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CATHOLIC MOVE TO MUZZLE THINKERS IN "CLOAK AND DAGGER ACTION"

A leading Catholic theologian has been banned from teaching and stripped of his title of "Catholic Theologian" by Catholic authorities. Hans Küng has defied the ban and accused the Roman Catholic Church of starting an Inquisition case in the twentieth century. Professor Küng is a Swiss-born priest who has taught theology for many years in Germany at the University of Tübingen. Meanwhile, proceedings have been instituted against another theologian, Professor Edward Schillebeeckx, in what has been widely described as a major heresy trial. Schillebeeckx, a Belgian theologian, has been summoned to answer questions, but the outcome of his interrogation may not be known for some time.

Hans Küng has reacted strongly to the declaration by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He said: "I was completely surprised by this cloak and dagger action. I find it completely scandalous that a church which is based on Jesus Christ and which recently has started to defend human rights stages Inquisition cases in the twentieth century. The main aim was to gag an unloved and uncomfortable critic of the church."

He subsequently defied the ban and lectured for 90 minutes to an overflowing audience of 2,000 at Tübingen University. (As always the attempt to censor ideas increases the interest in them.) He has been offered another post at Tübingen University and nine of the 11 professors at the theological faculty have issued a statement supporting him: "We are shocked by this strong move by the Congregation and by the entire action."

The declaration condemning Küng opens by insisting that the Church had "received from God the mandate to keep and to safeguard the deposit of the faith. . . ." The writings of Professor Küng are said to be "a cause of disturbance in the minds of the faithful." Apparently Küng has already been warned

and counselled not to carry on his work without the "authentic *magisterium* of the Church."

The two areas of Küng's teaching which cause particular concern are the dogma of infallibility and the divinity of Christ. In his book *Infallibility: An Enquiry* he argued that the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church should always be handled with some caution, since words could not always express the exact truth. Conjuring up a new word to cover the question of infallibility, Küng himself said the church spoke with "indefectability"—which means that it cannot stray from the main path of truth.

Only two papal pronouncements—on the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption—are regarded by the church as carrying the authority of infallibility. Küng is especially critical of what he calls "creeping infallibility," by which papal pronouncements are regarded as almost infallible. He has been especially worried by papal statements about birth control.

Worldwide Amazement

There has been widespread reaction of concern and surprise at Küng's treatment. Anglicans have a high opinion of Küng's writing and leading Anglicans have regretted the action of the Roman Catholic Church. The subjects over which Küng has quarrelled with the authorities are ones which are stumbling blocks in talks about church unity between the Church of England and the Catholic Church.

There has also been worldwide amazement at the heresy trial of Edward Schillebeeckx. His reaction has been much less defiant than Küng and he is co-operating in his questioning. He appears to be undergoing the full procedural steps of a modern inquisition. He is a Dominican monk who teaches the

(continued over)

ology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen in Holland.

The 700-page book which has got him into trouble is *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*. It was first published in Dutch but has been translated into many languages including English.

Behind a lengthy examination of the New Testament tradition lies a suggestion that the virgin birth was a story adapted after the event to express the truth of the imagery of the prophecies of Isaiah. Schillebeeckx's book also questions the physical resurrection and suggests it should be interpreted as an experience of grace and forgiveness by Jesus's disciples rather than taken literally.

The procedure by which Schillebeeckx may yet be muzzled reads like a medieval tale. The Vatican's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Holy Faith decided that there is a case of heresy to answer and without telling the suspect they chose two scholars to prosecute and one to defend. When the reports were not satisfactory, the accused was required to answer written questions—the first moment he realised that he was on trial. He then appeared before a three-day hearing. The affair now passes to the Pope for a final decision; it may be some months before it is known whether he will be stripped of his teaching rights, like Küng.

It is open to theologians who don't like the authoritarian actions of the Catholic Church to leave—a solution which freethinkers would be delighted to see. But the whole affair is an example of the way the Catholic Church, despite apparent modernisation, is shaken rigid by unorthodoxy and still does not hesitate to wield the knife to cut out offending thinkers. There can be no surprise that they should wish to suppress ideas which would logically lead to a total rejection of Christianity.

At a time when Pope John Paul II has made many pronouncements about human rights, it is bizarre to see him moving against freedom of thought and speech. How far proceedings, which have been in motion for several years, have been speeded up by him is not known.

Limited Freedom

In Washington he said: "It behoves the theologian to be free, but with the freedom that is openness to the truth and the light that comes from faith and from fidelity to the Church." In other words, freedom as long as you say the right things.

In his introduction to *On Compromise* (one of the famous Thinker's Library) John Viscount Morley said: "The right of thinking freely and acting independently, of using our minds without excessive awe of authority, and shaping our lives without unquestioning obedience to custom, is now a finally accepted principle in some sense or other with every school of thought that has the smallest chance of commanding a future." It is adherence to this outlook which will

always make secularists oppose bodies such as the Catholic Church, which use repressive measures to make people believe their weird ideas.

Freedom is never "a finally accepted principle" and must be defended generation after generation. We cannot abandon the defence this generation, where at a serious level (such as Küng and Schillebeeckx) thought is suppressed, and at a more trivial (but symptomatic) level school text books are thrown into the incinerator by a headmaster for being too risqué, as happened recently in England.

Recently, when a group of cardinals and scientists gathered to celebrate the centenary of Einstein's birth, the Pope defended Galileo, who was "made to suffer too much—and we cannot hide it—by the men and organisation of the Church." The Vatican forced Galileo to recant after threat of torture. He is now rehabilitated. Which of its current victims will the Catholic Church rehabilitate in 300 years time?

An exhibition of photography in Northern Ireland included a miniature picture of a naked lady. It was one of ten postcard-sized pictures under the title "Cures for a Sore Head". But it gave local chairman of the District Council, Mr McCrea, a terrible sore head. He is also known as the Rev William McCrea, a gospel singing recording star and minister of the Free Presbyterian Church. He was so incensed by the little bare lady that he fetched sellotape and brown paper to cover her up.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

ANNUAL DINNER

Guest Speaker:

JAMES CAMERON

THE GUNNER (Near Cannon St. Station)

SATURDAY 29 MARCH 1980, 6.30 pm

Further details from National Secular Society,
702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

Six babies born in Londonderry during the Pope's visit to Ireland were named John Paul. Reports indicate a rash of John Paul, Sean Paul, Paul and John as recent choice of Christian names. Parents, being less sexist than the Vatican, are also using Paula, Seanna and Joanna.

The chairman of the Society for the Defence of Literature and the Arts was described as Ben Brewster in the December issue of "The Free-thinker". This should have read Ben Whitaker. Apologies.

The Poverty of Mortalism

DAVID BERMAN

David Berman, who lectures in philosophy at Dublin University, has coined the phrase "mortalism" to describe a belief that denies the existence of an afterlife. He looks at the origins of statements denying immortality and concludes that belief in immortality encourages faith in the scriptures rather than the reverse.

The existence of God and personal immortality are, it is generally agreed, the two main doctrinal pillars upon which Christianity rests. In an article published last year in *Question 11* I noted that the first denial of the existence of God in Britain was printed in 1782, in the *Answer to Dr Priestley's Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*. I do not think this is generally known, nor that the first open rejection of personal immortality appeared, as far as I am aware, even later than 1782. For in the Prefatory Address to this first work of British atheism, we read: "For my part I firmly wish for such a future state, and although I cannot firmly believe it, I am resolved to live as if such a state were to ensue." (p.xxxii).

Neither in this tract, nor in British freethinking works published earlier, or some time after, is there an affirmation of unconditional mortalism—such as one finds in Baron D'Holbach's *System of nature* (Amsterdam 1770), pt. 1, chap. 13. Holbach, the Samson of atheism, is the first European to make an open assault on both pillars of Christianity. Hume, Paine and Shelley claimed to believe in immortality; although it is highly doubtful whether Hume was sincere in his claims. What seems clear is that in Britain avowed atheism preceded avowed mortalism.

The bare chronological fact is of interest. For one thing it lends support to Schopenhauer's hypothesis that it is not God, but immortality, that is most important to the religious mind. In his essay "On man's need for metaphysics", Schopenhauer states:

"... the interest inspired by religious systems has its strongest and essential point absolutely in the dogma of some future existence after death... if we could guarantee their dogma of immortality to them in some other way, the lively ardour for their gods would at once cool..."

Recognizing the relative newness of mortalism, as well as of atheism, may also help to dispel a vague but pervading opinion: that freethinkers have always been openly hacking away at the twin pillars of Christian belief. This opinion has, no doubt, been a source of consolation to some believers: an edifice which has withstood attack for so long—it is felt—is surely proof against present and future attacks.

But what is at the basis of this unwarranted consolation? Why is it imagined that mortalism has a

long history in the 17th and 18th centuries? One answer is that in the writings of 18th century theologians like Bishop Berkeley there are frequent but undocumented references to "gloomy mortals" and "ignorant creatures" who deny immortality. Now this is not to say that these charges are entirely lacking in substance. For there were 17th and 18th century writers who argued that the soul was neither immaterial nor naturally immortal; but none of them denied supernatural immortality, that is, the Scriptural promise of resurrection and eternal existence. Hence these men (who were often also materialists) were not unconditional mortalists, but conditional immortalists. Of course, some of them—like Anthony Collins and Hume—were with good reason suspected of being covert mortalists. Yet there were other proponents of conditional immortality whose sincerity was never seriously questioned—notably Henry Dodwell, the Non-juror.

It was, however, generally felt by the theological watchmen of the 18th century that those who denied the immateriality and natural immortality of the soul, whether well-meaning, like Dodwell, or ill-meaning, like Collins, threatened the pillar of immortality. In my view these theological watchmen were probably right. But they were wrong in carelessly inferring from the apparent damage done to the pillar that the vandalism has been carried out openly by unconditional mortalists.

The case of Dodwell is instructive. In 1706 he published a book with the informative title: *An Epistolary Discourse, proving, from the Scriptures and the First Fathers, that the Soul is a Principle Naturally Mortal; but Immortalized actually by the Pleasure of God, to Punishment; or to Reward, by its Union with the Divine Baptismal Spirit. Wherein is proved, that none have the Power of Giving this Divine Immortalizing Spirit, since the Apostles, but only the Bishops*. Now one of the implications of Dodwell's doctrine was that those born before Christ, or in countries where the Gospel had not been preached, were excluded from immortality, for better or worse. Dodwell also suggested—and here I somedetected his ulterior motive—that only those baptised by Non-juring bishops were guaranteed immortality. Dodwell was taken severely to task by his many opponents: more than thirty pamphlets were issued pro and con.

But perhaps the most revealing criticism is to be found in a private letter to him dated 17 August 1709 from his friend and countryman, William King, Archbishop of Dublin:

"... I foresaw the mischief that would follow if people knew that a person of your learning [held]

(continued on page 14)

A Freedom of Religion Bill to counter excessive pressure by evangelists caused great controversy in India in 1979. It was vigorously opposed by the Catholic Church and in this article, A. B. Shah, the President of the Indian Secular Society, questions the Catholic position. The article was first published in the Indian cultural magazine "New Quest" in the issue of May-June 1979; since then the Bill has been dropped because of the fall of the government and not until the result of the January election will it emerge whether another similar Bill will be proposed.

The Catholic community in India has been in a state of ferment during the past few months over Mr Om Prakash Tyagi's Freedom of Religion Bill. The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 21 November 1978 and seeks "to provide for prohibition of conversion from one religion to another by the use of force or inducement or fraudulent means and for matters incidental thereto." On a first reading of the provisions of the Bill one would think that no citizen would see anything objectionable in them. However, if one were to leaf through the pages of the *Examiner*, the weekly owned by Archbishop Simon Pimenta of Bombay one would think that Mr Tyagi's Bill, if passed into law, would let loose on the Christians in India the kind of persecution and tyranny which characterise the history of the Roman Church. The Catholic Church in India has mounted a well-organised offensive against the Bill, presented memoranda to the Union Government, held public meetings and taken out processions in its bid to ensure that its right to swell the ranks of the believers by the use of "force or inducement or fraudulent means" is not curbed in any way.

The Catholic propaganda against the Bill has succeeded in fooling a large number of well-meaning liberals, including Socialists like Mr George Fernandes, whom the Church can only regard as a renegade worse than a pagan and consign to hell. It is therefore necessary to examine the Bill in the light of the provisions of the Constitution, the values it seeks to embody and foster and—we hope the Church will forgive us for quoting the Scripture—the teaching of Jesus Christ in whose name the missionary enterprise claims extra-constitutional and even extra-terrestrial rights.

The main provisions of Mr Tyagi's Bill are reproduced below:

2. In this Act unless the context otherwise requires,

(a) "conversion" means renouncing one religion and adopting another;

(b) "force" shall include a show of force or a

threat of injury of any kind including threat of divine displeasure or social excommunication;

(c) "fraud" shall include misrepresentation or any other fraudulent contrivances;

(d) "inducement" shall include the offer of any gift or gratification either in cash or in kind and shall also include the grant of any benefit, either pecuniary or otherwise; . . .

3. No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to another by the use of force or by inducement or by deceit or by any fraudulent means, nor shall any person abet any such conversion.

4. Any person contravening the provisions contained in section 3 shall, without prejudice to any civil liability be punishable with imprisonment of either description which may extend to one year or with fine which may extend to three thousand rupees, or with both;

Provided that in case the offence is committed in respect of a minor [a person under eighteen years of age], a woman or a person belonging to the Scheduled Caste[s] or Scheduled Tribe[s], the punishment shall be imprisonment to the extent of two years and a fine up to five thousand rupees.

5. Any offence under this Act shall be cognisable and shall not be investigated by an officer below the rank of an Inspector of Police.

Catholic Fears

The Catholic Church feels that the Bill, if passed, "will make even genuine conversions illegal." It concedes that the aims and objectives of the Bill ". . . are above board" but adds that the connotation given to the words "force," "fraud" and "inducement" makes the Bill "draconian in its ambit" and "renders meaningless the fundamental right to profess and propagate the religion of one's choice" (*The Examiner*, 20 January 1979).

For one not well-versed in theological casuistry, it is difficult to see the point of this argument. For while Art. 25 of the Constitution guarantees "the freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion," this right is "subject to public order and morality." We presume that the Catholic Church in India—the Protestants and the Muslims have not created any hullabaloo over the Bill—does not regard the use of force, fraud or inducement as consistent with morality and public order.

Art. 25 has, besides, to be read "subject to the other provisions" of Part III of the Constitution. Among the rights listed in this Part is that of equality before the law. This would imply that if the Catholic Church is to have the right to convert others (particularly members of the Scheduled Castes and

Scheduled Tribes) by means of which even Jesus Christ would have disapproved, a similar right would have to be conceded to Hindu revivalist organisations as well as Muslim groups. The Catholics perhaps do not regard this as a development to worry about in the near future because it is the Christian missions alone that receive substantial material aid from abroad. The RSS and the Jana Sangh do not receive such aid and the Muslim organizations are too unsophisticated to adopt the methods of the Christian Church. But the Catholics would be well advised not to rule out a violent reaction from the Hindus, with or without the instigation of the RSS, once they begin to feel that they are being taken for granted by the politicians who equate secularism with the appeasement of the minorities. Reason would then be of no avail, and the soft-headed liberals in the so-called secular and pro-minority parties would be unable to help the Christians beyond issuing press statements. We suggest that the Catholics learn from the experience of the Muslims before it is too late, for we are as averse as they themselves are to the idea of a Hindu *Rashtra* (Nation)—though our reasons are different from theirs.

Mother Teresa

Even if the danger of a Hindu backlash were not real, we would oppose the Church's demand for unrestricted freedom to carry out mass conversions. Catholic Christianity is essentially opposed to the ideal of a liberal secular society. It is opposed to equal rights for women, to family planning by what it describes as artificial means, and to divorce even when a marriage has irretrievably broken down. It is therefore not surprising that in her open letter to Prime Minister Morarji Desai (*The Examiner*, 31 March 1979), Mother Teresa berates the Government of India for having legalised abortion and adds in sanctimonious tones: "You do not know what abortion has done and is doing to our people. There is so much immorality, so many broken homes, so much mental disturbance because of the murder (*sic*) of the innocent unborn (*sic*) child, in the conscience of the mother." We admire Mother Teresa for her social work, but we would advise her to talk to some non-Catholic doctors to find out what tremendous good the legalisation of abortion has done to women not as spiritually inclined as she herself is. Do these women, Christian as well as pagan, have a right to order their lives as they wish so long as they do not encroach on the similar right of others? Mother Teresa's answer, like that of the Catholic Church, to this and similar questions is a firm and absolute "No," and the Government and people of this country are expected, on pain of eternal damnation, to say "Yes" to it. Humility could not be more arrogant.

The Catholic Church, in short, is hostile to the values—liberty of the individual, equality of the

sexes, and secularism—enunciated in the Preamble and embodied in Part III of the Constitution of India.

As to the theological aspect of conversion, we challenge the Catholic Church to produce a single statement from the synoptic gospels which enjoins it as a duty on those who follow Jesus Christ. We leave aside the question of the historicity of Jesus and the authenticity of the gospels—modern Biblical research supports neither of these claims. But even granting these claims for the sake of arguments, "Jesus," as Gandhi put it more than forty years ago, "preached not a religion but a new way of life" (*Harijan*, 12 June 1937). Gandhi also said (*Harijan*, 30 January 1937) that the social work of the Christian missions "is undertaken not for its own sake but as an aid to the salvation of those who receive social service." But Gandhi, after all, was a pagan and need not therefore be taken seriously by the Catholic Church except when his pronouncements can serve its own interests. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, however, was a believing Christian who, as Health Minister in Jawaharlal Nehru's government, opposed family planning by "artificial means." And yet this is what she said in a letter to Gandhi (*Harijan*, 30 January 1937): "To me, therefore, conversion or the desire to impel another person to change his faith has always savoured of an arrogance tantamount to a violent attitude of mind, which must surely be against that very doctrine of love for which I believe that Christ lived and died." In modern jargon, what Gandhi and the Rajkumari thought of conversion may be expressed by saying that any attempt at converting others—especially the poor, ignorant and superstitious members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes—is an assault on human dignity.

This for us is a crucial point, and distinguishes the humanist position from that of the Hindu chauvinists. While we do not believe that any religion can provide guidance to contemporary man, we do not see any harm in conversion, even *en masse*, to Buddhism.¹ It is the only religion which respects reason, is essentially ethical in its import, boasts of no divine mandate, and claims no supra-human authority to prescribe how man should solve the problems of secular life. This cannot be said of Hinduism, Islam or Christianity. Whatever liberating role they might have played in the early phases of their history, for centuries past they have been religions of bondage, strife and social disintegration. Even individual conversion to any of them, except when strictly voluntary and based on a comparative study of competing creeds, should be prohibited by law.

¹Shah's equation of humanism and Buddhism, which may surprise some European readers, is justified more by the theoretical non-deistic position of Buddhism than by its practice, which often involves much superstition. (Ed.)

VATICAN ROUNDABOUT

PAPAL SUPERTOURS

Pope John Paul II gained maximum publicity from his superstar world tours. He tripped off to Ireland to pop in to Knock, a shrine where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared 100 years ago, but where a magic lantern may have been put to good effect. He pronounced that Peace is a Good Thing—and you can't get more uncontroversial than that. But the IRA don't seem to have listened, pre-Christmas violence was as bad as ever, and the auspices for a meeting to discuss power-sharing in Northern Ireland are not good.

The cost of the papal visit to Ireland was well over its budget and extra collections and sales of bric-a-brac which had been in the vicinity of the Pope were organised to recoup the shortfall.

His visit to the United States of America was on an equally grandiose scale. Journalists and television commentators had a field day—reaching for their big occasion phrase books for gems like “Papal Visit Touches All With Love.” The Pope is excellent at singing, walking vigorously through rain and playing up to children.

He also used the occasion to launch an attack on liberal attitudes to abortion and sexual relations. He harped on and on with words such as “We see so many disturbing tendencies and so much laxity regarding the Christian view on sexuality” and phrases like “conjugal morality” and “the obligation of celibacy.” Many women were infuriated by his insistence that a women's special role was motherhood. Thirty-five nuns stood throughout one of the Pope's addresses in protest at his sexist views.

American Atheists took legal action to enforce the US constitutional separation of church and state, which they claimed had been violated by state expenditure on arrangements for the papal visit. In Philadelphia, Roman Catholics were ordered to pay \$204,569 for the erection of a platform on which the Pope celebrated mass. The district judge ruled that use of public funds was unconstitutional, after a case brought by the American Civil Liberties Union.

Private enterprise, with a vigour which would have done credit to the most devoted Thatcherite, got in on the act. A record of the Pope singing in Polish, promoted by The Pet Rock, quickly reached “gold status” with 500,000 sales and surprised DJs by reaching the charts.

Amid far less public mummery and trumpet-tongued journalism, the Pope went to Turkey at the end of the year. He met leaders of the Eastern Orthodox Church and appealed for Christian unity—after 900 years division over the date of Christmas and other earth-shattering matters. He called for co-operation between Muslims and Christians (about what, for goodness sake?) and appealed to the Aya-

tollah Khomeini to release the American hostages—with no effect.

PAPAL POVERTY

The Vatican has discussed what it claims to be a declining financial situation. Accounts indicate that the Vatican ran up a deficit of £10 million in 1979. Pope John Paul II told a meeting of cardinals that reports of the Vatican's wealth were a “fable” and a “myth.” Freethinkers will think those words are better reserved for the resurrection and virgin birth than the Vatican billions.

Inflation may have created problems with cash flow, but the Catholic Church's assets are priceless, and investments in international stock markets and property are enormous. The expense of the Vatican radio, which broadcasts in 26 languages and the cost of keeping diplomatic posts abroad are no doubt increasing all the time. But the ramifications of Vatican finance and worldwide assets (let alone art treasures) will need much more thorough presentation than the papacy is ever likely to authorise, before unbelievers will shed a tear for papal poverty.

PASTORAL NONSENSE

The Catholic Social Welfare Commission in England has produced a document about “Pastoral Care of Homosexual People.” Behind the face of sympathetic concern for individuals whose condition “may not be a matter of choice,” there lies a bigoted condemnation of anything outside the norm of marriage. The Church's traditional narrow-minded attitude to homosexual acts is stressed: “Scripture and the ongoing tradition of Christianity make it quite clear that these are immoral.”

The paper makes a distinction between “irresponsible,” indiscriminate activity and “the permanent association between homosexual persons.” But since all homosexual acts are seen as intrinsically disordered the distinction will not be of much interest to homosexuals, who will be insulted by the exhortation to seek guidance and re-adjustment.

CONCILIAR GOVERNMENT

Among the many paradoxes of the modern-reactionary Pope is his commitment to a conciliar system. For the first time in 400 years the Pope ordered all his Cardinals to Rome for a meeting last October. So unusual was this event that Vatican gossip was full of expectations of some sensational announcement by the Pope (a tour to the moon?) The meeting proved an occasion for discussion and exchange of views, with the financial difficulties of the Holy

Sayings of the Seventies

The following quotations are all taken from "The Freethinker" and represent some of the memorable statements made in this journal throughout the decade.

We must have some moral attributes.—Baroness Wootton. 1970.

The tragedy of the people of Palestine is that their country was "given" by a foreign power to another people for the creation of a new state.—Bertrand Russell. 1970.

Almost anything may now be said about Jesus—he may even be called a homosexual—and the Church will not greatly mind so long as you admit he existed.—John Allegro. 1971.

It is time the Ulster Protestants were told in unmistakable terms that the Britain with which they desire union died with Queen Victoria.—William McIlroy. 1971.

Pope Paul's *Humanae Vitae*, with its condemnation of contraception, is, ecologically speaking, the most disastrous Christian utterance of the century.—Bishop Montefiore. 1972.

As far as letting rooms is concerned we make no discrimination against anyone.—Peter Cadogan, speaking of Conway Hall. 1972.

The urge to write is a widely distributed affliction.—Christopher Morey. 1974.

The Freethinker will not be muzzled.—William McIlroy, speaking of a libel case brought against *The Freethinker*. 1975.

It is now quite respectable to be an unbeliever.—Margaret Knight. 1975.

It really is time for the whole humanist movement to put away childish things and grow up.—Nicolas Walter. 1976.

We shall never overcome evil by being kept in ignorance of its existence.—Antony Grey. 1976.

Religion is a positive evil.—Sir Hermann Bondi. 1978.

The nation's moral fibre I have always seen as a kind of potting compost in which luscious weeds of persecution, repression and sanctimoniousness can be nurtured.—Maureen Duffy. 1978.

We must abolish the blasphemy law and not put freedom of speech in jeopardy or allow a small minority to dictate to the whole of society.—Denis Lemon. 1978.

When dogma dies opinion flourishes.—Francis Bennion. 1978.

If there is one thing on which Christians and atheists agree it is that we are now living in a post-Christian society.—Barbara Smoker. 1979.

HE AND SHE

American Roman Catholic bishops are moving to eliminate sexist language from the liturgy. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops are to vote to change the language of the liturgy, so that phrases such as "shed for you and all men" will shed the last word and read "you and all." "Man" would become "Men and women" and "all men" become "all people." The proposal would have to be accepted by the Vatican.

Mother Teresa for Papes?

EDUCATIONAL EMPHASIS

The Pope made a statement calling for religious education to be given priority by the Church. He re-affirmed the need for traditional teaching, but urged the use of new methods in his document *Catechesi Tradendae*. He spoke of the mass media as an important channel for education: "I think immediately of the great possibilities offered by the means of sound communication." (Does he ever think of anything else?) The Catholic schools also "have a grave duty to offer religious training."

This is all traditional Catholic teaching and the document has been in preparation since the rule of Pope Paul IV. However, it was issued with characteristic forcefulness by Pope John Paul II.

BARRIER TO PROGRESS

In 1979 the media latched on to the Pope as a buoyant and colourful personality. But the media is a fickle friend and Pope John Paul II's populist appearances may be deceptive. In what could prove a long reign, he has plenty of time to become one of the outstanding Catholic barriers against progress this century.

An appeal has been launched to raise money to commission a bust of Bertrand Russell and place it in the garden of Red Lion Square. Among signatories to the appeal are Lord Brockway, John Gilmour, Lord Willis, Dora Russell and Baroness Wootton. Contributions to the Bertrand Russell Memorial Appeal, c/o Peter Cadogan, SPES, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

ISLAMIC BRIAN

"Islam needs a Monty Python's *Life of Brian*," said Barbara Smoker in her Presidential address to the National Secular Society. Barbara Smoker was re-elected as President at the Annual General Meeting on 8 December, 1979, held in the library at Conway Hall. In her remarks she attacked the international Islamic revival of 1979 as a menace to humanity.

"Although," she said, "Islam is no worse in its theology or sacred precepts than Christianity, it is taken much more seriously. Even committed Christians today mostly keep their religion for Sundays, whereas Muslims pray five times every day—and this is symptomatic of their religion pervading everyday life. Taking religion too seriously is dangerous. Taken seriously, religion spells tyranny.

"Fortunately for the Western World, the Christian religion (though clinging to its historical privilege) has been modified by the dual influence of external scepticism and internal apathy, until today it is possible for Christianity to be laughed at openly and in the commercial cinema. When the Islamic world has its *Life of Brian*, Muslims will be able to enjoy civil liberty, sex equality, sexual freedom, freedom of speech and a humane system of Law."

APARTHEID CONTROVERSY

The most controversial and heatedly defended motion at the Annual General Meeting was one calling for the disaffiliation of the National Secular Society from the Anti-Apartheid Movement. It was proposed by Mr R. E. Bazin and read in full: "This AGM confirms the fundamental objective of the Society is the combating of religious superstitions by rational argument and that it has consistently exposed the church's history of violence. It therefore deplores affiliation to the Anti-Apartheid Movement, headed by embittered church dignitaries, on the grounds that it is a World Council of Churches' financed, terrorist front organisation similar to those of the I.R.A. in the United States, and moves that the Society disaffiliates forthwith."

Earlier at the meeting Mr Bazin challenged Barry Duke, a member who was about to be elected to the Society's Council of Management, to deny that he was a communist. The President pointed out that no other member was asked to declare any political affiliations. Mr Bazin also expressed the view that the NSS had been taken over by left-wingers and deviated from its original purpose of attacking religion.

In putting forward his motion, Mr Bazin claimed, with some emotion, that he had visited South Africa and was convinced that the South African government was doing its best for black people in the country. Barry Duke, who was born in South Africa,

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said that he was convinced that apartheid was an evil, which had often been justified by the Dutch Reformed Church, and urged the meeting to oppose the motion. The motion was defeated overwhelmingly and an alternative motion to continue affiliation to the Anti-Apartheid Movement was passed.

Another motion which caused controversy was one calling for the Special Patrol Group, "with its political bias and violent techniques," to be disbanded. Some members pointed out that the Society did not wish to undermine law and order at a time when the police had a very difficult job to do. Others pointed out that the political activities of the Special Branch could create disorder and gave the example of Grunwick (an example which appeared to cause amusement to some members at the meeting). The motion was passed.

A motion to set up a political party called the Secular party "with the distinctive and unique fundamental policy of the rigorous secularisation of the British State" was defeated. However, there was much sympathy for the idea, while it was felt it would not be practical at present, and it would be better to try to influence existing political parties.

Other motions passed opposed the Corrie Abortion (Amendment) Bill, called on the Department of Health and Social Security to reveal the annual cost of the chaplaincy service, and opposed the sale of the multi-faith Twyford High School in Ealing to the Church of England. An emergency motion deplored the use of religion as a corrective in the newly created detention centres designed to give offenders a "short, sharp, shock"; but it was pointed out that Christians were more likely than secularists to object to the authoritarian image of Christianity presented in this way.

HOLY TAKE-OVER BID

The opening of the fifteenth century in the Muslim calendar was marked by an astounding invasion and siege of the Grand Mosque at Mecca. Although less widely reported and discussed than the continued imprisonment of American embassy staff as hostages in Tehran, the siege at Mecca is probably a more important event to the Muslim world. Muslims were shattered to learn of the attack on their most sacred shrine, equivalent to an attempt to take over the Vatican by an extreme Christian sect.

The reports from Iran have been regular and clearly demonstrate the fanaticism of the country's religious maniac of a ruler, Ayatollah Khomeini.

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Declarations of refusal to release the hostages, in clear contradiction of all international laws and conventions, have been endlessly re-iterated as part of a propaganda war against the USA for its part in supporting the regime of the fallen Shah. The story is not yet over and at the time of going to press, before Christmas, the hostages have not been released. So far it can only be said that, despite the deeply felt belief that America played a vital role in sustaining the Shah's regime and especially its secret police SAVAK, this regime will surely prove one of the outstanding examples in history of religious fanaticism in politics. Pictures show the student sentries outside the embassy on their knees at prayer.

Reports of the incident at Mecca have been confused and the Saudi Government appeared anxious not to reveal full details. On the first day of the new Muslim century (20 November), Al Qahtani, a student member of an extreme religious group, entered the Great Mosque with 500 to 1,000 supporters and a number of coffins. He interrupted morning prayers and demanded to be proclaimed *al-Mahdi al Muntazar*—the long-awaited Messiah. A popular belief going back to the second century of Islam has thought that a Mahdi, a "rightly guided one," will eventually appear to effect the final triumph of Islam. Part of the tradition has it that the Mahdi would appear at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

When the holy leaders refused to proclaim him the Messiah, guns were taken out of the coffins and the rebels began to occupy the Great Mosque. The authorities did not wish to use force at first, for life is sacred and even lambs are not slaughtered in the Great Mosque. For almost two weeks the Saudi Government attempted to starve out the temple hijackers. Eventually in a violent conclusion, the details of which are unclear, there was a shoot-out and up to 200 have been reported dead.

Speculation about the causes and implications of the holy take-over bid has been diverse. The Saudi royal family have (naturally) denied that there was an element of opposition to the Government in the attack. They have also denied that there was any link with riots in the eastern province of the kingdom which took place at the same time. However, they must be conscious that Iran will not be the only country to feel the impact of radical Islam. Saudi Arabian leaders must feel in an ambiguous position as guardians of Islam's most holy place and as a close friend of America, which has become a symbol of all that is detested about the consumerist Western

civilisation to Muslims.

Prince Muhammed, the son of the late King Feisal, said that those responsible for the attack were mostly young people, who were calling for positive action "exactly like the 1960s in the United States." One report says that the leader of the rebel group demanded that the Government abolish radio and television, ban soccer and prohibit women from engaging in business activities. This would link the incident with Islamic rejection of Western civilization. Another report indicates that the guns, sequestered in coffins, were of Russian origin—a fact which could point to wider political attempts to ferment unrest.

Two key aspects of the Islamic upsurge in the area are the reaction against Western civilisation and the much-sought oil which makes the region a focus for political conflict. There is no doubt that there is a genuine revulsion against the Western life-style with its emphasis on consumerism and its "permissive" standards. This stems partly from the speed of social change which oil-wealth has initiated, and also from the fact that a middle-class elite are often the main beneficiaries of the new influx of wealth and the main proponents of the "immoral" life-style. Social changes which Europe has taken a couple of centuries to assimilate, have been thrust upon the oil countries in one or two decades—which must feel like a forceful invasion.

As the energy-devouring industrialised countries become conscious of the energy shortage, which neither nuclear power nor alternative technology is yet ready to meet, East-West conflict and influence play an important part in the area. Islam provides a potent alternative ideology to marxism or capitalism-consumerism.

The impact of Islam will be felt throughout the world in future years. When religion is entangled with economic and political forces, it is impossible to isolate all the factors. But rampant religious revivals drown any reasonable voices which might be heard in a complex situation.

Freethinker Fund

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BOOKS

THE GENIUS OF SHAW; a symposium edited by Michael Holroyd. Hodder and Stoughton, £9.95.

In the preface to his play, *Misalliance*, which was published in 1914, Shaw wrote that "a churchman who never reads *The Freethinker* very soon has no more real religion than the atheist who never reads *The Church Times*." In other places, he frequently expressed the view, with a tone of approval, that the essence of the English legal system was the fact that court procedure consisted of two advocates putting forward untrue versions of a matter with the judge finally deciding where the truth lay. In other words, Shaw was convinced that, as Blake put it, "without contraries is no progression." A symposium, therefore, might be thought a valuable means of approaching the truth about a diverse, indeed, a "multitudinous personality." Shaw would probably have approved of this idea in general principle, which is not to say that he would be satisfied with the fairness of the treatment accorded to him. Still, as his own M'Comas says to Crampton in *You Never Can Tell*, when the latter asks for fair treatment from his children: "If you're going to make impossible conditions of this kind, we may as well go back home at once."

Some idea of the type of compilation that this is likely to turn out to be may be found in the attitude of the editor who is responsible for the selection and presentation of the pieces of which it is comprised. Michael Holroyd has made a considerable reputation for himself with two large biographies of important figures in the literature and art respectively of this century, Lytton Strachey and Augustus John. From these two books, and the Lytton Strachey biography which has recently been re-issued, it is indisputable that Michael Holroyd is a most diligent and thorough research worker and student and no one can put the books down without a firm knowledge of the essential facts about the subject and some understanding. To qualify "understanding" with the word "some" is not to be unfair to Michael Holroyd because his attitude is not to do a great deal more than put enough evidence before the reader for the latter to reach his own conclusions. In the introduction to *The Genius of Shaw* he says that he has not "tried to impose an artificial unity on the book" but has put forward different aspects of the truth and invited the reader to reconcile them. An uneasy thought remains. It is quite right for the editor not to be engaged in hagiography, as he puts it, but his own attitude to Shaw remains cloudy. When he was invited to undertake the awesome responsibility of writing the "authoritative" biography of Shaw, it came as a surprise to many people to learn that he was certainly not in the front rank of those who had always been admirers of, or even greatly interested

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in, Shaw. This might not necessarily be a bad thing but, in a book containing more than once the criticism that Shaw was seriously lacking in emotional warmth, a little of that in the editor might not have been unwelcome. Boswell's biography of Johnson was not impaired by the great admiration for his subject that he showed in the opening lines and we hope that when the Holroyd biography of Shaw appears, we will not feel that its main purpose is, as it were, to cut Shaw down to size.

Fortunately, several of the authors of the best pieces in this collection resist the temptation. Thus, Hilary Spurling, in writing on the drama criticism, analyses with a sure touch the qualities that entitle him to the claim made recently by Sir John Gielgud that he is the best of all drama critics. Yet, Hilary Spurling associates this estimate with a thesis to the effect that, while he was writing regular dramatic criticism, Shaw was "in fact preparing what amounted to a scathing, closely argued and virtually irrefutable case against Shaw as playwright." She argues, not entirely convincingly, that Shaw's plays show substantially the same faults against which he deployed all his powers of wit and rhetoric in the work of Pinero and Jones and other nineteenth century writers whom he castigated regularly in his weekly articles. To say this, however, is to fail to recognise that Shaw's plays, born from an intense concern with burning issues, as well as springing from his own theatrical temperament, are of an essentially different order from those of dramatists who, with no compelling interest in politics or religion, felt that political or religious characters would give them something to write about, in much the same way as Gilbert and Sullivan wrote *The Mikado*, not because they were interested in Japan but because they wanted an attractive and colourful theme for their musical play. The essay on Shaw's plays by Irving Wardle does recognise the essential qualities of the work, the tension between the seriousness of the problem and the lightness of the treatment, the reworking of old methods and the anticipation of the styles of future dramatists, such as, for example, Eliot and Beckett. Irving Wardle by no means treats Shaw with excessive kindness but his contribution, even if it tends to lose its shape at the end, leaves the reader in no doubt that it is concerned with a major figure.

If drama represents one of the two principal interests and directing concerns of Shaw's entire life, politics was the other. Here, the book lets him down badly. The article by Robert Skidelsky on *The Fabian Ethic* is a scholarly piece but its main object is to prove that the "overwhelming sense of public duty,"

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which Skidelsky declares to have been the heart of the Fabian ethic is now stone dead. The implication seems to be that, had they realised what would happen as a result of their efforts, Shaw and the Webbs and the other Socialists of the nineties might well have found better things to do with their time. Yet, in the century or so which has elapsed since Shaw first took an interest in political ideas and political action, western society has been transformed, in spite of two impoverishing and debilitating wars. An assessment of the value of Shaw's contribution to such a transformation is long overdue. It may be true, as far as it goes, that, as Skidelsky says, "the most striking revolution in the West has not been the socialist revolution which the Fabians wanted, but the social revolution they feared," but there has been a political and social revolution, if not a clearly socialist revolution, as well as a sexual one and it is a distortion to ignore it. In a recent review in *The Guardian* of a book of essays by members of the Labour Left, Professor Bernard Crick wrote that he would like to see greater stress on democratic socialism "as a theory of productivity as well as of distributive justice" and he added that "oddly the generation of Shaw and Wells saw this more clearly."

Enough has been said to show that this book provides a great deal of fuel for thought and argument. If space permitted, Shaw's religion and philosophy, as discussed by the sympathetic, but not deferential, John Stewart Collis, would justify an article in itself. He it is who insists on one of the most important things about Shaw, that his entire life was informed by "an intense experience of purpose." Barbara Smoker writes on Shaw's writings—his letters, postcards, shorthand and alphabets and Brigid Brophy on Shaw and vegetarianism. There is far too much in other essays about Shaw the man, as distinct from Shaw the writer and thinker but Benny Green reminds readers of what is forgotten in several of the essays, that Shaw was exceedingly witty. Finally, there is one thing that is immensely to the credit of *The Genius of Shaw*. It is most attractively produced. The eminent American Shavian, Stanley Weintraub, in his contribution, *In the Picture Galleries*, writes on Shaw's own criticism of pictures, but expands to cover such topics as the portraits and busts that were made of Shaw himself by various distinguished artists. This article seems to set a tone for the book as a whole and on almost every page, there is a striking picture, many of them unfamiliar to even well-informed Shavians. There are, naturally enough, plenty of pictures of Shaw, and of the many great ones with whom he was closely associated, and there are also

scenes from his plays and posters for the plays, reproductions of his hand writing, musical scores, costume design, landscapes, street scenes and caricatures. In a well-known anecdote Shaw used to record his mixture of pleasure and disappointment in being told by an oculist that he was abnormal in having normal sight; our own eyes are certainly given new delights by *The Genius of Shaw*.

T. F. EVANS

ATHEISM: THE CASE AGAINST GOD by George H. Smith. Prometheus Books. (Available from G. W. Foote in near future.)

There are, of course, horses for courses. To single out, given the requirements of different individuals and different times, the best book on atheism is surely impossible. Yet it is easy to understand why George H. Smith's *Atheism: The Case Against God* has received fulsome praise from many quarters. One would be hard-pushed to find a better single volume to place in the hands of any "intelligent layperson" seeking a broad, but concise, case against theism and for atheism.

The book starts with a discussion of the myths concerning, and the real meaning of, atheism. Smith has little difficulty, of course, in exposing the slanderous misrepresentations (for example, as committed even by scholars like Jacques Maritain) of atheism, nor in demonstrating that it is the theist—the asserter of a positive belief—upon whom the burden of producing proof for "god" actually lies.

Following this preliminary ground-clearing exercise, however, Smith wastes no time in tackling his subject head on, in a devastating conceptual analysis which alone demolishes the theistic case. What is the definition of "God?" Smith asks. For the task of definition is not an optional chore but a necessary prerequisite for intelligibility. What is it that the theist is claiming existence for? Unless the theist, of whatever sort, can reply intelligibly then his word "God" makes no more sense than do assertions of the existence of other undefined nonsense words, whether "widgets," "bleepas," or "unies." Smith then proceeds to take apart, patiently and methodically, the various alleged attributes of "God," demonstrating them to be nonsensical, contradictory, or meaningless (characteristics which are the lack of characteristics, incompatible with the notion of existence itself). Moreover, he demonstrates the important fact that theists have to resort, at one stage or another, to the concept of "unknowability"—"religious agnosticism" which asserts the existence of that which we cannot have knowledge. (In passing, Smith disposes of those "liberal" or modernistic theologians who by sleight of intellectual hand attempt to define atheism and atheists out of existence. Such "politicians of the spirit," as Smith aptly puts it, are perhaps more intellectually and morally reprehensible than the outright apologists for theism.)

Although having by page 46 demonstrated totally the untenability of the concept of God in the eyes of any rational person, Smith does not decline the task of wading through the acres of nonsense, verbiage, confusions and stratagems employed by generations of Christians. Whether the "unlimited attributes" with which they attempt to flesh out their supernatural being without limiting (naturalising) him, or Thomistic sophisms regarding essence and existence, Smith demolishes the Christian case. And as for the Christian God's "goodness," the painful record of historical reality or the biblical descriptions of Jahweh and Jesus hardly attest to that. Indeed, Smith shows that there really is not *anything* the Christian would accept as evidence of God's ungodness, such is the dogmatism of their position. In the face of rational criticism, then, the Christian is left

"believing in the existence of some unknowable being that cannot be coherently described. In other words, the Christian, operating from a conceptual vacuum, is defending the rationally indefensible; he cannot even specify what it is that he believes in. Or, in more blunt terms, the Christian, when he asserts that 'God exists,' simply does not know what he is talking about. And neither does anyone else. . . . In essence, the case for atheism is fully established at this point. When undefined, 'God' is a meaningless sound. When defined in the traditional manner, 'God' slumps back into the muck of unintelligibility. Therefore, a rational man has no choice but to reject theism."

It is not simply a matter of *lack* of Christian proof, as Smith makes clear after his analysis, but rather the very logical impossibility of what is meant by a "god" which emerges from a conceptual critique.

"It is logically impossible for a god—a concept replete with absurdities and contradictions—to have a referent in reality, just as it is logically impossible for a square circle to exist. Given the attempts to define God, we may now state—with certainty—that *God does not exist.*"

But, of course, if theism does have to descend into the depths of unknowability to defend its "god," plenty of theists have indeed been willing to do this—and have attempted to marshal epistemological weapons against reason itself, to erect "faith" as the epistemological foundation for theism. The core of Smith's work, then, constitutes a broad critique of Christian irrationalism and scepticism, its attack on logic and reason. This section is possibly the most valuable in the book to my mind, since scepticism is not the prerogative of Christian apologists alone, and philosophical scepticism has had wider detrimental consequences (politically, ethically and even scientifically) than in merely propping up the Church. Smith demolishes the common ploys involved in scepticism, such as its equation of knowledge and certainty with infallibility, its reliance on "stolen

concepts," and its fallacies regarding the nature of sense perception, and he does so with a lucidity and penetration that is breathtaking.

Following this central critique, Smith's dissection of the "varieties of faith"—Pascal's "wager," existentialist "acts of will," etc.—as well as various cosmological "design" arguments, miracles or revelations, constitute little more than mopping-up operations.

The final sections of the book are taken up with a discussion of the "practical consequences" of God. From the very start Smith has made clear that the case against theism is not simply on a par with the case against, say, elves or some other flight of fancy.

"There can be no knowledge of what is good for men apart from knowledge of reality and human nature—and there is no manner in which this knowledge can be acquired except through reason. To advocate irrationality is to advocate that which is destructive to human life . . . Religion has had the disastrous effect of placing vitally important concepts, such as morality, happiness, and love, in a supernatural realm inaccessible to man's mind and knowledge. By severing any possible appeal to the supernatural—which, in terms of human knowledge means the unknowable—atheism demands that issues be dealt with through reason and human understanding. . . ."

Christianity, Smith demonstrates, is not only utterly detrimental to human life and happiness through its irrationality and attack on reason, but its very ethical system is wholly evil. "Christian ethics is more conducive to misery than to happiness, and it prescribes moral principles that are more accurately described as a code of death rather than a code of life." Here Smith draws heavily—as he did in his epistemological analyses—on the Aristotelian and humanistic philosophy of Ayn Rand, with its defence of a scientific ethics based upon human life and happiness. He shows why a religious morality differs *fundamentally* in nature from scientific morality. The "Sins of Christianity," as Smith entitles his concluding chapter, are then manifold.

Christianity not only embraces an unlibertarian philosophy which makes "God" a master, and man a slave, but viciously attacks human happiness in order to capitalise on human guilt. Indeed, happiness and pleasure (especially sexual pleasure) are seen as sins. (The mealy-mouthed attempts by "modernists" to squirm out of the full implications of their philosophy are particularly dishonest.) Religion has "denaturalised" morality, replacing a standard-based approach (morality as a science of values conducive to human survival and happiness) with a sanctions-backed system of irrational rules.

"With its emphasis on obedience, enforced through the inculcation of fear and guilt, Christianity has transformed morality into something that is generally considered ominous and distasteful. With its emphasis on punishment and

reward in an afterlife, Christianity is largely responsible for the notion that morality is impractical, and has little or nothing to do with man's life and happiness on earth."

As for the ethics of Jesus, their unoriginality, un-systematic nature, and obscurity need little spelling out to anyone who has read the Bible, and are, with their threats of damnation, as coercive as anything in the Old Testament. They do not merit serious attention.

It is impossible to convey, in such a review, the skill and scholarship, combined with readability, which Smith brings to bear in his case against God. No matter how many atheist books you may have already read, the pleasure, intellectual stimulation and illumination, and, indeed, the moral inspiration, and illumination from Smith's work renders it a rare treat. Atheism, and the struggle for human liberty and happiness, has obtained a major weapon in its sadly depleted contemporary armoury.

CHRIS R. TAME

THEATRE

AMADEUS by Peter Shaffer. Olivier Theatre at the National Theatre.

For Faustian drama—as this is—to work, there must be a strong central figure, a person possessed of such magnitude that his dilemma embraces us all in its sweep. Otherwise one might as well stay with *Faust* proper.

Peter Shaffer, it is fair to say, is obsessed with the theme of man's rivalry with the divine. He has written about it in most of his plays and, on two previous occasions, chosen historical episodes as his focus. This seems to me not only valid but vital, as it is often history alone that provides the kind of larger-than-life situation that evokes real tragedy. (At least it offers the perspective necessary to recognise it.)

But Shaffer, alas, is not a tragedian, not a Mann, nor a Marlowe nor even, I dare say, Edward Bond. He cannot conjure up for us the kind of dilemma that moves us beyond the mundane, the hackneyed, the sense that there is nothing else outside of our own rather churlish preoccupations. This is a pity. His genuflection is about as engaging—as earth-shaking—as that of a business executive fighting flab.

The Faustian figure in this new play is one Salieri, a minor contemporary of Mozart, whose burning ambition it is to compose great music to the continual glory of God. He makes this his covenant with the divine. Yet as the Infant Prodigy's star rises and his own remains still, Salieri embraces Mammon instead, almost, one feels, as a jilted lover might do. To Mammon he vows to destroy Mozart, and much of the play is given over to this

singular ambition. It is so singular, in fact, that it is Salieri alone who believes he is responsible for Mozart's death.

Unpromising territory indeed for grand tragedy. Unfortunately, that is about all there is to it. Paul Scofield does his best with this meagre amount. It is never boring to see him strive so hard, only painful to look at the waste. And through his efforts we can see what the play might have been. The idea of representing a great man through the eyes of a mediocre one is fascinating, and so it might have been here if only Shaffer had realised his intention. But there is little point in choosing to focus attention on a minor figure if, after three hours, all you have done is explain to us why he is minor.

There were some very nice excerpts from *Così fan tutti*, however, and Simon Callow in the rather thankless role of Salieri's Nemesis was very convincing. Through his highly disciplined performance, it was possible to imagine just how galling true genius can be to those of us who want it and are not possessed of it. Perhaps one day soon someone will come up with a secular tragedy in which a man not confirmed in the faith dies with his arms stretched upward to heaven. Perhaps not, though. Religious hypocrites are not all that interesting.

JAMES MACDONALD

LETTERS

WAR'S IRRATIONALITY

I. S. Low's excursion into the ifs of military history ("The Freethinker", December) was interesting. I recall reading that in the 1920's the R.A.F. was preparing to attack France, the navy to attack Japan and the army to attack the USA. Even Bertrand Russell thought a war with the USA possible and favoured a strong navy.

The irrational side of war (which is irrational anyway) would fill a book. We have all read about eighteenth century wars which were so gentlemanly that they never fought at night and did not start until someone side-stepped forward and said . . . "Que les messieurs commencent". In many wars women and slaves were never used. Even now there seems to be a rule that you only take on an enemy of your own size. If you are a great power, you do your fighting through satellites.

Since the days of Cardinal Wolsey this country was committed to the doctrine of the balance of power. This probably caused as many wars as it prevented. In 1711, Alexander Pope wrote:

"Now Europe's balanced, neither Side prevails,
For nothing's left in either of the Scales."

Unfortunately this may be the state of Europe in 1981 if General Luns and Nato have their way. Today Francis Pym is pressing reluctant Holland, Belgium, Norway and Denmark to take new American missiles while he cheerfully offers sites in East Anglia and Oxfordshire. Tom Mangold on "Panorama" pointed out that British retaliation might be posthumous.

I doubt if national sovereignty can explain this lunacy. Correspondence in the Radio Times on 13 December suggests that few are impressed by Lord Chalfont's arguments in favour.

Why do they do it? I suggest the following possibilities:

1) Sheer lack of imagination. In Shaw's "St. Joan" the clergyman from England keeps demanding that Joan be burnt, but is horrified when he sees the actual burning.

2) They always have done it. The British War Office was well known for preparing for the last war instead of the one coming.

3) "War means work". This, of course, was Hitler's solution to the unemployment problem.

4) Technical virtuosity which drives one scientist to outdo the next in producing horrors. Leonardo da Vinci refused to go ahead with his submarine because he thought it was too terrible. He was a humanist, whereas Commander-in-Chief Carver thinks Russia is Antichrist.

As Bertrand Russell said, war is a human custom 4,000 years old and it is time man gave it up.

SAMUEL BEER

APARTHEID ATTACKED

Along with his pretty holiday snaps and glossy government brochures, Mr R. E. Bazin, South Africa's unofficial ambassador to the NSS's AGM last month (see page 8), appeared to have acquired the typically South African trait of branding anyone who dares speak out against that odious authoritarian state a "communist".

But far from being angry over his irrational outburst against the Anti-Apartheid Movement, and his impetuous insistence that I should affirm that I do not belong to the Communist Party, I am in fact delighted that Mr Bazin travelled 600 miles that day to make out such a strong case for the NSS's continued affiliation to the Anti-Apartheid Movement.

Britons rarely are treated to the sight of a fanatical supporter of the South African regime in full cry, and Mr Bazin's performance—which evoked memories for me of bullet-headed boers shrieking: "We have God on our side!"—was in the finest tradition of South African red-baiting. What a pity he was not a deist as well, or he could also have accused me of being an atheist! At any rate, his conduct led to an overwhelming vote in favour of continued affiliation to the Anti-Apartheid Movement.

But I am not writing to discuss his attempts to vilify me, simply to answer Mr Bazin's accusation that I was lying when I said apartheid was a bible-based doctrine introduced by Christian Afrikaners who formed the first Nationalist Government, and that the NSS therefore had a duty to condemn this vicious theocracy.

In order to prove my point, I shall simply refer you to an extract from Articles 14 and 15 of the Manifesto of the Institute for Christian National Education, published in Afrikaans in South Africa in February, 1948. "Native education should be based on the principles of trusteeship, non-equality and segregation; the aim should be to inculcate the white man's view of life, especially that of the Boer nation, which is the senior trustee. . . . The Coloured man must be educated according to Christian National principles. . . . only when he has been Christianised can he and will he be truly happy and secure against his own heathen and all kinds of foreign ideologies. . . ."

It is against this background that one must view the Soweto riots of 1976 when hundreds of school-children died for protesting against the regime's black educational policies — particularly a directive that children were to receive their schooling in Afrikaans so that they would be able to understand orders from their Afrikaans bosses better.

I could, in conclusion, play Mr Bazin's game, and call him a crypto-Christian. But I shall simply settle for the term gullible fool.

BARRY DUKE

Surely the point about the relevance of the thermodynamic law of entropy to life and evolution is that this law applies only to a closed system and that the earth, far from being closed, has received from the sun a daily energy input of nearly two million million million watts for several hundred million years, which should be enough to satisfy the most fanatical creationist.

Chris Tame says in his review of "Question 12" that "unfortunately, Wells doesn't offer a point by point reply" to the article by the Rev. D. P. Davies on "Christianity and the Appeal to History". Professor Wells will be offering such a reply in "Question 13".

NICOLAS WALTER

(Mortalism)

the soul naturally mortal. I was stunned when I learned you had put it in the title of a book and the consequences have been dreadful. I wish you had considered that abundance of people have but a mean opinion of revealed religion and many believe nothing of it who yet believe the soul immortal and consequently future reward's and punishments. And even this is a great restraint on them and contributes to help keep them in order. But you have turned these loose by vouching the natural mortality of the soul. Nor will your introducing revelation help the matter, for that which inclines the world to believe revelation is the belief that their souls are immortal and being immortal they could not imagine what would come of them, if revelation did not discover it to them and I believe it will be found that Christianity is grafted on this belief and owes its great success in the world in a great measure to it." [King Mss. Trinity College Dublin].

There again we see the leading role which belief in immortality plays. It is not Scripture which grounds belief in immortality, but immortality which generates faith in Scripture. On the other hand, Dodwell's position on immortality was fundamentalist and reactionary in the extreme. Hence it is somewhat ironic to find Marx, in a well-known section from the *Holy Family* (1845), representing Dodwell as one of those deists who "shattered the last theological bars that still hemmed in Locke's sensationalism."

Terminological note

There is no recognised term for the position which denies personal immortality. The nearest acceptable designation is Sadduceism, but it is hardly very happy. This absence of a satisfactory descriptive name has probably put the opponents of immortality under a disadvantage. To be sure, there is also no recognised name for the position which *affirms* immortality; but within an environment in which nearly all people are committed to a certain doctrine it is probably to their advantage that there is no specific name for or against it. "Mortalism" and "Immortalism" seem to me the clearest and most neutral names for the opposing positions.

Religious Broadcasting Defended

Religious broadcasting was discussed by members of the BBC at a public meeting at All Souls Church on 21 November, 1979. The platform speakers were Dr Colin Morris, the new Head of Religious Broadcasting, John Lang, just leaving his position as Head of Religious Broadcasting, Colin Semper, the Head of Religious Radio Programmes, and Gerald Priestland, Religious Affairs Correspondent and former Foreign Correspondent. Terry Mullins, Secretary of the National Secular Society, who attended the meeting, writes:

It was unfortunate that Robin Day was not able to take the chair as planned, as he might have provided a more impartial chairman than his stand-in, the Vicar of All Souls. The audience of around 100 was predominantly middle-aged, with apparently all being committed Christians (except me).

The meeting opened with a brief address from Lady Falkner, a BBC Governor, who spoke of the privilege of being in All Souls Church (without any reference to whether a hire fee was charged). Then the questions got going, and three young ladies roamed around with microphones, while cameras flashed.

After a question about programmes for the disabled, I asked: "How much does it cost per year to run the Religious Broadcasting Department?" After an embarrassed silence, the chairman asked Colin Morris to answer. There was a pause. Then he said "I am not sure, I believe it is somewhere around two to three million pounds."

The microphone was then whisked away from me, so that I could not pursue my question further. The man next to me said he thought it was worth every penny—even though he did not know how many million pennies this would be.

Some questions about the broadcast of faiths other than Christianity followed. Colin Semper thought there was a case for presenting other faiths, which would serve the immigrant communities, but added that there were language problems. There seemed to be little concern that the only other faith represented on the Central Religious Advisory Committee was Judaism. Colin Morris said that services in unknown languages of unfamiliar rituals might make people think that other religions were merely quaint. (There was no fear that some people might find the existing Christian services rather quaint and ridiculous.) Gerald Priestland emerged from the slumber in which he spent most of the evening to comment that most people did not speak Arabic.

A lady asked whether members of the religious broadcasting committee really believed what the Bible says, and admitted that she had been responsible for distributing an anti-homosexual leaflet before the meeting. She was told that the department

contained a broad spectrum of views and when she insisted that they should all believe the Bible, she was told that there was disagreement on almost all dogmas and it was not the function of the committee to act as censors.

When it was asked why "Songs of Praise" always showed a packed church, rather than a typical small congregation, it was proclaimed that the programme aimed to depict a gathered religious community. There was much laughter at the chairman's reference to an ITV programme that showed how small some congregations were, but the amusement probably had more to do with ITV than the smallness of church congregations.

Someone asked if Christian education could not be got into short talks in slots such as concert intervals (half-time at football matches?) Colin Semper announced that this was going to be tried on Radio 3; cursed is the music lover, for he shall suffer tripe. An involved question from a member of the audience who thought that lawlessness could best be combated by the beatitudes puzzled Colin Semper, but awoke Gerald Priestland to the comment that the BBC should not usurp the parents' responsibilities when it came to teaching morals to the young.

Dr Morris, in answering a question about religious broadcasting in the eighties, said that there was a great interest in the programmes of the Religious Affairs Department. Gerald Priestland said he had never had such a response from listeners until he became religious affairs correspondent. (Presumably letter writers are less inclined to send comments overseas to foreign affairs correspondents.)

The subject of "Thought for the Day" was brought up, and Colin Semper explained that it could not be longer (mercifully) because of link-ups with other networks. He thought it should be topical and they were experimenting with this. (The lack of God slot at 8.45 perhaps means that late risers are beyond redemption.)

There was a question about the BBC's contribution to the coming Nationwide Evangelical Crusade. Colin Semper hoped to be in contact with those involved and to give coverage, but said that it was a cause of considerable distress to him that the radio was not a good medium for evangelism. He had earlier admitted that a problem with television worship was that it "seems to be much too one-way" (like all church services?) Preaching on radio causes a big switch-off, and the radio was not a successful medium for conversion.

In further discussion amongst the panel it emerged that the BBC preferred it not to be emphasised that some programmes were religious, for example "Everyman." There are now more religious pro-

(continued over)

(Religious Broadcasting)

grammes than there were ten years ago, but it was not clear whether they attracted a bigger audience.

Another question referred to Japan as the world's most godless country with England, according to a Readers Digest poll, coming second in the irreligious stakes.

The well-known comical, committed Christian, Kenneth Robinson was in the audience and he lamented the demise of the epilogue. The reason for this was apparently that no one in the audience ever sat right through to the close of TV programmes. It also seems that good people go to bed early (no doubt it should be inflicted on people who stay up late for their wickedness—or perhaps Mr Robinson was just being funny).

One poor devil in the audience thought that American religious stations were a good thing. Even Gerald Priestland woke up sufficiently to say that he hoped they would never come over here. Semper, despite his enthusiasm for the evangelical drive of the eighties, thought USA TV was a caricature of what religion was about.

I tried to get in another question at the end, but the chairman would not listen to me. After the meeting Colin Morris spoke to me, and apologised for the fact that I had not been allowed another question. He said he would have welcomed an audience that was more critical and less devout. I suggested that religious programmes ought to be identified as put out by the Religious Affairs Department, but he replied that they did not identify programmes made by producers who were atheistic or agnostic. But this ignores the fact that there are no departments specially devoted to such programmes—and the existence of a special department for a minority interest, like Christianity, is the crux of the secularist dissatisfaction with religious broadcasting.

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. The Work of the Samaritans, Thursday, 10 January, 8 pm. 8a Grand Parade, Castle-reagh Road, Belfast. Secretary: Wendy Wheeler, 30 Cloyne Crescent, Monkstown, Co Antrim. Tel White-abbey 66752.

Berkshire Humanists. Peter Dunn: The Ecology Party. Friday, 8 February, 8 pm. The Committee Room, Town Hall, Henley.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Professor James Sang: Fundamentalism v Evolution. Sunday, 3 February, 5.30 pm. Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove.

Havering and District Humanist Society. Sid Harroway: Experiences in the Motor Industry. Tuesday, 18 January, 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre (Junction of Gubbins Lane and Squirrel Heath Road).

Lewisham Humanist Group. Desmond Hunter: Love Versus Power. Thursday, 31 January, 7.45 pm. Lee Centre, 1 Aislibie Road, Lee, SE12.

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. Slide show: The Arts of Japan. Monday, 21 January, 7.45 pm. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead.

Muswell Hill Humanist Group. Jim Herrick: Cults in an Age of Irrationalism. Monday, 21 January, 8.30 pm. 15 Woodberry Crescent, N10.

Open University Humanist Society. Annual General Meeting. Saturday, 23 February, 2 pm. Room 47, Friends Meeting House, Bull Street, Birmingham.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday Morning Meetings, 11 am. 13 January, Peter Heales: The Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood. 20 January, Ronald Mason: Kipling—Lest We Forget Him. 27 January, T. F. Evans: From the New World—H. L. Mencken. 6 February, W. H. Liddell: The Peasant Community—Medieval Restrictions on Individuality. Sunday Forums, 3 pm. 13 January, Gordon Baxter: Morals and Money. 27 January, Penny Cloutte: British Volunteers in the Third World. Tuesday Discussions, 7 pm. 8 January, Jack Cohen: Revolution—Red. 15 January, Cllr Chris St Hill: Revolution—Black. 22 January, David Fleming: Revolution—Green. 29 January, George Walford: Systematic Ideology.

Sutton Humanist Group. John White—a literary evening. Wednesday, 13 February, 7.30 pm. Friends' House, Cedar Road, Sutton.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Professor R. B. Knight: Teaching Literature. Friday, 25 January, 7.30 pm. 4 Gloucester Place, Swansea.

Worthing Humanist Group. Professor C. Freeman: Micro-Electronics and the Future Pattern of Employment. Sunday, 27 January, 5.30 pm. Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade.

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