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TILL DEATH DO US PART, BUT . . . CHURCH MARRIAGE FOR DIVORCEES PROPOSED

A report from a special Commission of the Church of England has put forward a majority proposal for the remarriage of divorcees in church. As the divorce rate has increased steadily during the last decade the churches have been placed in a dilemma. They bind men and women together "indissolubly", but how do they cope with the logical problem of doing this twice for the same person? This is done, as is seen in the report, by a form of revisionism in which it is seen that nothing means quite what it seems or was thought to mean.

The report, *Marriage and the Church's Task*, is the result of a request from the General Synod for a special Commission to study the subject. In 1971 the report of an earlier Commission—known as the Root Commission after its chairman, Canon Howard Root—unanimously proposed that marriages should be allowed in church between individuals who had been divorced. The General Synod rejected that proposal after several years debate and requested further examination of the subject. The subsequent report will certainly be deeply divisive and it remains to be seen whether it is accepted, but it is worth noting that the recommendations, unlike those of the earlier report, are only by a majority of the Commission, which was itself divided. It seems that the Church will cling for as long as possible to the absurd idea of a marriage being "indissoluble".

The report, which will be debated at the General Synod in July, proposes, as well as permission for church marriage for divorcees, the abolition of services of prayer for remarriage after divorce, and the rescinding of regulations which admit remarried divorcees to Holy Communion only by permission from a bishop. Other proposals would give a bishop discretion to ordain a man who has been remarried and remove the obligation of the clergy to marry unbaptised people. (Perfectly reasonable, this last

proposal, since there is no reason why even clergymen should be obliged to act as vocal stage-props for a "white" wedding arranged for reasons of snobbery or entertainment.)

Technically a clergyman already has the legal right to remarry divorcees under civil law, and is only prevented from doing so by the moral pressure of church rules. Some clergy are already defying the regulations and such defiance is thought likely to become more frequent. This may weigh heavily when the General Synod comes to consider the proposals, for once again churchmen may have to twist their dogma to fit the *de facto* circumstances.

Marriage Indissoluble

The complex regulations and tortuous arguments of the Church of England would be of marginal importance if it did not claim to pronounce with authority on the meaning of marriage and if the majority (just) of the country did not still choose to be wed by some form of church ceremony. The two ideas about marriage which dominate the more general parts of *Marriage and the Church's Task* are that the relationship is indissoluble and in some sense sacred.

The church is therefore faced with a problem of its own making when remarriage is desired. As a result, interminable discussions of one or two biblical texts ensue—as though that were really relevant to how people conducted their relationships. In particular the words of Jesus from the sermon on the mount are scrutinised: "But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." This text has for ages been used by the Church of England to justify its stand against divorce, but the door to re-inter-

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pretation is gently opened with the report's words: "The recorded words afford us access to the mind of Christ, but the mind of Christ cannot be simply and immediately read off the recorded words." As ever, times change and "the word" will be found to have been previously "misinterpreted".

On the vexed matter of the "indissolubility" of marriage the Commission has it both ways. "In short we are all agreed in affirming that indissolubility is characteristic of marriage as it should and can be. There is something radically wrong when a marriage does break down. Marriages *ought* to be indissoluble! [sic] However most of us reject the doctrine that marriage cannot by definition be dissolved . . ." This is typical of the report's wanting to say two contrary things at once. And yet it assumes that the Church has the right to speak with authority. For instance, in commenting on the change of procedure in the working of the Divorce Reform Act 1969, whereby it became unnecessary for someone who was divorcing to attend court, the report comments that it is "unfortunate that it was introduced without prior consultation with the churches or the legal professions . . ."

Over-emphasis of Marriage

The report becomes even more vague when talking of the sacredness of marriage than when discoursing on the dissolution of the "indissoluble". The Commission is anxious to stress a "high" doctrine of marriage (could this idiom be derived from decaying food or recent drug-taking terminology?), but shies away from traditional ideas of a "sacrosanct" or "holy" relationship. The Churches have long over-emphasised their part in creating the ideal of a stable married family and in diminishing the amount of separation. Joseph McCabe wrote in *A Rationalist Encyclopedia*: "Its (the church's) boast that it suppressed divorce and made marriage indissoluble has, apart from the question whether this is socially desirable, an ironic aspect of which its apologists seem to be insensible. Instead of this triumph leading civilization into a new height in the cultural scale, as they imagine, it is a reversion to the most primitive condition of society or of pre-social savage life. 'Marriage is indissoluble', says Prof L. T. Hobhouse, a high authority who is so little disposed to criticise that he must have been unconscious of the irony of his words, 'amongst the Andamanese, some Papuans of New Guinea, at Watubela, at Lampong, in Sumatra, among the Igorrotes and Italonos of the Philippines, the Veddahs of Ceylon, and in the Roman Church.' (*Morals in Evolution*, 1929)".

Marriage and the Church's Task still continues to over-emphasise the importance of marriage as an indissoluble union. The ridiculous idea that two people may become one replaces the sensible idea

that two people may wish to share some or most of their lives with each other. The suggestion that in marriage "the fulfilment of the one is inseparable from the fulfilment of the other" flies in the face of observation, but more importantly ignores the psychological understanding that most fulfilled relationships are those where the individuals retain a strong sense of individual autonomy.

Need for Variety

"Is there life after marriage?" asked Quentin Crisp, the celebrated homosexual writer and entertainer. There is little doubt that marriage will survive as a sensible arrangement, especially for bringing up children, also since people enjoy its companionship. But the over-emphasis on family life by the Church—and some politicians—is a denial of the variety of human relationships. People change, their relationships may change; we must allow for the importance of different ways of life and different stages of life; for short term relationships, and long term relationships, for marriage and remarriage, for homosexual partnerships and, not least, the choice of living alone. It is important that children be brought up in an environment where they may develop a sense of their own worth; this may be provided by marriage, it may not.

Secularists are not against marriage where it is chosen and successful. But the Church's monotonous blastings about marriage and family life is tedious, unnecessary and arrogant: what a pity that politicians echo them. What a pity that *Marriage and the Church's Task* warns of the dangers of diminishing the permanence of marriage: "The door once opened would not thereafter be closed; there would be no possibility of a return to the Church's existing marriage discipline." This sounds like those floodgates of which moralists too frequently remind us.

Where responsibility for the young and shared property are involved a legal contract—which is partly the function of marriage—is necessary. And perhaps it should be a contract not entered into so lightly that the prospects of it being maintained are remote—as happens with some marriages. A fully secular society might require registry of marriages to mark a legal contract, and leave ceremony, promises, and so on entirely to the individuals, who can choose an altar, a mountain-top, or a public bar to state whatever they wish about their relationship, if they think it necessary. Marriage was made by men and women and not women and men for marriage.

"The golden rule is that there are no golden rules."
Man and Superman: G. B. Shaw.

Amnesty and Animal Rights

BRIGID BROPHY

In this article Brigid Brophy gives her reasons for objecting to experiments with pigs, which have been conducted for Amnesty International—the organisation concerned with worldwide political prisoners. She argues that the rights of political prisoners and animal liberationism are part of a single reasoned continuum which should be of crucial concern to secularists.

Three years ago, Amnesty asked me to join its list of people who, at a nod from Amnesty, send cables to régimes abroad about specific cases of injustice. I leapt happily at the chance to do my infinitesimal bit for an organisation that I admired not only for its practicalness but for its impartiality.

Almost alone among international groups, Amnesty neither swallowed nor practised the arithmetic of doublethink. It refused to engineer exchanges of prisoners: it knew that two reds don't make a white. Instead, it insisted on the rights of each prisoner as an individual, irrespective of his trade-in or write-off value. It was undecieved by the highly plausible arguments of régimes that maintain that some great good, such as the public security of the majority of the citizens, can be furthered by sacrificing the lives, liberties or freedom from pain of a mere handful of other individuals who are in any case devalued individuals, since they are "only" anarchists or "only" bourgeois reactionaries or "only" Christians, infidels, blacks, pinks, pinkoes or whatever class it is that that particular régime has ruled to be inferior.

Both my admiration and my small-scale work for Amnesty came to a shocked end in May 1977, when *The Guardian* reported that Amnesty had sponsored experiments on pigs.

The object of the experiments was the (in other circumstances) laudable one of helping to detect, and thus perhaps eventually making it easier to stop, the use of torture on political prisoners by discovering more about the lasting effects of heat and electricity on skin. The pigs were anaesthetised; heat or electricity was applied to their skin, from which a sample was taken; they came round and were allowed to live for some time, so that long-term effects might declare themselves; then they were anaesthetised again and were killed.

This was the first group of experiments. (There was a second, of which details have not been given. There may have been others.) It was not one of the most atrocious assaults ever committed by humans on fellow animals of a different species, but neither was it, especially if you allow for fear and bewilderment, innocuous. And of course it rested on the

assumption that a pig exists merely to be "used" and killed when you have done with him.

As for the laudable long-term purpose of the experiment, it is important to notice that almost all infringements of other beings' rights, including the infringements committed by governments against political prisoners which Amnesty so admirably combats, are committed for the most laudable long-term purposes in the world. Political terrorists torture hostages, and governments torture captured political terrorists, with the noblest conceivable intentions, which almost always include the intention of preventing someone from achieving a position where he can and will torture someone else.

As a result of my protests Amnesty eventually put me in touch with the doctor who was in charge of the experiments. I asked him to suppose that a government which wanted to investigate, with a view to stopping, the use of torture by terrorists on hostages had done to political prisoners exactly (anaesthetics, final killing and all) what Amnesty did to the pigs: would Amnesty hold that government to be justified? "I have to answer no", he replied.

Like my fellow anti-vivisectionist Bernard Shaw, I do not deny that results of interest or use to humans may follow from experiments on animals. In this case, the usefulness seems doubtful, both because of the specific differences between pigs' and humans' skin and because of the nature of evidence. You could shew that a prisoner's skin bore the marks of torture as established by the experiments on the pigs' skins, but that could not shew that the marks were in fact produced by the same method or that they were produced by intention, not accident; and a government that tortures prisoners is not going to be swayed by evidence that points only to likelihood, not certainty.

Experiments Not Justified

However, even if the experiments did or even could achieve the purpose they were designed to achieve, I do not think a reasonable person could maintain that they were thereby justified. If he did, he would have to admit that governments are justified in torturing terrorists or opposition leaders on the grounds that doing so is a very effective way of preventing them or others from torturing someone else. And that is precisely what we have all, until now, admired Amnesty for *not* admitting.

It seems to me that Amnesty, undecieved by political cant, has swallowed a dose of cant of a conventional or perhaps a religious kind. It has decided (I hope not irrevocably) to ignore the enormous fact of the evolution of species and, perhaps

on the premiss that God awarded humans "dominion" over all the other animal species, write off pigs as members of an inferior class who can be traded as though they were not beings but things. It has made the mistake, which it never would if it were asked to trade two Jehovah's Witnesses for one champion of black political consciousness, of enquiring "What is the value of a pig's life to Amnesty?" (answer: minimal) instead of the crucial question "What is the value of this pig's life to this pig?" (answer: invaluable, because unique and irreplaceable).

Animal Rights Movement

It is tragic that Amnesty should throw its Nobel-prize-winning international prestige into an endorsement of vivisection—indeed, should actually take up the practice of vivisection—at a time when the animal rights movement is taking off in tremendous moral force and is beginning to shake the public conscience (which was given voice, the other day, by the Prime Minister) into questioning human beings' assumption of absolute superiority to and absolute rights over individuals of other animal species. One could easily collapse into cynicism at the spectacle of Amnesty, of all organisations in the world, taking up and justifying such a practice. But it would be more useful to try to persuade Amnesty to change its mind.

That, in fact, several groups and individuals are trying to do. Lord Houghton has protested; so have many animal welfare organisations. I had a meeting with Amnesty, where I was abetted by Richard Ryder (chairman of the RSPCA and author of one of the central books of the animal liberation movement, *Victims of Science*), Graham Haydon (a lecturer in moral philosophy), Roslind Godlovitch (another moral philosopher and one of the editors of *Animals, Men and Morals*, the comprehensive handbook of animal rights) and Maureen Duffy (whose novels include the pro-animal thriller *I Want to Go To Moscow*). The trade union I belong to, the Writers' Guild of Great Britain, has deferred deciding whether to affiliate to Amnesty until our AGM has considered the ethics of animal experiments. Most important, there is growing opposition to the experiments within the international ranks of Amnesty itself, and the governing body of Amnesty is due to reconsider the whole question in September.

The National Secular Society could contribute to this movement by rescinding its affiliation to Amnesty until Amnesty accords rights to pigs as well as to prisoners. The NSS aim of extending the moral law to animals surely implies a recognition that animals have certain rights that are irreducible (not tradeable for possible advantages to other individuals).

I know that some secularists shy away from standing on a pig's right not to be vivisected on the grounds that it would be inconsistent or even hypocritical of them to do so when they daily infringe the rights of pigs with their morning bacon. This is a difficult argument for me to win, because I cannot conceal that I am myself a vegetarian and that I do not see how any secularist who agrees that evolution took place can find it in his conscience or his reason to be otherwise. However, it seems fair to point out that the inconsistency, if there is one, is in you: the suffering and the violation of rights are in the pigs. We are speaking of individual fellow animals, and where their lives and their pursuit of happiness are concerned I do not think it can be morally better to be consistent about wronging fellow beings than to be inconsistent enough, and compassionate enough, to stand up for the rights of at least some of them.

Reasoned Continuum

To my mind, secularism, support for the rights of political prisoners and animal liberationism are components of a single reasoned continuum. All rest on the perception that, in our moral relationship to fellow beings, the crucial question is what value that being has to himself, not to me or to my supposedly superior class or to some supposed superior entity like a god who has supposedly, and very conveniently for me, told me I may do anything that suits me to a creature of so little importance that it lacks even a soul. Animal liberation is, by natural reasonable progression, the 20th-century successor to the movement to abolish slavery, and it seems a matter of natural reasonable progression that secularists should be out there campaigning in the front line.

(The National Secular Society's Executive Committee have discussed the affiliation to Amnesty International. They have written to AI expressing concern, and have decided to reconsider the affiliation at the AGM in December.

Amnesty International have sent a statement which says: "The experiments on anaesthetised pigs were conducted . . . by a group of independent Danish physicians at their own initiative with funding for expenses from the Danish Medical Research Council. The doctors are members of the AI Danish Medical Research Council, and like other professional groups who donate their work for AI's aims, AI does not presume to comment on the standard working methods of their profession, so long as these methods do not violate local laws or the statutes of AI." Editor.)

"My country is the world and my religion is to do good." Rights of Man: Thomas Paine.

Religious Education and Muddled Minds

DAVID HARRIS

The author's experience of teaching led him to observe much dishonesty concerning Religious Education. He subsequently did research into teachers' attitudes to RE and moral education. In this article he summarises some of the results, which confirmed the inconsistency of many teachers.

I taught for ten years in a variety of state schools, and swiftly became disenchanted with the hypocrisy amongst many school teachers concerning compulsory Religious Education. I remember with grim irony two particular Headteachers, who both knew that I was a secular humanist, and whose situations were almost tragi-comic. One was a working-class Jew unforgivably ashamed of his ethnic origins, and the other a fundamentalist who rejoiced in the slaughter of the 1967 Six Day War. It *might* have been the Second Coming! Both were nonplussed when I mentioned that I was one of the Chosen People, (Old Trafford held about 63,500 at that time), and I slipped away to Southampton University to do 18 months research in an attempt to highlight such charlatanesque proceedings by looking at the work into Moral Education by the most practical of Oxford philosophers, Mr John Wilson.

Compulsory RE Shabby

This has led me to follow up the ensuing study at Cambridge and to reinforce my conviction of the shabby nature of compulsory Religious Education, i.e. indoctrination. At Southampton I had a look at Wilson's PHIL moral component, which is having the concept of a person and claiming to use this concept as the criterion for forming and acting on principles of action: that is, accepting that the wants and interests of other people be regarded as equal to one's own. A 60 item questionnaire was constructed with Wilson's aid and sent to 150 Middle School teachers, (catering for the eight to twelve age range), with items relating to discipline, behaviour, competition, social awareness and the mandatory provision for religious education, e.g. "Religious beliefs help to comfort the sick and suffering . . . Human nature being what it is, some schools need to use corporal punishment . . . Parents should have the facility to withdraw their children from Assembly . . . A man can override his self-interest without support from religion . . . If no inconvenience to my colleagues would result, I would opt out of Religious Education work . . ." etc. A built-

in "lie scale" sought to highlight inconsistency of response and all the results were correlated with sex, status, age, years in teaching and professional training.

The computer analysis revealed some intriguing results, including the following:

1. A third of all respondents felt that hymns provided no emotional link between the children and God.
2. Almost 46 per cent felt that direct moral instruction did little to improve children's characters.
3. Less than 40 per cent indicated that character training is impossible if there is no clear standard of right and wrong.
4. Some 70 per cent agreed that the school should teach the child to accept authority, yet 41 per cent of the total sample also felt that older pupils should be allowed to make decisions in the running of the school.
5. Approximately 70 per cent felt that withdrawal from Religious Education isolated children, yet half of these agreed that non-Christian children should be provided with facilities for practising their own particular faith!
6. Some 32 per cent felt that a man could override his self-interest without religious support, yet also agreed that "people require some form of religious orientation or belief in order to achieve a fully mature philosophy of life." Since these items were clearly mutually exclusive one may doubt the merits of such "maturity".
7. Almost one third agreed that more harm than good was caused by the retention of Religious Education by compulsion, and 37 per cent expressed their intention to "opt-out". The experienced teacher, or for that matter most people connected in any way with schools, will know just how rare such exits actually are. 44 individuals felt that "people who think that supernatural powers can help them are evading responsibility." As Dr H. F. Matthews wrote:

"It should be our main aim to help children in their years at school to come to responsible choices about moral values and about religious belief. If they can see in a school staff a number of people who, though differing in their answers, are all facing the questions honestly, they will more likely come to a state of informed decision than if they are

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Abortion Act—Tenth Anniversary

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Abortion Act 1967, which made abortion legal in Britain. This important Bill has enabled more than one million women to obtain legal and safe abortions, who might otherwise have been forced into the back streets, or into damaging their lives by having unintended babies. "If there was nothing else to be said for the Act", writes Madeleine Simms in *Breaking Chains*, the newspaper of the Abortion Law Reform Association, "this alone would mark it out as one of the most significant domestic social reforms of the post-war era."

The tenth anniversary was used by anti-abortion organisation SPUC for a distasteful and dishonest protest against the 1967 Act. Wreaths were carried from town to town and delivered to Members of Parliament and bells were tolled across the country to mourn the one and a quarter million "babies" said to have been aborted during the ten years of the present legislation. The National Secular Society issued a press statement deploring "the extreme bad taste of the exercise." It read: "Its organisers insist on using the emotive word 'babies' when they mean 'foetuses' as a deliberate attempt to burden with feelings of guilt all the women who have at any time had pregnancies terminated and to put pressure on women now pregnant to go ahead and give birth to unwanted babies."

"The National Secular Society would prefer to lament the many unhappy lives that began as unwanted foetuses and were denied abortion. If every potential life were sacred then every woman should be compelled to bear a child annually throughout her child-bearing years, though most of the children would inevitably suffer early death through starvation."

"We are told that the termination of a pregnancy is an 'unnatural' act and against God's will—all pregnancies, presumably, being willed by God even when the result of rape. But not only does this argument carry no weight with non-believers; it would logically forbid believers to cheat death unnaturally by medicine or surgery."

Many who have worked tirelessly to achieve and sustain the situation where a woman may have the right to control her own fertility have commented with thankfulness on "the enormous sense of well-being and relief that the 1967 Act, by its very existence, has brought to many women and their families". These are the words of Renée Short, MP for Wolverhampton, North East, in an Adjournment Debate in the House of Commons on 20 April 1978. But the anniversary is not a time for complacency, rather for ensuring the effective operation of the Act, and remedying "the failure of the National Health Service to provide the neces-

sary facilities for equitable treatment throughout the country", as Mrs Short also said.

In her speech (to be printed in full in the *Spring New Humanist*) Mrs Short referred to the ill-founded scandal-mongering of the anti-abortionists, who created myths about aborted "babies" being born alive. She mentioned in particular the book *Babies for Burning*, which had resulted in two Abortion (Amendment) Bills being brought before the House: "... that disgusting little book was touted around" and the authors eventually "were forced to make their humiliating High Court retractions and apology to the British Pregnancy Advisory Service. Not only did the authors lie in the book, they lied before a Select Committee of the House." That, she explained, "was her main reason for bringing the matter before the House."

Glasgow By-Election

Renée Short also referred to the by-election in Garscadden, Glasgow, where anti-abortionists attempted to make abortion an electoral issue. An article "By-Election Nonsense" by Sharon Spiers in *Breaking Chains* (May/June) shows how the antics of SPUC and the Roman Catholic Churches had no effect on the result. The views on abortion of all candidates was widely publicised and massive leafletting took place. It was a campaign in which Roman Catholic priests knocked on the doors of parishioners showing Labour posters and ordered them to take them down. The Labour candidate, who had declared himself in favour of the 1967 Abortion Act, was re-elected, and opinion polls indicated that electors placed abortion very low in importance compared with other issues.

Elsewhere in Glasgow the British Pregnancy Advisory Service held an open evening on May 15 at its Glasgow Branch. The well-known Glasgow MP, James White, has been invited by the BPAS to become a Patron of the clinic. (In 1975 James White, an opponent of abortion, brought a Bill to amend the 1967 Act.)

In an open letter to James White, Diane Munday, Public Relations Officer for the BPAS, wrote:

"You may remember that on 20 October 1975, when BPAS gave oral evidence to the Select Committee on the Abortion (Amendment) Bill, of which you were a prominent member, you asked (para 1796 of Hansard 253-(xii)) 'Could you tell me about your organisation in the city of Glasgow?' to which Professor Lafitte, Chairman of BPAS Trustees, replied 'We do not have one is the short answer.' You then said (para 1797) 'I am a bit surprised. It is the most deprived city

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THOUGHTS ON BLASPHEMY

A regular column in the *Church Times* by Canon Ian Dunlop is called "Thinking it Out". Unfortunately it often doesn't. The column for 21 April 1978 was entitled "Blasphemy and Freedom" and opened: "The National Secular Society's comment, as printed in the *Church Times* on March 23, read as follows: 'An adult society does not need a self-appointed school marm who tries to seal the mouth of her wayward pupils if they cannot echo her own piety'."

Ian Dunlop commented "I find this less than fair." A letter from Jim Herrick, as Secretary of the National Secular Society, was subsequently published. It read: "Although I am pleased that Ian Dunlop should give such serious consideration to our comments on blasphemy law, I feel that he was less than fair.

"Canon Dunlop's main point is that people have a right not to be 'gratuitously affronted'. But who is to draw the line between down-to-earth artistic expression and deliberate rudeness? What will draw one person's righteous indignation will merely tickle another's sense of humour. The right never to be offended is the right to live a dehumanised life in cold-storage.

"And, even if that were a right which anyone wanted, no one apparently cares about the sensibilities of atheists. They were recently described as elderly philosophers or young vandals by the Archbishop of York on BBC *Thought for the Day*, and were accused of 'besmirching with ordure' by Lord Halsbury in the House of Lords debate on Lord Willis's Bill to abolish blasphemy law."

Ian Dunlop also referred to the Committee Against Blasphemy Law's comment that "the law represented a continuing threat to freedom of expression on religious matters". Although claiming not to have read the poem, he said that he could not see that it "comes within the term of 'religious matters'. Necrophilia is not a religion it is a sexual perversion".

Nicolas Walter, member of the Committee Against Blasphemy Law, replied: "If the freedom of expression in religious matters had not been threatened by this particular use of the blasphemy law, he could have read the poem for himself rather than rely on misleading reports, then he would have known that it is

not about necrophilia, but is a poetical expression of the sexual interpretation of the Atonement (in a tradition going back to the Song of Solomon) which happens to take a homosexual form. What would he say to the commentators who denied the religious significance of, say, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the Ascension, or the Eucharist, and called them respectively sadomasochism, trickery, hallucination and cannibalism?"

The Committee Against Blasphemy Law is organising a petition against blasphemy law to be sent to the Home Office. Copies and further details may be obtained from CABL, 32 Over Street, Brighton, Sussex.

POWERFUL CONVERSION

Unwanted church buildings are being put to many alternative uses. The Episcopal Church at Dean Bridge, Edinburgh, is now being used as an electrical power sub-station. The "electrical power church" is officially described as a "very good conversion."

It has been reported that five out of six churches in Bristol's city centre are to be closed.

The publishers of "Gay News" and Denis Lemon, its editor, were given leave by the Appeal Committee of the House of Lords on 17 May to appeal to the House of Lords against their conviction of blasphemous libel.

BELOW: Denis Lemon, guest of honour at the Annual Dinner of the National Secular Society. From Left to Right: Bill McIlroy, Barbara Smoker, Denis Lemon, Jim Herrick.



It has now been decided to reject carbon 14 dating tests on the shroud of Turin. The scientific commission, which advises the Archbishop of Turin, has written: "A restudy in depth of the carbon 14 test should be postponed for the present since we do not have a consensus among the experts on the 100 per cent efficiency of this test in the specific case of the shroud". Carbon 14 dating is generally considered the most reliable and accurate test for dating. It is based on the proportion of a radioactive carbon isotope present to a non-radioactive carbon 12. The ratio enables scientists to estimate the date at which carbon dioxide in the atmosphere became "fixed" by incorporation in organic material and could therefore give the age of plants from which the shroud's linen was made.

The secretary of the British Society for the Turin Shroud, the Rev David Sox, has expressed disappointment at the decision. He has said that this is "the one test that could settle once and for all whether the shroud is a medieval forgery" and hopes that pressure of public opinion will cause the Archbishop of Turin to change his mind. The owner of the shroud, the exiled ex-king Umberto, has given permission for the tests.

The shroud will be on display in Turin between 27 August and 8 October and a major congress is to take place on the shroud in October. Experts will discuss the present state of knowledge, and the Rev David Sox hopes there will be a "first-class battle" over the Archbishop's decision. Many other tests are being permitted, but radio carbon dating is thought to be the most accurate means of determining its age.

Following her article in the May *Freethinker*, "No Shroud of Evidence", Barbara Smoker took part in the London Broadcasting Corporation programmes "AM" and "Sunday Supplement". Also taking part was Ian Wilson, author of the book *The Turin Shroud*. Barbara Smoker pointed out that scientists, while not actually deceiving with incorrect information, were offering interpretations that were spurious. Ian Wilson, who said that he was disappointed that carbon dating had been rejected, thought that the refusal was partly due to Italian envy of American scientific superiority in the field.

Even though eminent Catholic commentators such as Mr St John-Stevas, MP, have described such relics as "optional extras" not vital to the faith, the Archbishop of Turin would obviously prefer to avoid clear proof of forgery. But some people's wish to be convinced of the miraculous is so great that they would no doubt swell the ranks of religious tourists flocking to Turin in late summer even if its authenticity had been disproved.

BENIGHTED CHRISTIAN

"Thought for the Day", that morning snippet of religion on the radio which often wakes you with the thought that you'd prefer still to be asleep, proffered the surprising view, on 12 April from the Archbishop of York, that atheism is the philosophy of either elderly philosophers or young vandals. Barbara Smoker wrote to the programme "Disgusted, Tunbridge Wells" pointing out that she was President of one of the main atheistic organisations in the country "whose members cover a wide age range, and none of whom, to my knowledge, could be described as vandals".

Her letter, which was read out, continued: "The Archbishop is, of course, in a privileged position; for the churches not only have all sorts of legal and fiscal privileges; they are also allocated hundreds of hours of radio and television time every week, whereas alternative viewpoints are allocated no time at all, but merely invited to provide an occasional guest for religious programmes, so as to liven them up a bit, always on terms dictated by the religious side and usually with ecclesiastical spokesmen standing by to have the last word. Archbishops can therefore be as rude as they please to atheists, knowing that there is no similar opportunity for atheists to be rude back."

In due course, a letter of reply also emerged from the Secretariat at Broadcasting House in reply to Barbara Smoker's letter. The Senior Assistant, Patricia Hodgson, wrote that "I am sorry you were annoyed by the views expressed by the Archbishop of Canterbury on 12 April." Now to secularists it is a matter of small regard if the Archbishop of York and of Canterbury swap places—but no doubt it would be of concern to them.

The letter continued with further misinformation. It states that "The BBC's policy is not that every broadcast should include all points of view, but that all views should have access to the airwaves over a period. In this context I should point out that the first of a new television series 'Cross Question' included a debate between two eminent atheists, Sir Malcolm Muggeridge and James Cameron." But viewers who had been following this series would have looked for these eminent men in vain: they did not appear in the series. Distinguished atheists Gore Vidal, Angela Willans and Nicolas Walter did, however, appear. Furthermore, Malcolm Muggeridge—an eminent Christian—would doubtless be taken aback to find that he had been knighted and enlightened by atheism in one fell

AND NOTES

swoop. Secularists could not complain if all Christians appearing on religious broadcasting programmes underwent a similar conversion.

RADICAL JUDAISM

Judaism looks like going the way of all the other religions in the West as more and more Jews find it increasingly difficult to maintain a commitment to the basic tenets of their faith. The replacement of superstitious belief by a greater secular approach to the business of living has been noted, with some alarm, in the United States by Rabbi Alvin J. Reines of Cincinnati.

He has been quoted in *Time* magazine as saying of US Judaism: "No Jewish community has ever had more distinguished, respected or prosperous members. No Jewish community has experienced less anti-Semitism. No Jewish community has enjoyed more religious freedom. Yet American Jewry is in a desperate state of crisis." And he predicted that by the year 2,100, the number of American Jews could dwindle from its present 5.8 million to fewer than one million. This, he says, is because American Jews will simply no longer accept the teachings of traditional Judaism—and without religion, Jewry will vanish.

He is not alone in his pessimism. It is shared by virtually all of America's Judaic leaders who are suggesting all manner of means of curtailing secularist attitudes. These include a greater commitment to Israel, a higher birth rate, a stricter ban on intermarriage, and campaigns against proselytisers from other faiths. Rabbi Reines believes that none of these measures will be effective, but has come up with something he thinks might, in the end, save the day—Polydoxy. This, says *Time*, is a "radically open-ended faith which has only one absolute: That there are no absolutes".

What, then, is Polydoxy? On the surface, it looks like Judaism's answer to Unitarianism because it is tailored to the spiritual requirements of Jews who no longer believe in a personal benevolent deity. Polydox liturgies use vague formulations such as "the power of creation" or "the flow and force of life", and God has been reduced to a lower case "g". Polydox get-togethers are simply "services"—they are not referred to as services of worship, since followers don't worship any particular god. What's more, *Time* reports that newly-written Polydox texts for children have banished bible stories as "un-edifying and untrue."

Rabbi Reines, who has rejected Reform Judaism

as only a half-hearted attempt at liberalism, won't, however, have comparisons drawn between Polydoxy and Unitarianism. The latter, he says, "is not a religion. It ducks all the questions, the basic problems of the finite condition of the human person, death and so on".

It is doubtful whether many Jews believe that Polydoxy will, on the other hand, be able to provide those answers. The first Polydoxical synagogue was established about six years ago, and has a congregation of only 100. The total number of rabbis in the United States preaching Rabbi Reines' philosophy is a mere 75. Asked to summarise his Polydoxical outlook, one of Rabbi Reines' rabbinical followers, Anthony Holz, said: "50 per cent of what we know is wrong—and we can never know which 50 per cent."

So now you know!

Freethinker Fund

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I DON'T MIND THE SEX IT'S THE VIOLENCE by Enid Wistrich. Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd, £2.25.

Mr Whitelaw, deputy leader of the Conservative Party and its home affairs spokesman, has just told us that the next Tory government will strengthen the censorship laws. He attacks people like the author of this book. He says they "regard as antiquated and prudish prigs those—amongst whom I include myself—who believe that we have a duty to conserve the moral standards on which our society has been based, and so preserve them for future generations". (*Sunday Times*, 14 May 1978.)

Enid Wistrich, a former Labour member of the Greater London Council, was chairman of its Film Viewing Board in 1973-75. Her opposition to censorship in Britain today is threefold:

"First, it is an authoritarian act of formal political repression in a largely free Society. Second, it is a manifestation of paternalism. Third, it is a diminution of the individual's freedom to think, judge and choose for himself".

Why "political" repression? Because, says Ms Wistrich, art, entertainment and cultural artefacts contain messages which either reinforce or disrupt the prevailing ethos. Interference with those messages therefore has a political aspect, even where this is not suspected by the censor.

Ms Wistrich cites many examples of this "political" repression, from the earliest days of the British Board of Film Censors (founded by the trade in 1912 as a means of self-protection) to the present time. A list of grounds for censorship published by the Board in 1913 included indecorous dancing, scenes disparaging public characters and institutions and foreign customs abhorrent to British ideas. In our own day the film *Manson* is refused a certificate on the grounds that it makes the hedonistic life of the commune attractive and rejects normal social values. Ms Wistrich reminds us that among the flock of amateur censors today we have Mr David Holbrook demanding a total ban on public nudity (except for what he calls "certain works of art, where the overall creative intention of the artist demands it") and Ms Whitehouse pleading that if war documentaries are not censored the realism will so repel viewers as to sap the national will to wage war.

When one remembers that footage cut by a film censor presumably contains the most "extreme" portion of the maker's message, it is worrying to learn from Ms Wistrich just how many films have suffered these cuts. During the eight years from 1968 to 1975, cuts were required by the British censor in *more than half* of all films made for public exhibition to adults. 181 films were banned entirely,

representing 4 per cent of films of every kind submitted during the period. This is indeed formidable interference with freedom of speech.

The folly of censorship is that it supposes one human mind competent to decree what shall be admitted to other human minds. This supposition is self-evidently false, but persists. That is because many adults, uneasy at their loss of infant-dependence, yearn for parent-figures to direct them. They long for a God-our-father and create one wherever they can. That comforts them, but it is a child's comfort.

Censorship shows distrust of people. They are not to be allowed to form their own judgments based (as true judgment must be) on *all* the evidence. Other, better adjusted minds must intervene. What the masses see must be filtered by those with a loftier view, a better balance and a firmer base. No censor supposes that censors can be corrupted by what they see. Censors are supermen, above corruption. They thus confess themselves heirs of Nietzsche, Bowdler and Adolf Hitler. However well-meaning, they fail to see that the adult mind needs to grapple with unfiltered reality. Rejection must spring from the mind's own processes and no others. Growth ensues.

Despite its rather silly title, this is an admirable book which shows its author to be a civilised, public-spirited and courageous woman. It gives a useful view of how film censorship operates, and makes a thoughtful contribution to the debate on what (if anything) should succeed it. Ms Wistrich is on the executive committee of the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society. With that body she evidently believes that "history shows there is no monopoly of truth, no permanent opinion" and that "the ears of mankind must be open to every voice, for new truths come from unexpected quarters".* One hopes Mr Whitelaw will take heed.

FRANCIS BENNION

*Evidence to the Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship by the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society (18 Brewer Street, London W1R A4S), price 30p.

JACK: A biography of Jack London by Andrew Sinclair. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £6.95

When Jack London was six, his spiritualist mother stood him on a table and launched into a war-whoop of such ferocity that the local children christened the family dwelling behind a grocer's shop "the spook house". Flora London's other preoccupations

REVIEWS

were only slightly less bizarre, and one—her racialism—had a permanent impact on her son. Years later, London would boast of his superior Nordic origins to a journalist eager for background information on the man destined to become the most popular author of his time in the English-speaking world.

The true circumstances of London's birth—as we learn from Andrew Sinclair's biography—were more modest. He was, in fact, illegitimate, raised by his mother, sister and a black nurse into a household in Oakland, California that could barely be called lower middle class. Shame and financial insecurity led to a nervous condition and an itch to see the world. At 17, he shipped aboard a 150-ton schooner bound for Japan. At 21, he was off again, to the Alaskan Klondike in search of gold and adventure as the "Frisco Kid". Though these sojourns provided little in the way of material gain, they did acquaint him with the world of hard graft and serve as the basis of his best work and a ruling philosophy for the hard years ahead. He may have urged people at home to read *Das Kapital*, but his own understanding of "biological determinism" was closer to Nietzsche, Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin.

Mr Sinclair's most valuable contribution to the study of his subject is precisely his treatment of London's racism as it relates to his socialist ideology. "I am first of all a white man and only then a socialist", he once told a socialist gathering in Oakland. He favoured something more akin to benevolent dictatorship than outright equality of the masses. His compulsion to assert individual will above debilitating circumstances was almost certainly responsible for much of his creativity. Whether this meant writing "until the blisters broke" or nearly blinding himself with copious private study, London pursued whatever he did with the energy of a dozen pack horses. Perhaps as a tribute to his untamed insularity, he took to signing his letters "Wolf".

Today's readers are apt to qualify their enthusiasm for London's achievement by calling his best work children's literature, of the order of *Black Beauty* or *Ring of Bright Water*. His most recent biographer strenuously disagrees. *The Call of the Wild*, he says, is "a myth about life and death and nature". Mr Sinclair also views London as the forerunner of Hemingway, Henry Miller and others of the "tough-guy" school of American literature.

Humanists may be surprised to learn that many of London's ideas and much of his lifestyle re-

flected humanist thought. A confirmed anti-romantic, he boldly asserted that God was dead. His first marriage was a passionless union founded on reason. He was strongly in favour of euthanasia.

Mr Sinclair's penultimate chapter recounts the mysterious circumstances of London's death. At that time there was some question of his having committed suicide. Though he discounts this theory, Mr Sinclair makes broad hints of its possibility by alluding to the similarities between London's death and Hemingway's. Like Hemingway, London found his body was no longer capable of the physical excesses he demanded of it. From early adulthood, he was obsessed with the fear of venereal disease. Now he was plagued by urinary and other intestinal disorders. Heavily sedated, his sleep was disturbed by nightmare. Who is to say whether the final dose of morphine did not reveal a scarcely conscious death wish?

Andrew Sinclair occasionally prefers uncritical eulogy to more painstaking analysis of London's work, calling elements particular to the author's life alone "divine discontent". Since other biographers have concentrated on London's adventures in the Klondike, Mr Sinclair correctly relates these mainly in the context of his early life as a whole. The biography is of most use in outlining the various personal and intellectual influences on London's work, especially as these affect his socialism and racial antipathy.

JAMES MACDONALD

THE RASTAFARIANS by Leonard E. Barrett. Heinemann, £2.90.

Although on the surface Jamaica appears to be a lovely paradise island in the warm Caribbean it has had a sad history. Originally inhabited by Arawak Indians, it became a Spanish possession in the sixteenth century until Cromwell "annexed" it to England in 1655. By this time most of the Arawaks had been killed off and next came the English planters who realised what easy profits were to be made by shipping slaves from West Africa to work on their plantations. This obnoxious state of affairs continued until 1834 when slavery was finally abolished after an heroic rebellion in 1831-32, but alas poverty and distress is still very much evident in Jamaica today.

In his latest book *The Rastafarians* Leonard E. Barrett outlines the history of the island to demonstrate how the Rastafarians have come to be such an important social and political force. From this we can see that Jamaican culture has been a fusion of African and European ideologies with the latter trying to suppress the former. Traditional Jamaican religion consists of revivalism with African undertones and traditional pentecostalism, in particular the American Church of God which has made great

headway on the island since 1929 with its fundamentalist approach to Christianity. Previous to this the Great Revival of 1860-61 swept the island in the same way as Wales was "stricken" in 1904-5, ensuring that Christianity gained a firm foothold.

However much the various Christian Churches tried to keep Jamaicans to mainstream Christianity they could never suppress their African roots. The man who was indirectly responsible for the Rastafarian cult was Marcus Mosiah Garvey who became the leading spokesman for blacks in the early years of this century. At a time when the British Empire was at its zenith he spoke out consistently against the European colonial power and was much revered by blacks not only in Jamaica but worldwide. Before he left Jamaica for the United States in 1916 he is believed to have said "Look to Africa for the crowning of a black King, he shall be the Redeemer."

This virtually forgotten remark by Garvey became regarded as a biblical prophecy when Ras Tafari (from whom the cult gets its name) was crowned as Emperor of Ethiopia and took the name Haile Selassie to which was added "King of Kings" and "Lion of the Tribe of Judah". This event took place in 1930 and the Rastafarian movement can be said to have started from this point.

So who are the Rastafarians and what are their beliefs? In chapters 3 and 4 of his book Leonard Barrett answers this difficult question clearly for the uninitiated, as Rastafarianism is essentially esoteric. Basically they believe that Haile Selassie or rather was the embodiment of God (Jah) on earth. The fact that Haile Selassie is now dead only strengthens this belief amongst true Rastas as they claim that in his spiritual form he is even more powerful.

To support this claim various passages are quoted out of the Bible from Psalms, Jeremiah and Revelation. (Again note the blend of African religion and Christianity.) It is even believed that the Jesus Christ spoken of in the Bible is in fact Haile Selassie, but the white slave owners presented him as European to suit themselves. (John Allegro portrayed Jesus as a sacred mushroom, now it appears that he is Haile Selassie—over to the theologians!) Also in Rastafarianism there is a strong belief in compulsory repatriation to the African motherland and in particular Ethiopia—though how this is going to be achieved is not made clear. Indeed it appears that after several abortive attempts into pressurising the Jamaican government to give free repatriation to Rastas, they have settled on trying to improve their lot wherever they are in the world.

There is an undeniable anti-white feeling amongst Rastas, though they are a peaceable sect and their anger is more directed against white man's behaviour towards blacks than against whites them-

selves. In fact Leonard Barrett claims that in some Rasta communes in Jamaica there are a few whites probably attracted by the liberal use of "ganga" or the holy weed better known as marijuana in Europe. This use of ganga has resulted in several clashes with the Jamaican authorities who resent not only their use of the drug but also their way of life and their appearance—in particular those who wear "dreadlocks" (long thick strands of hair representing the mane of the Lion of Judah). The two major incidents were the destruction of the pinnacle commune in 1954 and the flattening by bulldozers in 1966 of the shanty town district of Kingston known as "Back-O-Wall", where large numbers of Rastas were squatting.

It is only in the last decade that the Rastafarians have become known internationally and that is mainly through the medium of their music, the distinctive Jamaican reggae. In particular the haunting melodies and rhythms of Bob Marley, an exceptionally talented musician, have spread the Rastafarian message to the States, Britain and of course Africa.

Apart from evolving a distinctive style of music, religion, and arts, they have their own language which is a mixture of "Jamaica-talk", itself derived from English and a hint of African dialect. It is almost devoid of subject—object opposition and makes scant use of verbs. A common expression amongst Rastas is the phrase "I and I" as opposed to me and you. This represents a form of solidarity with other followers of the cult, a one for all and all for one attitude common amongst oppressed minorities. Anyone opposed to their beliefs is referred to in their language as "babylon" (more old testament) and in particular the Jamaican government, though babylon can also refer to white society.

One thing that emerged in the book which I did not like was the Rastafarian attitude towards women. There appears to be a contradiction between their beliefs and women's rights. This is shown in the last poem on page 236 entitled "Abortion", the first *stanza* of which reads:

O terrible sin abortion! it is the worst of all
Eight letters spell the deadly sin, so is downfall
The wickedness of murderess destroy the yet
unborn
They never gave the seed a chance to see crea-
tion's Morn.

I did not expect to find that Mary Whitehouse and the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children would have anything in common with the Rastafarians but this poem would seem to support precisely their attitude towards abortion. I wonder if it is merely coincidence that the vast majority of Rasta are male, taking into account their acceptance of the moral instruction in Genesis chapter

38? (The sin of Onan who practised coitus interruptus.)

For the student of the Rastafarian cult the book is invaluable. One slight criticism that I would wish to raise is that there is very little mention of the Rastas in either the States or Britain where the cult is expanding significantly. In the inner city ghettos of Brixton, Handsworth (Birmingham) and Moss Side (Manchester) many Jamaicans are seen wearing the green, gold and red colours of the movement. Perhaps there is room here for another volume dealing with the Rastafarians outside Jamaica as there is no doubt we shall be hearing more from them in Britain in the near future.

KEN WRIGHT

THEATRE

BRAND by Henrik Ibsen. Olivier (National Theatre)

Ibsen's early play, *Brand*, has only been staged twice before in Britain, and, judging by the number of seats left empty after the interval at this third attempt, the theatre-going public has not been too cruelly deprived. It is a play for theologians, scholars, theatre historians and for anyone interested in following the conflicting phases in Ibsen's search for truth, as embodied in his successive plays. It is, I might add, a play which rewards those who do not vote with their feet in the interval, as it gathers momentum in the second half.

Brand is a Lutheran pastor whose demand that his followers commit themselves totally to serving God and that they relinquish all worldly goods and thoughts brings suffering and death to his family. His intransigence provokes in turn scorn, fear, grudging respect and hatred in the inhabitants of his edge-of-the-world village.

For me, the play is least resonant when seeking to be most "universal" and "allegorical". It has been described by Edmund Gosse as "a beautiful Puritan opera", and, despite Ralph Koltai's excellent set, a cracked, jagged glacier, it does not quite work as a stage play. With a little judicious pruning, it would make a fine radio play for the Sunday slot; but there is something faintly absurd about village folk milling vengefully about à la *Peter Grimes*. This production comes into its own in the domestic scenes, partly because in the title role, Michael Bryant, an actor long, very long, on compassion and integrity, and short on bravura, seems a little fazed by Brand's early diatribes. Lynn Farleigh, a joy to watch and listen to, gives dignity and lyricism to the wife Brand crushes with his piety. Patience Collier, as always, is excellent as Brand's mother—mother to his unyielding character, too. Robert Stephens as the Mayor, a well-fed pragmatist, is memorable. Only the crowds, and Tamara

Hinchco in the admittedly tricky role of the fey gypsy girl, jar.

VERA LUSTIG

LETTERS

GREAT PHILOSOPHER?

Who is "this great philosopher Jesus" whom G. A. Mawser eulogises in his letter in the May "Freethinker"? Can Mr Mawser possibly be referring to the hero of the gospel stories? This character, strictly according to those narratives, inveighed against the members of rival sects ("like unto whited sepulchres"), hurled abuse at anyone who didn't like his preaching ("ye generation of vipers"), threatened with eternal torment the many to be called but not chosen ("there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"), and flew into an irrational tantrum over a fig-tree that bore no fruit when out of season. What sort of philosopher is that? Oh, yes, he did occasionally preach the golden rule—but that had been put forward by many a philosopher centuries before his alleged lifetime.

Finally with reference to Mr Mawser's phrase "the great ethical concept of human relationships which Jesus advocated", I would quote two extracts from the sayings of Jesus, as reported by evangelist "Luke": "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you Nay; but rather division: for from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three."

"If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

BARBARA SMOKER

ALIEN ORIGINS

In his letter ("The Freethinker", April), J. H. Morten objects to a claim by Von Däniken that a photograph published by him is that of the likeness of an astronaut in a space-vehicle, on the grounds that the figure shown is unsuitably dressed and the "contraption" too primitive for space travel. (The photograph referred to is presumably that of the carving on the tomb in the Mayan temple at Palenque, Mexico.)

Is it not plain that the carving is simply a stylised representation, an imaginative picture, an artist's impression, of an astronaut in a space-ship, based on legend and folk-lore? No one, surely, would take it to be a literal representation.

J. H. Morten goes on to complain that Von Däniken does not tell his readers where such space-beings came from, as if that omission constituted some kind of refutation of his claim that planet Earth has received such visitors.

Obviously Von Däniken does not give this information because he does not know precisely where these purported space-travellers came from but what has that got to do with his claim that such beings have visited this planet?

If I met a man who spoke only his native tongue and who had arrived here from, let us say, Albania, then, although I probably would not know that he came from Albania, I should certainly know that he was an alien who had arrived here from somewhere outside the United Kingdom: his place of origin would have nothing to do with that fact.

Incidentally, J. H. Morten's concept of there being more than one universe is undoubtedly a novel one.

W. J. GLENNIE

HUMANIST KINDS

To those who attended the National Secular Society's annual dinner, Maureen Duffy (as you report in the April "Freethinker") addressed these words: "You and I are atheists . . ." I for one reflected then that atheism requires from its believers as much dogmatism as Christianity, though there is far less evidence in its support. No evidence in fact.

I resented Ms Duffy's ready assumption that we shared her faith. Others later told me that they had experienced similar resentment. Like me, they had no faith of their own. They felt unequal to it. They were agnostics.

While expressing resentment at Ms Duffy, may I say that I also resented the antics at the dinner of her friend Brigid Brophy in burning her NSS membership card. Like Ms Duffy's assumption that we were all atheists, it was gratuitous and impertinent. Whatever the NSS rules may say, animals have nothing whatever to do with secularism or humanism. It is perfectly possible to be a humanist without also being a vegetarian. I myself am that sort of humanist. It is perfectly possible to be a humanist without also condemning vivisection carried out in aid of medical progress. I myself am that sort of humanist. It is perfectly possible to be a humanist without also feeling disquiet at the experiments (found so objectionable by Brigid Brophy) which were conducted in good faith by Amnesty International. I myself am that sort of humanist.

A movement with so many opponents should be single-minded. As Goethe said, to accomplish anything it is necessary to limit oneself. The NSS seeks emancipation from religious dogma and persecution. Let it limit itself to that noble, difficult objective. Above all, let us who are its members not be bigoted and intolerant in our turn.

FRANCIS BENNION

WORLDWIDE

ITALY

A statue of the famous Madonna of Fatima in Portugal has visited Rome. It is on a 40 day world-wide tour as a "messenger of peace". The statue is to visit "Freedom Bridge" in Seoul, the Berlin Wall, Hiroshima and Jerusalem in a tour of 20 world capitals. In Italy the statue was carried in procession from the ruins of the Baths of the Emperor Caracalla to another shrine ten miles from Rome, that of the Madonna of Divine Love, where it was to share honours with a fourteenth century statue of the Madonna.

The miracle of Fatima, when three illiterate Portuguese children apparently saw a vision of the Virgin in 1917, is recognised as authentic by the Roman Catholic Church.

USA

A new organisation, Gay Atheists, has been formed in San Francisco to combat evangelical attacks on homosexuality. A crusade against homosexuals was led last year by Anita Bryant (See "Save Our Children from Bigotry" by John Lauritsen in *The*

Freethinker, July 1977.) She has said: "This is a battle of the atheists and ungodly on one side and God's people on the other. Hell will be populated by persons who say they are proud to be gay . . . If God had meant to have homosexuals he would have created Adam and Bruce."

In a leaflet *Why Gay Atheists?* it is stated that they aim "to expose and challenge the forces which oppose Gay Liberation by the use of religion and the primitive 'revelations' of the Bible to deny human and civil rights to homosexuals. When organised religion uses its powers to control government and forces its beliefs and social practices on unpopular minorities and lifestyles, it becomes dangerous and a serious threat to society."

The British Humanist Association have set up a working party to consider a humanist attitude to homosexuality and related issues. The group plan to prepare a statement, possibly in leaflet form, and perhaps along similar lines to "Towards a Quaker View of Sex", first published in 1963. David Porter, the originator of the project, will get together with fellow humanists, some of whom are gay, for monthly meetings at the BHA's offices in Kensington (13 Prince of Wales Terrace, W8). Anyone interested in attending will be welcome. First Tuesday each month, 7.30 pm.

Tenth Anniversary

in the whole of the United Kingdom. I find it very disappointing that in one clinic you can cater for 25 per cent of people from France and yet you have no organisation in the city of Glasgow.' To which I said 'You find us some premises and we will build it.'

"So now I am delighted to be able to write officially to tell you that BPAS has a flourishing pregnancy advisory service at 245 North Street, Glasgow.

"Because your earlier statements about the great need in Glasgow were made publicly (i.e. during proceedings of a Select Committee of the House of Commons attended by the press and public) I am sure you will be pleased to know that I am releasing copies of this letter to the press to show that we did take heed of your remarks and have now done something practical to meet your criticisms of BPAS."

Now that so much practical work has been done to enable women to obtain an abortion if they choose, we can look from a perspective of ten years, at the historic 1967 Abortion Act. Madeleine Simms has written "perhaps the most important and far-reaching effect of the Abortion Act has been to radicalize the women's movement".

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

- The Dead Sea Scrolls**, John Allegro. £1.00 (15p).
The Humanist Outlook, Ed: A. J. Ayer. 95p (26p).
Religion in Modern Society, H. J. Blackham. £1 (29p).
The Longford Threat to Freedom, Brigid Brophy. 10p (7p).
Thomas Paine, Chapman Cohen. 15p (7p).
Woman and Christianity, Chapman Cohen. 5p (7p).
Must We Have Religion?, Chapman Cohen. 5p (7p).
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Women's Rights, A Practical Guide, Anna Coote and Tess Gill. £1.25 (19p).
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Muslim Politics in Secular India, Hamid Dalwai. 50p (12p).
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The Bible Handbook, G. W. Foote & W. Ball. 65p (19p).
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The Presumption of Atheism, Antony Flew. £3.50 (26p).
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Religious Roots of the Taboo on Homosexuality, John Lauritsen. 20p (10p).
On the Nature of the Universe, Lucretius. 75p (15p).
The Vatican Billions, Avro Manhattan. £3.00 (33p).
The Absurdities of Christian Science, Joseph McCabe. 12p (7p).
Phallic Elements in Religion, Joseph McCabe. 12p (7p). (Other titles by Joseph McCabe available.)
Anarchy, Erricho Malatesta. 25p (12p).
The Trial of Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh, Roger Manvell. £5.95 (29p).
Witchcraft and Sorcery, Max Marwick (Ed). £1.25 (19p).
What Humanism is About, Kit Mouat. 60p (29p).
Humanism and Moral Theory, Reuben Osborn. 95p (22p).
Rights of Man, Thomas Paine. 80p (22p).
Common Sense, Thomas Paine. 60p (15p).
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asked to accept artificially a dogma which they think of as something laid down by the school authorities."

These results indicated that the compulsory nature of assemblies and religious education caused much heart-searching among the respondents, and there was a sufficient degree of irrationality displayed in the responses to bely simplistic grounds for keeping things as they are. Respondents often appeared to opt for choices which were contradictory to their probable school practice, and confirmed the cliché that belief implies action but does not guarantee it. Schools are supposed to operate on a consensus regarding the ethical education of the young. But heads are often lowered and consciences apparently kept inside promotional wage-packets. Meanwhile the children see through the acting and develop their own brand of world-weary cynicism.

And I return to those two Headteachers, the one bereft of the noble Talmudic tradition and the other hastily pulling down children's Christmas decorations when teased about their five-pointed "Soviet" shape. Freethinkers may see sufficient irony in that alone, for motionless stars have been causing them bother for two thousand years, yet such comedy in no way conceals the hollow pretence of so many "professionals". My modest research has only confirmed what was already widely known: for the teaching of the young to be most effective, behaviour must match intention, and a level of consistency attained which will inspire contexts and experiences.

REFERENCES

Harris, D. T. Unpublished MA thesis: *An Empirical Study into Moral Education examining John Wilson's PHIL component in relation to the Middle School*. Department of Education, Southampton University, 1975.

Matthews, H. F. *Revolution in Religious Education: A Commentary*. The Religious Education Press, Oxford, 1966, pp.127-128.

EVENTS

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 White-abbey 66752.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Speaker: S. V. Sandground. Sunday 2 July, 5.30 pm, Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove.

Havering and District Humanist Society. Mrs Doreen Humby: "Story of Music Hall", Tuesday, 20 June. Barbara Smoker: "Blasphemy", Tuesday, 4 July. Both meetings 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre (corner of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road).

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Edna Shotton: "The Role of Women in Society". Tuesday, 13 June, 7.45 pm. Education Centre, Woodhouse Square, Leeds.

Lewisham Humanist Group. "Humanism and Politics" —Group Discussion. Thursday, 29 June, 7.45 pm. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, SE6.

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.)

London Young Humanists. "Scottish Nationalism"; speaker from SNP, Sunday, 18 June, 7.30 pm. 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8.

Merseyside Humanist Group. "Members' Interests". Wednesday, 21 June, 7.45 pm. 42 Parkbridge Road, Birkenhead. Further information Ann Coombes 051-608 3835.

South Place Ethical Society. Sunday Morning Meetings, 11 am: Jasper Ridley: Bonapartism: Totalitarian Origins, 11 June. Martha Voegler: Frederic Harrison and the Religion of Humanity, 18 June. Richard Clements: The Impact of Ibsen, 25 June. Peter Cadogan: Re-appraising Bertrand Russell, 2 July. Tuesday Discussions will continue on an informal basis during June and July at 7 pm.

Tyneside Humanist Society: F. R. Griffin: "Further to Freewill", 21 June. K. T. Stephenson: "Six Years to 1984", 28 June. Both 7.30 pm, Friends' Meeting House, 1 Archbold Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne 2.

THE FREETHINKER

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