and religious freedom.



# Ingersoll on Paine

JOHN LAURITSEN

The appeal by a group of American Christians to give God his place in the Bicentennial celebrations has prompted John Lauritsen, a New York freethinker, to make his contribution. He has published Robert G. Ingersoll's Oration on Thomas Paine, which the famous American freethinker delivered in 1871. John Lauritsen has written a foreword which is published below.

The Bicentennial is being celebrated with apprehension. The bourgeoisie are haunted by the spectre of the American Revolution as it really was, and they are hastening to falsify or sugarcoat the revolutionaries of 1776.

Most of the Founding Fathers were infidels; they had only contempt for Christianity and Judaism. Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Paine—these men called themselves “deists”; today we should call them “agnostics”. They believed only in a “god of nature”, which to them meant faith in human advancement through a reasoned use of the evidence of the real world, or in other words, the scientific outlook. Horrified by the effects of religious intolerance and superstition in Europe, they provided in the Constitution for the absolute separation of Church and State, a principle which has much eroded in the meantime.

Thomas Paine was the Great Infidel of the American Revolution. He played a crucial intellectual role in both the American and the French Revolutions, and was a supreme political philosopher and propagandist. The very ideas we hold today of democratic rights are to a large extent the ideas of Thomas Paine.

Yet Paine was treated very badly—harassed and imprisoned in his lifetime and calumniated by the faithful after his death. By the twentieth century, a United States president, Theodore Roosevelt, could refer to Paine as “that filthy little atheist”.

## Religionists' Attack on Freethinkers

One man to defend Thomas Paine was the libertarian and freethinker, Robert G. Ingersoll. On 29 January 1871, the 134th anniversary of Paine's birth, Ingersoll delivered an oration on Thomas Paine at a ceremony dedicating the newly completed Fairbury Hall to Free Thought, in Fairbury, Illinois. Wild dogs of controversy were unleashed, and religionists of every stripe rushed in to attack both Paine and Ingersoll, vilifying not only their ideas, but also their private lives.

A Presbyterian publication, the *New York Observer*, charged that Paine, “frightened of God”, had

recanted his religious heresies (like denying the authority of scripture) on his deathbed, and that he had “died a drunken, cowardly, and beastly death.” Ingersoll offered a thousand dollars in gold to anyone who could prove that “Thomas Paine died in terror because of religious opinions he had expressed, or that Voltaire did not pass away serenely as the coming of dawn.”

Ingersoll won. In 1877, he published a pamphlet, *A Vindication of Thomas Paine: A Reply to the New York “Observer’s” Attack Upon the Author-Hero of the Revolution*. In it Ingersoll marshalled evidence which proved that the charges against Paine were rumour and fabrication, and that Paine had in fact maintained his principles to the very end.

One passage in his pamphlet expressed Ingersoll's abhorrence of the *ad hominem* attack to which he and Paine had been subjected: “Owing to the attitude of the churches for the last fifteen hundred years, truth-telling has not been a very lucrative business. As a rule, hypocrisy has worn the robes, and honesty the rags. That day is passing away. You cannot now answer the arguments of a man by pointing at holes in his coat. Thomas Paine attacked the Church when it was powerful—when it had what was called honours to bestow—when it was keeper of the public conscience—when it was strong and cruel, the Church waited till he was dead then attacked his reputation and his clothes.”

## Champion of Equality

Ingersoll's 1871 oration on Thomas Paine is a study of eloquence. It is rhetoric in the grand style; and yet for all the richness of language, Ingersoll presents his facts and ideas with logic, clarity, and power.

The speech is deeply moving, even in cold print. We can imagine what its effects must have been on an audience when delivered by the greatest orator of the time, known as the “American Demosthenes”. Towards the turn of the century, oratory was a major form of mass entertainment, and Ingersoll was in great demand.

Robert G. Ingersoll (1833-1899) was the foremost figure in the freethought movement in the United States; he was called the “Great Agnostic” and the American “bulldog” for Darwin. He was a close friend of Walt Whitman in his latter years and an early champion of equal rights for women.

● “An Oration on Thomas Paine” by Robert G. Ingersoll is obtainable from G. W. Foote & Company, 698 Holloway Road, London N19, price 20p plus 7p postage.



Secular Humanists who attack supernaturalism at a fundamental level and argue the case for atheism are often accused by their fellow Humanists of being "negative". The president of the National Secular Society makes the point here that, since social attitudes are often dependent on fundamental beliefs, atheism remains socially relevant. Indeed, without "negative" atheism there can be no "positive" Humanism.

"NO HAWKERS—NO JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES" reads the notice on my front-door, put up in memory of several ruined meals—though I do admit that one ought to welcome the opportunity of exchanging tracts with Jehovah's Witnesses and other religious zealots, since one must assume they have brains capable of re-thinking their received beliefs. If only there were not so many of these doorstep missionaries in my neighbourhood, and if only they did not call upon me quite so persistently and at such inconvenient times! Besides, they do keep on so about the Book of Daniel.

Not only are their arguments depressingly predictable; they are also static, or, at best, circular. First your attention is directed to a biblical text; you reply that, as an atheist, you do not accept the Bible as a reliable authority; your attention is then directed to another biblical text, as "proof" of the Bible's divine inspiration. Their training is obviously confined to the interpretation of sacred scripture: they have no appropriate arguments for those who reject the sacred.

Many secular Humanists, however, similarly fail to direct their arguments to the standpoint of their opponents. In the political arena they base their arguments for social reform on rationalist assumptions, without recognising the necessity of justifying those assumptions at a fundamental level to opponents who do not share them. In practice, this recognition means relentlessly attacking religious doctrines—and the Humanists I am talking about are too genteel for that. They see religious faith as a private affair, not as a determining factor (generally retrogressive) in social change. But by carefully avoiding what they regard as the discourtesy of questioning religious assumptions, they are in fact refusing our opponents the courtesy of acknowledging that their social attitudes may follow just as sincerely and logically from their religious assumptions as our own social attitudes follow from our atheistic assumptions. Declining to argue about theism and immortality suggests that religious faith is an unimportant, harmless distraction for the proles, rather like Radio 2.

Thus, for example, a Humanist of this type will, in arguing for the retention of the 1967 Abortion Act, use the same arguments to an orthodox Roman Catholic as to a fellow Humanist—stressing the social benefits of fewer unwanted babies, the virtual elimination of dangerous back-street abortions, and so on. Sound arguments, all of them, on Utilitarian principles. The only trouble is that the person he is trying to convince does not accept Utilitarianism.

If an anti-abortion campaigner actually believes (as many do) that the foetus has an immortal soul to which abortion denies the chance of baptism and eternal salvation, it would obviously be immoral for him to stand silently by while abortions are carried out—so it does not make good sense to argue with him on ethical grounds. The sensible approach is to try to get him to see the irrationality of the doctrine of the immortal soul, since consciousness is a condition of the body and individual identity depends on the body.

If an anti-abortion campaigner believes in a personal creator of the universe who detests abortion—even, in the case of some Christians, extending his detestation to any artificial means of avoiding unwanted pregnancies—it is useless to argue with the campaigner on grounds of social benefit. To have any chance of success, we must direct our arguments either against the existence of a personal creator or against the likelihood of such a creator's disapproving of abortion.

## Disturbing the Peace

As president of the National Secular Society, I have made public statements on both the absurdity of belief in a personal creator (see my NSS leaflet *So You Believe in God*) and on the known medical fact that spontaneous abortions (miscarriages) vastly outnumber induced abortions—a fact which provided me with a new appellation for the God of the Christians as "the Great Abortionist". This phrase received considerable coverage in the religious press and elsewhere. The adverse comments, however, came almost as much from some members of the Humanist movement as from the opposition.

Indeed, the former are the less comprehending of the two, for they suggest that I am stirring up trouble in an otherwise harmonious live-and-let-live society, while the religionists do at least recognise the relevance of my arguments to current social issues, particularly the issue of induced abortion.

Their defence of the "sanctity of life" has a fine emotive appeal, which can be countered only by

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# Cracks in the Fabric

MARGARET KNIGHT

The recent report by the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England is entitled "Christian Believing: The Nature of the Christian Faith and its Expression in Holy Scripture and Creeds." This document demonstrates once again the divisions, uncertainty and doubts which are prevalent in the Church today.

*What time the evening shadows fall  
Around the Church on Earth  
When darker forms of doubt appal  
And new false lights have birth . . .*

*O Father in that hour of fear  
The Church of England keep,  
Thine altar to the last to rear  
And feed thy fainting sheep.*

Thus *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, number 216; and it is to be feared that the fainting sheep will find little sustenance in the recent Report of the Church of England's Commission on Doctrine.

Theologians, of course, have long been adept at suggesting that apparent setbacks are really developments. When the doctrine of special creation became untenable, they explained that the Genesis story is really a parable of the evolutionary process, and is far more inspiring when seen in this light. When the advance of science made the postulate of a "God of the gaps" superfluous, they argued that, rightly considered, the uniformity of nature provides still stronger evidence for the existence of a Creator. Today, the Church confronts a situation in which its leading members hold conflicting views about even the most basic articles of the creeds—are they literally true, "symbolically" true, or just plain untrue? And apparently this, too, is a Good Thing. "Pluriformity" is now the "in" word; and pluriformity, it appears, far from being a sign of impending breakup, is a manifestation of the Church's continuing vitality. The fainting sheep need not have distressed themselves after all!

Pluriformity, however, does create certain obstacles when it comes to compiling a joint report, and the members of the Commission (eighteen leading Churchmen, eleven of them Professors of Divinity or Heads of Theological Colleges) have taken account of this difficulty. The Report begins with a joint statement which embodies, so to speak, the greatest common measure of agreement that the Commission was able to reach; and it concludes with eight essays by individual members, in which each writer expresses his own views and the Com-

mission as a whole is not committed to what he says.

The joint statement, as was perhaps to be expected, is guarded to the point of flatness. It says little or nothing about doctrine, but concentrates on the attitudes of mind desirable in the believer. Bearing in mind that theological truth differs from other kinds of truth, and that the function of religious language is in some respects unlike that of ordinary language, the believer will do well to concentrate on the moral rather than the doctrinal teaching of the Gospels; and when he is obliged to confront doctrinal problems, to do so in a spirit of flexibility, openness and continued readiness for "dialogue". Perhaps the most explicit statement on doctrine is to be found in the penultimate paragraph (p.42), which recommends that "the creeds should be left in the kind of doctrinal position which in most churches they currently enjoy", and that we should continue to argue amicably about what they mean.

## Basic Teachings Rejected

This is not quite what one expects, perhaps, in a report concerned ostensibly with doctrine. But there is more substantial pabulum to be found in the eight individual essays, where the authors express views that range from near-fundamentalism to the most nebulous Honest-to-Godderly. Two at least of the contributors are cagey about the Incarnation and the Resurrection—they do not actually say that they disbelieve in them, but produce cautiously-worded statements such as: "The hypothesis of incarnation as a way of theologically articulating the faith-attitude of Christians . . . is not an irreformable truth communicated to men by God" (Professor Lampe, p.102). By contrast, J. R. Lucas (the only member of the Commission, incidentally, who is not a Reverend) says robustly that "If I believed that Jesus of Nazareth . . . was just an ordinary man . . . or that he was not crucified or never rose from the dead . . . I should have no business to pass myself off as a Christian believer or a full professing member of the Church" (p.71). And he adds later that "any difficulties we have in accepting what has been accepted down the ages may be due to the deficiencies of our culture, not that of other ages" (p.73).

Most of the writers reject the virgin birth, explicitly or by implication—the Right Reverend Hugh Montefiore on the somewhat unexpected ground that "human personality is formed through the pairing of 23 male and 23 female chromosomes" (p.146). Canon Allchin and Dr Turner, however, still accept it—the former maintaining that "the

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The Responsible Society is an organisation which was formed in 1971 by people who say their primary aim is "the encouragement of responsible behaviour in sexual relationships by educating and informing the public about the real consequences of irresponsibility." But a recent statement on sex education, written by K. H. Kavanagh of the Parents Advisory Group, demonstrates that rather than encouraging responsible sexual relationships, The Responsible Society is fostering ignorance, illusions and authoritarianism.

Somebody should tell K. H. Kavanagh and The Responsible Society that the sun has set upon the Empire. *Sex Education—Its Uses and Abuses* tells us absolutely nothing about the state of sex education and society today—but an awful lot about Mr Kavanagh! He takes as axiomatic that The Family and didactic and dogmatic teaching are "A Good Thing" and that "self-evolved solutions" (his apostrophes) are "A Bad Thing". Although religion hardly raises its hydra-like heads specifically, the whole tract bears the pervasive stamp of the Church's teachings.

Kavanagh's views on sex education and the place of the family and the parent in society would be justified if all 56 million of us lived in the society the Church sees through its rose-tinted goggles; a community based on fixed rules, a safe womb where everyone is happy to learn by rote and accept directions from the all-powerful paternal figure in the guise of God, his priests or Daddy. But despite the disproportionate number of Catholic and Church of England spokesmen in Parliament, we are no longer a Christian but a secular society. The only hold left on a large proportion of our community is that of inculcated guilt, misery and shame—as the waiting lists in our marriage guidance and psychosexual clinics, and the volumes of letters to Dear Marje and her legions reveal. And that is hardly something of which to boast or promote.

It is not the "cretinously avant garde" that point to the failure of the Family, as the pamphlet would suggest, but the Family itself. In 1973, the last year for which full statistics are available, 179,829 women experienced the results of sexual intercourse outside the family limits; 59,079 of them subsequently legitimised the babies they had conceived before the marriage ceremony (16.5 per cent of all legitimate live births). Of the remainder, 64,617 eschewed marriage as a solution and 56,123 turned to abortion. Since not everyone who is sexually active outside marriage becomes pregnant, this would indicate a large proportion of people "voting with their feet" (sic) against the old traditions.

To add disillusion to disinterest, while 442,000 couples married (and 27.1 per cent of these were remarriages!) 113,100 couples were divorced.

We may deplore it, but we have to accept that today's young people have learnt to question and to think for themselves. It does not show true concern for our young to insist that the questions raised by the ceaseless outpouring of sexual innuendo, titillation and distortion through the media can be answered by suppression and sublimation. As the Church treats adults like children, to be led and guided, so Kavanagh treats children like infants, quoting as authorities the words of Winnicott, Rycroft and Schwartz. In trying to uphold the child's "natural modesty" Kavanagh conveniently forgets that all three authors were referring to pre-pubescent "children", not adolescent "children".

### Sex Education—Christian Style

The Responsible Society has yet to present a constructive suggestion for a scheme of sex education. Perhaps if they did they might put forward the Father Aiden Pickering's slim volume, *Sex Instruction in the Home*, published only three years ago by the Catholic Truth Society. The Reverend urges parents to "train the minds of your children. Do not give them wrong ideas . . . Whatever their questions may be, do not answer with evasions. If they ask how a baby begins, they are quite satisfied if you tell them that you can feel it begin. Answers of this kind—the truth, yet not the full truth—can be given to similar questions . . . Take examples from the Hail Mary . . . just to show how natural it all is to us Catholics . . . If you are going to have another baby, you can tell your children a month or so beforehand . . . God himself creates the soul of a new baby, but its body comes from the body of its mother . . . But before this can begin to grow, it needs to be joined by a special liquid called 'seed' from the father, which is put into the mother when they join their bodies together. The part the father uses to give the seed is the part from which his water comes; and the part the mother uses to receive the seed is inside the outer opening from which her water comes."

Here, as any psychoanalyst or psychosexual counsellor would agree, is the basis of the age-old sex = dirt equation which troubles so many people and is at the root of so much unhappiness. The most frequent query dealt with by that outspoken magazine *Forum*, involves urination fantasies or practices.

In "Trouble With the Birds and the Bees" (*World Medicine*), Denise Winn and Tony Whitehead quote two cases. "A girl of 23 attended a sub-fertility clinic because, in spite of regular intercourse over a period of four years, she had failed to become



pregnant. Her urethra was found to be considerably distended. Her husband, with great perseverance on his part and much fortitude on hers, had succeeded in using the urethra as a vagina ('inside the outer opening from which her water comes'). This painful mistake is a fairly common cause for attendances at sub-fertility clinics.

"Another couple had been labouring under the illusion that copulation consisted of the man inserting his penis into the vagina and then remaining still ('the seed . . . is put into the mother when they join their bodies together'). Neither know how it was supposed to end but presumed that if they remained in this position long enough a pregnancy would result."

What gives people such as Kavanagh the arrogance to presume to dictate to society? Numbers do not back him up—by the Catholics own count they number only 3,700,000—less than 7 per cent of the population (*The Times*, 14 April 1975). Dr Coggan's "Call to the Nation" last October elicited only 27,000 letters. Even applying the broadcasting rule, "for every person who wrote, a hundred meant to write but never got round to it", that still only gives a figure of 2,700,000. Does 11.4 per cent of our society have the right to dictate the mores, education and indeed the life style of the whole society? By that token the Liberals should be in power and the Flat Earthers should have a seat in Parliament. Significantly, many of Dr Coggan's respondents "felt a great sense of nostalgia for the past, when values were less fluid and frequently the wartime feeling of national unity and common purpose was recalled." Oh cowardly old world . . . !

### Looking to the Future

When will these people learn that there is no return, and the more time our society spends peering, longingly, over its collective shoulder, the longer we remain in this limbo, this destructive interregnum between the successful domination of the Church and tradition over a population content to be led, and the possible future of individual responsibility and self-determination. If, during this period, all the Family Planning Association, Brook Advisory Centres and other educators manage to offer their bewildered students is contraceptive education, then all power to them—because it's better than nothing. At least it will give a significant proportion of our young people time to consider their options, instead of finding themselves burdened with an unplanned, unconsidered, and worst of all, unwanted child. In 1973, 179,829 women did not have this option; ignorance, innocence—call it what you will, it can hardly be offered as a reliable basis for decision making.

And can we please be allowed to treat our adolescents as people with individual thoughts of their

own—not as sub-normal babies? Is it really 49 years since Margaret Mead in her *Growing up in Samoa*, showed us that that period of storm and turbulence we accept as "normal" is in fact a product of our civilisation arising from the conflicts our teenagers face; their minds and bodies tell them they are no longer children and the media confirms this—but some parents and schools insist that they are. To persist in maintaining that as far as sex education is concerned they must be treated as infants is to further compound the crime.

We have a changed and changing society from that of K. H. Kavanagh's day. In it there is now an accent on, indeed an insistence on, freedom of choice. This choice will only be a good one if it is based on honest, open information, and not on the guarded backward looking evasions of such as The Responsible Society. Too many people are still paying too high a price for the conscience of the self-elected just.

## Freethinker Fund

*The Freethinker* has surmounted all the difficulties which have beset it, particularly during the last decade. Our main problems have been rising costs, the lack of co-operation by newsagents and wholesalers (who now insist on 60 per cent discount), apathy and a strong tendency to take the regular appearance of the journal for granted. But thanks to the generosity of good friends—many of them now dead—we have so far been able to make ends meet.

One reader, a former Roman Catholic priest, explained why he was sending a donation to the Fund: "I do so in the hope that all other regular readers desire to keep *The Freethinker* going. It is the one and only journal I should really miss if it failed to come monthly . . . *The Freethinker* is the only journal that seems fully alive to the dangers inherent in all forms of religious instruction and indoctrination."

During the period of 21 May to 18 June the following donations were received: H. A. Alexander, 25p; J. Ancliffe, £1.50; Anonymous, 50p; Anonymous, £5; S. Axenfield, £2.45; C. Begg, 50p; Miss S. Bell, 50p; D. Brennan, 25p; J. G. Burdon, £1.17; P. Crommelin, £5; F. Davies, £3.50; G. J. Davies, £4.50; T. H. Ellison, £4; E. J. Hughes, £1; J. H. Morton, 50p; R. Reader, 25p; Mrs M. Scott, 50p; J. W. Sim, 50p; B. Wycher, 50p. Total: £32.37.

Since the beginning of the present century the proportion of Christians to non-Christians in the world has declined from 36 per cent to 24 per cent, according to a survey on world statistics which has been carried out recently.



In October 1975 we received a letter from Martin Mears, a Norfolk solicitor acting for journalist Michael Litchfield, stating that the co-author of that celebrated work of sociology, *Babies for Burning*, was anxious to take proceedings against *The Freethinker*. The letter concluded with the warning, "... you will doubtless be hearing further from us." It now seems unlikely that we will be hearing from Mr Mears who has informed solicitors acting for the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, whose trustees are involved in a libel action against Litchfield and his co-author, Susan Kentish, that he is no longer acting on their behalf.

This is not the first occasion on which Michael Litchfield has parted company with solicitors; he was originally represented by a London firm, Field Fisher & Martineau. But the separation from Martin Mears will be of more than passing interest to Litchfield's admirers and to his critics—for two main reasons. First, the legal action initiated by the BPAS has reached a crucial stage, and this would not appear to be an opportune moment to hand over the case to yet another firm of solicitors. Secondly—and of much greater significance—Martin Mears is, if possible, an even more implacable enemy of the 1967 Abortion Act than are his former clients. To have defended such doughty anti-abortionists as the authors of *Babies for Burning* would surely have been regarded as a labour of love. So what lies behind this latest move?

It will be recalled that Litchfield and Kentish threatened proceedings against this journal because of an unfavourable review of *Babies for Burning*. They changed solicitors after the *Sunday Times* published a devastating *exposé* of their book. It is a curious coincidence that they have done so again following the publication of a letter by Michael Litchfield in the *Bedfordshire Journal* (4 April). Mr Litchfield claimed: "*Babies for Burning* is currently a best-seller overseas, having been published this winter . . . it was published overseas only after the lawyers of the publishers—one of the largest and most reputable in the world—had investigated the allegations contained in the book and decided that it should be published forthwith—in its entirety."

Diane Munday, BPAS public relations officer, wrote a letter to the same newspaper (published 6 May) inviting Mr Litchfield to "tell readers in which country the book has now been published, where it was published, and by whom?". No reply was forthcoming, and when BPAS solicitors pressed Mr Mears for this information, they were eventually informed that he is no longer acting for Litchfield and Kentish.

We trust that in the fullness of time Michael Litchfield will produce all the facts about his international publishing activities, together with verifi-

cation of his claim—challenged by the *Sunday Times*—that he won a Pulitzer Prize for journalism.

## EXTREMELY SENSIBLE

In his much publicised "Call to the Nation" last October, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Donald Coggan, complained of "extremists who tend to receive the publicity . . ." No doubt he will include Mabel Gittoes-Davies, a member of the Southampton Humanist Society, among the extremists in view of her letter which appeared in the *Guardian* newspaper. She was prompted to write the letter after yet another proclamation by Dr Coggan, and the text of her letter is published below.

The Archbishop of Canterbury in his Easter message called upon Christians to "clear Britain's spiritual breakdown." The word "breakdown" *must* imply that our national moral standards have deteriorated. I consider this to be an incredible assumption. In the course of my nearly 80 years' experience I have observed the social conscience of the general public in this country steadily developing.

I particularly question the reference to a modern lack of "reverence for life", since never before has so much care and consideration been given to the sick, the handicapped, the poor, the pregnant, the very young and the very old. Nor has so much attention been paid to health, sanitation and working conditions.

When I was young it was accepted that there were "the rich" and "the poor", and that this was a stable situation, calling for charity but not for change. Indeed the so-called "lower classes" were considered not suitable for education, since this would give them "ideas above their station", this station being one to which the church taught they had been called by God. Children could leave school at eight years and went "into service" or labour in factories, or even down coal mines.

With regard to materialism, mine owners and industrialists disregarded safety precautions and living standards for reasons of profit, allowing their workers to starve and sometimes die, rather than listen to complaints. Yet people were not wicked; their moral standards were socially undeveloped and lamentably low by modern criteria. Naturally, nothing today is perfect, but we do at least accept that this is the case, and that there is a constant need for vigilance over progress for equality in human rights.

However, I would emphasise that, while main-



# AND NOTES

taining a wonderful democratic freedom, we have not deteriorated in social morality. We shall always pay for our freedom with the possibility of it being misused. Surely, better far this payment than an authoritarian society.

The media respond to human frailty by drawing attention of the public to everything disastrous or undesirable. It would be good to hear more about the remarkable work done by thousands of ordinary people, young and old, in Britain today, as well as by the government, for the good of the community, and indeed for humanity everywhere.

I believe the call to "Christians and men of goodwill" should be forward-looking and constructive, and with no element at all of a return to some mythical moral superiority.

I am always interested to know how the army of censors of "morality" have themselves managed to escape corruption.

Mabel Gittoes-Davies is an extremist—if that appellation can apply to someone who writes extremely good sense.

## INDOCTRINATORS' VICTIM

The way in which interference by religious authorities in the country's education system can damage or even wreck the career of a young teacher has been illustrated in Scotland where such a teacher, Claire Selby, has been barred from teaching in Roman Catholic schools although she was appointed by the Strathclyde Education Department. A 1918 Act of Parliament decrees that teachers in Scottish Catholic schools must have a teaching certificate from the Church hierarchy. But the religious indoctrinators of Strathclyde have refused to issue such a certificate to Mrs Selby because she recently married a non-Catholic at a civil ceremony.

Mrs Selby, aged 21, is a university graduate and a student at Notre Dame teachers' training college. She believes that someone told Sister Francis, the college principal, of her marriage. "And", she says, "because I married outside the Church I have been labelled unfit to teach children. The principal said that because of my marriage I would not receive a teaching certificate, but if I got the Church to bless my marriage then the certificate would be produced. I replied that I could not ask my husband, or myself, to become hypocrites.

Mrs Selby says that she "is still a Catholic at heart." But that is not good enough for Sister Francis who declared adamantly: "She will not be receiving a teaching certificate from us."

## *The Relevance of Atheism*

demonstrating its absurdity in a world where both evolution and the survival of the individual depend on the prodigality of nature. And there is no point in putting the Utilitarian case on behalf of living people to fundamentalist Christians without first attacking the concept of the equal rights with living people of embryos and fetuses, based on a mystical notion of potentiality.

The social issues on which opinion divides almost exactly along the religious boundary will generally be found to turn on fundamentalist religious assumptions, and the religious lobby in these issues—which include sexual repression, censorship, punitive criminal laws, and the retention of denominational schools—can be fought effectively only by exposing these assumptions for the irrationalities they are.

I am not saying, of course, that we should abandon Utilitarian arguments altogether in favour of anti-theistic arguments; only that the two need to go together, for it is a great mistake to suppose that the battle against religious superstition has already been won. Religious claims may well have become tentative and tenuous among progressive, sophisticated theists, but there is a tidal wave of religious dogmatism among converts from nominal orthodoxy to the fanatical fringe and among the enthusiasts of the inter-denominational "charismatic" movement who largely make up the numbers in such pressure groups as the Nationwide Festival of Light, the Order of Christian Unity, the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, and the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association.

Humanist intellectuals who meet religious intellectuals in, say, the Social Morality Council, often go away with the erroneous idea that these people are typical exponents of the creeds they represent; and therefore regard those of us who "knock" religious doctrines as being "negative", "irrelevant", and, to say the least of it, guilty of very bad taste. Humanist propaganda should, they think, be confined to polite philosophising and preaching to the converted.

One day, perhaps, it will be no more relevant to call oneself an atheist than it is to call oneself a non-flatterer at the present time. But as long as supernatural beliefs take possession of people's minds to the detriment of commonsense and the distortion of social attitudes, the open profession of atheism, supported by rational arguments, will retain its relevance to human welfare, and we cannot afford to be too concerned about gentility. A gardener who, disdaining the "negative" chore of pulling out weeds, confines his activity to the "positive" planting of stock is going to find his expected prize blooms and vegetables crowded out of existence.

Perhaps, on second thoughts, I should go and take that notice down from my front-door.



# BOOKS

**THE TRIAL OF ANNIE BESANT AND CHARLES BRADLAUGH** by Roger Manvell. Elek/Pemberton, £5.95.

One hundred years after the event, Roger Manvell has given us an abbreviated version of the celebrated trial of Bradlaugh and Besant for publishing Dr Charles Knowlton's birth-control tract, *The Fruits of Philosophy*; or, *the Private Companion of Young Married Couples*, in contravention of Lord Campbell's Obscene Publications Act of 1857.

The Knowlton Pamphlet, as it was commonly called, was first published in the United States in 1832, and shortly afterwards in Britain by the leading freethinker, James Watson, whose edition was widely sold by the Holyoakes, Edward Truelove and other radical and secularist booksellers. After Watson's death in 1874 the printer's plates were purchased by Charles Watts, publisher for the National Secular Society, who continued to issue about a thousand copies a year of the 40-page booklet. The work was therefore closely associated with the British freethought, and so when Henry Cook, the radical bookseller in Bristol, was accused of publishing obscenity when he sold the pamphlet in 1876 he was advised by Watts that the book was defensible. However, when Watts then discovered that Cook had added some objectionable and unauthorised illustrations to the Knowlton Pamphlet, he felt that he could not take upon himself a defence of the work. Instead he reached a private agreement with the police whereby he admitted that the work was illegal on the understanding that he would not be prosecuted.

Charles Bradlaugh was outraged at this capitulation, and so was his new lieutenant, Annie Besant. They felt that Watts had betrayed the freethought movement, and immediately took steps to re-publish the pamphlet in order to establish their right to do so. The police were invited to prosecute, and this was done (although the exact identity of the prosecutor remained a mystery) early in 1877. The bulk of Mr Manvell's book is taken up with an abbreviated text and commentary on this trial.

The case was heard at Queen's Bench before the Lord Chief Justice in June 1877, and ended in a surprise verdict of guilty. Mrs Besant had pleaded with eloquence, Bradlaugh had played the legal game with his customary skill, the judge had conducted the case with humanity and impartiality. But prejudice amongst some of the jurors turned what looked like a split verdict into a unanimous one against the defendants, and they were each sentenced to six months in prison and a fine of £200. On appeal however, in February 1878, the judgment was set aside and no new trial was ever ordered.

Mr Manvell's book conveys both the atmosphere

# FREETHINKER

of the trial and the breadth and quality of the arguments used by the defendants. To this he adds brief introductions to Bradlaugh and Besant taken largely from the lives written respectively by David Tribe and A. H. Nethercot. But this is all. There is no attempt to discuss the merits of the case or to assess its historical importance beyond the claim that "The right to publish discussion on an important social problem relating to sex had been vindicated." Had it? The work had not been prosecuted prior to Cook's version of it, and, as leading Secularists such as Arthus Moss pointed out at the time, Bradlaugh and Besant did not issue a facsimile of the Cook or even the Watts edition. Birth control literature had not been challenged before Bradlaugh and Besant made it notorious; afterwards Edward Truelove was imprisoned for selling R. D. Owen's *Moral Physiology* which had been innocuously sold for years, and in the United States a strong reaction set in against birth control advocacy. These arguments were advanced by Marie Stopes in 1922. Perhaps they can be answered, but they should not have been ignored.

It is a pity that Mr Manvell did not take this opportunity to prepare a critical historical edition of the Knowlton Trial instead of contenting himself with a chronicle of events expressed largely in the words of the participants.

EDWARD ROYLE

**THE POLITICAL POLICE IN BRITAIN** by Tony Bunyan-Julian Friedmann, £4.95.

In reply to complaints of police behaviour in connection with the perfectly legitimate political activities of a political organisation, a chief constable of Middlesborough once informed the National Council for Civil Liberties that "free speech was still allowed in this country, provided a person chose rather carefully what he said."

This is all too commonly becoming the official viewpoint, coupled with the concept that political activity of any kind frowned upon by the Establishment, is more dangerous than the depredations of criminals. Tony Bunyan has rendered a signal service to all concerned that freedom to express heretical opinions is in graver danger than for years. The ever increasing interest of an allegedly undermanned police in political meetings, industrial disputes, and of photographing and compiling dossiers on individuals participating in those activities is very obvious. While many of the facts documented by Mr Bunyan may be common knowledge to members of



# REVIEWS

progressive and minority groups, traditional beliefs die hard. This book comes therefore, as a timely reminder that "it doesn't happen here" is erroneous. Despite popular opinion, Britain has a long established political police. Indeed, in some respects this country was a pioneer in the practice and employment of police spying on political non-conformists and dissidents.

Of ancient British vintage is the use of the agent-provocateur to entrap the unwary or naive protester against wrongs inflicted by the State. These include the so-called "Cato Street Conspiracy", devised and fomented by the Government spy, Edwards, and plots to involve early trade unionists and Chartists in insurrection and the purchase of arms. Nearer our own time there was the strange case of Mrs Wheeldon and her family during the 1914-18 war. She was a well-known suffragette and pacifist who, together with her daughter and son-in-law, was framed and jailed. How this was effected by a Major Lee, head of a branch of British Intelligence, aided by the police-informer Gordon, is detailed in the chapter on the Special Branch. The author gives many other examples of similar "fit-ups", which I understand is the correct modern term used by the police themselves to describe this practice.

Anyone with the delusion that such methods only obtain under foreign dictatorships and would never be permitted in our democracy should carefully study the many instances documented throughout this ably-written and revealing study. To many who think that it is only Communists and other extreme Left groups who are kept under surveillance (and who may quite genuinely believe this is justified) the following passage (page 179) may appear frightening: "In the period after the 1959 General Election the Labour Party underwent nearly four years of internal dissension between the reformist leadership of Hugh Gaitskell and the Labour Left . . . The Labour Party parliamentary leadership at the time was convinced that the only way to regain power after ten years in opposition was to excise the radical elements within the party in order to become more appealing to middle-class voters. Part of this face-lift was an approach by the Labour leaders to M15 to investigate, on their behalf, MP's considered to be 'crypto-communists'. A committee of three MP's was set up by the Labour leaders to investigate those left-wing Labour MP's thought to be 'fellow-travellers'—the three were Gaitskell, George Brown and Patrick Gordon Walker . . . A meeting took place between the committee and M15, and the names of 15 Labour MP's were handed over to M15 for investigation. These investigations

. . . involved 'telephone-tapping, shadowing, the opening of mail, examination of bank accounts, and other methods used by Intelligence services'. When the six-month investigation ended M15 informed Brown that there was no evidence of 'fellow-travelling' MP's in the Labour Party. However, in reality, it appears the Tory Home Secretary learned of the investigation and ordered it to cease and forbade M15 to present any evidence against a member of parliament." Perhaps the instigators of Watergate have but little to teach Britain.

With its long and honourable record in the cause of freedom and the rights of individuals, the Secularist and Humanist movement should be deeply concerned over recent trends and the ever-present threat of further inroads on civil liberty. For this reason alone, Tony Bunyan's lively *exposé* of this threat should be read and studied by every free-thinker. The chapter on "The Political Uses of Law", with example after example of how laws are manipulated and used for very different purposes to that originally intended, must serve as a warning. The history of the Special Branch with its growth into almost complete independence from the civil police, and the increasing use of search warrants obtained from complacent magistrates, for quite different purposes to the stated reason, are other pointers along the road to a police-state here. The author states an obvious truth when he reminds us that the contention that we live in a society where, increasingly, it is ideas which are policed is still one many people are not prepared to recognise. Yet this is precisely the premise of the Special Branch.

Included among other disturbing features is the extension of computerised criminal records to include people who have never been convicted of any offence, but who may be considered "dangerous". Such records contain details of their private lives and there is increasing misuse of them by police. On page 81, Bunyan poses the question: "The critical question in relation to this mass of files is just who has access to them?" In the case of criminal records it is extremely easy. "More usually employers use the private tracing agencies to get this information. These agencies employ ex-policemen who are used to making requests to (Criminal Records Offices) and who—given the demands on the CRO telephones—experience little difficulty because it is impossible to verify each call."

Additional to an informative and detailed history of all aspects of the British political police, the book draws much needed attention to a fresh danger. The rapid growth of private police forces in the guise of security organisations has sinister implications. Because their senior staff is largely recruited from the police—the author lists several examples including the ex-head of Metropolitan CID, Peter Brodie—they have facilities for obtaining information, often of a personal nature, and which is sup-



posed to be classified. It is significant that "security" patrols, sometimes in quasi-police uniforms, are being used increasingly at political rallies and in industrial plants particularly during trade disputes.

Possibly the effectiveness of this book is somewhat limited because of the total commitment of the writer. It shows through on almost every page. The result may be that the very people who should be most concerned could become alienated, viewing this as just "Left propaganda"—which it most certainly is not. The late Herbert Morrison a rather reactionary Home Secretary—once said in connection with telephone-tapping: "The innocent have nothing to fear." Unfortunately, as many know from experience and this book bears out, it is just the innocent and politically uncommitted who may have most to fear.

JAMES M. ALEXANDER

● "The Political Police in Britain" is obtainable from G. W. Foote & Company, 698 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL, price £4.95 plus 42p postage.

#### THE FALSE MESSIAHS by Jack Gratus. Gollanz, £6.00

This book is a very readable account of Messianic claimants and movements, mainly Jewish and Christian, from the Maccabees to the present day. The whole story is an instructive illustration of the way the desire for power in the few feeds on a complementary tendency in the many to act as obedient followers. The will of the few to dominate could not be gratified without this tendency in the many to humility, reverence and adoration (p.9). The effect of these two complementary tendencies is to enhance courage in both parties.

Reliance on a leader converts a feeble will into a strong one, and the leader himself feels the stronger for his consciousness that many depend on him. This accounts for the often incredible fortitude of both parties—fortitude which has again and again been called into play by the civil and religious opponents of every Messianic movement, who are as necessary to each Messianic drama as the leader and his followers. In the understanding of these three factors lies, surely, one clue not only to Messianic movements, but to political behaviour generally. Mr Gratus inevitably tells us a story that is, in the main, grisly. But the facts have to be faced if we are to attempt to understand them in terms of human psychology; and he does a good job in bringing them to our attention.

G. A. WELLS

Sir Cyril Black, a leading Baptist layman and former Conservative MP, has resigned from the board of London's Wimbledon Theatre. He is protesting against a decision to stage the musical, "Hair", next month.

## PAMPHLET

CHRISTIANITY IN A COLLAPSING CULTURE by O. R. Johnston. The Paternoster Press, 30p.

The end of the world is at hand. Well, not exactly the end of the world but, according to O. R. Johnston, the Director of the Nationwide Festival of Light, we are certainly facing the end of "Civilisation as we know it."

Mr Johnston has just published a little work, *Christianity in a Collapsing Culture*, and in it he sadly sets down the history of our decline and fall: "We have watched the erosion of the Lord's Day, the ousting of the Bible from the schools, the rescinding of legislation which restrained witchcraft, blasphemy, homosexuality, abortion and stage obscenity." The majority of these things would probably strike most men and women as a list of sensible and much-needed reforms, but to Mr Johnston's sensitive nostrils they have "the smell of the pit" about them.

In particular he has been very upset by the reform of the law on homosexuality: "What Scripture condemns is the deliberate satisfaction of homosexual desire in forbidden behaviour—sodomy. Homosexual practices are against nature and against revealed truth. They are not simply something which ought to fill us with revulsion. Homosexual indulgence is something which God condemns as the ultimate sign of decadence and degradation in any culture . . . If this vice becomes tolerated and commonplace, as appears to be the case today in Britain, we are very near the end of the road. So from this alone I would deduce that we are approaching the last stages of the disintegration of our culture. For we bear the mark of the lowest decadence of all."

Now this ugly diatribe is a useful reminder of the degrading influence which Christianity has had. For centuries our social life was strictly governed by the barbarous standards of the Christian moral code. We have not yet completely cast off this baleful influence, but it is a measure of how far we have come that the terms of Mr Johnston's condemnation of homosexuality are most likely to earn him the kind of pity which, until recently, marked the so-called "liberal" attitude to homosexuals.

Mr Johnston believes that "our culture seems to be disintegrating . . . If things go on as they are and God does not send us revival the outlook is indeed grim." It is, of course, a religious revival which he means, but as he tells us that the "only thing ultimately which we have to offer sinful men and women" is the proclamation that "The true treasure of the church is the most holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God" it seems unlikely that God or even Mr Johnson will "send us revival" in the foreseeable future. We have tried the most holy Gos-



pel and it has been found that an anthology of fanciful tales is not a sensible or useful guide to modern life. The history of the ages of faith, with their record of sacerdotal murder and mayhem, is not a particularly powerful advertisement for Mr Johnston's religion.

Christianity is a primitive and degrading superstition which has held back civilisation for as long as it has had the power to do so. Now it is not our civilisation, but Christianity which is collapsing. The Festival of Light's attempts to revive this particular form of systematised delusion can do nothing to raise cultural standards, because cultural life cannot be improved if intellectual life is debased and absurd. As Barbara Smoker has pointed out in her leaflet, *Festival of Twilight*, "Christianity is now on its deathbed. We say: let it die!"

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

## THEATRE

**DIRTY LINEN and NEW-FOUND-LAND by Tom Stoppard. Arts Theatre, London.**

These two new short plays by Tom Stoppard, originally presented by Inter-Action as a lunch time show, provided a topical and witty glimpse behind the scenes at Westminster. "Dirty Linen" shows, in a shabby room uncomfortably close to the booming of Big Ben, a Select Parliamentary Committee examining the question of immorality among MPs. The Committee must, of course, beware that no taint sully their own reputations. This is rather difficult, as we have already guessed from the conversations with Miss Go-to-bed, an attractive secretary, whose incompetence at shorthand is countered by her incisive common sense. ("Do you use Greg or Pitman's?")—"I'm on the pill.") When the bluff Mr Withenshaw, MP, enters loudly declaring "There's trouble in t' Mail" and flings down a copy of the paper which has been insinuating that one of the Select Committee was seen with a young lady at a certain restaurant, it is clear that covering up will be necessary. But the Committee's problems are further complicated by the arrival of the puritanical and probing Mr French, MP, who is determined that the wordy report and amendments be replaced by thorough investigations.

The farcical complications involving various items of Miss-go-to-bed's clothing and the verbal fantasies and puns are characteristic of Tom Stoppard's writing. I am always amazed at the audacity of his puns ("It is a briefcase", replies Mr Withenshaw when questioned about returning a pair of briefs to it). Indeed these MPs are sent into a flurry of double-entendres, not so much Freudian slips as Pavlovian pants. It is the brio and inventiveness of Mr Stoppard's verbal wit, which sustains this rather slight piece.

The other sketch, tenuously connected with America for bi-centennial reasons, rested uneasily within the main play and was even slighter. It involved two Parliamentary Secretaries with papers for the naturalisation of an American—obviously based on Ed Berman, the director and founder of Inter-Action. One, ancient and interminably reminiscing about Lloyd George, is given a superb cameo-caricature by Richard Goolden. The other embarks on a Hollywood-style account of America, which went on too long. Though these plays are really expanded sketches, they are presented with deft and energetic humour. And the important point is entertainingly made, that the private life of MPs, or any other public figure, is their own concern.

JIM HERRICK

## EVENTS

**Ancient House Museum.** White Hart Street, Thetford, Norfolk. Exhibition: "Thomas Paine, Thetford, America and Elsewhere". Friday, 2 July, until Sunday, 1 August, daily 9 am-5 pm (Sunday, 2 pm-5 pm).

**Humanist Holidays.** Summer Holiday (7 to 21 August) at Weston-super-Mare. Details from Mrs M. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey; telephone (01) 642 8796.

**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.)

**London Young Humanists.** 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8. Sunday, 18 July, 7.30 pm. Michael Heston: "Can an ex-Con Afford to be Honest?" Sunday, 1 August, 7.30 pm. Discussion: "Pornography".

**Muswell Hill Humanist Group.** 43 Page's Lane, London N10. Wednesday, 14 July, 8 pm. Barbara Smoker: "From Catholicism to Atheism".

**Merseyside Humanist Group.** Lecture Room, 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. Meetings held on the third Wednesday of the month, 7.45 pm (not August).

**National Secular Society.** Annual Excursion, Sunday, 12 September. Details in August "Freethinker".

Liam Cosgrave, the Prime Minister of Eire, is at loggerheads with the majority of his Cabinet colleagues who favour liberalising the laws relating to contraception and divorce. Both the Minister for Foreign Affairs (Dr Garret FitzGerald) and the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs (Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien) recently made major speeches calling for reform, and the Minister for Justice told a meeting of the Council of Europe justice ministers last month that he favoured divorce and for the Constitution to be altered accordingly. Cosgrave is one of the most reactionary and powerful figures in Irish politics, but he may soon find that the pressure for change, from both inside and outside Parliament, is irresistible.



Historically religion has played an important part in binding communities together. Now that Christianity is recognisably declining, there is a need to discuss the part which Humanist groups might play in the community, argues Phil Taylor of the Cardiff Humanist Group.

From the time when men first painted their exploits and aspirations on cave walls, up to the present day, we have evidence that the human species has taken part in activities which we might loosely describe as religious in character. Over the centuries the forms of this activity have varied considerably. No doubt they also varied in the era between man's total preoccupation with the business of survival and his development towards ability to communicate ideas. In the known period of history, however, religion has evolved from the naive attempts to explain the properties of natural phenomena in terms of individual spirits to its more sophisticated use as a means of controlling nations.

There is a temptation to believe that because a way of doing things has been fashionable for generations it becomes in itself enshrined with special value and inseparable from man himself. So although there is no reason to think that any existing or past patterns of religious behaviour are in any way innate in man, the many forms which they have taken during our social evolution should perhaps encourage us to look ahead, particularly now that Christianity in Western Europe has so obviously passed its peak.

## Something Missing?

Even among some Humanists there is a feeling that with the decline of Christianity something is missing. To understand this attitude it is necessary to be aware of how it has arisen, how we are by no means free agents in our thinking (even though we might try to be) and how its roots lie in our ancestry. Until very recently, Christianity in Western Europe had an overwhelming and monopolistic control and influence over man's intellect. Political power, the arts, philosophy and everyday social intercourse were all embraced by this religious system. Its power is vouched for by the fact that today as we see its fall, we also feel its loss.

This might explain why some Humanists and others have tried to find a replacement for the Christian religion. But it is a task as likely to be successful as a search for the Holy Grail. There are, nevertheless, some functions which Humanists could transform and thus make them acceptable in this new situation. People are becoming much more

aware of the value of communities. It is as if they realise that if man has any innate biological tendencies, they are concerned with how he relates to his fellow men. Communities are living, dynamic phenomena which, to survive, need regular reinforcement of bonds. As well as groups with rather restrictive patterns of behaviour, such as evening classes and social drinking, community centres are springing up which cater for this need according to a wide range of tastes. Yet, valuable opportunities for strengthening community bonds are missed if celebration of marriages, births, death and seasonal events are restricted to near relatives only. Many people also need an opportunity for a deeper level of communication with each other and for a chance to pierce the cocoon of everyday activities which occupy so much of our lives.

## Communication

Humanist groups could play a part in fulfilling these needs. They should not attempt simply to replace the Christian slot. Fellowship and support should be openly stated motivations and the aim should be to provide inspiration and encouragement for the individual to participate in a secular society. Humanists have attitudes to life which have now been experienced for some time and written about with much eloquence. At a local level these attitudes can thrive because of their practical nature and the more personal level of communication. Humanists are well placed to contribute to the foundation of a society where it will be possible to make real progress towards the ideals of individual responsibility and freedom.

## OBITUARIES

### MRS N. MERKLEY

Nola Merkley, who was severely disabled by an incurable arthritic condition, died recently by self-euthanasia. Mrs Merkley, a talented painter, was the wife of an American businessman and formerly an active member of the Mormon Church. There was a secular ceremony when she was buried at Green Lawns Cemetery, Warlingham, Surrey.

### MRS S. SHILTON

Sylvia Shilton died recently in a London hospital following a distressing illness. She was aged 64. Mrs Shilton was the fourth member of the family to die within the last five years. Like her husband, daughter and mother, Mrs Shilton was cremated at Golders Green after a secular committal ceremony.



# LETTERS

There are a few comments I would like to make on your "News and Notes" item, "The Agreed Syllabus" ("The Freethinker", June).

To participate or not to participate in the work of a body like the Religious Education Council must always be a difficult decision for Humanists under the present law. As a Christian, I would urge participation for two reasons. First, it is the only way to ensure the representation of your point of view. Secondly, the Humanist presence is a reminder that you possess insights and a concern for moral values and for education. Humanists have a positive philosophy and are not merely anti-religious. For these reasons, many of us want you to share in our work and wish to change the rules to make this possible.

We were not so naive as to think that our report, "What Future for the Agreed Syllabus?" would provoke no reaction. But we did hope that our underlying principle might be grasped. This was that RE (call it what you will) should be lifted out of the Christian nurture context and made a properly and fully educational subject like History or English.

The school is not a place where we should battle for the minds, but where we should equip the immature to be informed about the ways in which people find purposes in life and cope with being human. It is as educators with particular insights that I want Humanists, Muslims and Christians to engage in the development of RE—not so that they can share the Christians' evangelistic platform. I want to remove that altogether from our schools.

"What Future for the Agreed Syllabus?" should not be seen as a sell-out to Humanists or as a charter for Humanist evangelism. It is an attempt to provide a new, non-evangelical basis for school religion, or Education in Stances for Living which will include education in religion and non-religion.

W. OWEN COLE

Head of Religious Studies,  
James Graham College, Leeds

## THE POLICE AND THE PUBLIC

From his rather emotional outburst ("The Freethinker", June) it is somewhat difficult to know what Brian M. Clarke, Director and Editor of "The Police Review", really requires of me. He hopes "none of your readers will be taken in" by me, requests "a real article" wants me to join in singing an old song and thinks "we could well do without the likes of (me)."

He refers to my "biased, rather silly, and obviously irresponsible" writing. So I will give him some more irresponsible writing: "Police intelligence is now forward-looking, anticipating who is going to commit what, when and where, and because it is so purposeful it is also frequently libellous . . . Much of the information is personal details of a suspect, his family associates, way of life, and although it may seem to trespass on the freedom of the individual, it is the bread and butter of successful policing." I quote from Mr Clarke's own "Police Review" (5 May, 1972).

I am very pleased that he raised the matter of "good, capable and often first class officers" who attempt to always obey the rules of law enforcement.

From research into this, it appears some of the more fortunate ones continue unpromoted and beating the pavement until they retire. I am concerned with the fate of others like the young Kent constable who insisted on prosecuting a Member of Parliament for motoring offences covered up by his superiors; the young Leeds constable who refused to join in the con-

spiracy of perjury arranged by senior officers to protect a superintendent who killed an old lady through his drunken driving; the officer from Hampshire who reported a CID chief when he found a valuable watch and forgot to tell anyone; the officer who exposed the "fiddling" of expenses by senior police at the Investiture of Prince Charles in 1969; the officer who reported the stealing of almost five tons of goods from a lorry by senior officers, none of whom were charged. Or even Constable Maynard, who dared to accuse a sergeant of beating-up a prisoner and was refused the right of legal representation at the ensuing police inquiry.

There are many other similar cases I could quote, but these will suffice.

Mr Clarke also considers my remarks about "rotten apples" ludicrous. Perhaps he places in the same category Sir Robert Mark's recent statement that quite a number of senior CID officers, now free, are most likely guilty of the crimes alleged.

JAMES M. ALEXANDER

May I suggest to the Director and Editor of "The Police Review" that instead of making derogatory remarks about James M. Alexander he should seek a better understanding of what humanism and freethought are about.

As Michael Albert says in his excellent book "What is to be Undone" (1974) we should "struggle collectively to overcome impediments to societal and also to personal and interpersonal change." The goal of fighting oppressive ways of thinking and acting is the "liberation of the human personality so that it may attain the greatest possible heights of growth and fulfilment."

According to the "Sunday Times" (13 June, 1976) the Metropolitan Police Commissioner has indicated that in the last four years or so an average of nearly a hundred police officers a year were "required to resign" after disciplinary proceedings, or left the service voluntarily in the course of criminal or disciplinary inquiries. The new Police Complaints Bill aims to assuage public criticism and deal with the cases of serious police corruption. It introduces major changes in the present complaints system and a new form of independent review of public complaints against policemen.

L. R. PAGE

## HUMANISM AND THE NOVEL

I should like to make one or two observations on Maureen Duffy's review of my book "Humanism in the English Novel" ("The Freethinker", June).

Miss Duffy is unhappy about my use of the word novel; she seems to wish to use the word to include all forms of prose fiction. I would not attach all that much importance to a particular word, but it would have presented a quite unmanageable task to survey all the material that seems to her relevant. Of course I know there was fiction before the eighteenth century, but Maureen Duffy does not give me any reason to suppose that that fiction showed the inherent interest in the individual which I take to be characteristic both of the novel and of humanism.

This brings me to the more important definition. Your reviewer Maureen Duffy finds something unsatisfactory in my attitude, so far as I can see, because it exhibits a clear scale of values, and so sounds like "a doctrinaire religious or political position." Apart from the rhetorical adjective "doctrinaire", I find this puzzling. Does Maureen Duffy mean that humanism is so nebulous an attitude to life that we can point

(Continued on back page)



## Cracks in the Fabric

evidence of St Matthew and St Luke, when taken in conjunction with the consensus of the whole tradition . . . seems overwhelmingly strong" (p.139). He also, incidentally, believe in the perpetual virginity of Mary, despite the unambiguous references in the Gospels to Jesus' brothers and sisters.

One could give many more examples of divergent views, but it is perhaps more interesting to consider two points (albeit negative ones) on which all the contributors agree. First, none of them so much as mentions the after-life—surely a surprising omission from an official report on Anglican doctrine. Second, they all seem supremely unaware of, or indifferent to, Christianity's historical record of persecution, torture and bloodshed. It may be said that they are concerned with theology not history, but several of them make historical claims of a kind: for example, Professor Nineham (p.85) claims that immense benefits were conferred on the world by the Christian Church; Professor Lampe (p.114) states that with the birth of Jesus "a fresh divine initiative changed the course of human history"; and Dr Turner (p.119) describes the incarnation as "a rescue operation mounted at utmost cost by God for the redemption of the world". But signs of "redemption" are little in evidence when Christendom's cruel and blood-soaked Ages of Faith are compared with the civilisations of Rome and Athens. It is perhaps significant that the only historical work referred to in the Report is Sir Richard Southern's *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*—a book which is, to put it mildly, one-sided, since it barely mentions the Inquisition (there is no reference to it in the index), and refers delicately to the Albigensian bloodbath as "the conversion of the heretics of Languedoc".

The Report has inevitably given rise to a good deal of controversy, and has evoked some spirited letters to *The Times*—one in particular from a middle-of-the-road Christian, the Rev Dr E. L. Mascall, from which I cannot resist quoting. He found the Report unconstructive, and concluded his letter (26 February): "Attempts have already been made to gloss over the seriousness of the doctrinal chasm

that the report reveals; traces are even visible in the report itself. Thus it has been suggested that it does not matter that there is disagreement about *what* we believe, since there is virtual agreement about *how* we believe; to which example of papering over the cracks one can only reply 'Doesn't it?' and, 'Is there?.'

### Change of Address

1 August 1976

**THE FREETHINKER**  
(Editorial and business)

**NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY**

**G. W. FOOTE & COMPANY**

The new address will be

**702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL**  
**Telephone (unchanged) (01) 272 1266**

### Letters

to no particular qualities that characterise it? For her "all areas of experience, even the undesirable, must have some 'significance'." Clearly they have, but if humanism means anything at all it must offer some guidance to us in trying to decide what is "most" significant in our experience, and it cannot do this without criteria.

The criteria central to my idea of humanism and to the novels I discussed (a much more varied group, incidentally, than anyone would gather from this review, including Butler's "Erewhon", Joyce's "Ulysses" and Orwell's "1984", as well as "Middlemarch") is that "particular people in particular places" are what matter more than any abstractions. No doubt the public wants, as Maureen Duffy asserts, "fantasy and myth", but it would be odd to see "The Freethinker" associated with the suggestion that humanist novelists should devote themselves to fulfilling this demand.

PETER FAULKNER

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TELEPHONE: 01-272 1266  
UK ISSN 0016-0687

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

"The Freethinker" was founded in 1881 by G. W. Foote and is published mid-monthly. Material submitted (including Letters and Announcements) must reach this office by the 20th of the preceding month.

### SPECIAL POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

**Inland and Overseas:** Twelve months: £1.50 Six months: 75p  
**U.S.A. and Canada:** Twelve months: \$4.50 Six months: \$2.25

Please make cheques, etc., payable to G. W. Foote & Company. (Foreign subscriptions by cheque or International Money Order)

"The Freethinker" can also be ordered through any newsagent.