

# The FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Secular Humanist Monthly

Vol. 98, No. 10

OCTOBER 1978

20p

## LONG-SUPPRESSED REPORT CLAIMS MOST CATHOLICS FAVOUR BIRTH CONTROL

It has just been revealed that almost two-thirds of British Roman Catholics have not only defied the late Pope Paul's ruling on birth control, but actually believed that his prohibition, contained in the grossly misconceived encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, was wrong. The revelation was made in the London Weekend Television Programme, *Credo*, following a Gallup Poll random survey which showed that 79 per cent of those between the ages of 25 and 34 approved of contraception in marriage.

Apart from the actual figures revealed in the survey, conducted among a random sample of 301 Catholics throughout the United Kingdom, the most interesting aspect of the poll was that the results were disclosed some 18 months after it was taken. The *Catholic Herald*, which commissioned the poll in 1977, has stated: "The results of the replies to this question (whether people approved or disapproved of the use of contraception in marriage) were not published at the time because it was felt that their impact would detract from the rest of the survey. The valuable and interesting information about Catholic attitudes in regard to politics, liturgy and social action would have been lost in a furious and probably fruitless argument about birth control."

"This is a laughable excuse," said Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society. "It might have held good for a fortnight at the most, but not for 18 months. A much more likely reason for suppressing the figures for so long is that they simply dared not release them while Pope Paul was still alive. In revealing the figures when they did, they probably reasoned that a new Pope would be able to reverse his predecessor's decision with some face-saving formula."

Nicolas Walter, of the Rationalist Press Association, commented: "It is interesting, but not surprising to get this confirmation that a majority of Catholics in this country reject the basic doctrine on

contraception. Similarly, they are rejecting other doctrinal matters in regard, for instance, to sexual matters and divorce. And a recent survey has shown that 50 per cent of Catholics never go to church and that 60 per cent think that women ought to be able to become priests if they wish. It would be interesting to know what they think about more fundamental Christian doctrines."

Diane Munday, speaking for the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS), said that there was no doubt that *Humanae Vitae* "almost tore the Catholic Church apart" with the conflict it caused between those Catholics who hoped to see birth control gain papal blessing, and those who did not. She said she has believed for a long time that in order to stop the church "falling apart at the seams", an effort was made at the very highest levels in the church to smokescreen the birth control issue, and paper over the tremendous differences it caused.

The device they found was abortion. "This," she believes, "is why we are at present experiencing a sustained campaign against pregnancy termination. It's an issue with which they have been able to unite Catholics. One has to remember that Catholics are the oldest hands in the pressure group business. They have a lot of money and a great deal of power, and it is going to take a lot of energy to counteract their campaign—one I expect will be sustained for a long time."

She also pointed out, for the benefit of those who might think that the figures were peculiarly representative of Britain and not the rest of the world, that a similar survey conducted in Ireland among Roman Catholic students produced roughly the same results.

Predictably, one Catholic newspaper that is not taking the results of the poll very seriously is the *Universe*. It dismissed the *Credo* programme as

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# South African Churches Prop Up Apartheid

TOINE EGGENHUIZEN

In spite of all the energy spent by certain Christian organisations in an attempt to smash apartheid, the Churches in South Africa find themselves assisting the existing system rather than acting as a dynamic force for change, argues Toine Eggenhuizen, a former Catholic priest in South Africa. He left the priesthood in 1970. Six years later Mr Eggenhuizen, a Hollander, was deported from South Africa.

"Every man has a right to a decent life before any individual has a surplus above his needs." Can the Church endorse these words of Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere? South Africa is characterized by exploitation of the masses to provide huge profits for the few. A vicious system of laws, riot police and security branch has been set up to protect the interests of the ruling clique. Yet apartheid is a policy administered against the will of most people in South Africa.

Church officials themselves come largely from "bourgeois" classes (the missionaries from overseas), from the ruling classes (white South African ministers) or from privileged groups (black South Africans who get some status as church officials). It is, therefore, not surprising that the upper classes have a great influence upon the thinking and actions of the Church as a whole. The Church of the rich can never at the same time be a Church of, for and with the poor.

The lifestyle of the West in general and of South Africa in particular is determined by materialism. Well-being has become well-having. Generous talk and gestures about "that they (i.e. the have-nots) may have more" mean in fact "that we (the haves) may not have less". And that is not on. To illustrate the point R 457 is spent annually per white child for education and R 28.56 per black child. South Africa will have to spend an additional amount of more than R 2,000-million annually on education for all children applying such a principle of equality. Add to this health care, wages and so on. South Africa's resources do not stretch that far. Therefore, justice and peace based on a radical redistribution of wealth and power can only be achieved if the "haves" are prepared to give up their surplus wealth. All attempts to create a small group of wealthy blacks or paying better wages to some simply confirm the basic evils of the system.

The Church has a dismal record of paying wages to black staff. It is fairly common that black church ministers, teachers, housekeeping staff are paid less than their white counterparts. Admittedly, the

Church's resources do not stretch that far to pay just wages. However, funds are available to enable white expatriates to spend regular holidays overseas. Most Church ministers are well provided for as far as food, drink, cigarettes, clothing, transport, accommodation is concerned. Are the Church officials who are better off prepared to sacrifice in order to achieve justice within the Church institution? When will bishops move into humble dwellings? If the Church does not set the example the South African "haves" will not take their preaching seriously.

The National Party-based regime stopped all subsidies to private schools during the fifties. Church run schools were all affected. Many schools had to close down. A number of schools exclusively for white children managed to survive because of the high school fees paid by parents. Thus schools for a rich elite were created. Allowing black children to enroll in these schools in 1977 broke down some racial barriers, but this could create a small black elite. (Are the few black private schools admitting white children?) This new school policy of mainly the Catholic Church is merely a concession. "It invites the Black community to participate within the framework and structure of the apartheid system. Black demands are not for peripheral change but they are for fundamental and structural change," commented a group of black priests.

## Opium for the People

The Church operates on the model of reconciliation: reconciling the rulers and the ruled, the oppressors and the oppressed, the rich and the poor. "I was able to help this sick person to accept in faith and peace her problems," says a minister of a very wealthy suburb in Johannesburg. "In the same way", he adds "black ministers should not talk about trade unions etc. but ought to help the black migrant workers to accept their problems in the light of their faith." This happened in October 1976. My sanity was restored when another priest muttered: "Opium for the people".

With rules and regulations, with its moral attitudes, the Church has individualised religion. Adam Smith, the father of liberal capitalism, was convinced that given enough freedom society would balance itself out. In spite of insatiable egotism, he thought, an invisible hand relying on the nature of social relations would achieve a more or less equitable distribution. The Church, relying on the individual's relation with God and on the nature of religious relations among people, appears to expect that soci-

ety itself, guided by the invisible hand of God, will come right. Traditionally the Church stressed the decent treatment of slaves rather than the abolition of slavery.

Institutionalised the Church is a bureaucratic organisation. It needs investments. It relies on wealthy donors and a financial administration to maintain itself. Thus it confirms again the basic structure of society. "Only when the churches no longer have so many private interests to defend, when their privileges cease to exist, will they be free to commit themselves to the interests of those who are of no 'interest' to anybody. Only if the Church gives up its solidarity with the oppressors and joins with the oppressed can it authentically bring good tidings to the miserable, bind up the broken hearts, proclaim freedom to the imprisoned and break the chains of the bound," said Bishop Helmut Frenz, expelled from Chile in 1975, reflecting on the role of the Church in defending human rights.

### Conserving the Past

The fact is that the Church officials tend to avoid the real issues. Instead they concentrate on the liturgical aspects. "The Churches in South Africa have sold themselves to a priestly role, ignoring their prophetic duty," says a South African minister of religion.

It will not come as a surprise that migrant mine-workers assert: "The Church preaches submission to the system, indicating that this system is good." Other migrants are quoted, in a recent study entitled *Another Blanket*, as saying: "The Church is a sort of stooge sent by mine management to encourage them (the migrants) to pray, because the more they pray the more they become quiet."

In the conflict situation in South Africa the Church tries to maintain contact with all groups, oppressor and oppressed, and thus becomes neutral. The only common element between the conflicting parties lies in the liturgical field. The Church has degenerated into a saleshouse of sacraments, avoiding all controversial issues, in spite of the occasional pronouncements on social matters. Considering evil as the sin of the individual the Church accepts if not confirms the status quo—the evil of the social structures. The fundamental problem of the Church is conservatism, conserving the past, Bible, traditions. Everything must be justified by theologians before Christians can participate in change.

The so-called English churches, like Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational, have always been non-racial. However, domination by white officials undermines the non-racial concept. Two new white bishops have been appointed by the Catholic Church in 1977. Without doubt black candidates are available. Probably fear to upset conservative whites in the dioceses concerned

has played a role. On the other hand symbolic appointments of black deans e.g. in the Anglican Church, Johannesburg, do not in itself signify a new direction. Social distance is reinforced by ritualised appearances like token gestures of mixed meetings or services. These rituals benefit only the privileged group. Therefore, with a reference to a commemoration service on June 16, 1977, Jimmy Kruger, South African minister of "justice" and police, stated: "I have no objection to them conducting their service—but if laymen make speeches, which by their very background would likely be political speeches, then the service will be stopped immediately." The bishop obliged and decided on a solent vigil without "potentially inflammatory" speeches by concerned Christian women like Helen Joseph.

There is no real conflict between Church and State in South Africa. Surely at times certain statements or publications by church bodies upset the fascist authorities. Neither churches nor the Council of Churches form a real threat to "the South African way of life" although many white Christians think they are going too far. This led to the formation of the Christian League of South Africa. A Catholic priest, Francis Morscher, has formed the South African Catholic Defense League. Both Leagues are opposed to "politics" in Church. They equate change with communism. Anti-communism is more important to them than anti-apartheid. One can wonder if these leagues are not the result of the wellworn paths of pastoral care of the official churches.

### More on Arms

On the practical level, one could argue, the welfare activities of the Church confirm the system of oppression as well. Every school run by the Church allows the regime to spend more on arms for instance. Social welfare projects among families in the rural areas to compensate for the absence of the migrants strengthens the migratory system. Caring for immediate and humanitarian needs is vitally important, but it should be outweighed by a proper analysis of the whole situation. Otherwise the Church will be used by the regime in spite of all good intentions.

The African sects form a special problem. In times of social upheaval a dominant cultural pattern clashes with a weaker culture. Messianic movements spring up during the resulting process of acculturation. The losers want to resist but lack the power. Their own culture is partly rejected because it did not provide the means for victory. The new and imported culture is not fully accepted because it is the enemy's own although it is "superior". Liberation (salvation) is found in messianic move-

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# A Platform for Persuaders?

FRANCIS BENNION

A recent Open Door television programme gave the Human Rights Society the chance to present its case. Francis Bennion here demonstrates that the programme was not at all open in its approach. If the proposal for the fourth TV channel to become an open forum for various opinion groups is implemented, it will be necessary to examine carefully what methods of persuasion are acceptable.

When dogma dies opinions flourish. They will flourish more luxuriantly if the Government's recently-announced plan for the fourth TV channel is implemented. The channel will be an open forum through which opinion groups can present their case to the public without editorial interference. The proposal follows the success of the BBC's Open Door programmes, run on the open forum basis for the past seven years.

The liberal instinct that this development is a good thing was reinforced by the prompt response of anti-libertarians. *The Times* quickly provided Ms Whitehouse with a platform for the expression of her fears about the dangers to the public of allowing untrammelled opinions to fly around the airways. The settled state of our institutions will, she feels (no doubt rightly), be still further disturbed. That is not a ground to trouble readers of this journal, but there is another reason for scrutinising the proposal with some care. A recent Open Door programme provides an example.

There is much justified anxiety nowadays about human rights. When in May a body calling itself the Human Rights Society was billed to present an Open Door programme it seemed worth watching. The programme turned out to be a one-sided treatment of the question of legalising voluntary euthanasia.

Is the right of a person who suffers painful and incurable disease to terminate his or her life to be numbered among the human rights we are nowadays anxious to protect? If not, should it be? Strangely, these questions were not discussed in the euthanasia programme presented by the Human Rights Society; indeed they were not even mentioned.

Instead it emerged that what the Society considers a "human right" is something rather different from the right to choose euthanasia; in fact the direct opposite. It is expressed in two of the Society's five aims:

"To ensure that the dignity and worth of the human person are respected, by the general acceptance of human rights and responsibili-

ties."

"To defend in particular the right to life of all, including the sick, the handicapped and the aged."

To refute a man it may be necessary to misrepresent him. To refute advocates of voluntary euthanasia it may be necessary to pretend that in some way they deny or threaten people's *right to life*. The necessity arises from the fact that without such misrepresentation the argument in favour of allowing voluntary euthanasia with adequate safeguards is irrefutable.

The Human Rights Society's Open Door programme was largely taken up with shots of terminal patients being lovingly taken care of at a home known as St Joseph's Hospice. I have no doubt the love displayed was sincere. The voice-over stressed that the quality of care at St Joseph's is greatly superior to that provided by the various NHS hospitals from which the patients had but recently been rescued by members of the Human Rights Society. It was not mentioned (though subsequent enquiry confirmed the fact) that St Joseph's Hospice is a Roman Catholic institution.

An interview with a Conservative Member of Parliament followed. Gravely and compassionately he told us that only God had the right to take away human life. It was not mentioned that this gentleman was of the Roman Catholic faith, though his name was given as Norman St John Stevas. Again, there was no suggestion that any other point of view might be valid—or even that any other point of view existed.

The programme was one-sided also on the question of enabling (through advanced medical techniques) grossly defective babies to survive their birth and grow to maturity. There were shots of a dozen such children enduring life together in a single dormitory. Each had a different deformity; all were severely damaged. Devoted people tended them, but the disquieting side of the matter was not referred to. It is depressing in the extreme for a growing child to find itself grossly deformed and compelled to exist in an institution where the other child inmates are grossly deformed too. Yet we know there are severe problems in rearing such children in the bosom of their own family. The strains are enormous, and frequently cause emotional disorder among the healthy members of the family. Marriages break up in consequence. These facts were not mentioned or even hinted at in the Human Rights Society programme. The one-sided emphasis was on preserving life at all costs.

When challenged later about the programme's lack of balance, the Society defended itself by say-

# WORLDWIDE

## GREECE

What started out as a major scandal over a naughty picture and a Greek orthodox bishop's very unorthodox sex life has grown into a major debate on the whole question of the Established Church in Greece.

The scandal blew up with the revelation that the Minister of Education and Cults had passed onto the head of the Greek Orthodox Church a photograph allegedly showing the 66-year-old Bishop of Preveza lying under a naked woman.

Despite overwhelming evidence that the picture was not faked, and the testimony of his former chauffeur that the bishop had enjoyed the favours of between 10 and 90 ladies in his diocese, Aristotle Stylianos dismissed allegations against him as "a communist plot."

Bishop Aristotle, who was brought before a church court, obviously doesn't like communists. It has been revealed that while he was an army pastor on the prison camp island of Makronisos in 1949, where atrocities were perpetrated on detainees, he wrote that "everybody who kills a communist is doing his duty towards religion and the nation."

One of Greece's daily papers, *Eleftherotypia*, is now calling for a separation of Church and State.

## SOUTH AFRICA

The execution rate in South Africa—a country which already accounts for 90 per cent of all executions in the Western World—is rising. Last year 90 people were executed—29 more than in 1976. A further 111 people are currently in custody in death row, awaiting hanging. In 1974 a commission of inquiry was appointed to examine the penal system in South Africa. It was instructed not to consider the question of abolishing the death penalty. That, as much as anything, illustrates the presumption in favour of the death penalty among the dominant law-making whites.

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The Dudley Council in West Yorkshire has had to destroy all copies of a leaflet issued to school-leavers by the Council's Careers Advisory Service. The leaflet said nothing about jobs. It was a straight warning on sex lifted from pamphlets issued by the Jehovah's Witnesses. Issued by Mr Arnold Wallers, a careers' officer who had the printing done himself, the leaflet warned, among other things, that premarital sex was abhorrent because of the right to a "clean" partner in marriage; and that masturbation turns a person homosexual! The leaflets were destroyed following a storm of protest from teachers.

ing that it was intended as an answer to an earlier Open Door programme in which the Voluntary Euthanasia Society had presented the contrary viewpoint. The defence does not meet the objection, for there must be many people who missed the earlier programme and are unaware of the beliefs or even the existence of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society. Why did not the Human Rights Society mention this vital fact in their own programme?

Why indeed did the Human Rights Society adopt that name at all? Here we come to the hub of the question. No doubt the founders and members of the Human Rights Society are sincere, well-meaning people. Many doubtless believe in their cause with burning zeal and yearn to persuade others to support it. Herein lies the danger. If a tendentious, misleading title will help to attract support it seems a small price to pay. What is truth beside the sufferings of terminal patients and spina bifida children? The end justifies the means.

This line is taken by many (though not all) of those with a cause to promote, whom we may call the persuaders. Do not admit there is another side to the question. Distort the views of your opponents. Play down their arguments. If necessary falsify the facts, or at least select them judiciously. This is propaganda and in a propaganda war truth is a necessary casualty.

We all of course do this sort of thing, to a greater or less extent, in aid of our pet causes. If we are in politics we do it constantly, for such is the stuff of politics. But we may question whether that is a justification for turning over the country's fourth TV channel as a free platform for the persuaders (it is not suggested that groups should be asked to pay for their privilege). Are there not enough causes, and is there not far too much doubtful propaganda already?

My own answer is that the project should go forward, but we should do our best to rescue the truth. Does this require the imposition of censorship? Certainly not. What it means is that in preparing their programmes groups should be exhorted to be fair and truthful. If they do not present the other side's arguments they should at least acknowledge their existence. Perhaps there should be a body for this purpose analogous to the Press Council. Such a body could investigate complaints and pronounce judgement upon them. Like the Press Council, it should be totally lacking in any power to punish or ban.

Vance Packard wrote a successful book some years ago called *The Hidden Persuaders*. It is as well that the persuaders should not be hidden, but encouraged to come into the open and state their case. So far as it can however, society needs to ensure that broadcast opinions, no less than consumer goods, pass the trade descriptions test.

# William Willis (1830-1894)

## Forgotten Stalwart

NIGEL H. SINNOTT

On the whole the main characters on the stage of freethought history have received a reasonable amount of attention by historians and other writers. Only in recent years, however, have some of the minor acolytes and the loyal, hard-working rank and file begun to receive their fair share of notice. W. Willis, the subject of this article, was one of the people who helped build and develop the NSS and contributed to the success of meetings and lectures at Bradlaugh's Hall of Science. Just as important, he was one of the small—but most fascinating—band of British freethinkers who tried, with varying degrees of success and failure, to transplant the secular movement to the emergent colonies of the nineteenth century.

William Willis was, like G. W. Foote, a West Country man. He was born at Bridgwater, Somerset, on 29 August 1830; and while living in Bristol came into contact with various freethinkers of the day, including Charles Southwell, Emma Martin and Charles Watts. Willis moved to London in 1859, where he followed various occupations including that of umbrella maker.

After the formation of the National Secular Society in 1866 Willis became an active member (and it would be interesting to know if in fact he was a founder member); he also acted at various times as chairman, reporter (for Charles Bradlaugh's *National Reformer*) and bookseller at the Hall of Science, Old Street. He worked for the National Sunday League and for a while edited the League's journal, the *Free Sunday Advocate* (launched in 1869 and which lasted, surprisingly, until the Second World War). In addition he also took on the secretaryship of the Freethinkers' Benevolent Fund. Robert Forder (N.S.S. Secretary) remembered Willis as "an earnest and effective speaker and writer", a "solid reasoner" whose speeches were "models of terseness brightened with wit and pathos".

Around 1884 Willis decided, like Joseph Symes about the same time and Southwell a generation earlier, to see what prospects Australia had to offer. He left behind a son (William Willis junior?) who served on the NSS executive committee and who, in the 1890s, became a county councillor for Battersea.

Whereas Southwell and Symes headed for Melbourne, the Willis family made their home in Sydney. By the beginning of 1886 advertisements for "Willis's Freethought Book Store" were appearing in Symes's Melbourne *Liberator*; and in the same year Willis contributed articles on "Fraternity" and "Progress" to the *Freethinker and New South Wales*

*Reformer*, a short-lived Sydney journal edited by William Whitehouse Collins who had followed Symes out to Australia.

In September or October 1886 Willis was appointed sole Australian agent for the Freethought Publishing Company (Bradlaugh and Besant). That December he bought up R. B. Skinner's well established bookselling business at 109 Castlereagh Street, Sydney, to where he transferred his operations. Eventually he moved his business to 715 George Street, Haymarket, an area noted to this day for its radical bookshops, where he advertised himself as an "importer of advanced literature".

Willis's enthusiasm and freethought background was soon recognised by the Australasian Secular Association of New South Wales. He was twice elected president of the New South Wales branch and between times, as G. Wood put it, "continued to fill any important position whereby he could forward the interests of the Secularist movement". Among his many appointments Willis was (until 1893) chairman of the (Sydney) Freethought Hall Company, presided at ASA meetings at the Progressive Lyceum Hall in Campbell Street, and he also contributed a chapter or essay to Skinner's *Secularist's Guide* (Sydney, c. 1885).

Willis clearly thrived in Australia but, like Symes, found himself at loggerheads with the fashionable racism of the place and times. "Some men," he observed, "profess a love for all mankind, but Englishmen as a rule have but scant respect for negroes and aboriginals of any clime."

In November 1893 Symes himself passed through Sydney *en route* to New Zealand for a lecture tour and he records the kindness with which the Willis family accommodated him overnight. Very soon afterwards, Willis sold up his business, which was doubtless ailing as a result of the severe trade depression in Melbourne and Sydney and of the Australian bank failures of 1893; perhaps also because of health reasons. He, his wife and youngest daughter then moved to Hobart, Tasmania. Within weeks tragedy struck: Willis was admitted to Hobart General Hospital with an abscess of the kidney and there died on 9 February 1894, at the age of sixty-four.

"This is sad news," Symes commented when he heard of the death. "I knew Mr Willis well; and a more honest, straightforward man I have not known." His old friend Wood remarked: "Truly has the Secularist party lost a good, honest and unswerving opponent to all dogmas and superstition, and one who, during his life in Sydney, never

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# JOTTINGS

WILLIAM McILROY

*The higher excellence of virginity and celibacy, as compared with the married state, is . . . a doctrine taught in the first instance by our divine Saviour and the Apostle of the Gentiles. It was solemnly defined as an article of divine faith by the Holy Council of Trent.*

*Pope Pius XII.*

In the 24 years since Pope Pius XII issued his Encyclical Letter, *Sacra Virginitas*, the Roman Catholic Church has been forced to adopt a liberal posture which would have horrified that grim-faced old reactionary. In 1954, the year that *Sacra Virginitas* was promulgated, the Catholic hierarchy could still manage to present an image of unity and unquestioning obedience by the clergy and the laity to papal commands. It was, however, a spurious image.

There were far more defections from the priesthood than the bishops cared to admit. Almost all of those who did leave remained silent to save their families from embarrassment and to avoid persecution by their vindictive and unforgiving fellow-Catholics. Those who wrote about their decision to quit the priesthood (and sometimes the Church) were boycotted by reviewers and censored by advertisers. Their books were removed from shops and libraries in response to pressure by Catholic Action and other Vatican hatchet-men. Often the former priest was the victim of a vicious smear campaign, particularly in the United States where anti-Communist hysteria was at its height.

It is no longer possible to paper over the cracks or to conceal the divisions within the Church. Only pious ostriches deny that cherished beliefs are being seriously questioned. Catholic teachings, particularly those relating to sexual relationships and family life, are being ignored by the flock. Contraception is widely practiced by Catholic parents, who are more concerned for their children's material wellbeing than they are for adding to the Catholic proportion of the population. Every year a substantial number of Catholic women, many of them married, have their pregnancies safely and legally terminated, despite the fulminations and deceitful propaganda of the anti-abortion lobby.

Now comes the news from the National Conference of Priests, held in Birmingham last month, that an organisation has been set up within the Church to campaign for married clergy. The sponsors of this group believe that "the law of compulsory celibacy has lost much of its credibility".

The law of compulsory celibacy has little credibility to lose. It is based on the delusions and obsessions of asexual misogynists. Celibacy is certainly a stumbling-block to the recruitment of priests and an important factor in the decision of many to leave the priesthood. But it is not a new problem, and the reformers will find their path blocked by *Sacra Virginitas*. For Roman Catholics who wish to change the rules regarding married clergy will have to persuade the bishops, and eventually the Holy See, to reject not just a traditional practice but an article of faith.

Pope Pius XII admonished those who are "going astray . . . and are exalting the marriage state to the point of placing it above virginity, therefore disparaging consecrated chastity and ecclesiastical celibacy". He declares that "ministers of Christ, who offer the sacrifice of the Eucharist every day, should be distinguished by perfect chastity". He quotes St Peter Damian: "If our Redeemer was so enamoured of the flower of unsullied chastity that He was not only born of a virgin womb, but also fondled by a virgin foster-father, and this, mark you, while He was still a wailing infant in arms, by whom, I should like to know, does He wish His Body to be handled, now that He is reigning in His immensity in heaven?" Not by a married priest, appears to be the implication of that pronouncement.

Those who enthuse about the comfort and happiness that Christianity is supposed to bring into people's lives might also consider the misery it has inflicted upon incalculable numbers of its most devoted adherents whose personalities have been stunted by a morbid obsession with "chastity". With *Sacra Virginitas* Pope Pius XII contributed more than his share to that misery, and he revealed his own woeful ignorance in this passage: "People who regard man's natural sex instinct as the dominant factor in his make-up, and infer from this that he can master it for a lifetime only at the risk of upsetting his physical and, still more, his mental equilibrium, with consequent harm to the balance of his personality, are simply going counter to the common judgement of sane and conscientious men".

He later expresses the hope that "fresh, serried ranks of priests and religious . . . will happily go forth as soon as possible to tend the vineyard of the Lord . . . Parents should consider what a great honour it is to see their son a priest or their daughter pledging her virginity to the divine Bridegroom". It was a forlorn hope. During the intervening years conversions have declined, suitable candidates for the priesthood are fewer and parents are far less willing to encourage their daughters to sacrifice themselves on what Joseph McCabe

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## BOWMAN FOR TRIAL

Mrs Phyllis Bowman, the 52-year-old anti-abortionist who heads the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC), has been committed for trial by Redbridge Magistrates in London for allegedly contravening electoral laws.

Mrs Bowman, of Hendon, is accused in a summons of improperly issuing pamphlets that might have affected the outcome of a by-election. Issued by the Director of Public Prosecutions, the summons relates to SPUC's activities during the campaign for the Ilford North seat. SPUC is supposed to be politically neutral.

Between the time of the summons being issued, and her appearance at Redbridge on September 13, Mrs Bowman's case has received a great deal of exposure in the *Catholic Herald*—particularly in the letters' column where SPUC's director has gone to great pains to explain the apparent withdrawal of support for her defence by the Knights of St Columba, a fraternal order of Catholic Men.

The *Catholic Herald* was taken to task by Mrs Bowman for reporting that the Knights of St Columba had pulled out of a secret plan to provide financial support for her defence. She insisted that there had not been a secret plan, and that the Knights had withdrawn their original call for defence donations because they learned SPUC "required as little publicity as possible at that point in time".

"I would also stress that the only reason for not publicising the case too early in the proceedings was that people, not fully aware of the facts, might panic and do nothing in a General Election," Mrs Bowman wrote.

The Prime Minister's decision not to call a General Election must have come as a blow to SPUC, for it appears they were ready to go into action "to ensure that we achieve a pro-Life Parliament".

How pro-Life a Bowman-influenced Parliament would be is a matter for speculation. It is a known fact that many anti-abortion MPs would gladly see the return of capital punishment.

## WHITE SUPREMACISTS

One ought not to be in the least bit surprised by the Salvation Army's decision to withdraw from the World Council of Churches because of the WCC's recent decision to donate £45,000 for food, clothing, education and medical supplies for the Rhodesian guerilla movement, the Patriotic Front.

For, in the weeks of controversy that followed the grant, the Salvation Army has emerged as a thoroughly reactionary band of white supremacists—a role they've apparently enjoyed playing for many a long year.

# NEWS

In a recent letter to the *Guardian*, an African correspondent, Akhetla Tsehlana, pointed out that the Salvation Army "were among the first contingent to follow the forcible occupation of Rhodesia by Rhodes' private army, and by June 1876, barely three years after the spoilation of King Lobengula's Kingdom and the sacking of the royal village, Bulowayo, there was a farm eight miles to the south of Mazoe belonging to the Salvation Army and occupied by Mr and Mrs Cass."

History, he says, goes on to tell: "At a later date the Salvation Army major gained distinction for gallant conduct in the native rebellion and also became one of the early mayors of Salisbury."

Much more recently, the Army's General Arnold Brown, a 65-year-old Canadian, reckoned the leadership of the Army would remain white for many years to come—despite the fact that two-thirds of Salvationists are in Third World countries.

"We wouldn't want to appoint a Black general merely as a token," he said after his election last year. In the contest one of the possibles was Colonel Joshua Ngugi, territorial commander for East Africa. But indiscreet word from Salvationist headquarters a week or so ago was that the Colonel "does not have much English."

It has also come to light that the Salvation Army has never contributed towards the WCC's special fund to fight racism—it's out of this fund that the Patriotic Front is to get its grant—and that its contribution to the WCC's general fund was a mere £700 last year.

In fact, support from British churches as a whole for the special fund has been pretty abysmal. Last year the only contributions were £1,000 from the Methodist Church and about £500 from private donors. Compare that with the Dutch churches (£500,000); the German churches (£300,000); those in the US (£90,000); and the Canadian ones (£80,000.)

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**A Dutch Reformed Church in the Orange Free State in South Africa has turned a black homeland Cabinet Minister away from the funeral of the homeland's former Commissioner-General. Chief Wessels Mota, Minister of Justice in QuaQua could not attend Mr S. F. Papenpus' funeral because the Kestell church council had decided against opening the church to blacks.**



# AND NOTES

## MORE CENSORSHIP

One hundred and fifty-nine Members of Parliament have assured Mrs Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers' and Listeners' Association that they would support Parliamentary action to bring broadcasting under the Obscene Publications Act. They were 118 Conservatives, 28 Labour Members, four Liberals and nine MPs from other parties.

A National VALA questionnaire on MPs' attitudes brought in 280 replies. But, discounting fifty-seven "unfruitful" answers, 222 responses were used to compile a pre-election survey published recently.

Asked if they wanted to make the obscenity laws more effective, 141 Conservatives, 37 Labour MPs, three Liberals and nine others said they did.

There was a good deal of support for ensuring the maintenance of a daily act of worship in all schools. The total in favour of it was 195—made up of 144 Conservatives, 38 Labour, four Liberals and nine others.

MPs felt strongly, too, that no sex education should be given to children without their parents' written consent, and 141 said they would support action to ensure this. Asked if they would support action to ensure that compulsory sex education was *not* introduced, 144 said they would.

## GOD AND THE ALIENS

Speculating on what might happen if humans made contact with intelligent beings from elsewhere in the universe, the Very Reverend Dr Thomas F. Torrance, Professor of Christian Dogmatics at Edinburgh University and a former Moderator of the Church of Scotland, said: "I would find that intensely interesting and would want to know what contact they had established with God. Such contact would probably provide surprises for scientists and theologians alike."

A week later the *Sunday Observer*, which had published the interview with Dr Torrance, carried a letter which asked a simple, but very pithy question. "Would Dr Torrance care to outline the answer he would give if asked by the extra-terrestrials what contact humans have had with God?"

We, and the questioner Mr Donald G. MacLeod of Glasgow, are still waiting for a satisfactory answer.

Dr Torrance, by the way, believes it is "irrational" not to believe in God, and sees all forms of religion as in some sense a reflection of God. But he asserts

that only mainstream Christian theology, as developed over the centuries, matches exactly mid-twentieth century discoveries in physics and biology. His "theological science", expounded in 21 published books, is based on two fundamental cosmic propositions. The first is that God created the universe out of nothing and continually sustains it. The second is that God actually experienced human life, including life at its worst, in the person of Jesus. This made a tiny bit of God knowable to human beings.

The good doctor is optimistic about Christianity's future, and foresees something of a religious boom coming. "You won't find much atheism among the natural scientists at Edinburgh," he said in his interview. "There's still some among the social scientists who are still too often stuck in obsolete positivism but it's people like the physicists who are avid for solid theological understanding."

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## MORALS THAT ARE HARD TO SWALLOW

Letter from Brian Barratt in an Australian newspaper

Sir,—Hundreds and thousands of Australians are ill after eating oysters. At such a time of crisis, with morals on the decline and sinful lifestyles on the increase, it seems that the Festival of Light should speak out loud and clear.

Oyster-eating is condemned in the scriptures (Leviticus 7:21 and 11: 9ff) as clearly as homosexuality. Should these people be allowed to continue their practices? Do Australians realise that oyster eaters are actually teaching in schools and holding positions of responsibility in the Church and State?

Let us hope and pray that the forthcoming visit of Mary Whitehouse will lead people from their sinful ways, and teach them to eat only the food that is more correct. She will, after all, be saying the same thing about homosexuals.

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## Freethinker Fund

The Freethinker Fund goes a long way toward offsetting the cost of producing the journal, and your donations are highly appreciated. Thanks is expressed to the following: Anon, 10p; C. F. Ablethorpe, £2.60; Ms A. Avery, 60p; J. Barrett, £2.60; R. J. Condon, £7.60; A. R. Cook, £1; M. B. A. Fuller, 75p; S. Fuch, £1.10; In memory of Bert Follett, £1; P. Harding, £5; A. Howarth, 60p; E. J. Hughes, £1; J. Manus, £2.40; N. M. McConnell, £1.60; J. G. Peace, 60p; Ms M. R. Rayment, £1; Y. M. Ramage, 60; G. Stewart, £2.60; R. D. Wilson, £2.50; L. M. Wright, £2.05. Total for the period 23 August to 18 September: £37.30.

# BOOKS

**CENSORSHIP AND OBSCENITY** edited by Rajeev Dhavan and Christie Davies, Martin Robertson, £7.95.

This excellent and thought-provoking symposium on censorship is itself the by-product of a particularly crude and unpleasant episode in the suppression of free discussion, several of the contributions being revised versions of papers prepared for a seminar on censorship organised jointly by Brunel University and *Forum* magazine. The conference did not take place, because of pressures brought to bear upon the University by Lord Longford and by its own Chancellor, Lord Halsbury, as recounted in *The Observer* of 9 February 1975.

While their ostensible objection was to Brunel's association with *Forum*, their Lordships would doubtless have been even more displeased at the trend of the discussions; for the majority verdict of these authors is that at the very least the case for more censorship is not proven. But neither, according to some, is that for greater permissiveness.

Is a truce or even a compromise peace in the increasingly acrid and boring battle between "puritans" and "libertines" possible? John Trevelyan (the former film censor) and Professor Eysenck both, as reasonable men, hope so. Yet given the character of some of the protagonists, such a possibility seems remote. Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, for instance, as it is described by two University of Leicester sociologists (Dr David E. Morrison and Dr Michael Tracey) seems singularly unlikely to be willing to compromise with anybody about anything: its habitual use of the designation "communist" as a portmanteau term to lump together in "a rather nebulous whole" everything it fears and dislikes, such as liberalism, secularism and humanism, is a habit described deadpan by these authors as "a radical critique of the existing social world"—but one which strikes me as either sheer ingrained dottiness or else calculated dishonesty (maybe both).

The first section of the book, entitled "Who Censors and Why?" asks an important question which it doesn't fully answer. Apart from the NVLA case study (riveting reading for Whitehouseologists), the only other essay, by Christie Davies, covers a lot of ground and is fertile in ideas but fails to identify the main extra-Parliamentary pro-censorship groups and their motives. He does point out, however, that far from having forced a permissive way of life on an unwilling nation, Parliament has in recent years imposed some new forms of censorship on the people in ways that they probably did not want. He distinguishes between "moralist" and "causalist" arguments, and points out the shortcomings of both in this field, deploring the generally low level of public

# FREETHINKER

argument which all too often resembles "a muddled shout". Such changes as have occurred were, he asserts, neither deliberate nor rational nor liberal; and he ends by observing disdainfully: "if our rulers appear incompetent and irrelevant, it is because they are".

The second section of the book examines how censorship laws work, and consists of essays by Dr Rajeev Dhavan (on existing and alternative models), Professor D. N. MacCormick (on privacy and obscenity) and John Trevelyan (on film censorship). According to Dhavan, the criminal law model is based on the concept of protecting both individuals and social standards—yet "behind the facade of social consensus there is usually a tremendous conflict of opinion, attitudes and lifestyles in society". If we are to adhere to a criminal law regulating obscenity, its functions and definitions should be tightened up and made more explicit. The concept of privacy is not, as Professor MacCormick convincingly demonstrates in his erudite and interesting discussion, very relevant or helpful in providing new solutions, since most acts of censorship infringe individual privacy more than they protect it. Offensive public displays would be more appropriately dealt with as *nuisances* rather than as breaches of privacy. John Trevelyan expresses his belief that the maximum freedom of choice is an essential component of human happiness, and that the only justifiable form of censorship is self-censorship.

The third and final section of the book examines the effects of censoring and of not censoring obscenity. Berl Kutchinsky describes "the Danish experiment" in optimistic terms and believes that much of the vociferous opposition to pornography stems from the fact that for the first time in history it is no longer an elitist preserve but has been made available to the masses. His researches—borne out by those of Professor Eysenck and the US Presidential Commission—show that with its greater availability, interest in pornography wanes rapidly (as Bishop John Robinson once put it, "hard-bore rather than hard-core"). There is no evidence that availability of pornography induces moral decay or promotes sex crimes; those who persist in asserting the contrary must prove it.

That pornography does have a temporarily stimulating effect is common ground to Kutchinsky, Eysenck and Dr Patricia Gillan, of Guy's Hospital, who describes in fascinating detail how she uses "erotica" to treat sexual dysfunction by reducing anxiety

## REVIEWS

and boosting low sex drive. Not only films, slides, books and tapes but encouragement to oral sex, home movies, communal baths, bedside mirrors, gastronomic outings and learning about pleasure and hedonism feature in her repertoire. Perhaps God's eye twinkles as he observes Dr Gillan earnestly applying such remedies while Mrs Whitehouse solemnly pounds around the country telling us how wickedly oversexed we all are!

Professor Eysenck brings up the rear, somewhat testily complaining that nobody (except presumably the editors) ever asks a psychologist for his professional opinion upon this area of human behaviour. The protagonists usually much prefer to get on with the fisticuffs and never mind the umpire! Donning his white coat, the professor proceeds to dish out some hefty swipes in all directions. Introverts tend to be puritanical; extroverts are permissive. People differ widely in temperament, sexual appetites and moral views, and exposing them all to a uniform environment would not eliminate their differences. Like many of us, Professor Eysenck is much more concerned about the corruptive effects of uncensored violence than of erotica—"the notion of the pure innocent viewing a pornographic film and immediately rushing out to rape the nearest virgin could hardly be more wrong". In fact, most young people of both sexes are—even today—virginal; the "permissive society" is largely a media myth. ("When all is said and done, more is said than done".) Sex offenders tend to come from repressive homes and to be sexually deprived; pornography can be, in some cases at least, prophylactic.

Professor Eysenck, Mrs Whitehouse will doubtless be chagrined to learn, anticipated Dr Gillan by using *Fanny Hill* as remedial therapy for a wartime Serviceman patient who thought intercourse had to take place standing up. Research into sexual matters, he ruefully concludes, is still in its infancy and it is a tragedy that even today such research is almost shunned in Britain by experimenters, grant-giving bodies and universities alike. Why, Eysenck asks, are sex researchers looked upon as dirty old men whose thoughts are preoccupied with pornography? (And doubtless as "communists" too by such people as NVLA members). Perhaps because in this most emotive of areas it's easier for even academics to say "Don't confuse me with facts—my mind is made up!"

ANTONY GREY

It's been said there's no such thing as a free meal, and many secularists might agree there's no such thing as a free thought. Thoughts borrow from the past and may have to be paid for in the future. This is one of the reasons why, by contrast with Paul Blanshard, who has compiled a collection of "Classics of Free Thought", I prefer to speak of "freethought" to describe the sceptical attitude of mind which underlies secular humanism. In his Preface to the volume under review, Mr Blanshard says "the phenomenon called the free thought movement is more like a capricious cannonade than a movement". This is perhaps equally true of the corpus of fact and opinion collectively called "freethought" and is certainly true of this selection of it.

In the blurb its editor is called "perhaps the best-known religious muckraker in America", and *Freethinker* readers will be happy to find much "old-fashioned" polemics of the science-versus-superstition sort, but not alas much detail on modern natural or social science. When the real origins of our movement are in danger of drowning in an ecumenical morass, Mr Blanshard has done us all a service in dredging them up. To change the metaphor, one can hardly depict John W. Draper's *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* and Andrew D. White's *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* as evergreen favourites, since they have both for many years given decided evidence of being deciduous, but it is good to see the sap rising in them again. There are other favourites whose names are evergreen even if their writings are not: Charles Bradlaugh (wisely an essay is chosen and not an extract from his longer, and drearier, books); J. B. Bury, whose heart was in the right place, even if his historiography wasn't in *A History of Freedom of Thought*; Clarence Darrow, keeping alive the "Hyde Park" tradition of freethought; Charles Darwin (represented by an extract from his autobiography, showing portions on his religious views removed by his wife in the first edition even though in one case—unless there is a misprint in the current volume—nonsense resulted); Denis Diderot; E. Haldeman-Julius (more lively "Hyde Park"); George Jacob Holyoake; Julian Huxley (described as probably "the most eminent humanist for our time"); T. H. Huxley (called "England's most scholarly foe of orthodox Christianity during the latter part of the nineteenth century"); Robert Ingersoll; Thomas Jefferson; W. E. H. Lecky; Joseph McCabe (hailed as, in his lifetime, "the most scholarly—and also the most quarrelsome—rationalist in the world"); H. L. Mencken, not as well-known outside America as he deserves to be; John Stuart Mill, "the Saint of Rationalism";

Thomas Paine (called “the most famous freethinker in American history”—why not in English-speaking history?); J. M. Robertson (“relatively unknown to the current generation of Americans”); Bertrand Russell, whom a Jesuit magazine signalised as “a desiccated, divorced, and decadent advocate of sexual promiscuity . . . professor of immorality and irreligion”; Percy Bysshe Shelley; Leslie Stephen; Mark Twain; Voltaire, who must vie with Paine for the title of most famous freethinker in history.

There are many gems in this anthology, not all of them “classics” in the ordinary sense. Justice Harry A. Blackmun gives many ingenious arguments, including the right of personal privacy, in favour of abortion. Darwin gives a splendid example of experiential Christianity: “My father used to quote an unanswerable argument, by which an old lady, a Mrs Barlow, who suspected him of unorthodoxy, hoped to convert him: ‘Doctor, I know that sugar is sweet in my mouth, and I know that my Redeemer liveth.’” I like Mencken on theologians, who have had a far more pernicious effect on society than securing the promulgation of particular statements that are untrue or questionable: “They have gradually broken down all the natural barriers between fact and fiction, sense and nonsense, and converted logic into a weapon that mauls the truth far more often than it defends it.” W. K. Clifford, who doesn’t gain a place in his own right, is quoted in a biographical note on Stephen: “It is wrong always, everywhere and for everyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.” And Stephen’s “Agnostic’s Apology”, taken from an article in the *Fortnightly Review*, must be the best thing ever written on agnosticism and shows that it can be a spear instead of a tickling stick in the right hands. Lecky on the “Unblushing Mendacity” of the Church Fathers is crystalline freethought at its diamond best, but the two sentences I think most effective come from Diderot: “Wherever people acknowledge a God, there is a cult; wherever there is a cult, the natural order of moral duties is upset and morality corrupted. Sooner or later there comes a moment when the idea which prevented the theft of half-a-crown leads to the massacre of a hundred thousand men.”

An anthology of freethought, as of anything else, is a very personal, if not capricious, amalgam. Mr Blanshard’s selection of 36 freethinkers is confined to “the 200 odd years of the modern free thought movement”. 19 (20 if one includes Paine) of them are American, and only two are neither British nor American. English readers may be disappointed to find that the Cohen included is the New York philosopher Morris R. Cohen and not Chapman Cohen, and that Annie Besant and G. W. Foote—to say nothing of many brilliant but less famous English contemporaries—are also missing. Clearly the book has an American editor and publisher, and who can

blame them for being influenced by their own reading and readership? My main concern, however, is not over those who have been omitted but over one of the inclusions. I don’t object to the admission of three judges, though court decisions seldom enshrine the most sparkling prose; and Eleanor Roosevelt may be forgiven for being a conventional Episcopalian when she deals so capably with that mendacious mendicant Cardinal Spellman on the Catholic schools issue. But why, oh why, did John F. Kennedy get into this select company?

I hasten to say that I would not exclude Catholics from public office, that some of my best friends are Catholics, and that, like Joseph McCabe, I would be willing to recognise as freethinkers one or two philosophers who might also figure in Catholic biographical dictionaries. But a political speech “by” John F. Kennedy—almost certainly written by one of the “liberal pens” so conspicuously for hire at the American court of Camelot—in such classic company is little short of outrageous. Oh, I know Kennedy didn’t take down the American taxpayers to cushion his old age as Nixon later did; he didn’t need to, his father had chiselled well enough to set the whole clan up for generations. Who today wants to remember that Kennedy was responsible for the Bay of Pigs fiasco as well as the successful brinkmanship over Cuban missiles; that it was Kennedy who got the Americans into Vietnam in a big way and Nixon who got them out again; that while Kennedy was always talking about the “Peace” Corps, largely funded by the CIA, Nixon was the architect of detente with the Soviet Union and China; that Kennedy became famous for saying, with an execrable accent, “Ich bin ein Berliner”, but Nixon came to terms with the two Germanies? Moreover, while the White House mythmongers were busy canonising their “Holy Family”—the saintly John F., the radical-chic Jackie preening herself in the glow of his halo and appraising its melted-down value, and the two “cute” brats—his whoremasters were scouring the country for beauties like Marilyn Monroe and, as many believe, making plans for their “suicide” if they became embarrassing. Of course, none of this has any particular relevance to Kennedy’s “Houston Speech” culled for this volume, but I throw it in for those who may say, “Well, maybe the speech isn’t all that great, but Kennedy deserves inclusion for what he did and what he ‘was’.”

Now for the speech. Oh, it’s good campaigning stuff, but what else could a Catholic say on standing for president in a Protestant country? Mr Blanshard says, “I can think of only one slight correction that needs to be made in that speech. Out of courtesy, no doubt, he praised the Catholic bishops for an ambiguous 1948 statement in which they allegedly ‘endorsed church-state separation’. Their endorsement was ecclesiastical doubletalk, since

they continued fiercely to demand tax dollars for their enterprises and to denounce the Supreme Court for eliminating religious instruction in public schools." Mr Blanshard may call gratuitous praise of ecclesiastical doubletalk "courtesy"; I would call it political doubletalk. As I would Kennedy's desire for an America "where no Catholic prelate would tell the president (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote" and where "whatever issue may come before me as president—on birth control, divorce, censorship, gambling, or any other subject—I will make my decision in accordance . . . with what my conscience tells me to be the national interest, and without regard to outside religious pressures or dictates". It is a notorious fact that Catholic priests are more prone than Protestant ministers to give voting instructions, but better able in moral questions to rely on an identity of views between the "conscience" of their brainwashed faithful and the teachings of the church.

Maybe an anthology needs something to rave or rage over to bring it to life, just as a reviewer must occasionally depart from judicial prose. While in a carping mood, I must add that my pleasure over the editor's biographical notes is modified by some anxiety over their accuracy; for I found enough mistakes in places where I was familiar to make me tread warily where I was not, and any reader can note the odd absences of dates for people and publications. Though not always in agreement, I was much happier about the editor's deft treatment of questions of opinion. But should Secular Humanism be included among Buddhism, Taoism, Ethical Culture "and others" in a list of "religions in this country which do not teach what would generally be considered a belief in the existence of God?

DAVID TRIBE

*Note English prices and availability not known at time of going to press. Copies will be obtained if there is a demand.*

## THEATRE

**THE RIVALS** by Richard Brinsley Sheridan (Old Vic).

For the benefit of those whose memories need prodding, *The Rivals* is Sheridan's *other* masterpiece, the one that features Mrs Malaprop. For anyone interested in seeing company theatre at its best, you could not hope to find a better production than this if you scoured the listings for months. Prospect Company have come up with a sterling revival. Everything about it—the pace, the wit, the sheer exuberance of the performances—amounts to a fine evening's entertainment.

Sheridan wrote the play as a satire on the pretentious and overweening sentimentality of the late eighteenth century. One way and another, foppish young men and nubile ladies come in for a good deal of leg-pull. Above all, Sheridan trains his pen at the excessive "man of feeling", whose ardour leaves his paramour screaming for help.

With all the raillery, the verbal virtuosity, it is sometimes easy to overlook the really astringent comments the dramatist makes about custom and society. It may come as something of a surprise to learn that Sheridan's age was concerned with problems of censorship no less than is our own—rather more so, in fact, to listen to the likes of Mrs Malaprop and the complacent Sir Anthony Absolute. "A circulating library", avows Sir Anthony, "is, as an evergreen tree, of diabolical knowledge . . . they who are so fond of handling the leaves will long for the fruit". Small wonder, he argues, that Mrs Malaprop's niece should behave oddly: she has been taught the "black art as the alphabet".

Mrs Malaprop herself could well profit by closer acquaintance with the library. She is, as we all know, a stickler for precisely the wrong word. She is also a prude. Squeamish when someone casts "an aspersion upon me parts of speech", her "derangement of epitaphs" is as valuable to her as her honour, and the man who upholds it is "the pineapple of politeness".

Beryl Reid delivers such lines with arch aplomb that never tips the scales into mock seriousness. She is the perfect conception of an errant Aunt Edna, one minute urging sobriety, signing herself the passionate love goddess Delia the next. As Sir Anthony, Anthony Quayle is both beautifully controlled and wonderfully comic, becoming redder by the minute as he delivers his impassioned pleas against passion to his all too reticent son.

Perhaps the outstanding performance is given by James Aubrey in the part of Faulkland, the sentimental lover whose worship of Julia betrays an innate narcissism. Traditionally the character is either a sluggish buffoon or an acned adolescent, oozing sentimentality out of every pore. In truth, and as Aubrey plays him, Faulkland is venomous with self-reproach, Sheridan's misanthrope, and as such he is the cornerstone of what the play is about. Long before the word "repression" became part of everyday speech, Sheridan realised that genuine emotion, couched in the conduct of proscribed convention, turns in on itself and transforms people into fatuous parodies of human beings.

JAMES MACDONALD

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A Swiss parliamentary commission has unanimously rejected a voters' call to legalise euthanasia.

# TELEVISION

"Holocaust" by Gerald Green. BBC Television.

Much has been written about the last war. As a member of a generation born during it, I knew none of the glory—only the aftermath. We played on bomb sites, lived in a seedy drabness, and saw the guilt in our parents' faces for what war makes one human being do to another. We saw too their unspoken pain redeemed in the hopes and love they spent on us.

"Holocaust" is a complete travesty of the facts. Germans are no longer the stereotypes they once were, but the equally false romantic presentation of the past exploits human suffering for commercial success. They see "the Nazi" as something intrinsically distinct from humanity and not as, in fact, a potential in each of us to be evoked by fear and hate to persecute and exterminate the invented enemies of our madness. The dangerous superficiality of "Holocaust" imposes a certain acceptability of the facts and the madness it portrays.

Personally I cannot hate the Nazis. I cannot continue the festering sore that still creates their like, or compromise the hopes and love that came out of the real "Holocaust". We have survived, and our survival demands the courage to recognise the facts and their implications, in Russell's words, to "remember your humanity and forget the rest". I cannot but think that in this our survival has some sort of significance.

JOHN SUTCLIFFE

# LETTERS

## ANTI-ABORTION ABSURDITIES

Charles Oxley's letter (September "Freethinker") defends the use of the affecting term "unborn child" for a human foetus on the irrational ground of potentiality, and dismisses Ken Wright's apt analogy with contempt instead of argument because he has no argument.

But many of the anti-abortionists who depend on this false premise, that a potential person is actually a person, are so taken in by it themselves that they will pursue it to even further stages of absurdity and still fail to recognise its irrationality. For instance, a recent letter in a Roman Catholic newspaper, on the test-tube baby controversy, referred to the fertilised eggs in the early trial runs as "these new human beings" and objected to their being "thrown down the sink when the test-tubes were washed out".

Anyone who really believes that human eggs are fertilised by divine guidance, or, at least, that there is a god who cares whether they are fertilised or not and who proceeds to create special "souls" for them can hardly assume that their creator is opposed to abortion, for it is now a known medical fact that at least four out of every five pregnancies end in spontaneous abortion, usually at such an early stage that the woman is not even aware she is pregnant. In fact,

an omnipotent creator would be the greatest abortionist of all time.

The Catholic letter-writer who was so worried about eggs fertilised in test-tubes being flushed down a sink would presumably be driven to distraction by the fact that every day, taking the world as a whole, something like a million fertilised eggs must be flushed not down sinks but down lavatory-pans. And even at the later foetal stages, there is a far greater incidence of spontaneous abortion than induced abortion, especially in the poorer countries.

However, Charles Oxley and his bed-fellows cling so tenaciously to their metaphysical notions that they will presumably tell us that spontaneous abortion is different, being "God's will", not the result of deliberate human intervention. I wonder how they ever justify any medical intervention whatsoever, since "God's will" must not be thwarted?

BARBARA SMOKER

## AGAINST CONTRACEPTION

Putting aside Mr Oxley's odd enthusiasm for refuting a view "hardly worthy of refutation" ("The Freethinker" September), his metaphorical elaborations fail to meet the issue. It is very important whether the phrase "foetus" or "unborn child" is used, because the latter phrase is so emotive as to cloud reasoned argument.

If he is so concerned to preserve every "potential adult person", does he intend to launch a campaign to oppose contraception, which in some methods, such as the intra-uterine device, destroys foetal development? Or will he not be able to spare the time from his antediluvian campaign against blasphemy?

J. R. ELTHORNE

## ATHEISTIC PROOFS

Why is it that most atheists are so reluctant to admit that a categorical denial of God's existence does not automatically constitute a disproof of his existence? By the same token, a categorical assertion of God's objective reality is not a proof of his reality. As a famous sceptic, Carneades of Cyrene, said, we must always be careful to distinguish between absolute certainty (unattainable) and reasonable probability (attainable).

I see no evidence to suggest that "God" is anything other than a fiction, an unwarranted assumption—indeed, if a believer claims the world is inexplicable without reference to God, I would reply "It is inexcusable with reference to God". Nevertheless—however numerous, lucid and cogent the atheistic arguments may be, it is still impossible to actually disprove that God exists. (The atheist says "Why disprove a negative?" "Negative" only for him.)

Why do atheists sneer at agnostics, then? An agnostic is honestly convinced that the "Is there or . . . isn't there?" question is unanswerable. In addition, even if God could be shown to exist, the agnostic would still maintain the unknowability of the deity. So—whilst theists categorically affirm, whilst atheists categorically deny, agnostics say "It is an imponderable question". I suppose I am a strange type of atheist—I sympathise with the agnostic, since I freely admit that there is all the difference in the world between denial and disproof (and affirmation and proof).

GEOFFREY WEBSTER

## CADOGAN AND PEACE

Peter Cadogan is wrong when he states that a war in Europe is inconceivable ("Freethinker" August). There are several ways in which such a war could break out.

Firstly, an uprising like that in Hungary in 1956 or the coming to power of a government like that of Dubcek could gain support from the West thus provoking Soviet retaliation. Secondly, border incidents along the dividing line between the GFR and the GDR could escalate into war. Thirdly, coalition governments in France, Italy or Spain containing Communists could, if threatened by coups, seek Soviet aid thus threatening NATO's southern flank. Fourthly, on the death of Tito there could be a conflict in Yugoslavia between pro- and anti-Soviet elements with both West and East intervening to support the rival factions. Finally, war by accident is an ever present danger.

At the hands of Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin, communism was transformed from the humanism of Marx into the ideology of a totalitarian elite bent on world domination and the suppression of all rival ideas. As long as this remains so, and recent events from the pro-Soviet coups in Yemen and Afghanistan to the trials of dissidents show that it is, there will be a danger of war on a world scale.

I, too, would like to see the state abolished, but, until it is, democracy is preferable to totalitarianism. Furthermore, I believe that democrats have a right to defend themselves and the moralising of Peter Cadogan will be little protection against Soviet tanks.

TERRY LIDDLE

Peter Cadogan continually raises the doubt whether he actually believes what he says or if he is pandering to what we want and expect him to say. Superficially there is nothing any freethinker would disagree with. It is the implications of it, and what he attempts to justify in the unspoken proposition that accompanies his more obvious use of expected phrases, that we need to question. His little work "Direct Democracy" says a lot but means very little, most of it is not new and all of it, I fear, is "rational" window-dressing for a very irrational ideology which is only too apparent in his "Freethinker" article. War we are told, "has always been the health of the State, politics have always come out of the barrel of a gun. That is the scale of our dilemma—to abolish war we shall need to abolish politics and the State, to proceed beyond civilisation to something else. At that point our mortal imagination calls a halt. Until we can break through that barrier, the one within ourselves, we shall continue to be laden with wars . . ."

Bertrand Russell once wrote it is "means" that are irrational not "ends". Civilisation is a painful infliction brought about by politics. Apparently Cadogan's "direct democracy" is a mystical unity that does not require the mundane practice of debate, choice and the ballot box. We are not told what lies beyond civilisation, but I feel it is at one with Mr Cadogan's monolithic notion of Truth, the simple facts will not do. Freethinkers have always been concerned with the reform of political and other institutions, and to extend civilisation not to capriciously overthrow it for some questionable ideal. Like all irrational idealists Cadogan believes Utopia can be realised by the mere act of wishing. It is a frustrating fact for him that life on this planet require something more than a pious altruism to solve the problems that divide humanity. Is Mr Cadogan suggesting that armed force is a test of Truth? Does his ideology buffeted by mundane apathy lead like the rest to a pragmatic trial of strength from which Truth is to emerge like the Phoenix from the ashes?

Like a latterday Cato, Cadogan never fails to assert "civilisation must be destroyed", oft repeated it may well happen. But I cannot see the drawing room advocate of this doubtful point facing up to the facts of life without it.

JOHN SUTCLIFFE.

### *(Church and Apartheid)*

ments offering sublimated resistance to the oppressor by using aspects of the new culture (especially religious) mixed with traditional elements. This occurred in one form or the other on all continents from the classical Messiah Jesus to today's 3,000 or more sects in Southern Africa. The sects drain the energies to tackle the real problems of society. Repression generates anger and frustration. This resentment cannot find revenge against the oppressor because of his might. The oppressed live in tension between the freedom of their dreams and harsh reality. Their innermost needs find an outlet in the mythical rites and observances the many sects provide.

The Afrikaans speaking Reformed Churches support the system of apartheid. The members and officials of their black "daughter" churches work and believe in the system and thus strengthen it, like the homeland leaders in the political field.

The English speaking churches and the Independent Sects assist the existing system of exploitation in spite of themselves. They provide at the most an opportunity to some for blowing off steam. Repressive tolerance makes allowances for a "Hyde Park Speakers' Corner", a safety valve for the system.

The churches present an obstacle for change. The question is: Can the churches become again "the salt of the earth" and are their leaders prepared to die on the cross with the oppressed?

"It is time some bishops went to jail," a South African priest commented recently, in regard to the role of the Church in an apartheid society.

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### *(Jottings)*

described as "this perverse altar of chastity".

It is asserted in *Sacra Virginitas* that "life-long virginity is a gift from on high which was brought into the world by Christianity". Reforming elements within the Church may feel that it is a gift they could do without. Others will resist any further concessions or liberalisation.

Happily the Church will be on the losing side whatever the outcome of this confrontation of reformers and conservatives.

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"Notes on the Symes Family and Joseph Skurrie" have been received from Nigel Sinnott. They add further information to his booklets on Symes and Skurrie, and are available from NSS, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL, on request with a 7p stamp.

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This edition of "The Freethinker" has been edited by Barry Duke, while the editor is on holiday.

(Catholics Favour Birth Control)

giving "a rather biased account of current views on the subject", and complained that the programme was "mostly devoted to presenting a case for change". They pointed out, with a degree of bitchiness more suited to the *Daily Mail's* gossip page than any Christian organ, that the opposition *Catholic Herald* reporter involved in the Credo programme "admitted she was on the pill".

(William Willis)

gave a chance for the orthodox party to cast a stone. He always did credit to those whom he represented by the temperate and exemplary life he led." Joseph Mazzini Wheeler who, "as a youth derived profit from the conversation and criticism of the late W. Willis" concluded that "the cause has lost an indefatigable worker and an earnest, clear-headed, high-principled man".

William Willis was certainly a remarkably enterprising man. His loyalty to the cause of freethought transcended the boundaries of geography and the problems of hard work. His memory, and the respect he earned during his life, deserve to last the test of time.

#### REFERENCES

Grateful thanks for help and information in connexion with this article are extended to Mr Jim Herrick (NSS), Mr Harry H. Pearce (Melbourne), Mr Alan Rickard (Sydney) and Dr Edward Royle (University of York). Further information on W. Willis would be welcomed. Death certificate, Tasmania (Hobart, 3106): William Willis.

*Freethinker* (London) 10 June 1893: 498; 8 Apr. 1894: 230\*; 15 Apr. 1894: 246\*.

*Freethinker and N.S.W. Reformer* (Sydney) 13 June 1886: 78; 22 Aug. 1886: 154-155.

*Liberator* (Melbourne) 24 Jan. 1886: 135; 14 Nov. 1886: 430; 2 Dec. 1893: [6409]; 17 Feb. 1894: 6593; 3 Mar. 1894: 6621.

*National Reformer* 19 Apr. 1868: 250\*; 24 Apr. 1868: 335\*; 26 Sept. 1875: 207\*.

*Secular World* 1 June 1863: 2\*.

(References marked with an asterisk (\*) have not been seen/checked by the present writer.)

## 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 Whiteabbey 66752.

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** Barry Duke: "Apartheid and the South African Churches". Sunday 5 November, 5.30 pm. Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove.

**Harrow Humanist Group.** Nicolas Walter: "Voltaire His Life and Times". Wednesday, 11 October, 8 pm. Gayton Road Library, Harrow.

**Havering and District Humanist Society.** Eugene Levine: "Dinosaurs". Tuesday, 17 October, 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre (corner of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road).

**Lewisham Humanist Group.** Barbara Smoker: "Relics Rise Again". Thursday, 26 October, 7.45 pm. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford.

**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.** The Vegan Approach to Life. Sunday, 15 October, 8 pm. The Campaign to Legalise Cannabis. Sunday, 5 November, 8 pm. Both 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8.

**Merseyside Humanist Group.** Frances Morton: "Work for Human Needs in a Just Society". Wednesday, 18 October, 7.45 pm. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. Enquiries telephone 057-608 3835 or -342 2562.

**Muswell Hill Humanist Group.** Glenys Atkinson: "A Labour Councillor's Conflict of Loyalties". Wednesday, 18 October, 8.30 pm. 155 Woodberry Crescent, N10.

**Sutton Humanist Group.** Mrs Norah Adams: "School Counselling". Wednesday, 11 October, 7.30 pm. Friends' Meeting House, 10 Cedar Road, Sutton.

**West Glamorgan Humanist Group.** Ivor Russell: "The Stones of Venice—125 Years After Ruskin" (Presidential Address) Friday, 27 October, 7.30 pm. The Royal Institution.

**Humanist Holidays.** Christmas at Teignmouth. Family Hotel. Four main days full board £13 per day. Extra days at £11. Easter at Bournemouth. August 1979. Two weeks on Suffolk coast. Details: Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, tel 01-642 8796.

## THE FREETHINKER

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UK ISSN 0016-0687

The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Publishers or of the Editor.

"The Freethinker" was founded in 1881 by G. W. Foote and is published mid-monthly. Material submitted (including Letters and Announcements) must reach this office by the 20th of the preceding month.

#### SPECIAL POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Inland and Overseas: Twelve months: £2.40 Six months: £1.25  
U.S.A. and Canada: Twelve months: \$5.00 Six months: \$2.50

Please make cheques, etc, payable to G. W. Foote & Company. (Foreign subscriptions by cheque or International Money Order.)

"The Freethinker" can also be ordered through any newsagent.