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CONTROVERSIAL ANGLICAN REPORT ON HOMOSEXUALITY WIDELY CONDEMNED

The Church of England has produced a report which has satisfied no one, says nothing very much at great length, and is likely to be debated with much heat by Anglicans. Many societies have accepted homosexual orientation and behaviour as an unsurprising and unthreatening part of human life. It is a part of the heritage of "the misery of Christianity" that homosexuality is seen as a "problem" rather than a variation within the spectrum of sexual behaviour. Having created the "problem", no wonder Christians find themselves—rather like the man trying to pull himself up by his own bootstraps—in a quandary extricating themselves from it. And as Christians try to catch up with changing social attitudes, their confusion makes ludicrous their claim to pronounce with moral authority to society in general.

Homosexual Relationships—A Contribution to Discussion was a document which had already acquired a history by the time it was eventually published on 19 October. Five years ago the Board for Social Responsibility of the Church of England set up a working party to study the subject of homosexuality. In the summer of 1978 the working party presented the Board with its report and for over a year the Board agonised about publishing it. Rumours have abounded that the report was too liberal for the taste of members of the Board, especially its chairman, the Bishop of Truro. Now that the report has been published it contains an introduction emphasising some of the Board's reservations and an additional Part II detailing critical observations from the Board—so that the criticism may be as widely circulated as the unanimous conclusions of the working party.

All this humming and hawing might suggest a really radical challenge to the Church's traditional view that homosexuality is sinful was being launched. Far from it. The report takes only a tiny step

forward in acknowledging the validity of *some* homosexual relationships. It comes nowhere near accepting the kind of equality which homosexual organisations (and the National Secular Society) have been advocating for years.

The tone of the report is patronising, and like a caricature of a woolly "if and but" clergyman. Here is a sample: "We have agreed that the situation of those who have no choice but to be homosexual is such that they could not, even if they wished to, conform to a norm which is rightly felt to hold for others. We plead for a wider recognition of this fact and greater understanding of the homosexual condition. This plea has a better chance of being heeded if those to whom it is addressed, both within and outside the Church, realize that they are not being asked to repudiate their deeply-felt convictions about the nature and purpose of human sexuality. They are rather being asked to acknowledge a difficult, but limited, human problem with honesty and compassion."

Negative Report

The report, while constantly requesting a positive and compassionate approach, is negative in numerous ways. It says that antipathy to homosexuals may be conscientious and "derive from a basic conviction about the proper use of sex which is, in general, well-founded". The report expects homosexuals to exercise greater restraints than others in ordinary public places and situations. The working party betrays its implicit feeling that homosexuality is undesirable, and only to be accepted where inescapable, by its comment that close friendships between members of the same sex could be misunderstood and damaged by wide acceptance of homosexuality:

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"If, in other words, it ever came to be assumed that every Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson, or even Starsky and Hutch were homosexually related, the value of friendship would be greatly threatened."(!) It suggests that people with bisexual characteristics should "seek to restrain their homosexual inclinations and develop a heterosexual orientation" when there is a "real" choice.

Patronising

Where statements are more positive, they are patronising and qualified: you can almost see the knotted brows as working party members struggle earnestly to be compassionate and fair. They say fear of homosexuality is usually unjustified, attempt to counteract some of the myths and stereotypes concerning gay people, and cautiously suggest that there are "circumstances in which *some* people *might* be justified in choosing homosexual relationships with the *hope* of enjoying companionship and physical expression of sexual love similar to that of marriage." (Italics added.)

Much of the report looks at biblical evidence—which is said to be crucial. The details and the detailed criticisms from Board members are of little interest to non-believers, save as an example of the extraordinary lengths religious people will go to analyse a small biblical passage to show that it doesn't mean what it seems to mean, or has been thought to mean, or might be interpreted to mean. . .

In substance, the report goes no further than the Wolfenden report went over 20 years ago. And for all its caution it is set fair to sail into vigorous opposition. Already there has been predictable opposition from Mrs Whitehouse. The *Church Times* comments in a leader that the majority will see homosexuality as a sin and see sexual activity between man and woman in marriage as the Christian model. The evangelical *Church of England Newspaper* criticises the Board for not including any evangelicals on the working party, and is dismayed that the report allows "known, self-professed, practising homosexuals to continue in full church membership . . . without any obligation to mend their lives". The whole subject is apparently to be treated with such kid gloves that it must be carefully discussed for over a year before the General Synod may debate and vote upon it.

The report has been condemned by the Campaign for Homosexual Equality: "We totally reject the Report's fundamental assertion that homosexuals are essentially inferior and unequal to heterosexuals, and that their relationships are somehow less valid. The Report's few positive aspects (a call for limited law reform, lowering the age of consent to 18 and 'a measure' of acceptance) come over at best as patronising . . .

"On the question of social and legal discrimination, the Report's arguments and conclusions are a

disgrace. It argues that while there is room for some measure of acceptance, gay men and women have no right to demand an end to all prejudice, because that prejudice is so deeply felt. CHE is shocked that the Working Party state expressly that they cannot accept the claim for full equality in social, educational and theological terms . . .

"The Report offers scant respect, understanding or love; what it lacks is faith, hope and charity."

The Gay Christian Movement has described the report as "woolly-minded and pusillanimous". They say that the report itself contains "little careful thinking and few useful sections", while the second part, which contains the Board's criticisms, "reads rather like a Government Health Warning on a packet of candy cigarettes."

The report is particularly controversial in its attitude towards practising homosexual clergymen. Although almost never publicly acknowledged, the Church of England has a higher proportion of gay people than the population as a whole; this is one of the reasons why churchmen worry so about the question. The working party indicate that clergy who are practising homosexuals should resign from their posts and re-apply, so that their bishops may consider their individual circumstances. The Board's criticisms include the comment that the onus of dealing with homosexual clergy should rest on the bishops rather than the individual conscience of the clergy.

The *Freethinker* would be delighted to see all homosexual clergy resign from their posts and re-apply—after at least a month's consideration of their position. We think that numerous congregations throughout England would be amazed to find themselves sermonless for a brief period. Apart from the welcome opportunity given to congregations to reflect on whether church-going is really a worthwhile habit, such a hiatus would demonstrate the utter hypocrisy with which the Church of England has edged nervously towards limited toleration, when a considerable number of its leaders and preachers are themselves gay.

Church's Impudence

The Gay Humanist Group have emphasised that an organisation which is so divided over straight-forward matters of human behaviour has "no claim to make moral pronouncements which carry any weight".

The GHG states: "The Church's impudence in attempting to speak with moral authority about matters of which it is incapable of making up its own mind would be laughable if there were not people still prepared to listen. But—alas—judges, politicians, local councillors, leader-writers and broadcasters will continue to talk about 'Christian values in a Christian society'".

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The Environment—A Humanist Priority?

DON E. MARIETTA, Jr.

A concern for the environment is often expressed by humanists, but such a long-term issue can sometimes be put aside for more immediate issues of law reform or current controversy. Don E. Marietta, who lectures in philosophy at the University of Florida, was in England earlier in the year and discussed attitudes to the environment with a number of humanists. Here he asks how important a priority the environment should be.

Humanists are concerned for human welfare, and among humanists there is a very broad consensus regarding the measures, programmes, and projects which must be fostered if human welfare is to be secured. One of the causes which must be supported in terms of education, influencing of popular opinion, adoption of an individual life style, and political action, is environmentalism. Virtually all humanists agree that this is an important humanist concern. Where humanists disagree is the relative priority of environmental issues. To many humanists, these issues do not seem as urgent as matters of civil liberty, secularisation of state-supported schools and other areas of civil life, freedom from censorship, sexual freedom and abortion, euthanasia, and other efforts to create a just and humanistic society. Environmental protection, therefore, receives more lip-service than active support from humanist organisations and humanists as individuals.

It might be well to examine this whole matter of urgency and priorities. I am not going to argue that environmental causes should be supported at the neglect of women's rights or educational reform, as a mere re-arrangement of priorities. Rather, I suggest that there are differing sorts of urgencies, and a simple notion of ranked priorities is too simple a model of social action to meet adequately the complexities of contemporary life.

As a start toward rethinking the notion of priorities, let us see that some of the problems humanists must address are acute and some are chronic. Naturally there is a tendency to become wholly involved in facing acute issues, since they often have deadlines. One certainly cannot influence an election the day after the voting. To become wholly absorbed in acute issues, however, is an inadequate way to organise humanistic activity. To use a medical analogy, chronic illness is often more significant than an acute illness. To neglect the chronic to attend to the acute is shortsighted and ineffective.

Preservation of the environment is a chronic concern. There are no clearly established deadlines to meet. For some aspects of the health of the environment we are already behind and are trying to make

up for a late start. Other decisions must be made in the next few years, the sooner the better, but no one can give a precise date. In this respect environmental issues are much like other chronic issues, such as the establishment of economic justice. It is with considerable insight that the authors of the British Humanist Association pamphlet "People First" point out the close connection between the establishing of a non-exploitative humanistic society and the preservation of the environment. A pamphlet published by the Unit for the Study of Health Policy, "The NHS in the Next 30 years: A new perspective on the health of the British", shows how these two chronic issues are related to the chronic issue of adequate health care.

Long-range and Short Term Problems

How do we avoid neglecting the long-range humanist concerns in the face of concerns which carry definite deadlines? First, we must think through the matter of urgency. Only in a superficial sense are deadline issues more urgent than the deeply serious environmental, economic and health issues. We must not become wholly engrossed in, or take great satisfaction from clearing our calendars. Second, we need to see that we can do several things at once. We simply do not have the luxury of intense specialisation. We cannot go off in all directions at once, of course, nor should we skim the surface of everything. But we must not let these spatial metaphors numb our creativity. We are able to respond to acute issues of great importance, and carry on a sustained effort to solve the chronic problems. Any humanist organisation can become known as a powerful force in respect of both immediate and long-range humanist concerns. There are, of course, various ways of attacking the several issues. I am not suggesting that each group should duplicate what others are doing. Joint endeavours with humanist and other groups have much to commend them. Perhaps the important thing is that there be no doubt about the humanist position regarding the environment and that such resources and means as any group has be used to strengthen the cause of environmental responsibility.

Why should environmental concern be a special interest of humanists? Are there reasons why humanists in particular should see this as an urgent matter? I have already mentioned one reason, the close connection between this concern and health and economic justice. There is another important reason why humanists should be environmentalists—our naturalistic world view. We believe that we have one world, one life. As products of the evolution of

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"The Freethinker" is approaching its centenary—in a year's time in 1981. Meanwhile, we approach the end of the seventies and in this article in two parts, Francis Bennion looks at editions of "The Freethinker" through the decade. He considers the recurring matters of great concern and resurrects a few interesting sidelights from the past.

A pamphlet dated 27 May 1970 reminds me of how I began the decade: in a state of Voltairian anger against certain callow idealists. They detested what their opponents were saying, and fought to the death to prevent them saying it. At the Oxford Union they silenced the Foreign Secretary. In the High Court they silenced counsel. Later they were to lay violent hands on Professor Eysenck at the London School of Economics. In 1974 their crude philosophy was formalized in the NUS resolution to deny a platform to racists and facists (undefined).

Voltaire's famous principle is not limited to freedom of speech. It applies in defence of all human freedoms. Those who believe in a particular cause (as I myself believe in opposition to Apartheid, for instance) must be very careful not to forget Voltaire in pursuing it. Some of the callow idealists, led by Peter Hain, did forget Voltaire in 1970. That was the subject of my pamphlet. They forcibly prevented people who wished (lawfully even if misguidedly) to stage, play in or watch sporting fixtures with visiting South African teams from doing so. Although this was illegal, the British Government acquiesced.

In me the effect of this pursuit of a cause I ardently supported by means destructive of basic liberties fuelled a powerful reaction. I brought a private prosecution, which led to a 30-day Old Bailey trial and a heavy fine for the instigator of these non-Voltairian activities. Was I right to do this? It was an expensive exercise for me, in more ways than one. Opinions differed, but I can say that on one occasion at least I did more than talk in support of my beliefs. Many private prosecutions brought during the Seventies were severely criticized in the pages of *The Freethinker*; but not this one. Confirming that was a source of satisfaction as I read through its back volumes for the purpose of writing this article. The reason no doubt was that whereas my prosecution was brought in defence of liberty those of Whitehouse, Blackburn et al. (briefly surveyed below) were brought in opposition to it.

I can recommend the reading of ten solid years of this journal. Where else will you find such concern for what matters to people? Where else will you find humanity's deepest issues probed with such honesty and devotion? I found it a feast (and no

Barmecide feast). One is in the company of the elect. The contributors are people who care. They care about the human condition, about the meaning of the universe and about what humanism is and should be. They work hard for enlightenment, and they do not want to be paid.

Sir James Goldsmith, recruiting journalists for his new magazine *Now!*, has ordered them to be offered good salaries. For, says he with customary elegance, if you offer peanuts all you get is monkeys. *The Freethinker* does not even offer peanuts, but it attracts contributors among whom Darwin himself would have been content to be numbered. Among so many, it would be invidious to mention names.

The Freethinker began the decade as a 24-page weekly price 6p. It ends it as a 16-page monthly price 20p. And the pages today are smaller. This reduction in size and frequency is unquestionably the most depressing fact to emerge from my reading. The change to monthly publication occurred at the end of 1972. Readers were then informed that unless circulation increased, and more donations and legacies were forthcoming, the long-term existence of the paper was doubtful. Since circulation figures are not published one does not know if the hoped-for increase materialised. Commenting on the new monthly status, Peter Crommelin (a former priest) offered as a grain of comfort "the fact that *The Freethinker* has to a very large extent completed the task for which it was founded". I wonder if this is true?

Not Yet "Redundant"

My ten-year study of the paper suggests there is still much to be done. Under five editors (David Reynolds, Nigel Sinnott, Christopher Morey, Bill Mellroy and Jim Herrick) it has battled away at familiar targets: religious education, church schools, blasphemy law, oath-taking. On assuming office as President in June 1972, Barbara Smoker declared that the National Secular Society "is by no means redundant yet". The same must apply to its associated organ, *The Freethinker*.

Some of the battles have been to *retain* progress previously made. The compulsory pregnancy lobby has fought hard against NHS contraception services. By an unparalleled succession of private Members' Bills it has waged war against the progress achieved in David Steele's Abortion Act of 1967, even though the Act was vindicated by the Lane Committee in 1974. 1967 also saw the partial emancipation of gays by the Sexual Offences Act. Even this limited degree of humanity has been challenged by the Godbodies. In particular the Nationwide Festival of Light fought hard to raise the age of consent for homosexuals from 21 to 24!

The campaign against oath-taking received promising support from two quarters. In 1972 the Criminal Law Revision Committee, a prestigious official body, recommended that swearing oaths in court be abolished. Welcoming this, the NSS pointed out that, although humanists have the right to affirm, assertion of the right by a witness often causes prejudice against him on the part of the judge and jury. Then in 1973 *Justice*, the all-party group of lawyers, proposed that the oath be replaced by a simple declaration and promise to tell the truth. Two years later the NSS urged the Home Office to introduce legislation on these lines. The Society hoped that abolition of oath-taking in courts would soon be followed by its abolition in Parliament, in making affidavits, and in all spheres of public life and national ceremonies. Nothing has been done.

Freedom of speech was always a dominant concern of *The Freethinker*. The issue has been prominent in the Seventies; especially in relation to blasphemy. The decade opened with Lady Birdwood's attempted prosecution of the play *Council of Love*, for which in Germany Oscar Panizza had been imprisoned for blasphemy. It ended with Mary Whitehouse's successful prosecution of *Gay News* and its editor Denis Lemon for publishing a blasphemous poem by an established writer and professor of English literature, James Kirkup.

The catalogue of targets for complaint on grounds of obscenity is long. In some ways it is a rollcall of the *causes célèbres* among libertarians and their

opponents: *Oh! Calcutta!* (running throughout the decade), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (starting 1972, and still going strong), the film *Blow Up* (unsuccessfully prosecuted by Ms Whitehouse), the *Little Red Schoolbook* (successfully prosecuted by Ms Whitehouse), *IT Magazine* (crushed in *R. v Kneller*), *Oz* (prosecuted for its School Kids issue, and sunk without trace), *Growing Up* (Martin Cole's sensible sex education film), *Sex—the Erroneous Zone* (the NSS's sensible sex education manual), *More About the Language of Love* (successfully prosecuted by Raymond Blackburn), *Inside Linda Lovelace* (unsuccessfully prosecuted by one Watts), *Last Tango in Paris* (unsuccessfully prosecuted by Edward Shackleton of the Festival of Light), and many more.

On the legislative front, the official Tory *Indecent Displays Bill* was overtaken by the 1974 General Election and failed to pass. It was reintroduced as a private Member's Bill and once more failed to pass. Now it threatens us again. The *Protection of Children Bill*, which further restricts "indecent" photography, was introduced last year against Home Office advice in response to a scare whipped up by Mary Whitehouse. In a quite unprecedented manner, it was rushed through the House of Commons without amendment, even though its promoters conceded that the drafting was seriously defective. It was left to the House of Lords to put this right. The Bill is now law.

(To be continued)

Women Priests: For Women, Read Danger

JIM HERRICK

Controversy has raged in the Church of England during recent years about ordaining women as priests. Two decisions have slowed progress towards equality for women. Last year, the General Synod voted against accepting women for ordination; this year the General Synod voted against even allowing women already ordained in Anglican Churches abroad to conduct services while visiting England. The Anglican church—and even more so the Catholic Church—will have a tough time bringing about equality, since the weight of the whole history of Christianity is against women.

Miss Bennett from Hongkong, or the Rev Joyce Bennett as she is known professionally, joined in celebrating the eucharist at a service in Oxford in August this year. The event was seen by the church press as a significant act of rebellion. Miss Bennett was one of several clerics taking an interdenominational service and her participation at the point of consecration was not regarded by her as a deliberate act of defiance. But in view of the decision by the

Anglican General Synod a week or so earlier not to allow women ordained as Anglican priests in other countries to take services in England, her action was extremely controversial: a landmark and precedent for those urging acceptance of women priests, an omen and warning for those resisting change.

The ordination of women priests is likely to be one of the most divisive issues in the Church of England in coming years. It divides not only because the church has great difficulty in reconciling its traditional anti-female attitude with current womens' liberation outlooks, but also because it creates great problems in ecumenical talks with other churches. The Roman Catholic church with its continuing affirmation of celibacy for male priests seems light years away from accepting women as priests. The Free Churches have accepted women as priests for some decades and they play an important, if not large, part in their ministry.

Ordination of women as priests also creates great controversy within the worldwide Anglican community, because Anglican women priests are now being ordained in other countries. Anglican churches in the United States, Canada, New Zealand and

Hongkong have led the way and there are now more than 150 women priests in the Anglican churches abroad.

The General Synod on 6 July 1979 voted against opening its altars even to Anglican women validly ordained overseas. The Synod has a three tier voting system, and in favour were a majority of the Bishops and laity, while crucial opposition came from the clergy. The significance of giving hospitality to overseas women priests particularly lies in the fact that occasional women priests from abroad could enable congregations to become familiar with and accepting of the practice.

The Synod decision quickly led to a defiant call from the Rev Alfred Willetts of Manchester for clergy to sign a public declaration that they intend to open their altars to Anglican women priests from abroad. (Shortly before her death, his wife, Deaconess Phoebe Willetts, caused an ecclesiastical kerfuffle when she and her husband invited an American woman to become the first woman to celebrate holy communion at a parish altar in England in 1977.)

The General Synod in August 1978 voted against a motion proposing that women be allowed to be ordained in the Church of England. The laity and bishops were in favour, but the clergy were decisively against. The debate in Synod indicated the depth of division of opinion and the words of some of the opposers are a strong reminder of the traditional hostility of Christianity to women. The Bishop of Truro, Dr Leonard, for instance, suggested that proponents of women's ordination were distorting scriptural authority: "... in order to maintain that the proposal is consonant with scripture, they have to eviscerate it of almost all authority".

Hostility of Churches

Certainly the hostility of the churches to women has been so consistent and so firmly based on biblical authority, that to accept women priests would involve a considerable about turn. But a theological *volte face* would be no novelty at a period when even the divinity of Christ is doubted by some theologians.

Horror at the idea of women priests comes from the pagan associations of priestesses and goddesses, from the patriarchal, masculine-dominated aspect of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and from a deep-seated belief—symbolised in the creation of Eve from Adam's spare rib and the focus of the original fall of man in Eve's weakness for apples—that woman is a lesser creature than man.

Such prejudices were highlighted by the words of a lay woman in the Synod debate: "'Priestesses', the dreaded word is spoken, and people draw back in horror with visions of orgies . . ." There may also be an undercurrent of primitive feeling that woman is unclean as a result of the female menstrual cycle. A Swedish woman priest, Kerstin Berglund, said in an interview in the *Guardian* (31 July 1978): "Deep

in their hearts the opponents say we are not clean".

One of Chapman Cohen's Pamphlets for the People *Woman and Christianity* makes many telling points in describing the history of the Christian attitude to women. He points out that "In morals, in learning, in social government, in the personal status of men and women, the world under the Cross took a step backwards". He also made a point about self-oppression, long before liberation was a fashionable attitude: "... for Christianity not only makes men and women servile, it has the supreme art of teaching them to love their chains".

Texts such as St Paul's "Let the women learn in silence with all subjection, but I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (I Tim. ii 11-12) have become the basis of Christian anti-feminism. At its worst it could develop into tirades such as Knox's *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*: "Nature doth paint them forth to be weak, frail, impatient, foolish, and experience hath declared them to be inconstant, variable, cruel and lacking

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When God created man . . .
she was only testing

JOTTINGS

WILLIAM McILROY

The ecclesiastical adventurer has had his representation in every age of church history.—F. H. Amphlett Micklewright, The Freethinker, 12 June 1964.

Readers of this column were recently assured that I enjoy perfect health except for weekly bouts of nausea brought on by reading the religious Press. The latest bulletin is that the attacks have become more acute after sampling contents of the *Catholic Herald* correspondence column.

It started on 27 July when letters were published by O. F. E. Charlton lamenting that with the Reformation "the ordinary people of England were robbed of the Real Presence", and by G. Drake pointing out some of the obstacles to a reunion of Canterbury and Rome. All rather unexceptional stuff, but it prompted others to send their missives to the Editor of the *Catholic* weekly.

One correspondent stated roundly that "the Church of England as newly created in 1535 was nothing more than an Erastian sect." And before the dear old C of E can expect a welcome on the Vatican mat, "valid orders must be recovered, a valid attitude towards Catholic authority come into operation after four centuries and a valid exposition of the Mass and the Real Presence possess the Anglican mind." He advised any of the Anglican clergy or laity who were drifting Romewards that "there is open to them the path of individual submission, the road taken by every convert, clerical or lay from the days of the Reformation until the present time. Such and none other is the way along which St Thomas More and St John Fisher beckon them."

That schoolmasterish admonition to Anglican fellow-travellers was delivered by none other than F. H. Amphlett Micklewright, once well known in the secularist movement as an implacable enemy of the Roman Catholic Church. He followed with other letters which will have given many of his readers the impression that he is an isolated "cradle Catholic" who cannot accept change and innovation. In fact he has had a diverse career as an Anglican clergyman (twice), a Unitarian clergyman and a prolific writer for Unitarian, rationalist and secularist publications. (He was jocularly referred to by his freethinking contemporaries as "Pamphlet" Micklewright.)

During his first Anglican phase Micklewright was officiating Chaplain and Tutor at St Boniface College, Warminster (1936-37), Curate at St Paul's Wednesbury (1937-39) and St. Paul's, Hammersmith

(1939-41). He resigned the Anglican ministry in 1941 and a few months later became minister to the Unitarian congregation at Southampton. Announcing Micklewright's Southampton appointment, *The Inquirer*, the Unitarian weekly to which he had contributed many articles while still an Anglican clergyman, declared: "For a long time he has been Modernist in his point of view."

Two years later he moved to Cross Street Unitarian Chapel, Manchester, and remained there until 1949. During this period he was also writing and speaking for the Rationalist Press Association. In 1949 Micklewright was re-admitted to the Anglican ministry and became Curate of Thornhill Lees (1949-52) and Vicar of All Saints, Knightsbridge (1952-55) when he once again resigned.

Micklewright joined the National Secular Society in the early 1960s and served for a time on its Executive Committee. NSS members are not noted for their softness towards Rome, but many of us were dismayed by his virulent anti-Catholic bigotry. Although something of a hero to those whose "free-thought" began and ended with hatred of Catholics, he soon twigged that his brand of anti-Catholicism was not acceptable to the majority and in fact deplored by leading members. There then developed a whispering campaign, which was fostered by his writings, about a "Fifth Column" in the movement; on one occasion the present writer was accused to his face by one of Micklewright's more paranoiac admirers of being a Catholic Action agent who had been planted in the NSS to tone down its anti-Catholic propaganda.

Let us return to the *Catholic Herald*: by 17 August Micklewright had got into his stride vigorously denouncing what he called "the persecuting spirit of Protestantism", particularly as manifested by his former employers, the Anglican and Unitarian churches. By way of illustrating such illiberal, anti-Catholic attitudes he related his experience at Cross Street Chapel when, in an endeavour to beautify the place, he proposed adding a pair of candlesticks to the furnishings. This suggestion aroused the persecuting spirit of older members ("all of whom were philistine and some of whom were positively illiterate") who regarded such objects and anything of beauty as symbols of popery fit only to be stacked away in the vestry. (Micklewright omitted to tell *Catholic Herald* readers, and probably Manchester Unitarians, that the aforementioned candlesticks were part of a consignment of holy clutter, including statues of Buddha and Jesus, which he acquired from H. J. Blackham who, in a rare fit of tidiness, had had a clear up at the Ethical Church, Bayswater.)

Micklewright concluded his 17 August letter: "Indeed as I think of the persecuting spirit of Protestantism . . . I can find only one answer:

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PEACE PRIZE CRITICISED

The Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to Mother Teresa of Calcutta. The award of £95,000 will be used to further her work among the poor and dying. Mother Teresa has been described as a saint by Malcolm Muggeridge, among others.

She has founded a religious order, the Missionaries of Charity, which has 158 branches with 1,800 sisters and 120,000 co-workers performing work among the starving and the very sick in 25 countries. On being told she had won the prize in Calcutta, she said, "Thank God for his gift to the poor". No word of God's curse of human suffering and poverty.

Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, commented on the award: "Everybody applauds the choice of Mother Teresa for the Nobel Peace Prize—everybody, that is, who doesn't stop to think about it.

"It is true she tidies the Calcutta streets of the dying, giving them a little comfort in their last hours. No-one would deny the human charity in that. But the main effect is to make the appalling Third-World death rate more acceptable to the rest of us.

"Over-population is the chief cause of starvation and disease, but Mother Teresa would rather have a high death rate than a low birth rate. She supports the Pope who has recently made it clear that their Church will not sanction any effective birth control.

"Mother Teresa perversely worships the God who, she believes, creates the mess that she is devoting her life to mopping up."

PEACEFULNESS FORGOTTEN BY KRISHNA DEVOTEE

The Hare Krishna movement preaches against violence, but one of its members hit someone over the head with a pair of wooden rice flails at the sect's Soho Temple. James Mackessy, a Hare Krishna devotee, appeared at Marlborough Street magistrate's court pleading guilty to maliciously wounding Anthony O'Loughlin, who had been drinking and was asked to leave the temple for causing a disturbance.

It was said that Mackessy, who is studying to become a Krishna teacher, got the wooden flails to frighten O'Loughlin who was refusing to leave, and then forgot the Krishna doctrine of peacefulness. Mr Mackessy was conditionally discharged for a year.

Secularists who attended the debate between Hare Krishna Das and Barbara Smoker at Conway Hall will remember the menacing way one or two young shaven-headed devotees approached a few members of the audience who were asking for more public discussion.

NEWS

REMOTE CHRISTIAN TRUTH

The doughty Christian campaigner of Wimbledon, Sir Cyril Black, has been cluttering the letter columns of the *Wimbledon News* with correspondence about "Christian truth" and the part played by ideas of life after death in church services.

Terry Mullins, Secretary of the National Secular Society, entered the fray with a letter which asked: "What, I wonder, does Sir Cyril Black mean by Christian truth in connection with life after death? Is Christian truth different from other kinds of truth?"

He continued: "Surely a thing is either true or it isn't and as far as life after death is concerned there is absolutely no evidence that there is such a thing.

"Has anyone ever produced the sort of evidence that is required in a court of law on this important point? Of course they haven't and that is why Sir Cyril is right to talk of Christian truth—by which he means there may be a remote possibility that it is true."

CATHOLIC ADVICE

Church leaders have made many comments on the forthcoming elections in Portugal. Archbishop Custodio Pereira told pilgrims to the shrine of Fatima that it was "a grave sin" for Catholics to abstain from voting. He also called on priests to play a more active political role.

The Portuguese Episcopal Council has issued a pastoral note condemning left and right wing extremism and reminding voters of the importance of essential Christian values, such as liberty, respect for human life, the family unit, and freedom to participate in public life.

THE UNPLEASANT PERSONALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

by Colin Maine

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AND NOTES

CENSORSHIP IN USA

The Academic Freedom Group has been formed to counter censorship of school books. Parental and religious organisations are scrutinising books to remove those which contain indecent words or ideas. In Texas six dictionaries are banned because of their definition of "hot" and "slut" and some Missouri schools have removed the respected American Heritage dictionary because it gives the usage of the word "bed" as a verb. The American Library Association and other major educational organisations are concerned at this trend towards censorship.

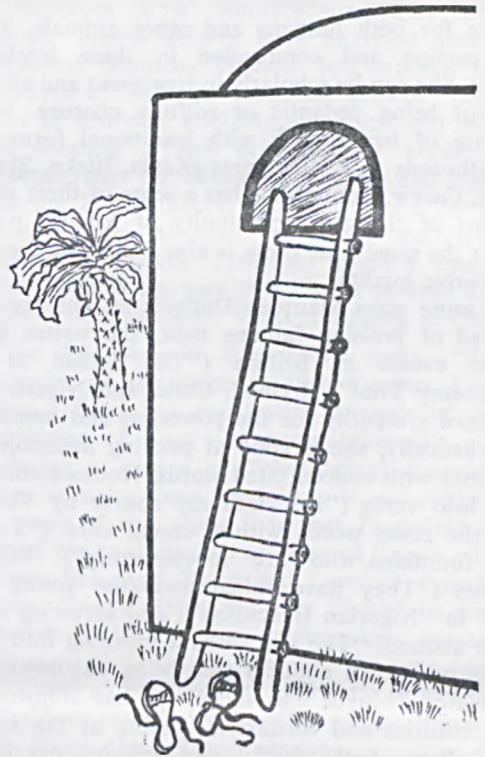
Banned ideas include objections to a poem which contains the line "You and I can hold completely different points of view and both be right". Parents complain the line ignores "definite standards".

In Georgia and California parents' groups want biology teachers to give equal time to the biblical theory of creation and Darwin's theory of evolution. (How much time does it take to describe divine creation?)

**NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

DECEMBER 8th, 1979,

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MEMORIALS OF THE QUICK AND THE DEAD by
Maureen Duffy. Hamish Hamilton, £4.95.

Maureen Duffy's poems are full of a concern for justice for both humans and other animals. There are passion and compassion in these intelligent poems. She can be scholarly in treatment and allusion without being pedantic or wilfully obscure. Partly because of her playing with traditional forms and her allusions to earlier poets (Keats, Blake, Shakespeare, Carew, Donne) one has a sense of these poems as part of the great continuity of English poetry, but at the same time there is also a pleasing free and innovative quality.

In some ways Maureen Duffy is an anti-laureate. Instead of praising famous men, she writes about public events in Britain ("The Ballad of the Blasphemy Trial"), Ireland, Chile, and Nigeria with outraged sympathy for the powerless and oppressed.

Stylistically, she is good at packing meaning into her lines with concentrated words. Nouns sometimes turn into verbs ("I sextant my course by Venus") and she coins words with a casual care ("a pond and fountains/who are lovessporting"). Striking phrases ("They have fallen awry/the young men shot" in "Nigerian Execution") and arresting metaphors abound. "The saw rasps a morning into logs" begins one poem about a tree being cut down. She speculates "Maybe this morning/ has shipwrecked two centuries and Mozart/is playing at the inmost ring." Puns, both playful and serious, are everywhere. "I hold an ache, oak corn in my palm".

The poet has an Elizabethan fondness for play on words. A bean left on the vine is a "has been". In her poems there are complexes of words which vibrate with meaning. A tagged graylag goose becomes an "old lag" and a "laggard" lured "to the snare of our curiosity/that would follow you about your seasons/mark where you spring and fall/where you are laid and lay". Ms Duffy knows that if words are to pull their full weight in poetry they must be loaded with as much meaning as they can bear.

"Condemned: for 'Shelter'" shows Maureen Duffy using several varieties of poetic magic at once. The adult remembers herself as a child in this skillful picture: "Halfasleep I fondle my brother's pubescent prick/limp and pink as the raw runt/of a pound litter of sausages/a makeweight piglet I wish was mine". Clichés are taken up, tweaked, and put down new. "We live by bread almost alone/with jam on it. Dinners bubble and squeak/their second or third time round". An imaginative and allusive turn of mind transforms mere ice on the tap in the yard into "eskimo splinters". Phrases unroll, accumulating new meanings. Ms Duffy has a very effective device of pivoting meaning on words which first seem to have one sense or to be one part of speech but then

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shift to another. "They are slaughtering/ innocents with charity Christmas stockings/over their faces garnished with gold coins/of bitter chocolate and foil". "Charity" at first seems to be the object of "with" but then becomes an adjective modifying "stockings"; "with charity Christmas stockings" at first, grammatically, seems to be the means of the slaughtering, but then in the next line turns out to be a parody of stocking masks as used by thieves or terrorists. The "gold coins", being chocolate, are not what they seem, either. "Bitter" describes more than the chocolate, and "foil" may carry the faint reverberation of deception and wickedness of "foil" meaning "thwart". I have delved at such length into these quite unobscure lines to show what complexity lurks close under the surface of Ms Duffy's poetry. Every word is there for a good reason.

"The Ballad of the Blasphemy Trial", which first appeared in *The Freethinker*, is here, simple and artless in the manner of traditional ballads, but relentless in its condemnation of the blasphemy law. Jesus and Socrates watch from Parnassus; says Jesus, "Oh I have stood in a courtroom/and now what's this I see?/They are trying a man at the bar/and all in the name of me."

The poems for special occasions or persons seem to me relatively less successful. They are poems dedicated to Lettice Cooper, R. S. Thomas, Seamus Heaney, Roy Fuller, and others. They are not bad poems, but there is in them a self-conscious and somewhat exclusive sense of private letters intercepted.

Although Maureen Duffy often moves very easily and skillfully between the specific and the general, in "Taking Down the Runners" the precise and evocative description of autumn garden chores leads to two conclusions where one would perhaps have been enough. Autumn evokes thoughts of death and renewal. "I turn indoors with my load of compost thoughts". The speaker is painfully aware of evidences of mortality. "This body/the earth will break to humus yearns after/painful life, knows itself now twined, curled crisp/upon its hard pole spine death will unstack/tumble its vertebrae/to nourishing bonemeal". This seems to me to be a very satisfactory conclusion to the poem without the tacked-on "Dover Beach" couplet "Oh my dear give me your warm flesh til that last/frost fall we can't. soft or sharp winged, migrant fly." It can be jarring to find a poem about nature and mortality suddenly turning into a love poem in the last breath, but yet the unexpectedness of the ending is like the unexpectedness of a sudden realisation, and therefore is effective in a way.

REVIEWS

Her love poems have a frankly erotic note: "Like revolution you have to be made/over and over again". Although this sonnet is addressed to a "you" Ms Duffy changes one of the pronouns to "her" to make certain the reader will know that the "you" is a woman. "The rough rain outside our windows falls tender/through the tropic of our bedded afternoon/as I make her over and over: promises/of renewal in our joined and living flesh". The "you" of the poem can also be a general "you" with plays on "make" in the senses of "create" and of "seduce". In other love poems there is the melancholy sense of lovers apart or a joyful expression of lovers very much together ("Your smile and invitation/'Come into me'"). In only one there is apprehension that the beloved may be attracted by the "summer boys" with "toasted muscles" sunbathing in the park. But apprehension is dispelled. Erotic but restrained, the speaker is "uneasy til indoors/you take all your clothes off/and not because of that sun".

It is hard to write about animals without sentimentalising or anthropomorphising them. When Ms Duffy parodies a nursery rhyme (the sly Blakean "Song of Ignorance") the little three-beat jingle becomes a sinister pounding, a scathing condemnation of people who have their healthy pets put down: "Ding dong bell/Pussy's gone to hell/brought in a plastic bag/as though already dead/one fifteen you pay/to have her put away". Nursery rhyme diction and cadence are combined with the conversational and classical ("now your nine threads snap").

The textures of most of her poems are rich and invite rereading. Maureen Duffy clearly revels in using words. It is a pleasure to watch her use our language.

SARAH LAWSON

QUESTION 12 Ed by G. A. Wells, RPA. £2.25 hard cover; £1.00 paperback.

In reading the latest issue of *Question* my expectations were immediately raised by Herman Bondi's statement at the beginning of his essay "Science and Government" that he is an "old fashioned liberal". Myself an exponent of the view that rationalism's general historical association with liberalism is a correct and beneficial one (and that Marxism and Socialism are akin to the authoritarianism of Christianity), I was disappointed to discover that Professor Bondi's essay bears little, if any, relationship to a liberal approach. Rather, it constitutes little more than a jejeune apologia for government spending.

A liberal would presumably be concerned over

the present relationship of the state to science for many reasons: the absorption of risk capital by taxation and the monopolization of research by State (and State financed) institutions; the direction of research by the "needs" of the State rather than by the satisfaction of consumer demand; and the development of a "military—industrial complex". Indeed, liberal writers have analysed such issues elsewhere. Seymour Melman has exposed the way in which a "parasitic economic growth" has taken place in America, gobbling up capital and resources, and creating a half private, half public system immune from the discipline of profit and loss. Likewise the British liberal economist John Jewkes has examined the abysmal record of state-sponsored science in Britain. Professor Bondi's essay, alas, offers little in the way of a liberal or even a *critical* analysis of his subject. What is it doing in *Question*?

The late Ronald Englefield's essay, "Kant as Defender of the Faith in 19th Century England", offers a brief but penetrating analysis of the true motivation of Kant's obscure philosophic verbosity as being a means of "abolish(ing) knowledge in order to make room for faith". If any criticism can be made of this essay it is that Englefield did not extend his analysis to a critique of Kant's ethics. As writers like Ayn Rand and Leonard Peikoff have shown, Kant's ethics, the very "faith" he wished to preserve by his sceptical epistemology, were the *ne plus ultra* of Christian morality, the very essence of its ascetic, life-denying, altruistic creed. Kant's exposition reveals its horrific nature more clearly than more camouflaged versions.

In the next two essays we return to a subject close to the heart of *Question's* editor, G. A. Wells, that of Christology. Wells has given space (perhaps over-charitably) to a rather longwinded essay ("Christianity and the Appeal to History") by Rev. D. P. Davies, the Welsh theologian. Rev. Davies seems to want to have his cake and eat it. He offers the view that it is "essential for a Christian to have reasonable grounds for believing that his faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour can be supported—though it cannot, of course, be proved—by an appeal to the historical evidence". Davies argues that a number of possible interpretations (differing, for example, from those of Wells) are possible on the basis of Biblical textual evidence, but eventually admits that ultimately the case for Christianity rests not upon such historical data but upon prior metaphysical conceptions. And here he attempts the old ploy of claiming that the anti-supernaturalist, scientific position is actually an unscientific "bias". Although I wouldn't wish to denigrate the value of textual/historical criticism of the sort so ably performed by Wells, Davies is, in my view, ultimately correct in pointing to the primacy of philosophic/metaphysical concepts. But it can do him little good, since human reason is quite capable (sceptics not withstanding) of

demolishing self-contradictory and nonsensical theistic assertions.

Unfortunately, Wells doesn't offer a point by point reply to Rev. Davies, but contents himself in this issue with a further explication of his critique of the Christ myth by an examination of the issue of "Does Jesus's Family Prove His Existence?"

However, from my personal viewpoint, the outstanding contribution to this volume (indeed one of the outstanding contributions to the past decade's issues of *Question/Rationalist Annual*) is Professor Stanislav Andreski's resurrection (!) of the name and reputation of J. M. Robertson, in "A Forgotten Genius: John Mackinnon Robertson (1855-1933)". Although never totally forgotten by freethinkers as a great fighter for rationalism, and author of the monumental *History of Freethought*, it is only of very late that a small number of liberal and libertarian writers—including myself—have rediscovered Robertson's penetrating contributions to sociology and social theory. Although somewhat peeved at having been beaten into print by Professor Andreski on someone who is now one of my principal intellectual heroes, I cannot but be pleased to see Robertson's stature once more publicly proclaimed.

Andreski is himself a liberal and an outstanding contemporary sociologist who has for years stood almost alone against the tides of jargonizing and pseudo-science in sociology, Marxism and a plethora of pretentious "existentialist/phenomenological" sects. He describes Robertson as a true, if forgotten, giant in the development of sociology, and shows him to be one of the last figures in that tradition of liberal social science stemming from Adam Smith and other members of the "Scottish School" through French liberals like Charles (not Auguste) Comte and Charles Dunoyer, to Thomas Buckle.

Robertson's inquiries, like those of his predecessors, were characterised by a liberal "economic interpretation of history" (not an economic *determinism*, or a Marxist historical materialism) and liberal class analysis. The motivation of his investigations was a "political rationalism" (his own phrase) that paralleled his philosophic rationalism—a deep concern with the conditions, causes and prospects for human social progress. Space does not permit me much further comment on Robertson nor on Andreski's assessment (where I would register one or two minor disagreements), but suffice it to say that Andreski also does a great service for those who have not spent years scouring the second-hand bookshops for Robertson's books by appending to his essay several representative extracts from Robertson's major works. Unfortunately Professor Andreski also wastes a page on an extract from Robertson's proto-Keynesian *The Fallacy of Saving* (which was actually footnoted in Keynes's *General Theory*). I must dissent from Andreski's own favourable view of Keynesian economics—now surely exploded by

modern economic science—and comment that whereas Robertson was indeed, as Andreski states, right on almost everything he wrote—on this subject he was not.

But if every other page of *Question 12* was blank, then Professor Andreski's essay would be well worth the price of admission.

CHRIS R. TAME

E. M. FORSTER: A LIFE by P. N. Furbank, OUP, £4.95 paperback.

This outstanding biography of E. M. Forster, published originally in two volumes as a hardback, has now been issued as a single paperback of over 600 pages. It has been widely praised as a masterly biography written with great sympathy, care and insight by someone who knew Forster in his later years.

The biography covers the genesis of his major novels, such as the experiences in India which led to writing *A Passage to India*. It also gives an account of his public activities, for example his involvement in the early years of the National Council for Civil Liberties in the thirties. Forster's private life — and he considered friendship the supreme human virtue — is handled with great sensitivity.

Extracts from Forster's diaries and letters remain delightful and constantly relevant. His distaste for religion is clear. His comments about the BBC might well be given to every new Director General to learn by heart: "A timid BBC is an appalling prospect because, though timid, it will always be influential, and it will confirm thousands of us in our congenial habit of avoiding unwelcome truths."

J.H.

THEATRE

DEATH OF A SALESMAN by Arthur Miller, National Theatre (Lyttleton).

In the history of American drama there are two plays that really matter, this one and—well, anyway, this one. The response to its original production here thirty years ago was less than overwhelming. Ivor Brown seemed to sum up the general feeling when he called it "a little man's tragedy". Willy Loman, the salesman with a smile for all comers who believes that the world can be his for a pat on the back, expressed for us all that was wrong with the American Dream: we would sooner have seen him vacate the premises.

The world was different then, of course. Our own quiet confidence was a good deal sturdier. In truth perhaps this aspect of American life is still too foreign for Willy's pathos to move us much. And yet I prefer to think that his tragedy does relate to us more than a little, that he is a man to whom, as his wife says, "attention must be paid".

It is simply not true that Willy holds no beliefs, or that what he professes to believe in is hollow. Other people may distort the ideal, but Willy, for all his confusion, remains unsullied. He is, above all, a frontiersman and, as such, he embodies the same humanistic spirit for which Paine and America's founding fathers fought. Its essence is contained in Willy's epitaph: "A salesman is got to dream, boy, it comes with the territory".

The play's territory is harrowing. The action takes place in Willy's memory as well as the realistic present. Reflected in his tangled thought pattern are both the image of how things should have been and the nightmare they have become. It is not out of place to see Willy, with "a batch of cement in his hands", as a true descendant of Thoreau, abundantly self-reliant, brimming over with goodwill. He wants the best for himself and his family, and he relishes the prospect of honest labour reaping a just reward. In another age, one feels, Willy Loman would have been a charter participant in Owen's New Lanark.

In another age, perhaps. But America is in the throes of a Cold War. Everyone's motive is suspect, and the rallying cry now is "cover yourself". Willy can no longer count on his own initiative, he has to depend on others for his self-esteem.

It is thus that Willy Loman assumes the role of an Everyman figure, a victim of a materialistic monster he unwittingly helped to create. A stronger man would have been called before the House Un-American Activities Committee—and refused to testify. Willy has neither the prescience nor the stamina to know what is happening to him. His only recourse is to pass on what he knows to his sons. But Happy has already sold out to big business, while Biff, Willy's real benefactor, is so disgusted by the life round about him that his vision is as blinkered as Happy's. Neither son has any awareness of Willy's real worth, or the torment he is going through. Happy could not care less; Biff, who should know better, calls his father a fraud, worth "a dime a dozen".

The tension is finely poised on the riveting conflict between Willy and his sons. It is, in the best American tradition, a family tragedy. But there is less personal rivalry here than in classical drama. The conflict, though personal, remains ideological. Miller's abiding strength as a dramatist is his power to conceive individual crises within a wide social framework. For him it is insufficient to create characters in a vacuum. As he says at the end of another fine play, they are "all my sons". We cannot help but see Willy Loman in large terms. He is a psychic representation of American history; we dare not dismiss him.

It would be a pity to think that Warren Mitchell's performance, fine though it is in every respect, somehow overshadowed the character of Willy Loman and so stifled his humanity. For myself, it did not. Mr. Mitchell, indeed, captured all Willy's

pathos, his unquestionable dignity. Yet I shuddered to hear a self-satisfied "aah" from the audience as Willy was being told off for not producing the goods. It is all too easy to puncture Willy Loman's hot air balloon. Is it that much more difficult, I wonder, to be moved by his terrible descent?

JAMES MACDONALD

CINEMA

SCUM (X) General Release.

Roy Minton's play about borstal life, filmed and then banned in 1977 by BBC television, can now be seen on the large screen in a film directed by Alan Clarke. The original script is intact. Unsurprisingly, it is a bleak, harrowing film, if a little fudged. One thing comes across loud and clear, though. What can be achieved by places of correction is nothing short of remarkable. Young people who manage to arrive there still clinging to some self-respect, warmth, curiosity, humour or trust will be beaten, crushed, unjustly punished, terrorised and betrayed by screws and fellow-inmates alike. An ideal preparation for a life of wretched criminality.

The screws (licensed thugs), Matron (full of pudgily contempt for the boys she could have done so much for) and Governor (a religious bigot with "a BSc in Hatred") are shown, with the exception of an older, milder screw passed over for promotion, as unremittingly callous and sadistic. *Scum* deals with an important, neglected and topical issue, so it's unfortunate that it should put its credibility at risk by loading the dice so heavily against the System. True, in a closed community containing potentially violent people, those in charge become brutalised in order to survive, but surely some *start out* with liberal ideals. It would have been wise to have shown a new warder beginning to lose those ideals to the general ethos of the place.

Which brings us to the accusation "unbalanced", probably in part behind the BBC's withdrawal of the play (I think Auntie should look to her own laurels in the area of news coverage . . .) It's a sense of direction that the writing lacks, more than balance. For a slice-of-life or an adventure story, its plot is too busy (a power-struggle between a newcomer and the established mafia, a bereavement, a gang-bang, a riot and two suicides). For a much-needed appraisal of our penal system, it narrows the focus too much, giving only a minimal impression of the boys' home environment. As an analysis of borstal it is not wholly successful because it never shows how a screw learns to be a brute, to be one of the men.

Being "one of the men" is essential if you're not conformist or street-smart enough to survive on the right side of the bars. Borstal is divided not into screws and inmates but into bullies and victims. A

screw looks on with a triumphant smirk while a homosexual boy is gang-banged. Most interesting of all, and it was frustrating not to know what became of him, is the character of the highly articulate Archer. He acts fey to deter the bullies and disrupt the system, doggedly works barefoot in the snow because, he says, his principles forbid him to wear leather. He smiles sweetly as he argues rings round his captors—knowing full well that they are out to break his spirit, and that it is more than likely that they will succeed.

VERA LUSTIG

LETTERS

DOGMATIC ATHEISM

Geoffrey Webster's rehash of the old canard that "atheism . . . is a dogmatic creed" has no basis. The Everyman English Dictionary gives the following definitions:

Atheism: disbelief in the existence of God.
Dogma: article of faith, tenet; body of principles or belief . . .
Dogmatism: of dogma; asserting positively, overbearing.

It is quite clear from these definitions that atheism, as such, cannot be dogmatic (even if some individual atheists may be "overbearing"!) since "dogma" refers to a positive, to a belief in something. Atheism, on the other hand, is a negative, a disbelief in the validity of theism. Since one can only be "dogmatic" about "positive assertions", atheism is not a dogma, but a repudiation of a dogma.

As for his accusation of "parasitism" one can grant that there would be no atheism without the existence of theism, just as there would be no medicine without the existence of sickness. On the same grounds, however, there would be no chance for Webster to attack atheists without the existence of atheism. If the existence of theism makes atheism "parasitic", then equally the existence of atheism makes Webster's criticism "parasitic". If we are all parasitic upon each other, I do not see what is so special about his parasitism that it deserves any consideration.

Geoffrey Webster asks if atheists would find the proposition that God and matter are "co-eternal" so easy to defeat. Let him first prove the existence of this "God" and we shall see. Until then I can see no advantage in replacing the nonsense of Christianity with the nonsense of Hinduism—of which the Hare Krishna doctrine is a prime example.

S. E. PARKER

POSITIVE HUMANISM

Is humanism negative or positive? In his "Jottings" column in the October "Freethinker", William McIlroy indicates that for him humanism is negative. By lamenting that I have fallen among positive humanists, and hoping my "aberration" is temporary, he puts his position beyond doubt. He adds the charge that some humanists adopt the "positive" label as an excuse to avoid the hard slog of challenging Christianity's privileged position. Such words from so experienced a campaigner deserve respect. But Mr McIlroy misses the point.

The point is that there could be no more powerful weapon in the anti-Christian armament than pastoral humanism's replacement factor. People cling to religion because it satisfies their emotional needs. They will renounce it only if it is replaced by an alternative that also satisfies their emotional needs. That is what

pastoral humanism is about.

Mr McIlroy condemns pastoral humanism as "grandiose". If it is grandiose then every religious sect attracting followers sufficiently committed to pay for the upkeep of a local chapel and minister is grandiose. If humanism cannot match such efforts it deserves to fail—and it will fail.

But I take heart, because while denouncing pastoral humanism, Mr McIlroy's piece (when the rhetoric is disentangled) is seen to advocate many elements of it. He says that local humanist groups should do the following:

1. Establish an active and visible presence by—
 - (a) sending reports to local press and radio,
 - (b) issuing statements on local affairs,
 - (c) encouraging members to make their views known to MPs and councillors.,
 - (d) promoting sales of the movement's literature, and
 - (e) ensuring humanist works are in the local library.
2. Accelerate the move to non-religious weddings by suggesting improvements in register office facilities.
3. Expand the network of funeral officiators, and provide undertakers with their names.
4. Inspect plans for new crematorium buildings and ensure their suitability for secular services.
5. Arrange seminars to consider what practical steps can be taken to disseminate humanist views through the media.
6. Support the humanist press, and organise fund-raising functions for it.

I am delighted that my article on pastoral humanism should have prompted these valuable suggestions from so seasoned a campaigner. Can it be that William McIlroy is a positive humanist without knowing it?

FRANCIS BENNION

RATING RATTIGAN

Does James Macdonald ("The Freethinker", October 1979) really class Terence Rattigan as "Britain's top playwright during the first half of this century"? He was a popular and successful West End dramatist who occasionally suggested something a little better (he could also plunge the depths as in his virulent and historically inaccurate late play featuring a drunken Emma Hamilton dragging Nelson into disrepute.)

But may one point out that during this period Bernard Shaw produced most of his major plays, and there was a poetic revival led successfully by T. S. Eliot and Christopher Fry even in the West End.

AUDREY WILLIAMSON

An exhibition of sculpture, organised by Amnesty International, has been on show at Bristol Cathedral. A sculpture of a nude man wrapped in barbed wire has been put in a pair of pants to avoid embarrassing children.

(Women Priests)

the spirit of counsel . . ." A less harsh, but limiting, approach has been the exhortation of women's role of motherhood.

The issue of women's position in society in an age when she can control her own fertility, contribute much more to society, and participate in fulfilling relationships between equals, is bound to invade and entangle the churches. They are, as ever, in the cleft stick between changing with the times and elaborating a theology which explains why an already elaborate theology does not mean what it has meant.

The ex-Vicar of Bathford (who lost his job because of his parishioners' uncharitable attitude towards a sincere relationship he had with a local widow) has joined the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs (ASTMS), who are taking up his case to obtain dole money. Will the ASTMS also take up the matter of equality of opportunity in his profession?

The stereotypes of masculine and feminine roles are being questioned today. We can no longer assume, in the words of Deaconess Willetts—"to my son a tin hat and a rifle, to my a daughter a tea-pot and a pair of knitting needles". (Though a simple reversal of that by prominent women politicians, such as Mrs Thatcher constantly vaunting her penchant for tin hats in public, may not be any happier a situation.)

Mary Hunt, one of a number of American women battering at the door of the Roman Catholic priesthood, has said that in a church with women "we change the power model from pyramid to pinwheel". Reinforcement of a patriarchal, hierarchical structure is one of Christianity's worst contributions to civilisation: that women are stirring and yearning for a different model is admirable and exciting. A church floundering for a role in the modern world must inevitably be involved in the forceful shift towards equality for women. Will the move for women priests further shake the authority and power of the Christian religion as it divides clergy and undercuts tradition, or will the priestesses eventually become another wing in the oppressive ranks of religion?

(Jottings)

*Faith of our fathers, Mary's prayers
Shall win our country back to the . . .*

and it is for this end that I am bound to watch and pray."

This denunciation of the persecuting spirit of Protestantism is rather rich coming as it does from someone whose name was synonymous with venomous anti-Catholic bigotry. In an article on school religion entitled "Teachers' Right to Contract Out" (*The Freethinker*, 6 March 1964) Micklewright declared that the situation called for ". . . militant activity generally against the Papists and other religionists who seek to undermine the democratic liberties of English citizens. For those who wish to live under clericalist domination it is not uncharitable to remark, in view of the origins of most Papist teachers, that there is always a boat back from Holyhead."

Even the 1829 Catholic Emancipation Act was too great a concession to Rome for his liking. In "I Indict the Papacy" (*The Freethinker*, 22 October 1965) he wrote: "Wake up, John Bull, your freedom is at stake . . . The country is flooded with priests, monks and nuns . . . John Bull made a bad mistake when, in 1829, he passed the Catholic Emancipation

Act. He was giving an official recognition to a foreign pontiff not invariably friendly to the government of this country".

In the same article Micklewright dealt with the question of mixed marriages, arguing that it should be a criminal offence for a Catholic to claim that there is anything wrong with a marriage recognised by English law. "It is the Common Law of England", he thundered, "the Royal Law, not the bastard Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church which controls the English scene." There was no nonsense then about "adopting a valid attitude towards Catholic authority."

On 24 August the fair damsel in distress situation was reversed when a lady rushed to Micklewright's support with a letter which concluded: "To our shame, too many Catholics either do not know, or forget . . . that the faith you and I possess was kept alive here by prayer, struggle, sacrifice, constant missionary activity, immigration and the uncosted blood of the martyrs." It was signed by Dr G. Hawtin, another name from the past.

Gillian Hawtin will be remembered both as Micklewright's companion and as an equally vitriolic opponent of the Roman Catholic Church. Her anti-Catholic articles carried such titles as "Education for Death" and "The Awful Truth About Convents." In the latter she described nuns as being "the victims and agents of a mind-enslaving system, which leaves Communism in the shade, which consumes the whole being." As for convents as educational establishments: "It is quite vital that such schools be seen in the eyes of the world to offer a high level in the secular field. Poison chocolates should have a picture on the box and a piece of satin ribbon."

During the 1960s Amphlett Micklewright and Gillian Hawtin were familiar figures at meetings in London. He was a brilliant speaker who could transform the dullest debate into a sparkling affair. Miss Hawtin was of a different mould. She knitted incessantly at meetings (in moments of mad irrationality just before closing time we would speculate if she had been a *tricoteuse* at the guillotine in a previous incarnation) and her contribution to the proceedings usually consisted of the irritating click of needles, contemptuous sniffs when something was said that displeased her and mutterings of approval when the Great Man heaped fire and brimstone on Catholic heads. Now she writes in the *Catholic Herald* about "centrality of Catholic truth" and Micklewright castigates those who will not take "the path of individual submission" to Rome.

Oddly enough no one who knew Hawtin and Micklewright in their Catholic-bashing days has expressed great astonishment that they are apparently now nestling in the bosom of Holy Mother Church. Indeed one of Micklewright's former colleagues is of the opinion that he is perfectly capable of performing yet another somersault. But in which

direction will the ex-Anglican, ex-Unitarian, ex-secularist jump next time? Is it possible that we shall yet see a shaven-headed, saffron-robed Amphlett Micklewright waddling around the West End of London—with Gillian Hawtin in tow—thumping a drum and chanting *Hare Krishna*?

(Homosexuality Condemned)

To Christians who find themselves in the sad conflict of choosing between happily enjoying their homosexual orientation and striving to comprehend the confused Christian attitude towards them, the Gay Humanist Group suggests that they give serious consideration to abandoning Christianity and choosing a more rational, more enjoyable, more responsible, and less confused outlook.

The working party report says in its conclusion: "We are still emerging, half dazzled, from a long period of darkness in which the whole subject was regarded as shameful and unmentionable." They refer to society as a whole, but they unintentionally describe their own efforts with great accuracy. They have struggled through a foggy tunnel only to emerge into a twilight world of fuzzy good intentions and unconscious prejudices.

(The Environment)

the world and its various life forms, we are a part of the natural world. Dreams of man standing over against nature, which he could conquer and use at his pleasure, are now seen to be chimerical. We must achieve an economy which can be sustained indefinitely without degrading the natural world. We must give up grandiose schemes for managing nature and learn to manage our lives and our society within nature. Our lives can be happy and productive and our society just and supportive of human growth while we live in harmony with nature. The alternative to accepting our role within nature looks bleak and uninviting. Human survival itself may be at stake. Certainly the welfare of human beings is at issue.

As humanists we must be concerned with making our peace with the natural world. We are in the world and of the world, and matters involving our

success or failure in relating to the environment are matters of urgent concern for humanists. We must not let the absence of specific deadlines cause us to ignore urgent concerns which must continue to be at the heart of humanist concern in each generation.

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. Meetings on the second Thursday of the month, 8 pm. 8a Grand Parade, Castle-reagh. Secretary: Wendy Wheeler, 30 Cloyne Crescent, Monkstown, Co. Antrim. Telephone: Whiteabbey 66752.

Berkshire Humanists. Mr Bullamore: "Psychical Phenomena." Friday, 9 November, 8 pm. Friends' Meeting House, Church Street, Reading.

Leicester Secular Society. "Woody": "Parallel culture as a social strategy." Sunday, 11 November. Charlie MacDonald: "Libertarian ideas in a corporate era." Sunday, 18 November. 6.30 pm. Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester.

London Secular Group (outdoor meetings). Thursdays, 12.30 pm. at Tower Hill; Sundays, 2-5 pm. at Marble Arch. ("The Freethinker" and other literature on sale.)

Merseyside Humanist Group. David Ward: "A Scientist Looks at the Paranormal." Monday, 19 November, 7.45 pm. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead.

Tyneside Humanist Society. 14 November: "Religion and Humanism"; 21 November: "Diseases from Space"; 28 November: "A Humanist Looks at St Paul". All 7.30 pm. Friends' Meeting House, 1 Archbold Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne 2.

Worthing Humanist Group. Erik Millstone: "Reason, Science and Society". Sunday, 25 November, 5.30 pm. Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade, Worthing.

Humanist Holidays. Christmas trip to Malta fully booked. Easter 1980: Isle of Wight. Details from Mrs Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12 0NA. Telephone: 01-673 6234.

South Place Ethical Society. Sunday Morning Meetings, 11 am. 11 November, Dr L. L. Ware: English and Continental Cultures Contrasted. 18 November, Ian MacKillop: F. R. Leavis, Culture and Ethics. 25 November, Shuan de Warren: Expanding Consciousness. 2 December, Lord Brockway: Disarmament is Now Realistic. Sunday Forum, 2.30 pm. 11 November: Victims of Psychiatry in the Soviet Union.

THE FREETHINKER

Editor: JIM HERRICK

702 HOLLOWAY ROAD
LONDON N19 3NL
TELEPHONE: 01-272 1266

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