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## YESTERDAY'S SEX EDUCATION FOR TOMORROW'S CHILDREN

"Tomorrow's Parents" is the title of a recently published new booklet on sex education. Its authors are Dr Ernest Claxton, formerly principal assistant secretary to the British Medical Association and the Rev James Fry, vicar of Chalk, Gravesend, who teaches at a comprehensive school. The booklet has been widely criticised for its mixture of moral exhortation, Christian platitudes and misinformation.

The publishers are Grosvenor Press, and the booklet costs 25p and must be subsidised. Two undisclosed charities are said to be contributing to costs, one a Christian concern and the other a general philanthropic organisation. The booklet's extraordinarily perverted approach leaves no surprise that the funders prefer anonymity.

Dr Ernest Claxton, co-author, recently spoke at a Silver Jubilee event. He said that the best form of contraception was the word "No" and apparently complained: "Young people are actually being told that sex is fun and that everyone can have it. We talk about the closed shop. Well, let's have a closed shop on sex for teenagers." The gathering, on "How free is our freedom?", was organised by Moral Re-armament and a group of women, who got together the Houswives Declaration two years ago.

The sex education booklet is in the form of letters and conversations between two teenage twins, John and Jan, and their godfather, Uncle Frank, a doctor. After a pompous cascade of advice about the dangers of sex and the virtues of discipline, ("We older people don't realise how much we must exasperate the young with our patronising pomposity!"), the twins no longer squabble, keep their rooms tidy and successfully pass their O levels. Some psychiatrists have warned that the booklet could harm young people by producing psychological difficulties over sexual relations.

Suzie Hayman writes about "Tomorrow's parents",

—or how to make your child a psycho-sexual patient without really trying:

"As you know, you can't enjoy a game, whether it is ludo, football or tennis unless you obey the rules. Life's like that too. A business or country won't run properly unless the rules are kept. We must know what they are and what happens if they are broken. In football, a player is booked or warned and then sent off if he doesn't play fair. In life—for life is a bit like a game in some ways—the play is spoiled and the players suffer if the rules aren't kept."

"You know, life, life its rather like opening a tin of sardines. We are all looking for the key. Some of us think we've found that key, don't we? We roll back the lid of the sardine tin of life, we reveal the sardines, the riches of life therein, and we get them out, we enjoy them. But, you know, there's always a little piece in the corner you can't get out."

### No Joke

One of the above quotes is from Alan Bennett's "Take a Pew" sketch from the 1963 revue *Beyond the Fringe*. The other is from *Tomorrow's Parents; Life Sex and Purpose—Missing factors in sex education*, by Dr Ernest Claxton and The Rev James Fry. My first reaction on reading this pamphlet was to howl with laughter and reach for the phone to ring and congratulate Alan on his marvellous spoof. And then with a mounting sense of horror I realised it was no joke.

The most insidious aspect of this slim volume is that, like the curate's egg, it is excellent in parts—as moral treatises go. One can hardly fault a concerned insistence that "all should practice the idea of caring for each other, helping one another and

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contributing to the whole." One can hardly fault their ideal of the family nor their argument that stable, loving families produce balanced, happy individuals. But the constructive parts of this booklet are ruined by an arrogant assumption of a monopoly on such concern, by the authors' blinkered belief in a code of morals having necessarily to be "Christian". A semantic quibble, perhaps, but these two committed Christians have undoubtedly fallen for their own myth; not only that "Christian" means "one who lives a good life and is always ready to help others; unselfish, charitable, willing to forgive;" but that those characteristics are the exclusive property of those professing Christianity. No wonder England seems a bleak and inhospitable place, when a falling proportion of the population are keen Christians. And so much for the rest of us, cruel, selfish, wicked, nasty agnostics, humanists, atheists, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists etc, that we are!

### Homily and Platitudes

The authors also find it difficult to conceive of a lifestyle that is not suburban, educated and middle class. When the booklet's protagonist is asked "... you described what goes into an ideal home. But most of the boys at school haven't homes like that", he responds with the charming little tale of the university student from just such a home (sic) who found God and brought love and honesty and "a new relationship between them" to his hated and feared father. Presumably if you live in Tower Hamlets and work on a building site you will have to go on hating and fearing your father and living in a less than ideal home.

The principles behind the pamphlet are difficult to decipher, concealed as they are under a welter of friendly, jolly platitudes and funny little anecdotes. The homily is delivered through the letters and discussions between the 14-year-old twins, Jan and John (where have I seen them before?) and their kindly doctor Godfather, Uncle Frank. Most of the discussion is unremarkable, if stultifyingly boring. What horrifies me is that two reasonably intelligent 14 year olds can be seriously presented as being totally incapable of spotting the blatant illogicality of Uncle Frank's arguments. When asked "But isn't contraception a good thing? it would prevent unwanted children and there must be some way of counteracting the population explosion", he answers: "Increasing population is a world problem. It specially affects developing countries. So far educational schemes there have not proved very effective and the 'pill' is too costly for wide distribution. But you are quite right, an answer must be found for the population explosion. I am sure that something other than dishing out contraceptives, providing pills or doing sterilising operations is needed." Having recovered one's breath, and charitably decided that Uncle Frank is not telling deliberate untruths, he just doesn't read the

right literature and has therefore missed all the reports on the world-wide success of many family planning programmes, one asks—what is Uncle Frank's and Caxton and Fry's answer to overpopulation? "Mahatma Gandhi, the great Indian guru and leader, was concerned about the dangers of widespread use of contraceptives and sterilisation. His grandson, Rajmohan Gandhi, says quite truly that husbands and wives can live a disciplined life together and set a pattern for purity . . . people can understand self-discipline better than the techniques of contraception and the invitation to lust which birth control provides."

And there it is, in a nutshell. Caxton and Fry's message—the missing factor in sex education. "Contraception, the pill . . . with real purity of living and the right relationships one need never have to bother about them."

Caxton and Fry fall into the same trap as K. Kavanagh, author of *Sound Sex Education*, who quoted Winnicott (out of context, naturally) on the need to protect children, i.e. small children from premature sex education, to back up his wish to protect "children" i.e. adolescents. To the Christian a teenager is an infant, as an adult is a child. Uncle Frank is proud of his need for God's protection and guidance; Jan and John are frightened and bewildered when "our teachers say we must decide things for ourselves." They demand rules and orders. "We'll give it a try but we'll need help to keep up the standard . . . What can one do then . . . Yes but what do I do? How do I do it?" and so on.

### Moralistic Writings

Implicit in all moralistic writings of this ilk—and in *Tomorrows Parents*, often explicit, is the belief that sex education that includes contraceptive information encourages promiscuous behaviour; that not to expressly condemn premarital relationships is to encourage them. What a depressing and pessimistic view of society, that without curbs, bars and halters we will all fall instantly prey to our animalistic lusts and passions. To be asked to exercise free will, to make up one's own mind about sexual—or any other—activity, is obviously either terrifying or incomprehensible to the God-fearing Christian. Uncle Frank's need for direction, his dogmatic insistence that God and the love of God are the only keys to life and to sex education, provide the sad and sorry clue to Caxton and Fry's apparent illiteracy when it comes to non-religious sex education. They insist such literature says "That young people *should* (my italics) experiment sexually before marriage." This in spite of such statements as "There is no reason at all to feel that you must have sex because you think everybody else is doing it . . . sleeping around when you are young . . .

(Continued on page 79)



# Secularization and Society

CHRISTOPHER MOREY

In this article Christopher Morey describes and discusses some of the ideas of Bryan Wilson, a sociologist who has written widely on the subject of secularization and cults. These ideas were set forth in the Riddell Memorial Lectures, 1974, (recently published). The lectures analyse the social significance of the increasing secularization of society, the place of cults in the West and the Third World, and the place of cults in a "counter-culture". The article also considers Humanism as a cult.

come problems (arising from secularization) that were far greater than any amalgamation of sects could cope with. The charismatic movement is seen as an aspect of ecumenism. Those that way inclined have united across denominational barriers, and significantly their bizarre enthusiasms have met with a mighty silence from the churches, who in previous generations would have poured on them the scorn they deserve. Organisational decline and theological uncertainty combine to make any religion, however extravagant, better than none.

The second lecture contrasted the social significance of the new cults in the West with that of those in the Third World. From the latter Dr Wilson took as examples three very different religions: the Kimbanguists in Zaire, Pentecostals in Chile, and Jehovah's Witnesses in Kenya. He shows how these movements are both socially constructive and contribute to secularization in these countries. Native beliefs (in the case of Chile, autocratically imposed Catholicism) easily give way in demoralized societies to cults that "communicate a new social ethic. That is to say, they emphasise qualities of personal integrity, and the transformation of individual consciousness; they prescribe the style of personal relationships; they socialise their members into an objective system of obligation and constraint."

## Religion a Leisure Activity

In contrast the new cults in the West operate in modern, highly specialised societies, where religion is no more, according to Dr Wilson, than an ill-organised, under-capitalised leisure activity. Far from tending towards a new culture and a new society, they concentrate on the individual or on the individual in a self-selected community—"the redemption of the self, by the self, for the self." All of them offer a "salvation" that is available quickly and easily, here and now. The examples he takes exemplify what he considers to be the three themes most prevalent among the new groups: the need for esoteric knowledge is exemplified by scientology; the achievement of "salvation" from liberating powers within oneself, by the human potential movement (that gamut of trendy pursuits from encounter groups to transcendental meditation); the communal ideal, by groups such as the Children of God.

Dr Wilson held out little hope for these cults in the long run. While lack of stability ("eternal verities") in society facilitates their development, it also effectively curtails their penetration of society. They tend to fail to hold subsequent generations. They fail to come to terms with the dominant

(Continued on page 79)



# Lord Houghton Speaks of Secularism and Politics at NSS Dinner

The Annual Dinner of the National Secular Society took place at the Pavours Arms last month. Over 100 people attended this thoroughly enjoyable event. The guest of honour was Lord Douglas Houghton, who reminded the audience that the days of oratory have not quite vanished with his speech on secularism and politics.

Mrs Lena Jeger, Member of Parliament for Camden, Holborn and St Pancras South, proposed the toast to the guest of honour. Mrs Jeger was on the staff of the *Manchester Guardian* in the fifties, and has been associated with progressive causes throughout her career as an MP. She was previously the representative for the Camden area on the London County Council and has shown a fierce loyalty to her locality.

Mrs Jeger expressed great pleasure in being given the opportunity to propose the toast to Lord Houghton, who had been a close friend of hers for 25 years. Although people might have varying ideas about the value of the House of Lords, she had no doubt that, as long as there was such a building, men such as Lord Houghton should be there talking sense, along with the bishops.

Pope's *Essay on Man* was quoted as a tribute to Lord Houghton's achievements as an MP, in a period when achievement was not as easy as now:

"For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight;  
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

It was easy for members swept in on a more recent tide of progressive measures, to forget the earlier difficulties and fights. For instance, it was appropriate to remember a century back the suffering which Bradlaugh had endured in his process of becoming a member of the House. A striking and reassuring aspect, however, was the stalwart faith which his Northampton constituents showed in consistently voting him back. This showed their faith in a basic right of liberty—the right to do what other people think is right even if you disagree with it.

Many battles in the Commons have taken place over the matter of individual liberty for family planning and abortion law reform. This was part of a larger concept of human liberty—"woman's cause is man's." Mrs Jeger paid tribute to Lord and Lady Houghton's consistent concern not only with family rights and women's rights, but with the whole of the advancement of social justice. The night of 13 July 1967, when the third reading of the Abortion Bill was being awaited, was recalled and the importance of MPs following their

principles in such matters was emphasised. Nothing, Mrs Jeger suggested, was more contemptible than a politician failing to follow his principles, because of fears of the electorate's views. In proposing the toast to "Douglas and Vera" Mrs Jeger praised their consistent, tolerant and humane concern.

Lord Houghton's long political career has included 1949-74 as MP for Sowerby, high office in the Labour Government, close links with the TUC and a deep interest in the social services. He will also popularly be remembered for his regular broadcasts on the radio programme *Can I Help You?*

Lord Houghton said he was going to devote himself to the subject of secularism and politics in Parliament, a subject not sufficiently thought about. He felt the link with politics in Parliament was of crucial importance for the advancement of social causes.

## Brave Dissenting Tradition

Reminiscing about his childhood, (he had been born in 1898), he described how he had been brought up in a dissenting tradition, a brave tradition. His father, he remembered, had been a passive resister after the Education Act of 1903, and the regular annual 14 days in prison was a familiar family event. This dissenting tradition had been one of a struggle to fight against the entrenched position of the establishment, a tradition moving towards freedom of speech which was still qualified, as the box collecting money for the *Gay News* fund still showed.

Public attitudes have changed and politicians were less likely to have to go through the brutal character assassination which men such as Bradlaugh had experienced . . . "They broke that man. They killed him." What a proud record for Northampton to have allowed their MP to "do his own thing" in this way.

The strongest force for change in the last 30 to 40 years was that of the young. The revolution in social attitudes had been brought about partly by war and partly by the determination of young people not to accept ready-made principles.

The place of politics in Parliament was too little discussed in connection with changing social attitudes. There was far more discussion of Parliament and the press, Parliament and the media, and so on, than the place of politics in Parliament in reform and social change. It was in the nature of party politicians that they balked dealing with sensitive matters. Such matters are deliberately put down low on the agenda of trade union and political party conferences, thus avoiding discussion of policy in this area. A subject discussed becomes quickly part



of a policy, part of a manifesto, part of an obligation. It has to be fulfilled. Therefore the sensitive matters are kept at bay. Only the Communist Party has had a policy concerning issues of morality.

Morality should not be remitted to the theological sphere, having nothing to do with daily lives. Matters of moral sensitivity were kept out of politics by being described as a matter of private conscience. Conscience was a matter of deeply held personal conviction, not necessarily of religion, though this was apparently not good enough for the TUC.

It had always been his concern to see "Fair do's for the fair sex." He had been one of the first people to suggest family planning on the National Health Service in a broadcast on the radio. Keith Joseph and Barbara Castle were mentioned as figures from opposite sides of the House who had played their part in bringing this about. A measure of how far things had come could be seen by the fact that voluntary vasectomy was no longer a taboo subject. And things were still changing, a woman's charter was now being discussed in the TUC, though not yet elevated to a policy.

Lord Houghton lamented the part of some politicians who feared the electorate; people should not be untrue to themselves, on any subject. There is no political advantage in cowardice. It was too easy to be influenced by the rise of "Public Opinion". A notable feature of this public opinion today was the absence of a religious struggle. We are almost in danger of weakening under apathy in the face of an increasingly materialistic and secular society. There is now no stark religious confrontation (except in Ireland). Much of the opposition to reactionary moves in areas such as abortion now came from representatives of extreme aspects of socialism. Where were the Labour supporters?

### Parliamentary Procedure

It was important to take note of Parliamentary procedure. At the beginning of the century Parliamentary time had been in the hands of MPs. For instance MPs brought the question of what Gilbert called "the annual blister of the deceased wife's sister" to the Commons eleven times. It could now take a decade to move a private Bill at all. During Balfour's period as Prime Minister, Parliamentary time passed into the hands of the government and sessional order has ruled procedure ever since. Only part of Monday and Friday was set aside for private bills. This meant that the time given to issues by the Government was of great importance. Roy Jenkins had given extra time to several reform measures.

Now more than ever, it was necessary for secularists, humanists and all with progressive aims to apply their efforts to Parliament. The public could be receptive, the young could be receptive, but it could be felt that Parliament was irrelevant. It was

necessary to lobby Parliament as well as to express one's views on the streets. If we have a reactionary Government after this one, we shall have a rough time.

The young are essentially interested in causes not politics. We must absorb these causes into party political activity. Socialists must not be afraid of publicising burning issues of personal relationships. Many young people felt and regretted that the history of our culture was seen as one from nuclear family to nuclear weapons. It was essential to pay attention to politics in Parliament if this history was to be affected in the future.

After Lord Houghton had been warmly applauded, Peter Fryer proposed a toast to the National Secular Society. Peter Fryer is a writer who has charted crucial steps and amusing byways in the history of nineteenth century social attitudes and social reform. *The Birth Controllers* is a fascinating history of family planning; *Mrs Grundy* provides entertaining sidelights on Victorian double standards.

Referring to the centenary of the *Fruits of Philosophy* trial, Peter Fryer emphasised the importance of Freethinkers in the struggle for women's rights and family planning. The opposition had come vehemently from unmarried bishops, energetically from the medical profession, and from most socialists until a later stage. The despised infidels had stood up and struggled for these rights and were now carrying forward, if on a shoestring, the fight against obscurantism and injustice.

Denis Cobell, a member of the NSS Executive Committee, also a member of the Lewisham Humanist Group, and contributor to the columns of *The Freethinker*, proposed thanks on behalf of the NSS. He pointed out that not all the battles were won, that the NSS was still working hard as the "virile arm" of the humanist movement. An impending blasphemy trial, with the editors of *Gay News* in the dock, showed that the forces of reaction were still around.

In the chair was Barbara Smoker, who regaled the audience with entertaining anecdotes. She welcomed the wide variety of organisations represented, from right across the humanist movement, and also including the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, Abortion Law Reform Association, and Voluntary Euthanasia Society. She particularly welcomed the presence of the printers of *The Freethinker* and thanked them for their marvellous service, far beyond what could be reasonably expected. Also welcomed were Diane Munday, now working very hard in defence of the 1967 Abortion Act for which she had campaigned, and Harold Blackham who recently retired as President of the British Humanist Association, who is leaving London and who kindly agreed to say a few words.

● £34 was collected at the dinner for the defence of "Gay News fund."



# Results and Effects of the Bradlaugh-Besant Trial, 1877

EDWARD ROYLE

The narrative of the trial of Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant for publication of "Fruits of Philosophy" a century ago was vividly detailed by Edward Royle in his lecture at the centenary commemoration meeting organised by the National Secular Society on 13 April 1977 at Conway Hall. Dr Royle is Lecturer in History at the University of York and a specialist in the history of radical and secularist movements. In describing the background to the trial, Dr Royle referred to Edward Truelove, the veteran London bookseller who sold other birth control publications such as R. D. Owen's "Moral Physiology" and "Individual, Family, and National Poverty" by J. H. Palmer. These books, and also later "Fruits of Philosophy", were seized from Truelove and he learnt that the Society for the Suppression of Vice were behind the prosecution. (The source of the Bradlaugh-Besant prosecution was not disclosed.) Unlike Truelove, Bradlaugh and Besant were eventually acquitted on appeal and on a technicality. In this concluding extract from Edward Royle's lecture the implications and results of the trial are considered.

The results of the case were many, but they have often been exaggerated or misunderstood. The right of publication was not immediately vindicated, for Bradlaugh had not obtained a verdict in his favour. The cases against Edward Truelove still stood, and only in May 1878 did Bradlaugh succeed in getting a judgment that there was no case against Truelove for selling the *Fruits of Philosophy*—and then, again, only on a technicality. And at the Old Bailey on 8 May 1878, Truelove (then aged 69) was sentenced to four months and a fine of £50 for his earlier offences of selling the Owen and Palmer pamphlets. Mrs Besant also suffered legal consequences of the trial when in June 1878 she failed in her attempts to retain custody of her daughter Mabel. Her husband had used the Knowlton affair to remove Mabel from her mother.

The most important consequence of the trial was in its impact on birth-control advocacy. Marie Stopes argued in 1921 that the trial had damaged rather than helped the cause. She claimed that birth-control propaganda was increasingly winning the ear of society and that the effect of the Bradlaugh-Besant trial had been to identify birth control in the public mind with obscenity and atheism. Further, the emphasis which Bradlaugh had put upon Malthusian reasons for birth control had clouded the issue, for Stopes wished birth control to be advocated for its own sake. She was certainly right

that Malthusian ideas were not universally popular. On the one hand, Social Darwinists were beginning to argue that the struggle for life engendered by overpopulation was essential to the progress of the race, while Socialists insisted that to present birth control as the principal remedy for poverty was to draw attention away from the real cause which was the mal-distribution of resources within the capitalist system. This last point was most telling and still remains a relevant one. When Mrs Besant herself became a Socialist in 1884 she accepted it, but continued to urge that birth control was also necessary to the creation of a better society.

The identification of birth-control advocacy and Malthusian economic theory, however, was not so much the outcome of the trial itself as the work of the Malthusian League. Bradlaugh had founded such a society in 1863, but it was refounded in a more permanent way in July 1877 by Annie Besant with the help of Dr Charles Drysdale and Dr Alice Vickery (both of whom had given evidence for the defence at the trial). The League was principally concerned to stress the economic argument for birth control as a solution to the problem of poverty, and not until 1913 did it formally advertise techniques of contraception; and its president, Drysdale, had moved far from the traditional Liberalism of working-class Secularists when he argued that the corollary of state aid to the poor was that the state should "provide that no person shall be born without its consent". This was a far cry from the tone given to birth-control advocacy by Marie Stopes and the twentieth-century movement, and the League was dissolved in 1927.

## The Fragility of Liberty

The trial is also important because it stood not at the triumphant end of a battle for freedom of publication, but near the beginning of a renewed contest. Edward Truelove's was the first of a new series of petty persecutions which punctuated the history of the next few decades. Unless one accepts Marie Stopes's claim that the trial was itself the cause and not the symptom of this trend, then one can see that Bradlaugh had been right in seizing upon an important issue when he saw that the right to publish must be defended at all costs. The trial served, as have others since, to underline the fragility of liberty in a democratic society. On the one hand, liberty may fall into license, as it did with Henry Cook, against which public taste needs protection; but on the other hand liberty may as easily fall to bigotry, at it did at the hands of the Vice Society and the supporters of the Knowlton prosecution.



## Freethinker Fund

But the most convincing case for the importance of the *Fruits of Philosophy* trial is that put forward by the medical historian, Norman Himes. He has demonstrated that a chart of births in England and Wales, calculated by three-year periods between 1853 and 1933, shows a rise to 1874-1876 and then a rapid falling away. This he attributed to the widespread publicity given to birth-control by the trial and its aftermath. Certainly the figures are impressive. Between the trial and the end of August 1881, 185,000 copies of the *Fruits of Philosophy* were sold, not counting pirated editions which would probably bring the total to around the quarter of a million mark. Also, the *Law of Population*, written by Annie Besant in 1879 to improve upon Knowlton, itself sold 175,000 copies before Mrs Besant withdraw it from circulation in 1891. All together, Himes estimates that about a million copies of birth-control literature were put into circulation during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and this vast output can in large measure be attributed to the Bradlaugh-Besant trial. For perhaps the first time, the hard-pressed lower-middle classes and the respectable but woefully poor working man and his wife were told, cheaply and clearly (even if, in the *Fruits of Philosophy*, rather inadequately) physiological facts which were socially taboo, and the methods of family limitation. Obviously other factors also need to be taken into account in explaining the decline in population growth and the increasing use of contraceptive devices—new methods, such as the rubber cervical cap popularised by Dr H. A. Allbutt, undoubtedly helped; and modern experience suggests that rising living standards themselves encouraged family limitation, contrary to what Malthusian theory might suggest. But unless the stern discipline of Thomas Malthus himself were to be invoked, none of this would have had much effect without the cheap and widespread dissemination of physiological and practical knowledge. This was what the Bradlaugh-Besant trial helped to accomplish.

Readers continue to send donations which enables us to bridge the gap between income and expenditure. But the latest amount falls far below that we received last month. We therefore appeal to organisations and individual readers to ensure that the monthly total does not fall below £100. Our thanks are expressed to those who sent donations during the period 22 March until 21 April. Mrs B. Able, £3.25; Anonymous, £5; M. Armstrong, £1; H. Bowser, £1.25; Mrs D. Cheeseman, 45p; R. Clemants, £2; W. Craigie, 75p; W. Crees, 60p; Mrs S. Czerski, 60p; J. L. Ford, £1.25; S. Fuchs, 75p; W. J. Glennie, £1; L. Goldman, £3; J. K. Hawkins, 25p; Mrs J. R. Hayden-Smith, £3.25; Mrs E. Hillman, £1.25; G. B. Horne, £1.25; E. J. Hughes, £1; H. Jakeman, £1.25; R. Jeffard, £2.25; S. E. Johnson, £15; C. Jones, 75p; R. Lewis, 60p; F. Lonsdale, £4; C. Lovett, 50p; J. MacGregor, £1.25; E. McGue, £5.50; R. C. W. Morgan, £1; E. A. W. Morris, £1.25; T. Murphy, 25p; Mrs M. Nichol, £3; A. Oldham, £3.25; K. C. Orr, £1.75; W. R. Philpott, £1.48; T. Stevenson, 75p; R. K. E. Torode, 25p; M. Villiers-Stuart, £2.25; Sheila Williams, £3.25. Total: £67.48.

### BLASPHEMY IN 1977

PUBLIC MEETING AT  
CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE  
HOLBORN, LONDON WC1

FRIDAY, 27 MAY, 7.45 pm

Speakers:

**EDWARD BLISHEN**  
**BRIAN SEDGEMOOR, MP**  
**BARBARA SMOKER**  
**NICOLAS WALTER**

Organised by  
THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY  
702 Holloway Road, London N19  
Telephone: 272 1266.

The Pope has declared that Catholic opposition to liberalised abortion is not Church interference in political affairs. A pro-life prayer vigil held in Rome has been reported as being described by the Pope as "not intended to have any of the characteristics of polemical discussion, much less of interference in politics, but is only a celebration of a very high aim in the civil and moral order."

Is there a god? This is the title of a summer course being held at Goldsmith's College on Monday evenings, beginning 2 May 1977. The tutor is Bob Brecher, BA, and the intention is to become acquainted with some of the issues involved in thinking about the idea of a divine being, and thereby to gain a better understanding of the impetus behind contemporary atheism. Some of the traditional arguments for and against the existence of god will be looked at including the argument from design, and the moral argument on the one hand and the problem of evil on the other. Although it might seem a non-subject to some readers—the arguments in the course might be even more fascinating with humanists in the class.



## NEW-TIME EVANGELISM

The Second National Evangelical Congress attended by 2,000 Christians at Nottingham last April gave several pointers to developments within Christianity in the future. Its very existence and the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Coggan, is a measure of the increasing weight of the evangelical wing within the churches.

A large-scale gospel mission uniting the English churches has been under consideration in their upper echelons for some time. It is expected to take the form of a major Christian festival, perhaps with more than a touch of old-time crusading evangelism, and involving Anglicans, Roman Catholics and most other mainstream denominations.

There has apparently been some conflict over whether church leaders such as Dr Coggan (believed to be personally sympathetic) should set the seal on the venture with their blessing. Those committed to the project have grown impatient with waiting for official approval and gave Dr Coggan a deadline to decide the Church's attitude. Dr Coggan was expected to deliver a sermon at the Congress saying that a national mission could not now be supported.

Those who might feel relief that England is to be spared a prolonged session of bombardment with evangelical fervour, will be unhappy to hear that a return of Dr Billy Graham to England is an alternative being considered. However, Dr Coggan has temporarily settled the question in a typical Anglican way by leaving all doors open. And the nation may yet be called by a major crusade.

One significance of such moves is seen in the ecumenical aspects of evangelism—cutting right across traditional sectarian barriers. In a comment on the Evangelical Congress, John Stott in the *Guardian's* weekly Saturday theological column *Face to Faith*, pointed out that traditional "biblical" evangelicals and "liberal" contemporary Christians were contrasting strands which rarely joined. It looks like becoming a more frequent combination, judging by this Congress.

Another feature of the evangelicals' growing popularity among the young is their lack of attachment to one particular institution. John Stott describes a group of Argentinian Christian students who have dropped out of their own churches. They call themselves "cristianos descolgantes", literally "unhooked" like a picture taken down from a wall, or unattached. This challenge to the authority of existing institutions seen in all sectors of society today is giving religious groups new problems and new possibilities, which may mean swaying society and influencing individuals in unexpected ways.

It is unexpected, for example, to find churchmen echoing the longstanding secularist call for disestablishment. But a draft statement for the National Evangelical Congress was reported to be criticising

## NEWS

the privileged Church-State links: "We deplore the tacit triumphalism which marks so much of England's public institutional life, and we wish to see this cease. In particular, we see the historical constitutional links with the state as now being not only unhelpful to mission, but also prejudicial to healthy re-union."

While the Church is unlikely to be moved immediately to abandon its historically privileged position, such statements indicate a growing change of mood. Any suggestion of Church-State links hampering church unity demonstrates how desperately ecumenical some churchmen are becoming. Nevertheless, arguments over the prospective crusade confirm that they find it as hard as ever to reach any agreement.

## TREASURE ON EARTH

The April budget produced a pleasant bonus for Churches and charities. The 2 per cent addition to the employers' national insurance contribution, due to take effect from the new financial year, will not apply to any organisations with charitable status. This of course, in the present unjust state of the law, includes the Churches and will give considerable relief to them. Dr Gerald Ellison, the Bishop of London, apparently said he was "delighted, relieved and grateful"—as well he may be, though other non-profit-making organisations not favoured with charitable status will not benefit.

Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, commented in a press release, which was quoted on the radio programme *Sunday*: "The Budget proposals meet the Archbishop of Canterbury's demand on the very issue on which the Prime Minister was too busy to 'meet' him some months ago.

What the Church of England, one of the wealthiest institutions in the country, was kicking against was having to pay the 2 per cent National Insurance surcharge, on behalf of its clergymen and other employees, that other employers have to pay. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has apparently yielded to ecclesiastical pressure and other privileged organisations are getting a free ride on the Archbishop's cope-tails.

For historical reasons, from the days when everyone was expected to be a practising Christian, the Church has enjoyed enormous fiscal privileges, including exemption from all direct taxation, and, paradoxically, it is this existing exemption that they have used as their argument for being exempted



# S AND NOTES

also from new forms of taxation.

"Unto everyone that hath shall be given and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

## "BLASPHEMY" IN 1977

During the last 111 years the National Secular Society has worked for the total abolition of laws relating to blasphemy. One of its presidents, G. W. Foote, served twelve months in prison for the "crime". There have been many other blasphemy trials, the most callous and disgraceful being that of John William Gott 55 years ago. Although he was seriously ill, Gott was sent to prison for nine months "for this most dangerous class of crime." He served the full sentence and on the day of his release the Deputy Prison Chaplain told him: "You are going out and I do not think you will live long. You will not be able to carry on your evil work much longer." The Deputy Prison Chaplain was right — Gott died a few weeks later.

In recent times Secular Humanists have been assured that campaigning against blasphemy laws was unnecessary in this age of ecumenism and Christian liberalism; prosecutions for blasphemy were a thing of the past. But last year the evangelical Archbishop of Canterbury reminded the faithful that it is still possible to initiate a private prosecution for blasphemy. The Home Secretary, replying to a Parliamentary Question, added his encouragement. So in the last quarter of the twentieth century Christians can still use obsolete laws to defend their superstitious beliefs and to impose their standards on all.

Mrs Mary Whitehouse has initiated a private prosecution against the journal *Gay News* in which James Kirkup's poem "The Love That Dares to Speak its Name" was published last year. Denis Lemon, the Editor, will appear at the Old Bailey on a charge of blasphemous libel.

The blasphemy laws will be discussed at a public meeting which is being organised by the National Secular Society, at Conway Hall on Friday 27 May 1977 at 7.45 pm. The speakers will be: Brian Sedgemoor, Labour MP for Luton West, who has asked a question about blasphemy in the House of Commons earlier in the year; Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, who published an article on blasphemy in *Tribune* recently; and Nicolas Walter, Editor of *New Humanist*, who has taken a great interest in the history of blasphemy laws and their possible current use.

## RELIGIOUS SURVIVAL

Lord Hailsham wrote in the *Sunday Express* that he marvelled at the fact that, after 60 years of official discouragement, Christianity survives in Communist Russia and some people there still attend church. Does he not also marvel at the fact that, after more than a thousand years of official encouragement of Christianity in Britain, together with 33 years of the law that made religious instruction in state schools compulsory, the vast majority of people in this country not only never attend church but see no relevance in their lives in religion at all? Fortunately, in every society, people think for themselves. And Lord Hailsham has little cause either to jeer at Russia or to cheer the Christian British Establishment, which he himself represents.

## OBITUARIES

### MR M. BROWN

Maurice Brown, who has died at the age of 81, was a former civil servant who in his retirement became an expert in planning gardens. He was an unbeliever and there was a secular committal ceremony at the Surrey and Sussex Crematorium on 5 April.

### MR P. CAMPBELL

The sudden death is reported of Patrick Campbell, a leading member of New Zealand Rationalist Association. He was president of the Association from 1961 until 1969.

### MR S. DICK

Stirling Dick, a former sub-editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, has died in a London hospital at the age of 71. He also worked on the *Glasgow Herald* and other papers. Mr Dick was a talented artist and a member of the Langham Sketch Club. He was a forthright exponent of rationalism and freethought, and directed that there should be no religious service at his funeral. Mr Dick's wishes were observed, and a number of his friends attended the non-religious committal ceremony at Mortlake Crematorium on 21 April.

### THE FREETHINKER

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**SPEAKER'S CORNER: AN ANTHOLOGY** Edited by Kropotkin Lighthouse Publications, £1.75.

Time was, when the National Secular Society had speakers on soap-boxes up and down the land at all those places recognised for open air oratory. Even in the 1950s notices in *The Freethinker* gave details of outdoor meetings where the hosts of heaven were regularly confounded before anyone who cared to spend a few minutes, or much longer, in a dozen or so towns and cities. Now, there is just one secular platform left in London, at Hyde Park. The popularity of television, where there is no freedom of speech, or access, except for the chosen few, has put paid to most outdoor oratory. This is a shame, but it is interesting to recall the days when Hyde Park was the "People's University", on the occasion of the publication of this anthology. Speakers' Corner may be a tourists' paradise or "zoo" with eccentrics on view today, but all manner of political, religious, social and atheistic speakers have used the place as a forum. The gay liberationists and those seeking a pardon for Hanratty are diverse modern examples.

F. A. Ridley, a former NSS President, and Hyde Park orator before the war, has written on the occasion of his eightieth birthday, in the Spring edition of *Hyde Park Socialist*: ". . . for quite a few periods in the history of England, the only place where you could hear the truth spoken was in Hyde Park. There have been many brilliant speakers and agitators in the Park, who have put forward advanced ideas which have been of permanent value to humanity."

In 1904, when Guy Aldred—later publisher of the anarchist paper *The Word*, in Glasgow—arrived to speak on behalf of secularism, he found the Christian Evidence Society would brook no opposition. Their speaker averred: "Atheism was unmanly, cowardly, brutish, immoral, beery, and not respectable. It was a barrier to scientific, intellectual and moral progress."

But mostly, there was, and still is, freedom of speech for anyone with the guts to mount a soap-box at Marble Arch. Jim Huggon reminds us, however, in this anthology, that the Hyde Park Regulations and Statutory Instruments, only allow speeches at the discretion of park-keepers and police. These Regulations, which few of us who have spoken in Hyde Park bothered to read, prohibit blasphemy by speakers. The last recorded case was brought against a Secularist in 1941: mint sauce, it was suggested, gave extra culinary delicacy to the Lamb of God! In view of the revival of interest in blasphemy, perhaps it is just as well Mary Whitehouse is not a regular amongst hecklers.

This anthology includes contemporary historical documents concerning the "Agitation against the

Sunday Trading Bill" in 1855. The main opponents were the Church and Parliament. At the time meetings in Hyde Park, organised by the Chartists, were thought to herald an English revolution, and were described as "unparliamentary", "extra-parliamentary" and "anti-parliamentary".

The institution known as Speakers' Corner has its distant origin in the habit of permitting sentenced men at nearby Tyburn to speak from their gallows. But the more modern custom commenced in 1855 when an unknown London carpenter gathered an audience. Regular meetings were prevented by police until 1866, when the Reform League assembled a crowd so huge that it forced the gates of Hyde Park open. Since then subsequent Regulations have allowed meetings, subject always to police approval.

William Kent, Royden Harrison, Antonia Raeburn and Dona Torr, are among those whose writings refer to the historic role of Speakers' Corner, quoted by Jim Huggon. Donald Soper, one of the best orators remaining (in style, if not content) and "Horatio", a Socialist Party of Great Britain speaker, provide recent references.

A chapter from Bonar Thompson's famous book *Hyde Park Orator* is reprinted; a facsimile reproduction of Thompson's *Black Hat* magazine for April 1947, price 3p, is invaluable to younger readers. The editorial for this issue may be a good guide to all editors of impecunious little papers: "No MSS submitted for publication in the *Black Hat* will be considered unless accompanied by a substantial cheque towards the development of the paper. It must, however, be clearly understood that MSS will not necessarily be accepted because a cheque is enclosed." However, this may mean, that an editor adopting this policy will find himself in the same situation as Thompson: he will have to write the paper himself.

Bonar Thompson was probably the finest speaker ever to grace Speakers' Corner. He suffered from the peculiar Regulation which prohibits collections. Among the many illustrations in this anthology, is a photograph of the "black-hatted" Thompson, who used to take his audience outside the park-gates to relieve them of their coins. He once declared his epitaph should read: "The collection was not enough."

"Freedom of the Park"—which was George Orwell's protest at the arrest of paper sellers for "obstruction" outside the gates of Hyde Park in 1946—is included in this anthology. It strikes a chord today; sellers of *The Freethinker* have been



# REVIEWS

"moved on" by police even this year. The contemporary scene at Speakers' Corner is provided through an article from *Time Out* in 1974. This article, "Stop Speaking, I'm Interrupting", was initiated by the stage presentation, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, of Heathcote Williams' noted book *The Speakers*, published in 1964. *The Speakers* presented a verbatim record of performances by some of the so-called lunatic fringe at Speakers' Corner. Though, one sometimes wonders, whether there aren't more lunatics at the southern end of Whitehall.

One glaring omission from this book, which is more surprising as Jim Huggon has been a regular anarchist speaker during the past decade, is any reference to the most noticeable facet of Speakers' Corner to the casual observer. Black Power speakers, the Coloured Workers' Welfare Association, and Negro orators, often dominate the Park nowadays. Roy Sawh, the most brilliant speaker of this group, was prosecuted only a few years ago, for using "threatening language".

This criticism aside, the book is a useful backcloth for everyone interested in the history of all radical, revolutionary and other protest movements that have held demonstrations in the past century. Hyde Park is still a noted meeting place for all reform movements. Probably the best part of this work—because it is original—is the foreword by Philip Sansom, who spoke on anarchism in Hyde Park between 1947 and 1960. He writes, "What is a little sobering today is to reflect that over those 13 years I must have spoken well over 500 times, uttering millions of words to thousands of people, with, as far as I can see, precious little effect in terms of influencing events." I hope this severe indictment is not shared by all who have spoken or heckled at Speakers' Corner: the TV confrontation, or even 'phone-in programmes, are poor substitutes for lively exchanges between minds in the open air.

DENIS COBELL

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**SCOUNDREL TIME** by Lillian Hellman. Macmillan, £4.95.

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Lillian Hellman has chosen to call this account of the McCarthy era in America "her own history of the time." The personal perspective is both correct and significant. She had never been a member of the Communist Party and did not know the precise political affiliations of even her closest friends.

Yet her appearance before the US House of Representatives' Committee on Un-American Activities in 1952 was a milestone of perhaps the most infamous political witch-hunt in recent times. In her letter to the committee, Miss Hellman said: "I cannot, and will not, cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions." She refused to testify against people she had known; she waived the privilege to refuse to incriminate herself. She risked imprisonment and suffered financial hardship by her action. What is remarkable is not that she successfully stood up to the committee and was the first to do so, nor that what she did amounted to an act of singular courage in an episode marked by its cowardice and cheap theatrics. The important thing about Miss Hellman's stand was that it was based on the simple, humanistic belief that one did not betray personal loyalty in order to save oneself. The remarkable thing about this book is that Miss Hellman does not bear malice against her persecutors, and is consistently critical of her own actions, reluctant to call them "courageous". It is "the bravery of the staircase", she says with arch self-reproof.

Readers of *Scoundrel Time* are far more likely to agree with James Cameron's assessment of Lillian Hellman. In an introduction written specially for this edition, Mr Cameron makes the point that she was all the more courageous because she was also afraid. Unlike vituperative critics of committee members who would pound restaurant tables in disgust only to submit when their turns came, Miss Hellman was uncertain of her actions up till the very moment the committee spokesman uttered the words: "We have no further questions to ask this witness."

Her defiance was neither mere bravado nor a legal ploy to escape conviction. Her self-criticism is based on her failure, as she sees it, to tell the committee what she really felt about them: that they were self-seeking bullies who forced timid people to behave dishonourably and to degrade themselves. Of those who became friendly witnesses, she displays a certain amount of tolerance: if she had stood to lose as much, would she have "named names" as they did?

Miss Hellman reserves her most stringent comments for American liberals like herself who were foolish enough not to question the bedrock of American political life. They were complacent in their belief in freedom of speech, and yet were largely ignorant of the power of such men as Joseph McCarthy, Whitaker Chambers and Richard Nixon. The time of McCarthy was scoundrel time precisely because liberals with no real awareness of what they believed were being persecuted by politicians who had no genuine conviction in what they were doing. The entire affair was grossly inflated, yet because of it, reputations were damaged and men and women of talent and integrity were humiliated and destroyed. The waste was grotesque.



If the episode could be recorded in history as a tragedy, and Americans could learn from it, McCarthyism would remain a painful but self-contained footnote to American postwar fervour. Americans, Miss Hellman concludes, have no sense of history:

It is not true that when the bell tolls it tolls for thee: if it were true we could not have elected, so few years later, Richard Nixon (a member of the committee). It was no accident that Mr Nixon brought with him a group of high-powered operators who made Cohn and Schine look like cute little rascals from grammar school; the stakes were higher, because the prize was the White House. And . . . we have almost forgotten them, too. We are a people who do not want to keep much of the past in our heads. It is considered unhealthy in America to remember mistakes, neurotic to think about them, psychotic to dwell on them.

JAMES MACDONALD

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**THE ELEMENTARY FORMS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE** by Emile Durkheim. Allen & Unwin, £3.95 paperback.

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This is a relatively cheap edition of the best-known classic in the sociology of religion, with a new introduction by the American sociologist Robert Nisbet. The book is interesting and important enough to be worth reading on its own, but the introduction gives it added value. Nisbet begins as follows: "There is charm as well as irony in the authorship of this book. For it is without question one of the most powerful justifications of the functional indispensability of religion to society ever written. Yet its author, Emile Durkheim, was himself a professed, virtually devout, agnostic in all matters of religious belief . . ."

This contradiction is not satisfactorily resolved; nor is the problem that, despite its classic status, the book has been strongly attacked ever since it was first published in 1912 by scholars who have known far more than Durkheim either about religion in general or about the religion of the Australian aborigines in particular—the latter providing the factual basis for the author's conclusions about the former. After more than half a century, in fact, it is more and more difficult to accept what Durkheim says; but at the same time it is more and more easy to appreciate the way he says it, for unlike most modern sociologists, everything he says is not only worth reading but also a pleasure to read.

Anyway, here is the main book which argues that religion and society are necessary to each other, because they seem to be so in the totemist beliefs about kinship among some primitive Australian tribes. If this kind of argument convinces you, well and good; but even if it doesn't—if you prefer

to argue that, since you don't need religion, neither does society—you can enjoy the way it is presented.

NICOLAS WALTER

## THEATRE

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**STRAWBERRY FIELDS** by Stephen Poliakoff. Cottesloe Theatre, London.

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Although in his twenties Stephen Poliakoff has already established a reputation for himself with the performance of over half a dozen plays, and has begun to carve out his own recognisable territory of the politics of desperation in an urban wasteland. *Strawberry Fields* is his new play at the recently opened experimental section of the National Theatre, the Cottesloe Theatre. In the maddening summer heat, three young people sweat their route across the motorways of England. Charlotte is a young lady whose coolness defies even the sweltering tarmac. She is a representative of the English Peoples' Party travelling with lists of contacts, with information to exchange with members, and with a gun. Kevin is a jittery ex-film-addict and a half-baked supporter of the English Peoples' Party, accompanying her. Nick is an out of work teacher whose rather insipid persistence has enabled him to hitch a lift with them.

The English Peoples' Party, whose parallels with the National Front are obvious, has a programme of cleaning up the countryside and bringing back order and greatness to England. This innocuous aim has the more hysterical undertone of keeping at bay all that is filthy and squalid in life today, and slowly reveals a menacing extremism.

The trio are seen passing on their journey in the motorway cafe and lay-bys. Stephen Poliakoff has exactly placed the bleak plastic of England's wayside halts in a motorised age. The sense of being separated from everyday life in a mobile limbo which you feel on long-distance travel was well conveyed.

Late at night they await a contact by an unmanned hot-dog stall, outside a derelict cinema. Nick, the hitch-hiker, is still hanging around, worrying around them like a small dog, trying to find out their ideas and motives. Despite their determination not to cross the law in any way, Nick persuades Kevin to join him in ransacking the hot-dog stall. And a policeman, who discovers them at this point, is shot by Charlotte: curtain—or dazzling lights and interval. The second half of the play sees them on the run, listening with fearful curiosity to reports of their own crime on the transistor radio and eventually almost coming to hope for a dramatic capture, which would leave them mythic heroes of the Party.

Charlotte, seemed to me the most plausible of the three main characters, perhaps especially be-



cause of Jane Asher's first-rate performance; the only moment I noticed a smile break through her steely fastidiousness it seemed a calculated grin. Her fanatical support of the party is quite successfully linked with her detestation of dirt and rubbish, seen as a repressed fascination with the slime of life, comparable to the ooze of a pond which she had pulled herself through in a state of pubertal sexual awakening.

As a hang-over from the sixties, wilting flower-power turned sour, Kevin was fairly convincing. His sight is failing, having spent two years in the cinema; not that this disability has anything to do with his joining the Party, he over-anxiously insists. Stephen Rea brought nervous power to the role, notably at the point where he spews out a sequence of nightmare images of violence and hate on a fantasy screen in front of him. This idea that violence on the screen, far from being a cathartic way of getting it out of the system is a way of getting it thoroughly inside the system, could have been further developed. In his brittle incompetence he was no Clyde to Charlotte's Bonnie (the second half had echoes of this kind of myth-making partnership in crime), and though I could see how he became disaffected and neurotic it was less likely that he should be caught up in an organisation likely to attract more stupid, straightforward thugs as hangers-on.

The least satisfactory of the central characters was Nick, who much of the time appeared a shadowy foil for the other two. He seemed to lack the necessary likeability and vitality to enjoy kids and adventure playgrounds, as he said he did.

A superb short performance was given by Anna Leon as Mrs Roberts, a timid, nascent paranoid, afraid of bombs in every corner of the coach station. She was pathetically anxious to please the Party, with a collection that failed to reach the hoped-for target, an enormous folder of cuttings and a deep concern that her children be kept from anything rough. The acting was poised beautifully between caricature and reality.

The production was fluid and gave some effective moments of stillness. It was unfortunate from my point of view on the second level that the director had chosen to conduct two thirds of the play on the side of the stage where my visibility was limited.

It was perhaps a weakness of the plot that the climax of the shooting occurred too early and the interest was less easy to sustain in the second half. This made the failure of the characters to interact more obvious, though this must be an inherent difficulty in writing about characters marked by an inability to relate. A more serious defect of the play was its failure to settle into any context of a wider spectrum of society, than this little claustrophobic group. A broader framework connecting followers of this sort of extremism to a more everyday aspect of life, and giving it a more social ex-

planation in terms of people's disappointments and fears would have helped.

It is, of course, in the play's favour that it led to such high expectations. Not many plays make the vital attempt to face seriously issues such as those raised by the National Front. Not many plays make me feel, as I did with this one, that I do not want to miss the author's next work.

JIM HERRICK

## MEDIA

The Easter period gave television viewers a plethora of Jesus watching. Not only a full scale documentary enquiry into *Who Was Jesus?* but also the much-vaunted Zeffirelli technicolor *Jesus of Nazareth*, trumpeted loudly long before the screening (how else could people be persuaded to sit still for two three-hour sessions?). It gave television critics the opportunity to keep their wits sharpened, sent Christian observers (mostly) reaching for their superlatives, and gave holidaymakers the chance for a long rest.

The visual effects were very impressive. The story is a good one and was told with some of the traditional effectiveness of screen narrative, with stunning sunsets, landscapes and water effects. Realism was not baulked in the sweaty birth and the agonising crucifixion. Some of the best drama was in the political sub-plot, with incidents concerning Herod, Salome and the Roman background being well padded out. But there was a growing monotony in the tendency to alternate between crowd scenes with Jewish jollification, lamentation or debate, and intense personal confrontation.

If this is a Jesus for our time, we get a remarkably traditional figure. Robert Powell as Jesus, bearded and blue-eyed like a post-Raphaelite Sunday-school print, slowed the action down and dropped any dramatic tension, looking deeply at his feet or into the camera, and always surrounded by a hushed swirl of reverence. There were no angels; some miracles were given a naturalistic context while others, such as the multiplying of the loaves and fishes, remained plain miraculous.

The dialogue was the weakest part, and it is surprising that a writer of such skill as Anthony Burgess was involved. The words lurched between the chattily idiomatic, "What's going on here?", and the stilted semi-biblical, "Now I can die contented God according to thy word." Between the dubbing and the cutting and the script no-one has much to be content with the words of the film; appropriately for a television age the best was in the visuals.

## COUNTDOWN

The *Monty Python Show* in a repeat reminded us that television is not all reverence. A Sunday-style interviewer announced a further round in the Epilogue debate between a Christian and Humanist



over the existence of God. The battle took place in a wrestling ring and the result was "God Exists by Two Falls to a Submission."

#### EVERY SUNDAY

The God-spot on Sunday has become a moveable feast. A new series, *Everyman*, on BBC1 has been designed for later on Sunday evening than the traditional religious hours, and kicked off with a devastating picture of an American big business Evangelist. The Reverend Robert Schuller, who has been a pioneer of family drive-in entertainment worship, has built the fantastic Tower of Hope, whose gigantic illuminated cross stretches 200 feet into the sky. He produces his own television programme for the American networks, *The Hour of Power*, and specialises in Possibility Thinking. He peddles what he describes as "a theology of self-respect, self-dignity, self-worth, self love." One of his most widely promoted works is *Beautiful Possibilities for Today* and he offers correspondence courses in Possibility Thinking. He loathes the word "Salesmanship" and is proud of his integrity, which he believes is the secret of his success. A Crystal Cathedral has been built, with the funds donated by admirers overwhelmed with tax-deductible gratitude.

*Everyman* followed with a look at the Gay Christian movement, and moves on to a survey of the devil and exorcism. A rich chronicle of contemporary religion should be provided and this is the sort of religious programme which should find its own valid place in broadcasting when the privileged position of religion in the media has been completely removed.

#### NO GOD

The General Secretary of the British Humanist Association, Kenneth Furness, appeared on the ATV programme *Matter of Morals*, in a series looking at the relevance of the ten commandments today. All six speakers were given an equal opportunity to put their views on the commandment "Thou shalt have no other God but me . . ." Kenneth Furness clearly explained how it was perfectly feasible to live without any belief in a God and the programme was balanced between three speakers for and three against the existence of God. But there was no chance for discussion, and no count-down.

#### RIB-TICKLER

A recent session of *Brain of Britain* (Radio 4) included the question, how many ribs have human beings. All four of the contestants—though pre-selected for their wide general knowledge—were of the firm opinion that women have fewer ribs than men.

[The correct answer is twelve, irrespective of sex.]

## LETTERS

In "The Freethinker" (March 1977) you published the text of a letter said to have been sent recorded delivery to me by Harold Haywood, Chairman of the Albany Trust, and also the text of a further letter apparently sent by him to me.

I am blamed for many things—I don't see why I should also shoulder the responsibility for the shortcomings of the Post Office—not to mention the shortcomings of Mr Haywood's secretarial staff!

MARY WHITEHOUSE

Editor: The Albany Trust has repeated that the letter has been sent twice, once by recorded delivery. Antony Grey, director of the Albany Trust, has commented: "If Mrs Whitehouse has such difficulty receiving post, she must be missing an awful lot of interesting information. This letter from her is even more disingenuous than usual. Now that she has apparently seen the letter, via the columns of "The Freethinker", perhaps she would have the common courtesy to offer a substantial reply to the letter, which pointed out so many inaccuracies in her allegations about the Albany Trust. This feeble reply carries even less conviction than most of her utterances."

May I be permitted to comment on a sentence in Francis Bennion's article in the April "Freethinker"? He writes: "Once a society has satisfied the most pressing requirement of human beings, namely adequate nutrition, sexual fulfilment assumes the dominant position." I am reminded of a Sanskrit epigram: "Narah vai sisnodara parayanah" ("verily, man is a creature devoted to the penis and the belly"). Bennion conveniently overlooks the fact that it is through "sexual fulfilment" (in unpretentious, fullblooded, old-fashioned English, "lust" and its satisfaction) that we inhabit a grossly overpopulated world—it is through men being obsessed with their genitals that we have venereal disease, possessiveness, rape, marital discord and all the other results of Man's desire to gratify the mindless and ludicrous urge of his loins. Naturally, we are at once informed that such an "anti-sex" attitude is based upon Christian indoctrination (I grew up in an atheist household), inhibition, etc. and that all the world needs to become a regular little priapic paradise is for all of us to mate as frequently and enthusiastically as possible. We can use contraceptives or avail ourselves of vasectomies, so our sex can be "mature, fulfilling, the expression of deep, meaningful interpersonal relationships." (Or—more truthfully—we needn't be saddled with kids!)

It never seems to occur to those who want to establish this global sexual Utopia that there are secularists who are by no means sympathetic to the "Sex at all costs" outlook. These are not puritanical individuals, simply folk who recognise that sex is only a momentary gratification (as well as the act by which we are choicelessly thrust into the world), something which cannot be a kind of experimental "panacea" for all the miseries of life. The deification of human sexuality ("Thou shalt have no other God but orgasm") is a manifestation of an infantile approach to life—the desire of contemporary man, neurotic, harassed, to grasp at the carrot of sex and win (at what cost?) a few brief moments of deodorised forgetfulness. How pathetic! And the non-existent God help anyone in the secularist movement who refuses to bow the knee (or some other more appropriate part of the anatomy) to the religion of sex!

GEOFFREY WEBSTER



## Yesterday's Sex Education

could make it more difficult for you to be a happy, contented person as you grow older" (*Straight Facts about Sex and Birth Control*—Family Planning Association). Like a colour blind person confronted with a red and a green apple, they cannot distinguish between their didactic rules on how life *must* be lived, how sex *must* be viewed and how fertility *may* be permitted to be controlled, and the neutral presentation of facts and points of view upon which you may or may not choose to act. Faced with a set of options, a non-Christian code of morality, a rationalist view of sexual behaviour in the context of modern society, and the chance to choose between this code and their own, they run screaming to the hills protesting that the alternative code is being *forced* upon them. Having been cushioned and protected from choice, they and their young creations find the prospect terrifying and very puzzling. They are unable to perceive that choice exists and can only interpret the situation in the light of their own behaviour, that of didacticism.

The booklet contains the most unbelievable and dogmatic statements: masturbation "is really very childish and conscience tells us it is not right either . . . sexual intercourse outside marriage is medically dangerous . . . the pill is dangerous for girls who are still growing . . . the Roman Empire disintegrated because of sex obsession and indulgence."

These are blanket statements which are either humbly simplistic, only partially true or downright lies. Can a practising doctor really be so medically illiterate? Furthermore, not only have the authors selectively censored their medical and psycho-analytical reading, they are no classicists, either. The Roman Empire flourished, both in terms of political power and artistic creativity, well into the Christian era. It was the Holy Roman Empire that eventually fell to the barbarian hordes. Caxton, in his introductory press release, claims "It must be recognised that there was a virility about (the Victorian) era which contributed to the development of the world and many humanitarian reforms" conveniently forgetting the child prostitutes, those fine upstanding Victorian *pater-familias* practised their virility upon, the explicit pornography and the fact that any humanitarian reforms were forced upon a protesting and hostile establishment by a very few humane people. Do we really want our children to be taught sex education by a man who professes admiration for such a society?

Caxton and Fry also have a pitiful belief that sublimation is a Good Thing, and that only "victory over lust" leaves one free to exercise ones creativity in work or art. John F. Kennedy, Lloyd George and Pablo Picasso are doubtless tittering in their graves!

But through the tears of laughter, I must now admit to tears of grief. In 1977, do we really still have to be confronted with such uncharitable, mean, vicious claptrap? Is it really 50 years since Margaret Mead showed us that the storms and tribulations that we accept as natural to adolescence are absent in teenagers of "primitive" societies; far from being natural, they are a reasonable reaction to our cruel insistence in artificially prolonging childhood in people whose bodies and minds tell them that they are adult. The cruelty, the danger inherent in such nonsense is that if it is the only literature on the subject given to a young person—and given with the full weight and authority of parent, teacher and church, the damage and unhappiness caused can be tremendous. According to The National Marriage Guidance Council, 27,000 marriages break up every year needlessly, because of marital difficulties *directly* caused by sexual ignorance, fears and misapprehensions.

The authors themselves do not have large families—the Rev Fry has two daughters, Dr Caxton admits to six grandchildren. Is one to presume that they practice what they preach: a life of celibacy? If so, I suppose one has to admire them, as one admires pole squatters or Christmas Day bathers in the Serpentine. Marvellous self-discipline, stiff upper lip. What?! But good grief, what's the point? If they must persist in their strange, masochistic behaviour—well, it's a free country. But they certainly have no right to insist on forcing their unnatural minority activities on *my* child.

*Note:* In case you're still wondering, the second quote is Alan Bennett!

<sup>1</sup> Penguin English Dictionary.

## Secularization and Society

agencies in the secular societies in which they operate. The devotee does his own thing with the aid of some eclectic hotch-potch of youth culture, therapeutic exercises, mysticism, meditation, popular psychology, science and science fiction, with or without exotic, primitive religious practices dragged out of context for ornamentation. Adherents are mainly drawn from the mobile, uncommitted young. Individual involvement, being optional, tends to be ephemeral and gives the movements a high turnover in membership.

In his final lecture Dr Wilson considered further the question of whether the emergence of the new cults in the West represents a counterforce to secularization or the beginnings of a counter-culture. He believes that few outside the movements can believe they will lead to a new, general lifestyle, and he considers the existence of the cults as confirmation of the process of secularization: "They indicate the extent to which religion has become



## EVENTS

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove. Sunday, 5 June, 5.30 pm. D. B. Roodyn: "Doubt and Certainty in Science".

**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.

**Humanist Holidays.** Summer Holiday at Ross-on-Wye (small hotel and camping site). No single rooms. 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, 26 May, 7.45 pm. A speaker from The Adult Literacy Scheme.

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

**Merseyside Humanist Group.** 248 Woodchurch Road, Birkenhead. Wednesday, 15 June, 7.45 pm. Current Affairs.

**Muswell Hill Humanist Group.** 30 Archibald Road, London N7. Thursday, 19 May, 8.30 pm. Professor and Mrs Woerhlin: "American Impressions".

**National Secular Society.** Conway Hall, London. Friday 27 May, 7.45 pm. "Blasphemy in 1977". Brian Sedgemoor, MP, Barbara Smoker, Nicolas Walter.

**West Glamorgan Humanist Group.** Friends Meeting House, Page Street, Swansea. Friday, 27 May, 7.30 pm. Peter Cadogan: "Ecological Humanism".

JAMES RANDI

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inconsequential for modern society". Western societies, he maintains, have passed the point at which religion can exercise formative influence over whole societies or significant parts of them. The cults "save" people from society. "They are not so much the progenitors of counter-culture as random anti-cultural assertions . . . congeries of options in a plural society—a diverse set of options 'out'." Clearly the cults cannot attain the role that religion exercised in the past. Personal experience which so many of the movements emphasised can never be the priority of a social system. Personal gratification (which may take the form of asceticism) is stressed and there is an absence of any programme for society at large. The restraints and compromises that characterised traditional religion are absent from the cults. Dr Wilson wonders whether, if future religions are not to be institutionalised, one powerful force for civilisation will be lost. Religions have always had cycles of decline and regeneration. "In the modern world it is not clear that they have any prospect of rebirth."

It is particularly interesting to apply the propositions of this book to humanism. With its internalised morality it could clearly be held to be "old fashioned"—the ultimate Protestant sect. It too for most of its adherents is an ephemeral commitment. The result is that it has high membership turnover. It too stands little chance of becoming institutionalized (even if it wanted) and so would seem to be destined to remain a minority option, one among many, always on the side-lines. It is hard not to go along with this thesis. It certainly confirms my own view that campaigning is the most important part of the movement's work, and that those who have notions of promoting Humanism-with-a-capital-H as a socially significant, universal (albeit individualistic) prescription for living—a humanist centre in every suburb—are engaged in a futile exercise.

[These lectures have recently been published as *Contemporary Transformations of Religion* by Bryan Wilson, Oxford University Press, £2.95. It is recommended as a stimulating book bringing together valuable information and ideas.]

### THE FREETHINKER

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