

JESUS, ROYALTY AND SEX — MR THORSEN BACKS A WINNER

The Queen was "extremely ill-advised" to join in the controversy over Jens Thorsen's proposed film on the life of Jesus Christ. That view was expressed by Alexander Walker, the London "Evening Standard" film critic in a recent radio interview. And Mr Thorsen said that he was "very flattered and honoured" that the Queen had become involved.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Hume, who has been leading the campaign against Mr Thorsen's project, wrote in *The Times* that "the film will be sensational, pornographic, and, in terms of truth, entirely speculative." But so, for that matter, is most of the Bible, declared Barbara Smoker, president of the National Secular Society, in a press release.

She added: "It will be impossible to make an historical film of the life of Jesus, since it is very doubtful whether the Gospel hero is based on a true life character. But if such a person did live, and if, as the Church alleges, he were truly man as well as truly God, then surely he must have had a sex drive like anyone else. If Christians wish to preserve their image of a Christ without desires of the flesh, then they need not, of course, go to see a film that destroys that image.

"Although, by all accounts, the proposed film is likely to be in rather poor taste, to say the least of it, the National Secular Society is strongly opposed to any form of censorship or coercion from powerful interest groups, since this is always far more dangerous than whatever such censorship or coercion seek to suppress.

"The Queen, who is generally wise enough not to take sides in controversial issues, has described the very idea of a film on the sex life of Jesus Christ as 'obnoxious' and, moreover, has claimed that in this opinion she speaks for most of her subjects. On what statistical evidence does she base this claim?

"Controversial pronouncements by the monarch,

which drew attention to her anomalous position as head of a minority Church, whilst purporting to speak for the country as a whole, could well provoke an upsurge of republican feeling."

Nicolas Walter, managing director of the Rationalist Press Association, said that Mary Whitehouse had described her campaign against the film as an "outpouring of love and loyalty". "But", he said, "I would call it a flood of hatred and hypocrisy reminiscent of two thousand years of Christian intolerance and persecution. And I would add that it is doing more damage to the reputation of Jesus and the position of Christianity than any film could do.

"Christians may dislike the film, but this is no excuse for resurrecting the obsolete and objectionable law of blasphemy against it. Fictional treatment of the life of Jesus goes back to the Gospels, and fictional treatment of the sex life of Jesus goes back to D. H. Lawrence.

"The film may turn out to be offensive and trivial, but freedom of speech begins with the freedom to say offensive things and ends with the right to say trivial things."

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Donald Coggan, warned that there is a law of blasphemy on the Statute Book. It is not clear if he will invoke that law but he commented that the idea was very much in the back of his mind.

Dissenting Voices

Not all churchmen have jumped on the Whitehouse-Hume-Coggan bandwagon. The Rev Kenneth Leech, a prominent Anglo-Catholic, denounced the lack of proportion that has been evident on this issue. He wrote: "Clergymen are now running around with petitions. Dr Coggan hints darkly of the blasphemy laws, suddenly the Church is abuzz with wrath."

Dr Colin Morris, president of the Methodist Con-

(Continued on page 146)

New Journals for Liberty

After a period during which rising costs have forced scores of independent journals to contract or close down, it is a particular pleasure to announce the first appearance of two publications. *Rights!*, which will be issued every two months by the National Council for Civil Liberties, aims to counteract what Patricia Hewitt, NCCL general secretary, describes as "the overwhelming lack of public knowledge and misinformation about crucial civil liberty issues in Britain."

The first issue carries a survey on the campaigning and voting records of MPs which reveals "a depressing lack of regard for civil liberties." The survey was based on an analysis of voting, sponsorship of motions and performance at Question Time in the House of Commons. Pride of place goes to Robert Kilroy-Silk (Labour), Anthony Nelson (Conservative) and Alan Beith (Liberal). Wooden spoons are awarded to Michael Alison (Conservative), Jack Dunnett (Labour) and Cyril Smith (Liberal).

Rights! is obtainable from the NCCL, 186 Kings Cross Road, London WC1, price 20p including postage.

At Work, a quarterly from the Albany Trust, is extremely well written and the design is excellent. Its publication marks a new phase in the development of the Trust's work to promote psychological health, with particular reference to the individual and social needs of those who are homosexual or bisexual. The Albany Trust was founded in 1958,

and in recent years has broadened its concern with counselling, education and training into the wider field of sexuality as a whole.

At Work declares editorially that the special needs and problems of those who belong to sexual minorities "will only become more widely appreciated throughout society as a whole, and ultimately alleviated, as the realisation spreads that they are not alien or outlandish needs and problems but are commonly experienced—though sometimes with difference in emphasis—by many other members of the wider population. Our philosophy, therefore, is an integrationist one: 'integration' implying an acceptance of variety in lifestyles, not the imposition of uniformity."

A free copy of *At Work* is obtainable from the Albany Trust, Victoria Chambers, 16-20 Strutton Ground, London SW1.

The Rev John Stott, rector of All Souls, Langham Place, London, for 25 years and one of the most influential Anglican evangelicals, has declared himself to be in favour of capital punishment. He said in a newspaper interview: "The Biblical base for capital punishment is Genesis 9.6. . . The extreme gravity of murder is due to the sanctity of life, namely that human beings are made in God's image . . . My view is that the State should retain the right of capital punishment . . . but should seldom use it." Mr Stott is also a member of the Festival of Light's Council of Reference.

HERETIC CARDS FOR CHRISTMAS

Leaflet from Barbara Smoker
6 Stanstead Grove, London SE6

Jesus, Royalty and Sex

ference, also denounced Christian attitudes to the proposed film. He said that the louder Christians shout, "the more certain it is that the film will be made somewhere by someone." Dr Morris added that he "wished the Churches were as vocal about such issues as poverty, injustice and exploitation."

Kenneth Furness, general secretary of the British Humanist Association, said that the "great indignation shown by some Humanists seems, to put it mildly, an over-reaction to a really rather sordid incident. Nobody has been banned, nobody has made a film, and does anyone really expect the Queen to approve a film on the sex life of Jesus. The whole controversy is pathetic."

Freethinker Fund

There was an excellent response to the appeal for more donations to the Fund. Our thanks are expressed to those readers who sent contributions during the period 22 August until 21 September. I. Barr, £2; J. Barrett, £1; S. Bonow, £5; W. Benison, 50p; British Pregnancy Advisory Service, £10; A. E. Burton, £5; R. Cadmore, £15.35; I. Campbell, £2.95; Miss L. Colley, 25p; R. J. Condon, £5; P. Crommelin, £5; E. Eagle, £2; A. Ego, 50p; In memory of H. E. Follett, £1; R. A. D. Forrest, £5; J. Gibson, 23p; W. E. Giles, 25p; Miss P. Graham, £5; Dr W. A. Gray, £2; R. J. Hale, £1.50; L. Hanger, 50p; P. Harding, £1.25; E. Henderson, £2; E. J. Hughes, £1; J. R. Hutton, £1; P. Lancaster, £2; L. Leslie, 25p; Dr R. Mackeith, £5; A. F. M. McLennan, 50p; Miss M. R. Rayment, £2; G. Reddin, 50p; J. F. Robbins, 50p; A. E. Smith, £1.50; J. Sooner, £6; G. Stewart, £1.50; H. Stopes-Roe, 50p; J. Sykes, 50p; E. Wakefield, 78p. Total: £93.81.

Last month the "Church of England Newspaper" gave a full page puff to anti-feminists Phyllis Bowman, of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, and Dr Margaret White, who devote what time they can spare from denouncing the Family Planning Association to attempting to destroy the 1967 Abortion Act. The point of the article, based on an interview with Kate Phillips, was to "clear up misunderstandings".

One misunderstanding which many people suffer from is the notion that since abortion deaths have fallen from about 50 a year to about ten a year since the Abortion Act, this may in fact be partly or largely due to the Act. Not so. SPUC know a gynaecologist in Bristol who has proved that illegal abortion in the city is rising. This proves that the Abortion Act was a disaster.

Another misunderstanding concerns doctors. It appears that they are emigrating in droves because of the Abortion Act. This is in line with Roman Catholic evidence to the Select Committee on Abortion. On 29th March, Professor John Bonnar denounced the discrimination good Roman Catholic gynaecologists had to face nowadays. Embarrassingly enough, the *Cambridge Evening News* on 11th May revealed that Professor Bonnar himself had been offered the Chair at Cambridge, no less. He had turned it down in favour of the Chair at Dublin, where perhaps the anti-feminist atmosphere was more to his taste. What was worse, the question of carrying out abortions never even arose at his interview. Said Dr Theo Chalmers, Dean of the Clinical School at Cambridge: "It would be a ridiculous thing to make a condition."

Professor Bonnar actually had the nerve to say to the Select Committee: "Can we produce any evidence of doctors appointed in obstetrics and gynaecology who are against abortion?" Well, yes, actu-

ally. The second recent one is Ronald Taylor, a militant, campaigning anti-abortionist Roman Catholic gynaecologist, who boasts from Life platforms that he "never" does abortions. This did not prevent him obtaining the Chair at St Thomas' Hospital, London. In the "break" at the Select Committee, I took the opportunity of reminding Professor Bonnar of this detail. He rather crossly promised he would mention it in the second half of the proceedings. Alas, it slipped his memory a second time.

I wrote and informed the Editor of the *British*

Hook, Line and Sinker

Medical Journal of this when he published an article in this Roman Catholic campaign entitled "A Question of Conscience" by Professor R. Walley, who, he assures us, had been passed over for a senior post in Britain in favour of a man "who had no objection to abortion, had only been in the country one year, and had no postgraduate qualifications." I asked the Editor to state the place where the remarkable events Professor Walley described, had taken place. This annoyed him. He was unable to reveal any information but was quite certain that what Professor Walley had written was "accurate". More accurate, let us hope, than what Professor Bonnar had said (and not said).

What a pity Kate Phillips swallowed this pernicious nonsense—and much else besides—hook, line and sinker, referring to it as, of all things, a "crusade that deserves the support of all Christians". Christians who are less busy crusading might like to know that there are any amount of senior posts going in the field of mental subnormality and genetics, where the shortage of staff is now chronic. Alas, no remunerative private work attaches to these fields.

Giovanni Franzoni, a leading member of the leftist group, Catholics of Dissent, has been laicised for being "publicly and ostentatiously disobedient to Church authority". The ex-Benedictine monk and former abbot of St Paul's Outside-the-Walls in Rome, has consistently opposed the Catholic hierarchy on political and social questions—notably on divorce legislation. He has been in trouble with his superiors for the last two years and according to Cardinal Poletti, Pope Paul's vicar for the Rome diocese, Franzoni did not show any signs of repentance and rejected the Church's "fraternal gestures". He has announced that in future he will vote and work for the Communist Party.

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The Pope is now a Protestant

BARBARA SMOKER

Is the Roman Catholic schismatic movement, led by the arch-conservative archbishop, Monsignor Marcel Lefebvre, no more than "a storm in a chalice"? That is what spokesmen for the Church would have us believe. But Barbara Smoker, president of the National Secular Society and herself a former Roman Catholic, is convinced that it is a crisis of major proportions and could well prove to be of great historical significance.

"The new rite of the Mass is a bastard rite, the sacraments are bastard sacraments, and the priests who emerge from the seminaries are bastard priests." The words of an Evangelical fanatic, perhaps? Not at all. These are the words of a 71-year-old Roman Catholic prelate, who, until 1970, was one of the most eminent pillars of the Church.

The quotation is taken from a statement made to the press by Monsignor (alias Archbishop) Marcel Lefebvre a few weeks ago, when, before a fervent assembly of some 7,000 Catholics in the sports stadium at Lille, he celebrated Mass in the old Tridentine rite.

Referring to himself, in traditional pastoral terminology, as a shepherd, he also dared to call the Pope "a wolf". And, worse still: the Pope is, he declares, no longer Catholic, but Protestant.

Having been brought up as a Roman Catholic myself, with a soul-stirring convent education from 1927 to 1939, I cannot but agree with Lefebvre's accusation that the Pope has (however reluctantly) turned Protestant. And with him, almost the whole College of Cardinals; most bishops and priests; practically every community of monks or nuns (in which the remaining adherents to pre-conciliar tenets are mostly elderly and easily overruled); and practically the whole laity, world-wide. And this second Reformation, so much more sweeping than the first, has, amazingly, been effected almost entirely within the past 15 years.

My convent education left me with the firm impression that there were two main categories of religion: on the one hand, the true religion, ensconced in the Roman Catholic Church; and on the other every other religion and sect, from Shintoism to the Plymouth Brethren, united in their common attribute of error. This arrogant certainty is now a thing of the past—except for Lefebvre and his supporters.

What do I (and Lefebvre) mean by Protestantism? A number of things. The final arbiter in matters of faith is now more likely to be the Bible, freely interpreted, than the authority of Catholic tradition, and the final arbiter in matters of morals

is more likely to be the individual conscience than the authority of the hierarchy. The mystique of a priest with his back to the congregation, muttering Latin prayers and incantations and making secret gestures over the altar, has given place to a participant congregation. Decisions are no longer made authoritatively by the Pope or bishop or parish priest or abbot or mother superior, as the case may be, but democratically, in committee. And, though there is much to be said for committees, they rarely exude the same aura of finality as the single authoritative voice—especially when, in the case of *ex cathedra* papal pronouncements, that voice is directly monitored by the Holy Ghost. But papal infallibility has given place to collegiate infallibility—and even that now keeps a low profile.

As for modern vernacular liturgies, compiled in committee under democratic procedures, they can hardly compete in terms of poetry and mystery with the medieval hocus-pocus they have superseded. And when the language group to be catered for, in identical wording, includes such linguistically disparate cultures as those of Britain and the United States, the result is often excruciatingly banal.

Taboos are Abandoned

In my Catholic youth, no women, even nuns, were permitted to set foot in the sanctuary during Mass, while grubby little boys were drilled in the Latin responses and recruited as Mass servers. For unpriestly hands to touch the consecrated host was utterly taboo; but now, communicants—even female communicants—are encouraged to receive the host in their hands, instead of on the tongue, as before.

I was taught consistently at school that the souls of unbaptised infants spent eternity in Limbo—a humanitarian advance, at least, on consigning them to the eternal punishment of hell-fire for something outside their control. But now Limbo has gone; even Purgatory (without which, indulgences and requiem Masses lose their *raison d'être*) is very much played down, and apparently on the way out; and Hell itself has lost its terrors in nebulous metaphorical interpretation.

In my Catholic days it was mandatory at every Benediction in this country for the Prayer for the Conversion of England to be recited. Such an insult to other Christian sects would be unthinkable in today's ecumenical climate.

In recent months, Lefebvre and his schismatic traditionalist movement have obtained for the Roman Church an unprecedented amount of secular reportage and comment—which the Church authorities would have much preferred to do without. The Roman Catholic press in Britain had been trying (in accordance with Vatican policy) to play

down the crisis, but suddenly *The Observer* of 8 August devoted 30 column inches to a report on it from their Paris correspondent; the next morning, it was the subject of the first leader in *The Times*, which, in addition to an article by its religious affairs correspondent the following week, devoted most of its readers' letters space to the subject for almost a fortnight; and on 13 August the *Guardian* chipped in with an article on it by their man in Paris. Then BBC radio made it the subject of an item in "From Our Own Correspondent". The media had obviously decided that the rift in the Roman Church had become significant.

But in all the talk of forbidden medieval rites, rebel priests and prelates, and illicit ordinations, the underlying motives of the leading personalities of the traditionalist movement have been obscured. Most readers have probably been left with the impression that, despite its aspirations for *aggiornamento*, that Church is, after all, being true to its historical insistence on total obedience, permitting no deviation from the post-conciliar forms of worship, and employing all the pre-conciliar heavy-handedness of censure, indict, suspension *a divinis* from priestly activity, and even threats of excommunication, against those whose only sin is nostalgia. But it is not quite like that.

Freethinkers, and liberals generally, who have expressed sympathy with Lefebvre as a rebel against the Vatican's dictatorial refusal to allow deviant forms of worship have failed to understand the sort of ecclesiastical feudalism that he stands for. On the other hand, I would not waste any tears over the plight of the Church—except, possibly, tears of merriment as I watch their past teachings come home to roost. Ultimately, the secularist interest would probably be best served if neither side made any concession, so that the rift widens and becomes permanent. "And if a house be divided against itself . . ."

Authoritarians in Revolt

The breakaway movement was started with the financial backing of wealthy French families, who have always been the mainstay of the Church in France. Lefebvre himself comes from this establishment background: from a family with an industrial fortune in northern France—the stronghold of Catholic authoritarianism. His second-in-command is 78-year-old Monsignor François Ducaud-Bourget, known to be an admirer of Mussolini and Franco.

Having bought five priories in France with his French donations and opened hundreds of Tridentine Mass centres in that country, Lefebvre and his cabal reached out into Switzerland, Germany, Britain and the United States. Wealthy Catholic families in America are now pouring money into their coffers—presumably with an eye to social and political, rather than supernatural, dividends.

In Britain, the movement is led by the ample figure of Father Peter Morgan, a fanatical convert from Anglicanism, who was reordained by Lefebvre. He has been reported as saying that Franco was "too liberal".

During the Vatican Council, Lefebvre opposed many of the new provisions—especially those devolving power from the Apostolic See to (of all things!) regional conferences—and, indeed, as a known conservative, he was expected to do so. However, when these provisions were carried, he did sign the documents approving them. So when, between 1968 and 1970, he founded the Fraternity of St Pius X (named after the Pope responsible for a famous encyclical against Modernism in 1906) and opened two theological study centres in Switzerland, no one took much notice. Then it was discovered that, not only was Lefebvre continuing to use the superseded Tridentine liturgy himself, but he was training his students in the old rite, preparatory to ordaining them in the diaconate (which had been abolished by Vatican II) and later as full priests. The Church could afford to close an eye to a few elderly clerics persisting in using the Pius V Missal, but the ordination of young men to carry on the schism was another matter—so Lefebvre was ordered by the pontiff to close his seminary at Ecône, together with its subsidiary houses that had by now sprung up in France, Britain, Germany, the United States, and even Rome itself. But the archbishop continued to defy the Vatican.

Vatican Condemnation

For another three years the Church played a waiting game—though Lefebvre's seminarists now numbered over a hundred. Then a special Cardinalate Board was set up to confer with him—the outcome being his now famous "profession of faith" in November 1974, when he declared (in Latin, of course):

"With all our heart and with all our soul we will adhere to Catholic Rome, custodian of the Catholic Faith and of the traditions needed to preserve this faith, to Rome Eternal, Master of Wisdom and Truth. But we refuse, and have always refused, to follow the Rome of neo-modernistic and neo-Protestant tendencies so clearly shown in Vatican Council II . . . No authority, not even the highest hierarchy, can force us to abandon or to weaken our Catholic Faith clearly expressed and professed by the *Magisterium* of the Church over nineteen centuries . . ."

Again the Vatican held its hand—for another 18 months.

Only in May this year, during the consistory at which the 19 new cardinals were created, did Pope Paul make a solemn declaration, calculated to chill the spine of any son of Holy Mother Church—the declaration that Lefebvre had placed himself

“outside the Church”. But Lefebvre’s spine is not easily chilled—he is too confident of the rightness of his cause: “. . . the good God wishes that I should ensure the survival of the Catholic ministry.”

It is paradoxical in the extreme that a man who has always stood for ecclesiastical authority as against the claims of private conscience should now himself oppose the ecclesiastical authority he has always acknowledged—but, as he sees it, only his movement is now in step with the will of God and with the whole history of the Catholic Church. He has suggested, in fact, that Pope Paul’s pontificate is bound to be retrospectively nullified when the Church eventually comes to its senses.

Oh, yes—he accepts papal infallibility all right; but no pronouncements made by the present pope have unequivocally fulfilled the conditions prerequisite for infallibility. Besides, how can a pope who is obviously in heresy be exercising the divine protection from error that is on offer to him?

Lefebvre and his supporters claim that, since Pope Pius V promulgated the Tridentine Mass as unchangeable for all time, it is obvious that no subsequent pontiff could legitimately substitute another rite. The official reply is that the Church, being a living entity, must, whatever Pius V thought to the contrary four centuries ago, be subject to development. A protestant line of argument if ever there was one!

The Reluctant Protestant

Pope Paul is by no means a Protestant at heart; nor are many of the cardinals, especially those of the Vatican secretariat. The reactionary (not to say panicky) encyclical, *Humane Vitae*, showed them in their true colours. But Protestantism has been forced on them by the strength of the modernist movement in the Church, brought to the surface—and, moreover, given executive power—by the Second Vatican Council: the legacy, ironically enough, of the “stop-gap” pontiff, Pope John.

Not that the recommendations of the Council were themselves wholeheartedly Protestant. It was mainly the unexpectedly thorough implementation of those proposals that wrought such a change. For instance, it was generally assumed that Mass in the vernacular, as recommended by the Council, meant more or less straight translations from the Latin rite crystallised by Pius V after the Council of Trent; but in the event, very significant changes were made. There is even one optional post-consecration form of English wording in which the consecrated bread and wine are referred to not as body and blood but as “the bread of life” and “this cup”—obviously with an eye to eventual communion with Protestant Churches—and I was interested to note that this was the wording chosen for a Mass recently broadcast by the BBC.

From our utilitarian viewpoint, the liberalisation

brought about in the Roman Church by Vatican II has been almost entirely for the better—not least, for the mental health of millions of its people and for a more humanistic outlook on the rest of the world—but there is no denying that the Roman Church has lost not only much of its mystique, after which many people hanker, but also the certainty which comforted those born into the faith and attracted many a convert to it. Hence the appeal of the traditionalist movement.

Appeal to Traditionalists

Preservation of the Tridentine liturgy is not, as many commentators have assumed, what the fuss is all about. But making it the visible symbol and rallying point of his movement was Lefebvre’s stroke of genius. Thousands of nostalgic Catholics have been attracted to his illicit Masses, mostly unaware of the élitist sociological and political ethos behind the ritual. Thousands more would attend these Masses if this were geographically feasible, and probably hundreds of thousands would do so but for their ingrained horror of disobeying the Pope.

Most Catholics find it difficult to understand why the Apostolic See cannot allow the old rite to exist alongside the new. They point to the paradoxical situation that, whereas dire warnings about attending non-Catholic services are no longer to be heard in any Catholic church, such warnings are constantly given against attending a Tridentine Mass—the very rite which, until ten years ago, it was compulsory for all Catholics to attend on Sundays and Holidays of Obligation. How absurd that what used to be compulsory should suddenly be forbidden!

The fact is, however, that had the choice of rite been left to the personal preference of priests and laity, not only would it have been difficult to get the new Normative Mass established, but each of the two rites would have tended to have its own following—resulting in a division within the Church, rather like the Church of England division into High and Low churches. The solid liturgical unity of the Roman Church, its greatest source of strength for the past four centuries, would thus have been lost.

However, now that the Normative Mass is well established, the Church could probably afford to relax the ban on the old rite, at least for a certain proportion of the Masses in each parish. (At present, the official ration for Britain is one public Tridentine Mass a year, in Westminster Cathedral!) And, faced with the alternative of imminent large-scale schism, the Holy See may well be preparing some face-saving formula to allow a few Tridentine Masses in every church, and so steal Lefebvre’s thunder.

In that event, most of his popular Tridentine support would very likely drop away. The schism of the remaining out-and-out reactionaries would then be no more serious for the Church than that of the

Old Catholics, who broke away from Rome over the doctrine of papal infallibility after the First Vatican Council in 1870. There are still a number of Old Catholic congregations in Germany and the United States, and at least one in London, but they have never posed any really serious threat to Mother Church.

Like the traditionalist movement today, the Old Catholics were able, a century ago, to claim that it was "the Papalists" who were heretical, in their newly defined doctrine, while they themselves could not be accused of any heresy—only, at most, of schism. (Rejection of authority is schismatic, whereas the promulgation of false doctrine is heretical.)

Since the Old Catholics obtained their episcopal orders from a Dutch Jansenist bishop, the Roman Church has never been able to deny their claim to the "apostolic succession". Thus, Old Catholic priests—unlike those of the Church of England, however "High"—have always been credited by the Roman Church with all the supernatural powers (though not, of course, the legality) of their own priests.

"Once a Priest . . ."

Recent references to this in the RC press highlight the concern of believers with the magical powers conferred on a priest at ordination and with whoever may have these powers outside the one true fold of their own Church. It seems that in recent years, ecumenism (combined, no doubt, with declining congregations) has brought about a merger between the Old Catholics and the Anglo-Catholics (i.e. High C of E)—and, as Old Catholic bishops (wearing red gowns with a sort of Lutheran ruff at the neck) have been officiating at the consecration of some of the new Anglican bishops, it is being seriously debated whether the apostolic succession may not have infiltrated back to some sections of the Church of England in this way.

One of the doctrinal "facts" repeatedly taught in my convent school was: "Once a priest, always a priest." Even a heretic priest who denied the true faith, or a schismatic priest who left the Church, or a wicked priest who (horror of horrors!) took unto himself a wife, could never lose the supernatural power of saying Mass—that is, the power of changing bread and wine into the "body, blood, soul and divinity" of Christ. God, it is understood, is bound by his own promises to obey the command of the renegade priest, much as a High Court Judge is bound by his own past decisions. Perhaps a more apt simile, being in the realm of magical myth, is that of Aladdin's lamp, whose genie is bound to obey whoever rubs the lamp, even the wicked uncle. This is a universal folk myth, on which all priestcraft is based, from that of the primitive witch-doctor to the latest ordinand.

Thus, one of the practicalities I was taught at

school was that though one should never, under any circumstances, participate in Protestant worship, since the Protestants, having broken away from the "apostolic succession", had no valid orders, it would actually be better to attend a Mass of the Greek/Russian Orthodox Church than to miss Sunday Mass altogether, since Orthodox priests were in the unbroken line of apostolic succession and, being validly (though unlawfully) ordained, were empowered to effect the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the godhead.

Since transubstantiation remains a firmly entrenched part of Catholic doctrine and is still the essence of the Mass, of whatever rite, no suspicion of doubt can be cast on the validity of Lefebvre's priestly powers, conferred by his ordination way back in 1929, nor on his subsequently acquired powers, dating from his episcopal consecration, to ordain new priests with the same supernatural powers. This means that the Church is faced with a self-generating schism—the first such break since that of the Old Catholics, who, in terms of numbers, have proved a negligible threat. And whereas the appeal of the Old Catholics was to academic restraint, the appeal of the Tridentists is to popular sentiment, which could prove highly infectious.

Needless to say, for those who believe in magic, the question of who is able and who is allowed to perform it is of prime importance. In any other sphere of human endeavour, the proof of the pudding would be in the eating: but it is an article of Catholic faith that the fundamental change that occurs in the bread and wine at the Consecration makes no difference to the "accident" of appearance or taste. There can therefore be no tangible test that the magic has taken place. In other words, it is on the same level of confidence trickery as the Emperor's new clothes.

And when the magic formula is put into plain English or French, the trickery loses much of its confidence.

BARBARA SMOKER

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The 1976 Silly Season has been a hoot. The total of unemployed reached a post-war record of one and a half million; we teetered on the brink of a disastrous strike by seamen; the value of the pound fell daily; financial scandals rocked the City; the growth of racism continued unabated. It was, as all the politicians say during an election campaign, a time for decisiveness, action and leadership. And it was against this background that both the Queen and the Prime Minister were pressurised by a well-organised letter-writing campaign into making asses of themselves over a film that has not been made about a character who probably never existed.

Historians of the 1970s will surely conclude that the furore over Mr Thorsen's proposed film on the life of Jesus showed our religionists and guardians of public morality in their most priggish and hysterical mood since the Profumo affair.

There have been developments during the anti-Thorsen rumpus that should be regarded as danger signals by those who value freedom. One of the most ominous features of the campaign has been hints about "threats to public order" should the film producer come to Britain. Now it would not be very difficult for certain religio-political groups to arrange incidents that could be regarded as a threat to public order. The mindless automatons who obey commands to protest against television programmes and publications would act in a disorderly and unlawful manner if they had the assurance that what they were doing was in Jesus' name.

Significantly, many of today's puritan activists are, or have been, enthusiastic supporters of Moral Re-Armament, another Right-wing religious movement that was founded by Dr Frank Buchman ("I thank heaven for a man like Adolf Hitler.").

Censorship is the weapon of authoritarians—an appellation that can be justly used about the pressure groups that have been leading the hue and cry against Thorsen. Evangelical puritans are a major menace to liberty in Britain today. So far they have been held in check, but it may be a different matter if they join forces with one of the political parties on the extreme Right. The racism of such parties would not be an insurmountable obstacle to a close association with fundamentalist Christians. Christianity has a history of anti-semitism that stretches back over many centuries, and evangelical Protestants have been the mainstay of authoritarian and racist regimes in South Africa, the "Bible Belt" states of the USA and in Northern Ireland.

Roman Catholic and Protestant critics of Mr Thorsen have been even more hypocritical than usual in their condemnation of the financial aspect of the film. It is rather odd how those who continually sing hosannas to the free enterprise system

change their tune when a project which they do not approve is likely to be profitable. The Christian churches and their "non-political" front organisations extract huge subsidies from the public coffers every year; Mr Thorsen is not, to the best of our knowledge, proposing to raise the money for his film from public funds in Britain.

"Why do Christians always defend Christ's reputation so hysterically?", enquired the *Church of England Newspaper*. Why, indeed.

Perhaps the answer is that people tend to become hysterical when they are frightened and unsure of themselves. For, in spite of the evangelical fervour, the phoney unity of ecumenism and the Queen's involvement in their squalid censorship campaign, Christians are aware that growing numbers regard their creed as obnoxious. And it is in retreat.

RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

It is reported in *Pharos*, quarterly journal of the Cremation Society of Great Britain, that the Environment Health Committee at St Helens, Merseyside, has been asked to display a symbol of the Hindu religion at the local crematorium.

Crematoria serve the whole community, and in view of the growing numbers of adherents to non-Christian faiths, such requests are likely to proliferate. It is to be hoped that those who are responsible for the planning and designing of such buildings will also take into account the considerable section of the population who have no religious beliefs. National and local Humanist organisations arrange many non-religious committal ceremonies, and the demand for such services increases every year.

We suggest that religious symbols are installed in a manner which makes them easy to remove or cover during non-religious ceremonies. *Freethinker* readers and Humanist groups should endeavour to inspect plans for new crematoria or expansions to existing facilities in their area.

The cause for the canonisation of Edmund Ignatius Rice has taken its first step. Archbishop Ryan has signed the approval of the Dublin Historical Commission who examined documents relating to the founder of the Christian Brothers. It is reported that the news has been greeted with satisfaction by all houses of the congregation. Generations of children have suffered at the hands of Christian Brothers in classrooms, and rumour has it that if Edmund Ignatius Rice is canonised he will become the patron saint of sadists.

S AND NOTES

BAD RATINGS FOR "THE GOOD BOOK"

The results of a National Opinion Poll conducted on behalf of the Bible Society will be of little comfort for those who constantly refer to the popularity of the Bible as evidence that Britain is still a Christian country. It is clear that religion in school has not produced a generation of young people devoted to the scriptures. Bible-readers are an aging section of the population; ownership and readership continues to be fairly high after the age of 55. But in the 16 to 34 age bracket is a marked preference for paperback novels.

Only 4 per cent of the population read the Bible every day, and only 30 per cent of those over the age of 16 have read it in the last year. Bible-ownership is down 5 per cent in the last three years and at least 77 per cent of Bibles owned by those over 16 were acquired as gifts.

A very high proportion of the people of all ages own dictionaries, paperbacks and encyclopedias.

PRESSURE GROUPS

"The world of pressure groups is one of some intricacy, a labyrinth that is also a minefield . . .", writes Peter Shipley in his introduction to *The Guardian Directory of Pressure Groups and Representative Associations*. Undeterred, Mr Shipley and two colleagues ventured into the hazardous regions to collect information on the histories, policies and personalities of over 350 such groups in Britain.

The publishers declare that they intend to update and re-issue the *Directory* from time to time. And a good thing too, for one of the shortcomings of such a handbook is that the comings and goings of individuals, changes of address, mergers and winding up of groups makes yesterday's intelligence today's misinformation. Although the *Directory* appeared less than two months ago some of its contents are already obsolete—which is hard cheese for those who stumped up their £7.50.

The *Directory* is divided into twelve sections, beginning with political parties and groups. The last section, devoted to "Animal Welfare and Protection", rather curiously includes the Wildfowling Association which endeavours to "foster and safeguard sporting shooting with particular emphasis on wildfowling and roughshooting."

Organisations representing a wide variety of interests are listed. These include the British Unidentified Flying Objects Research Association, the Great Ouse Restoration Society, National Campaign for

Firework Reform and the Society for the Preservation of Beers from the Wood. The National Cleansing Crusade was not, as may be suspected at first glance, formed to promote the interests of launderette proprietors. This worthy body has "the safeguard of our Christian heritage" and the restoration of capital punishment high on its list of priorities; it is associated with the Anglo-Rhodesian Society and the Mothers Crusade for Victory Over Communism (Arizona). Its founder, general secretary and, we suspect, entire membership, is Vera Fletcher, a devoted handmaiden of the Lord who dwells at Stockton-on-Tees.

Restoration of capital punishment is also primary concern of the Citizens Protection Society (chairman, the Rev Percy Gray). The National Association for the Protection of Family Life, a Catholic breeders lobby, is opposed to permissiveness "and anti-family humanism and secularism."

Directory readers will be surprised to hear that South Place Ethical Society is "a private religious society." So will most members of South Place Ethical Society.

The Progressive League is also listed, but there is no mention of the British Humanist Association, National Secular Society or the Rational Press Association. We hope that these omissions will be rectified in a future edition of the *Directory* which is published by Wilton House Publications, 16 Regency Street, London SW1.

OBITUARIES

MRS I. B. BROOKS

Iris Beryl Brooks, who died tragically at the age of 43, was buried at Bandon Hill Cemetery, Wallington, Surrey. The secular ceremony was attended by a large number of relatives and friends.

MR C. J. FIDGIN

Charles James Fidgin has died after a long illness at the age of 75. Mr Fidgin was a staunch atheist, and there was a secular committal ceremony at Randalls Park Crematorium, Leatherhead.

MR F. GRIFFIN

Fredrick Griffin, a radical and freethinker for many years, died recently in hospital at the age of 69. There was a secular committal ceremony at the City of London Crematorium.

MR C. S. LINDSEY

Cyril Samuel Lindsey, who has died at the age of 78, was a noted leather manufacturer. He started his business on a modest scale and developed it into one of the most important in its field. Mr Lindsey had no religious convictions. There was a secular committal ceremony at South London Crematorium.

BOOKS

THE MAGIC OF URI GELLER by James Randi. Ballantine Books, 65p.

The impossible can be performed twice nightly by any competent conjuror. Miracles take slightly longer. Gautama the Buddha put it rather well when in reply to a question from his followers, he said that even the creator could not work miracles. Once God (even supposing he existed) had created the universe with its concomitant physical laws, any attempt to abrogate any of them would cause complete disintegration of the universe itself. Even the gods themselves must be subject to the laws they have made.

Down the ages have come a succession of charlatans claiming that universal laws can be suspended in their favour. They attract vast hordes of believers, partly because of man's insatiable love of mysteries. And, with the breakdown of the authority imposed by established superstitions, they invoke increasing interest and greater relevance. Nor are merely the illiterate and ignorant the only dupes. One of the regular claims of these wonder-workers is that they have been "tested and approved" by leading scientists and university professors.

Uri Geller is but the latest miracle merchant to hit the headlines. His pretensions and tricks are most satisfactorily debunked in this book by one of America's foremost magicians and illusionists, The Amazing Randi. It is in the tradition of Houdini's famous exposure of mediums some half century back. Randi's style is both racy and informative. He does much more than explain how the tricks are done. Indeed, we learn that many of those in the Geller repertoire can be found in popular books on conjuring obtainable from any magic trick shop. Some of them are now considered by professionals to be so simple and old-hat that they have been abandoned long ago.

That all fakirs comes as no surprise to one who was initiated into some of their secrets by friends, like The Marvellous Haytors—a well-known "second-sight" act of the thirties; Henry Sara (sometime National Secular Society lecturer, exposé of spiritualism, and a very good amateur magician); Percy Press of the Magic Circle, now well into his seventies and still entertaining. That all "thought transference" acts are based on codes of one kind or another involving the use of confederates, is, one would have thought, widely known. So it is no surprise to learn that Geller is invariably accompanied by his *eminence grisê*, (or should it be "greasy"?), one Shipi Shtrang. They have been associated since the days of performing their act in Kibbutzim and at Bar-Mitzvas, before graduating to Tel Aviv night-clubs. At all demonstrations, whether at Stanford Research Institute, TV studios,

FREETHINKER

or University College, London, Shipi is hovering inconspicuously in the background. That this should be permitted under so-called test conditions is an example of the credulity of alleged logical-thinking scientific "experts".

But there is a much more serious side to the whole business than key and spoon bending, reading messages in envelopes or describing drawings concealed in sealed boxes. There is a military interest in Extra Sensory Perception now. The Pentagon moguls would love metal-bending by remote control to be really a fact, thus enabling enemy weapons to be bugged up. The CIA could pull off some real coups with the aid of teleportation. And what an opportunity to put one over on those beastly Reds. Meanwhile, in Moscow those selfsame Reds are equally busy investigating their own claimants to ESP powers. Perhaps this is what it is really about and why so many scientists and the space-boys at Houston have been involved. The author hints at these sinister implications throughout the book.

In explaining his decision to expose Geller, Randi says: "... I am proud of my profession. I am even jealous of it and resent any prostitution of the art. In my view, Geller brings disgrace to the craft I practice. Worse than that, he warps the thinking of a young generation of forming minds. And that is unforgivable." Again: "For we are the only element that stands between the faker and his victim. Men of science and other great intellects are without that peculiar expertise that qualifies us to detect chicanery when it is practised on a high level. . . . This is a challenge we must not only accept; we must lay claim to it. Tomorrow may be too late. The charlatans are upon us." He also reveals that Geller may be planning to move on from mere metal bending to spiritual healing.

It is an interesting example of the power of vested interests involved with the sensational that it seems not widely known that long before he started on his occult conquest of the West, Geller had already been exposed as a fraud and convicted in his native Israel. This is fully documented with translation from the original report in the Hebrew language magazine *Haolam Hazeh*.

People believe in the irrational because they want to believe. But there is more to it. The media will rush to join the bandwagon in reporting the sensational. There is no news value (or advertising revenue either!) in saying that Father Xmas is a myth; but what a story if it could be shown that he actually existed.

REVIEWS

Thank you James Randi for a fine piece of research, even if the literary style is not the greatest. The illustrations add conviction to the facts described and give visual evidence of fraud. In the Space-Age as in mediaeval times, the deluders and the deluded are still with us. Fortunately, friend Randi has shown that we can safely sleep in our beds. The laws of the universe do not appear to have been bent by a young trickster from Israel.

The Magic of Uri Geller has been virtually ignored by reviewers and is not easily obtainable in Britain. Fortunately readers can acquire copies from *The Freethinker* office (see advertisement on page 158).

JAMES M. ALEXANDER

FREEDOM IN ARMS: A Selection of Leveller Writings.
Compiled by A. L. Morton. Lawrence & Wishart, £1.

However brilliant and convincing the interpretation of the historians may be, we gain something that no analysis can wholly reconstitute when we listen to the very voices of the men who are living through great moments of change and struggle. Interpretations of the English Civil War, the Cromwellian Revolution, may vary. But it would be hard to deny that there we have a great watershed of history—one slope looking back to the medieval world, the other facing into our own. And no other event has quite this characteristic on a grand scale. So A. L. Morton has done an important service in making widely available an excellent selection of Leveller writings, in which we hear the common man speak out as at no previous period. He also provides a long introduction, which gives all the explanation that the reader needs to understand what the texts are about and what questions are being so passionately discussed.

There are many angles from which these writings can be approached. What I would like to stress here is the point I have just made. In these pamphlets we find ordinary people becoming vocal, thinking hard, thinking to great purpose; and we have no record of anything like it before. Religious idioms had previously dominated in all great popular movements, or we have no account of how the participants talked and argued among themselves. Usually, unable to grasp fully what was happening, but stirred deeply with incoherent hopes, the people at decisive moments of change had been liable to turn to religious ideas, allegories and symbols. Hence

the recurrence of millenary movements which made desperate attempts to wrest a meaning from the book of Revelation as proof that some sort of just and brotherly society was about to be born, and to learn from its wild texts how to interpret the direction of events.

But the Levellers were wholly secular in idiom. Here is the deep break they reveal from the other sections of the revolution which in varying degrees of frustration and fear, or in the need to keep mystifying the situation, turned to religion. In Morton's book we see them in the process of creating a new sort of English; direct, simple, yet vividly urgent. After them, whatever the defeats of the people and the confusion of the issues, the ability to set our clear social objectives, freed from all religious fantasies, was never lost. Though they went down in disaster, we may then truly call them the founders of modern democracy and of rational political argument in terms that go straight home to the business and bosom of the common man.

JACK LINDSAY

DIDEROT: THE VIRTUE OF A PHILOSOPHER by Carol Blum. Sheldon Press, £5.50.

"Books and articles on Diderot pour forth from the printing presses", remarked Professor Lough in the early 1950s when he produced his useful selection of Diderot's philosophical writings. Since then, in the lavish tradition of American scholarship, Arthur Wilson has done for Diderot in his definitive life (*Diderot*, 1957, 1972) what Mossner did for David Hume. Mrs Blum's book first published in America in 1974 and now issued here by the Sheldon Press, is not at all *de trop*, however, for what she has to say about this most attractive of the *philosophes* goes to the heart of the matter, is said as shortly as possible, and developed with admirable skill.

"Nature", "society", "virtue" were key words for Diderot, as for Rousseau, key to ideas and ideals that seemed to make sense of the world and terms with the world. "'Virtue' was Diderot's meditation between the impersonal forces of nature and the superpersonal forces of society. His struggle to give adequate meaning to the word, on one hand, and to make the meaning consubstantial with his inner self, on the other, was the central movement of his life. This endeavour, as it is reflected in his works and his correspondence, is the subject of my study."

As she tells her story and develops her argument, she uses deftly as foils in their different ways those with whom Diderot was most intimately involved, his father and brother, his wife and daughter, Rousseau and Grimm, Sophie Volland. His experience of them, of himself, of the world gradu-

ally changed his ideas and ideals. The central notion of virtue, at first as the indulged sympathies of the innocent human heart, became inseparable from continual actions for the benefit of others, which in turn were seen to spring from mixed motives, so that self-awareness was a necessary part of virtue. Society, thought of with Shaftesbury as the natural product of fellow feeling and mutual dependence, and yet with Rousseau as having institutions which perverted nature, came to seem more like a reflection of original predatory interdependence. Through these extremes he moved to a necessary disillusionment, an insistence on realistic awareness, a justification of compromises, without renouncing the duty of the philosopher to set an example and to exert his influence to improve the world.

These experiences, with the emerging changes of view, are all embodied in successive pieces of writing. Like Goethe, with whom there are striking parallels (and who first published *Le Neveu de Rameau*, one of the masterpieces), Diderot wrote for himself; what is going on inside, his dialogue with himself, is the clue to the book, as the book is a clue to what is going on inside. That is why Carol Blum's percipient study is a needed guide to the written works. Her Diderot is not the hero of the great *Encyclopédie*, but the man within, often baffled, often depressed, not merely in confronting the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, as he did, but mainly face to face with himself, in his relationships with those he most cared about and depended on, and in reflection on his most cherished opinions. After Mrs Blum, one returns to the key works with new insight into what they really mean. And they are not less relevant today to the serious questions of morality without religion than they were in their own day.

It is a pleasure to say that the book itself is a pleasure to hold and to behold, in binding and paper and type, up to the high standard of American book production which, in this instance at least, is not worth less as it costs more.

H. J. BLACKHAM

APES, MEN AND LANGUAGE by Eugene Linden.
Pelican, 90p.

Eugene Linden is asking for a revolution or, perhaps more accurately, plotting the beginning of one. Like all revolutions in human thought, it will no doubt take donkey's years to bring about and meanwhile the oppressed will go on being imprisoned and killed and used for hideous experiments in the belief that they don't feel things the way we do, an argument drearily familiar to social historians, from the pens of 18th-century slavers and 19th-century factory owners and colonists.

Some of the material in *Apes, Men and Language* will be familiar already from a startling television

programme shown last year which introduced Washoe and her peers to British audiences. For those who didn't see it Washoe is a chimpanzee, naturalised American, who uses a version of what we idiomatically call deaf and dumb language, technically Ameslan. She was captured in Africa, after the death (perhaps killing) of her mother, and taken to the USA where, at about one year old, she was adopted by a scientific couple, Allen and Beatrice Gardner, experimental psychologists. Washoe, as she was named after the county they lived in, grew up for the next six years treated much as a human child, but a child that had trouble with its vocal organs and therefore had to be taught sign language. For these six years too she never saw another chimpanzee. When she did at last meet some, she called them "black bugs". At first the Gardners and their helpers taught Washoe single words or, better, signs, like those for "hat" and "hurry", "listen", "me" and "Washoe". Then she began to combine the signs for what she knew into sentences, propositions and questions. The questions worked both ways. Sometimes Washoe wanted information, "Who is he?" and sometimes she was asked "What's this?"

"Fruit".

"Whose fruit?"

"Washoe fruit".

"What Washoe fruit?"

"Please Washoe fruit".

Signs of course don't have the grammatical rules that sounds need. It's enough to put two signs "Washoe" and "fruit" as it were in apposition to signify possession. They can, however, have the logic which lies behind verbal grammar.

Washoe was the first. Now there are Lucy, Ally, Salome, Tanya, Bruno, Booe, Cindy and Thelma. By this time, since the book was written in 1974, there may be a Washoe baby whom she is herself teaching to talk in Ameslan. Washoe learnt the sign for baby quite early and was perfectly able to distinguish the young of a species from an adult and sign so.

Eugene Linden has begun to spell out the implications of Washoe in this book. He has been very restrained. He is a journalist, not a scientist, and he is therefore vulnerable to changes of sentimentality from those who prefer to hide behind a clinical white coat from the ethical as well as the scientific problems which Washoe and her, now, friends pose. For Washoe's learning to use a language which we understand has let us into her head and heart. We find there a difference perhaps of degree but not of kind. Washoe for instance is a racist. She calls a macaque a "dirty monkey". "Dirty" is her swear sign too. Shut briefly in a cage which she dislikes she tries all the ploys of a child not wanting to go to sleep, in particular, "Gimme a drink of water." After Jack, the helper on one

occasion, had ignored her several times, she signed "Dirty Jack gimme drink."

Ally calls people "You nut" and makes them enter tickling sessions with him to try who is the more dominant. Lucy keeps a pet cat. Ally also paints in oils but then Ally is very bright. He can equate human vocal signs, English words, with Ameslan signs and the concepts that lie behind both. Like Washoe, Ally raises the question "Is he really talking?" and again "How do you define language?" Linden puts it like this: "We have an immense investment in the idea that man is an animal wholly alienated from the rest of nature: we have bet the world on this idea."

Only towards the end of the book, when he describes a scientific conference to discuss Washoe, does the author hint at another question. Washoe, Ally and company live relatively happy lives either in foster homes or on the chimpanzees' island at the Institute of Primate Studies in Oklahoma. They have to work hard at their language classes but elements of play and reward are built into them and they seem to enjoy them more than most children of comparable ages. But throughout this book I kept seeing another chimpanzee face and it was terrified. Her name was Bonny and she was being strapped into a space capsule in front of the television cameras. Chimpanzees' faces are very expressive and I have no doubt that had Bonny been taught Ameslan she would have been signing "Please No".

MAUREEN DUFFY

RADIO

A QUESTION OF FAITH. Capital Radio, London.

Capital Radio is one of the two commercial broadcasting stations serving Greater London. Licensed by the IBA for the general purveyance of pop and pap, it nevertheless feels it necessary in its striving after "respectability", to model itself on Auntie BBC by dishing out regular doses of Reithian piety. But on Sunday, 12 September, Nicolas Walter, editor of *New Humanist*, was the guest of the religious phone-in programme "A Question of Faith", answering callers' questions on the Bible.

Like the Christian freethinker—who welcomed the opportunity given to Nicholas Walter to express anti-Christian views—I found the programme intensely interesting and witty.

Commenting on the number of new Bibles published in recent years and the need for interpretation, Nicolas Walter commented: "If God wished to speak to men in writing it seems very odd to me that it isn't writing which they can simply read and understand". And summing up at the end of the programme:

"What I believe is that every document, and

every idea, and every piece of authority that is handed down to us—whether it is Humanist or Catholic or anything else—should be questioned, should be thought about, and should not be accepted purely on faith."

It was a first-rate performance by Nicolas Walter.
BRYAN AUBREY

LETTERS

This house subscribes to your ungodly journal that we may be forewarned of campaigns against our Lord's work.

However I feel I must write to concur with the item (under "News and Notes" in your September issue) castigating that upstart Humanist Calendar, dedicated as it is to the blasphemous aping of Christian devotions. Its deliberate selection of Good Friday as "World Humanist Day" you so rightly described as "an example of positive bad taste and insensitivity." I am strongly tempted to add a few epithets of my own, but our Holy Rule adjures me to curb my terminology.

Yours in the Faith.
(Mother) Mary Perpetua of the Most Precious Blood.

CRITIC CRITICISED

I'm pleased that Philip Hinchliff tore up the first draft of his review of "The Rise of the Mediocracy" ("The Freethinker", September) because, as he came to recognise, it "missed the point". Had he proceeded to a third draft, I'm sure he would have done further justice to the book.

Apart from subjective reactions to stylistic matters like alliterative chapter headings "in oversized type", your reviewer's complaints boil down to four particulars: (1) "instant judgments" derived from "glib packaging" on contemporary ideas; (2) use of "numbing neologisms"; (3) inclusion of too many topics in too little space; (4) "no conclusion".

These complaints arise, I suggest, from major and minor misconceptions. (1) My packaging of prevailing ideas is no glibber than the ideas themselves, and such contradictions as Mr Hinchliff pointed out derive from the ideas too. One of the tokens of the rise of the mediocracy is the fact that "radical ideas" today are so half-baked compared with, say, those of a century ago. (2) As distinct from "Nucleoethics" which your reviewer liked, my latest work contains very few neologisms. "Neophilia" is from Christopher Booker, "juvenilophilia" from Philip Toynbee and "radical chic" from Tom Wolf. I may have coined "privilegentsia", "pharmacophilia", "gynophilia" and "sensationalia". Items (3) and (4) are further consequences of the rise of the mediocracy, where the economies of book publishing and buyer resistance among intellectuals have combined to limit the size of serious works.

Notes, extended exegesis, recapitulations and bibliography can no longer be afforded. I cannot however see how their absence leads to "structural incoherence". Your reviewer had no difficulty getting my basic message, but, like many contemporaries, seems irritated that the problems I identify "may, therefore, be insoluble".

DAVID TRIBE

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES to the General Secretary,
702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

In April we published a reply by the Rev Dr D. P. Davies, a lecturer at St David's University College, Lampeter to Professor G. A. Wells' earlier article "Reciprocity and Neighbourliness in Jesus' Teaching". Professor Wells replied in the same issue and Dr Davies now clarifies several points of difference between them.

(1) I deliberately avoided saying that contemporary Christians no longer accept the *eschatology* of the *New Testament*. What I said was that they have ceased to believe in the element of divine *judgment* central to the teaching of Jesus. Many contemporary Christians would accept the eschatological teaching of the fourth gospel or the Epistle to the Hebrews, for instance, even though they no longer accept the future apocalyptic eschatology of passages like Mark Chapter 13 which, in my view, reflect the eschatological beliefs of Jesus himself. The eschatological teaching of the New Testament is diverse, depending to a large extent on the authorship, date and environment of its various constituent parts.

(2) It was not my intention to argue that Christians today should work out a *new* eschatology. My contention that "Christians must recognise *afresh* the central importance of eschatology" could (and, in my view, should) be understood to mean that Christians must *recover* the essential elements of the eschatology of Jesus and early Christianity. Otherwise, as Professor Wells says, it cannot be called *Christian* belief. I hope this will make the meaning of a somewhat ambiguous sentence a little clearer, though I should say that in commenting on Professor Wells' initial article my main concern was with historical rather than confessional problems, even if the answers to historical questions clearly have implications for contemporary belief (or lack of it).

(3) In his further note Professor Wells has rightly seen that it is impossible to separate ethics and theology in the New Testament and belief (or commitment, as I would prefer to describe it) is indeed what is most stressed in the New Testament. Ethical teaching, such as it is, derives from belief in the one God whom Jesus believed was about to act in a decisive way by establishing his reign of salvation among men. The earliest followers of Jesus after his death believed that God had so acted in the death and resurrection of Jesus and this belief governed *their* approach to ethics.

May I also elaborate on three other minor points: (1) Luke's portrayal of Jesus' attitude to the Pharisees is more complex than Professor Wells allows. Luke records some 16 incidents involving Jesus and Pharisees, of which twelve certainly reveal hostility

between them (usually over points of the *Torah* like Sabbath observance, fasting and food laws, i.e. eating with the unclean). Yet on three occasions he claims that Jesus ate with a Pharisee at the Pharisee's invitation (hardly a hostile act in the society of the time)—see 7.36, 11.37 and 14.1, though on each occasion, as Professor Wells says, hostility comes to the surface in the subsequent incident. At Luke 13.31, however, certain Pharisees are concerned for Jesus' welfare and this is the impression we have in Acts (by the same writer) where at Acts 5.34 and 23.6-9 Pharisees are favourably disposed towards Christians, while Acts 15.5 and 26.5 refer to converts to Christianity from Pharisaism. There are no hostile references to Pharisees in Acts.

As Professor Wells suggests, this evidence points to the existence of separate traditions (none of which is necessarily more reliable than the others), so the question of Jesus' attitude to the Pharisees remains unanswered. Hostility to Pharisees as such is found mainly in Matthew's gospel and this, as I suggested earlier, reflects the attitude of the Church for which Matthew wrote his gospel.

(2) I am surprised that Professor Wells should cite Matthew 25.40 and 45 in arguing that in the New Testament a man's behaviour to his fellows is of no significance in the context of his ultimate destiny. I would have thought this text suggested the opposite, namely that a man's conduct to his neighbour (the least of these my brethren) is the yardstick for judging his true attitude to Jesus. In other words, what counts is what a man does and not what he says he believes.

(3) It is difficult to indicate an order of priorities in a Semitic language. This means that the word "hate" is not to be interpreted in the extreme sense we would give it today. The meaning of Luke 14.26 is that commitment to Jesus takes precedence over family ties, which is how the parallel passage in Matthew 10.37 interprets it. (See T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, p.131). A man must be prepared to sacrifice everything in the service of Jesus (see Matthew 10.38 = Luke 14.27). Such a call for total commitment is not, of course, unique, but it is an essential feature of the preaching both of Jesus and of his earliest followers.

**JAMES RANDI
THE MAGIC OF URI GELLER**

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LEAFLET PROTEST

Letters have been sent by the National Secular Society and the National Council for Civil Liberties to the Department of the Environment following an incident at Trafalgar Square, London, on 25 September, when police stopped NSS supporters distributing leaflets.

The secularists were giving out copies of Barbara Smoker's *So You Believe in God!* at a Festival of Light rally. One distributor was persistently tailed by a Salvation Army officer who warned recipients of the leaflets, "It's Filth! Don't read it!" He apparently complained to the police, for several policemen who had been watching with equanimity suddenly pounced on the distributors and warned that they would be arrested if they continued to hand out leaflets.

On being challenged as to what law they were invoking, the police referred to a Department of the Environment by-law which allowed leaflets to be distributed only by people authorised to do so by the organisation that had booked the Square. This means, in effect, that only one point of view is allowed to be promulgated at any one time, which hardly seems in accord with Britain's proud boast of free debate which many overseas visitors still associate with this country.

In spite of massive advance publicity in the religious press and elsewhere, the Festival of Light rally—on the theme, "For the Love of God and Neighbour"—attracted far fewer participants than similar events in the past.

When the Rev Robin Ray arrived recently to take the service at St Andrew's Church, Boscombe, near Salisbury, where he is the assistant curate, he found that his congregation of eight had been augmented. Mr Ray, who is joint master of a Wiltshire otter hunt, had to face the wrath of those who are opposed to this "sport". A notice had been pinned to the altar cloth saying "Keep Hounds off our Wild Life". During the service, demonstrators held up placards

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Imperial Hotel First Avenue, Hove. Sunday 7 November, 5.30 pm. Jim Herrick: "Some Cults of the East".

Havering Humanist Society. Harold Hill Social Centre, Squirrels Heath Road. Tuesday, 19 October, 8 pm. Margaret Carey: "R. D. Laing".

Humanist Holidays. Christmas at Brighton and Easter, 1977 at Southsea. Details from Mrs M. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Tel: (01) 642 8796.

Independent Television. Friday, 8 October, 9 pm. David Yallop's "The Fruits of Philosophy", a play based on the trial of Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Mike Heys: "Peoples Organised Workshop on Ersatz Religions".

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, 17 October, 7.30 pm. Jan Melichan: "The Price of Peace".

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

Worthing Humanist Group. Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade, Worthing. Sunday, 31 October, 5.30 pm. C. E. Grant: "Psychosexual Problems".

on which were written: "Only Rotters Kill Otters" and "Gory Hallelujah!" They sang the popular hymn: "All things bright and beautiful, All creatures great and small, All things wise and wonderful, The curate kills them all." After the service, the otter-hunter raised his hand and declared: "I bless you all". The demonstrators shouted "We don't want your bloody blessing".

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Editor: WILLIAM McILROY
Assistant Editor: JIM HERRICK
702 HOLLOWAY ROAD
LONDON N19 3NL
TELEPHONE: 01-272 1266

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