

SAFE SEX FOR TEENAGERS RECOMMENDED IN NEW BROOK PAMPHLET

There is at present inadequate practical help in birth control for teenagers, according to a new pamphlet issued by Brook Advisory Centres. "Safe Sex For Teenagers" by Dylis Cossey recommends that more facilities appropriate to the needs of young people should be available. Among proposals put forward are the suggestions that Area Health Authorities should set up more centres, that nurses should play a greater part in provision of contraceptives, and wider possibilities of advertising contraceptive methods.

The problems of teenagers involved in a sexual relationship are illustrated by a quotation from the problem page of a teenage magazine: "I'm fifteen and, although I know it's breaking the law, my boyfriend and I have made love. I know I'm going to do it again, and as neither of us likes taking risks, I'd like to go on the Pill. But I don't think I could go through the embarrassment of seeing a doctor only to be told I'm too young."

It must be recognised that this situation exists and realistic help must be offered. Sexual activity among teenagers has increased in the last decade. This is clear from surveys such as that given in Michael Schofield's book *The Sexual Behaviour of Young People*. Replies to questions in 1964 indicated that 6 per cent of 15-year-old boys and 2 per cent of the 15-year-old girls were sexually experienced. In comparison a survey quoted in *My Mother Said* by Christine Farrell suggested that ten years later 26 per cent of boys and 12 per cent of girls claimed to have had their first sexual experience before the age of 16. Further evidence comes from the increase of unwanted pregnancies among the under-20s. The number of abortions among the under-16s in England and Wales rose from 1,732 in 1970 to 3,592 in 1977. The reasons for the increase are unclear, but earlier physical maturity and strong advertising pressure on teenagers to be involved in romantic situations may both be factors.

The fact is, whether it is liked or not, that there

is a very clear need for greater contraceptive advice for teenagers. Free contraceptive advice is now (thankfully) available to all through the National Health Service. The Brook pamphlet shows that there remain limitations in this service. For instance, youngsters may be reluctant to seek advice from a GP. They might fear that the family doctor would tell their parents, or with people under 16 react by reproving them for breaking the law; also the doctor, as an authority figure, might be an unapproachable figure for a teenager. For these reasons Brook think that it would be helpful if nurses could play a greater part in contraceptive provision and the possibility of pharmacists playing a wider role should also be considered.

Giving Youngsters Advice

Young people are much more likely to visit a clinic if it is recommended by a friend and if the atmosphere is informal and non-judgmental. There are a few highly successful examples of this type of clinic. A youth advisory clinic at Doncaster was strongly attacked when it was set up. At the time Maureen Cozens wrote in the *Sunday Sun* "The staff . . . damn well should be moralising . . . Parents, teachers and these clever medics are going to have to moralise a bit more . . . The law doesn't allow . . . sex for twelve-year-olds." (29 January 1978). The doctor in Doncaster defended the clinic on the grounds that a wide range of advice would be available, pointing out that in many cases youngsters might simply wish to discuss emotional problems. Despite the protest the clinic has been well attended.

Giving advice to youngsters at high risk in deprived areas is especially difficult. A Brook Advisory Clinic in the Lambeth district has proved highly successful in attracting young people who might otherwise never go near a doctor who could give them contraceptive advice. It has been shown that

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Criticising Christianity

"Religion is debasing in fundamental and analysable ways," said Dr Harry Stopes-Roe in an address which he called "Criticising Christianity". Dr Stopes-Roe, Chairman of the British Humanist Association, was speaking as a guest of honour at the Annual Reunion of the South Place Ethical Society on Sunday 24 September.

He argued that criticising Christianity was important and not to be conceived as a negative activity. The supreme advantage of revealed religion, he suggested, was that it covered all questions; but its supreme disadvantage was that God never revealed the answers unambiguously and a wide range of options remained. This did not make believers humble and cautious, but dogmatic, arrogant and absurd.

The real trouble with religion lay in the lack of control over the views or values of the "life-stance" adopted. In contrast, humanism looked at the world direct, and reason and experience controlled the views taken. Thus the core of our outlook—a concern for other people—was controlled by study and use of reason.

This matter of control was the basic contrast between the religious person and the humanist. Principles based on revelation quickly led to the inscrutable, the claim "That's too deep for us . . ." In this respect Dr Stopes-Roe was much struck, while joining the Birmingham working party to produce an Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education, that values such as sensitivity and awe were pressed upon children, while what was startlingly omitted was a sense of man's power over his own life, of his responsibility and potency.

Dr Stopes-Roe said he found the inscrutability and double-think of religion distasteful. He cited the example of a conversation he had had with John Hick, editor of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, who had been asked why he did not change his creed now that his views were so different from what Christians had previously claimed; the theologian had happily replied with answers of the kind "It has always really meant . . ." Humanists had a role in dispelling this kind of humbug.

The question of truth and falsity was of fundamental importance, since falsehood infects and debases thought. This was why criticism of Christianity was not necessarily negative. We could not allow people to be spoofed. He offered here the example of Creationism (a literal Genesis view of the origin of mankind) which had been given equal status with evolution by the American Society for the Advancement of Science. We could not allow any separation between areas appropriate to science and areas which were to remain unexaminable realms of religion.

The basic falsity of the Christian view was seen in its progressive degeneration and re-interpretation from the time of literalism and miracles to the idea of the myth of god incarnate. It was comparable with Marxism in its consistent attempts to claim that it was still saying what it had always said and meant (but nothing means quite what it seems . . .). It was a falsity reinforced by the re-writing of history, as for example in the neglect of the Greek tradition in favour of a Judaeo-Christian emphasis.

A further criticism of Christianity was its strong mystical content, which produced an area of complete confusion. The sermon on the mount had an other-worldly emphasis which made it quite unacceptable as a shared basis for moral attitudes.

For these reasons we had a responsibility to devise other means of moral education, to give confidence to people, and to replace a failing and misplaced confidence in Christianity. Dr Stopes-Roe concluded by quoting W. B. Yeats:

"The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity."

"We want conviction without passionate intensity," he said "and for this we must clear the ground by criticising Christianity."

A recent biography of Richard Burton by Michael Hastings contains the following conversation, which took place on board ship, between Burton and a Jesuit priest:

"My wife is a Jesuit of the family", Burton said.

"What a capital thing for you!" exclaimed the dignified frock . . .

"Well, Captain Burton, there are some of your ancestors." (Pointing to some monkeys shinning loose up the mast.)

"Well, my Lord, I at least have made some progress", Dick replied, "but what about your lordship, who is descended from the angels?"

ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES

Charles Darwin

60p plus 22p postage

From G. W. Foote & Co.

702 Holloway Road, London N15 3NL

List 28 (the first for 18 months) of secondhand Freethought/Humanist books is available from Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex RH17 5JU. Please send s.a.e. (foolscap) if interested.

Alert 87-year-old would like to correspond/meet other Freethinkers in W. Yorkshire. Please write P. J. Payne, 29 Dale Court, Valley Drive, Ilkley, W. Yorks.

This year in Spain 500 years since the formal foundation of the Inquisition is being marked. In the post-Franco period of liberalisation there have been comments on Spanish television and in the press criticising the Inquisition. An international congress on the Inquisition is being held in Cuenca, a small town where the archives of the Inquisition are kept. Rafael de la Llave, who here writes about the Inquisition, is a student of physics who was one of the founders of "Cuanto y Cosas" ("Quanta and Things"), a scientific, literary and political journal. He has also been active in theatre groups and says of himself "from 1973 I was engaged in the anti-Franco struggle".

On the first of November 1478, answering a request of the Spanish King, Pope Sixto IV appointed four priests as inquisitors.

This was not, however, the first time a priest prosecuted his fellow human beings for not sharing his opinions. Throughout the Middle Ages, there existed a mini-Inquisition, which, particularly from the twelfth century, spread all over Europe except England, where it was not necessary because Henry II had already imprisoned or branded with a hot iron all the heretics in his country, as well as killing Thomas Beckett, just to finish things off. This small Inquisition was not, anyway, very influential.

But it was the modern Inquisition (sometimes called Spanish Inquisition), which by flattering or blackmailing the Kings got their support and succeeded in spreading all over Europe and part of South America. It was this Inquisition which burnt Giordano Bruno, arrested Galileo and put Servetus into the hands of the Calvinist inquisition, moulded on its pattern.

Nowadays, Catholics give some ready-made official answers—all of them hypocritical—when questioned about the Inquisition. Sometimes they say that there has been exaggeration of its atrocities: inquisitors were good lads at heart and details of most of their victims is just anti-Church propaganda. At other times they recognize that the Inquisition was bad, but claim that it has nothing to do with the "true Church", which, of course, is perfection itself. Another answer is to recall that the victims of the Inquisition were killed by civil executioners and claim that this is a complete discharge for the Church; as this is plain stupidity—like claiming that a criminal just pulled the trigger and it is the bullet which did the killing—I am going to discuss the first two answers. I quote it just to show how unfair the Catholic way of thinking can be. Can anybody sensible turn for moral guidance to such people?

Maybe there has been exaggeration about the cruelty of the trials of the Inquisition. I think that

is a logical consequence of their secrecy. The accused were not told who were their denouncers, and sometimes they were not even told what were the charges. They were not allowed to select an advocate of their own, and on most occasions were held for years before the trial was started. From the arrest, their possessions were confiscated to cover the expenses of the trial, and it was forbidden to use any money they had to feed their children or wife. All these things were worse than torture—which they definitely used systematically—and there is no exaggeration in them. It is not unlikely that the most obvious exaggerations were spread or at least tolerated by the Holy Tribunal itself. We must not forget their ultimate end was the fear of the people.

The estimates of J. A. Llorente, secretary of the Inquisition, who lost his faith through this experience and helped with his knowledge in its abolition, are of 341,021 victims, 31,912 of them burnt alive. But, how can we estimate the number of people who died because of the Holy Tribunal's opposition to medicine? Or those who died in the religious wars waged by the Inquisition — not to speak of the cultural harm done to people by depriving them of this freedom. What kind of literature can exist in a country where people are afraid of expressing their feelings?

Pathetic Documents

The most pathetic documents of the Inquisition which I have read are the letters of Spanish physicians asking leave to read medical books—petitions which entailed a heavy risk of being considered suspicious—and the refusals of the Tribunal. As health was considered the exclusive competence of providence and so a good source of revenue for the priests, they looked with suspicion on the physicians and the Inquisition opposed them harshly. No progress in medical science was accepted from the beginning and especially the Paracelsus' doctrine of the possibility of curing diseases by use of chemicals was forbidden almost to the end of the Inquisition.

And the Church has never repented of having created the Inquisition; as a matter of fact, the Inquisition has not been abolished by the Church. Officially, it has only undergone a change of name and now it is the Congregation for the Defence of Faith: the Inquisition has only been suppressed by force, when the people tired of its tyranny.

Only some years ago, in a meeting of Spanish bishops, a vote was taken as to whether they should apologise, in the name of Church, before the Spanish people—the people who have suffered the Inquisition most. The motion was rejected. They refused to give humanity even that insufficient and inexpensive reparation.

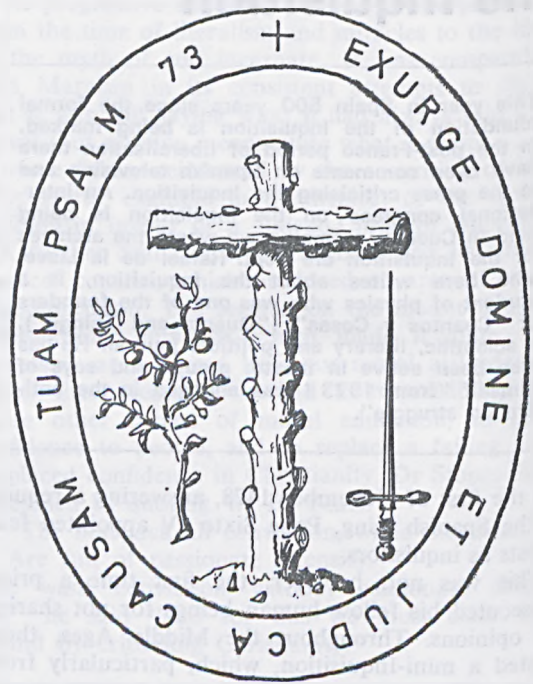
But I do not think the point is that they do not repent of having gone astray. (Aren't they infallible?) What is important is that their basic attitude has not changed and probably will not. (Aren't their principles immutable?)

They still venerate the book which tells that if anybody adores another God you should kill him or that every crime will be forgiven except the sin against the spirit. What is more, they practice intolerance. In the twentieth century they condemned: liberalism, socialism, psychoanalysis and even scientific theories like polygenisis. Not to speak of the famous deliberations by Paul VI on "artificial birth control", divorce and sexual questions.

The supposedly liberal John XXIII and the Concilium have repeated that religion should direct the political behaviour and that catholics should toil for a catholic society.

While Catholic organizations like Opus Dei, which advocate the establishing of the Inquisition (under another less unpopular name, of course) and which were the backbone of Franco's regime are tolerated and encouraged, even the Catholic's "Christians for socialism" are condemned. Though it is true that the extreme right wing has also been condemned (Lefebvre) this was only for disciplinary questions.

If all these condemnations do not end in "auto-da-fé" it is only because of the work of people like Voltaire, Thomas Paine, Bertrand Russell and many others who defied the eternal fire to prevent their fellow men from being burnt in the monks' real, terrestrial fire.



Emblem of the Inquisition. "Exurge Domine et judica causa tuam. Psalm 73"—"Arise, O God and judge your cause".

INDIAN ATHEIST CENTRE

As a result of an appeal in *The Freethinker*, £78 has been sent to the Indian Atheist Centre, which was devastated by a cyclone last year. The Atheist Centre was founded by the famous Indian atheist Gora, and his son Mr Lavenam was in London recently. In conversation with G. N. Doedhekar, the Treasurer of the National Secular Society, Mr Lavenam said that it was very encouraging to be given such support from overseas. It was helpful not only because of the financial assistance, but also as a boost to morale at a time when religious organisations were giving substantial support to Indian groups.

The Atheist Centre on the East coast in Vijayawada, is now being rebuilt and its library replenished. It follows the Gandhian tradition of field work and is active in health and family planning education, general education, and support for fair treatment for the poor, especially combatting the caste system. The Centre is particularly active in assisting with marriages between people of different castes.

NEW MEXICO

Mrs Maria Rubio, while cooking tortillas for her husband, discovered one had burns which formed a picture of Jesus. She was convinced this was a miracle and had it put in a plastic frame covered with glass. She showed it to a priest who said: "I think this is just a coincidence". She replied "It's not a coincidence. I have been rolling burritos for 21 years, and this is the first time the face of Jesus has ever appeared in a tortilla." So Father Finnegan blessed the tortilla.

Mrs Rubio built a small shrine to the tortilla, placing it on a table and erecting a makeshift chapel around it. Word spread and people came to the shrine; visitors dropped to their knees and prayed aloud. So far 8,000 people have signed Mrs Rubio's register. They light candles and bring photos of members of their families who need healing to the shrine.

"It is a miracle," she has been reported as saying. "I will keep my tortilla for ever."

(Source of this story: *American Field Newspaper Syndicate*.)

Pope Without a Crown

BARBARA SMOKER

The unexpected death of Pope John Paul I, after only 34 days in office, has brought characteristic explanations from the believers in divine guidance, the sentimental, the superstitious, the rational. Here Barbara Smoker looks at some of these responses and sees the funny side of the situation. She also looks ahead, for the second time in five weeks, to the ways in which the new incumbent of the See of Rome is likely to wield the considerable feudal power that he still holds in the modern world.

"One of the shortest papal reigns in modern times" was the cautious comment of BBC radio in the early news bulletins that Friday morning only 34 days after Albino Luciani had become Pope John Paul I. One of? And even at that, only in modern times? Obviously no one had got around to checking the historical records; but they need not have been quite so cautious.

They would have had to trace back almost 400 years, to 1605, to find a shorter pontificate—that of Leo XI, who, though aged only 50, caught a chill during his coronation on the seventeenth day of his reign and died ten days after that. Fifteen years earlier, there had been an even shorter papal reign—that of Urban VII, who reigned from September 15 to 27, 1590. The shortest reign of all, however, seems to have been that of Stephen II, lasting a mere four days, in 752. He was never crowned, and for this reason it has been disputed whether he could be counted as a pope at all, though in fact a reign begins on acceptance of the office, not on coronation; and John Paul I had decided not to be crowned.

According to official Catholic reckoning, he was the 263rd pope—making the average reign, down the centuries, 7½ years each.

Whether the very brief reigns of Stephen II, Urban VII, and Leo XI gave rise to puzzlement and questioning and superstitious explanations we do not know, but probably not, for it is only in the present century that sudden death from natural causes has become a matter for speculation. In the case of John Paul I, the response on all sides has been the insistent question "Why?"

Cardinal Confalonieri, Dean of the Sacred College, himself twenty years older than the late pope, threw wide his arms, in Italian fashion, asking "Why did he go? Who knows what is the design of God?" And Cardinal Florit, Archbishop of Florence, echoed "I have been shaken by this sorrowful event, which convinces me of one thing: that the intentions up there—I mean God's—are inscrutable. We wonder why God has permitted this death . . ."

Not all of the faithful, however, have been content to leave it at that. In the twentieth century, people expect the cause of death to be discovered, if necessary by *post mortem* examination—but it is contrary to the Vatican's Constitution to carry out such an examination, and, since the late Pope Paul VI refused to relax this ruling, no one can be sure what killed John Paul I, though a coronary seems most likely. Not surprisingly, however, the uncertainty has led to rumours of foul play—possibly because this pope promised to be a bit too liberal in some directions.

God's Intentions?

But for every person who suspects the hand of an assassin in this death, there are thousands who see the hand of God in it—for one reason or another. One of the most widespread theories among the diehards in the Church is that John Paul I, had he lived, would have rescinded his predecessor's encyclical against contraception, *Humanae Vitae*, and that this would not have been in accordance with the divine will, so, for the sake of the Church's teaching and in order to preserve papal infallibility, God had no option but to prevent the pope from living long enough to carry out this terrible intention. (Why God did not prevent the conclave of cardinals from electing him in the first place is a little obscure.) What adds weight to this theory is that John XXIII, who set up the commission that investigated the whole question of birth control, was expected to accept their recommendation that the Pill should be permitted—and he died just before the commission made its report, which his successor, Paul VI, rejected. It seems that some of the cardinals have themselves been thinking along these lines, resolving to steer clear of any candidate likely to be soft on contraception, if only for the sake of his expectation of life. Certainly some of them suggested, after John Paul's death, that they thought the brevity of the reign indicated that they had somehow misinterpreted the Holy Spirit's intentions and elected the wrong man. Was there a fault in transmission, or reception?

Other people, captivated by John Paul's engaging smile and his apparently simple and humble character, have declared that the good die young. "We wanted him so much, but God wanted him more," said the *Universe* editorial, ostensibly quoting "a blind old lady". (Secular papers traditionally quote a man on a Clapham omnibus, but the religious press generally have an old lady on hand, preferably blind.)

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Taking the too-good-to-live line of thought a step further, a number of the devout have suggested that God would in fact have taken Albino earlier but had deliberately spared him long enough to reward his humility with the honour of the highest title the Church can bestow on a living man. (It would not be surprising if they soon proceeded to bestow on him beatification followed by canonisation, in response to popular emotion.)

Explanations for this sudden death have also been found in less religious superstitions. For instance, he was the first pope to choose a double-barrelled name, and such names, it is said, are unlucky. Then no coronation! As was asked of Stephen II, twelve centuries ago, how can a pope be pope without a coronation?

A more sophisticated explanation that I was given while carrying out a little market research among Catholics was that God wanted the cardinals to get to know one another better, and he therefore arranged it so that they would have to hold two conclaves instead of one.

Then there was the progressive, though superstitious, Catholic from Nigeria—where Catholicism is tinged with the old tribal beliefs, and where Catholics pay little attention to popes, especially in such personal and practical matters as birth control—who told me that the pope's death was a sign from God that he did not want there to be any more popes ruling over his Church.

The purely philosophical reaction to this death sees it as a reminder that all humans, even popes, are mortal. The ultimate rationalist reaction, complete with useful lesson, was expressed in a letter to *The Times* that is worth quoting:

Cardinal Hume and other leading RCs ask what the meaning is of the untimely death of Pope John Paul I . . . For an unbeliever, there is no astonishment when a confirmed cigarette smoker in his sixties has a fatal heart attack . . . Although I do not see any sign of the Holy Spirit playing a part in these matters, it would undoubtedly be of enormous benefit to mankind if every Catholic were to begin campaigning vigorously against the use of tobacco.

Intolerable Pressures

As a non-smoker (despite my name), I am ready to use any opportunity to campaign against the noxious weed; but, in all honesty, I cannot think it was the major factor in the late pope's sudden demise. The most likely trigger was the unexpected and unaccustomed pressure of the responsibilities of a head of state, prime minister, religious leader and pop idol, rolled into one. For a man who had spent most of his life as a simple priest, with no experience of affairs of state, to be thrust suddenly into such a position in his 66th year—an age at

which most men have gone into retirement—it must all have been a quite intolerable strain, especially as he seems to have been the sort of person who really believed in all the Catholic fairy-tales, including his own infallibility, and therefore must have been literally worried to death when he found himself out of his depth.

His brother, Eduardo Luciani, says that when they had lunch together at the Vatican after the election, Albino confided in him: "I was shocked and terrified when they told me I had been elected." And Fr Mario Senigaglia, who, as secretary to Luciani when he was Patriarch of Venice, knew him well, has commented simply, in contrast to all the superstitious theorising, "He had to suffer efforts and tensions he could not stand."

Unconscious Cruelty

In fact, with hindsight, the election of such a man to the papacy appears not only lacking in imagination and common-sense on the part of the cardinals (let alone their divine guide) but an act of unconscious cruelty.

However, perhaps we need not feel too sorry for Albino Luciani, alias Pope John Paul I. His was the rags-to-riches story to cap them all; and, instead of ending his life with, say, five weeks of a terminal illness, he had five weeks of glory, actualising a schoolboy fantasy, and then died in his sleep. Moreover, his posthumous reputation is unassailable, for he had no time to blot his copybook. The only universally esteemed pope is a dead pope.

Besides, he did achieve something in his brief reign that it will be difficult for the future to undo: he went further than either of his immediate predecessors in eliminating much of the traditional pomp of the papacy, thus improving and modernising its image.

For that very reason, secularists and others who are aware of the dangers of organised religion should maintain their eternal vigilance with even more vigour in the immediate future.

As I wrote in the September *Freethinker*, one of the major decisions facing the papacy at this time is whether to go along with Pope Paul's hard line on birth control, as set out in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*—and inevitably condone its widespread flouting, even by staunch Catholics, and with it the flouting of papal authority—or to repudiate some of that encyclical. Even though Paul VI refrained from putting the seal of infallibility on it by issuing it *ex cathedra*, for a pope to make an explicit repudiation of any of it is bound to undermine the allegedly immutable magisterium, however ingenious the face-saving formula with which the repudiation may be made.

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JOTTINGS

WILLIAM McILROY

In 1964 two Moral Re-Arming Christian ladies—one of them a provincial schoolmarm, the other a clergyman's wife—started a crusade against “the propaganda of disbelief, doubt and dirt” with which Auntie Beeb was allegedly flooding the homes of Britain. Although “dirt” came a poor third in their list of media transgressions, the movement became known as The Clean-Up TV Campaign (now the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association). It made a national figure of Mrs Mary Whitehouse (Norah Buckland soon stepped, or was pushed, out of the limelight) and several other pro-censorship groups, most notably the Nationwide Festival of Light, came into existence.

These latter-day Grundys have managed to keep themselves in the public eye and have persuaded even members of the Royal Family to endorse their antics. Nevertheless their significance in the history of the moral sanitation movement over the last three centuries is not rated very high by Edward J. Bristow in his excellent history of purity movements in Britain since 1700 (*Vice and Vigilance*, Gill and Macmillan, £12).

Professor Bristow scornfully dismisses the “meagre results” of the Festival of Light's “Operation Newsagent” and Mrs Whitehouse's National Petition for Public Decency. Although some readers may feel that the author of *Vice and Vigilance* is a mite too optimistic, he has, I believe, probably made a correct estimation of such groups. For while it is true that our overworked police have spent much of their time and public money raiding bookshops, confiscating stocks and prosecuting the owners, historically speaking this is small beer indeed.

During the 18th and 19th centuries there were hundreds—probably thousands—of prosecutions for blasphemy, sabbath-breaking, publishing and sexual crimes. The greatly diminished powers of the Church courts, and the reluctance of the State to become involved in a hopeless struggle to impose piety and purity on a recalcitrant citizenry, left the field to religious zealots who harassed and prosecuted with characteristic Christian vindictiveness.

A network of censorious, evangelical organisations was created, covering most of the country and impinging on all sections of society. The best known were the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, the Society for the Suppression of Vice and the National Vigilance Association. Less exalted, but equally earnest for the Lord, were assorted

organisations like the Female Mission to the Fallen, the Midnight Meeting Movement, the Pure Literature Society and the Snowdrop Bands. (Probably the only group of this kind to serve any useful purpose was the National Truss Society for the Relief of the Ruptured Poor, which offered physical as well as spiritual uplift.)

Most of the social-purity organisations drew their support from the middle and upper classes, although Ellis Hopkins claimed that her White Cross Society was “essentially a working man's movement”. She was so concerned for the moral welfare of the working man and woman that an appeal was sent to members living in country areas beseeching them to “keep a watchful eye on the hayfields at meal-times”. A pamphlet entitled *Smut in the Wheat* was produced to assist the endeavours of those who laboured to combat the randiness of agricultural workers.

The purity crusaders found vice and immorality in the most unlikely places, and were not above manufacturing it when necessary. Thus in 1889 the Leamington Spa branch of the National Vigilance Association came unstuck when, in its efforts to cleanse that genteel backwater of Victorian England, it set up a number of false rape cases. The Salisbury branch of the same organisation fell apart when it was revealed that a leading clerical member spent most of his spare time sending obscene letters to servant girls.

It has been claimed that puritan vigilantes were the rescuers of hordes of prostitutes. In reality, most of them did not want to be rescued, particularly when it meant incarceration in one of the dreary refuges which were founded by various Christian organisations. The routine in such places was on much the same level as that of the workhouse or prison. The “rescued” prostitute worked long hours in the laundry, existing on a diet of bread and scrape fortified by generous dollops of bible readings and prayers.

The Church Penitentiary Association ran the country's largest such establishment in Highgate, North London. A committee which was set up by the Bishop of London in 1896 to investigate conditions reported that inmates were beaten and subjected to confinement in the coal cellar. Exercise was forbidden as a chaplain believed that it excited the passions.

In other refuges for the fallen, girls were virtually imprisoned until they were too sick to work and then turned out into the street. It is not surprising that most prostitutes preferred the degradation and danger of their profession to Christian charity.

The forces of prudery and repression in the 18th and 19th centuries (like their successors in 1978) were adept at creating outbursts of moral panic.

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UNPREMEDITATED ACT

A leaflet attacking Transcendental Meditation has been produced by the Association of Christian Teachers. They are worried about the spread of this meditation popularised by the Maharishi Yogi. TM is apparently now being introduced into schools—and even being used by clergymen.

Is this not an odd case of the kettle calling the pot black? If the objection is to the commercial, proselytising approach—why have the ACT not objected to Billy-Graham-style crusades? If the objection is to meditation itself—why have they not also objected to traditional Christian works on meditation? (A priest once admitted his meditation stool was his most valued possession.) If the objection is to the influence on tender, unformed minds—why do they not object to Christian education in schools?

The Secretary of the ACT, Richard Wilkins, made it clear that their chief objection was to the surreptitious way in which the Hindu religion was being introduced. He felt the approach was dishonest, and the technique was not the neutral approach it claimed to be. The ACT have great doubts about the initiation ceremony (puja), which is a Sanskrit invocation to Hindu deities. Also the mantras, which are supposed to be personalised for each individual, are invocations to Hindu gods. (It is now well-known that the personalised mantras number only 16 and are assigned indiscriminately to certain age groups!) Surely very few meditators see their activity as religious. So where is the harm? Or are the ACT worried that the (evil?) Hindu deities will prosper as a result of the increased chanting of their names?

The leaflet points out that TM has been widely promoted in American schools and colleges. But the Spiritual Counterfeits Project (SCP) has exposed much deception in TM. A law case in New Jersey brought by the SCP resulted in a ruling that TM may no longer be taught in the state's schools, since it is a religious system. The leaflet does not point out that in the USA the teaching of *all* religious systems, including Christianity, is prohibited.

The Secretary of the ACT suggested that there is a difference between Christian meditation which concentrates upon a concept (such as god?) and Eastern meditation which concentrates upon emptying the mind (so as to be closer to god?). They really preferred prayer to meditation, he said.

The practice of meditation is not something secularists necessarily oppose—like other forms of relaxation it seems harmless and may be beneficial, provided it is not seen as a panacea to all the world's problems. But there is no need to pay the Maharishi's organisation a week's wage to find out about it, nor to go through a meaningless ceremony.

In a letter published in the *Guardian* (21 October)

NEWS

Jim Herrick, Secretary of the National Secular Society, wrote:

"As secretary of the atheistic NSS, I am not very enthusiastic about the 'transcendent' aspects of meditation myself. But commercial sales of TM as a leisure pursuit are obviously good business, even though most customers do not expect to reach the dizzy heights of their leader, the Maharishi Yogi, whose levitational skills have been reported.

"Yet is not the Association of Christian Teachers itself in favour of compulsory daily 'transcendental' worship in schools, and active in persuading youngsters to follow someone 2,000 years dead and alleged to have risen from the grave?"

SUNDAY OBSERVANCE

New Year's Eve falls on a Sunday this year. Sunday Observance Laws—many of them now amended or forgotten—are likely to cause some difficulty for the usual festive welcome to the New Year.

Publicity about this arose when a local mayor in the Ormskirk area decided to organise a New Year's Eve charity ball to raise money for children in care. He was told by a magistrates' clerk that "Music and dancing licences will not be granted for public functions on that day". He contacted his MP, Mr Robert Kilroy-Silk, who wrote to the Home Office. The Home Office pointed out that "The Sunday Observance Act 1780 prohibits dancing after midnight on Saturday in premises to which the public are admitted on payment". Shirley Summerskill, Junior Minister at the Home Office wrote: "The Home Office has no power to suspend the operation of the Act, either generally, or in respect of this particular day."

Mr Kilroy-Silk commented that "It is absolutely ludicrous that people should be restricted by such an archaic law passed nearly 200 years ago." He has also said that he will attempt to bring an amendment into Parliament before the end of the year.

A spokesman from Mecca, one of the largest commercial organisers of dances, admitted they might have difficulty holding dances in some areas. The licensing and Sunday Observance laws are complex and unclear and leave room for differing interpretation by local magistrates. There can be difficulties with any Sunday event—not just New Year's Eve. The Mecca spokesman said that they would operate within the law as it stood, but "celebration on New Year's Eve is a part of our traditional way of life and it will be a pity if people cannot do this."

S AND NOTES

The NSS has put forward a way of getting round the law. In a letter from the secretary published in the *Guardian* (October), it was suggested that to avoid the killjoy heritage of Lord's Day Observance, dances held on the Saturday night (as many functions might be) could dance through the night into the Lord's Day by paying up to midnight and becoming free guests after that time. A proposal from the NSS about dances on the Sunday evening was quoted on the BBC radio programme "Sunday" (8 October): dances could carry on beyond midnight and customers could "do as you do at the supermarket—pay on the way out."

WHITEHOUSE GOES UNDER

According to reports from the Australian press, Mrs Whitehouse's visit to rally the Australian Festival of Light was a flop. The *Tribune* said that Festival of Light supporters have "acknowledged privately that Mary Whitehouse's tour wasn't the success they expected". Public meetings were noticeable for the list of apologies read out and for counter-demonstrators outnumbering the faithful. Supporters of the Festival of Light were far less numerous than in previous events.

Mrs Whitehouse was heckled and even had pies thrown at her. A big rally at Town Hall Square, Sydney, was described by *Direct Action* (the Socialist Workers Press): "Whitehouse's long-awaited 'Speech for the Child' was a bit of a let-down, enlivened only by lesbians in the audience, who staged a silent walk-out under unfurled umbrellas with slogans. . . It all ended with the usual call for everyone to complain about smutty television, and to write to candidates in the coming election asking them not to legalise marijuana, homosexuality, abortion, prostitution, or, God forbid(!) de facto relationships."

Nigel Sinnott, former editor of *The Freethinker*, writes from Victoria: "Like the priests of Baal, I think Mary is having trouble with getting a flash of lightning to start the pyre going." The Secular Society of Victoria said in a press statement: "The doyenne of what is in fact a Gathering of Gloom has long claimed that her enemies are 'dirt, doubt and disbelief'. While the well-washed members of the Secular Society of Victoria are happy to be damned on the latter two counts, they suspect however that Mrs Whitehouse's real foe in this country will be something rather different: the innate Australian good sense of the ridiculous!"

A Bristol bookshop window displayed: "The Turin Shroud. Signed Copies."

UNBORN PRAYER

A new prayer to be used after "a medical termination of pregnancy" has been rejected by a liturgical Revision Committee at which it was proposed. The prayer included the words: "Into your hands we commit in trust the developing life that we have cut short. Look in kindly judgement on the decision that we have made and assure us in all our uncertainty that your love for us can never change."

The bizarritiy of such a prayer needs no comment. The muddled viewpoint was well exposed by Christians unhappy about the prayer's approval—and disapproval—of abortion.

A letter from "Alert Granma" to "Rhodesian Viewpoint", newspaper of the Rhodesian Alliance Party was reprinted in "Anti-Apartheid News": Dear Sir, Your paper has gladdened my heart! Good for you, here's wishing you great success, wisdom, knowledge and courage.

My late father arrived here in 1902 to help civilize the blacks but not to make presidents of them. In any case, the Lord says "put not the stranger above you who is not your brother", "be ye separate".

We believe He has a plan for Southern Africa because the Bible distinctly says "My people, beyond the rivers of Ethiopia shall bring mine offering". It is up to us to pray continually.

I think the news about the German missile base is too wonderful! My grandson, in the army, is not fighting for black government, but for a Christian country.

God bless your paper.

Freethinker Fund

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HUMANITY AND SEXUALITY, by Basil and Rachael Moss, Church Information Office, 60p.

A leading member of the Nationwide Festival of Light wrote to me recently: "the Christian religion is nothing if it is not a revelation". Unfortunately, he was wrong—although it is not a revelation, Christianity remains a big social nuisance, especially in relation to sex (with which many Christians are so morbidly obsessed). This latest contribution to these ceaseless Christian outpourings on the ever-interesting topic is by the Provost of Birmingham and his wife, who are joint Chairpersons of a British Council of Churches working party on sexuality, and it has been published as a contribution to the Church of England Synod's ongoing study of the theology of sex.

Well meant and humane in intent, the pamphlet unfortunately reeks of that condescension to lesser mortals (i.e. us non-Christians) which even liberal churchpeople seem to find it difficult to avoid. "We hope that the Christian perceptions and perspectives with which we approach the subject will illuminate it not only for our fellow-Christians but also for all who wish to treat their fellows with dignity and respect" the authors tell us in their first paragraph. They then proceed to wrestle with the uncomfortable facts that "revealed truth" until recently permitted slavery and still sanctions racial inequality in South Africa; and conclude that "endless testing and reformation of tradition is a proper and perpetual obligation upon Christians". The usual stuff about "love" being the key concept of Christianity follows.

They then ask a large number of rather naive questions about sex and the social and sexual relationships between the sexes. Gender differences, psychological insights and social roles all seem to be curiously baffling to committed Christians, lumbered as they are with their concept of the Sexless God who is Love. "Because we Christians are concerned with justice and love, and the value of each human being before God, we need to affirm the wide variety of human personality as a thing to be celebrated". Tell that to Mary Whitehouse and the Festival of Light! And do they really think that it is only "we Christians" who are concerned with justice, love and human individuality?

The place of the feminine element in the God-head provides some entertaining speculations about the Divine Nature for those who are entertained by such speculations. Sexism, happily, is taken seriously: "there are qualities of femininity, available to both males and females, which have remained all too long obscured and overlaid". Those who maintain that sexual expression can legitimately be,

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and very often is, separated from love are dismissed curtly as reductionists. "Any counsellor can testify that sex between human beings, even when intended to be a casual, cheerful gratification of bodily need, or an expression of 'low-level' friendship, very often turns out to be nothing of the kind. Deep disturbances of the human spirit frequently manifest themselves unbidden...".

Where the exploitative and destructive aspects of sex are concerned, "it is too common for Christians to rush in with condemnation" which lacks understanding or compassion. As for *Eros*, "perhaps as Christians we ought to replace the old myth of the boy with his arrows by the Biblical picture of God the Disturber, using 'the natural instincts and affections' to create new levels of human interdependence". Dr and Mrs Moss suggest that it should be left to the conscience of homosexuals how to handle the erotic possibilities of human loving. The concepts of lifelong monogamous marriage and of the nuclear family should be re-examined in case 'impossible burdens' have been imposed upon them.

So far so good. Many of the Mosses' questions are valid and need asking. But why are Christians always so *solemn* about sex? Don't they ever experience it as sheer fun?

ANTONY GREY

A PRE-RAPHAELITE CIRCLE by Raleigh Trevelyan. Chatto & Windus, £8.50 (256 pp).

The lives of the so-called intellectual aristocracy of England—Darwins, Huxleys, Macaulays, Trevelyans and Wedgwoods—have invariably been as interesting as has been their influence. The poems of Lord Macaulay, with their fervent overtones of republican virtue, left a distinctive mark on my own childhood; and in later years I derived great pleasure from the writings of G. M. Trevelyan—particularly those on Garibaldi and the Italian *Risorgimento*. I still retain vivid memories of an evening spent in St John's Wood a few years ago at the house of the late W. R. Price (botanist, "character", and lifelong reader of this paper, who died in 1975) and in the company of some of his Trevelyan relatives. So I reckoned that a book by a Trevelyan about Trevelyans ought to be good: this one was certainly not disappointing.

A Pre-Raphaelite Circle concerns the life of Pauline Jermyn, daughter of an East Anglian curate with typically nineteenth-century tastes in antiquarian studies and natural history. After a stimulating adolescence, illuminated by contact with Cam-

REVIEWS

bridge scholars and other men of science, she married Sir Walter Calverley Trevelyan, the "Apostle of Temperance", phrenologist and "model landlord". Pauline was, in the best Victorian tradition, a voluminous letter writer, and this book is derived in great measure from her correspondence with the Ruskins, Algernon Swinburne, William Bell Scott, Thomas Woolner and others.

However, my reaction to Raleigh Trevelyan's book is that its success is due not so much to new information it contains as to the author's capacity to set, without extravagance, an historical stage and to get the feel of his characters and of their time without undue partiality. The book conveys very much the flavour of mid-Victorian liberal upper-class life: ardent teetotallers emptying the contents of ancestral cellars into ponds; plans for model dwellings for the urban working classes; agonisings over Tractarianism; John Ruskin's tragic marriage to Effie Gray—who, after her divorce, happily married John Everett Millais; Ruskin's subsequent, sad devotion to little Rose La Touche; accounts of gynaecological surgery in the early days of anaesthetics; the Pre-Raphaelites trying to inspire a new approach to art; Swinburne trying to abolish God and the Austrian Empire with verse; and the superlatively "gushy" letters exchanged by intense women friends in that pre-Freudian age.

Pauline Trevelyan is notable for a number of reasons: her appreciation of Turner at a time when his paintings were largely the butt of jokes; her continuing friendship with Ruskin after his divorce; and the motherly help, friendship and tolerance which she extended to the young Swinburne—all this despite many years of serious ill health. Lady Trevelyan also arranged for members of the "inner circle" of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood to decorate a series of pilasters at the family seat of Wallington, Northumberland, now one of the National Trust's great treasures.

In brief, this is a first-rate read for anyone with an interest in, or feeling for, the literary and artistic life of Victoria's England—particularly of Northumberland.

NIGEL SINNOTT

A QUESTIONNAIRE FOR GOD by W. A. Rathkey, Rampart Lions Press; Cambridge, 1978. (£5 from Peter Bevan, Spindles, Westabrook Farm Lane, Ashburton, South Devon.)

A Questionnaire for God by W. A. Rathkey is a curious collection of poems and epigrams, at once

simplistic and profound. The poems are all, or nearly all, parodies of songs or nursery rhymes and all without exception are passionately anti-war. Here is "Humpty Dumpty":

Arrogant nations sound the Call;
Arrogant nations bid their youth fall.
But all their remorse, and all their old men
Cannot put youth together again.

Rathkey's use of parody is strangely effective, in spite of the eventual impression of simple-mindedness. The parodies are mostly a case of simple substitution, so that even those who do not normally have folksongs and nursery rhymes running through their minds will nevertheless find the verses immediately familiar ("One man went to kill/Went to kill a brother"). The innocence of the original rhymes makes the parodies all the more sinister; the tunes with their new words stick in the mind with a nagging persistence. Some of them would make good songs or chants for protest demonstrations. The wars which Rathkey protests, however, are the First and Second World Wars, with a glance at the Vietnam War. Deplorable and sickening as the First World War was, 1978 seems an odd time to be nauseated about trench warfare. Some of the poems seem to have been written in the 30's if not earlier:

Please to remember the eleventh of November
Season of treason and plot.
But the boys who will die because of Versailles
Will all of them soon be forgot.

Among the 209 epigrams are some in a similar vein; some are criticisms of Christianity, and others are washpish comments on modern life. Some are merely facile (No. 7: "Religion: Not seeing is believing"); many are not particularly original or even well put, for example No. 16: "Why are sinners so entertaining, and the virtuous so deadly dull?" or No. 125: "A crowded room is no guarantee against loneliness. Think of cocktail parties". There is a tart Ambrose Bierce streak (No. 28: "Those who cannot suffer fools gladly should avoid mirrors"; No. 179: "A penny for your thoughts is generally far too much").

A few epigrams are merely sour, like No. 62: "To certain painters: When next you get your colours, buy a tube of imagination as well". There is the sly and Shavian No. 197: "Nudity is in itself so harmless that it is certain the Devil invented clothes" and the rather silly No. 191: "Despite its follies and absurdities, the Catholic Religion is by far the most lovable. It has the warmth of the south, and the affectionate embrace of a woman". The ones with a lighter touch seem to me more successful, like No. 98: "How attractive Truth is: There are so many varieties" or No. 108: "I wonder if God ever wishes he could resign". Other good epigrams are No. 123: "When a tyrant dies his successor thinks you are cheering him"; No. 182: "Man cannot live by bread alone; but don't mention

this in a famine area"; No. 201: "The only valid excuse for ignorance is death".

A Questionnaire for God is published in a limited edition of 200 copies by Will Carter and is handsomely produced with untrimmed pages of laid paper. Regrettably, the contents are not quite up to the impressive appearance of the book.

SARAH LAWSON

THEATRE

COUSIN VLADIMIR by David Mercer. Royal Shakespeare Company at The Aldwych.

A Russian defector is helped into England by a marriage of convenience between his cousin and a brilliant British physicist. This looks like being a dramatic setting for a conflict between the values of Eastern and Western Europe, especially since the Russian, Cousin Vladimir, is no rebel of conscience complete with Samizdat credentials, but a wily black-marketeer who enjoys life greatly. And the scientist is so disillusioned with science that he prefers not to think about it, prefers in fact to drown the mere possibility of thought in alcohol. A serious conflict of values within the context of two strongly individualised characters was possible. But the play did not live up to its possibilities.

The physicist, Austin Procter, is surrounded by a group of drinking cronies from the pub near his Regent Park House, who describe themselves as the "hard core" and provide the soft centre for the play. Their ceaseless drinking, banalities, and surface frustrations and hysteria pervade the play and threaten to choke it with trivia. As is—unnecessarily—pointed out more than once, they are not a representative sample. One is a sadistic architect, builder of the Costa del Ruin and now on the verge of bankruptcy, another is an actress whose skills are only put to the test in her matinal miseries. The youthful private eye (with apologies to the amiable performance of Michael Bertenshaw) could have been omitted from the play with no loss at all, and the architect's wife, "Smidgie", was one of the most embarrassing caricatures I have seen on the stage for a long time. Only the ex-army officer, Henry Craxton, provided the vestige of an interesting character by virtue of his friendship with the scientist. The "hard core" are so unlikely a collection of drunken derelicts that they cannot really be relevant to a drama about the decadence of English moral values.

The play lurched towards its most serious conflicts too late. When civil servants tried to blackmail Austin into returning to science, by threatening to turn over the Russian to the authorities, Vladimir and Austin are forced towards moral choices. But the play is almost over and the moving decision of the scientist's wife, Katya, to reject England and return to Russia came as an effective isolated mom-

ent not as the climax of the play. I am not sure that the sub-plot gave us a much more convincing picture of bureaucratic deviousness than the hard core's demonstration of high-life decadence.

The two central characters, however, were fascinating and linger in the memory. Austin Procter, played with gangling bluntness by George Baker, was a person whose alcoholic haze seemed worth penetrating. Why had he abandoned science? Was it the vertigo he felt on the edge of a "spiritual" experience where time, space and matter met, or his disgust at the thought of producing thermo-nuclear fusion to give the human race more and more energy with which they would do less and less, or simply the death of parents whose pools win gave him financial security?

Vladimir, given the warmest performance of the evening by Mark Dignam, at least seemed to enjoy his drink. Shifting from exhilaration to melancholy with Chekhovian subtlety he appeared to be a shrewd, foxy, good-humoured man, who retained a commitment to the human race but no allegiance to any political system. Contemptuous both of the Western adulation of dissidents as a means of assuaging its own guilt and also sustaining a deep-rooted scorn for the inanities and cruelties of the Russian system, he was his own man.

David Mercer has a record of important drama; he has given intensity to the legacy of Marx and Freud, to the pressures of society which push towards madness and political activism. The play is, therefore, all the more disappointing. Has he lost his way among the drinking classes? Does the glass war replace the class war? "Your freedom is something you do not know what to do with," says one of the Russians commenting on the decadent West. It is an important challenge, but the play does not examine it head on.

JIM HERRICK

(Jottings)

There was a wave of hysteria regarding masturbation which terrified generations of adolescents. Religious groups produced an avalanche of books, pamphlets, tracts and leaflets on the subject. Members of the medical profession were to be found in alliance with the evangelical alarmists, and gave an air of authority to the fantasies of religious ignoramus.

There was also an upsurge of religio-medical purity lectures by barnstorming preachers who toured with such titles as *Human Wrecks* and *Plain Words for Young Men on Avoided Subjects*. One pioneer of this genre was Henry Varley, pork-butcher turned missionary, who also played a significant role in securing the prosecution for blasphemy of G. W. Foote, founder-editor of *The Freethinker*. Masturbation, vast audiences were assured, resulted in impotence, madness and early

death; the practice could be overcome by recourse to cold baths, prayer and, in extreme cases, circumcision.

Throughout the period serious writers and artists were hounded and victimised by Christian fanatics. Henry Vizetelly, publisher of works by Zola, Maupassant, Flaubert, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, was prosecuted by Samuel Smith, MP, and the National Vigilance Association, after the publication of Zola's *Nana* and other titles. Although the Government had at first refused to act, the Attorney General later took over the case. Vizetelly was found guilty and fined.

A few months later the National Vigilance Association struck at Vizetelly again, and this time the veteran publisher, ill and ruined, was sent to jail. The *Vigilance Record* charitably commented: "We trust that the imprisonment will not unduly affect his health".

The NVA registered another triumph in 1890 when it closed an exhibition of Jules Garnier's illustrations of the works of Rabelais at the Waterloo Gallery. The Government remained aloof, but the authorities were remarkably co-operative in granting the NVA a search warrant and the police helped with the removal of the paintings.

At a subsequent hearing it was ordered that 22 of Garnier's works should be destroyed. But the Government, fearful of a diplomatic incident, came to an arrangement with the NVA and the paintings were safely returned to France.

However nothing could prevent an outrageous act of pious vandalism by Sir Richard Burton's wife. After her husband's death in 1890, Lady Isabel Burton consulted William Coote, leader of the National Vigilance Association and a tireless campaigner for purity. Together they collected and destroyed irreplaceable manuscripts from Sir Richard's collection of Arabic erotic folklore.

Professor Bristow's book is a fascinating account of militant prudery, philistinism and repression during the last three centuries. It is abundantly clear that Christianity has always been the inspiration and driving force behind such movements. Contemporary organisations like the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, the Festival of Light and the Order of Christian Unity continue the unworthy tradition.

(Pope Without Crown)

It was probably the responsibility of this decision facing him that was largely responsible for John Paul I's early death. Was he really about to give his blessing to the Pill, as so many of the esoteric theories for his death suggest? The diehards, who tend to identify their views with the divine will, are ready to see the restraining hand of God in the fatal heart-attack; while among the liberals are

those who have been voicing suspicions of assassination. In each case, because, they believe, John Paul I was about to sanction the Pill. Whether he had in fact reached a final decision about it we shall probably never know.

Now a second John Paul (not, as proposed by *Private Eye*, John Paul Ringo George) has ascended the papal throne. The name chosen by (or, probably, for) a new pope has traditionally indicated his main policy line by reference to predecessors of the same name, and on this occasion it was odds on that it would be John Paul again unless the cardinals had changed their minds fundamentally over the type of man required. In the event, the only important criteria that seem to have changed between early September and mid-October were the age and physical fitness of the prospective pontiff. And, of course, the 450-year-old criterion that the pope must be Italian. The choice of Luciani to become John Paul I had got away from the tradition of a curial pope, and the choice of Karol Wojtyla as his successor went a big step further in getting away from Italian birth—and so far away as a country in the Eastern bloc.

After the conclave the cardinals tried to play down the political significance of this, preferring to stress the man's pastoral credentials for spiritual leadership. But Russian reaction has been very wary—in contrast to the rejoicing in other socialist countries, not only in Poland but also, less predictably, in China (possibly for no better reason than the discomfiture of the USSR).

We have to hand it to the cardinals—they seem to have made a most astute choice this time, with or without divine guidance. Poland is probably the most Catholic country in the world, and Catholicism there is at the same time an expression of patriotism and a focus of dissidence against the communist regime. Wojtyla's past record is one of give-and-take with the regime, but of insistence on civil rights—primarily, of course, for religionists, but generally too.

John Paul II is apparently a far more decisive man than Paul VI, and has already made it clear where he stands on theology and liturgy (firmly middle of the road), on church authority (strong discipline within the fold, tolerance for those outside it), and on Christian unity (a cautious progressive). But he has not breathed a word so far on the burning social issue of birth control. He can hardly delay doing so for long.

In the unlikely event of his suffering an untimely death, the superstitions would rise with irresistible force. He, like his predecessor, has refused a coronation; he has the same double-barrelled name; and—who knows?—the Holy Ghost might like yet another get-together of cardinals. For the Vatican, however, it would mean the expenditure of another million or so pounds. Already they have something

of a cash flow problem, with two expensive con-
claves in a few weeks, and have issued a new stamp
to help them out. This time they have taken care
to choose a man renowned for his physical fitness.

LETTERS

WAR AND PEACE

It is not supposed that "the moralising of Peter Cadogan" will be of any avail against Soviet tanks. The moralising of Andre Sahkarov, however, is an entirely different matter. He and his kind have opened the doors of perception in the Soviet Union and all the KGB's horses and all the KGB's men will never close those doors again.

Sahkarov is very much aware of the connection between human rights and peace. Effective opposition to Soviet authoritarianism (based on militarism) accounts for the vicious police clamp-down of recent months. But this time the police are losing. The Kremlin, for all its apparent might, is desperately afraid that the truth might break out.

As the history of the last 33 years is our witness, war cannot break out between East and West because neither has any defence against the other. All Great Power wars are now fought through third parties in places like Vietnam, Angola, Ethiopia, the Middle East, Cuba, etc. In Europe itself we are currently the victims of the biggest confidence trick of all time. The military propaganda build-up is simply to persuade us to pay our taxes to keep the redundant military and their industrial suppliers in business. We can dismiss the military on the morrow of ridding ourselves of the myth that sustains them, to wit, that we "shall always have wars".

I have never said that "civilisation must be destroyed". That is a grossly irresponsible use of quotation marks for which I am owed a retraction and an apology.

What I say is that civilisation is destroying itself. Since it is based on war it depends, in turn, upon the feasibility of war. But weapons of mass destruction have made that war impossible — between the Great Powers. This means that the very centre of civilisation has fallen out. To get beyond civilisation we have to conceive of, and invent, a non-violent society from the Rockies to the Urals and beyond. Today this is both feasible and imperative. Can we, please, have some serious thinking and some action?

(Will those who take the last sentence to heart contact me and ask for a copy of the Charter of the East-West Peace People? Something big is beginning to move.)

PETER CADOGAN

ONUS OF PROVING ATHEISM

Mr Webster ("Freethinker", October) is worried because we cannot actually disprove the existence of God and he suggests we should therefore be more sympathetic to agnostics. I respect his scepticism, which once I shared, but it must be said that the onus of proof falls wholly upon the believer, who claims God exists, and not on the atheist, who finds the evidence unconvincing. The full reasons for this have been set out in Professor Flew's book, "The Presumption of Atheism".

If I am told that Mars is inhabited by kangaroos who live ten miles underground and converse in Siamese, I cannot prove that such beings do not exist. But it would be absurd for me to adopt the agnostic position and reserve judgment because these beings are unknowable and their non-existence unprovable.

The rational thing for me to do is to ask "what is the evidence for their existence?" And if the evidence is inadequate, then I must disbelieve. I do not need to look for counter-evidence.

The question of God's existence demands an answer. If somebody convinces me that God does exist, and so may punish my disbelief, then I must alter my opinions and my way of life very radically and try to earn his favour, whatever the present cost. I cannot, like Mr Webster's agnostic, say "The question is imponderable" and set it aside, because in living my life I must constantly make decisions; and these decisions will depend on my basic assumptions, such as my belief or disbelief in God's existence. A man may call himself an agnostic, but he cannot really be one.

The opinions on which we base our actions are nearly always a matter of probability rather than proven knowledge, and there is no reason why this should worry us. The important thing is the degree of probability. And today the hypothesis that God exists—if we grant the word "God" anything like a real meaning—has become so improbable that we are more than justified in calling ourselves atheists rather than attempting vainly to evade the question.

CARL LOFMARK

CATHOLICS AND CONTRACEPTION

My comment on the public opinion survey showing that a majority of Catholics favour contraception became garbled on its way to you ("The Freethinker" October). I said that another public opinion survey shows that 30 (not 50) per cent of Catholics never go to church. I added that previous public opinion surveys have shown that a majority of Catholics also favour legal abortion.

Incidentally, if Christians in general and Catholics in particular really believed that a fertilised ovum was a complete human being, they would surely give baptism to and hold a funeral for every single miscarriage.

NICOLAS WALTER

(Safe Sex for Teenagers)

some groups such as emotionally and socially deprived girls and also children of parents in conflict are particularly vulnerable.

Area Health Authorities could do much more to set up full-time advisory centres for young people. They are understandably sensitive to opposition from members of the public who might raise a moralistic outcry about teenage sex. But the reality of the situation in which teenagers are developing sexual relationships must be faced. When youngsters become pregnant the alternatives are abortion, single motherhood, and marrying at a very early age—all of which are likely to be much more stressful than preventative measures. Area Health Authorities might also remember that contraceptive advice has been demonstrated to be cost effective by preventing future problems.

Although the pamphlet does not deal with the topic, Brook have stressed that sex education is very important. Such education remains poor or non-existent in some schools. All young people should leave school with an understanding of contracep-

(Continued on back page)

PUBLICATIONS

(A full list is available on request with s.a.e.)

- The Dead Sea Scrolls, John Allegro. £1.25 (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).
Pagan Christmas, R. J. Condon. 20p (7p).
Women's Rights, A Practical Guide, Anna Coote and Tess Gill. £1.25 (19p).
The Devil's Chaplain, H. Cutner. 10p (10p).
Muslim Politics in Secular India, Hamid Dalwai. 50p (12p).
Origin of the Species, Charles Darwin. 60p (22p).
Bertrand Russell's Best, Robert E. Engar. £1.00 (26p).
Fact and Fiction in Psychology, H. J. Eysenk. 90p (15p).
The Bible Handbook, G. W. Foote & W. Ball. 65p (19p).
Frauds, Forgeries and Relics, G. W. Foote and J. M. Wheeler. 15p (7p).
The Presumption of Atheism, Antony Flew. £3.50 (26p).
Causing Death and Saving Lives, Jonathan Glover. £1.25 (15p).
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tion, since it is as basic a part of life-knowledge as reading and writing. Good sex education can also help young people to explore their feelings more clearly and not get themselves into situations which they might regret. Part of sex education should help people to know how to say "No" when they feel they are unready or unhappy about a sexual relationship.

A further way in which youngsters could be helped with information is by relaxation of the rules about advertising. The pamphlet asks for the ban on commercial advertising of the sheath to be lifted. Those in control of advertising outlets keep up a double standard. Scantly dressed, sexually provocative figures are used to advertise boots, underwear or cosmetics; but anything other than a soberly worded advertisement for family planning services still quickly runs into difficulty. This is ironic since the admissable pressure on the teenage consumer must be a factor in teenagers' increased sexual activity.

The pamphlet reflects the need for a balanced attitude towards human sexuality. Adults often allow their own confusion about sexual feelings to cloud their attitudes towards young people. The most important aspect of counselling young people is to "respect young people and a great many of their philosophies and standards." Too many people want to make judgments. The 1977-78 Annual Report for the Brook London Centre said: "In the twelve months we have seen a number of children whose fear and distress at their unwanted pregnancy is sometimes aggravated by the punitive attitudes of their parents. To our knowledge three 14-year-old girls have been made to continue with the pregnancy and have babies they do not want as these parents have refused permission for the pregnancy to be terminated. In each case the parents have said the child must accept the punishment of caring for the baby for the wickedness of having early sexual intercourse."

The pamphlet concludes its balanced and healthy emphasis with the sentence: "There are still too many workers in birth control clinics who believe, consciously or subconsciously, that sex before sixteen is sinful."

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. Fanny Cockerell, Editor "Plan": "A Passionate Agnostic". Sunday, 3 December, 5.30 pm. Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove.

Harrow Humanist Group. Professor Sir Peter Medawar, CH, FRS: Question and Answer Session. Wednesday, 8 November, 8 pm. Gayton Road, Library, Harrow.

Leicester Secular Society. Jim Herrick: "Against the Faith", Sunday 12 November. Nicolas Walter: "The Blasphemy Law", 19 November. K. Furness: "The Future of Humanism", 26 November. All 6.30 pm. at Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester.

Lewisham Humanist Group. A Speaker from the Legalise Cannabis Campaign. Thursday, 30 November, 7.45 pm. 41 Bromley Road, Catford 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. Bryan Gunn: "The Anti-Vivisection Society". Sir Hermann Bondi: "Science and Education". Sunday 29 November. Both 6.30 pm. 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8.

Merseyside Humanist Group. Vegetarianism. Wednesday, 15 November, 7.45 pm. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. Enquiries telephone 051-608 3835 or 342 2562

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1. Sunday Morning Meetings, 11 am. 12 November, W. H. Liddell: Guy Fawkes, Conflagration to Fireworks. 19 November, Dr H. Stopes-Roe: Conviction and Agnosticism. 26 November, Keith Gilley: A Religion for Today. 3 December, Nicolas Walter: Swinburne, Man Against God. Tuesday Discussions, 7 pm. 14 November, An Introduction to TM. 21 November, Sir John Whitmore: Festival of Mind and Body. 28 November, Frank Claburn: Has the Free Religious Movement a Future? 5 December, London Communications—press, radio, TV.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Karl Heath: "Philosophy for Humanists". Thursday, 24 November. 7.30 pm. Friends Meeting House, Page St., Swansea.

THE FREETHINKER

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