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RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING RISES AGAIN —“TOO MANY EASTER PROGRAMMES”

Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, has written to the BBC complaining that “There were more Christian programmes on nationally networked radio and television this Easter than ever before”.

The television and radio critic of the *Church Times*, Norman Hare, had crowed in the pre-Easter edition, “Without hesitation I would say that, since broadcasting began, the events which Christians commemorate during the next few days have never attracted so much attention from producers, performers and writers. I leave others to any conclusions to be drawn from this, and merely report that on Good Friday there are eight and three-quarter hours of TV and seven and three-quarter hours of radio devoted to religion, and on Easter Day more than seven hours of TV and five hours of radio.”

Barbara Smoker wrote: “If there is one thing on which Christians and atheists agree it is that we are now living in a ‘post-Christian society’. The decline in Christian belief has now reached the stage where the number of viewers and listeners interested in religious broadcasts (with the possible exception of religious music and hymn-singing) is comparable with those interested in, say, angling. Licence-holders are therefore entitled to some explanation for BBC policy as to the excessive amount of time devoted to religion, especially the Christian religion. Giving it the benefit of the doubt, perhaps the unusually fine weather this Easter weekend was confidently predicted and it was therefore decided to discourage people from staying indoors?”

“But there can be no excuse for the long BBC1 programme on the Turin Shroud. The propaganda film ‘The Silent Witness’, which formed the core of the programme, was bad enough, with pseudo-scientific mysteries piled one upon the other to a musical accompaniment that combined science-fiction

sound effects with traditional church chords. Even worse, however, was the fact that the discussion that followed the film failed to restore the balance by including any non-believer who had investigated the matter or any suggestion of how the forgery of the shroud was carried out—thus confirming the impression left by the film that it is totally inexplicable. The fact is that the image on the strip of linen known as the shroud has been found to consist of scorch marks, and these appear to have been made by the cloth having been laid on a heated brass or bronze life-sized statue.

No Miraculous Explanation

“This would account for all the mysteries raised in the film. For instance, the fact that the VP8 Image Analyser produced a less distorted relief image from the shroud than from an ordinary photograph requires no miraculous explanation if the variation of intensity of the image is in direct ratio to the prominence of each part of the face—as it would be if prominent features in the statue (such as the nose and chin) naturally came closest to the linen and therefore scorched darker than, say, the eyes. This also explains why the image shows up so much better in a negative photograph than in actuality.

“As for the pollen from the Jerusalem area, its presence is hardly surprising since Jerusalem was the centre of the vast trade in relics during the crusades, when every crusader had to take some holy souvenir back home with him. There were hundreds of holy shrouds about then, and, for the less affluent crusaders, enough splinters from the true cross to keep a chipboard factory in production for months on

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end. In the interest of plausibility, all the shrouds were gradually eliminated except one—a particularly impressive one, that has been in Turin Cathedral for the past four centuries.

“There is no excuse for the conspiracy of silence on the heated statue theory, especially as an experiment along these lines, carried out by the author Geoffrey Ashe in 1966, successfully produced a cloth image similar to that on the so-called shroud, and the details were published. Since this simple explanation of how the image was made fits all the facts, it is hardly honest to trump up a great pseudo-scientific mystery about it in a programme lasting one-and-a-quarter hours of prime television time, without even mentioning it.

“As President of the National Secular Society, which has been striving since 1866 to counter undue religious privilege, I would like to ask if it is not high time that religious broadcasting ceased to have

its own special department and its own special advisory council, and, above all, ceased to be given far more broadcasting time than it knows how to fill in an interesting and honest way.

“Minority interests must certainly have a look-in, but they ought not to hog disproportionate time at the expense of the majority.”

Perhaps the threat of a television strike came as a relief to those who did not wish to be soaked in religion over the bank holiday weekend. Since the strike did not occur, viewers suffered a plethora of film versions of the Gospel from the epic Charles Heston to the frenetic “Jesus Christ Superstar”, of songs from the Old Rugged Cross to the traditional service, and talks from the chatty to the pontifical. If religious broadcasting is to rise again with such a vengeance, perhaps it is time atheists and agnostics all made their views known more strongly to broadcasters.

A Secular View of Moral Education

JIM HERRICK

The National Secular Society was asked by the Journal of the Lincolnshire Council of Churches Education Committee, “Contact”, to contribute to an issue on “The Moral Education of Children”. This is the published article which was written in response to that request. Although the article aimed to explain a secular view of morality to a religious readership, secularists themselves may consider this a topic worthy of much thought.

rule (“Do unto others . . .”), with some recognition of the Shavian caveat “Do not do unto others as you would that they should do unto you. Their tastes might not be the same.” The crucial difference between a secular attitude to morality and a religious one is that the former is concerned solely with the relationship of man to man, while the other includes the relationship of man to God.²

While there has been agreement since the time of Aristotle that it is important to inculcate morals (“All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth”) there has never been any complete consensus about what morals to inculcate. We all want to encourage the next generation to be virtuous, especially since we are conscious that virtue has eluded the existing generation, but can we agree what virtue consists of? Societies and individuals have varied enormously in their answer to this question. The warrior virtues of a Spartan people would not be admired by the gentle generosity of an Owenite Utopian community. Even questions relating to life and death can provide very different answers: bishops may bless killers who march to war, while the state may employ the hangman to kill someone who had broken the law forbidding murder of a fellow creature.

Relativity of Morals

This variability or relativity of morals suggests a) that moral education should relate to training in sensitivity, judgment, thoughtfulness and so on, rather than imbibing a list of rules b) that it is better for society to concentrate on discouraging the

It is the view of the National Secular Society that religious education and moral education should not be confused. This is all the more important since we live at a time when young people's adherence to orthodox religion is declining¹ and when it is no longer common for values to be received (or given) from religious authorities. There is consequently at present a danger that the baby of moral values is thrown out with the bathwater of religious belief. So we must preserve as important the need for moral education, while recognising the theoretical and practical difficulties which arise as soon as teachers, administrators, etc., set about attempting it.

At the root of a secularist attitude to morality lies the understanding that “morality is social in origin and application and aims at promoting the happiness and well-being of mankind”. This means that no given set of rules exists for mankind, which can be derived from a revered teacher or admired book (though thinkers ranging from Buddha to Bertrand Russell are not necessarily irrelevant). Our attitude towards others stems from the fact that we live in communities, and we would share with many ethical outlooks a regard for the golden

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The Pope's Manifesto

BARBARA SMOKER

What is to be expected from the pontificate of John Paul II, which could easily see the twentieth century out? The pope has given some unmistakable clues in his first encyclical and two subsequent documents, scrutinised for "Free-thinker" readers by the President of the National Secular Society. She looks at what he has said, how he has said it, and, not least, what he has left unsaid.

Pope John Paul II has now shown his hand, in three official letters published during Lent. They reveal that he is disappointingly conservative in many ways and indicate a pontificate of Catholic consolidation rather than the liberalism we had hoped for.

The first and longest of these three documents is his first encyclical—that is, a letter addressed to the whole body of Roman Catholics throughout the world—which was published in mid-March. The other two, published a month later (on Maundy Thursday, traditionally the feast day of priests) are a 33-page message to RC priests and a 5½-page message to their bishops.

The first two words of the Latin version of the encyclical are *Redemptor Hominis* (the Redeemer of Man). By tradition the opening words of a papal encyclical are carefully chosen to form a suitable title for it and to sound the keynote of its theme. Furthermore, the keynote of a new pope's first encyclical is to be taken as a clue to his prevailing concerns and the political direction of his reign. From the opening of this encyclical ("The Redeemer of Man, Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe and of history") we can see that John Paul II is other-worldly, doctrinaire, and theologically conservative, and that his pontificate is unlikely to give the progressive theologians their head. This pope, it seems, will try to put a brake on "the runaway Church", set in motion by Pope John's Vatican II, and try to restore some of its old stability and certainty.

We might have guessed that the conclave of cardinals who elected him, though forced into some degree of compromise between the curial conservatives and pastoral progressives, were unlikely to run the risk of another John XXIII. They would be looking for another John Paul I—who, though he did not live to produce any encyclical, had made it clear that, for all his pastoral background and famous smile, he was definitely in favour of doctrinal rigour and ecclesiastical discipline. In the second 1978 papal election, the cardinals would be trying to find a man in much the same mould—except with regard, first, to age and health (they had learnt a sharp lesson on that score) and, second,

to political and diplomatic acumen (in which Luciani had lived long enough to show himself embarrassingly naive). The choice was widened by the fact that, having once taken the unprecedented step of electing a non-curial candidate, they could now take the further step of going for a non-Italian. This wider choice made it possible to keep to the same pattern of conservatism in the areas that really mattered; and the diehard Italians probably preferred a non-Italian (provided he spoke Italian) to a man who might allow theological and liturgical anarchy, the marriage of priests, and even (horror of horrors!) women priests. The sop to the progressives was that Wojtyla, like his immediate predecessor, was both "pastoral" and "collegial" (i.e. willing to give the College of Cardinals and the Synod of Bishops a share in "infallibility").

The date-line of the encyclical is rather daringly worded "At the close of the second millennium"—presumably indicating that John Paul II intends his pontificate to last at least 21 years. This prophecy is quite likely to be fulfilled, as the man is not only comparatively young but has always kept himself physically fit.

Heavily Assertive

An innovation in style, indicative of the pope's native Polish directness and lack of pomp, is the use of the pronoun "I" instead of the traditional papal "We". In spite of this, the overall effect is formal—not so conversational as the encyclicals of Pope Paul VI, who was far less self-confident than John Paul II. The general tone of *Redemptor Hominis* is, in the outspoken *Catholic Herald* editorial description, "heavily assertive and didactic . . . tough, confident and headmasterly". And it is not helped by the poor translation into English.

Although primarily theological, the encyclical touches on a number of ecclesiastical and social themes. The ecclesiastical ones include continuity with the last three pontificates, pluralism in the Church, Christian unity (he says there is no going back, but insists that nothing must be given away), and collegiality. The social ones include human rights and freedom (something about which he feels strongly, having lived under a totalitarian regime), arms sales, poverty, technological progress, and pollution. On most of these social issues many free-thinkers would find themselves in full agreement with him, though greatly irritated by the arrogantly patronising assumption that with a little more insight we would all be members of his Church.

His emphatic insistence on the dignity of man and on the need for people to be "more responsible, more open to others, especially the neediest and the weakest" are things we would gladly endorse, if not

for his dogmatic insistence on their inseparability from faith in God, love of "the Redeemer of Man", and grace bestowed by God on man through the sacraments of the one true Church. This is the main drift of the encyclical.

The most important thing about the document, however, is the glaring omission of any reference to contraception. It is the first papal encyclical since 1968, when Pope Paul's notorious *Humanae Vitae* forbade Catholics to use any artificial methods of birth control, and it would have been difficult to find a face-saving formula to undo that—but sooner or later it must be done: not only for the sake of human welfare, but also, from the special viewpoint of the Vatican, for the sake of papal authority, since few Catholics now obey this diktat.

Anti-Abortion

Although he is generally described as a humanist, Wojtyla has always deferred to the anti-contraception tradition of the Church—especially in his book *Love and Responsibility*, first published (in Polish) in 1960. Since his election to the chair of Peter, he has avoided tackling the issue but he can hardly hope to get through a reign of possibly quarter-of-a-century without its tackling him.

Though keeping silent so far on the subject of contraception, the pope has not been slow to make his views known on the related topic of abortion—on which, of course, he takes the predictably inflexible line, stemming from belief in an immortal foetal soul and from the ignorant sentimentality that extends full human rights to the foetus and the embryo, and even the just fertilised egg. Though there can be no doubt that his joyous love of children (typical of Poles) is sincere, he has exploited the International Year of the Child to promote the cause of extending to the foetus the child's right to life. This has earned him, in Britain, fulsome tributes from two non-Catholic religious bodies—the non-sectarian Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC) and the Anglican body, the Church Union, which have used the pope's statements to give impetus to their anti-abortion campaigns and a spurious authority to their propaganda.

The subject of sexual repression brings us to the other two Lenten messages from the papal pen, the main burden of the lengthy letter to the world's 400,000 Catholic priests being that they must give up any hope of a relaxation of the celibacy rule. A lifelong commitment to celibacy is made by the RC ordinand at an age when he may not fully grasp the extent of the sacrifice he is making, and is the chief cause of the current high rate of defection among young priests. Some had hoped that the new pontificate would solve the problem of defection by removing its chief cause, but no such luck. While expressing fatherly solicitude for the young priest who happens to be normally sexed and to yearn for

intimate companionship of the opposite sex, the pope reiterates the rule of strict celibacy, maintaining that the renunciation of marriage and fatherhood are "a spiritual travail of value beyond calculation" and "a powerful source of social good", and that "the priest, by renouncing this fatherhood of married men seeks another fatherhood".

The other message is addressed to the RC bishops, and is very much shorter—bishops presumably being past the need for the proverbial cold shower. Expressing confidence in his bishops, the pope urges them to care for their priests with magnanimity and understanding. In other words, authority with a human face, discipline with compassion, laying down the law in a fatherly tone.

Maybe Wojtyla's lack of Western experience has caused him to underestimate the discontent among many of the younger priests in Western countries burdened by sexual repression for which they see no good reason. It could mean a further drop in ordinations, an increase in defections, and a decline in the obedience of priests comparable with that of the laity after the 1968 encyclical on contraception.

OBITUARY

Leicester Secular Society regret to announce the death on 6 December 1978 of Mr F. A. Watson at the age of 76. He had been a member and official for many years. A regular attender at their Sunday lectures, he was an active participant in debate and a champion of democratic procedures. He will be missed by all who knew him.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
(founded 1866)

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From Easter Weekend, "Saturday Reflection", by Dewi Morgan: "Life is our journey to the airport. Resurrection is our take-off on God's super package tour." Evening News, 14 April, 1979.

**BROADCASTING, BRAINWASHING
CONDITIONING**

by David Tribe

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Free Speech Till it Hurts

FRANCIS BENNION

The Defence of Literature and the Arts Society is opposed to censorship. Where should it stand on the issue of allowing free speech to fascist bodies like the National Front? Francis Bennion, a member of the DLAS executive committee, attempts an answer. Comments are welcome.

Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, says the European Convention on Human Rights. That is what DLAS believes too. The Convention allows exceptions where these are *necessary* for various reasons. That is where danger creeps in. The exceptions can easily whittle away the principle, till there is virtually nothing left. That is what DLAS is fighting.

Those who seek to whittle away freedom of speech always have a plausible reason. The people they want to silence are nasty people; or the message they want suppressed is a nasty message. But nastiness is a matter of opinion, not a matter of fact. In a free society the citizens form their own opinions. They do not submit to having their minds made up for them by superior people who think they know best.

Last autumn, when the general election appeared imminent, a storm blew up about the fact that on the principles applying to allocation of party political broadcasts the National Front were entitled to one. When the election does take place (before you read this), the issue will rise again. Well-meaning people like the Anti-Nazi League will renew their demand that the rules should be bent to stop the NF getting the broadcast they are entitled to. If the rules are not so bent, they will try to persuade the technicians unlawfully to "pull the plug" so as to stop the broadcast going out.

Anyone who wants to pull the plug on National Front political broadcasts deserves our sympathy and understanding. His heart is in the right place, even though the emotions may be out of control. Clearly he harbours good intentions, but (as Lord Dufferin said when Viceroy of India) in public life there can be no allowance for good intentions. Undoubtedly compassionate, the plug-puller is also both arrogant and timorous. He distrusts his fellow-citizens. Deep down, he distrusts freedom too. Democracy is for him a meaningless noise.

The plug-puller's timidity is understandable. Over his shoulder he sees the spectres of Hitler and Roehm. He fears that, given a 15-minute party political broadcast, Martin Webster and his unpleasant chums might take over London as the storm-troopers took over Berlin. Old maids look under the bed; the plug-puller looks over his shoulder. Not seeing where he is going, he falls into a bottomless

pit. We must not let him drag us all down with him.

The bottomless pit is the trap of letting broadcasting authorities decide which of the political parties should be granted air time and which should not. In a *Sunday Times* article last autumn, David Edgar argued that the NF are "beyond the democratic pale" because their ideology threatens the freedom of biologically-defined groups to exist. But what of an ideology that threatens democracy itself, such as that of the Socialist Workers' Party? Is that "beyond the democratic pale"? It is perfectly plain that once we allowed the BBC and the IBA the right to decide between political parties the case would be argued for excluding other parties beside the NF. In a democracy such decisions belong to Parliament alone.

A more dangerous trap still would be to allow the more militant members of the Anti-Nazi League to get away with doing the plug-pulling themselves. At least the broadcasting authorities have some degree of social accountability. The ANL has no more social accountability than the NF. To surrender to people so distrustful of their fellow-citizens would be to surrender to anarchy.

I do not distrust my fellow-citizens. I believe that in Britain we have a sufficient supply of robust common sense and firmness to stand no nonsense from neo-Nazis. But we will stand no nonsense from plug-pullers either. We insist on judging for ourselves the National Front activists and their message.

I was profoundly grateful to the BBC for exposing the Front in one of the Tonight programmes. I saw for myself the crude, brash abrasiveness of their leader. I judged for myself the sort of people they attract to their hysterical, unhealthy meetings. I felt my own surge of anger at their obscene attitude to fellow human beings. I was taking orders from no one. My opinions formed themselves, having concrete evidence to go on. Many other viewers reacted in the same way no doubt.

Emile Durkheim, the French sociologist, once said that if a nation had no crime it would have no freedom. That was a vivid way of expressing the obvious truth that "freedom" includes freedom to do bad things as well as good. Society, in self-protection, is forced to curtail the freedom to do wrong. It should do so to the minimum extent, and should insist that curtailment is effected only by its elected representatives after full debate. It is not for the self-elected to impose their view of what is right and wrong. As I once said to Peter Hain (a moving spirit behind the Anti-Nazi League): "If I am free, I am free to do what you do not like, as well as what you like; if I am free only to do what you like then I am not free". Peter Hain is an exponent of "direct action" against racism. This is the illegal and forcible imposi-

tion of its will by a minority faction. It disdains the parliamentary processes of a mature democracy. Instead, it unleashes the raw muscular power of idealistic youth.

Most people believe both in opposing racism and in preserving parliamentary democracy. Direct action campaigns pressurise them into apparently having to reject one of these causes in order to uphold the other. The more strongly the two beliefs are held, the more acute becomes the seeming dilemma. The real truth is that the fight against racism must be conducted wholeheartedly—but not by methods that alienate those who believe in the preservation of our democratic system and the rule of law.

The arrogance of Peter Hain and his fellow plug-pullers lies in this. They have inspected the National Front, its leaders and supporters. After examining the evidence, they have reached the conclusion that these people are vicious, sick and contemptible. No doubt they are right. No doubt the vast majority of

the British people, allowed to judge for themselves, would reach the same conclusion. But no individual or group has the right to pre-empt that conclusion. We must all be free to form our own judgment on such issues. We have fought many enemies to establish our right to do that.

My own view is that the British, who believe in giving a man enough rope to hang himself, will judge shrewdly whatever case the National Front may put up in their party political broadcast. The only peril to reaching that judgment is if self-appointed dictators of opinion try to tell the British public what to think. That might easily be counter-productive.

We insist on judging for ourselves. And at the end of the day we are likely to say of the National Front, in the words of the Arab proverb: The jackal barks, but the caravan passes. If you stop the jackal barking you give him a legitimate grievance. That we must not do. Free speech means nothing if it does not allow statements to be made that most of us would strongly disagree with.

Obituary: William Griffiths

We regret to report the death of William Griffiths aged 79. He had a lifelong association with secularism, and as a longstanding treasurer laid a secure financial basis for the future of the National Secular Society and "The Freethinker".

Bill Griffiths was born in London of Welsh parents—the eldest son of a good-sized Edwardian family, of whom two brothers and two sisters survive him. He also leaves a wife, son, daughter and grandchildren. His marriage of 54 years was sound, happy and lasting.

He was a man of strong principles and very firm opinion, formed in a mind which, until recent years, was most acute. Having reached a particular viewpoint after weighing all the evidence, he would abide by it, no matter what anyone else might think.

During the first world war he volunteered for the Flying Corps, but after a disagreement with the Corps (which was, perhaps, not altogether uncharacteristic of him!), he transferred to the Army. But he could also be amazingly loyal, and he remained with the same firm throughout his entire working life, and he was highly respected, both inside and outside the company, for his ability in his work and his shrewd judgments.

In the second world war he did his bit as an air-raid warden and in the Home Guard. But what stands out most in his life is the active interest he took in community affairs.

For many years Bill was a hard-working parish councillor and keen Rotarian; and he was always generous in contributing to various charities, especially those concerned with youth organisations and other community causes, in which he enjoyed the necessarily full support and co-operation of his wife.

He was a life-long supporter of the cause of free-thought and secularism. Chapman Cohen, who he knew and admired, asked him shortly after the last war, if he would be willing to be nominated to succeed as President of the National Secular Society, but he modestly declined.

As the Society's treasurer and one of its trustees he gave inestimable service; his knowledge of financial matters and his flair for investment put the National Secular Society on a healthy financial footing and enabled *The Freethinker* to survive.

Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, officiated at the secular funeral at Bedford crematorium. She said: "Bill Griffiths knew all the leading secularists of the past fifty years, and out-lived most of them, so his death is the end of an era for the secularist movement.

"His great hobby, apart from his social causes, was reading. He would read most nights until well after midnight—and his well-stocked mind was evidence of the many important books he had assimilated.

"Bill was a man who knew his own mind. He had high ideals, and he lived by them. In the religion of justice, integrity, love, and the brotherhood of man, Bill Griffiths was a believer."

JOTTINGS

WILLIAM McILROY

Five years ago in a *Freethinker* review of Joe E. Barnhart's book, *The Billy Graham Religion*, I commented: "Evangelical preachers are being forced increasingly to pose as champions of social justice and reform in order to hold the attention of the hippies and the trendy Jesus people. Some of them, including Billy Graham, are adapting to the new situation and presenting an acceptable image." So it was particularly interesting to read that the foremost expounder of hilly-billy Christianity has declared himself to be "a late convert to the peace movement". He also stated in the same television programme that he has come to believe the atomic-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 to have been wrong.

Billy Graham's change of heart is significant. For two decades he was one of America's most hawkish Cold Warriors. In 1954 he advocated that Germany should be given "the latest and most powerful weapons". He was a resolute supporter of Senator McCarthy and the Un-American Activities Committee, and later became the close friend, adviser and defender of America's leading crook, Richard Nixon, whom he described as "a man of high moral character".

Graham owes much of his success as an evangelist to his ability to sell himself to the Press bosses, industrialists and conservative politicians who sponsored and financed his campaigns. They in turn could rely on the former brush salesman from North Carolina to lard his sermons with a defence of social and political conformity, exhorting his followers to get Right-wing with God.

Why has Billy Graham now moved on to the side of those he once reviled as "the rats and termites that are subversively endeavouring to wreck the defences of this nation from within"? The evangelist claims that he underwent a conversion experience when he visited the Auschwitz concentration camp site last Autumn. He then became aware of the terrible sufferings which the peoples of Europe endured in the course of the Second World War. This awareness convinced him of the need to halt the arms race and to avoid a nuclear war.

It may seem odd that Billy Graham had not previously realised the sufferings which were inflicted on the peoples of Europe during the years 1939-45. It does not require either a particularly vivid imagination or undue sensitivity to conceive the horrors of the battlefields, concentration camps and bombed cities. But to have done so would have put Graham

in a dilemma, for he would have had to acknowledge the horror of the military operations, including chemical warfare, which the United States carried out in Korea and Vietnam. That would have been asking too much from a passionate believer in Christian Americanism and his country's right to impose its version of democracy on others. Consequently it was not Billy Graham—hailed as "God's man with God's message"—but "the rats and termites" who first spoke out against America's rapacity abroad and the social injustice in God's own country.

Billy Graham's admission of past errors is belated, but it is welcome nonetheless. He is now 60 and during the remaining years of activity he could apply his enormous energy and use the massive crusades, hitherto a vehicle for the promotion of Christian propaganda, to advance the cause of world peace.

Future generations of Christian apologists will attempt to play down Billy Graham's baleful influence on American public opinion, his opposition to social reform and support of censorship, his defence of capital punishment in this world and belief in eternal punishment in the next. But his conversion to the peace movement should be welcomed by all who are at the present time concerned at the wastefulness and dangers of the arms race.

* * *

The Spring-Summer issue of the Lord's Day Observance Society's dotty little magazine, *Joy and Light*, carries the usual dire warnings about the threats to Sunday as we know and love it. First, there is the Sunday Trading Bill, introduced in the House of Lords earlier this year, and which, if it became law, would permit chemists to sell "all toilet requisites including perfume and cosmetics in whatever form they come". But even this desecration of the Lord's day is surpassed by the proposal that "Garden Centres would be able to sell not only flowers, but plants and shrubs as well".

Then there is the South Yorkshire Bill which *Joy and Light* agrees "at first glance appears very harmless". However a closer examination of the Bill's contents horrified the sabbatarians, for it would have allowed the organisers of Sunday agricultural shows to make an admission charge.

The Scottish correspondent's report is a heart-rending chronicle of woe. Readers are informed that "Satan's power has gained the upper hand, not only in Glasgow, but in other parts of the land". One example of how Satan has triumphed north of the Border is the Sunday opening of the Struan Grill Restaurant on the Isle of Skye.

Joy and Light is able to report one notable victory for "Our Lord and His Day". An attempt in Parliament to amend the Sunday Entertainments Act of 1780 to allow public dancing on Christmas Eve

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FREE CONVERSION

A minor flutter among the Christian Missionary dovescotes is expected if the Indian Parliament passes a bill which seeks to make it an offence for a person to attempt to "convert someone from one religious faith to another by the use of force or by inducement or by deceit or by any fraudulent means". (Such inducements to change of religious faith are not uncommon and can include loans, agricultural credits, educational facilities or even food.)

The bill will apply to all religious zealots equally and in its statement of objects it concedes that conversion from one religion to another by free consent and will cannot be questioned.

It is interesting to recall that at the first Convention of Indian Rationalists held in Madras in December 1949, a resolution was passed which included the following section: "While guaranteeing the freedom of the individual to profess, to practise and to propagate any religion there would be a similar guarantee to the individual holding anti-religious opinions. Such propaganda of religion and anti-religion should be carried on directly among the people and should not be carried on under cover of social service like education, medical relief, famine relief, etc. . ."

That such a bill should be necessary at all, or that it should be opposed by Christian missionaries, suggests that some people have not yet got over their nineteenth century religious imperialism.

The bill would be improved greatly if it concedes, in its statement of objects, that conversion from one religion to another or *none* by free consent and will cannot be questioned. This would cover the point raised by the Indian Rationalists as early as 1949 and will better correspond to the secular Constitution of the Indian Republic.

ABORTION ANOMALIES

Mrs Renée Short, MP, has welcomed a ruling from the Director of Public Prosecutions clarifying the law in relation to techniques of early abortion. She commented: "Knowing that the earlier a pregnancy is terminated the better it is emotionally and physically for the woman, this clarification of the law is very welcome."

The method of abortion which was particularly in question was menstrual aspiration. Controversy arose when a Manchester consultant gynaecologist, W. Goldthorp, wrote a paper describing how he performed abortions using this method up to 12 days after a missed period before definite pregnancy diagnosis can be made. Anti-abortion groups made complaints, which led to a warning that the gynaecologist could be prosecuted.

A number of parliamentary questions were asked, letters were written to the Secretary of State for

NEWS

Social Services and Mrs Renée Short took the matter up with the DPP. The DPP has now made it clear that such very early techniques are legal within the 1967 Act, even if there is no certainty that the woman is pregnant.

Further encouraging news for those who support the right of a woman to choose an abortion comes from Warwickshire. Despite strong opposition from anti-abortion groups, the Warwickshire Area Health Authority had agreed in principle that abortion in the area should be contracted out by the National Health Service to a private abortion agency.

The chairman of the Area Health Authority has said that this is because the area lacked sufficient beds, staff or time for gynaecologists to do the abortions that were needed. The scheme, the details of which have yet to be finalised, is likely to contract out abortions to the British Pregnancy Advisory Service—the biggest charitable organisation dealing with abortions.

It has been well known that areas of the Midlands have been extremely difficult for women choosing an abortion under the NHS, and this scheme should do much to remove anomalies whereby some areas lack NHS facilities for abortion.

In two decisions it has been seen that the anti-abortion lobby has failed. Despite their attempts to produce scare stories in the run-up to the election, it is becoming steadily more apparent that there is a consensus acceptance of abortion as an option which a woman may choose. That is something the next government, of whatever persuasion, will have to take into account.

UNTALENTED

The Rev Edmund Nadolny of Hartford, Connecticut, in the United States, wanted to raise funds for the local Catholic Evangelisation programme. He sought also to demonstrate the truth of the Gospel parable of talents, where the Master shares out money and waits for the Lord's work to be done.

Borrowing \$20,000 from the bank, he loaned it to 50 people who agreed to go forth and multiply the cash on the Lord's behalf. Unfortunately the plan went awry when he discovered that many of the borrowers had given incorrect addresses and phone numbers and his attempts to get the money back were fruitless. He admitted that the plan to utilise the message of the parable and Christian faith had not worked, and embarked on a raffle to raise the money to pay back the bank.

AND NOTES

GRAVE DISPUTE

A row broke out recently in Birmingham over whether a service had been performed at a dead man's grave. Mrs Lorna Brown of Great Barr alleges that she arranged a funeral for her father at which it was agreed there would be no service. When she arrived at the crematorium she found that a friend of her father, who was himself a managing director of another Funeral Directors, had brought a minister with him.

"There was a virtual graveside battle—and then I was told that Mr Ward and his friends held a service as soon as we left." The National Association of Funeral Directors has asked Mr Ward to apologise, but this he has so far refused to do, saying that "We went as family friends and knelt to pray afterwards as individual mourners. We have done nothing wrong."

CHINA

The Chinese press has denounced a revival of witchcraft, after a case where two young children were burnt alive by a witch who claimed supernatural powers. Freedom of religious belief is guaranteed under the Chinese Constitution, but the *People's Daily* has said that this only applies to "world religions" like Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Such practices as "Witches, wizards, divining water and medicine, divination by lot, fortune telling, curing diseases through exorcism, phrenology, physiognomy and geomancy" are all to be outlawed.

Freethinker Fund

The continuing generosity to this fund makes a substantial contribution towards the printing of *The Freethinker*. Thanks to: Anon, £20; P. Bales & L. Brooks, 60p; H. Bowser, £1.10; P. Brown, £1.25; G. F. Clarke, 60p; J. B. Coward, 60p; C. W. Covett, £2.60; G. Donald, 60p; B. B. Farlow, £2.60; J. D. Groome, £1.60; E. J. Hughes, £1.00; H. J. Jakeman, £2.60; C. Jones, 60p; J. Lippitt, £3.00; E. Litten, £1.60; G. R. Love, 90p; R. H. Scott, £10.00; Dr G. Stein, £1.80; P. W. Tepham, £2.60; R. Torodo, £2.60; F. White, 60p; L. Wright, £2.00; M. Villiers-Stuart, £2.60. Total for the period 24 March to 19 April: £64.25.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

A Public Meeting

CLEMENT FREUD, MP

CRISPIN AUBREY

In the Chair BARBARA SMOKER

Thursday, 24 May, 7.45 p.m.

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1
Clement Freud, Liberal MP for the Isle of Ely, used his opportunity to bring a Private Member's Bill to embark upon a Freedom of Information Bill. The Bill, which is lost through fall of the Government, would have repealed Section 2 of the Official Secrets Act of 1911, established a general right of access to official documents for the general public, and made new provisions about wrongful communication and handling of official information. Clement Freud will describe the importance and difficulties of such a Bill.

Crispin Aubrey was one of the three journalists tried in the notorious ABC case last year, and will speak about the implications of the case in relation to official secrets.

Extract from the National Secular Society Practical Objectives:

12. The abolition of censorship in matters of information, culture, and entertainment, except in strictly limited cases relating to defamatory libel and the protection of children.

13. The enactment of the right of the individual to access to stored information about himself or herself.

SHOULD WE HAVE MORE DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS?

A public meeting

MR MAYCOCK

Ealing High Schools Defence Campaign

JOHN WHITE

Chairman of the BHA Education Committee and an experienced teacher.

In the chair: G. N. DEODHEKAR

Thursday, 14 June, 7.30 p.m.

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

A PUBLIC DEBATE

BARBARA SMOKER

President of the National Secular Society

HARE KRISHNA DAS

of the ISKON Temple in London

Friday, 18 May, 7 pm

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

FREETHOUGHT IN THE UNITED STATES. A descriptive bibliography by Marshall G. Brown and Gordon Stein. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut & London. Approximately £16.

The history of freethought is the saga of individuals who faced immense odds to enlighten their fellow men and women. Ranged against them were church and state, and the weapons employed included vicious legal penalties and often measures designed to ensure that the victim was prevented from following his trade. In the light of their vile record the current wailing from the various sects about their supposed persecution in certain countries, which usually is simply the loss by the sects of their privileged positions, can be justly termed canting hypocrisy.

Anyone familiar with the history of *The Freethinker*, the life of Bradlaugh and also that of Gott—who died from the after-effects of a sentence to prison for blasphemy, not to mention Paine and Carlile, will be well aware of the lengths to which organised religion, and individual Christians, would go to manifest their hatred, and fear, of truth; and if anyone thinks that this happened only in Britain they need only to turn to G. S. Macdonald's excellent two volume history of the American journal, *The Truth Seeker*, which is also a history of American freethought, to discover that in a country where there was no established sect, and constitutional safeguards existed to protect those who did not believe, Christians ran roughshod over these safeguards, and Christian judges abused the constitution of their nation to protect their crude superstitions. (In recent years *The Truth Seeker* has declined considerably and is now, in the main, a medium through which racist and right-wing John Birch type views are expounded—a sad fate for a once great freethought organ.)

Freethinkers faced up to their persecutors, and fought to present their ideas. Many of these brave individuals are now forgotten, however, their names, and sometimes their deeds, are preserved in pamphlets, books and old journals. Many of these publications survive in minute numbers, and are to be found in a few institutional libraries or private collections, many more probably remain forgotten in attics. Perhaps this bibliography will serve to awaken interest in them, for unlike so much old theology their messages are frequently still very relevant, for the superstitions they attacked are still with us, and may be having a revival if the spread of fundamentalism is anything to go by.

Although this new book is termed a bibliography, and is in fact just that, it goes beyond this narrow term by giving short but detailed essays before each chapter. These are excellent in their own right. Some 542-plus books, pamphlets and journals are listed,

FREETHINKER

mostly by simply giving author/s, title, publisher and date of first edition. Bibliographers may well say this is not adequate, and demand particulars about differing editions, binding variations, and so on, but in essence this is a pioneering work (parts of which originally appeared in the *American Rationalist*, of which Dr Stein is editor), and points the way to more detailed work on individual publications.

Valuable and informative appendices are provided on ethnic freethought in America, freethought collections, theses and dissertations on freethought, and on Canadian freethought. In addition there is a glossary of terms, person index, title index and subject index. All in all this is an excellent work, and while being an essential aid for collectors, librarians and research workers, is a very readable book. Both authors deserve the highest praise for having produced a much needed work—and before anyone laments upon there being no similar work covering British freethought I hasten to add that Dr Stein has been commissioned to produce one. How long it will be before it is published I know not, however, I look forward to its eventual appearance.

ROBERT W. MORRELL

HAVELOCK ELLIS, PHILOSOPHER OF SEX by Vincent Brome. Routledge & Kegan Paul, £8.95.

"In every man of genius a new strange force is brought into the world. The biographer is the biologist of this new life," wrote Havelock Ellis in his "Open Letter to Biographers". In the same essay he observes that too many practitioners of the art are hampered by their hero's personal friends and relations "who will only help you on condition that you produce a figure that is smooth, decorous, conventional . . . above all, closely cut off below the bust". His own recent biographers—first Arthur Calder-Marshall and now Vincent Brome—each encountered such difficulties (which they recount in their books) with the late Madame Françoise Delisle, Ellis's companion during the last two decades of his long life, who strenuously contested the supposition advanced by both that Ellis, if not totally impotent, was at least highly inhibited sexually.

Certainly he combined an excessive modesty and reclusiveness with an absorbing interest in the highways and still more the byways of sexuality. Having undergone a philosophical "conversion" whilst teaching in Australia as a young man—an experience which left him an atheist of mystical propensities, bent on reconciling scientific truth with a deeply felt intuitive sense of values, and above all determined to make an endeavour to unravel some of the mysteries of sex a major part of his life's work—he returned

REVIEWS

to England and qualified as a doctor. One of his personal fascinations was with what he christened "urolognia" (a sexual preoccupation with women urinating). His wife was predominantly lesbian, and before the end of the nineteenth century he had written the first modern scientific work on homosexuality. He was unworldly enough to choose a disreputable publisher for it, with the result that the book was pilloried in court as an obscene publication. Ellis published the remainder of his massive *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* in the United States.

Though now comparatively forgotten, in his day he was more pervasively influential than Freud. The two men never met, though they corresponded amicably (with a certain wariness). Ellis's approach was much more empirical and socially orientated than Freud's. He was more concerned with the practical effects of sexual taboos on people's lives, and blazed a trail for the work of many subsequent sex reformers. But he founded no "school", and was sceptical of the more far-fetched theoretical flights undertaken by the Scheherazade of Vienna's middle-class bedrooms. Mr Brome—a committed Freudian—is a shade too dismissive of Ellis's pragmatic determination to allow the data which he painstakingly amassed to speak for themselves.

Much of Ellis's continuing fascination for us today stems from his virtuosity as a self-taught, highly cultivated polymath. Besides becoming "the sage of sex" he was no mean literary critic and an adventurous editor (as a young man he originated the "Mermaid" series of Elizabethan dramatists' texts as well as the "Contemporary Science" series). His own books covered a multitude of interests. Some, such as *The New Spirit* (1890), *Affirmations* (1898) and *The Soul of Spain* (1908), read as freshly now as when they were first written. Some of his later work—including *The Dance of Life* (1923), in which he endeavours to set out his personal philosophy—is, to my mind, less spontaneous and so less attractive.

During his lifetime Havelock Ellis was acknowledged to be a major figure in British life, letters and sex research for over half a century. His eclipse today is unwarranted, and it is time for a revival of interest in his writings (which perhaps contain more of intrinsic interest than his personal history). Mr Brome has given us the best account of Ellis yet to hand. But this is not the definitive *Life*—one reason being that it deals cursorily with the quality of Ellis's mind and the contents of his writings. There is still room for a full, well-rounded study of this exceptional man.

ANTONY GREY

(Antony Grey is Honorary Secretary of the Havelock Ellis Society)

LIFE ON EARTH by David Attenborough. Collins/BBC, £7.95.

BBC2 has been providing some splendid fare for the naturalist of late. As well as their regular "World About Us" series, there has been a narrative of Darwin's voyage on HMS Beagle and the recently completed David Attenborough's "Life on Earth" serialised into 13 parts.

The book of the series is likewise divided into 13 chapters to coincide as closely as possible with the weekly parts and although the photography in the book cannot hope to match the magnificent film of species performing their everyday activities in their natural environment, it doesn't come far short of it. There are over one hundred colour plates in addition to over two hundred pages of text, which in this day and age represents exceptionally good value for a hardback book at £7.95. Some of the colour shots are quite extraordinary. Two in particular which caught my eye were the crocodile carrying its young to the river and the cheetah attacking a herd of wildebeest. It is a pity that more room was not available to show a few more action shots from the series, particularly one of the American species of bat which uses its echo location navigation system to detect ripples on the surface of water caused by fish and swoops to catch them with its feet. Inevitably, a few sacrifices had to be made.

David Attenborough obviously has a great passion for his chosen subject and conveys this impression in the way he both speaks and writes about the natural world. His enthusiasm for what he is doing is obvious, yet at the same time he remains calm and articulate in the way he explains the behaviour and life-style of the many species on planet earth. His method in demonstrating how life evolved on earth is, as he explains in the Introduction, to extract the most important and significant thread in the history of any group of species and then to concentrate on developing that strand ignoring as far as possible any tangents in other directions.

This is, of course, similar to the method Charles Darwin used over a century ago in *The Origin of Species*, when the whole idea of evolutionary theory was set in motion. Over the years there has been much criticism of this theory, above all from religious quarters, though it is now more or less universally accepted. Indeed, even leading Jesuits, such as Teilhard de Chardin have accepted it and even contributed to it in their writings.

I note that recently Christopher Booker, writing in the *Spectator*, criticised "Life on Earth" for putting forward outdated evolutionary theory which is open to question. In fact, I wholeheartedly agree that any scientific theory should be open to question: from this process of investigating, questioning,

and experimenting we can validate any given hypothesis. Most of the evidence, especially fossil records, that has been forthcoming since the theory of evolution was first expounded has indeed upheld Darwin's views and not negated them.

To Mr Booker I would say, if you reject evolutionary theory, what is it going to be replaced with? An all-loving God of creation, perhaps, who fashioned all the species in six days flat to prey on one another?

Considering all the material that has had to be omitted all the main stages of the development of life are covered very well—from the early origins of single-cell organisms in the sea over 600 million years ago through to fishes, crustaceans, insects, amphibians, reptiles, mammals and lastly *homo sapiens*. Near the back of the book there is a helpful diagram which charts out the way in which species have branched out and evolved to adapt to their environment. It was also helpful to have the common names of the species used in the book, though the specialist will be pleased to know that the Latin classifications are bracketed in the index. This television series in conjunction with the book has undoubtedly been one of the major achievements of BBC and I can well imagine overseas broadcasting organisations queuing up to purchase the screening rights.

KEN WRIGHT

BOOK STOCK

MOHAMMED by Maxime Rodinson. Penguin, £1.25 + 15p p&p.

A biography by a scholarly French atheist, who describes the life of the founder of a world religion in the context of Arabian history. Rodinson sees Mohammed as the founder of an ideology and links his influence with the birth of an embryonic Arabian state.

As an atheist, Rodinson is well-placed to give an objective study of an important and complex figure: "Ought we to be surprised at these complexities and contradictions, this mixture of strength and weakness? He was after all, a man like other men, subject to the same weaknesses and sharing the same powers. . ."

Important background material at a time of the resurgence of Islam influence in world politics.

CLASSICS OF FREE THOUGHT edited by Paul Blanshard. Prometheus, £1.00 paperback, + 19p p&p.

An American anthology of freethought material which, despite some carelessness in the text, contains interesting extracts from the writings of free-thinkers such as Voltaire, Russell, Ingersoll, G. J. Holyoake, Clarence Darrow, and Charles Bradlaugh. (Reviewed by David Tribe in *The Freethinker*, October 1978.)

THE NEW APOCRYPHA by John Sladek. £1.50 + 19p p&p.

This delicious debunking of "strange sciences and occult beliefs" has now appeared in paperback. The book ranges over acupuncture, Atlantis, UFOs, poltergeists, Stonehenge, Zen macrobiotics and so on. It looks rationally and coolly at the more bizarre manifestations of sects, cults, the occult, the paranormal and alternative medicine. Not only is it informative and highly amusing, but it also provides a cold shower for those disposed to believe all manner of hocus pocus.

John Sladek says of Von Däniken's theories about the pyramids being built with the help of extra-terrestrial gods: "This kind of tiresome nonsense comes about through a complete ignorance of serious archaeology." He asks bluntly in a chapter heading: "Will U Kindly F O?" With great clarity he demonstrates the similarities between mediums and conjurers: "Thousands of mediums have been shown up as frauds, and this fact alone should carry some weight in making up our minds about spiritualism."

A refreshing read.

CINEMA

MADAME ROSA. Directed by Moshe Mizrahi. French dialogue. Subtitles. Certificate AA. The Screen on the Hill, Haverstock Hill, London NW3.

Madame Rosa, played by Simone Signoret, is an Auschwitz survivor in her late sixties, incurably sick but spunky. She lives in a 6th floor walk-up in a raffish, ethnically mixed district of Paris. Having given up prostitution when it ceased to be "esthétique" for her, she now cares for children farmed out to her by other prostitutes, sheltering both them and herself from the Assistance or Welfare Services, whom she likens to the Gestapo. The eldest of the children is Momo, an Arab boy responsible beyond his years and totally devoted to Rosa. Rosa's love for him is tempered by mistrust. He is, after all, an Arab. . .

At night the insomniac Rosa shuffles down to her *trou juif* or Jewish hideaway below stairs, where she has secreted food supplies and a *menorah* (Jewish candelabrum). By day she sets aside her Jewishness and receives a colourful assortment of visitors: kindly tarts, nicely brought-up Arab youths, quaint African and even quainter Jewish doctors, a senile Muslim teacher. There is also a surprise visit from Momo's father, who wants to see his son, left with Rosa 11 years back. The old Arab had killed his wife out of jealousy, and has just been discharged from a psychiatric institution. Rosa tries to fob him off with Moïse, a rather withdrawn Jewish boy in her care, explaining that she had taken in a Jew and an Arab on the same day, and had mistakenly brought up the Arab boy as a Jew. The old man

promptly dies of shock at the thought of having a barmitzvah'd son, but not before revealing that Momo is in fact 14, not 11—and not before the situation has been milked for all the laughs it so plainly does not warrant.

Rosa's health and finances fail. The children, all excepting Momo, are taken away. The Gestapo Assistance threaten to put Rosa in a hospital, but she begs Momo to kill her rather than let her die away from home. Telling the doctor he is sending Rosa to Israel, Momo leads her down to the *trou juif*. Rosa lights the *menorah*, and together the pair recite the *shema*. As the candles begin to gutter, Rosa dies. Momo paints her face with make-up and sprinkles perfume over her in a vain attempt to mask the smell of putrefaction. He lies down, willing himself to die, but the Assistance break the door down, and Momo is rescued by an affluent young French/Spanish couple who had befriended him earlier. He recites this part of his story in a hushed, elegiac voice-over of the type so beloved of French film directors.

This embarrassing load of *schmalz* won an Oscar in '78 as Best Foreign Film. It doesn't surprise me at all. *Madame Rosa* has all the ingredients of an Oscar-winning confection—pathos, children, friendship, a pet dog even, a nice sense of location, heroism, laughs (to be honest, I did enjoy the *oy vav* humour of the film). Worst of all, in the light of the tragic and seemingly insoluble Middle East conflict, it figure-skates with fashionable adroitness over the surface of complex and inflammatory problems.

On Monday 28th May, the National Film Theatre on the South Bank, London, will be showing a highly intelligent film (no figure-skating here!) by the Swiss director, Alain Tanner. In brief, it shows the unsuccessful attempts of eight people to break away from convention and obey the dictates of their own consciences. The film—"Jonah Who Will Be 25 In The Year 2000"—also assesses the influence of the thinking of Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Highly recommended.

VERA LUSTIG

LETTERS

S. R. Dalton's statement that coherent passages are impossible to produce if limited to the Basic list of 850 words is difficult for me to understand with the Basic versions of the Bible and Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" before me. To make the statement that "such words as 'me' or 'it' or any numerals" are missing proves he knows little or nothing about his subject. If Mr Dalton is so certain in denying "any merit whatsoever in Basic English", might I suggest that he should castigate the organisers of the National Congress on Languages and Education who stated in the "Times Educational Supplement" of April 15, 1977, that the works of Richards and Ogden were on the agenda for consideration at their congress to be held in July 1978. As my book on Vertical Translation, which advocates the substitution of a daily lesson from

complete English into Basic English for most of the foreign language teaching in secondary schools, was also chosen for the official agenda, Mr Dalton might be good enough to castigate me as well.

He might recruit as assistant Samuel Beer whose letter expressed surprise at Barbara Smoker's attempt in her review to "resurrect the corpse of Basic English". As a (retired) professional teacher of English, I define every word in Basic English formalised for the secondary—not primary—schoolroom where I never translate without a context. My accuracy depends on my knowledge of the context and I would only define or translate the terms "humanist", "agnostic", "free-thinker", according to the meaning—sense, feeling, tone, intention—of the passage presenting them. In translating Dr Johnson's letter to Lord Chesterfield, my fifth-former writes down the Basic sense of "The shepherd in Vergil grew at last acquainted with love, and found him a native of the rocks" as "Vergil's keeper of sheep at last saw that love and kind acts come (only?) from those in the lower levels of society".

S. B. WYNBURNE

(Jottings)

and New Year's Eve, which in 1978 fell on a Sunday, was unsuccessful. The LDOS "is thankful that . . . the law of the land was not changed".

The sabbatarian's thankfulness for this small mercy is likely to be short-lived. They put prayer high on their list of priorities, so it must be rather galling to reflect that for all their endeavours and supplications since the Lord's Day Observance Society was founded in 1831, Sunday gloom is giving way to Sunday freedom.

Our Lord has a poor track record when it comes to competing with Old Nick.

* * *

It is a rare pleasure to report an example of rational and sensible behaviour by a religious community. But the Benedictine monks at Buckfast Abbey have shown that in one respect they have got their priorities right.

The community is justly famous for wine-making and bee-keeping, skills which have been turned to profit and thus attracted the attention of the tax authorities, to whom nothing is sacred. In due course VAT forms arrived at the abbey in such profusion that the good Abbot of Buckfast complained about the excessive paperwork which meant that there was less time for other activities. A sacrifice had to be made. Should they produce less wine or keep fewer bee-hives? The problem has been happily resolved: time for prayers has been reduced from 6 hours to 3½ hours a day.

Audrey Williamson, a regular contributor to "The Freethinker", has been awarded the Crime Writers' Association Gold Dagger Award for the best non-fiction crime book of 1978 for her book "The Mystery of the Princes: An Investigation Into a Supposed Murder" (Alan Sutton, £5.95).

obvious "not-Good" ways in which we hurt each other, rather than pursuing some chimera of "Good" behaviour about which we all disagree. (The latter strand of moral training and certitude has led writers to fear that Plato's Guardians would become guarantors of a fascist-type state, or crusading moralists to persecute the "immoral" with a viciousness which is itself horrifying.)

Both a) and b) are reasons for separating religious education from moral education. If moral education is to relate to encouragement of attitudes of thoughtfulness, empathy, tolerance, etc., it is best separated from any religious "thou shalt" approach. (The more flexible situational ethics approach is a fairly recent and tenuous phenomenon in the history of religion.) It is for educationalists to research into the possibility of encouraging these attitudes, perhaps with courses influenced by the John Wilson approach; but it seems likely that attitudes develop more as a result of environment and example than as a result of classroom instruction. For this reason the way a school is run is a most important aspect of moral education (as, of course, is the kind of home and society in which children develop). Although it would be reasonable to ask teachers to think more carefully about how schools are run so that moral attitudes are acquired, it would be asking too much of them to solve all the problems of society, as perhaps happened with the exaggerated expectations of the sixties.

Schools could help by being tolerant, open, honest, caring communities. This is often *not* the case. Also it provides a strong reason for opposing the existing statutory laws relating to religious education and daily acts of worship in schools. There could be no better way to teach people about hypocrisy than to ensure that they take part, day by day, in an act of worship, which perhaps more than half the participants, including staff, endure with great cynicism. This act of worship is in effect compulsory, since schools are bound by the 1944 Education Act to operate it, and head teachers rarely publicise the right of parents to withdraw their children, and even where a child is withdrawn the alternative of ten minutes in a corridor can be most uncomfortable. If there are to be acts of worship in schools at all, they should be voluntary and children and parents should opt into them.

Similarly the statutory requirements for RE lessons should be dropped, and religion (would "mythology" be a better word) left to find its level in the curriculum like any other subject. Quite recently I was told by an RE teacher that he was often asked by 4th and 5th formers why they had to do RE, and could only tell them it was the law and he too would prefer it to be optional. Of course, teaching *about* religion should remain, either as a specific subject

or perhaps better as a part of humanities and general courses. But to compel children to take part in a lesson they know is only compulsory because of a legal sanction is to mitigate against attempts to create openness, honesty and participation. But that it is to divert from ME to RE. Running a school in such a way that moral values are acquired must be a delicate and skilful business. For it means that increasingly, as they develop into maturity, children should be given the opportunity of participating in the organisation of the community. While this obviously can't mean that 11-year-olds choose their own syllabus, it must mean real choices and real participation in decision making throughout adolescence. And this means more than a school council set up at a period of discontent to give off the argumentative in such a way that only minutiae become matters for the council's decision. It means that questioning should be taken seriously and not brushed aside, that anxieties are discussed (including those of teachers, who have always struck me as a body peculiarly defensive about discussing their own problems), that no-one feels worthless and put down by the school system. It does not mean that all elements of structure and discipline are abandoned, for these may be necessary at various stages; but any structure and discipline must be there for the sake of the community and not for the benefit of blind obedience to rules.

An important difference between morality from the secular and religious standpoint lies in the sanctions which are seen as necessary. Religion has often used fear as a sanction—especially the fear of losing an allegedly prized afterlife. Secularism sees sanctions as only necessary for the protection of others. In the context of a school, sanctions should relate as clearly as possible to reasons why the behaviour is thought undesirable and not seem arbitrary. Nor are calculated acts of physical degradation, such as corporal punishment, the kind of example to lead children to develop a sense of belonging to a caring community.

Development of Co-operation

A further aspect of school life which could be a part of moral development is that co-operation should be encouraged quite as much as competition. The accusation "you copied" could be replaced with the praise "you helped each other". And any community which allows some to feel always at the bottom of the pile will develop resentful, angry, frustrated citizens; so excessive lauding of academic or sporting achievements should be replaced with attempts to value the individual worth of everyone's activities.

The acquisition of "conscience" and moral sense is a complex process about which psychologists have

(continued on back page)

PUBLICATIONS

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

- 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).
 The Nun Who Lived Again, Phyllis Graham. 5p (7p).
 Bertrand Russell: A Life, Herbert Gottchalk. 25p (12p).
 The Humanist Revolution, Hector Hawton. 95p (19p).
 Controversy, Hector Hawton. 95p (19p).
 RI and Surveys, Maurice Hill. 5p (7p).
 Middle Eastern Mythology, S. H. Hooke. 90p (12p).
 Speakers Corner, an Anthology, Ed Jim Huggon. £1.75 (26p).
 Oration on Paine, R. G. Ingersoll. 20p (7p).
 Rome or Reason, R. G. Ingersoll. 10p (10p).
 Mistakes of Moses, R. G. Ingersoll. 15p (7p).
 The Little Red School Book, S. Jansen. 30p (12p).
 Honest to Man, Margaret Knight. £3.75 (26p).
 A Humanist Anthology, Margaret Knight. 95p (15p).
 Christianity: The Debit Account, Margaret Knight. 3p (7p).
 The Case Against Church Schools, Patricia Knight. 20p (7p).
 Introduction to Politics, Harold Laski. £1.50 (12p).
 On the Nature of the Universe, Lucretius. 95p (15p).
 Arts in a Permissive Society, Christopher Macy. 75p. (12p).
 The Absurdities of Christian Science, Joseph McCabe. 12p (7p).
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offered various theories. There is a general acceptance of a picture of development from egocentric beginnings to a state of moral responsibility. Nothing will ensure that everyone completes this route, (if it can be completed) but we can encourage as many as possible to move as far as possible in this direction. Then the reason for consideration for others will become "I refrain from this action because I would not like to receive it myself or because I dislike the adverse effects on the community if everyone behaves in this way". Authoritarian and repressive rearing does not lead to this; it leads rather to kicking the traces as soon as the hand of authority is removed, or extremes of submissiveness and rebellion.

Secular humanism does not believe in innate goodness any more than original sin; we all have potential for actions in anti-social and in altruistic directions. Of course, man will remain greedy, envious, angry, but the aim of moral education is understanding and autonomy so that this can be coped with. Even if it seems unlikely that all adults will ever reach such maturity, this seems the best direction in which to try to push humanity.

A final suggestion is contrary to fashionable gloom about the increase of crime, terrorism and violence ushering in an age of moral decay: my feeling is that there is nothing new about such anti-social characteristics, but what may be new in the last century is an increase of sensitivity to cruelty, degradation, and suffering. By supporting Oxfam or Amnesty or opposing war in Vietnam or helping at the local legal aid centre, people show great caring about the world in a way that has perhaps not always been the case. Let moral education build upon this, while remembering "No morality can be founded on authority, even if the authority were divine" (A. J. Ayer).

1. National Survey of Religious Attitudes and Beliefs. Reported in *New Society*, 28 September 1978.
2. See further arguments relating to this in *Morals Without Religion* by Margaret Knight published by NSS, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL.

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. Charles Wilshaw: "Euthanasia". Sunday, 3 June, 5.30 pm. Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove.

Enfield and Barnet Humanist Group. Barbara Adams: "Egyptian Mummies" (Slides and samples). Sunday, 13 May, 8.30 pm. (Preceded by buffet supper 6.30 pm.) Further details 01-360 1828, 70 Vicars Moor Lane, N21.

Havering and District Humanist Society. Jim Herrick: "Secularism, Past and Present". Tuesday, 15 May, 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre (Junction of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road).

Lewisham Humanist Group. Keith Mack: "Florentine Art and the growth of the Secular Outlook". Thursday, 31 May, 7.45 pm. Unitarian Meeting House, 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.)

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1. Sunday Morning Meetings, 11 am. 6 May, Harold Blackham: Fables: 13 May, Ronald Mason: A Look at A. E. Housman. 20 May, John Burrows: Ethics and the Health Service. 27 May, Nicolas Walter: W. K. Clifford—Centenary of a Pioneer Humanist. Tuesday Discussions, 7 pm. **Making Humanism Visible.** 1 May, Francis Bennion: Pastoral Humanism. 8 May, Jim Herrick: Personal Humanism. 15 May, Discussion: South Place—What Kind of Commitment? 22 May, Peter Cadogan: Can there be a Humanist Non-Party Politics? 29 May, G. N. Deodhekar: Humanism and the Asian Scene.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group: Harold Blackham: "International Humanism". Friday, 25 May, 7.30 pm. Public Meeting at the Royal Institution (Swansea Museum).

Humanist Summer Course. Dartmouth House, London, 3-10 August, 1979. Talks to include: Beata Bishop: Shifting Authority from 'out there' to 'in here'. Victor Serebriakoff: Intelligence and permissiveness: do we need a standard? Barbara Smoker: Permissiveness: progress or pendulum? Details from Margaret Chisman, 41 Penn Road, London N7 9RE.

THE FREETHINKER

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