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CATHOLIC CONGRESS CHALLENGES TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

A National Pastoral Congress in Liverpool last month could radically change the nature of the Catholic Church in Great Britain if the recommendations were implemented. The lay conference asked for a reconsideration of teaching on contraception, a new look at the possibility of married priests and the ordination of women, and a greater emphasis on human justice and peace in the Church's teaching and activity. The Congress, itself an example of greater democracy, called for an increase of lay participation in running the Church.

Many of the recommendations were at odds with the hierarchical, illiberal and dogmatic traditions of the Catholic Church. The values of the delegates indicate the extent to which humanist ideas have now been adopted by some sectors of the Church. Failing the "withering away" of the Church, which freethinkers would welcome, a liberal Church is preferable to an illiberal one—and to that extent some of the recommendations of the Congress are a good sign.

The Congress is also an indication of the extent to which the curial hierarchy, and even perhaps the Pope, hold views which are out of touch with their followers. The Pope had to visit the Dutch Catholic Church to smooth over the quarrels caused by a liberalising process; it doesn't look as if he'll easily prevent spread of secular humanist values among British Catholics.

There were unconfirmed rumours that the Vatican had made moves to stop the Congress, alarmed that it might challenge Church teaching. Archbishop Murphy of Cardiff said a week before the Congress that it was not "a new rash of democracy". He warned that it was not "a new heresy of the divine right of 51 per cent, or a new example of the tail wagging the dog. It is quite simply a fresh attempt by the episcopal body to find out why the tail is or isn't wagging, or even why it is sagging, or why

we, as bishops and priests, are failing to get across to a sagging tail the good news of the Gospel."

2,000 delegates attended the Congress and they were all lay people representing a particular parish. Democratic principles—previously anathema to the teaching of the Church—are not easily stifled, and the Catholic Church's twentieth century Protestant revolution continues apace.

Clearly the area which most challenges the Pope's traditional stand will be the majority view that the Church's teaching on marriage, sexuality and contraception needed "fundamental re-examination" with the possibility of change and development being left open. The report from the section discussing Marriage and the Family said that "A large majority agree that there is a widespread lack of understanding and disagreement among Catholics on contraception. . .". The report also said that it was time for "positive teaching on sexuality". There was recognition that intercourse between married couples does not need procreation as its justification; it is not a big step from that to recognition that sexuality can be pleasurable and beneficial between couples married or not or homosexual (though the report referred to the rather muddled and patronising Catholic document *Pastoral Care of Homosexual People*).

Unfair to Women

The oppression of women—one of the most significant shifts of understanding and opinion in our time—was also looked at by the section studying Ministry and Vocation. They said: "There is so manifestly an imbalance in favour of men that they (women) are often unable to utilise their particular skills in the service of the Church and the wider

(continued over)

world. If everyone is to play his or her full part in the ministry of the people of God to all the world some definite changes in attitudes and structures are needed. . . The question of the eventual ordination of women was raised in this context, with a plea that the matter be explored seriously at this time."

On education the Congress was less progressive, stressing the value of Catholic schools. Young people made a special request for compulsory religious education and specialist Catholic RE teachers. Far from wanting general education *about* religion there was a recommendation for emphasis on prayer, liturgy, the role of the clergy and "Christian ethos". Amidst ecumenical talk there was mention of joint Christian schools, though this did not seem to be linked with the call for a major conference on Northern Ireland.

Without offering specific solutions to problems such as Northern Ireland, the Congress allied itself very strongly with arguments for greater human justice. There was a call for the Pope to convene a summit of world leaders to discuss world peace, which sounds pious rather than practical, but the report from the section on Justice and Peace is filled with strong expressions and hopes which secular humanists would agree with. The report dealt with racial justice—and roundly condemned the National Front—referring to Britain as a multi-cultural, multi-racial society. A search for alternatives to prison was urged (the fact that 10,000 out of 45,000 prisoners are registered as Catholic was mentioned).

The report called for multilateral disarmament and some argued in favour of unilateral action; the irresponsibility of the arms trade was condemned. Responsibility was said to include "housing, unemployment, human rights in the Church, discrimination against women, homosexuals, abortion, euthanasia, law and order. . ." (The importance of employment led to a suggestion that the feast of St Joseph the Worker be upgraded!)

It is doubtful whether the Catholic system will change easily: against change is wealth, a deeply traditional Pope, an entrenched hierarchy, and dogma and theology (which was not prominent among the discussions). Secularists object more strongly to the public practices of Christianity than to private beliefs: laws and institutions affect us all, private beliefs in Jesus, which may seem a weird fantasy to the unbeliever, are less of a threat to human justice. (And secularists who wish strongly to question the truth and value of religion in public argument might be reluctant to attack the faith of a devout elderly neighbour.) The connection between public action and private belief means that the two cannot be entirely separated, but it is the ugly public face of religion that secularists especially dislike. So where a Church moves towards a secular humanist outlook it is welcomed, since concern for justice

and the future of the world can be reason for co-operation. Freethinkers would strongly endorse the Justice and Peace section's concern for "those who live in sub-human conditions, those who suffer discrimination, those who are imprisoned, naked, sick—all those who are uprooted in a world which has foolishly walked on the moon and yet let its own planet slip through its fingers."

But why hang on to a vague belief in Jesus and God as foci of co-operative concerns? And cannot justice and peace best be achieved by concentrating on human behaviour and not bothering at all with a supposed supernatural world?

WORLDWIDE

TURKEY

Disturbances took place in Turkey at a televised religious ceremony in which prayers were read for the soul of Ataturk at a Muslim festival. There was booing and hissing at the reference to Ataturk and the authorities detained 10 people. Kemal Ataturk (1881-1938) was the founder of modern Turkey as a secular state and reduced religious education and the power of Islamic institutions.

Turkish leaders have condemned the disturbance, but ultra-traditionalist religious spokesmen have said the incident might be a trick to provoke persecution of Muslim believers. Some commentators have suggested a religious revival might be imminent in Turkey.

HOLLAND

Churches will no longer serve as a sanctuary from the law in Holland. The State Secretary for Justice, Mrs Elbarta Haars, has given the police the right to enter a church to make an arrest. The policy comes from a campaign to deal with the continued residence of illegal migrant workers (mainly Turkish and Moroccan) who have moved into churches to escape deportation.

Church leaders have protested against the rejection of their right to give protection, saying "the Church should be the last one to throw them out".

AUSTRALIA

The Queensland Government has passed the first reading of a Bill to reduce abortion. The Pregnancy Termination Control Bill limits abortion to women who face death or suicide as a result of birth, and to the victims of rape and incest.

The Bill was introduced by the right-wing state Premier and National Party leader, Mr Bjeike-Peterson. He is believed to have been influenced by pressure from the Right to Life Association and the Catholic Church.

The Bill has provoked wide opposition and is expected to be fought fiercely point by point.

Bradlaugh's Election: A Centenary

A centenary meeting was held by the National Secular Society on 3 April 1980 at Conway Hall to commemorate the first election of Bradlaugh to Parliament on 2 April 1880. The subsequent struggle in which for six years he was refused permission to take the oath and enter Parliament and eventually (in 1888) the right of MPs to affirm was established is an important part of the history of civil liberties.

The speakers at the meeting were Edward Royle, Lecturer in History at York University and author of "Radicals and Republicans, Popular Freethought in Britain 1866-1915" shortly to be published, Nicolas Walter, editor of the "New Humanist", and Christopher Price, MP. Edward Royle gave an account of the background to Bradlaugh's election, Nicolas Water described the six-year struggle to take his place in the House of Commons, and Christopher Price made some comparisons between Parliament then and now.

Edward Royle's account has been edited and abridged. (It will appear in full in the "New Humanist".)

Charles Bradlaugh was born in Hoxton, north London, on 26 September 1833. He rebelled against his Christian upbringing in his mid-teens, and by 1855 was beginning to make a name for himself as "Iconoclast", the breaker of idols, on Secularist platforms first in London and then in the provinces. The Bradlaugh family came from Suffolk originally, and Charles's first visit to Northampton did not take place until 1857. Two years later he was back there, lecturing on freethought and debating atheism in the theatre with John Bowes, an habitual opponent of the Secularists.

Bradlaugh was at this time a tall young man, more powerfully built than he had been before his spell in the army in his late-teens, but he had not yet developed that muscular—and later still corpulent—figure which was to distinguish the Member for Northampton. He had married in 1855 and, with three children being born in the next four years, his main aim in life was to earn enough money to keep his family in lower-middle-class comfort. He worked first as a solicitor's clerk and then as an independent financial agent and promoter of speculative companies, his lecturing and writing being a spare-time activity. Only in 1870, with the failure of his finances and the break-up of his marriage (his wife had become an alcoholic), did he devote himself single-mindedly to public propagandism. It was through the Secularist movement and the *National Reformer* newspaper, which was started by a group of Sheffield supporters in 1860, that Bradlaugh emerged in the 1860s as a leading popular politician and demagogue at open-

air meetings and in the back-street halls frequented by supporters of the movement to extend the vote to every adult male. In 1866 he announced the formation of the National Secular Society with himself as president, and also joined the newly-established Reform League, on the general council of which he rapidly emerged as a leader of the extremists.

[He was not, however, a political extremist. He was a constitutionalist who revered the law and Parliament.]

Bradlaugh always had an immense faith in the existing system; he fought only against those who had corrupted the system and usurped the rights of the people. He was a Radical, but he was a very conservative one; he was quite at home in the Liberal Party led by Mr Gladstone. Such moderation was hard for the casual observer to detect, and was not fully appreciated until after Bradlaugh had established himself in Parliament in the later 1880s. When he began his campaign to win a seat he was thought of as an outspoken opponent of both Church and Queen—the "coming Cromwell", even the first president of the English Republic, though one humourist saw him more fittingly as the Minister for Public Worship in the first republican cabinet!

In the general election which followed the Reform Act of 1867, the Reform League threw its support behind the official candidates of the Liberal Party in an endeavour to ensure the return of a reforming government led by Mr Gladstone. Not all branches of the Reform League were happy with this policy, and there were Secularists in Birmingham and Glasgow who thought that Bradlaugh ought to stand for Parliament. In the event it was the Northampton branch of the Reform League which went against national policy and issued the invitation which Bradlaugh accepted.

Atheist Views

[Bradlaugh stood as an independent candidate and his views as an atheist were a stumbling block.]

Bradlaugh himself realised this and did his best to combat the prejudice against his religious views. His election manifestos never went further than an advocacy of disestablishment and a national system of compulsory education—both items to win the support of Nonconformist Liberals. Throughout his long association with Northampton Bradlaugh never pushed his freethought views in the town; on the contrary, he demanded a strict separation of his anti-religious and political images. His opponents, of course, tried very hard not to allow this to happen, and the Liberal paper, the *Northampton*

Mercury, never lost an opportunity of stirring up the *odium theologicum* against Bradlaugh.

[Bradlaugh succeeded as an independent in a three-cornered fight in showing that he could prevent the Liberals from winning. His eventual election resulted from being nominated as a Liberal candidate.] A majority of Liberal electors would probably have preferred not to vote for Bradlaugh, but once he had been selected for them they voted for him, and in time even came to like him.

Bradlaugh did not, though, make life easy for his followers, By espousing the cause of the Knowlton Pamphlet, which was prosecuted for teaching methods of preventing conceptions in 1876, he added obscenity to his sins of atheism and republicanism. His opponents, especially among the Non-conformist Liberals, were given new ammunition with which to oppose a Bradlaugh candidature. Nevertheless, as the 1880 general election approached, the official Liberals found themselves without any candidates at all, partly through ill-luck but possibly also because Bradlaugh had made Northampton a considerably less safe seat than it once had been. No doubt this was one reason why when Henry Labouchere, a Radical journalist and impious society wit, was approached he stipulated that the other Liberal candidate should be Bradlaugh. A Liberal party, anxious to win back the seats, agreed, under some pressure from national headquarters. The voting in 1880 was: Labouchere (L) 4,158; Bradlaugh (L) 3,827; Phipps (C) 3,152; Mercwether (C) 2,826. Not all Liberals had voted for Bradlaugh: 407 voted solely for Labouchere and a further 250 split their votes between Labouchere and the Conservatives, but most Liberals had, as Labouchere put it, "swallowed Bradlaugh after all".

Price Paid

In conclusion I want to offer a few observations on the importance of the affair for Bradlaugh, for the Secularists, and for British politics. Bradlaugh paid a heavy price. The 1868 election would have bankrupted him had his creditors not remained patient and friends lent him money; the cost of the 1874 elections was met partly by a timely loan from, of all people, Prince Jerome Napoleon! The strategy of those who prosecuted Bradlaugh for voting as an unsworn member was to render him ineligible for Parliament through bankruptcy. He survived only because he finally won and was sustained by the donations of thousands of poor supporters. The real price which he paid was his health, and that debt no-one could pay for him as he died, prematurely aged, in January 1891.

The impact of Bradlaugh's parliamentary struggle on Secularism was enormous. The National Secular Society had thrived amid the campaigns for parli-

amentary reform and republicanism in the later 1860s and early 1870s, but it had then collapsed. Gradually in the later 1870s Bradlaugh had rebuilt his movement, aided by the infamy brought by his defence of the Knowlton Pamphlet, but not until the 1880s did Secularism really become a significant popular movement. Bradlaugh had successfully transcended the boundaries of an anti-religious pressure group and turned it into an effective instrument of political protest and for political change. At a time when the first Socialist leaders were beginning to organise their followers in London, the voice of the people remained staunchly Liberal, and that voice was the voice of Bradlaugh. Though the tide was turning in the mid-1880s, and those Socialists whom Bradlaugh had for so long opposed were beginning to take the initiative, for a few golden years Bradlaugh had been the most popular leader in the country, a pugnacious symbol of hope for the unfranchised and excluded.

What had he achieved in the longer term? Even before 1880 he was being compared by some with the legendary John Wilkes, hero of the people in the 1760s. Unlike Wilkes in personal character, yet like him he shared an awareness of the power of public opinion against the narrow oligarchy which dominated the political life of the nation; and he had the ability to seize on those legal principles which made him the champion of right against might. Like Wilkes he had fought successfully for the freedom of the press, and like Wilkes he was to fight for the freedom of election. In the 1880s Bradlaugh achieved an important step in the further legal secularisation of the institutions of Britain, when his Oaths Act of 1888 did away with the stumbling block which had kept him excluded from Parliament for six years; and in the course of his struggle he had won an important test case to forward the establishment of a democratic system of politics in Britain.

(To be continued in the next issue)

President Bradlaugh, M.P., by David Tribe £4 + £1.20 postage from G. W. Foote & Co, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL.

Sutton Humanist Group approached the Sutton public library asking if they stocked "The Freethinker". In due course the borough librarian agreed to subscribe to it. While centenary celebrations for "The Freethinker" next year are being planned we are particularly anxious to increase the readership of the journal. Why not approach your local library or bookshop and ask if they would be prepared to take "The Freethinker". If every reader could persuade one acquaintance to subscribe to "The Freethinker" its circulation would double.

A Searing Flame

VERA LUSTIG

"Like a searing flame" is how some victims of female genital castration have described the experience. The practice—still widespread in parts of Africa and the Near East—is part of a cultural and religious tradition. The motives are complex, but the effect is to ensure male domination. However, it is a controversial issue within the women's movement, as Vera Lustig explains.

"The little girl sits down on a stool . . . and several women hold her down firmly. After separating her outer and inner lips (labia majora and minora) with her finger, the old woman attaches them with large thorns onto the flesh of each thigh. With her kitchen knife . . . the woman then pierces and slices open the hood of the clitoris and begins to cut it out . . . The little girl screams in extreme pain. . .

"The woman finishes the job by entirely pulling out the clitoris and then cuts it to the bone. . . She then digs a deep hole amidst the gushing blood. The neighbour women . . . then plunge their fingers into the bloody hole to verify that every remnant of the clitoris is removed. . . If the little girl faints the mother blows pilipili (spice powder) into her nostrils to revive her . . .

"After a short moment the woman takes the knife again and cuts off the inner lips (labia minora). . . Then the mother . . . begins to scrape off the skin from the inside of the large lips. . . Sometimes in a spasm the child bites off her tongue. The other women carefully watch the child to prevent such an accident . . .

"With the abrasion of the skin completed according to the rules, the woman closes the bleeding lips and fixes them one against the other with acacia thorns (their sap has analgesic properties).

"The operator's chief concern is to achieve as narrow an opening as possible, just enough to allow the urine and the future menstrual flow to pass. . . The honour of the operator depends on making this opening as small as possible, because among the Somali the smaller this artificial passage is, the higher the value of the girl. She is traded by her father, usually for goats, as soon as she starts to menstruate, to a man willing to pay the price." (Jacques Lantier: *La Cité Magique et Magie en Afrique Noire*. 1972 Trans. Fran P. Hosken.)

That is a description of infibulation, or pharaonic circumcision, which is still practised on girls, usually between the ages of 5 and 8, in Somalia and the Sudan. There are regional and tribal variations, for example the lacerated vulva are sometimes held together by stitches of silk or gut rather than thorns. According to reliable sources some form of "circumcision" (such a misleading euphemism, I feel),

usually the less drastic "suna", which consists of excision of the clitoris without infibulation, is carried out in many African and Arab countries, including Libya, Guinea, Tanzania, Kenya (clitoridectomy is romanticised in Jomo Kenyatta's autobiography, *Facing Mount Kenya*), the Yemen, Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The governments of some of these countries have shown token disapproval. In the Sudan, for example, pharaonic circumcision has been illegal since 1946, and the penalty for practising it is five years' imprisonment (reduced from seven in 1974). There is, however, no record of anyone having been tried for this offence. Many African and Arab communities are either nomadic, or geographically very isolated; they have no schools and no electricity, and therefore no television, so official anti-clitoridectomy propaganda cannot reach them. Given these circumstances, I would have thought that withdrawing aid, as suggested in a recent British magazine article, would be counter-productive.

Although genital mutilation is widespread in the Muslim world and is often accompanied by ritual, it is not required by Islamic law. In fact it predates Islam. Mohammed is reputed to have said, "Reduce but do not destroy", implying that he may have favoured some form of circumcision, but opposed the greater barbarities of infibulation.

Cruel Operation

Excision is referred to by those practising it as "purification" or even "embellishment". The fact that this cruel operation is carried out by women who have themselves undergone it demonstrates the force of society's pressures, still largely unchallenged, that make them consider it to be in the girls' best interests. Male dominated, often polygamous, societies, set great store by female virginity and fidelity, as this ensures that the man's name, property and land are only passed on to his legitimate sons. Also, an effective way to prevent a girl from, literally, cheapening herself is to make sure that she cannot enjoy sex. After pharaonic circumcision, of course, it is physically impossible for her to have sex with anyone other than the husband chosen for her. Thus a pharaonically circumcised girl will have her scar slit open with a scalpel or razor on her wedding night—and she will be penetrated immediately and at frequent intervals, to ensure that the wound does not close again—and then again before each of her agonising, protracted and dangerous confinements. Likewise, divorcees and widows are re-infibulated or re-sewn.

From a list of the complications arising from clitoridectomy, drawn up by Asim Zaki Mustafa, a research assistant at the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of Khartoum, I have made a small selection: "Shock . . . Haemor-

hrage . . . can be fatal . . . injuries to the urethra, bladder, vagina, perineum. . . Fatal cases of tetanus and septicaemia. . . Chronic pelvic infection. . . It has been blamed for retarding the physical and mental development of some children. . . "Psychological damage can of course be very severe; and the danger to mother and baby, caused by earlier mutilation of the vulva, is great. All these after-effects are aggravated by inadequate hospital provision.

Weakened by continual pain, fear and ill-health, and by their low status, few of these women protest vociferously. Many urban women are now refusing to have their daughters pharaonically castrated, but the custom will persist in remote areas until a polite but very determined campaign is launched. Sunna, too, is on the decline. Increasingly, medical and paramedical staff are being called on to carry out the operation. This means a lot less pain and risk for the little girls, but it also means the institutionalising of what is after all a punitive act. The operation is in all cases irreversible.

In the West, those usually so quick to condemn puritanism, feudalism, exploitation, the oppression of women, and physical abuse, make, at most, apologetic noises of disapprobation. The anger aroused by whaling or dolphin culls is not provoked by clitoridectomy. UNO, UNICEF, and WHO have investigated and debated the issue at some length, but have declared it to be outside their jurisdiction. (In fairness, after a conference organised by WHO in February 1979 in Khartoum a resolution was passed condemning all forms of clitoridectomy and urging that campaigns for its abolition be set up in all

countries where it is still practised.) Victims of domestic, rather than political, torture are not covered by any human rights charter (even when that torture is connived at by the state). Is not the distinction between domestic and political torture anyway too simplistic?

An Englishwoman, Mrs Isobel Clarke, spoke on the subject recently at Kent University. About 40 people, mainly students, were present. Mrs Clarke spent six years in the Sudan. Although she clearly found the practice cruel, she asked us to show understanding for this culture and its traditions. We must not, by our protests, make the Sudanese "lose face". Mrs Clarke denies that Sudanese women were repressed. . .

The feminist press is afraid of being labelled "imperialist"—which means that, while giving short shrift to Western rapists and wife-beaters, it would not presume to apply even the most basic standards of human behaviour to less privileged countries. (Western concern does not necessarily mean pollution, dried milk and concrete.) To qualify as a good liberal, must one then tolerate the deliberate maiming of thousands of children?

Further Reading: WHO, Scientific Group on the Epidemiology of Infertility, Technical Report Series No 582 (1975). The Hosken Report on the genital and sexual mutilation of females contains all the information Ms Hosken has collected to date, plus history and analysis. Available from Ms Fran Hosken, the Women's Research and Resource Centre, 190 Upper Street, London N1. Nawal et Saadawi "The Hidden Face of Eve", the Zed Press.

AN OCCASIONAL COLUMN

JOTTINGS

WILLIAM McILROY

Few people have not heard of the Nationwide Festival of Light and Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, the main organisations dedicated to maintaining conservatism, conformity and Christian privilege. They are, however, only two of a plethora of religious pressure groups which have been assiduously undermining personal freedom and social reform over the last 15 years.

Less known, but even more strait-laced and repressive, are the Order of Christian Unity and the Responsible Society, whose leading lights are Lady Lothian and Mrs Valerie Riches respectively. But perhaps the most rabidly reactionary of the lot is the Community Standards Association, whose

honorary secretary is Miss Ann Whitaker, of Tremore Manor, near Bodmin, in Cornwall. These virtuous handmaids of the Lord hail one another over the unfriendly terrain of "permissive" Britain like sex-starved mastodons calling to their like across a primeval landscape (although one foresees hatpins at dawn in a battle for leadership of the goody-goodies when Mrs Whitehouse, now pushing 70, decides to call it a day).

The Community Standards Association, which recently attracted attention through its efforts to have books withdrawn from school reading lists, was formed by local worthies in South-West England six years ago. Dr Graham Leonard, Bishop of Truro, is the only person of note listed as a supporter. The organisation's strength is still concentrated in Devon and Cornwall, but there are branches in other parts of the country. It also operates under different names: Family Life Association (Bristol), Child and Family Protection Group (Harrow), Association for Community Standards (Portsmouth), Christian Social Action (Southend) and Christians in Action (Derwentside).

Some of the CSA's main aims—like discouraging drinking and drug-taking by children—are unexceptionable. But a close examination of the Association's publications and activities reveals that behind the smoke-screen of innocuous platitudes and smug sermonising is an organisation that encourages snooping and informing, campaigns for censorship, opposes the valuable social and educational work of agencies like the Family Planning Association and belittles those sections of the community such as homosexuals and one-parent families, whose life-style is not in accord with the CSA's narrow standpoint.

CSA members are particularly enthusiastic for film censorship—euphemistically described in their journal as “quality control”—ostensibly to protect the young, but in effect to inflict their own tastes and standards on cinemagoers of all ages. They are therefore rather cross with those local authorities which approve films “on the nod” without prior vetting by a film viewing committee. Members are being constantly urged to write to councils “emphasising their responsibilities” in this matter. Predictably there is no hint of criticism by the CSA of those bodies which ban films without seeing them.

“Girlie” magazines are high on the Association's black list and virtually every issue of *CSA Newsletter* carries reports on members' prying exploits. “There is no need to buy the offending magazine and the police must not reveal the name of the person making the complaint”, is the reassuring advice offered in the Winter 1977 *Newsletter*. The CSA's stand is that films can be banned without being seen, magazines condemned without being read and newsagents reported to the police without their knowledge.

Prurience and paltriness are the chief characteristics of CSA members, so predictably Brighton Borough Council's decision to designate part of the beach for use by nudists caused consternation in the ranks of Brighton and Hove branch. The pruders v. nudes battle started last September when the CSA wrote to all Council members objecting to the scheme. Councillor Jackie Barnes, their mouth-piece at the Town Hall, organised an anti-nudist demonstration with CSA backing to which she said “hopefully over 2,000 people will turn up”. Actually it was attended by just over a hundred elderly residents who waved little flags suitably inscribed “Traditional modesty suits us.” Many of the demonstrators were so unsteady on their pins that they processed in a bus which had been thoughtfully hired for the occasion.

Even before the beach was officially opened, Councillor—or should it be Clowncillor—Barnes proclaimed: “We've already seen the reaction to the nudist beach—all these winds and the Athina B crashing. These are all acts of God.” The grounding

of a 2,000-ton cargo vessel, thereby attracting thousands of visitors to the town during the flat season, was regarded by many Brightonians as a godsend rather than as a punishment for allowing people to swim and sunbathe in the altogether. But logic is not a strong point with those who regard the nudist beach as Brighton's biggest scandal since the affair of Prinny and Mrs Fitzherbert.

Other burning issues taken up by the CSA include the lyrics of a Punk Rock song, the size of lettering on the signboard at Bocastle witchcraft museum and the opening of a clinic in Doncaster where girls may obtain advice on contraception. A further matter for concern is “the trend towards topless dancers and strip shows in hotels and clubs.”

However, it is in the sphere of education that the Community Standards Association is seen both at its daftest and most unpleasant. While assenting to the right and responsibility of teachers and educationists for teaching methods and choice of books, the Association fully supported the action of one member who organised a protest against “the introduction of young teenagers to sordid books in the school curriculum.” (*CSA Newsletter*, Spring 1975). Miss Whitaker revealed in a letter to the *Western Morning News* (3 April 1975) that the “sordid books” to which the CSA objected were *A Kind of Loving*, by Stan Barstow, *Cider With Rosie*, by Laurie Lee, *A Kestrel for a Knave* (on which the film *Kes* was based) by Barry Hines and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, by Alan Sillitoe.

A Sussex member was congratulated (*CSA Newsletter*, Winter 1979-80) for objecting to “extremely offensive” books set by the South-East Examinations Board. The books included *The Millstone*, by Margaret Drabble, *Chips With Everything*, by Arnold Wesker and, again, *A Kestrel for a Knave*. (It is worth noting that the last named is one of the most popular books studied by secondary school pupils taking English in the past few years.)

Fortunately, teachers and education authorities usually take a firm stand against the CSA book-watchers. But it is deplorable when fanatically religious and puritanical parents deprive their children of the opportunity to study and acquire a wide knowledge and appreciation of literature. Moreover, it is intolerable that CSA parents (not to mention the Association's maiden ladies without, presumably, experience of parenthood) should attempt to deprive other people's children of the right to do so.

Of course the CSA is greatly in favour of bible reading, particularly by the young, although it contains many violent and disgusting passages. Perhaps the Community Standards Association should change its name to the Double Standards

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IN PRAISE OF THE NON-RATIONAL

The non-rational was praised highly by the two speakers at the Rationalist Press Association's Annual Dinner. The dinner was held at the restaurant of the London Zoo on 17 May, and the two guest speakers were Kathleen Nott and James Hemming.

Kathleen Nott, a novelist and poet, has been associated with humanism for many years and was described by Nicolas Walter, chairperson for the evening, as a "protagonist of unpopular causes in a difficult world". She embarked upon the unpopular course of attacking over-emphasis on reason and rationality. She set up her Aunt Sally of the desiccated nineteenth century rationalist who disregards the emotions in order to knock it down with praise for the non-rational. (What rationalist does not recognise that any description of mankind must take account of the emotions?)

"The rationalist tends to assume the opposite of rational is irrational, whereas it is non-rational," said Kathleen Nott. Freud has shown that man is not a rational animal and the twentieth century has shown that no moral progress could be made by persuading people to be more reasonable. Science had been misinterpreted as the solution to all problems, and the arts showed the importance of creativity without ratiocination. "Rationalism leaves out a large part of being human."

Having thoroughly muddled what it means to adhere to a rationalist approach, Kathleen Nott made more specific criticisms. She said the RPA should not have defended Kirkup's poem "The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name" because it was not a very good poem. (Does freedom of speech only apply to highly regarded masterpieces which no one would want to condemn?) She threw in a sharp comment on her dislike of the word "gay" to mean homosexual. (Did she speak out against the use of the word "queer" when it was current?) She also described Heretic Christmas cards (produced by Barbara Smoker) as grossly offensive to humanists.

Kathleen Nott concluded by confirming that she was against superstition and concepts of God.

James Hemming, President of the British Humanist Association, spoke of a belief vacuum among young people who had abandoned the religious tradition and of the need for humanism to come into focus sufficiently to fill the gap. He said that the humanist movement was without serious internal dissension while it was united against religious orthodoxy. (But Bradlaugh and Holyoake strongly disagreed about how far to attack Christianity 100 years ago and there has always been a range of emphasis in so far as there has been a cohesive movement.)

NEWS

James Hemming claimed that many Christians no longer believed superstitious dogma and had adopted humanist attitudes on human rights and so on. They were therefore now becoming important as allies. (Haven't humanists always been prepared to co-operate with religious leaders on matters of common concern such as prison reform or disarmament? And vice versa, Christians have supported humanists, for example some clergy supported Bradlaugh in his struggle to take his place in Parliament.)

The scientific world view had changed, said James Hemming, and values and responsibility were more important, while reality had become a looser concept. (Does not the distinction between the scientist and the theologian remain: where one sees mystery he seeks an explanation, where the other sees mystery he rejoices in the glowing fudge of God's mysterious ways?)

Mankind could be characterised by psychologists into two types, suggested James Hemming: this had been done variously as tough-minded — tender-minded, introvert — extrovert, convergent — divergent. He linked this polarity with discoveries about the function of the right and left hemisphere of the cerebral cortex. The left dealt with symbols and logic, the right with intuition, synthesis and patterns. People were dominated by one side or the other and the humanist movement contained the polarity between the ethical and rational wings, which must work together so that humankind as a whole may be mobilised.

(Is not the typology which sees mankind as *two* types a caricature of human diversity, and are all neurologists really confident that such conclusions about types can be drawn from discoveries about parts of the brain function? Is not the adoption of a hemisphere typology akin to nineteenth century enthusiasm for phrenology, which Holyoake believed in? Also, to characterise a rationalist as left-hemisphere, logic dominated and an ethical humanist as right, feeling dominated doesn't seem to fit: you meet imaginative use of logical thought and rigorously logical ethicists.)

The dinner was attended by members of all the humanist organisations, who put into practice their belief in tolerance by listening to such criticism and discussing it rationally.

The Rationalist Press Association publishes the "New Humanist". Details from RPA, 88 Islington High Street, London N1.

AND NOTES

SUSSEX BUDDHISTS

Twenty Buddhists have bought a Victorian mansion in West Sussex and are converting it into a monastery. Chichester District Council first refused them permission to stay, but the monks are appealing.

The monks live by a code which prohibits sex, alcohol, entertainment and the personal possession of money, property or food. Chichester Council fears increased traffic and damage to the environment, but the monks wish to avoid publicity and favour conservation of the countryside.

Freethinkers would question such an organisation's right to be a charitable trust exempt from taxes, but the District Council's attitude typifies the illogicality of people's thinking about religion. How many Christian monasteries have met with objections? Indeed, Councillor Peter Luttmann-Johnson said: "Should we permit everything in these islands?

... I would rather have a Christian organisation, but recognise that Buddhism exists and that Chichester Council is not going to change Buddhism into Christianity overnight. . ."

CHRISTIAN POLICE CHIEF

The annual convention of Mrs Whitehouse's National Viewers' and Listeners' Association was addressed by Greater Manchester's Chief Constable, James Anderton, at its annual convention in Birmingham. He said: "I am probably the only chief constable in recent times to state unequivocally and publicly that his personal stand for righteousness and virtue is the major weapon in his police armoury against crime and public disorder — the only chief constable who has honestly admitted that distinctly moral judgments within the law influence his professional attitudes.

"In consequence, I have been ridiculed, criticised and subjected to rigorous campaigns demanding my removal from office.

"Yes—all right—they can do without me, but they cannot ignore what I stand for. Truth and righteousness will never be denied."

Mr Anderton also attacked the Williams Committee's report on obscenity and film censorship, which he described as a "confidence trick".

The NVALA has received papal approval for its work "to defend family life". Mrs Whitehouse wrote to Pope John Paul telling him of her campaign and received a reply saying "His Holiness invokes on

you and the members of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association the abundant blessing of Almighty God."

A deputation of eight members of the Lords and Commons, led by Lord Nugent, met Mr William Whitelaw, the Home Secretary, to criticise the Williams Report. They said pornography is "morally corrupting, an infection of the mind and of the social climate". When will Mr Whitelaw see a deputation supporting the Williams Report?

Freethinker Fund

We are grateful to the following readers for their kind donations to the Freethinker Fund:

J. Busby, £1, F. Davis, £7; R. C. Edmunds, £1; S. Evans, £1; G. Fleddermann, £1.60; D. J. George, £7; R. P. Gill, £2; G. Glazier, £1; G. & L. Goldman, £2; E. J. Hughes, £2; G. R. Love, £1.30; C. Marcus, £2; P. J. McCormick, 50p; E. McGue, £1.70; P. Ponting-Barber, £1; W. Shannon, £1; L. Stapleton, £2; R. Stubbs, £3; Mrs Summersgill, £5; M. Violin, £6; S. Williams, £2; L. Wright, £1. Total for the period 21st April to 20th May £52.10.

OBITUARY

William M. Leech

On Friday, 16 May, Barbara Smoker officiated at the funeral at Putney Vale Crematorium of William Murray Leech (56), who had died suddenly, leaving a wife, a son and two daughters.

Mr S. Turnbull

Stanley Turnbull died in hospital last month, aged 63. There was a large gathering of relatives and friends at the secular committal ceremony which took place at Worthing Crematorium, Findon, Sussex, on 12 May.

The anarchist band Crass have made two albums "Station of the Crass" and "The Feeding of the 5,000" described by the band as "Totally anti-Christ in a responsible sort of way". Police have visited shops in Birmingham and London warning that the records are obscene and blasphemous.

CRACKED VIEWS

"Some people think I'm a crackpot, but the only crack in my head is where the light of Christ got in." Jim Duffecy, Australian evangelist, who directs the international evangelical organisation Open Air Campaigners based in America.

BOOKS

THE FREETHINKER. 1979 Bound Volume. G. W. Foote & Co. £6.00 (Fully Indexed)

Question: What is it that begins by reporting and ends by discussing obscenity?

Answer: The bound volume of *The Freethinker* for 1979, edited by Jim Herrick, with assistance from Barry Duke.

The discussion concerns the Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship chaired by Professor Bernard Williams; the report is of the mass "suicide" of religious fundamentalists at Jonestown in Guyana. These two editorials illustrate well what the journal has been saying for almost 100 years: that whether "obscenity" is defined in terms of capacity to deprave and corrupt or to offend reasonable people, its real manifestation is not description or depiction of the facts of life but the acting out of fantasies based on falsities. Truly, those who believe absurdities can commit atrocities.

These days you don't, of course, need to turn to *The Freethinker* to read about Jonestown or even about Williams. The mass media, which constantly promote superstition, both orthodox and unorthodox, are the first to scream when simple people take it literally, just as they deplore pornography while daily titillating sexual appetites. But thoughtful readers, as well as students of history, know where to go for a balanced, and often for a first, look at social realities that lie behind the passing scene. Themes which feature in the bound volume for 1979 are blasphemy law; voluntary euthanasia; soft drugs; homosexual law reform; abortion law reform (or, rather, abortion law retention, for humanists in the seventies have been more concerned to retain gains made in the sixties than to strike out in new territory); freedom of information; nuclear power; moral education; Basic English; the environment; international relations. Narrower secularist issues are not forgotten: Christian frauds; militant Islam; the essence of secularism; religious humanism; the case for atheism; fringe religions; church schools; papal roamings and writings.

Archivists can look through decades of *Freethinker* bound volumes without concluding that domestic arrangements, or at any rate ideals, consist in anything but a man, wife (female) and 2.3 (or whatever) children. There is passing reference in 1894-5, when a libel action was brought, to gay orgies said to have occurred in Leeds in 1878; but only to assert that these "most odious offences against decency and morality" were part of a Christian plot to discredit secularism. Times have certainly changed. In 1979 there are numerous book reviews and articles by Antony Grey, Britain's leading authority—I hope this is fully recognised—on gay rights, an article by Barry Duke and Brian

FREETHINKER

Parry on "Birth of Gay Humanist Group" (August) and reports by the editor and by Nicolas Walter, managing editor of *New Humanist*, on the *Gay News* appeal.

This theme alone demonstrates how successful *The Freethinker*, which is unable to pay contributors, has been in attracting feature writers, reviewers and correspondents who are acknowledged experts in their fields and sometimes household names. So we have Nicholas Reed and Lord Raglan on voluntary euthanasia; David Berman on atheism; Peter Cadogan, general secretary of South Place Ethical Society, on religious humanism; Sir Hermann Bondi and Harry Stopes-Roe on nuclear power; Edward Blishen on publishing for the young; and many others. Even rarer and more refreshing are two other characteristics of *Freethinker* contributors. Whether famous or not they are highly vocal, thoughtful and unafraid to challenge the experts—as over nuclear power. And they do not shrink from unpopular views, even within humanist and radical circles. It is very easy for minority groups and publications to become self-congratulatory; so readers should welcome, however much they may personally disagree with, courageous pieces like Geoffrey H. L. Berg's "A Right-Wing Atheist's Perspective" (April), Francis Bennion's persuasive "Free Speech Till It Hurts" (May) and Christopher Findlay's review of "IQ Heritability and Racism" (December). Similarly, although the environment is hardly an unpopular theme in humanist circles, Don E. Marietta, Jr, argues (November) that the movement has given it insufficient attention. Professional courage of a different sort is displayed by the editor in October when he admits a guest editorial (by David Berman) four pages long. I found this exposé of the Knock apparition as plausible as it was novel and comparable with explanations of the Turin shroud which appear elsewhere in the volume.

Much valuable work in exposing religious frauds has been done by "Her Logic" Barbara Smoker, president of the National Secular Society, whose comments on *homo religiosus* glitter throughout the journal. It has other stalwarts: James MacDonald on theatre and Vera Lustig on cinema, both demonstrating that comment on the arts need not be "arty" but can be highly relevant to contemporary life. Discontinued in December through pressure of other work, William McIlroy's monthly "Jottings" are among the highlights of 1979. Though he sometimes writes like an atheistic Earl of Arran, this editor of *The Freethinker* is never dull, especially when exposing religious cults. Like Jesus at the marriage feast at Cana, he saves his best wine till

REVIEWS

the end; with a filtering of Francis Bennion's "pastoral humanism" in October and a pre-Christmas unbottling of a magnum of the milk of human kindness and a litre of loveliness in November. Editors of the journal have a habit of returning to the scene of their former crimes, and we find interesting reviews in 1979 by Nigel Sinnott and Christopher Morey.

Readers outside London will particularly welcome reports of meetings and dinners they may have been unable to attend: the NSS AGM (January) and Annual Dinner, where the Guest of Honour was the evergreen MP Renée Short, demonstrating that personal qualities are more important than mealy-mouthedness in retaining what could be a marginal constituency (April), the Rationalist Press Association's Annual Dinner (June) and NSS meetings on freedom of information (June), Krishna Consciousness and church schools (July). The journal has been slow to recognise the worldwide significance of the revival of Islam, but perceptive articles on Iran (March) and Pakistan (June) by "An Indian Rationalist"—who for years has done enormous unsung work for secularism—do much to fill the void. A new series on overseas freethought bodies, starting with the Israel Secular Association (October) and the New South Wales Rationalist Association (December), is also welcome.

I am pleased to see the reappearance of satire with Francis Bennion's "The Fight for Plant Rights" (April) and wonder if it will be taken seriously. Some years ago I wrote, under the nom de plume of "A Reverent Humanist", a few spoofs which almost caused apoplexy among some leading secularists. Another stimulating article, though vulnerable to the criticism it in fact attracts, is "What Is Secularism?" by Harry H. Pearce of Melbourne, who owns the best private library of freethought books I have ever seen. In addition to names already mentioned, there are interesting book reviews by Sarah Lawson, Margaret McIlroy and Ken Wright. Some of the best items are, by the way, by the editor himself, notably "A Secular View of Moral Education" (May).

A sad feature of many publications is obituary coverage. I was particularly grieved in 1979 by the passing of William Griffiths, for many years regarded by NSS dissidents as the kingpin of its "establishment". Though having all the outer trappings of a church warden or at least of someone who "doesn't believe a word of religion but won't hear a word against it", he was an active secularist throughout his adult life. Cautious in accepting at face value newcomers to the movement (I soon discovered

how prudent his caution was), he gave complete loyalty to those who proved worthy of it. Equally essential was his abiding concern for the movement's finances even at times when it was fashionable to spend as if "the Lord will provide". His selfless dedication to "the best of causes" was unsurpassed.

DAVID TRIBE

MUSLIM POLITICS IN SECULAR INDIA by Hamid Dalwai. Hind Packet Books, 60p.

Post-partition India contains a substantial number of citizens who are Muslims by religion. Most of them and their leaders seem to think of themselves as a separate community, supporting separate Muslim parties where they are in fair numbers, being wooed by the national parties for their vote as a community, defending its separate personal law (including inheritance, marriage, divorce, etc.) and obstructing progress towards a common civic law for all citizens. Mercifully they participate in all trade union activity freely as workers, and fully appreciate the need for putting aside religious considerations. Some of them become irreligious Marxists and yet lose none of their support for that reason provided they do not raise questions of religion, dogma, secularism or a common civil law.

It is left to only a handful of Muslim intellectuals to raise the fundamental questions regarding the integration of the Muslims in a secular society. Among these, Hamid Dalwai was the most outspoken; he did most significant work, in co-operation with the Indian Secular Society, to organise the struggle of Muslim women against arbitrary divorce.

Hamid Dalwai's unique analysis is a valuable aid to the understanding of the Muslim situation in the Indian sub-continent.

G. N. DEODHEKAR

Available from G. W. Foote & Co, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL, 60p + 13p postage.

CINEMA

MIRROR (U) Camden Plaza, London. Distributed by Artificial Eye.

BAD TIMING (X) Selected local cinemas.

"Mirror has proven itself a clear film . . . even for the uninformed public . . . If one finds double meanings in it, that will be because we are not used to seeing the truth on the screen," said Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky of his latest film, *Mirror*. The Soviet authorities, however, condemned it as elitist. *Mirror* is autobiographical, but is not a straight narrative. Working backwards and forwards, it evokes certain periods in Tarkovsky's life, and sets them in their historical context by

the use of carefully chosen and juxtaposed newsreel footage, some of it very moving, from the Spanish Civil War, World War II and the postwar period. The personal recollections, of Tarkovsky's wartime childhood in a rambling *dacha* and of his adult life with his son and estranged wife, are in colour and are also interspersed with melancholic fantasy scenes, filmed in a damp, greenish monochrome. The sequences move and merge with great fluency. There is an uncanny rightness about every one of the often surreal images: milk dripping from a ceiling; the mother levitating from her bed; a boy standing in the snow, a bird alighting on his head; a hand closed over a burning stick. Tarkovsky's evocation of a child's wonder and foreboding, and his sensuous use of the elements — the sight and sound of wind raking a meadow; feet stamping and squeaking on hard-packed snow; Father silently helping Mother wash her hair — must surely be unsurpassed in the cinema.

All that said, I found this film remote and confusing. It was not a question of finding "double meanings", as Tarkovsky has suggested, but simply, and maddeningly, not knowing who was who or what was happening on many occasions. Lack of humour and of any climax or any emotional involvement (except in the newsreel footage) seem to be the price we have to pay here for cinematic "truth". It is odd that what is evidently a deeply personal film should have such an impersonal feel to it.

With the passing of Hitchcock, Nic Roeg (*Performance*, *Walkabout*, *Don't Look Now*) is probably our greatest living director. His latest offering, *Bad Timing*, is set in present-day Vienna, still haunted by the shades of Freud and Klimt and very much part of the Central Europe of Kafka and Dracula. Milena Flaherty and Dr. Alex Linden, an ill-matched American couple, have been having a stormy affair, which has culminated in Milena's taking an overdose. While doctors operate to save Milena's life, the reptilian Alex is interrogated by an Inspector Netusil (translated roughly as "He didn't have an inkling"), who becomes increasingly appalled and fascinated by the "physical and moral chaos" he uncovers. Netusil's existence begins to impinge eerily on Alex's. A painterly director, Roeg creates a cruel world of voyeurism and destructive passions, in which everyday objects—brooches, a penknife, a stone—are invested with significance. Using brilliant cutting techniques, he flicks back and forth between the operation, the couple's life leading up to the suicide attempt, and the interrogation. Milena arching under the surgeon's knife is intercut with her writhing under Alex's body. The result is an exhilarating, if painful, eroticism.

Bad Timing is rich in dilettante-ish visual references to Freud, Klimt, Egon Schiele, Pinter, full of hints and red herrings. Roeg loves to play at spot-the-reference and guess-the-quotation with his audi-

ence, and his rather pseud quality makes his films at once irritating and personal, as though one could glimpse Roeg himself reflected in their venerated surface. With all due respects, I think other critics have praised his direction fulsomely, at the expense of his very Central European-looking cast. Particularly memorable are Theresa Russell as the wayward Milena and Harvey Keitel as Netusil. Theresa Russell gives a performance of tremendous rage and raunchiness, yet wears her plumage-bright clothes with style. Harvey Keitel has an unnerving screen presence, with his lank hair and that careworn face which so powerfully combines menace and vulnerability. His role is sadly, and mistakenly, peripheral. I fail to see why the screenplay-writer, Yale Udoff, having flattered our smartness with his games and quotations, then goes on to insult it by taking the lovers off on a beautiful but irrelevant jaunt to Morocco. If, instead, he had expanded the less photogenic Alex/Netusil relationship, allowing its undertones of ambivalence and of emotional vampyrism to develop, we would have had a film that was, admittedly, shorter on the seedy glamour, and therefore perhaps a little less accessible. It would have stayed truer to itself, though, and might well have grown into a steamy masterpiece.

VERA LUSTIG

LETTERS

ABSOLUTELY NOT!

Referring to my article "Money Matters at Conway Hall" ("Freethinker", April), John L. Broom questions (May Letters) my stand on a non-absolutist situational morality, reading into my article "an absolutist stand regarding the immorality of incitement to racial hatred". But the point I was making was that, although I certainly regard such incitement as invariably immoral, in certain circumstances it may be the lesser of two evils, and I put the value of freedom of speech very high indeed. In fact, I think Camden Council was wrong to ban the National Front from council-owned premises, not only because members of the NF are ratepayers, but also because the fresh air of free speech is the best defence against false ideologies. Conway Hall, however, is privately owned, so does not have quite the same social responsibility to provide facilities for the expression of abhorrent views.

Even so, I was not opposed to its letting to the National Front until the student Gately was killed in a consequent demonstration. That, to my mind, tipped the scale against future lettings that might lead to similar tragedies. But I respected the view of Peter Cadogan and his supporters that freedom of speech and assembly remained paramount. I joined the vociferous opposition to them only when Mr Cadogan decided that, on the ground that controversy within the Society of which he is secretary would be prejudicial to its forthcoming court case, freedom of speech in its journal should be denied to those of its own members who opposed the prevailing letting policy. Ironically, therefore, it was really in defence of free speech that I joined the opposition. The turning-point was when SPES lost its grant from Camden Council as a result of its letting policy, and Mr Cadogan, instead of allowing the General Committee

to discuss this new factor in the situation, immediately issued an intransigent press-release off his own bat. Later he deliberately gave the impression, on television, in his speech in the council chamber, and in the press, that the Society was united on this, and castigated those members who dared to expose the true division of opinion.

The letter from Brenda Able, supporting my opposition to letting the hall to the National Front, goes much further than I would be prepared to go, and includes as undesirable hirers the Paedophile Information Exchange. Here I disagree with her. What possible risk could there be to children at a public meeting? You might as well advocate banning assemblies of heterosexual males in case some of them rape women!

BARBARA SMOKER

TOLERANCE

That the paedophiles met in Conway Hall is true. It indicates no "South Place" support for them. They are people with a problem which I don't claim to fully understand. The problem, however, does not go away by someone denying their right to meet to talk about it. They made a mistake in making the meeting public and I understand that they now, more sensibly, meet privately. We behaved openly and honourably in defending their right to meet and I, for my pains, got pelted with stink bombs and other missiles when I took charge of the front door. I have no regrets and our position was commended at the last conference of the National Council of Civil Liberties. The intolerant only condemn themselves.

PETER CADOGAN

SHOSTAKOVICH

Audrey Williamson criticises Jasper Ridley for writing biographies only in the nineteenth-century period ("The Freethinker", May). Even if this were a valid criticism in general, it isn't a valid criticism of Jasper Ridley, who has written biographies not only of Garibaldi, Palmerston, and Napoleon III and Eugénie, but also of Nicholas Ridley, Thomas Cranmer, John Knox, and Mary Tudor.

Audrey Williamson also argues that Robespierre and Stalin were really quite nice chaps. She says she used to be a music critic. She should have stuck to it.

W. H. PEMBERTON

I cannot understand the strange reasoning of Audrey Williamson in her letter on Shostakovich and Stalin (May, "Freethinker"). To dismiss the bloody purges of Stalin as some "treason trials" is to completely misunderstand the nature of the Bolshevik terror, which had its origins in the rule of Lenin and of which Stalin was the heir. By the time the purges of the 1930s took place all opposition outside of the Communist Party had been ruthlessly suppressed by firing squad, imprisonment and—if one was lucky—exile. The Tzarist regime was a rule of amateurs by comparison. When Stalin turned his attentions to his fellow party members, therefore, he was not indulging in a whim, he was applying the same policy to them that he (and they) had applied to the non-Marxist dissidents of previous years. All this was well-documented before Stalin became, first Hitler's ally, and, then, our ally.

As for her attempt to excuse Stalin's actions on the grounds that they were necessary in order to build an "industrialised society" one can only reply: "bullshit". Any dictatorship could excuse its repression with a similar argument—didn't Hitler "wrench" Germany out of the economic chaos of the Weimar Republic and provide "work and wages" for all? It is time this old communist fellow traveller canard was put to rest along with all the other threadbare ration-

alisations that apologists for the Bolshevik myth have used.

S. E. PARKER

In an otherwise excellent review of "Testimony, The Memoirs of Shostakovich" ("The Freethinker", April), Terry Mullins makes the inaccurate statement that Bertrand Russell was singing the praises of the Russian Revolution. True, some like the Webbs admired the authoritarian regime, but Russell took a commendably libertarian line. To quote from his "Why I am not a communist": "The dictatorship of the proletariat thus came to be the dictatorship of a small committee, and ultimately one man—Stalin. As the sole class-conscious proletarian, Stalin condemned millions of peasants to death by starvation and millions of others to forced labour in concentration camps . . ."

I am completely at a loss to understand how it came about that some people who are both humane and intelligent could find something to admire in the vast slave camp produced by Stalin.

BILL HUGHES

Editor, "Hyde Park Socialist"

As I pointed out in my review of the Shostakovich "Memoirs", there were a number of questions raised by the publication. Certainly, if they are forgeries they are a remarkable work of fiction.

Audrey Williamson (April, "Freethinker") does well to question the political gullibility of some secularists. The elimination of such eminent artists as Meyerhold, Zashchenko, and Akhmatova as well as Marshal Turkhachevsky is sufficient to damn Stalin in my eyes, as is his creation of the Berlin Wall and all that it stands for. As for Shostakovich's son Maxim, what else could he say, he has to live in Russia and has an important musical post there.

It is to be hoped that S. Volkov will produce the chapters signed by the composer when Maxim's biography of his father appears.

TERRY MULLINS

WESLEY

Audrey Williamson and J. Hoskins take exception to my review of Stanley Ayling's biography of John Wesley (Letters, April). Their attitudes seem to me quite mistaken. One should try to judge a person objectively, irrespective of whether his religious views coincide with one's own.

Audrey Williamson wishes me to accept "that the eighteenth century was the Age of Reason". It was not. There were fewer witch-burnings and less religious persecution than in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and Thomas Paine, Voltaire and their associates lived in it; that is all. Thomas Paine was an incomparably greater thinker and a more attractive character than Wesley, as well as a genuine democrat. Unfortunately he was far in advance of his time—as well as of our own.

As for Wilkes, Audrey Williamson's remarks are enough to make one wonder whether she remembers her own book! Of his 1776 Reform Bill, she writes: "It cannot have been wholly insincere"! She has to admit: "These brutalities" (transportation to Australia) "the slave trade, the exploitation of Africans and Indians, seem to have come outside the range of Wilkes' reforming zeal, nor was he deeply concerned with workers' wages and conditions of work. Probably this was lack of imagination rather than inhumanity." No doubt; but Wesley did have the imagination and a deep, genuine passion to match.

Audrey Williamson blames me for excusing some of Wesley's unenlightened attitudes by reference to

the standards of his time, but she is quite happy to use the same excuse for Wilkes when she discusses his enthusiasm for the continuance of a war with France, being fought for the most sordid commercial motives. She writes: "In such matters of foreign policy he was essentially a man of his time", and adds, "It was from this moment that he made himself popular with the city merchants for supporting their commercial interests."

Wesley advocated far more than "charity" to the poor. He wanted to curb the luxury of the rich to benefit the needy and went without any form of luxury himself. Wilkes, on the other hand, would have been as ready to limit the rich for the benefit of the poor as is Maggie Thatcher. Audrey Williamson herself tells us how he supported a workhouse in his constituency as being the cheapest way of providing for the poor, and she writes: "How much his interest in poverty was based on a sense of the financial burden on those in better circumstances is equivocal, but he was not an inhumane man."

To J. Hoskins I say merely that if he will re-read my review he will find that I never implied that the movement Wesley founded has been "wholly beneficent". The book, and therefore my review, dealt with Wesley personally, not with Methodism. Nor was I uncritical of him, pointing out that though he vehemently opposed the Calvinist doctrine of pre-destination in which he was brought up, the doctrine of hell-fire which he did teach was still abominable.

Wesley worked for what he believed in with unsurpassed courage and endurance. These are the facts. His readiness to sacrifice himself for his principles was matched by his readiness to sacrifice others. If one must look for comparisons with other historical personages the one which occurs to me is with Lenin.

Life would be simpler if people and movements did not contain odd mixtures of vices and virtues. But life is not simple. I stand by everything I said in my review.

MARGARET McILROY

MORTALISM

M. M. Wiles writes (Letters April 1980) that my "Poverty of Mortalism" (January 1980) "suggests that the term ["mortalism"] is of recent coinage"; but even after re-reading my article I can find no such suggestion. What I did claim was that "There is no recognised term for the position which denies personal immortality. The nearest acceptable designation is Sadduceism . . ."—a claim which seems to be borne out by the Oxford English Dictionary whose entries for Sadduceism are more numerous and widely distributed than those for mortalism. (The earliest entry for mortalism is 1646, whereas there is one for Sadducean in 1593.)

My principal concern, however, was not the early use of the term mortalism but the early avowal of (unconditional) mortalism. Wiles suggests that shortly after 1640 there were "heretical books and pamphlets" in Britain which affirmed mortalism. I have been unable to find such published affirmations and would be grateful for the evidence. Freethinkers should be at least as interested in those pioneers who made freethinking history as in those who made lexical history: who first avowed mortalism rather than employed the term by way of accusation or warning.

DAVID BERMAN

"CATH-BASHING"

I fully endorse the sentiments of R. W. Aldridge in his letter (April, "Freethinker").

There has been a noticeable trend in recent years for secularists to indulge in "Cath-bashing". While this undoubtedly allows those who do this to vent

their spleens against some imagined popish plot, it hardly improves the image of secularists to others who may come to the conclusion that freethinkers are either inverted Catholics or alternatively suffering from an attack of acute paranoia with Roman undertones.

I also agree that the Labour Party is hardly a vehicle for promoting a secular point of view. Soper we all know about, but remember that even amongst the Tribune group Eric Heffer and Tony Benn, to name but two, accept a Christian interpretation of life; so I would take the point of view that joining the Labour Party to advance secularism is a close parallel to participating in necrophilia.

Finally, although I agree that there are many reasons for opposing the Catholics on ideological grounds, I have come to the conclusion that Protestants (particularly those of the "born again" type or low Anglican) pose more of a menace to freethinking than Roman Catholics. Petty-minded puritans like Ian Paisley and Madam Whitehouse are products of Protestant societies not of Catholic ones. In Catholic countries there is a more clear-cut division between religious and secular than in Protestant nations where the two tend to become merged, which can lead to the church's opinions becoming intermeshed with the country's legal framework.

In this day and age we should all be concerned about erosions of individual liberty and privacy from any quarter, be it religious or temporal, but please let us not single out Catholics as the only danger to a rational society of mankind.

KEN WRIGHT

ADULTERY AND THE KORAN

Vera Lustig repeats the general belief that the television film *Death of a Princess* concerned "the Koranic law on adultery" (Freethinker, May). It should be made clear that capital punishment for adultery is not in the Koran, which mentions only flogging and life imprisonment, but appears in post-Koranic tradition.

NICOLAS WALTER

(Jottings)

Association.

CSA members are urged to "question young people along the following lines: (1) what work are they studying in English classes at school (2) what ideological discussion takes place during the English lessons. Please give as full details as possible of the dates, the type of school and its name. Material will be handled confidentially." Children may be recruited as unwitting spies and teachers are fair game for CSA marks. Such are the ethical standards of the upholders of Christian morality.

The CSA is strongly opposed to the work of the Family Planning Association among the young. Readers of *CSA Newsletter* (Winter 1977) were informed: "Since 1973 we have written to the press warning of the FPA's activities among young people . . . We shall continue to warn the public . . . of the FPA's work so far as it concerns young people." In the same issue of *CSA Newsletter* members were recommended to discuss "the dangers of the FPA's influence and activities among young

(continued on page 96)

PUBLICATIONS

- ALLEGRO, John. The Red Sea Scrolls. £1.25 (16p).
 AYER, A. J. (Ed.) The Humanist Outlook. 95p (36p).
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(Jottings)

people and the importance of FPA-based sex education training for teachers being opposed."

The Family Planning Association has a long and honourable history of counselling, educating and disseminating knowledge that has prevented an incalculable number of unwanted pregnancies, abortions, broken homes and deaths. Yet its work among the young is sabotaged by the people who ignorantly claim that child prostitution has been "almost unknown" during the last 100 years (CSA Newsletter, Winter 1977).

Organisations like the Community Standards Association attempt to justify their policies by posing as the defenders of youth. Their claim is, of course, a red herring, and a rather smelly one at that. They brazenly exploit an instinct that is common to most animals, including the human species, to defend and protect their young. This reaction in contemporary Britain takes the form of deep concern about the welfare and future prospects of young people, threatened by expenditure cuts in the education services, lack of social and recreational facilities, long periods of unemployment and, in many areas, racial discrimination. The CSA ignores these fundamental problems, because for all their mealy-mouthed moralising they don't care a damn about the real interests of young people. They regard the youth of today as the pew fodder and breeding machines of the future.

In one CSA leaflet we are urged to build for future generations "a society in which they will be proud to live." A noble sentiment: but in reality the type of society which the Community Standards Association favours is one in which the censor, the authoritarian, the informer and the religious bigot holds sway.

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. Talk-in on Humanism. Thursday, 12 June, 8 pm. 8a Grand Parade, Castlereagh Road, Belfast. Secretary: Wendy Wheeler, 30 Cloyne Crescent, Monkstown, Co. Antrim. Tel: Whiteabby 66752.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Tea party followed by Annual General Meeting. Sunday, 6 July, 4.30 pm. Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove.

Havering and District Humanist Society. Discussion: Involvement. Tuesday, 17 June. Dick Condon: Primitive Gospels. Tuesday, 1 July. Both 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre (Junction of Gubbins Lane and Squirrel Heath Road).

Leeds and District Humanist Group. John Allcock: Secularisation and Moral Change. Tuesday, 10 June, 8 pm. Swarthmore, Leeds.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Annual General Meeting. Thursday, 26 June, 7.45 pm. 21 Brightling Road, London SE4.

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.)

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday Morning Meetings, 11 am. 8 June, T. F. Evans: A Century of Tawney. 15 June, Albert R. Vogeler: Is "Class" Still Important? 29 June, Robert Hemstreet: Being Religious Liberally. 6 July, Richard Scorer: Creative Evolution and the Individual. 13 July, Harold Blackham: Self-Management. Tuesday Discussions will continue informally, details on request.

Sutton Humanist Group. Nicolas Walter: Freedom of Information. Wednesday, 11 June, 8 pm. Friends' House, Cedar Road, Sutton.

Tyneside Humanist Society. A. C. Hobson: Survival in a World of Change, 18 June. Discussion: Humanist Issues, 25 June. F. R. Griffin: Basic Humanism, 2 July. All 7.30 pm. Friends' Meeting House, 1 Archbold Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne 2.

Gay Humanist Group. Antony Grey: Being Rational About Being Gay. Friday, 13 June, 7.30 pm. Library, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1.

Preparations have commenced for the centenary celebrations for "The Freethinker" next year. Further details will be announced, meanwhile we would like to announce that we would be willing to provide a speaker for local humanist groups to talk about "The Freethinker", which was founded in May 1881. If you would like to arrange for a speaker please contact the "Freethinker" office: 702, Holloway Road, London N19 3NL.

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Editor: JIM HERRICK

News & Notes edited by Barry Duke

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