

# The FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Secular Humanist Monthly

Vol. 96, No. 11

NOVEMBER 1976

10p

## PURITANISM AND CENSORSHIP NOT A RECIPE FOR THE GOOD SOCIETY

"Among the disillusionments of the late twentieth century there is a certain sour weariness with the lack of moral and social purpose which now appears to accompany our 'welfare' society", declared Enid Wistrich when she addressed a Fabian Society-Progressive League conference on 7 November. Although there are extensive social services and an important sector of the economy is in social ownership, the level of social aspiration and behaviour seems deplorably low.

Mrs Wistrich said that Socialists in particular have some cause for dismay: "In popular folklore, society decays when it becomes absorbed in the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake.

"Earlier generations of Socialists saw the decadence of Victorian and Edwardian society not only in the self-indulgent pursuits of the idle rich, but in the drunkenness and depravity of the improvident poor. 'Bread and circuses' were the 'opium of the masses' deprived of economic and social justice in a capitalist society.

"Come the revolution and the reordering of our society, according to the principles of social justice, and Socialist man would be reborn with a high sense of social and moral purpose, dedicated to working for the good of society and ethical ideals.

"Some Socialists linked pleasure with a lack of moral purpose. The Independent Labour Party was strongly orientated towards temperance. The non-conforming religious background of many Socialists also went in the direction of abstinence and 'clean living'.

"There is indeed a strong basis in the scriptures for the puritanism of the God-fearing. The books of Exodus, Deuteronomy and Leviticus in the Old Testament forbid adultery, incest, homosexuality, transvestism and bestiality. Death penalties were prescribed for most of these offences and for the

girl discovered on marriage not to be a virgin.

"St Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, urges his listeners to abjure 'fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness . . . neither filthiness nor foolish talking or jesting . . . have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather prove them'."

Mrs Wistrich, an Executive Committee member of the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society and a former chairman of the Greater London Council Film Viewing Committee, recalled that the Puritans of the seventeenth century closed down the playhouses. "Now" she added, "those of the twentieth century want stricter censorship of the theatre and the cinema.

### Personal Freedom and Justice

"The early Socialists saw an end to idleness and dissipation as the new Socialist order emerged with a common sense of social purpose and the pursuit of higher ideals. We often regard the 'permissive society' as a degeneration of those ideals.

"Yet attempts to reimpose the prohibitions of the Puritans will not do. Socialism, to my mind, requires personal as well as economic and social emancipation, just as personal fulfilment cannot be achieved in a society in which there is no justice.

"If every individual is to realise his or her true potential they need to be able to explore ideas, experiences and relationships. Any parent of teenage children knows that careful exploration of experience is a better recipe for eventual balance than flat prohibitions. Similarly, as adults we will not learn moral purpose by erecting barriers against sensual experience or trivial pursuits."

Enid Wistrich warned against assuming that the enforcement of anti-permissive measures will lead to a good society. She said: "Nazi Germany is a good

(Continued on page 162)

# Euthanasia Poll: Majority Favour Legalisation

The National Secular Society has welcomed the publication of a National Opinion Poll survey which shows that more than four times as many people in Britain are in favour of the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia as are opposed to it. The result of the survey, sponsored jointly by the British Humanist Association and the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, was announced by Professor Antony Flew at a press conference in London last month.

Barbara Smoker, president of the NSS, commented: "Up till now it has been accepted that the present law does at least reflect the view of most people of religious faiths who have always presumed to dictate to the rest of us what we may do in many aspects of our lives, not least the ending of them. This survey, however, shows that even

among Christians—including Roman Catholics—there is now a majority positively in favour of this change in the law. Since no one is suggesting that euthanasia should be compulsory for anybody—only permissible for those who have made a prior request for it in writing—it is difficult to see any excuse for further delay in making it legal.

"The National Secular Society hopes that Parliament will now find both the time and the courage to enact this legislation before thousands more people are condemned, against their will, to months—and even years—of unnecessary suffering, distress and degradation."

● "Mercy Killing or Merciless Killing?", page 164

## *Puritanism and Censorship*

example of a society where art and culture were harshly purged of all signs of 'permissiveness', but corruption and cruelty reigned.

"Women, too, stand to lose from the puritanical onslaught. It is no coincidence that German women in the Nazi period were confined to children, the kitchen and the Church ('Kinder, Kuche, Kirche'). The placing of women on a pedestal means all too often the denial of their full development and personality. The idea that women need protection from the coarse sensuality of men ignores the needs of both in personal and sexual development, and perpetuates sex stereotypes.

"True growth of personality cannot come from prohibition and repression. We need an environment in which there is not only economic and social opportunity, but freedom and compassion for each individual to develop his or her lifestyle. Education in life, as in scholarship, requires an open mind and a careful, self-imposed discipline.

"The excesses of 'permissiveness' will not be excoriated by censorious rulings which only egg on curiosity about what is forbidden, but, hopefully, will disappear as true fulfilment is gained."

R. J. CONDON

### OUR PAGAN CHRISTMAS

20p plus 7p postage

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

## Freethinker Fund

The increase in contributions to the Fund has been maintained, and during the period 22 September until 21 October a total of £70.57 was donated. Our thanks to those supporters whose names are listed below. G. A. Airey, 50p; J. Ancliffe, 30p; Anon, £5; I. Barr, 50p; S. Berry, 50; T. Boyd, £3.45; J. G. Burdon, 50p; A. E. Burton, £20; "C", 71p; Mrs Carter, 66p; A. Chambers, 50p; R. L. Clare, £4.15; W. Craigie, £2.60; Miss I. Davis, £1.15; Miss J. Davis, £1; C. M. Drew, £2.40; J. Futter, £1; Mrs E. M. Graham, £2; E. J. Hughes, £1; Miss F. Jacot, £5; J. Knowles, 50p; W. Lazarus, £3.50; J. Manus, £1; K. Moore, 50p; H. Newman, £2.40; Miss A. Parry, 50p; Miss W. Peters, £2; W. Ramage, £1; G. Reid, £1.50; D. Sallitto, £2; A. Shore, 25p; G. Thanki, £1; P. Willmott, £1 and V. Wilson, 50p.

Clifford Read and his wife Marion of Sleaford, Lincolnshire, became convinced that the end of the world was near. After a family Bible reading session they decided that they and their young son Matthew would be saved, but that their daughter Samantha, aged eight, would not because the devil had got inside her. As they lay on a bed waiting for the end Mr Read's hands were "guided" to a pair of scissors and he killed Samantha by cutting her throat. At Lincoln Crown Court last month he was found not guilty of murder by reason of insanity and the judge directed that he be "admitted to such hospital as may be specified by the Secretary of State." Mrs Read was to be kept in medical care.

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

# PAT Answers to the RE Question

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

The latest contribution to the discussion on school religion comes from the Professional Association of Teachers in the form of a document entitled "Religious Education in State Schools". It indicates that PAT, whilst claiming to take a professional approach to teaching, also takes a professional approach to indoctrination.

When the National Secular Society decided to make opposition to religion in schools one of its principal tasks, there were those who protested that we were raking up a dead issue. Now, thanks in large part to our persistence in opposing the injustice of the 1944 Education Act, the Religious Education issue is a highly publicised controversy. In common with most controversies there has been much heated and passionate argument; it has been rare to find humour.

Now Ian Mitchell-Lambert, chairman of the Professional Association of Teachers, has shown that it is possible to write hilariously on the subject. It is perhaps unfortunate that the humour is entirely unconscious. We should none the less be grateful to Mr Mitchell-Lambert for his contribution to national mirth.

The fun is all to be found in the unusual style of his "Personal Introduction" to a pamphlet entitled *Religious Education in State Schools*, published by his organisation. Amongst other things, we learn there that "It is fairly well established that the average age of personal moral awareness begins between 13 and 15 and by the age of 16 to 18 has begun to crystallise in relation to the personality of the individual". It is obvious that Mr Mitchell-Lambert's thoughts had not "begun to crystallise" at the time he wrote that sentence. He seems to believe that an average age can "begin", and that it is helpful to locate this "beginning" between 13 and 15. Finally he mistakes the subject of his verb "begins" and tells us that an average age of between 13 and 15 begins to crystallise between the ages of 16 to 18. The confusion is complete.

Later he admits to being "extremely disturbed at (?) attempts to try and (!) teach spiritual truths to the majority of children below the third or fourth years of a secondary school. I emphasise the two words "teach" and "truths" because we are talking about conveying what is in Piaget's studies, the abstract. Shortly before telling us what we are talking about he states that "the facilities inside schools are considerably greater than those normally available to most Sunday schools, and this is often subliminally observed by young people". It seems that Sunday

School pupils are not the only people given to making observations beneath the threshold of consciousness.

Unfortunately Mr Mitchell-Lambert's clumsiness has its serious side, because behind the confusion of his bumbling sentences there is a failure to understand the injustice of imposing compulsory religious teaching on any children, whatever the views of their parents or their teachers. He apparently rejects the idea that "all children should have an understanding of other people's religions". He thinks that "the only true way for a Christian to understand the truths of the Hindu faith of a colleague is for the Christian to become a better Christian and for the Hindu to become a better Hindu. In that way they both come closer together and come closer to the truth". He concludes: "It should be the function of the Head Teacher or the Head of any Religious Education Department to ensure that the Christians receive the best Christian teaching that they can, the Buddhists receive the best Buddhist teaching that they can, the Jews the best Jewish teaching that they receive, (*sic*) and so on".

## Who Decides?

It is noticeable that he makes no attempt to deal with the question of the children's freedom. Who is to decide which children are Christians and should receive Christian instruction? Does he mean that all children should be instructed in the faiths of their parents? What about the children of Humanist parents? Are they to receive compulsory lessons in atheism? What right have RE teachers to use the special atmosphere of the classroom to promote Church recruitment? Why should children be obliged to attend compulsory lessons in *any ideology*? One looks in vain for any answers to these questions. Indeed Mr Mitchell-Lambert gives no sign that he has even thought of the questions let alone the answers.

After his introduction we get on to the main body of the pamphlet which, though not a personal statement, seems to show many signs of Mr Mitchell-Lambert's amusing individual style. For example, in Section 10.2 of the statement we read: "It is increasingly true to say that in both primary and secondary schools Religious Education taught is part of an integrated system and that to operate the conscience clauses rigidly for teacher and withdrawal rights for parents would result in considerable confusion in terms of the curriculum that the pupils are following. In this situation it is felt by the Association that the social problems that could

(Continued on page 167)

# Mercy Killing or Merciless Killing? CHARLES WILSHAW

Even the sponsors of the National Opinion Poll on euthanasia were surprised that such a large proportion of the interviewees expressed support for the idea that those who wished to do so should be allowed to opt for "a good death". The claim often made by Church leaders that Christians are overwhelmingly opposed to voluntary euthanasia was effectively undermined, with Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Methodists strongly in favour of medical help to an immediate peaceful death in certain circumstances. The result of the survey, sponsored by the British Humanist Association and the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, will have a profound effect on Parliament and on the medical profession.

Two noteworthy investigations have recently been made and their findings released for general consideration. The first is the Criminal Law Revision Committee's Report which pays special attention to mercy killing. The second is the result of a well conducted National Opinion Poll on the desirability of legalising voluntary euthanasia. These matters are interrelated and merit special attention.

Members of the Criminal Law Revision Committee are in agreement that mercy killing is quite distinct from true murder, and are seeking the means of changing the present law to make it, at worst, a minor offence—justifiable mercy for the merciful. The Committee is acutely aware of the difficulty of framing a satisfactory definition of mercy killing and applying a revised law in practice. The Committee points out that it would have to be "with the consent or without the dissent of the deceased." But what if the patient is unconscious, and how can it positively exclude the possibility of motives other than those of pure compassion? Indeed the Committee is very concerned on these points and invites constructive comments and suggestions.

To people of good sense it has always been obvious that genuine mercy killing, like applied euthanasia, is not murder. Murder is never intended for the benefit of the victim. "Mercy killing" is unfortunately a misleading term; it is the disease or body disorder that is the killer, therefore merciful release is the better term.

It is time that society realised, and acted in accord with the fact, that it is not murder to shorten the process of dying in a patient that nature is already irrecoverably destroying in a protracted, cruel and clumsy manner. Mercy killing is the compassionate release from *merciless killing* which is nature's way in all too many cases. The tragic

circumstances which drive relatives to mercy killing will only be appreciably diminished when voluntary euthanasia is legalised.

This latest survey was widely based to include all areas together with an even distribution of ages and social status, with 2,125 persons being questioned. The question put was: "People say the law should allow adults to receive medical help to an immediate peaceful death if suffering from incurable physical illness that is intolerable to them, provided they have previously requested such help in writing." "Do you agree or disagree?" 69 per cent agreed; 17 per cent disagreed; 14 per cent undecided.

The result is remarkable in that relatively few people are truly acquainted with the terms of the proposals for voluntary euthanasia and many still suppose that there is a real risk of abuse. There was evidence of this misapprehension during the BBC Radio 4 *Voice of the People* phone-in programme on 15th October which dealt with this subject. The belief was repeated, without a single correction, that relatives would be involved and even able to influence the case. The general impression was that relatives could be at the bedside presenting the afflicted patient with a form to sign and themselves witnessing it. There would be no such thing. Not only would relatives be prohibited by law from witnessing a declaration, but the law would require two witnesses of approved standing, neither of whom would stand to benefit by the death of the patient, to testify that the declarant knew the meaning of the document and was under no pressure to sign. Understandably, doctors and nurses would also be unacceptable as witnesses.

## The Position of Relatives

It is not only reasonable, but it is humane to disassociate relatives from any part in the practise of euthanasia. This is not only to avoid suspicion of mixed motives, but also because of the more usual and natural surge of emotion which would make purely objective decisions most difficult in such times of distress, and perhaps leave a lingering sense of guilt or doubt.

Misgiving and misunderstanding concerning influence and interference by relatives is in no small measure due to the emotive and misleading propaganda of some of the less scrupulous opponents of voluntary euthanasia. These biased opponents assert that relatives would be prone to persuade their enfeebled and perhaps troublesome old folk to sign a form to get them killed off. Detractors of euthanasia usually remember not to say that the declaration can be revoked by the declarant at any time, or to mention that the mentally alert patient,

would by virtue of the declaration, remain in control of "the administration of euthanasia at a time or in circumstances to be indicated or specified by me."

The extent to which the Roman Catholic extremists will go to confuse people can be judged by an extract from a Human Rights Society publication entitled *Not Wanted*: "If we are not being blamed for being parents, then we are being demoralised by the 'too old at 40' cult. We feel ourselves being hastened to the scrap-heap. Before they even reach pension age, older people are being persuaded that the sooner they die the better. Some theorists would even call a halt to cancer research, on the grounds that cancer is a useful means of disposing of the over-sixties.

"Even more gruesome is the suggestion that legalised euthanasia could be used as a 'population control' measure. If this becomes law, it could result in pressure being brought on older people to sign their own death-warrants, authorising their doctors to kill them, whenever their relatives found it convenient. However bravely they might wait for the death-signal to be given, they could not avoid passing their last years in suspicion and fear of those nearest to them. They could not look forward to a well-earned retirement, or think of their sons and daughters as the light of their old age."

### Religious Attitudes to Euthanasia

It is unworthy and inhuman for professed Christians to foster such confusion and fear amongst the less informed. If such fear does arise from other sources or from an individual's own imagination, why not tell these people that if they do not sign a form everything will be as it always has been in their case?

However, it seems that the Roman Catholics might have overplayed their hand. There can be little doubt that the result of the BHA-VES survey is a shock to the Roman Catholic pundits. 54 per cent of the 222 Catholics who were questioned approved the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia, with 12 per cent still undecided. Church of England followers agreed by 72 per cent and the Methodists supported with 71 per cent.

Leading Roman Catholics have repeatedly proclaimed in their opposition to abortion, that if abortion is sanctioned—then euthanasia will follow. How right they seem to be in this prediction! Hence, they might be well advised to look inwards to the management of their flock which is slipping away in mistrust of the spiritual masters who have opposed contraception and abortion.

It requires little intelligence to know that abortion is quite distinct from euthanasia. However, they have this in common; each involves the natural right of individual liberty in order to make one's own choice, as well as the insistence that *all life must be personally wanted*.

There are sufficient doctors, despite the British Medical Association's claim, who will come to terms with voluntary euthanasia once they have a safe system supported by law. In recent years there has been noticeable improvement in doctors' attitude to the uselessness of prolonging the process of dying in terminal cases. This is, unfortunately, somewhat offset and complicated by the introduction and availability of more effective life supporting drugs and apparatus. The expressed wish of the patient must be made paramount and regarded as being in the best interest of the patient.

It is encouraging to recall a National Opinion Poll taken in 1965 of a sample of 1,000 doctors when 762 agreed to the statement that "Some medical men do in fact help their patients over the last hurdle in order to save unnecessary suffering, even if that involves some curtailment of life." Unfortunately this humane practice is very restricted by the present repressive law. Nevertheless, the Catholic hospices which care for selected terminal cases do, in fact, take advantage of a Vatican directive which allows pain-killing drugs to be given in necessarily increasing doses even though that does shorten the act of dying provided that the relief of pain is the prime object. This is indeed a degree of applied euthanasia, although the hospices' staff will not admit to that. The disquieting fact is that the hospices' staff are so unreasonably opposed to voluntary euthanasia being available for others who might wish to avail themselves of its aid.

The claim by some doctors that pain can now be suppressed almost completely, and the handling of terminal cases is best left to their discretion is not justified in practice. First, careful investigation has shown that pain has not been suppressed in 18 per cent of cases. Second, pain is by no means the only disability suffered in terminal illness. A 1973 report, *Life Before Death*, by the Institute for Studies in Social Care on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Security, based on a survey by doctors and health visitors of 785 patients, shows an appalling percentage of patients who had distressing symptoms for a year or more before they died. Here are some examples: pain, 37 per cent; bowel disorder, including incontinence, 20 per cent; breathing trouble, 24 per cent. Even without statistics, visits to geriatric wards sadly reveal the extent of degeneration and disintegration to which human beings are subject. In the new National Opinion Poll, 37 per cent said "Yes" to the question: "Have you known someone in the last five years who has suffered such an illness?"

If Parliamentarians are truly representative of the people, then more than two-thirds will be unequivocally in favour of voluntary euthanasia. That is sufficient to secure the passage through Parliament of a Bill for Voluntary Euthanasia and support for their prospects at the next election.

Wars continue to beset the world as ceaselessly as sectarian stridency. It has become intellectually fashionable to undercut religious explanations of war by theories of sociological, ethnic and economic differences. There is a continuing catalogue of wars where religion remains an important factor. In November, the month of Remembrance, it is a factor not to be forgotten.

*Lord God of hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget, lest we forget.*

For centuries historians were clerics who described the world in terms of conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil, or as the unfolding of God's plan for mankind. In the eighteenth century most leading historians turned to freethought, and recast the ideological interpretation of history in secular terms. In the nineteenth century the conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil became the conflict between science and religion, where missionaries were identified as warmongers and martyrs dismissed as masochists. In recent years, with the decline of both religious and irreligious convictions and with the rise of new studies like the sociology of religion, socio-political interpretations of history have become dominant.

Sectarian groupings are now equated with social classes. Clerical meddling in politics is virtually ignored. Religious wars like the Thirty Years War and the Crusades are described in purely political terms, while the religious element in upheavals like the English Civil War is lost in its class-struggle interpretation. Twentieth-century wars are labelled quite simply as imperialistic, capitalistic or ethnic.

Now, there is, of course, a good argument in favour of not taking religious slogans at their face value. In God we trust, but human ingenuity keeps our powder dry. Behind theological banners may lurk brigades united less by their piety than by their rapacity. God may order wars, but Mammon picks up the bill—or the spoils.

Unfortunately, these neo-Marxist interpretations are partly based on misconceptions and crowned by some wrong conclusions. It is far too glib to assume people are insincere in their religious protestations, or that their religious beliefs have no impact on their behaviour. The modern secular view of conflict thus gives too little credit and too little discredit to religion. It is secular without being secularist.

It doesn't demand too deep an analysis of the political situation in the world's trouble spots to see religious origins (which may not be the only origins).

Religion offers the best means of labelling warring factions. The Middle East probably still heads the global list of trouble spots. In Palestine, both Jews and Arabs are non-indigenous Semites, though the Arabs have a vastly longer history of continuous settlement. What really marks them off from each other is religion: Judaism versus Islam. In Lebanon the basic conflict is between Christians and Muslims, once equally balanced numerically, though politically the Christians have always been dominant. Now that—after influxes of refugees from Israel—they form a minority, this dominance is increasingly resented by the Muslim population.

If we pass alphabetically through countries that are experiencing or have recently experienced upheavals, sectarian forces line up along our path. Algeria saw a small Christian minority in the last stages of imposing its will on a Muslim majority. In the Congo a larger Christian minority tried to dominate an animistic or non-religious majority. Cyprus was torn between a Christian majority and a Muslim minority. So was Ethiopia. In Guyana the majority was Christian and the minority Hindu; in the Indian subcontinent the majority Hindu and the minority Muslim. Partition of Ireland left one part with a Roman Catholic majority and a Protestant minority, the other with these positions reversed. Malaysia was a melting pot of Muslims, Buddhists and Confucianists, where separate ingredients failed to gel. Nigeria saw a Christian minority try to wrest power from a Muslim majority. In South Africa Christians predominated, but a Dutch Reformed minority imposed its *apartheid* concepts on Christians and non-Christians alike. In the Sudan a Muslim majority fought to control a rebellious Christian minority. In Vietnam a tiny Christian minority, foreign or indigenous, for decades controlled a Buddhist or non-religious majority.

## An Ignored Factor

Wherever possible, news media have described these and other points of conflict in secular terms—political, economic or ethnic. Admittedly, in many parts of the Third World the above analysis does not apply precisely, for the struggle seems to be tribal and all the contenders animistic. Yet, far from being inapplicable, a religious interpretation is particularly relevant here, for animism is, of course, a complex of religious or magical forces organised on tribal lines. In Third World countries like Rhodesia and New Guinea, separatist factions are not only encouraged by Christian ministers but led by them.

Before and during the Second World War this global contest was described as an ideological struggle.

gle between the irreligious forces of fascism and the religious forces of democracy. Only after extensive research by secularist writers like Frank Ridley and Avro Manhattan, who were boycotted by the media for as long as possible, was it fully revealed how actively the Vatican supported Germany, Italy and Spain in their struggle against democracy.

Today, with some plausibility, worldwide "brushwood" fires are said to be fuelled by ethnic tinder, and a Third World War is widely postulated as one between Europe and Asia, whites and non-whites, haves and have-nots. Again, consciously or unconsciously, religious causes are ignored.

### Reactionary and Divisive

In a world of declining religious convictions, not to mention the "ecumenical movement", identification of religious rivalries as a significant source of world dissension may seem unrealistic. But this popular dismissal of religion as a cause of conflict results from failure to understand the true nature of religion. Where its message is one of sweetness and light, it usually transpires that its leaders for the time being are sweet and light, regardless of their ideology, or that this attitude is a public relations exercise. Whatever the cause of this sweetness and light—religious apologists say it is the expression of "true religion" and nastier images stem from secular perversion—people of good will naturally stretch out their hands to it. It is, therefore, entirely appropriate for Women for World Disarmament, founded in 1950 by the English secularist, Kathleen Tacchi-Morris, to number Christians and other religionists among its active supporters. But those who do a micro-analysis of global problems see religion as a continuing builder of barriers among mankind.

Religion is an expression of man's ego as a species opposed to other species, a race opposed to other races, a tribe opposed to other tribes. Because each sectarian view is, in theory, timeless and universal, its adherents take dominance over other groups to be their divine right, while the socio-political attitudes which prevailed in the country and century of its origin and are enshrined in its sacred scriptures and the structure of its professional organisation exert a continuing reactionary influence.

To return to the prime trouble spot of the Middle East, the chief cause of dissension is Zionism, the political expression of the "covenants" enshrined in Judaism. Semitism and anti-Semitism (in their popular form of pro-Jewry and anti-Jewry) are also fundamentally expressions of religion and not of racialism. Had Judaism not discouraged interbreeding and assimilation in the Diaspora, both attitudes would have vanished centuries ago. Only when people endorse their common humanity will peace ultimately prevail in the world.

### PAT Answers

develop could create much bigger complications." This is one way—though not the clearest—of saying that the conscience clauses of the 1944 Education Act are ineffective and unworkable. The National Secular Society and the Humanist Teachers Association were pointing this out years ago, though it was then indignantly denied. Now it has become so notorious that even a handbook, edited by an Adviser on Primary Education to the Inner London Education Authority, can warn new teachers that they "... have the right to opt out of religious education but few do so. The implication is that it is unwise, in career terms, to opt out . . . Probably few young teachers will want to take the step of opting out, if only because it involves considerable inconvenience to themselves as well as to the other member of staff who has to step in."

### One Humanist's View

Several pages of the PAT pamphlet are given over to a review of Religious Education policy statements made by organisations such as the Joint Council of Heads and the Assistant Masters' Association. Under the heading "The Humanist View" we find consideration of only the British Humanist Association pamphlet *Objective, Fair and Balanced*. This is not of course *the* Humanist view. It may not even be *a* Humanist view. It seems rather to be a confusion of different views—a confusion largely caused by the invention of a non-concept known as "Stances for Living".

An example of the confusion which this has caused can be seen in statements which followed Brigid Brophy's criticism of the BHA pamphlet (*The Freethinker*, December 1975). When she suggested that "Education in Stances for Living" might include lessons in astrology, Dr Harry Stopes-Roe, former BHA chairman, flatly stated that "Brigid Brophy's examples—fascism, flat-earthism and astrology—are not stances for living at all." (*The Freethinker*, February 1976.) But a few months later, in a report of an RE working party which included Dr Stopes-Roe, we read that "life-stances" include "magic, occultism, astrology, etc." (*What Future for the Agreed Syllabus?* Religious Education Council, 1976.)

A Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at a teacher training college has recently declared "The claim of the RE teacher must be that intellectually, morally and spiritually the child needs what religion stands for." (B. W. Hearn, *Religious Education and the Primary Teacher*, Pitman, 1974.) This seems to be the attitude of the Professional Association of Teachers and, despite the amusement of all the howlers in their pamphlet, this document is basically a sad one. It is sad because it shows just

(Continued on page 169)

## RELIGION AGAINST HUMANITY

The lot of family planning pioneers has never been easy, particularly in those areas where the professional celibates of the Roman Catholic Church are a dominant force. This fact of history has again been illustrated by the obstacles which have been put in the way of the Galway Family Planning Association in the west of Ireland.

However, despite a calumnious campaign by local Catholics, the Association acquired sufficient funds and trained doctors to start work. Only the lack of premises prevented them from doing so, and when suitable space became available in the city's Dominick Street the FPA started negotiations with the landlord. It looked as if the search for premises was over.

But part of the building was occupied by Mr MacCathmhaoil, a solicitor and a strong opponent of family planning. He believes that "the family planning business is a curse . . . based on a philosophy of violence . . . anti-human and linked with abortion." Mr MacCathmhaoil said: "I stand by *Humanae Vitae* instead of ideas imported from abroad." (This gentleman is, no doubt, an excellent solicitor, but he seems to be weak on geography; the Vatican, from whence *Humanae Vitae* emanated, is a long way from Galway.)

Mr MacCathmhaoil threatened the landlord of the building that if the Family Planning Association moved in he would move out. Alternatively, he offered to rent the entire building and thus protect it from contamination by the family planners. The landlord, who was quite honest and had only a business interest in the affair, accepted this offer, and the Family Planning Association is still looking for premises.

The opponents of family planning will regard the Galway episode as a triumph for virtue, chastity, patriotism and Christian principles. But they will probably approve a plan by the Irish Catholic hierarchy to set up a project known as CURAM (the Irish word for care). This is a telephone service to assist single girls who become pregnant and have to go to Britain for an abortion. The Church has been prompted to take action by the realisation that in 1974 a total of 2,508 Irish girls had an abortion in Britain; in 1975 the figure rose to 2,672 and for the first quarter of 1976 the figure was 1,684.

The figures quoted are conservative as they are based only on those girls who have given Irish addresses. It is quite certain that for reasons of confidentiality many of the girls who come to Britain for an abortion do not give their Irish addresses.

Many of the Irish girls who make the sad journey to abortion clinics would not have to do so if those who deny them the right to contraceptive knowledge and facilities jumped into the deepest part of Galway Bay.

# NEWS

## GOD LIVES IN SCOTLAND

"Scotland—a Nation of Believers" was the banner headline on the front page of a recent issue of the *Glasgow Herald*. It was announcing the result of a survey carried out by that newspaper and which revealed that 85 per cent of those interviewed believed in God. Church attendance figures in Scotland are also high compared with those south of the Border. Indeed, with the possible exception of Northern Ireland, it appears that Scotland is the most religious part of the United Kingdom.

The result of the Scottish survey will encourage those Christians who are constantly proclaiming that Britain will never be great again until the nation turns to God. Scotland, with its more strictly segregated schools, Sabbatarianism, restrictive licensing laws and anti-libertarian attitudes, seems to have been sheltered from the winds of change. She should be an example to us all.

However, the Humanist contention that belief in God is an unreliable foundation on which to build standards of moral and social behaviour, was confirmed in the same newspaper's extensive reports of the Glasgow Rangers football team's visit to the Aston Villa ground at Birmingham.

One sports writer, who described the Scots fans as "a pack of marauding, drink-sodden louts . . ." commented: "It was the first time in almost 100 years that the clubs had played one another and if their next meeting is 100 years hence, it will be too soon for the people of Birmingham . . . In the city, shop windows were smashed, men and women assaulted as they tried to do their shopping, the pubs became battle grounds as the crazed fans went after more drink."

Hooligans are to be found on the terraces at practically every football match, and it would be unjust to claim that Glasgow Rangers club is unique in that it attracts what the same writer described as "the scum of the earth." But it was another columnist who pinpointed the uniqueness of Glasgow Rangers: "They are the only club in the world which insists that every member of the team is of one religion . . . Their major anthem from the terraces is a song which celebrates a useless battle fought in 1690."

Spokesmen for Rangers have often condemned the behaviour of their fans who, inflamed by drink and religious bigotry, have brought disgrace on the club and on the city. But, as the *Glasgow Herald* declared editorially: "If Rangers want rid of these fans, they must rid themselves of the hard-nosed Protestant



# AND NOTES

image that appears to attract and delight the very lowest in our society. So long as Ibrox Park remains a shrine for the regular re-enactment of the Battle of the Boyne there is no hope of ridding Scottish football of the cancer that will eventually destroy it."

The Rangers management have at last announced that in future religion will not be a factor when players are being recruited. It is to be hoped that their action has not come too late to save the club, and that it will encourage the people of Scotland to take a stand against social policies and actions which foster religious bigotry and hatred.

## JESUS, MARY AND JENS

How do the guardians of other people's morals themselves withstand the corrupting influence of books, films and television programmes they force themselves to sample in order to ascertain what is suitable cultural fare for the *hoi polloi*? For, if *Oh! Calcutta!*, *Last Tango in Paris*, *The Little Red Schoolbook*, *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Exorcist* are as abominable as their censorious detractors claim, then Lady Birdwood, Raymond Blackburn, Lord Longford, Mary Whitehouse and other less exalted defenders of chastity, must themselves be so defiled as to make Dorian Gray appear to be the quintessence of purity.

Mrs Whitehouse has revealed how she protected herself from contamination when reading Jens Thorsen's film script on the life of Jesus. She had obtained a copy from Denmark and employed a translator to prepare an English version for the Home Office. They held a prayer session each morning before starting work on the script which Mrs Whitehouse described at a press conference in London as "more obscene, decadent and blasphemous than any normal mind could have conceived . . . the ultimate in spiritual vandalism and corruption."

As the Christian God appears to be a wrathful, vengeful, egotistical monster he will hardly be interested in the whining supplications of the Queen Mum of contemporary puritanism. The One Above is much more likely to accept the praise and thanks of clever Mr Thorsen who, largely because of Mary Whitehouse and her bird-brained followers, has become an international figure in a matter of weeks. Any film Mr Thorsen decides to make in future will be a raging success, whether it is based on the sex life of Jesus or of Winnie the Pooh.

## OBITUARY

### MR. F. J. CORINA

Francis Joseph Corina has died in hospital at the age of 72. There was a memorial meeting at the Central Library, Bradford, on 15 October.

*William Miller writes:* The memorial meeting was attended by about 150 people from various organisations and all walks of life. After the chairman, Mr Joe South, had paid his tribute, others were invited to speak. The speakers who had worked with Joe Corina in his many activities, such as free-thought, secularism, CND and the peace movement, realised and appreciated his ability and fighting spirit in support of any just and progressive cause. He led the fights in Bradford against grants to church schools and against religious indoctrination in schools.

I am sure that members of former NSS branches in the Midlands, and no doubt other parts of the country, will remember his inspiring speeches. Many times he and his wife Rita travelled hundreds of miles through winter ice and snow to fulfil engagements. There is no doubt that the freethought movement has lost one of its greatest fighters. One can only hope that the many people he inspired will carry on working for the principles and ideas which he spent his lifetime upholding.

For me it was a pleasure and privilege to have known Joe Corina.

## THE FREETHINKER

VOLUME 95 (1975)

Price £2.60 plus 30p postage

(Bound volumes for other years available: various prices)

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

### PAT Answers

how far many teachers are from realising the injustice of one-sided compulsory religious education.

The only useful contribution which this publication can make to the RE debate is to show just how dangerous it could be to trust assurances that religious education is already, or is just on the point of becoming, "objective, fair and balanced."

**A HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY** by Paul Johnson.  
Weidenfeld & Nicholson, £7.00.

This trip through the morass of Christianity from the Council of Jerusalem in AD 49 to the dislocated Church of post-Vatican II has the advantage, the blurb assures us, "of providing new and illuminating perspectives" (depends on the point of view) "and of demonstrating how the varied themes of Christianity repeat and modulate themselves through the centuries." The literary quality is what one would expect from a notable writer. As a source of reference the book is no doubt invaluable. As a human document it is, on the whole, horrifying, and to me at least unspeakable depressing.

Paul Johnson is honestly, I think, trying to tell the truth about Christian history, which is bound to plunge one into a horrific nightmare of confusion, cruelty, corruption, insanity, and pathetically wasted human aspiration. But we have to understand that, as he tells us in his prologue, "... Christianity by identifying truth with faith, must teach—and properly understood does teach—that any interference with the truth is immoral. A Christian with faith has nothing to fear from the facts." Of course not: he possess the anaesthetic *par excellence*. Though I anticipate shudders, even flight, in the case of more sensitive readers, even the strongest may, at some point, throw up. But not the genuine historian, familiar with horrors: "A Christian historian who draws the line limiting the field of inquiry at any point whatsoever, is admitting the limits of his faith. And of course he is also destroying the nature of his religion, which is a progressive revelation of truth."

It will come as a blow to us poor unbelievers to learn that a Christian is freer to follow truth than a non-Christian "who is pre-committed by his own rejection." This seems hard, too, on a multitude of humans who have never known Christianity, let alone rejected it. Ah well, we can at least give Johnson his meed of praise for unveiling "the facts of Christian history as truthfully and nakedly as I am able." With certain exceptions, he shamelessly does.

However, at an early stage he perpetrates an annoyingly characteristic Christian omission by belittling the contribution of Greek culture to the religious climate at the time of Christ. It failed, he complains, "to produce that startling blend of the real and the ideal which is the religious dynamic." I think he should at least have mentioned Epicurus, whose "blend" was dynamic enough to last for 700 years, preceding Christianity by three centuries, co-existing with it, a source of freely borrowed ideas and practices, until the age of Constantine brought the younger cult into State power. Epicur-

anism is ignored, being man-centred instead of god-centred—the very reason of its prime importance. Early Christianity owed it a great deal. Alas, once in power the Church obliterated the debt with a smear-campaign that lasted until the rehabilitation of Epicurus by the great writers of the Renaissance onwards: Lorenzo Valla, Erasmus, Montaigne, Bruno, Gassendi. All this may seem a digression from Johnson, but is pertinent to the history of Christianity.

Still more so is the assertion: "There can, at least, be absolutely no doubt about his (Jesus') historical existence." In support of this extraordinary statement the usual Josephan quibbles are offered, and the dubious witness of that dusty triad, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger and Suetonius. The doubt about Tacitus' source is admitted, and also the "garbled" reference of Suetonius: "Did he think 'Chrestus' was alive at the time? Anyway, he, and every other source referring to earliest Christianity, treats Jesus as an actual, historical person." What other sources, we may wonder. In the next breath Johnson says, "When we turn to the earliest Christian sources, we enter a terrifying jungle of scholarly contradictions." This is very reassuring. But at least Mr Johnson does give us a genuinely frightful account of the Temple abattoir, which he underwrites as "the unconcealed and unconcealable machinery of tribal religion inflated by modern wealth to an industrial scale." How well this could apply to the Christian Church in power, with tortured and murdered humans replacing slaughtered beasts.

Much space is given to Paul ("that morbid crank", as Nietzsche furiously called him), whom Johnson regards as "the first pure Christian: the first fully to comprehend Jesus' system of theology." But did Jesus ever have one? Or did Paul invent it, as is so often said? Johnson thinks not; Paul, he says, *rescued* the Church from extinction—that is, from absorption into Judaism. Whatever the facts, the body of Christian doctrine concocted by Paul became at once—and remained ever after—the subject of violent controversy. Despite Eusebius' efforts in the fourth century "to prove that a Christian Church, vested with the plenitude of Christ's teaching, had been ordained by Jesus right from the beginning", the truth is as Johnson admits: "Christianity began in confusion, controversy and schism and so it continued. A dominant orthodox Church, with a recognisable ecclesiastical structure, emerged only very gradually and represented a process of natural selection—a spiritual survival of the fittest

# REVIEWS

And, as with such struggles, it was not particularly edifying."

This was to be the pattern throughout the centuries. There never has been a truly calm period in the history of Christianity, nor a wholly edifying one; mostly it has been the reverse. The Emperor Julian, "an infallible expert on the darker side of Christianity . . . found from experience that no wild beasts are as hostile to men, as Christians are to each other." In fact, Paul Johnson's exposure of "the darker side" is likely to leave one with a horror of the human race as well as of Christianity. It is obvious, however, that placating bad gods transmogrifies even sane mortals into mad dogs. And the "gods" of institutional religion are political, commercial, militant, power-obsessed man in his basest image. This became tragically clear as Johnson unfolds the history of the Christian establishment. From a loosely organised revival movement, centred in Jerusalem, hourly expecting the *parousia*, the Jesus sect, after the final diaspora, shifted its centre of gravity to Rome. From then on, despite persecutions, its true character began to develop; until, by the end of the third century, "Christianity was able to confront and outface the most powerful corporation in ancient history, the Roman Empire." With the Edict of Milan and the final reversal of the Empire's policy of hostility, the Church itself, already rich with the favours and friendship of the great and powerful, and already self-organised into an episcopal hierarchy, entered on its career as the religio-political empire that moulded Europe and influenced much of the world.

Paul Johnson poses the conundrum: "Did the Empire surrender to Christianity, or did Christianity prostitute itself to the Empire?" He admits there can be no definite answer. But is it a question of *either-or*?

Constantine, that "weird megalomaniac", was shrewd enough to see the possibilities of a Church-State union, and vain enough to lap up the flatteries of the fulsome Bishop Eusebius. As for the Church, it had everything to gain from this "unseemly marriage". The marks of a State Church were already manifest in Roman Christianity. The subsequent regime took on "a Caesaro-papalist flavour", and was indeed a presage of all that was to come. The time-honoured myth of Constantine's "vision" and "conversion" can be safely committed to the refuse-heap of innumerable other pious frauds. He was, and remained, a sun-worshipper and devotee of Mithraism, that rival cult which all but

outdid Christianity, and which in fact left its mark on the victorious religion, whose holy day became Sun-day, and whose Nativity feast was held on 25 December, birthday of the Sun at the winter solstice. Many Christians, we are told, made no clear distinction between the sun-cult and their own.

Johnson's debunking process includes many other characters cherished in Catholic devotion. For example, Athanasius, author of the abominable Creed that bears his name, was "a violent man, who regularly flogged his junior clergy and imprisoned or expelled bishops." Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, "a superstitious and credulous man", developed the cult of relics with unscrupulous frenzy; his ideas on sex, marriage and virginity were as weird as his cosmology; Jerome was the epitome of anti-life, "an unhappy and a bitter man." As for Augustine, "the dark genius of imperial Christianity", his God was a monster, perpetually angry and vindictive. A hero of later times, the much-pilgrimised Becket, is described as "an obstinate and at times hysterical man, with an actor's passion for noisy drama", who "did no service to Christianity." His assassination brought him swift canonisation and lasting fame. But according to William FitzStephen, he could easily have saved himself by flight; but martyrdom was "a spectacular, and theatrical, way out of the impasse into which he had driven himself."

These random samples of the way Johnson treats the giants of Christian sanctity are characteristic of his critical assessment throughout the book. The "spiritual survival of the fittest"—and not necessarily the most spiritual—continues all along the labyrinths of Christian phenomenology. The overwhelming impression, as one ploughs through the 514 pages to the Epilogue, is of a vast, perpetual internecine struggle between incompatible forces: in the questionable corpus of Christian dogma, in the mass of human lives imprisoned by it or inspired by it or in rebellion against it, and in the problematic sources of ecclesiastical power and authority that have never yet been resolved. This latter cause of dissension has been, all along, the key to the tragic and shaming story of Christianity. It still is. As Johnson admits, ". . . the question of authority . . . has always been, and remains, the real source of division in Christianity." It is always the urge behind persecution of heretics; it supercedes the well-intentioned zeal of reformers.

Can there be any doubt that this sinister force has still to be reckoned with, however muted it may seem beneath the deceptive surface of "civilised values"? It is all the more insidious when opposing, not digressions from dogma as such, but from what dogma lays down as "the moral law". The ruthlessness behind this type of Pharisaeism (with which we in our time are well acquainted) is just as destructive of genuine morality, and bears the same hallmark of acquisitive authority and personal power.

It machinates at all levels, right to the ivory tower of the Vatican, whence Pope Paul VI issues the encyclical *Humane Vitae*, "against the majority view of his advisory commission", but faithfully in line with the *Casti Connubii* of Pius XII, "the autocratic monarch of the last *ancien régime* court in history." For both these popes "the whole matter of the natural law, its foundation, its interpretation, its application, so far as their moral aspects extend, are within the Church's power . . ." Except that many of their victims do not agree, or will not submit, and the reign of Paul VI is consequently marked by "a general erosion of ecclesiastical authority" and "the decline of papal prestige." Unfortunately Johnson's book ends with 1975, so we do not have his comments on the current schism concerned with the Tridentine Mass.

In his final chapter "The Nadir of Triumphalism" he has much to say about the attitude and conduct of Christians in two world wars. The first, "a civil war among the Christian sects, opened a period of tragedy and shame for Christianity. The war, and the peace that followed, demonstrated the weakness of the churches; but at least none of them positively identified themselves with evil. That was to come." Having read this, I expected at least a mention of the horror regime in Croatia, the deliberately organised extinction of Orthodox Christianity under the direction of the Catholic Archbishop of Zagreb, presumably with Pius XII's approval and complicity, since that most Augustinian of pontiffs received the chief murderers and torturers in audience and bestowed on them his blessing. But no: the whole blame for anti-Christian persecution is laid on the Nazis: Himmler is supposed to have said: "We shall not rest until we have rooted out Christianity." Perhaps he did, perhaps not; the crime of twentieth-century papal Christianity remains, a heresy-hunt as horrible in its ruthless atrocities as any in the Church's scandalous past. It is a pity that Paul Johnson's outspoken book is less than honest on this gruesome chapter of modern Church history.

In the Epilogue Mr Johnson does his biased best to rehabilitate Christianity, and so becomes fulsome, false and irritating. But the face-saving is, in the last resort, merely pathetic. The final judgment, with which the book ends, is hardly inspiring: ". . . our history over the last two millennia has reflected the effort to rise above our human frailties. And to that extent, the chronicle of Christianity is an edifying one."

It occurs to me that Koestler's comment on history in general could well apply to the Christian slice of it: "If one looks with a cold eye at the mess man has made of his history, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he is afflicted by some built-in mental disorder which drives him towards self-destruction."

PHYLLIS GRAHAM

**REBIRTH OF A NATION?** by Garth Lean. Blandford. 90p.

If you still need an emetic after *Dear Archbishop* (reviewed by Barbara Smoker in September) try this book. Garth Lean follows John Poulton's digest of letters to the Archbishop of Canterbury with what is described as "a pungent analysis of some of the issues raised in the Archbishops' Call and what people of all kinds are doing about them." In fact it is not an analysis but a clumsy compilation of quotations and reports attacking "the New Morality" and documenting case-histories in the questionable rebirth of Britain. It is pungent all right, in the sense of having a strong smell—of Moral Re-Armament, the Festival of Light, and the whole apparatus of modern evangelism.

The two most interesting things about the book from our point of view are the lack of argument and the lack of audacity. The evangelical method is still that of the original Evangelists—mere assertion based on the insistence on faith and the invention of facts—and the parables are not as good as they were two thousand years ago. The attacks are on easy targets—not Scribes and Pharisees, but the modern equivalent of trendy clerics and liberal politicians—rather than on the people who are really responsible for the theory and practice of the new (i.e. non-religious) morality.

Religious literature is like religious broadcasting and religious education—full of confidence as long as no one is allowed to answer back. It is typical that Garth Lean has a chapter called "The Two Atheisms" which says nothing about atheism at all. The fact is that the Archbishops' Call was just a voice crying in the wilderness, and the rebirth of the nation is just a way of not thinking about the life of the nation. The evangelists are caught in a dilemma—either they say something definite, in which case most people will disagree with them; or they say nothing definite, in which case many people will agree with them. Garth Lean says nothing definite, because he has nothing to say. The worrying thing is how many people seem to like hearing it.

NICOLAS WALTER

PHYLLIS GRAHAM

THE JESUS HOAX

£3.95 and £2.25 plus 47p postage

G. W. Foote & Company

702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

# TELEVISION

THE FRUITS OF PHILOSOPHY, by David Yallop.  
Granada, 8 October.

Trials have always made good television drama and David Yallop's version of the trial of Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh was no exception, providing a gripping contribution to the Granada series of dramatised Victorian scandals.

The story of how these staunch secularists championed people's rights to obtain cheap knowledge of contraception, by inviting prosecution and vigorously conducting their own defence, is well known to students of freethought history. But the general public were probably less familiar with how *The Fruits of Philosophy: or the Private Companion of Young Married Couples*, a birth control handbook by Charles Knowlton, was charged as an "indecent, lewd, filthy, bawdy and obscene book . . . contaminating, vitiating and corrupting the morals." The book had been available for 40 years but it was particularly the publication of a cheap easily available edition which provided the occasion for a prosecution.

In the opening scene of the play Charles Watts the publisher was seen in vigorous argument with Bradlaugh and Mrs Besant. These two chose to provoke prosecution and stand firm on the issue of freedom of the press. From this opening argument it was clear that David Yallop was going to exploit fully the dramatic potentialities of the case. Some moments which I particularly enjoyed were the acute embarrassment displayed by the Solicitor General, Sir Hardinge Giffard, played with relish by John Carson, when the judge insisted that he read aloud the passages from the pamphlet; the judge's comment, when Annie Besant requested that the sunlight be shaded from the jury's eyes to avoid their discomfort, to the effect that nothing she had said as yet could cause them discomfort; and the fierce arguments of the jury including manipulation by one of them, Arthur Walter, a son of the principal owner of *The Times*.

An inventive and humorous touch was provided by the youthful George Bernard Shaw's retelling of the famous story of opening one's watch and waiting for the hand of God to strike you dead; this episode was one of the few speculative incidents in a play that combined dramatic tension with strict adherence to fact. Indeed, some of the best speeches within the trial came over powerfully word for word as they had been spoken almost a hundred years ago.

Louise Purnell, as Annie Besant, seemed to have just that right strain of moral determination and indignation, particularly in her impassioned plea that she was acting on behalf of the poor, amongst whom ignorance produced families far too large to care for so that backstreet abortion and infanticide were common. I found her deep-felt description of

the "sense of outrage I felt on my wedding night" valuable as an insight into her own feelings, the platonic relationship with Bradlaugh (which the calumny of gossips doubted, hinting at the spurious fruits of philosophy) and the bizarre direction which her career later took. Bradlaugh's speeches also had conviction, but I felt that David Swift in this role lacked some of the fire and solidity which the first president of the National Secular Society, barn-storming and campaigning orator, must have possessed. To me when he said: "I have had no University to polish my tongue; no Alma Mater to give me any eloquence by which to move you" —there should have been more of an absolute sinewy eloquence that belied this claim; nor did he really convince as a man of the people himself.

The play most clearly raised some of the vital issues of the trial: its importance in the defence of freedom of speech, in the early history of the right for easily available information about family planning, and in its insight into the early stages of secularism. After the trial the final scene showed Annie Besant's daughter being collected on behalf of Frank Besant, her cleric husband, and as the child was tearfully carried away this telling play by David Yallop most effectively concluded with Mrs Besant's words: "It's a pity there's not a God, it would do one so much good to hate him."

JIM HERRICK

## LETTERS

Contrary to the views expressed by Mr Alexander in the October "Freethinker", miracles do appear to occur.

Surely the overnight transition of the National Front into a "racist organisation", according to the general secretary of South Place Ethical Society, because of the providential appearance of a poster can only be ascribed to divine intervention. The miracle is, however, only of twelve months duration and does not extend to the equally racist National Party.

This humbugging, face-saving partial ban by SPES surely raises the question whether that body, under its present leadership, can any longer be considered part of the Humanist movement.

DEREK ALLEN

### A POLICEMAN'S LOT

The October "Freethinker" grumbled about police "moving on" some secularist leafleters at a Festival of Light Rally in Trafalgar Square, and invoking a by-law to do so. I don't see why you're getting so emotional about this incident. There is nothing in the NSS literature I've read to suggest freethinkers are against public order.

On attestation, every constable solemnly undertakes (without swearing on the Bible or anything like that) to "cause the peace to be kept and preserved, and prevent all offences against the persons and properties of her Majesty's subjects". Coming down to practical everyday street bobbying, this means that police will do their best to anticipate and cool any situation

likely to result in a punch-up, especially in a public place.

I'm as much a freethinker as the next man, but I don't think my freedom is unreasonably restricted by this by-law. If religious people were distributing leaflets at a secularist rally in similar circumstances, they too could be "moved on".

LEN AINSBURY

## MURDEROUS RITUAL

Last year the widespread showing of the film "The Exorcist" coincided with the case of a man who killed his wife after having devils driven out of him in accordance with Christian ritual. This year the widespread showing of the film "The Omen" has coincided with the case of a man who killed his daughter after deciding that she was possessed by the devil in accordance with Christian doctrine. The charismatic and pentecostal movements, which encourage such rituals and doctrines, have some responsibility for such atrocities, as do the established churches, which do not discourage them.

If these particular atrocities could have been connected with films about sexual activities, we may be sure that advocates of censorship would be leading a campaign to ban them and to prosecute anyone who made or showed them. Since they can be connected with films about religious absurdities, however, we are getting a deafening silence instead.

Opponents of censorship will conclude that people like Dr Donald Coggan, Mary Whitehouse, Lord Longford, Malcolm Muggeridge, Sir Cyril Black, and so on, are more disturbed by normal behaviour than by abnormal belief, even when the latter involves insanity and murder. We suggest that their future complaints about this or that film, book, magazine, play, or anything else, should be treated with the contempt deserved by all hypocrites.

DEREK MARCUS

Chairman, British Humanist Association

NICOLAS WALTER

Managing Editor, Rationalist Press Association

## JESUS AND SEX

May I make a few comments on Jens Thorsen's widely discussed project to make a film on the "sex life" of Jesus?

To me, it is a matter of supreme indifference whether J. Christ, Esq, either existed or engaged in any form of sexual activity. Judging by the Gospels, he would seem to have advocated a most disdainful attitude towards human sexuality, recommending we become eunuchs and telling us that married folk are not in the running in the heavenly stakes. Obviously he had no respect whatsoever for family life.

This conviction that sexual intercourse defiles and degrades the individual, alienating him from God, is also present in the writings of St Paul. And we have the famous verse in the Book of Revelation where we learn about the 144,000 male virgins surrounding the throne of God. Add to this the traditional Christian condemnation of sex for pleasure (as distinguished from joyless sex for reproduction) and it is easy to understand why Christians are disgusted at the thought of a film showing Jesus actually employing his genitalia.

However, there were a number of Gnostic Christian sects which insisted that Jesus taught complete antinomianism (rejection of the moral law). For them (such as the Carpocratians, for example), a true

Christian, being a "Gnostic", possessor of the redeeming knowledge, could not be affected by anything he or she did with the body. If Jesus came to liberate us from sin, this meant he also encouraged us to no longer feel that sexual satisfaction was in any way reprehensible.

Modern Christians marry and raise families. They ignore the Gospel passages where Jesus recommends chastity and a life of renunciation, even going so far as to say we must be "realistic", or that Jesus was only suggesting his immediate followers become celibates, homeless wanderers, etc. This, I would maintain, is a complete betrayal of the ascetic outlook ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels. So if the vast majority of Christians, by marrying and having children, have clearly turned their back on the teaching of Christ, how dare they object to a film that would show Jesus enjoying sexual experiences? This is a fine case of the pot calling the kettle black! Either the figure of Christ in the Gospels approved of human sexuality or he did not—textual evidence persuading us he did not. The whole pack of Christians (apart from monks and nuns) are insulting the memory of their chaste, childless founder.

GEOFFREY WEBSTER

Barbara Smoker seems to think that Christians deny that Jesus experienced any sexual desires ("The Freethinker", October).

There is a difference between sexual desires and promiscuity! Of course Jesus was attracted to the opposite sex. So am I, but as an unmarried male who considers that the place of sex is within marriage I resist any drive I have to copulate with any female to whom I may feel attracted. The criticism of the script of Jens Thorsen's proposed film is not based on the fact that Jesus had sexual desires, but in his imagined response to such desires. Such a mis-argument is typical of many in "The Freethinker", and Christians who look for a reasoned view of Humanism just get fed up with the monthly non-sequiturs and decide to spend their time more profitably.

In the same issue, Nicolas Walter states that "Fictional treatment of the life of Jesus goes back to the Gospels . . ." What evidence has he for this claim?

IAN ANDERSON

DAVID TRIBE

**THE RISE OF THE MEDIOCRACY**

£4.95 plus 29p postage

G. A. WELLS

**DID JESUS EXIST?**

£5.80 plus 47p postage

CHARLES WILSHAW

**THE RIGHT TO DIE**

25p plus 10p postage

*Copies of our Publications list are available*

G. W. Foote & Company

702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

# Conservative Theology Today

G. A. WELLS

Professor F. F. Bruce's "Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament" (Hodder and Stoughton, 1974) is worth attention as a striking example of how some present-day theologians uphold traditional beliefs.

Professor Bruce is rightly regarded by critical theologians as ultra-conservative in his Christianity. However, he insists that, in this book, he is "not trying to prove anything" (p203) but simply to put the factual record before us. Now I would not suggest that a desire to prove something, to reach a particular conclusion rather than another, is necessarily pernicious. It may simply make a man work harder in seeking out and interpreting relevant facts. But whether or not disinterestedness is desirable, one does not need to read further than Bruce's Introduction for evidence that his claim of disinterestedness is unjustified. He begins by discussing the objection, made by an agnostic, that "the substantiation of the Gospels from one another is hardly acceptable, as it is internal, and such evidence would be inadmissible in any other form of enquiry" (p13). This objection, put to one of Bruce's Christian correspondents, caused the latter "some little upset in his spiritual life", and Bruce supplies the following reassuring answer: *If we were dealing with four witnesses who had met together in advance and agreed on the story they were to tell, that might be a reasonable objection; but is it seriously suggested that the evidence of the four Gospel-writers is of this sort?* By thus interpreting the objection to mean something absurd, Bruce can dispose of it. But anyone who knows anything at all of New Testament criticism will realise that the phrase "inadmissible internal substantiation", when offered as an objection to the reliability of the gospels, may plausibly be taken to mean that Matthew and Luke drew their basic information from Mark's gospel, whole chunks of which they reproduced verbatim; and that John, whose gospel does not have such long verbal parallels with the other three, nevertheless uses occasional phrases which betray that, at certain points, his sources were identical with theirs. One inference from all this is that Matthew and Luke's accounts of events also narrated by Mark are not acceptable as independent testimony; that we have, for these events, not three witnesses but one, and that the real question is: did Mark obtain his information from reliable sources?

Professor Bruce continues his reply to the objection about the "internal" substantiation of one gospel by another, saying: "It would be odd if anyone dismissed John Morley's *Life of Gladstone* as worthless for factual information because the author was

Gladstone's friend, political ally and cabinet colleague." Comparison between Morley on Gladstone and the evangelists on Jesus would be relevant only if we are to suppose that any of the evangelists had been personally acquainted with Jesus. Such a supposition is today entertained, even among theologians, only by arch-conservatives. Even C. F. Dodd, whose book on Jesus, *The Founder of Christianity*, Bruce holds up as a shining example of exact scholarship which has vindicated traditional beliefs, admits to "serious difficulties" in this connection.

Much of Bruce's book is about non-Christian literature. He claims (p16) that "the brief references" to Jesus and his first followers in "early Gentile writers are independent of . . . Christian influence." Let us see how he tries to make good this assertion in the case of the statement of Tacitus (*circa* 120 AD) that Christians "got their name from Christ, who was executed by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius." There is no doubt that, by AD 120, Christians themselves were alleging that Jesus died under Pilate; and so we want to know whether Tacitus is here repeating what he had gathered from them about their origins, or whether he had made an independent inquiry and established his facts from archives.

Among the difficulties of this latter view are: (1) He gives Pilate a title (procurator) which was current only from the second half of the first century. In archives which recorded earlier events, Pilate would surely have been designated by his correct title (prefect). (2) He does not name the executed man as Jesus, but uses the title Christ (Messiah), as if it were a proper name. But he could hardly have found in archives a statement such as: "The Messiah was executed this morning." Furthermore, there are good reasons why Tacitus, hostile to Christianity, should have been glad to accept, from Christians, their own view that Christianity was of recent origin; one such reason is that the Roman authorities were prepared to tolerate only ancient cults. Nothing of all this is as much as mentioned by Bruce, who confidently decides that, "from the contemptuous and hostile tone which Tacitus adopts towards the Christians we may gather that he did not seek his information from them" (p23).

Tacitus, as governor of Asia about AD 112, may well have had the same kind of trouble with Christians that Pliny experienced as governor of Bithynia at that very time. E. T. Merrill long ago noted in *Essays on Early Christian History* that "it is altogether likely that Tacitus returned to Rome from his province with no favourable opinion indeed of Christianity, but with some knowledge of it that he might not have acquired without his period of official service in the particular province." To decide from his "hostile tone" that his information does not

derive from Christians, is entirely unwarranted.

Thallus is cited as another pagan witness, as someone who wrote "about AD 52", probably with knowledge of "the Christian narrative of the crucifixion." The footnote Bruce adds (p30) gives the impression that it is only minor matters—whether Thallus was a Samaritan and a freedman—not this dating of AD 52 that are questionable inferences rather than established facts. I have discussed Thallus in my *Did Jesus Exist?* and will not repeat myself, beyond saying that he probably wrote late in the first or early in the second century, and may not have mentioned Jesus at all. To put him up as evidence that a Christian passion narrative existed as early as AD 52 is fantastic.

Dr Neil asks in his preface to the book: "if we are not to end our quest for the truth about ourselves and the world in which we live in cynicism and disillusionment, where else can we turn but to religion" (p7). Yet, of course, the book thus introduced is not trying to prove anything. And in answer to Dr Neil's question, I would note that men who are indifferent to religion find satisfaction in their work, which they carry on without any fanaticism, and which is often quite useful. They try to keep in good health and protect their families from disease and accident, but they do not worry themselves too much about death. They reflect that, before they were born, the world went on for a very long time without them, and they would not much wish to have lived in former ages. And they think that the world is likely to go on for an equally long time after they are dead and that they have no reason to expect that it will be much better than it is. Certain rules of life—sensible to follow because found by experience to make for contentment and good health—have nothing to do with religion, but are based on the enquiries which study man and his environment systematically with a view to reaching reliable generalisations which are confirmed in practice. Religious preachers, however, arrive at generalisations without any difficulty, but they do not try to test them, and it is nearly always found that their generalisations are so framed that no test would be possible.

## EVENTS

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove. Sunday, 5 December, 5.30 pm. V. H. Wentworth: "Thoughts About War".

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove. Saturday, 13 November. Annual Dinner. Tickets, £2.50 each from Mrs M. Millard, 142 Western Road, Hurstpierpoint, Sussex; telephone 833057.

**Freethought History and Bibliography Society.** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 28 November, 3 pm. Pat Knight: "Origin of Feminism and Birth Control, 1850-1914".

**Havering Humanist Society.** Harold Hill Social Centre, Squirrels Heath Road. Tuesday, 7 December, 8 pm. James M. Alexander: "The Social Use of Slang".

**Harrow Humanist Society.** The Library, Gayton Road, Harrow. Wednesday, 10 November, 8 pm. Debate—Peter Cadogan and Nicolas Walter: "Solzhenitsyn—True or False Prophet".

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

**Lewisham Humanist Group.** Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, 25 November, 7.45 pm. A speaker from the Campaign for Homosexual Equality.

**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, 21 November, 7.30 pm. Hugh Jenkins, MP: "The Artist and Political Literacy".

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

**Muswell Hill Humanist Group.** 5 Leaside Avenue, London N10. Wednesday, 17 November, 8 pm. Sir Robin Williams: "The Common Market—the Meaning of Membership".

**Worthing Humanist Group.** Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade, Worthing. Sunday, 28 November, 5.30 pm. J. Marshall: "Freud's Analytical Theory".

### THE FREETHINKER

Editor: WILLIAM McILROY  
Assistant Editor: JIM HERRICK  
702 HOLLOWAY ROAD  
LONDON N19 3NL  
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.