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RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING: ANNAN REPORT DEEPLY DISAPPOINTING

The Annan Report was published on Thursday, 24 March, 1977. Its committee had sat for two and a half years, and had sifted through an enormous amount of evidence. This Committee on the future of broadcasting has produced a report of around 500 pages and with 174 recommendations. The immediate reaction in the media concentrated on the major aspects of the report dealing with proposals for a fourth television channel, and with comments concerning sex, violence and bad language. Free-thinkers will be particularly interested in the chapter concerning Religious Broadcasting, which can only be seen as bitterly disappointing.

A joint Press Statement by Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society and Nicolas Walter, of the Rationalist Press Association, entitled *Humanists Condemn Annan Report* began by describing the chapter on religious broadcasting as "quite inadequate for a pluralist society and therefore quite unacceptable to the humanists represented by the National Secular Society and the Rationalist Press Association."

Crucial Questions Not Asked

The statement continued: "The prevailing system of reinforcing the mainstream of the Christian tradition, which has been a permanent feature of broadcasting for half a century, is approved by the Annan Committee, with the addition of a few tentative suggestions for administrative changes to make the system seem more appropriate in an increasingly secular age. The Annan Committee follows its predecessors, the Beveridge Committee in 1951 and the Pilkington Committee in 1960, in refusing to take seriously the general humanist criticism of the privileged position of religion on radio and television."

The chapter completely failed to ask the crucial questions. An introduction contradictorily combines a comment on the dwindling of Christianity and sets the tone for assuming a continuing importance in broadcasting for religion and the establishment Churches. After this, a brief survey of the output of religious programmes points out that the per cent of religious broadcasting has declined since the Pilkington Committee reported in 1960, and accepts this. The report then looks at "The Objectives of Religious Broadcasting" and asks the questions "Who should Advise on Religious Broadcasting?" and "How should Religious Broadcasting be Presented?". What the Report completely fails to do is ask basic questions about the privileged positions of religious broadcasting at all.

Privileged Status to Continue

The Press Statement of the NSS and RPA continued: "Moreover the particular submissions which were made by several humanist organisations are completely distorted and contemptuously dismissed in the Report. The evidence submitted by the British Humanist Association, the Glasgow Humanist Association, and the South Place Ethical Society is mentioned without comment. The evidence submitted by the National Secular Society, recommending the abolition of all the religious advisory committees and religious broadcasting departments, is not mentioned at all. The argument of the Rationalist Press Association, recommending that religion should be exposed to the same treatment as every other controversial issue, is misunderstood. Instead the Annan Committee recommends that radio and television should continue to give privileged status to the churches, and should also 'cater for the religious needs of people outside the churches.'"

The report shows a glimmer of humour when it

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refers to the variety of conflicting evidence which it received concerning religious broadcasting: "From this and the other evidence we found it easier to draw plans for a new Tower of Babel than for a new Jerusalem." It is critical of the fact that "Some of the evidence displayed only a tenuous grasp of what the word 'religious' meant". The sublimely arrogant assumption that those who wrote the report knew what this word meant, without even having the courtesy or clarity of explaining their meaning to the readers, is a hallmark of the central confusions of this chapter. Among the many senses in which the word seems to be used was one instance referring to the need to "consider how the religious interests of both believers and non-believers could best be served." What exactly are the "religious" interests of non-believers is not divulged.

"The Annan Committee", continued the NSS and RPA Press Statement "is not even as firm as its predecessors in agreeing that non-religious and indeed anti-religious views should be given a hearing alongside religious views. It assumes that this is already normal practice, which is far from the case. The report includes vague references to 'numbers of disbelievers' being on religious programmes and to religious programmes being 'frequently humanist', but although we are occasionally allowed on to religious programmes this happens only as an exceptional concession and on terms acceptable to the religious establishment."

Barbara Smoker has also emphasised that "the secular humanist viewpoint is still rarely heard" and that "The humanist spokesman is tolerated to liven up a dull programme, and is usually outnumbered and is never allowed the last word."

"Synthetic" Religious Programmes

Some telling observations are made on the content of religious programmes. There is some small comfort in the recognition that religion in this country is no longer synonymous with Christianity and that it is not the function of religious broadcasting to proselytise. And humanists will agree with some criticisms of "synthetic" religious programmes, though for different reasons than those given in the chapter. "The efforts of clergymen not to put off their audience by dwelling on what is integral to Christianity are far from edifying." There is a reference to a programme in which a clergyman said "Stop all this Jesus, Jesus, stuff which I must say is counterproductive." The important point is made that "Christianity parts company from humanism precisely because it does not put concern for other human beings first, but enjoins its adherents first to love God . . ." Many will see this as a glaringly obvious reason for being very careful about the nature of religious broadcasting, indeed, for reconsidering its status altogether more radically. But the members of this Committee have not. Barbara Smoker has commented that "now

that religious programmes are put out on any day of the week at any hour, and, unlike political broadcasts, are not explicitly labelled as such, the fact that the views expressed are biased may not be apparent."

In looking at the question of who should advise on religious broadcasting the report suggests that the BBC and IBA should appoint their own religious advisory committees. They are opposed to religious or non-religious bodies having the right of nomination. They correctly assume that such nomination might lead to competition as organisations strive to capture seats on the bodies. But the conclusion that broadcasting bodies themselves should nominate members of such advisory bodies is not logical. This would not lead to the kind of openness in such matters that humanists would wish.

Kenneth Furness, General Secretary of the British Humanist Association, when asked about his reaction to the report commented: "The BHA's submission to the Annan Committee covered the whole range of broadcasting structure and policies, a major concern being to get acceptance of the view that questions of value and belief are pluralist and that the current 'objective approach' to world problems implies a single view of values which is just not realistic."

Surprisingly Naive Comments

"It is too early to comment on the many specific proposals made in the report. The comments on religious broadcasting however require the closer attention of Freethinker readers. The Annan Report shows surprising naivety in its use of dubious figures for church attendance and in its emphasis of the links between Church and State. It speaks misleadingly of 'concern about religion still being strong', where it might have been more appropriate to speak of interest in the supernatural—and not all of this is healthy."

He also felt that one interesting suggestion is "that the religious broadcasting department be disbanded and that responsibility for 'religious programmes' should be through other departments. What however do they mean by religious programmes? Do they mean what the report calls 'intellectually stimulating programmes which examine moral issues', in which case the report makes the classic mistake of linking morality with religion. Or does it mean something else?"

In referring to the Central Religious Advisory Committee, Kenneth Furness said: "Annan points out that CRAC has been broadened and now includes a West Indian Anglican priest and an ex-Buddhist from Ceylon. It already has an Irish Roman Catholic, a Scottish Bishop and a Welsh Archbishop. Never mind! Annan wishes to broaden it further to include 'some individuals with a religious

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The item "School Daze" ("The Freethinker", December 1976) referred to the difficulties of parents with RI and morning assemblies. Here a Churchman with experience of "this futile exercise" comments on pupils being bored, irritated and offended by "religious guff".

"Flup, flup, flup . . ." Our National Education can be stupidly comic.

In another secondary school, where I once worked, a master bearing a great cane took up the position for his ego-trip, and bawled out: "Groaners and crows, right and left—wait for it! — march!" I must admit, the tone of the unbroken voices was not unimpressive, but had Jesus been present, I wonder what he would have said to the crows and groaners?

One very amusing episode occurred at a mixed grammar school when the Head was reading (molto pomposo) the Conversion of Saul from the Authorised Version. All went well until the passage: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the . . ." (Pause. Silence). We all knew that the old man should have said "pricks". Alas, after the pause, all he uttered, somewhat dramatically, was the word, "thorns". As one girl said afterwards, she did not know why he need be embarrassed. After all, he had a couple of children!

I could go on. In my time I have seen hundreds of ludicrous happenings at these daily meetings. Yet few teachers, in my experience, ever oppose them. Indeed, many enjoy them, as they make superb ego-trips giving one a sense of power as one stands on a dais, rostrum, platform or podium, preaching away. When is the futile exercise going to stop? Not yet, I suspect. *The Freethinker* makes a sharp point. Morning worship continues with the connivance of politicians, bureaucrats, and the media.

What a Waste of Time

Some recent comments on assembly by 16 year olds might be of interest:

1. What a waste of time! The teacher stands there on his modified beer-crate and tells you to be good little boys or he might get nasty. What a skive! What a load of rubbish!

2. I think the whole thing is a farce. Codswallop. We are all fed up to the back teeth with it. If pupils want to worship, surely they can go to church or chapel?

3. Fancy asking atheists like me to pray to something I know doesn't exist! Do teachers think we are daft?

4. Schoolteachers will never change *me* by their stupid preaching.

5. I do not come to school to worship. I come to learn, and I want to learn. We all hate being preached at.

6. Assembly has one advantage: the organist gets some free practice. Personally, I'd do anything to miss the rubbish.

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I am a Churchman. But I am with *The Freethinker* all the way in its demand that morning assembly should be abolished: the sooner the better. Some Christians are coming round to this point of view: it was heartening to read that certain members of the Assistant Masters' Association at last year's Blackpool Conference were outspoken in their condemnation of compulsory assemblies.

Personally, I have, for many years, loathed these meetings: many of them I have found odious and repulsive.

As a student, I recall a junior boys' school where three little boys were caned unmercifully—"for letting the school down"—after devotions had ceased. Poor kiddies: they screamed with the pain, and they danced in agony. Meanwhile, after witnessing this severe punishment, the school faced a picture of the King and sang the National Anthem. ("Suffer the little children to come unto me and I will give them a bloody good belting . . .")

In one secondary school I remember the entire intake being made to learn a hymn selected capriciously by the headmaster: "It is finished! Christ hath known . . ." set to a most lugubrious tune from Freylinghausen's *Gesangbuch* (1714). Not a single pupil had any interest in this exercise. I was the unfortunate pianist who had to bash out the tune—with a continuously running counterpoint in the bass which confused everyone, even the headmaster. After about 20 minutes he was furious. Things were chaotic. But he waved a great stick at the singers, yelling at the same time: "If I can't make you sing, I'LL MAKE YOU CRY!" Some of the smaller children were terrified. After all, they had just been singing to the Lord to "Purge our passions, scourge our vice".

I once attended a most curious assembly in London. Some poor child happened to move. The morning devotions were suspended as the head bawled: "You, there! You! You moved! Had you been in the trenches, you would have been shot!"

I knew a school where the school song was rendered (or rent) weekly. The school in question had chosen the Harrow song "Forty Years On" as their very own song. Regularly, the performance was stopped, as the unfortunate singers, instead of singing "Follow up, follow up, follow up . . ." sang

Scotching the Sex Haters

FRANCIS BENNION

A new journal, "Uncensored", has recently been launched by the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society. It is planned to be twice yearly and to cover the whole field of the campaign against censorship. In this article from the first issue, Francis Bennion, a prominent human rights campaigner and a member of the Executive Committee of the DLAS, calls for a Festival of Delight. He argues that it is necessary to move into the offensive in attacking sex-haters, so often emanating from religious quarters.

The Scotsman stood on my desk, wearing a kilt of tartan unknown to any clan. The Home Office official pressed a button. The front of the kilt was pushed up by an enormous erect penis. "That's what we want to stop", the Home Office man said. "No bloody public good in that."

I was the assistant draftsman of R. A. Butler's "liberal" Obscene Publications Bill. The year was 1959, just before the short-lived era of flower-power, hippies and gentle understanding.

The 1959 Act, which is still in force, was not all that liberal. It gave statutory effect to a common law rule laid down by the 1868 case of *R v. Hicklin*. This said that a book, picture or other object was "obscene" if it was likely to deprave and corrupt those unfortunate enough to come into contact with it. At no time has anybody really known what this resounding phrase means. The present-day judge, Lord Salmon, is at one extreme in saying that it covers anything that makes you feel randy (though naturally he put it in more dignified language). At the other end are more sensible suggestions that it betokens something so degenerate as to be likely to cause psychological harm of a lasting nature.

The truth is of course that no one has been able to prove that written or pictorial matter causes harm to anybody. In 1970 a Presidential Commission which examined the subject more thoroughly than any enquiry before or since told President Nixon that it could find no evidence that pornographic material caused harm. Nixon made a typical response. He said: "The Commission on Pornography and Obscenity has performed a disservice and I totally reject its Report."

Nixon used a subtle argument to support his position. No one, he said would deny that great art uplifts. Who could say that Shakespeare had not influenced mankind for the better? If good art uplifts then bad art must debase. Like so much in this field, it is a non sequitur. We all know that the tendency of anything bad is to get rejected. People see through it.

Still, the 1959 Act gave us one clear advance. It provided the "public good" defence. Even though an article is found by a jury to be so obscene as to be likely to deprave and corrupt it may nevertheless escape conviction if the jury are convinced that it is for the public good to publish it. The jury is not given a free hand. As always, Auntie is peering over its shoulder. The jury can only acquit if publication is justified in the interests of science, literature, art or learning, or of other objects of general concern. The House of Lords has just confirmed, in the celebrated Jordan case, that this does not permit the whole statute to be circumvented by experts testifying that all pornography is for the public good because it provides outlets for the frustrated.

As you might expect from the title of the journal *Uncensored*, those behind it think the public good requires all material to be freely available without interference from busybodies. Indeed we require all aspects of sexuality to be released from prudish inhibitions. Require is a strong word, but nothing less meets the case.

Festival of Delight

It is time we stopped playing around with this issue, and stopped being apologetic. The truth is that the sex-haters have caused, and are still causing, immense harm. Once a society has satisfied the most pressing requirement of human beings, namely adequate nutrition, sexual fulfilment assumes the dominant position. Our children are still being armoured from birth by unwitting parents. Sex-suppression rules, and mankind will not know happiness until its rule has ended. Sex-haters are led by so-called Christians, who have assumed postures their founder would be likely to disown if he knew of them. His followers need to be reminded of what that splendid pioneer Van de Velde said in his epoch-making book *Ideal Marriage*: "there is too much suffering endured which might well be avoided, too much joy untasted which could enhance life's worth." Even for those who unwisely insist that sexual fulfilment outside marriage is immoral there is need to ponder on Paul Goodman's words in his *Little Prayers and Finite Experiences*:

"... it is at peril that I resist what attracts me, however dangerous, unavailable, inappropriate or perverse I may judge it to be. I must love it and suffer rather than be bored and caged as the horizon closes in. I cannot choose my paradise to be convenient, moral or prudent."

Blake had much the same idea: "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires."

For those who reject orthodox religious belief

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Where Ramsey Feared to Tread

BARBARA SMOKER

In mid-March, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Coggan, delivered his latest wide-ranging, socio-religious, paternalistic homily—ostensibly to a university audience in Australia, but in fact to us all through the news media. And this followed hot on the heels of his blunderingly undiplomatic castigation of President Amin, couched in such terms as to endanger the lives of his own ecclesiastical colleagues in Uganda. Now he is off on a friendly diplomatic mission to the Vatican . . .

The unholy alliance of Church and State in Britain has always been a matter for concern in the free-thought movement. But in the past it has been mainly the behind-the-scenes influence of the established Church, its political power, and its fiscal privileges, that have exercised us and our predecessors—not the immature posturing of a Primate who, hooked on the public limelight, never pauses to think before making quasi-official pronouncements to the world at large.

We might well agree with Dr Coggan's description of President Amin as a "horrifying and tyrannical man"—and, since we are not speaking on behalf of any identifiable people physically in Amin's power, we can afford to say so. But how the Anglican bishops in Uganda must have trembled at Coggan's statement made on their behalf! We might well agree with him that Amin should be prevented from attending the Commonwealth Conference in London in June—and, no doubt, the British and Commonwealth diplomatists are preparing a formula that will achieve this without adding to the Ugandan atrocities. But they are unlikely to have found this public prompting from the Archbishop of Canterbury very helpful. We might well agree with him that Amin "must be stopped" in his murderous activities. But who in turn will stop the mouth of this turbulent priest?

Back to his more usual theme of general morality, on the basis of such commandments as "Thou shalt contribute thy full share of work to the capitalist economy" and "Thou shalt not commit abortion", Coggan played the part of Moses in a much publicised lecture to the chosen people in New South Wales on 16 March. The false gods against which he chose to rail this time were the forces in society that "cheapen life".

As usual (remember his "call to the nation" 18 months ago?), he was not just exhorting members of his own denomination, nor indeed, Christians or even theists, to accept his God-given values: he was addressing non-believers too. That is why he rarely drags in anything theological, let alone the

distinctive Christian message. Unlike his medieval predecessors, he does not seem to care what people believe—so long as they oppose the permissive society and leftist policies. And he relies on such emotive phrases as "to cheapen life", "trivialising sexuality", and "thoughtless euthanasia", to fudge controversial social issues, rather than subject them to any reasoned, analytical argument.

Until Donald Coggan became Primate of All England, successive heads of the established Church refrained at least, like the monarchy from blatantly political utterances that might antagonise particular political parties or social groups within the country or, worse, impede British diplomacy abroad. In particular, Dr Coggan's immediate predecessor, Dr Ramsey, was modest enough, sensitive enough, and wise enough, to stick to his ecclesiastical last. But Coggan rushes in where Ramsey feared to tread.

Since the key ecclesiastical appointments of Donald Coggan in the Church of England and Basil Hume in the Church of Rome in Britain, C of E churchmen have been heard opining to their Roman Catholic friends, "You've got our Ramsey now, and we've got your Heenan."

This month Dr Coggan is to visit the Pope—the main purpose of his visit being negotiations for further steps towards the ending of the 400-year-old schism between the Church of England and Rome.

I cannot see Dr Coggan as a negotiating match for Pope Paul. In any case, an official C of E statement has already made the one concession that was really crucial from the RC point of view: the acknowledgment that Christian Unity can only mean unity under the primacy of the Pope. This, after all, was what the original break was all about, four centuries ago.

The papacy is more important to Catholicism than the Virgin Birth, or any other doctrine: for, ultimately, Catholicism is its political identity; and that rests on the papacy.

Although, as secularists and freethinkers, we can take comfort in the knowledge that it is the crisis of worldwide Christian decline that is bringing the Churches together, we must be ready, as I stated when the joint statement on "Authority in the Church" was published, "to alert public opinion to the importance of ensuring that, when the Church of England is finally reconciled with Rome (as it certainly will be eventually), it is divested of the historical privileges of Establishment, both fiscal and political."

Bad enough to suffer Establishment with a babbling mouthpiece; how much worse to suffer Establishment as part of the Religious Club of Rome under the jurisdiction of the Vatican—the infallible mouthpiece of the deity himself.

Fruits of Philosophy

PUBLISHERS' PREFACE TO DR KNOWLTON'S PAMPHLET

Charles Bradlaugh was an advocate of birth control from the start of his public career in the Secularist movement. Charles Watts, the publisher of the Knowlton Pamphlet, pleaded guilty to publishing an immoral work in 1877. Immediately Bradlaugh and Annie Besant reissued the book, and the famous "Fruits of Philosophy" trial ensued. (The centenary of this trial is being commemorated by the National Secular Society at a public meeting on 13 April 1977, see p.55.) The following was the introduction to the book with full reasons for the reissue.

PUBLISHERS' PREFACE TO DR KNOWLTON'S "FRUITS OF PHILOSOPHY"

The pamphlet which we now present to the public is one which has been lately prosecuted under Lord Campbell's Act, and which we republish in order to test the right of publication. It was originally written by Charles Knowlton, MD, an American physician, whose degree entitles him to be heard with respect on a medical question. It is openly sold and widely circulated in America at the present time. It was first published in England, about 40 years ago, by James Watson, the gallant Radical who came to London and took up Richard Carlile's work when Carlile was in jail. He sold it unchallenged for many years, approved it, and recommended it. It was printed and published by Messrs Holyoake and Co, and found its place with other works of a similar character, in their "Freethought Directory" of 1853, and was thus identified with Freethought literature at the then leading Freethought *depôt*. Mr Austin Holyoake, working in conjunction with Mr Bradlaugh at the *National Reformer* office, Johnson's Court, printed and published it in his turn, and this well-known Freethought advocate, in his "Large or Small Families", selected this pamphlet, together with R. D. Owen's "Moral Physiology" and the "Elements of Social Science", for special recommendation. Mr Charles Watts, succeeding to Mr Austin Holyoake's business, continued the sale, and when Mr Watson died in 1875, he bought the plates of the work (with others) from Mrs Watson, and continued to advertise and to sell it until December 23, 1876. For the last 40 years the book has thus been identified with Freethought, advertised by leading Freethinkers, published under the sanction of their names, and sold in the headquarters of Freethought literature. If during this long period the party has thus—without one word of protest—circulated an indecent work, the less we talk about Freethought morality the better; the work has been largely sold, and if

leading Freethinkers have sold it—profiting by the sale—in mere carelessness, few words could be strong enough to brand the indifference which thus scattered obscenity broadcast over the land. The pamphlet has been withdrawn from circulation in consequence of the prosecution instituted against Mr Charles Watts, but the question of its legality or illegality has not been tried; a plea of "Guilty" was put in by the publisher, and the book, therefore, was not examined, nor was any judgment passed upon it, no jury registered a verdict, and the judge stated that he had not read the work.

We republish this pamphlet, honestly believing that on all questions affecting the happiness of the people, whether they be theological, political, or social, fullest right of free discussion ought to be maintained at all hazards. We do not personally endorse all that Dr Knowlton says: his "Philosophical Proem" seems to us full of philosophical mistakes, and—as we are neither of us doctors—we are not prepared to endorse his medical views; but since progress can only be made through discussion, and no discussion is possible where differing opinions are suppressed, we claim the right to publish all opinions, so that the public, enabled to see all sides of a question, may have the materials for forming a sound judgment.

The Need for Preventive Checks

The alterations made are very slight; the book was badly printed, and errors of spelling and a few clumsy grammatical expressions have been corrected; the sub-title has been changed, and in one case four lines have been omitted, because they are repeated word for word further on. We have, however, made some additions to the pamphlet, which are in all cases kept distinct from the original text. Physiology has made great strides during the past 40 years, and not considering it right to circulate erroneous physiology, we submitted the pamphlet to a doctor in whose accurate knowledge we have the fullest confidence, and who is widely known in all parts of the world as the author of the "Elements of Social Science"; the notes signed "GR" are written by this gentleman.¹ References to other works are given in foot-notes for the assistance of the reader, if he desires to study the subject further.

Old Radicals will remember that Richard Carlile published a work entitled "Every Woman's Book", which deals with the same subject, and advocates the same object, as Dr Knowlton's pamphlet. R. D. Owen objected to the "style and tone" of Carlile's "Every Woman's Book" as not being "in good taste", and he wrote his "Moral Physiology", to do in America what Carlile's work was intended to do in England. This work of Carlile's was stigmatised

Coming Events

CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE
HOLBORN, LONDON WC1

WEDNESDAY, 13 APRIL, 7.45 PM

PUBLIC MEETING

to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the prosecution of Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant for publishing a pamphlet on birth control ("The Fruits of Philosophy")

EDWARD ROYLE, historian and author of "Victorian Infidels"

ALASTAIR SERVICE, Chairman of the Family Planning Association

DAVID YALLOP, author of the television play based on the trial

CONWAY HALL, LONDON

FRIDAY, 27 MAY, 7.45 PM

PUBLIC MEETING

REPEAL THE BLASPHEMY LAWS

BRIAN SEDGMOOR, MP; NICOLAS WALTER; BARBARA SMOKER

Freethinker Fund

Readers have again responded generously to the monthly appeal on behalf of the Fund. Two Canadian friends, Mr and Mrs McLennan have given the Fund a splendid boost with a donation of £56. We thank them and others who sent a total of £143.54 during the period 22 February until 22 March. The list of donors is given below.

Anon, £1; A. E. Avery, £1; N. Barr, 25p; H. Bayford, £6.86; Mrs V. Brierley, £8; J. Broom, £1.55; J. G. Burdon, 50p; A. E. Burton, 28p; E. Cecil, 75p; G. Childs, 25p; Mrs J. Coward, £1.25; E. Cybart, £1.70; J. W. Eadon, £3.25; T. Eberhard, £8; R. Fennell, 75p; D. Fyffe, 50p; W. R. Grant, £1.25; O. Grindahl, £1.50; P. Harding, £2.25; D. Harper, £5; D. Holdstock, £1.25; E. J. Hughes, £1; S. E. Johnson, £5; D. R. Leighton, £1; W. Lewis, 75p; J. Little, £5; Mr and Mrs McLennan, £56; R. McQueen, 25p; The Rev A. J. Martin, 50p; R. Matthewson, £3.25; G. Mawer, £1.75; Cdr G. Mellor, £1.25; R. C. Morgan, £1; Mrs M. Morley, £1.25; Mrs Padgett, 50p; A. Petch, 40p; F. J. Pidgeon, £3.25; J. C. Rapley, £3.25; R. Saich, £3.25; R. H. Scott, £12.50; E. Vaughan, 25p; F. White, 50p; A. Woodford, £1.25; Mrs A. Woods, £2.

as "indecent" and "immoral", because it advocated, as does Dr Knowlton's, the use of preventive checks to population. In striving to carry on Carlile's work, we cannot expect to escape Carlile's reproach, but whether applauded or condemned we mean to carry it on, socially as well as politically and theologically.

We believe, with the Rev Mr Malthus, that population has a tendency to increase faster than the means of existence, and that *some* checks must therefore exercise control over population; the checks now exercised are semi-starvation and preventable disease; the enormous mortality among the infants of the poor is one of the checks which now keeps down the population. The checks that ought to control population are scientific, and it is these which we advocate. We think it more moral to prevent the conception of children, than, after they are born, to murder them by want of food, air, and clothing. We advocate scientific checks to population, because, so long as poor men have large families, pauperism is a necessity, and from pauperism grow crime and disease. The wage which would support the parents and two or three children in comfort and decency is utterly insufficient to maintain a family of twelve or fourteen, and we consider it a crime to bring into the world human beings doomed to misery or to premature death. It is not only the hard-working classes which are concerned in this question. The poor curate, the struggling man of business, the young professional man, are often made wretched for life by their inordinately large families, and their years are passed in one long battle to live; meanwhile the woman's health is sacrificed and her life embittered from the same cause. To all of these, we point the way of relief and of happiness; for the sake of these we publish what others fear to issue, and we do it, confident that if we fail the first time, we shall succeed at last, and that the English public will not permit the authorities to stifle a discussion of the most important social question which can influence a nation's welfare.

CHARLES BRADLAUGH
ANNIE BESANT

Note: 1. George Drysdale (1825-1904)

THE FREETHINKER

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(See review on page 58)

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SUNDAY SERVICE

An ingenious way of sidestepping the Sunday trading laws has been put forward in Cornwall. Mr Mike Robertson, a millionaire head of a mills organisation and owner of a large shopping centre outside Liskeard, is reported to have suggested that half his staff be converted to the Jewish faith. In this way 100 of his shop assistants would be able to worship on Saturdays and be free to serve on Sundays without contravening the Sunday trading laws. Mr Robertson is alleged to be seeking planning permission from the local council to build a synagogue nearby for the convenience of his converted worshippers. The Lords' Day Observance Society has been pressing the council with its objections.

The incident shows the stupidity of retaining laws which restrict Sabbath activity. Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, wrote a letter to the BBC radio programme PM, which was read out on 11 March 1977. She pointed out that this case "highlights the absurdities of our obsolete Sabbatarian laws." The letter continued: "Why should people be forced into subterfuge of this kind in order to comply with laws that have no social relevance . . . Now that even the churches no longer claim majority allegiance to the Christian faith, what possible excuse can there be for keeping these laws on the Statute Book? The National Secular Society is opposed to a law that forces people to remain idle when they wish to work, simply on account of someone else's religious fanaticism."

THE POWER AND THE GORY

Films about a supposed deity would seem to be a good recipe for money-making and trouble-making. Franco Zeffirelli, a film maker of international renown, has brought zest, colour and popularity to tales such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. Recently he has turned his cameras to the tale of *Jesus of Nazareth*. This six-hour epic film has been made with international backing and is tailored for worldwide television audiences. There is to be a book of the film as might be expected. But instead of being an illustrated edition of the New Testament, it will be *Jesus of Nazareth* by William Barclay and the advertising blurb is glowing: "The brilliant text is by the world's best selling religious author, and captures the simplicity, action and drama of Zeffirelli's ATV film, and is based upon the original film script by Anthony Burgess. The 149 colour photographs taken during the film are outstanding." The film is to be shown on British television at Easter. It will doubtless be seen at its best on a colour set.

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Jesus of Nazareth is planned to be shown by the major American network NBC in two instalments on Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. It has been disclosed that the American rights for the film and air time on NBC have been bought by General Motors for a large sum of money. The film has been described as vividly realistic by viewers at a private UK showing. "The realism was quite fantastic", is Cardinal Hume's reported reaction. On the other hand America's "Bible Belt", with its fundamentalist groups and hard-line evangelical sects, has denounced the film as "wicked" and a "blasphemy" and urged a boycott of General Motors' products. Zeffirelli has said that he set out to portray Jesus as an ordinary man "fragile, simple and gentle." Yet a campaign against the film has gained force, especially in the Southern states in the USA. Dr Bob Jones, a preacher of national note and President of Bob Jones' University in South Carolina, has expressed his fear that the film might be "the most wicked thing ever to be shown on television." To clinch his point he has stressed that "the blasphemy of humanising Jesus and denying his deity will not help the image of General Motors." He has even gone so far as to suggest that those who know the Lord Jesus Christ would make their protest known both verbally and by spending their automobile dollars elsewhere. General Motors have denied being influenced by such protests. They have withdrawn their sponsorship, however.

British religious observers who have seen the private viewing of the film have reacted more favourably. The Chairman of the Central Religious Advisory Committee, the Rt Rev Robert Runcie, Bishop of St Albans, has spoken of "moments of creative genius" in Zeffirelli's production. It is yet to be seen whether primitive fundamentalism will extrude its spiky fingers here, as in the USA. When a film of the life of the prophet Mohammed was released comparable fundamentalist objections from Islam leaders forced the film-makers to change its title, at considerable cost to the advertising campaign, to *The Message*, to avoid mentioning the name of a deity.

This was the film which became an issue in the alarming terrorist incident, which began on 9 March 1977 in Washington. Hostages were held at the Jewish B'Nai B'Rith organisation, the Islamic centre and the city hall building by a Black Muslim sect. A vital request of the leader, "Imam" Hamaas Abdul Khalis, was the ban and physical removal

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of the film *Mohammed, the Messenger of God* from cinemas throughout the USA. It would be mistaken to make too easy an equation between terrorist incidents and religious cults, but it would also be wrong to so happily speak of the secularisation of society as to discount religious fanaticism as a disturbing feature in contemporary turbulence. Vengeance and political extremism were factors in this tragic example of the endemic violence of the modern world. Religious fanaticism can too easily become woven into this dark cloth.

The showing of *Jesus of Nazareth* on British television at Easter is unlikely to produce such disturbance. The title-role will be played by Robert Powell, for whom the task must have been hard work, eyeball with eyeball. Zeffirelli's grave doubts about casting the role were apparently allayed by the photogenic quality of Robert Powell's eyes. Could the glint in the eyes of General Motors' accountants have had anything to do with the fact that on second thoughts, "commercial sponsorship was thought inappropriate"? Lord Grade of Elstree seems to have had no such qualms. He has elegantly said of potential sponsors: "We got 'em queuing up." For ATV *Jesus of Nazareth* may prove a happy combination of pleasure and profit. Lord Grade has apparently said of the film: "I hope it will be profitable. But it depends how you count profits. There can be profits from glory." And power?

PRAY TIME

A Muslim teacher has sought to have his leisure-time activity of prayer officially recognised, by claiming unfair treatment over the time he spent praying during school hours. The Master of the Rolls, Lord Denning, stated at a court of appeal, that "it would do the Muslim community—or any other minority group—no good if they were to be given preferential treatment over the great majority of people." Mr Ahmed, the Muslim teacher in the case, had resigned his full-time teaching post at a Roman Catholic primary school in protest at being told by the Inner London Education Authority that if he wished to absent himself for 45 minutes of prayer every Friday afternoon he could only be employed on a part-time basis for four and half days a week.

All groups in society should be given equivalent

freedoms, and that would include the contractual arrangements an individual is able to make over his work and leisure pursuits. But how would a headmaster respond to a member of staff making regular requests for time off to practise Zen meditation? The tedium and frustration of many jobs, including perhaps sometimes teaching, is such that many people might wish to pray for the hours to pass more quickly; this might legitimately be done silently, but what employer would offer time off for the purpose?

COME OUT, MARY WHITEHOUSE

"Come Out Mary Whitehouse" was the title of a talk given by the editor of *The Freethinker* to the Hampstead group of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality. His talk concluded: "The attack on *Gay News* for blasphemous libel is in line with a long and dishonourable tradition of Christian persecution of homosexuality. The Judeo-Christian culture is at the root of the false view of homosexuality as a corrupting disease. The city of Sodom has suffered centuries of deliberately distorted press relations, as a means of attacking homosexuality. St Paul should be the patron saint of an army of Christian queer bashers.

"Today two attitudes can be identified within Church groups. Some, not before time and one would hope shamefacedly, are attempting a more sympathetic reappraisal. But this is often patronising and of the we-are-all-sinners type of approach. *Pity the Odd Man Out* was the sad title of a recent sympathetic article on homosexuality in the *Church Times*, by the retired Bishop of Wakefield, the Right Rev Eric Treacy.

"Some, such as members of the Nationwide Festival of Light, in the face of widely liberalised attitudes in society, are attempting a vicious and absurd return of persecution. Humanists can only deplore this and the ridiculous revival of blasphemous libel charges which are also involved. We say to Mary Whitehouse come out, come clean and admit that such archaic victimisation is inhumane and wrong."

● The trial of the editor of "Gay News", Denis Lemon, for blasphemous libel will take place at the Old Bailey on 4 July 1977. John Mortimer is to lead the defence and the trial is expected to last two weeks. Denis Lemon has said that it is an enormous relief to know that a date has been set at last. "Gay News" needs £20,000 to defend the case, and a defence appeal has already raised £7,000. Mrs M. Whitehouse has refused to reveal the sources of her legal expenses.

BOOKS

THE FREETHINKER, BOUND VOLUME 96 (1976).
G. W. FOOTE & Co, £3.00 plus 47p postage.

If the world were a more rational place than it is, *The Freethinker* would be called a pillar of society. It really is a splendid organ. The issue for January 1976 must surely be a classic. We start the year with the telling and cutting observation that among MP's who voted in favour of a Bill proposing capital punishment for terrorists were John Biggs-Davison and Jill Knight, prominent campaigners for religion and the "sanctity of life", that is compulsory pregnancy. Barbara Smoker gives the game away on the Roman Catholic church's suicidal abandonment of the old Latin mass which it had used for four hundred years, and which was compulsory until recently—now it is compulsory not to use it. What a wonderful thing, to keep a whole army in step, even when it is busy disappearing up its own back passage. Malcolm Potts, the humanist doctor from the world Planned Parenthood Federation, describes the religious opposition to birth control in Ireland, where it contributes to keeping that country divided. He describes simply and movingly the human side of the fight, with Mrs Mary McGee in the van, a woman with an obstetric case history such that she was a living embodiment of the Catholic Church's preference to see a woman die rather than use contraception.

More about the Catholics comes with the welcome news that after years of being the fastest growing church in England, the Catholic church is now one of the fastest declining. In South America, however, the church has been sustained by huge subsidies from the CIA.

Some people like to think of *The Freethinker* as a single minded organ of bigotry. This they would find not so, if they would only read it. The January issue singles out the Methodists for praise for their open-mindedness, and in particular their humanitarian attitude to abortion. The Archbishop of Canterbury, too, comes in for praise for his rejection of the death penalty. Peter Cadogan calls for a sense of the sacred in characteristically vigorous and plangent tones.

Most of you will be regular readers of *The Freethinker*, and will think that you know it. You should come back to it after a couple of years absence, as I have. What a sense of light, air, honesty and energy the paper has! That sort of level of content and relevance was kept up every month for only ten pence. It's little short of a miracle.

Professor G. A. Wells has become a steady contributor in recent years, and kept up his flow of articles on what you might call a secularist eschatology of the New Testament in what I hope publishers will learn to call "The Holy Bible", and

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The Freethinker printed a reply to one of his articles on Jesus's moral teaching by a lecturer at St David's, Lampeter, the famous Welsh religious college. It is always a pleasure to read George Wells, and although he is never hard to understand, he seems to adopt an extremely lucid and easy style for *The Freethinker*. Truly, organs have lives of their own.

I liked the theory, put later in the year by Barbara Smoker, that the present Pope is so undermining the accumulated authority of centuries of the Roman Catholic Church that he may as well be recognised for the Protestant he really is. How long, I wondered, before the slogan "No Pope Here" appears on the gable end of the Vatican, and the Red Hand of Ulster flies over St Peter's, Rome?

New religions too, get their share of *The Freethinker* laser, in particular the so-called Moonies and their combination of modern and mediaeval habits. Full marks to Paul Rose, MP, for his efforts in exposing the effects of this church and for helping those who have been lucky to escape, and those who are unlucky enough to have sons or daughters caught up in the cult.

The antics and irrationalities of our politicians, and more importantly our self appointed moral makers like Mrs Whitehouse are kept in constant view, while the book reviews keep us in touch with the latest literature which an alert secular humanist ought to read, or at least to know about.

I really cannot tell you what a tonic it was opening these pages on the tube, going home dog tired one night. I'm converted, and am taking out a subscription forthwith.

CHRISTOPHER MACY

HUMANISM by H. J. Blackham. Harvester Press. £5.95.

It is always a pleasure to see new books on humanism, especially when they are written by someone who, at his best, writes as beautifully as he speaks and who is probably the most influential figure and interesting personality in modern humanism. It is, however, a little surprising that, at a period of decline in the British Humanist Association, Harold Blackham's Pelican Original on *Humanism*, first published in 1968, should be republished in hardback form by a new publisher. The Harvester Press edition is described in the blurb as "a revised, updated account based on the successful edition of the book in 1968." In fact, the original text is used throughout with the exception of fewer than 50 lines of updating, though there is some amendment

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of the blurb, an addendum to the bibliography and—the only significant change—a new and fascinating Introduction.

From the updating it emerges that since 1968 the International Humanist and Ethical Union has lost Denmark, Japan, the Philippines and Nigeria and gained Finland, Ireland, New Zealand and Yugoslavia; the *Ethical Record* of South Place Ethical Society has been dropped in favour of the *Humanist* (founded 1927) of the American Humanist Association; the BHA Working Party for Social Action has entered history; the Dutch Humanist League claims more professional counsellors and fewer volunteers; Holland has joined Britain in housing elderly humanists (the only worthwhile initiative of the Ethical Union); man is no longer just alone but alone “in the Universe”; the book has ceased to be “an important contribution to our understanding of this rational morality which, though age-old, has a new face today and a hold on the future”.

In 1968, of course, BHA humanism was still in the swinging sixties, when Mr Blackham was confidently forecasting a membership in six figures and humanist premises in every major centre of population in the UK. Fortunately, now that the sober seventies have descended on Prince of Wales Terrace, these forecasts were not, as far as I know, committed to print. Alas, the things wrong with this book are rather more serious.

On the positive side, it is written with grace and lucidity. As the distillation of a lifetime of devotion to philosophy and practical affairs, it is richly leavened with valuable insights into human nature and contains the best short account I know of the development of humanist thought from the ancient Greeks to the eighteenth century. Those who think of Mr Blackham as the master of convolution will be agreeably surprised by javelin thrusts like “morality as a universal absolute is a pernicious myth”; “life is always an untidy and risky business”; “the cult of an open mind and talk of a disinterested quest for truth is usually cant, and invites a good spit”; “science easily becomes the new superstition”; “love my neighbour as myself . . . is a stupid requirement”; “moral education is primarily social experience”; “there is an essential combination of practical atheism with an agnostic temper in humanism”; “a society that is held together by the fear of hell and the hope of heaven is not a company of men and women to which it would be safe or congenial to belong.” Would that the whole book were as satisfactory.

Three possible books could have been written by a Director of the BHA on humanism: (1) an

epistle of uplift, softly selling humanism as an alternative to religion which will give peace of mind through self-knowledge and a dynamic for social action through a feeling of at-one-ment with all humanity; (2) a “theological” text gathering the various philosophical strands within humanism and threading them into a coherent world-view for modern man; (3) an historical and organisational manual of the activities of humanists in opposing religious obscurantism and advancing law reform and civil liberties. Contrary to what many people may think, I should have no objection to (1) or (2) so long as they were well done and did not include knocking copy against (3). Mr Blackham appears to have tried to follow all three approaches and has, in my view, got lost down all of them, especially (3). For, at the end of the road, we are faced with drooping uplift, shallow philosophy and bogus history.

What went wrong? Was there an unreasonable desire by readers (as interpreted by publishers) to get three books for the price of one? Was the author too impartial for (1) and (2) and too partial for (3)? Or has he read too much and not thought analytically enough about basic questions of politics, ethics, psychology and other concerns underlying both religion and humanism? To go fully into all these issues would take a book at least as long as the one under review. So I must confine myself to the broadest generalisations. The guise of (1) is perhaps thinnest, though *Humanism* begins with a personal testimony, ends with a question-and-answer session, and has quite a lot in between about counselling, “the humanist himself” and human living as “a work or art” (unfortunately compared with contemporary art). Further, Mr Blackham set out to become, and became, Stanton Coit’s successor in the Ethical Church. This is a little surprising when we read that he was, from the start, “bothered by the moralism of the Ethical Movement” and that “morality as a universal absolute is a pernicious myth”. This myth is at the heart of Ethical Culture. So it is hardly to be wondered at that some old adherents contemplated a visit to the Court of Chancery when the assets of the Ethical Church (West London Ethical Society) passed via the Ethical Union to the BHA, which may be equally moralistic but subscribes to NSS views on the social origins of morality. Moreover, an epistle on uplift must avoid historical and philosophical analysis and not raise issues of the “futility” of our evanescent lives especially when the answer damns life with faint praise. Coming from a philosopher, the book is probably even more disappointing as (2). It begins by asserting that “humanism proceeds from an assumption that man is on his own and this life is all and an assumption of responsibility for one’s own life and for the life of mankind”. Later it says the first assumption “cannot be established once for all for one and all:

these are not scientifically verifiable propositions." Personally, I would contend that they are, if the implications of theism and "life" are precisely defined; though this will not disturb the determined believer. But the first assumption is surely different from the second whatever one thinks about science, and needs special justification if it isn't to appear completely subjective and arbitrary. Like most contemporary humanists, the author does not in the direction of science, but chiefly in relation to the theory of evolution rather than to neurophysiology, which is more subversive to religious belief, free will and mystical theories of ethics and aesthetics. It is more surprising that frequent mention of the death of natural theology should be made without outlining how Kant killed it, and that the absolutist claims of Christianity should be rejected without reference to comparative religion. Christian objections to the "incredible and intolerable" humanist claim that "the world and human life are products of chance" cannot be answered satisfactorily without some account of probability theory, scientific "accidents" and the exponential power of genetic complexity to produce species variations, as Bronowski demonstrated in *The Ascent of Man*. If a "humanistic" concentration on traditional literary and philosophical concerns is unlikely to produce a satisfactory humanist "theology" in a technological age, it is less likely to produce a satisfactory history, and *Humanism* is least satisfactory as (3) from the nineteenth century on.

From that time, modern humanism was shaped more by organisations and their organs than by the "humanist classics" Mr Blackham makes so much of. Yet there is little or no mention of the contribution of Owenism, Chartism, the co-operative movement, Cometicism, the republican movement, the socialist movement and the National Secular Society. Even his choice of influential humanist writers of the last century is peculiarly donnish: Mill, Carlyle, Ruskin, Spencer, Huxley, Arnold, Morris, Grote. Mill is probably the only one of them who was and is highly influential in the organised humanist movement; though today it should be acknowledged that *On Liberty* opposed the Welfare State and utilitarianism is under a philosophical cloud as the basis of ethics. I could find no mention of Paine, Carlyle, Reade, George, Buckle, Draper, White, Lecky, Froude, Taylor, Robertson, Foote, Ingersoll, Besant, Büchner, Haeckel, Blatchford, McCabe, Cohen and a host of others influential in their own day though now forgotten. Some of this singular selection of humanist classics springs from a desire to make non-persons of those "fiddling sour old tunes" against religious obscurantism, but much of it seems simply to reflect a general air of unreality and a willingness to accept the pious platitude in place of the constructive contribution, which have been recurring features of

modern "full-blooded humanism". Glowing tributes are paid to Periclean Athens, which practised slavery, suppressed women and persecuted heretics, and to "the open society", when campaigns to make it meaningful, involving abortion, euthanasia, censorship or ecclesiastical privilege, are described as "border warfare" that "looks more like making a nuisance than making history". Even more astonishingly, persistent cruelty and exploitation of others are equated with victimless crimes like alcoholism and drug addiction; technocrats and bureaucrats are described as "the ultimate enemy", and humanism is deliberately restricted to the "free world". Small wonder that, briefed by such a textbook, "full-blooded humanists" set up a Study Group on World Order and then proceeded to support "Biafra" against Nigeria.

DAVID TRIBE

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN—LENNY BRUCE! *The Ultimate Biography* by Albert Goldman from the journalism of Lawrence Schiller. Picador, £1.50.

This book is not so much a biography of "America's No 1 Vomic" as an evocation of his spirit. The past two decades have seen a lot of young writers, musicians and film-makers rejecting the uptight, materialistic ethos of middle America and speeding off along the freeways in search of a more honest lifestyle and mode of expression. But these "easy riders" have all managed to keep their "cool"—and let their public keep theirs. Unlike Kerouac, Dylan and Philip Roth though, Lenny Bruce met his audience face to face, eyeball to eyeball even. Where others communicate and entertain, Bruce used direct confrontation and assault.

If there was great tension between Bruce and his audience and his enemies—the narcotic squads, the censors, the British Home Office who had deported him on grounds of obscenity—there was an even greater tension within himself. The irony was that the man who set himself so far beyond the pale was in reality unable to break free from his lower-middle-class Jewish background. Though he aimed, and surely managed, "to make his audience sweat through their deodorants", Bruce, according to this book, felt constrained to "bathe or shower three times a day, swill glass after glass of mineral water . . ." While pouring scorn on accepted values and mores, "He puts people in pigeonholes and he doesn't like them popping out unexpectedly."

This paradox is captured with superb economy in "A Day in the Life—A Reconstruction" the first of the 13 pieces of journalism that make up this book. As its name suggests, this chapter moves through a typical day in Bruce's life, one of the less fraught days. In a swift but "spaced-out" tempo it moves from the secret injections in the hotel bedroom, through an actual performance, with Bruce on fine form, teasing and worrying his audience. Then on to "the ghastly moment of parturi-

tion from the audience, the umbilical snip that every comic dreads. You've killed the people, wiped them out, realised your dream of total power. Every gag, every laugh has carried you higher and higher. But when you start to come down, you realise that you're a million miles from reality . . ."

If the book were to be judged on the merits of this chapter alone, it would be a great work. I found "A Day in the Life" totally compelling, its style, masterly in itself, ideally suited to the subject. The material it contains must have been selected with great care, but far from being contrived, it is fluent and haunting. In fairness, "Jew Boy", the analysis of Bruce's boyhood, and, by extension, the stifling possessiveness of so many Jewish families, is both sharp and compassionate. But this is territory well covered by writers such as Saul Bellow and Philip Roth. It is essential in explaining Lenny's character, but lacks the freshness of the first chapter.

For the rest, it is a jumble of chapters which chronicle Bruce's battles with the police, his arrests and trials, his attempt to give up hard drugs, his broken marriage, his illness, and of course the development of his career. On reading these chapters, many of which seemed to duplicate each other, I became confused and finally bored. I got no clear overall picture of Bruce's life and career, and was frequently irritated by the self-conscious use of underground slang and Yiddish. I felt as though the editor was torn between trying to ape the style of the first chapter, and attempting to use a fresh approach. Possibly the writers, were disconcerted by the self-destructive energy of their subject. Lenny Bruce burned himself out. Perhaps any honest book about him must suffer the same fate.

VERA LUSTIG

The Sex Haters

(and they are the majority) it is insufferable to be subjected to a censorship tailored by religious adherents. It contravenes freedom of thought—a freedom protected by article 9 of the Council of Europe's convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, which this country signed back in 1950. We do not need merely to resist the putting down of sex. We need to go over to the offensive. The enemies are plain: the so-called Responsible Society, the so-called Nationwide Festival of Light, and many others of that ilk. Let's create a Worldwide Festival of Delight, and rout the sex-haters and sex-suppressors. It will need all our effort though. The pendulum is strongly swinging back into the age of inhibition.

● Copies of "Uncensored" (20p for one issue) may be obtained from DLAS, 18 Brewer Street, London W1R 4AS.

ABORTION BILL'S PROGRESS

Anti-abortionists won a small victory on 25 February when William Benyon's Abortion (Amendment) Bill passed its Second Reading in the House of Commons. But they are unlikely to see it reappear unless the Government gives way under pressure and allows extra time.

Controversial Private Members' Bills, such as Mr Benyon's have to make an almost impossible journey through Commons procedure. So many simple unopposed Bills have jumped in front of Benyon's Bill into the queue for the Standing Committees that the Abortion Bill is unlikely to get into committee before the end of May. From then on, the only date left for Report Stage and Third Reading is 15 July, so it is vital to the Bill's success that the Government allow extra time. Hopefully, the extra time will not be given, as David Ennals, Secretary of State for Health, has made it quite clear that the Government do not support the Bill, but Michael Foot, Leader of the House, has already received hundreds of letters from supporters of the Bill asking him to give way.

The pro-abortion lobby certainly cannot afford to be complacent. Such is the ferocity of the anti-abortion groups, that the Government might not stand firm under their weight.

But the Bill will certainly come under close scrutiny in committee as each of the eleven clauses are looked at in meticulous detail. Even Mr Benyon recognises that the Bill is loosely drafted and needs correction and the abortion supporters on the committee will make sure that every possible avenue is explored to prolong the discussion and hold up the Report Stage as long as possible. Points which will be most closely examined are: police access to records of abortion clinics or referral agencies; the upper time limit for termination; and the several clauses which will wreck the abortion charities.

JANE ROE

A group of 15 children have been refused confirmation by a Roman Catholic Bishop, Dr Philbin, Bishop of Down and Connor. He refused on the grounds that the children attended state schools, which, because of the divided situation in Ulster, meant Protestant Schools. The nearest Roman Catholic School is 14 miles away.

A protest by a group of Roman Catholic and Protestant mothers, described as a "pray-in", was held outside a Catholic Church in a normally untroubled area. The women are members of a pressure group All Children Together urging for greater attempts to desegregate the schooling of children in Ulster. One mother, who has described such demonstrations with regret as distasteful, said she hoped it would "draw attention to a very serious problem." A spokesman said in Belfast that there would be no comment on the demonstration.

SPAIN

A survey of student opinion suggests that the strict Roman Catholic attitude to sexual matters may have a limited future. The research was carried out by a team of psychologists questioning students at the University of Barcelona.

The Catholic Church uses its strong position to oppose abortion, but 90 per cent of the students approved of abortion. Homosexuality is forbidden in Spain, but a quarter of the students admitted having had some form of homosexual relationship. Although contraceptives are banned by the Catholic Church the use of contraceptives was widespread.

The liberal attitudes of these students was emphasised by 95 per cent favouring divorce, 40 per cent entirely opposing marriage, and only 5 per cent disapproving of sex before marriage. The researchers have warned that these views may not be typical of Spanish young people. They are certainly not typical of officially encouraged attitudes in Spain, but student views can sometimes be the spearhead of the outlook of the next generation.

YUGOSLAVIA

New laws affecting the teaching of religious education are in preparation in Yugoslavia. Children will only be able to attend religious lessons if they themselves and both parents agree. Previously the consent of the child and one parent was needed. Time off for Christmas and other such "privileges" will not be allowed. The official newspaper, *Oslobodjenje*, says these laws are intended to promote religious freedom and stop the religious community having a harmful influence on Yugoslav society.

FRANCE

A plan for education, published by the Socialist Opposition party in France, shows deep hostility to the position of the Catholic Church in education. Education and religion have been entirely separated in France since the beginning of the century, and Catholic schools are therefore automatically independent. The Socialist Party plan urges the nationalisation of all private schools to destroy their privileged position. According to their manifesto: "Private education has ceaselessly solicited and obtained exorbitant privileges without giving anything in return." About two million children attend Catholic schools, against a State school population of ten and a half million, and there is resentment at the exclusive and privileged nature of the Catholic schools.

"Due to pressure on space there is no Living Faith today." *Surrey Advertiser*, 18th February 1977.

In your last issue Mrs L. W. A. Findlay fired a broadside at "Freethinker" contributors in general but reserved her choicest shots for myself. Much of her criticism with regard to my article would have been blunted had there been space for the full text of my article. The issue of my dealings with the Church was not nearly so cut and dried as it appears in the published version.

The worst omission was the story of my entering the ministry. My reasons were mainly economic ones—very pressing in the "hungry thirties"—and had little to do with the sifting of Christian evidences or indeed with any overpowering convictions. An important omission occurred also in the story of my leaving the Church. In one sense, that was sheer economic folly, when I had invested so many years in achieving my position. It was something that might have been delayed for some years longer (one's self-interest again has to be stressed) but for a family disagreement. I had some relatives living at my expense at the parsonage. Leaving the Church was therefore a way of solving two problems at once.

Never at any stage did I think the Church had all the answers, though I had reason to be grateful to the said body for providing me with the educational dynamite that I have since used in opposing the faith. I do not think I was indifferent to suffering nor ignorant of the follies of mankind until the problems came home to me personally. One has to admit, however, that immediate personal experiences are always more compelling than those which happen to other people removed in time and place and which tend to remain on the mere fringes of one's consciousness.

GEORGE JAEGER

OBITUARIES

MR W. ARMSTRONG

We regret to announce the death of William Armstrong, Edinburgh. He was a *Freethinker* reader and a member of the National Secular Society for many years.

MR A COLES

Arthur Coles, who died recently at the age of 65, was an active member of the Progressive League for many years. He was a keen amateur musician and had a deep love for the countryside. He organised rambles for the PL. There was a secular committal ceremony at the Breakspear Crematorium, Ruislip, on 7 March.

MRS L. STUPART

Lena Stupart, who has died in her eighties, read *The Freethinker* and retained her membership of the National Secular Society until the end of her life.

Mrs Pat Knight, member of the National Secular Society Executive Committee and contributor to the columns of "The Freethinker", has given birth to a daughter. Congratulations to her and Jack Knight, also an EC member.

PUBLICATIONS

- The Presumption of Atheism, Antony Flew £3.50 (26p). Honest to Man, Margaret Knight, £3.75 (26p). Humanism, Barbara Smoker, 50p, (9p). The Longford Threat to Freedom, Brigid Brophy, 10p, (7p). The Right to Die, Charles Wilshaw, 25p, (9p). An Introduction to Secular Humanism, Kit Mouat, 45p, (9p). What Humanism is About, Kit Mouat, 53p, (26p). The Dead Sea Scrolls, John Allegro, 95p (17p). Morality Without God, Chapman Cohen, 5p, (7p). Woman and Christianity, Chapman Cohen, 5p, (7p). Thomas Paine, Chapman Cohen, 15p, (7p). Religious Roots of the Taboo on Homosexuality, John Lauritsen, 20p, (9p). The Absurdities of Christian Science, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). The Jesuits: Religious Rogues, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). How Christianity Triumphed, Joseph McCabe, 12p (7p). Phallic Elements in Religion, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). The Fraud of Spiritualism, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). Legends of Saints and Martyrs, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). Morals in Ancient Babylon, Joseph McCabe, 12p, (7p). 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Annan Report

understanding, even if they themselves have no religious beliefs. We must be grateful."

The Freethinker can only consider this chapter of the Annan report a combination of the inadequate, the inept, the confusing, the obscure, and the tragi-comic. The NSS and RPA Press Statement concluded by stating that "it is not sufficient for religious advisory committees to be joined by a few members from non-Christian religions, or for religious broadcasting departments to produce occasional programmes with a wider appeal. We believe that broadcasting on philosophical and ethical issues should be completely independent of religious interests, and that talks and discussions on religious subjects should be as open and balanced as those on social or political subjects. Specific religious programmes of the old kind, such as services and sermons, should be clearly identified, and synthetic programmes of the new kind, which disguise their message in deceptive ways, should be swept off the air."

● **Barbara Smoker** commented on the religious broadcasting section of the Annan Report on LBC radio's programme "Sunday Supplement" on 27 March.

Schoolchildren Dazed

7. What a raging bore. I am an atheist, and a teacher babbling away at morning assembly is no more uplifting spiritually to me than adventures of Andy Pandy.

As I said earlier, I am totally opposed to morning assemblies in schools, certainly State schools. The sooner they are dropped, the better.

The Annual Dinner of the National Secular Society took place on Saturday 2 April. It was well attended and much enjoyed. A full report will be published in the next issue of "The Freethinker".

THE FREETHINKER

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EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove. Sunday, 1 May, 4.30 pm. Tea Party followed by Annual General Meeting.

Belfast Humanist Group. Meetings on the second Thursday of the month, 8 pm. 8a Grand Parade Castlereagh. Secretary: Wendy Wheeler, 30 Cloyne Crescent, Monkstown, Co Antrim, telephone Whiteabbey 66752.

Hampstead Humanist Society. The Henderson Court Club, 102 Fitzjohn's Avenue, London NW3. Wednesday, 20 April, 8 pm. Jim Herrick (Editor, "The Freethinker"): "Godot, Galileo and Kung: Humanism and the Arts".

Humanist Holidays. Easter at Southsea and Summer Holiday at Ross-on-Wye (small hotel and camping site). No single rooms at either centre. Details: Mrs M. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, telephone (01) 642 8796.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, 28 April, 7.45 pm. "Buberian Dialogue on Religious Education".

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

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

Muswell Hill Humanist Group. 40 Chandos Road, East Finchley, London N2. W. McIlroy: "Humanism in the Seventies".

Worthing Humanist Group. Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade, Worthing. Sunday, 24 April, 5.30 pm. Professor Sang: "Race and Intelligence?"

JAMES RANDI

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