

# The Freethinker

secular humanist monthly

founded 1881

Vol. 101, No. 8

AUGUST 1981

25p

## MISERY OF CHRISTIANITY SEEN IN SUFFERING OF ABORIGINES

"The Misery of Christianity" is the title of a famous book by an ex-priest.<sup>1</sup> The author writes of how Christian theology "has shown that every form of human suffering, every deprivation and every injustice can be substantiated, glorified or made harmless by Christian teaching, which deadens man's sense of humanity and takes a fundamentally cynical view of human dignity". An outstanding feature of the misery of Christianity has been its missionary tradition. That history of atrocious events is recalled in current controversy in Australia about the Aborigines. The World Council of Churches has spoken of the oppression of Aborigines. Even today Christian intolerance, inflexibility and arrogance is exhibited in the attitude of some Catholic and Protestant church leaders in Australia towards them.

A World Council of Churches mission has been investigating the state of the Aborigines in Australia. The head of the mission, Professor Anwar Barkat of Pakistan, claimed that Australia was practising "a system of genocide" towards them.

Members of the WCC mission visited areas chosen by the Aborigines and said they were given a very warm welcome. The leader, Professor Anwar Barkat, said he had seen classic examples of "racism and exploitation by pastoralists who ignored Australian law". The premiers of Queensland and Western Australia refused to meet the team. They accused members of the team of having closed minds and being Communist influenced.

Although the WCC is very critical of exploitation and inhumanity in all corners of the world, Christians have played a prominent role in exploitation and repression in their missionary history. Evidence of this is emerging in the case of the Aborigines. A

Benedictine mission run by Father Seraphim Sanz is said by Aborigines to be a colonial era jail. An Aborigine, Clement Maraltadji, said "the priest treats us like children". He spoke of money deducted from social security cheques, appalling tin shacks, beating of children with a belt, and a refusal to let Aborigines develop their own capacities. Father Sanz refused permission for the WCC to land their aircraft at the mission, threatening a fine and a blockade of tractors and 44-gallon drums.

Another instance of the conflict of Aboriginal rights with Christianity is seen in the case of Father Dodson, the only Aborigine serving as a Catholic priest. Even as a Catholic priest himself, he is very critical of the Catholic Church. Father Dodson was put in charge of a Catholic mission in Darwin and he said he "let them bring back their traditions and their self-esteem".

### Pressure from Catholics

According to him there is pressure from the Catholic hierarchy for him to move. "There isn't much sympathy for the way I think in the Catholic Church. There are no black bishops. Even some of the Irish priests, who've been kicked out of their own country and should know something about dispossession, don't show much sympathy. Action against me won't be taken blatantly. I'll be transferred to New Guinea, or told that my special knowledge of Aborigines would be of great pastoral benefit to a parish in Toorak."

As an Aborigine Christian he is in a position of conflict. He has allegiance both to his people and to his church. He is aware of the way Christian missions have operated in the past: "My grandfather

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was kicked off the Catholic mission for keeping up Aboriginal ceremonies. He could combine both Christianity and traditional religion in his own spiritual life with no hassles, but they kicked him off with my mother and elder sister before I was born. When they thought he'd been sufficiently punished they brought him back and put him in a place the lepers had just been taken out of, to further emphasise his need for penitence."

Father Dodson has been rebuked by his Bishop, the Rev John O'Loughlin. The Bishop is critical of "revival of old Aboriginal customs" which has come "from certain artistic people who see some value in it because they can get some nice films of corroborees". He said evangelism was the most important thing Christians could offer Aborigines.

### Lutheran Profits

Earlier in the year conflict between Aborigines and Christianity arose when an Aboriginal leader attacked the Lutheran Church for its exploitation. Mr Charles Perkins, chairman of the Aboriginal Development Commission and special adviser to the Government, accused the Lutheran Church of pocketing \$1 million profit from cattle sales at an Aboriginal pastoral lease in the Northern Territory.

Speaking at the annual conference of the Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council, Mr Perkins said the Lutheran Church was "exploitative and anachronistic". He said the Aboriginal people received nothing from the profit from cattle sales at Hermansburg: "These people live in abject poverty and this body has the audacity to carry off such funds under the premise of spiritual needs of the church as sanctioned by the people."

A superintendent of the church mission said the church had not sold all cattle stock before the return of the land to Aboriginal ownership, and that any profits during the 103 years of the special-purpose lease would have gone back to the mission.

### Tribe Wiped Out

An article in *The Age* (Melbourne) by David Elias recounts the history of a Lutheran mission at Killalpannina. It is the site of a lost Aboriginal tribe and David Elias writes that Killalpannina is "one of the blackest chapters" in the 100 years history of the Lutheran missions. "The entire Djieri tribe which inhabited the north-eastern part of South Australia was wiped out in three stages by actions of the Lutheran missionaries."

The founder of the mission, Herman Vogelsang, disapproved of nakedness, like all good Victorian Christians, and distributed clothes among the natives. But the Aborigines were not told that the clothes needed washing, and many died from infested and diseased clothes.

At a later period during a prolonged drought, the Aborigines were told that God would provide for them. When the Christian god failed to produce rain, they rebelled and missionaries called in troops to put down the rebellion with further deaths.

The final disaster came with the influenza epidemic of 1918. The Aborigines had no built-in resistance to the white man's imported germs and the remainder of the Djieri tribe died.

Christians who praise evangelical work should remember the history of missionary activity. Christians today in Britain talk of the need to evangelise the inner cities. May we, unlike the Aborigines, be spared the worst excesses of the "misery of Christianity".

1. *The Misery of Christianity* by Joachim Kahl Penguin, 1971. Now out of print.

## GOALS OF ATHEISTS

Madalyn Murray O'Hair, a leading American atheist and Editor-in-chief of the *American Atheist*, talked about the aims of atheists in a stirring speech at Drake University in March 1981. She spoke of the goals of atheists and how they define their life-style:

"An atheist loves himself and his fellow man instead of a god. An atheist accepts that heaven is something for which we should work now—here on earth—for all men together to enjoy. An atheist accepts that he can get no help through prayer but that he must find in himself the inner conviction to meet life, grapple with it, to subdue it and enjoy it. An atheist accepts that only in a knowledge of himself and a knowledge of his fellow man can he find the understanding that will help to a life of fulfilment.

"Therefore, he seeks to know himself and his fellow man rather than to know god. An atheist accepts that a hospital should be built instead of a church. An atheist accepts that a deed must be done instead of a prayer said. An atheist strives for involvement in life and not escape into death. He wants disease conquered, poverty vanished, war eliminated. He wants man to understand and love man. He wants an ethical way of life. He accepts that we cannot rely on a god nor channel action into prayer nor hope for an end to troubles in a hereafter. He accepts that we are—in a sense—our brothers' keepers in that we are, first, keepers of our own lives; that we are responsible persons, that the job is here and the time now." (*The American Atheist*, April 1981)



# Bearing Witness to Parliament

BARBARA SMOKER

The daily evidence to parliamentary Select Committees is published by HMSO. Here the President of the National Secular Society gives the personal story behind some of the evidence for one day this summer.

If you are ever invited to appear before a Select Committee of the House of Commons to give oral evidence, by all means go—provided you happen to be a cardinal (RC) or an archbishop (C of E) or are dauntless under cross-examination. Unless you come into the first two categories, a little training might be advisable — training, say, under cross-examination on a murder charge. When, on 22 June, I went like a lamb to the inquisitors, I was an untrained novice.

The inquisitors were the MPs comprising the Education, Science and Arts Committee, which had been set up to look into the curricula and examinations in secondary schools. Although there was no mention of religion in its terms of reference, the opportunity of dealing with religion in schools seems to have been recognised at the outset, since the MPs who volunteered to serve on the Committee included at least two religious extremists, who, together with seven other MPs, make up this Select Committee. And the religious aspect of education seems to have become a major theme of its deliberations and of the memoranda sent in. Bodies which submitted memoranda on this theme included the Catholic Education Council, the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (Education Committee), the British Evangelical Council, the Christian Education Movement, and the Association for Religious Education; a neutral view being represented by the Social Morality Council, and the humanist view by the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society. We were fortunate in that the Chairman of the Select Committee, Mr Christopher Price, MP, is sympathetic to our viewpoint, and suggested we submit evidence for the sake of balance.

Nobody well acquainted with the BHA and the NSS could have failed to identify their respective memoranda by their style as well as their emphasis—the BHA's abstract concepts and academic language contrasting very much with the down-to-earth style of the NSS. While the BHA emphasised the need to widen RE so as to include naturalistic "life stances", the NSS simply demanded removal of the present religious bias, with its statutory compulsion and subsidy, nothing necessarily being put in place of it.

The BHA and NSS were also invited to appear before the Select Committee in tandem (one repre-

sentative from each) to back up their memoranda orally.

Dr Harry Stopes-Roe was chosen as the BHA representative and I as the NSS representative; and, in order to avoid the possible embarrassment of being at loggerheads before the Committee, we negotiated beforehand to narrow the gap between us. As a result of this negotiation, our respective committees agreed to amplify their memoranda. The BHA, on its side, accepted the need to consider what department of teachers should be responsible for "Life Stance Education", since it could hardly be (in their phrase) "objective, fair and balanced" if left in the hands of the existing RE teachers or teachers trained in the existing RE teacher-training colleges or departments, rooted in Christian theology. The NSS, in its turn, accepted the BHA's concept of "Life Stance Education" (though with little enthusiasm for the phrase), not as something that schools should necessarily provide, but in order to prohibit anything narrower than that: whilst assuming that most county schools would drop RE altogether once the compulsory element were removed from the law, and, unlike the BHA, viewing that prospect with equanimity, the NSS conceded the necessity of introducing replacement legislation to ensure that any schools which did not drop RE would present it as a range of alternative views, including non-religious views.

The time allotted to our oral evidence was from 5 to 6 pm on 22 June, the previous hour being allotted to the Catholic Church in the person of Cardinal Basil Hume.

## Cardinal's Evidence

Arriving at the House in time to hear the cardinal's evidence before giving ours, I was directed to the largest of the committee rooms, where the scene mirrored the large 19th-century painting of a similar committee hearing that hung on one of the walls of carved panelling. Six of the nine members of the Committee took their places on high-backed, gold-crested green leather chairs round three sides of the large table, the fourth side being reserved for the witnesses. An outer ring of similar chairs was taken up by two dozen journalists, a few spectators, and members of the BBC with their recording apparatus.

Cardinal Hume took his place at the witnesses' end of the table, flanked by two aides — one a bishop, the other a lay expert in religious education. The Chairman thanked them for coming along, and the members of the Committee took turns in questioning him, very gently. It was hardly surprising that Mr Patrick Cormack should be sycophantic



and feed him with the right questions, but one hardly expected Mr Stan Thorne, who was at one time a member of the BHA, to begin ingratiatingly "Like the Chairman, I would like to thank you for answering questions this afternoon, particularly as my wife thinks that we should be answering your questions!" However, this excessive politeness was, at least, reassuring for us.

The cardinal justified the need for religious education and for church schools in terms of the malaise and values of the consumer society and of such moral issues as nuclear weapons, disparity of wealth, and race relations. No one asked him why he expected religion to mitigate any of these problems when it had done nothing but exacerbate them throughout history. And so his hour of evidence, with occasional polite interventions by his two aides, wafted by.

As the hands of the clock neared 5 pm, the Chairman brought the session to a gentle close, and invited Dr Stopes-Roe and me to take the witnesses' places at the table. Some members of the press left at that point, but a few stayed and the BBC carried on recording.

### Gruelling Questions

The Committee questioned us closely on the membership figures of our respective organisations and of the humanist movement as a whole, suggesting that our small numbers made our presence there unjustifiable. We insisted that the relevant fact was not our joint paid-up membership but the proportion of the public at large that holds opinions in line with ours — but this only brought demands for statistical details that we did not have at our fingertips. (When the cardinal had made statistical speculations, no such demands were made.)

We were each questioned on points in our memoranda; but Dr Stopes-Roe came off worse there than I did, as members of the Committee found no difficulty, at least, with the everyday phraseology of the NSS memorandum, whereas they demanded off-the-cuff definitions of some of the academic phrases in the BHA memorandum—and Mr Thorne actually dismissed one such phrase, together with Dr Stopes-Roe's attempted explanation of it, as "gobbledegook". When Dr Stopes-Roe turned one question back to the Member who had asked it, he was told sharply that he was there to answer questions, not to ask them — yet when Cardinal Hume had similarly put one of his answers in the form of a question, he had been given a courteous (if noncommittal) answer!

It was a pretty gruelling hour, though we managed to hold our own most of the time. And the fact that we were told we would be expected to write in with substantiation of any statements we had been unable to substantiate with detailed

figures, references, and names, was to our advantage rather than otherwise.

In the supplementary memorandum which I accordingly submitted on behalf of the NSS, I was able to back up our justification for putting our views to the Committee by quoting the results of the Gallup Poll of May 1980 on religious affiliation in England and Wales, which showed that 13 per cent claimed to be RC and 12 per cent non-believers (atheist or agnostic). My comment on this was: "The gap between RCs and non-believers was thus only 1 per cent. Since that was a year ago and the gap has been steadily narrowing for decades, there is probably nothing between us by now. Yet no one asked Cardinal Hume . . . to justify his presence in the Committee room!"

On another point requiring statistical substantiation, I wrote as follows:

"Referring to Cardinal Hume's reliance on moral issues to justify a need for religion in school and for church schools, I mentioned that the proportion of Roman Catholics in penal institutions is at least twice their representation in the population at large. Though I was under the impression that this was a well-known fact, it caused some derisive laughter. But on checking the statistics, I find that again I erred on the side of caution: RCs comprise 12 to 13 per cent of the population of England and Wales but 25 to 35 per cent of the inmates of borstals, detention centres, prisons, and hostels for drug addicts, alcoholics, and the like, in England and Wales; and similar ratios pertain in all western countries.

"A book entitled *The Church Now* (published in October 1980 by Gill and Macmillan) contains a chapter by a Catholic priest, Fr Terence Tanner, enquiring why this should be so. He points out that the answer generally given in the past—that RCs are unduly represented among the poorer sections of the community—is no longer valid; moreover, that it is not only in 'working-class' crimes and vices that RCs preponderate, but also in those associated with the middle classes.

### Catholic Delinquents

"*The Times* of 3 October, 1980, carried a front-page comment by its religious affairs correspondent, Clifford Longley (himself RC) under the heading 'The Dilemma over Roman Catholic Delinquents', the first sentence of which reads: 'Roman Catholics are vastly over-represented among drug addicts, alcoholics, compulsive gamblers, prostitutes, nightclub strippers, and convicted prisoners, for reasons no one seems to know.'

"One possible reason — that the seeds are embedded in the religion itself—was suggested by another RC commentator, Hugh Kay, writing in *The Month* of November 1980: 'It goes to the root



of the nature and quality of the faith.' It might well be due to the sado-masochistic emphasis in Catholicism on crucifixion, martyrdom, self-abnegation, penance and eternal punishment — especially as, far more than in any other religion, Catholic children are largely segregated in their own denominational schools. In any case, Cardinal Hume's contention that church schools are morally beneficial is hardly borne out by the facts."

Had the Select Committee been as unctuous

with us as they were with Cardinal Hume and as they were two days later with Archbishop Runcie, I would not have been provoked to search out these additional telling facts—which have now not only been circulated among the members of the Committee but published by HM Stationery Office for public consumption and as a permanent historical record. Bigots and hecklers and respecters of persons serve our cause well. Let us give thanks to their god! Amen!

## Health Inequalities

G. HORNER

"Inequalities in Health" is a report by a research working group which was set up by the last Labour Secretary of State for Health to look at the evidence of differences in health status among the social classes and to make recommendations for further inquiry and action. The report, published last year, became known as the Black Report after its chairman, Sir Douglas Black, President of the Royal College of Physicians. The report, to which insufficient attention has been paid, shows a wide disparity in the health of different social groups.

The Labour Secretary of State, David Ennals, has in a speech in 1977 drawn attention to some of the differences in mortality rates between social classes I and V. He thought that "it is a major challenge for the next 10 or more years to narrow the gap in health standards between different social classes".

If it has taken Labour health ministers many years to reach that conclusion, Patrick Jenkin, the present Secretary of State, appears in his forward to have dismissed the working group's conclusions ostensibly on grounds of the cost of the recommendations. £2 billions a year (his estimate) "is quite unrealistic in present or any foreseeable economic circumstances quite apart from any judgment that may be formed of the effectiveness of such expenditure in dealing with the problems identified".

This important report will not lead to any action, therefore, by the present government but is, nevertheless, a very useful source of material on health and social class. The working group have produced a painstaking review of available evidence (but no original research). They have drawn some sweeping conclusions in some areas but have been pedantically cautious in others. The closely-reasoned argument and careful weighing of evidence only add to my confidence in the soundness of their work.

Some of the most startling facts to which the report draws attention are about mortality. For example, the age-standardised death rate for men in social class V is 1.8 times higher than for men in social Class I. In social class V there are 2.6 infant deaths (ie before the twelfth month) to every

one in social class I. For deaths by accidents for those from 1 to 14 years boys in class V are 10 times more at risk than boys in class I.

Some diseases seem to result in differences in death rates between men and women, eg death from circulatory diseases show a higher class gradient among women, while death from diseases of the nervous system is more class-related in men.

### Class Differences

Class differences in mortality are highest in the younger age-groups, where the most class-related causes of death are clearly influenced by environment eg respiratory disease, accident. The class relationship with mortality decreases as one goes up the age-scale.

However, the reverse appears to be true when rates of sickness as opposed to mortality are considered. The Working Group complain about the lack of adequate statistics on the subject of sickness and social class but they consider that the evidence is enough to indicate a similar class gradient in chronic sickness as in death rates.

Of course, the rising standard of living of the whole population leads to improvement in everyone's health. However, the report points to evidence in various government surveys of a decline in the trend towards equality of mortality-rates. Among children the trends towards equality of mortality rates have varied with a small reduction in the class differential between ages 1 to 4 and an increase in the class differential between age 10 and 14 years. The chapter on trends in the statistics concludes that the "structure of inequality in mortality rates during the life-span does not appear to have changed much in recent decades".

When the report turns to the issue of access to health services, a wide variation is seen. The studies of differences in quality of service as between different area health authorities show clearly that working class geographical areas are less well served than those whose population is more middle class. There is also a clear inequality in the use of preventive medical services such as family-planning, post-natal services and immunisation programmes.



What are the explanations for this state of affairs? The Working Group reject decisively the "cycle of deprivation" explanation, which has been popularised in the 1970s as falsely focussing on individuals and their families as the cause of their own poverty and consequent poorer health. No single explanation is thought to account for all the evidence of health inequality. Some genetic and purely medical explanations are allowed as applying to parts of the problem. The main type of explanation, however, is described as "materialist" or "structural". The direct and indirect effects of the relative deprivation generated by a capitalist economy is the most important underlying cause of persisting inequalities in health experience. The link with relative poverty is underlined and the point is made that, although the Registrar General's occupation classes IV and V have decreased, numbers living below or not more than 40 per cent above supplementary benefit level have *increased* between 1960 and 1977. The proportion in 1960 was 14 per cent. In 1977 it was 26 per cent.

The work of the sociologist Bernstein is quoted to demonstrate the interlocking process of low social class leading to poorer educational experience for the children of such families. The poorer educational experience affects job opportunities and hence health experience. But the poorer educational experience also means that the children who receive it are deficient in important communication skills necessary for the manipulation of a complex environment compared with the children of more fortunate parents. The report draws together much evidence to support its main contention that the parents in classes IV and V are less able to protect their children from all manner of noxious and disadvantageous influences and that health in adulthood and even mortality are clearly influenced by health in childhood.

### Recommendations

The report's recommendations have three underlying objectives: to give children a better start in life, to encourage good health among a larger proportion of the population by preventive and educational action, and to reduce the risks of early death for disabled people by improving the quality of life and also reducing the need for institutions. The specific recommendations include a shift of health resources to community care and re-distribution of general practitioner and community nurse resources. The report suggests a "district action programme" to improve existing health and welfare services to mothers and children, the disabled and the elderly. They ask for a greater role of the government in prevention, for example increased taxes on tobacco and alcohol and improved health education. They also look for the abolition of child

poverty during the 1980s.

This report must be highly embarrassing to the Thatcher Government. Presumably this is why the report has not been published by the HMS, but only in limited quantity and at high price by the Department of Health and Social Security. It will be relatively inaccessible published in this way.

### Irrelevant Government Policy

The facts and arguments marshalled by the authors highlight the sheer irrelevance of the current central government policy of encouraging growth of private medical services, which, of course, drain the NHS of human and material resources and which deal with the cure of disease not prevention.

It is doubtful whether the improved research demanded in the report will be forthcoming either, especially now the Government's statistical services seem likely to be a victim of cuts.

Let us hope that the next Labour Secretary of State will be able to persuade his colleagues to spend the money required on these excellent recommendations.

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### "BAD TASTE" ADS

That toothless tiger the Advertising Standards Authority has shown an odd bias in favour of religion. A complaint came from a member of the public about an advertisement for Jolly Cards. The ad for their Christmas cards, which appeared in a London magazine, included a copy of a card bearing a nativity cartoon with the words "It's Christmas, I'm pregnant, God knows how, and now you tell me you forgot to book a room! Terrific!" The complaint was upheld and the Advertising Standards Authority agreed that the ad was "in bad taste and likely to cause grave offence to a minority".

On the other hand the Authority are much less sympathetic to the trivialisation and sexualisation of women in advertising. An ad for furniture, for example, included a photograph of a nude model. The Authority conceded "the tastelessness and irrelevance of the illustration", but the complaint was not upheld.

Caution is needed in face of the new puritanism which sees nudity and commerce as evils. Perhaps the sexist imbalance in which almost exclusively female bodies are used to attract attention could be rectified by an increase of male nudes rather than a disapproving ban on nudes altogether.

The Advertising Standards Authority, not normally over-sensitive about anything, shows sympathy for religious taste—but it is worth noting that it describes those likely to be offended as a "minority".



# Islam, Afghanistan and Russia

TERRY LIDDLE

In some circles the present bloody conflict in Afghanistan is depicted as a struggle between a government which although totalitarian is trying to build a twentieth-century secular state and reactionary religious fundamentalists who want to return the country to the theocratic middle ages. However, the facts are somewhat different. From its very beginnings the ruling Khalq (People's) Party has proclaimed its loyalty to the Islamic faith.

In 1966, when religious leaders in Afghanistan's parliament demanded an investigation in the Khalq on the grounds that it was anti-Islamic, the Party's leaders long and loud proclaimed their loyalty to Islamic principles.

When the Khalq seized power in 1978, its then leader Nur Mohammed Taraki continued these protestations of fidelity to Islamic theology. Taraki, as head of government, led the prayers at the end of Ramadhan and on Mohamet's birthday. The Ulama Jirgah, or assembly of religious leaders, proclaimed it legal to kill "counter-revolutionaries" who were members of the Muslim Brothers. These were denounced as being in fact "Satan's Brothers". Groups of religious tribal leaders were taken to Kabul where they proclaimed their loyalty to the regime. The *Kabul Times* enthusiastically quoted the ulama who urged the people to support the regime, quoting the Koran: "Obey God, the Prophet and your Ruler."

Another coup brought Babrak Karmal to power. Karmal continued the policy of loyalty to Islam. The Khalq's all-red flag was changed to one featuring the Islamic colour of green. Under Karmal's direction a bureau of Islamic teachings was set up. Imprisoned religious leaders were released, and a national conference of religious scholars and clergy was held to persuade them that "respect for the sacred religion of Islam" is part of the government's programme.

Indeed, Karmal seems to be trying to outdo Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini in dedication to Islam. Each of his speeches begins with references to Allah and is interspersed with quotations from the Koran, ritual cries of "Allahu Akbar" and references to Afghanistan's Islamic tradition. Karmal has not been slow to exploit Islamic anti-Semitism, claiming that the Koran proves that the Jews have no right to their own homeland and that Afghanistan's enemies are "friends of the Jews". To cap it all, Karmal claims that Soviet support for his regime is an act of God and has sent a delegation of religious leaders to the U.S.S.R. to see the true Islam which he claims exists there.

Although the official Soviet ideology is atheistic Marxism-Leninism, Soviet leaders have always used

Islam for their own ends. The U.S.S.R. has 43 million Muslims who in turn have numerous fellow tribesmen and co-religionists in the Soviet Union's unfriendly neighbours, China and Iran. In the last decade numerous conferences of Soviet Muslims have been held which have been attended by high-ranking delegations from the Islamic world. Likewise, delegations of Soviet Muslims, often headed by Ziauddin Babakhanov, the Grand Mufti of Tashkent, have attended important Islamic gatherings in places from India to Algeria and from Mali to Mauritius.

Babakhanov has willingly lent theological legitimacy to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Quoting the Koran where it says God orders justice and decency, he accused Karmal's opponents of trying to "restore the regime of injustice condemned by Islam itself". Such was the content of his radio broadcast made on Mawlut—the Prophet's birthday.

Soviet Muslims were employed in Afghanistan in large numbers occupying posts at all levels of the administration, from the lowest clerical positions up to deputy ministries. Numerous Soviet Muslim troops were also used in Afghanistan, but were withdrawn when some of them defected to the rebels, who, fighting under the banner of Islamic fundamentalism, accuse Karmal of being an atheist. These rebels have gained both moral and material support from the reactionary religious regimes in Iran and Pakistan, the Iranian Ayatollah Shariat-Madari calling for the liberation of Muslim peoples from the "yoke of satanical powers, blasphemy and impiety".

Illogical though it may be, there have been various attempts to fuse Islam and Marxism such as Turar Ryskulov's "Pan-Turkic Marxism". During the Russian Revolution many took at face value Lenin's appeal to the Muslims of Russia who proclaimed that their beliefs would be free and inviolable, and fought with the Reds against the Whites. Such ideas find their echo in the Arab Socialism of Nasser and Qadhafi and the Iranian mujahadin.

In the Middle East the reactionary, obscurantist theology of Islam has become a weapon of power-politicians both Marxist and anti-Marxist. There seems little hope for the people of this benighted region until they rid themselves of the Ayatollahs, Muftis, Ulamas and all those who would use Islamic theology as an excuse for injustice and tyranny.

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The early Sunday morning Radio 2 religious programme, presented by Nick Page, has expanded from 30 to 60 minutes. Nick Page is a member of the editorial committee of the evangelical magazine "Crusade".



## CENSORS IN BRITAIN

Is the National Theatre the legal equivalent of a street? Are simulated acts on the stage as criminal as the real acts off the stage? Can a private individual circumvent the abolition of stage censorship in 1967 and make stage directors cautious of asking actors to simulate any criminal act? These are some of the questions raised by Mary Whitehouse's private prosecution against the director of the National Theatre's production of Howard Brenton's play *The Romans in Britain*.

Mr Michael Bogdanov, the play's director, is accused of procuring an act of gross indecency between two actors under Section 13 of the Sexual Offences Act. The Act is usually used to prosecute homosexual acts in public places, and no one has found an instance of it being previously used against a play.

As is now well-known the offending scene of the play depicted a Roman soldier's homosexual rape of a Druid. One success of Mary Whitehouse's prosecution is that details of the rape have been headlined in newspapers lying in private homes throughout the land, instead of being seen by the small group that attend modern political plays. Is it her intention to spread such details around the country? It will not be so clear for those who have not seen the play that the rape is a metaphor of colonial exploitation. It may or may not be a successful metaphor in a play which is intended to provoke thought about the relationship between England and Ireland, but artistic success or failure is of no relevance to criminal prosecutions. Mrs Whitehouse, who would be unlikely to recognise an idea—let alone a metaphor—if it hit her between the eyes, is obsessed with sexual incidents taken out of context and totally disregarding their artistic function. Her obsessions, especially with homosexual acts (as was seen in her last major private prosecution against *Gay News*), are her own problem and should not be those of the criminal law.

At committal proceedings on 29 and 30 June at Horseferry magistrates court Michael Bogdanov was committed for trial at the Old Bailey. The magistrate said "There seems to me to be some evidence that should go before a jury as to whether or not Mr Bogdanov procured the commission of this offence." Lord Hutchinson, acting on behalf of Mr Bogdanov, said the prosecution was illogical. He asked "If *Hamlet* is put on does the director procure the murder of Polonius? If *King Lear* is put on does the director procure the gouging out of Gloucester's eyes?"

Money and time will be wasted, at a time when courts are overloaded with cases and prisons filled with people awaiting trial—to the extent that gross injustices are caused by lengthy incarceration of

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individuals before their guilt or innocence has been proved. A further outrage is that Mrs Whitehouse's costs will be paid by public funds, while the National Theatre may have to pay its own defence costs.

The Gay Humanist Group, in a strongly worded press release, said:

"The settlement of the Romans in Britain was succeeded by the Christian Dark Ages; now, after *The Romans in Britain*, Mary Whitehouse and her backers are determined to usher in a new Christian dark age, in which much of the vitality and variety of the human spirit will be crushed and repressed.

"As homosexual humanists we are appalled at the waste of legal time and money in the attempt to censor simulated homosexual rape. It is a clear sign that the word 'homosexual' is still seen as threatening and bad in our society; heterosexual intercourse is simulated without legal fuss, and acts of violence far more damaging than rape are also a regular diet of theatregoers.

"The Gay Humanist Group is astonished that this absurd prosecution is now being carried to a trial, and is greatly disturbed that this may be a sign of increasing intolerance both of homosexuality and of avant-garde imaginative creativity."

## WEDDING AND DIVORCE

In the month of "the wedding" (and we write before the event has taken place) churchmen have been busy pontificating about the sacredness of marriage. The *War Cry*, for instance, offered a quotation from the arch-conservative eighteenth century writer, Edmund Burke, which expressed in better prose than that of the average modern sermoniser, the kind of sentiment which is being expounded ad nauseam: "The Christian religion, by confining marriage to pairs, and rendering the relation indissoluble, has by these two things done more towards peace, happiness, settlement and civilisation of the world, than by any other part in this whole scheme of divine wisdom." Bishop Booth-Clibborn of Manchester said it in a more banal way: the royal wedding "will make millions in our country think more deeply about the meaning of marriage".

There is, therefore, a fine irony in the fact that the Anglican synod voted in the same month to permit the remarriage of divorcees in church. This has frequently been debated in the Synod, but not



# AND NOTES

even the reactionary Mr Leonard, now Bishop of London, could sway the vote on this occasion. Clergymen can now marry people who declare they will remain united until "death do us part" and then marry them again a few years later—making the same promise?

Perhaps Prince Charles and Lady Di, who have followed the fashion of not using the promise to "obey" in the service, should have set a trend by promising to remain faithful until "divorce do us part".

## DIVORCE AND MARRIAGE

A new divorce law passed in Spain has been opposed by the Catholic bishops in the country. The new law enables couples to obtain divorce by mutual consent. The Bishops, supported by the Vatican, have waged a vigorous campaign against the change of law, but opinion polls show that 70 per cent of Spaniards supported the proposal to legalise divorce, which has been forbidden since 1939.

According to the Bishops the law "gravely upsets the stability of marriage and, moreover, leaves to such a large extent the decision over ending the marriage to the partners themselves". If people were educated and encouraged to make sensible decisions for themselves, what would there be left for bishops to do?

## SELF-DELIVERANCE

A booklet entitled *A Guide to Self-Deliverance* is now available to members of Exit, the society campaigning to legalise voluntary euthanasia. The booklet gives advice on suicide including practical details. It can only be bought by members of Exit of three months' standing who are over 25 years of age. At £6 it is rather expensive.

These precautions are hoped to prevent the booklet falling into irresponsible hands. A two-page section headed "Why You Should Think Again" gives reasons for not committing suicide. The secretary, Nicholas Reed, said, "We accept that it may, despite all precautions, occasionally fall into the hands of potential impulsive suicides, but we feel we have that to set against the very real misery experienced by a much larger number of people who are currently forced to suffer against their will, sometimes for long periods."

Arthur Koestler, the well-known writer, has written an introduction to the booklet. He points

out that humans unlike other animals need midwives at birth, and also, unlike other animals, do not die "peacefully and without fuss" in old age. He suggests that "We need midwives to enable us to be unborn—or at least the assurance that such aid is available."

*Exit is an organisation campaigning for voluntary euthanasia. Details may be obtained from Exit, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 5PG.*

## NEW FREETHINKER EDITOR

From the next issue of *The Freethinker* there will be a new editor. Jim Herrick has resigned and William McIlroy is to return to the position. Jim Herrick has been editor since January 1977 and was Assistant Editor before that from October 1975. William McIlroy is a former editor and former Secretary of the National Secular Society. He edited *The Freethinker* from 1960 to 1961 and again from 1975 to 1976.

Jim Herrick says: "It is with much regret that I have offered my resignation for personal reasons—especially other writing commitments. I would have been even more reluctant to relinquish the position if I were not handing over to Bill McIlroy, who is well-known to longstanding readers. I wish him every success and am sure *The Freethinker* will be in good hands as it embarks upon its second hundred years.

"I feel I have been privileged to be associated with *The Freethinker* at the time of its centenary. I hope to remain a contributor to its columns for many years to come.

"I should like to thank those writers who have contributed to *The Freethinker* while I have been editor. It is perhaps not realised by all readers that contributors are unpaid and offer their ideas and writing skills to support freethought. It would be invidious to name individual contributors, but I emphasise that the commitment of regular writers to *The Freethinker* is vital to its success. I should also like to thank Barry Duke, who has helped considerably with News and Notes items and with photographs."

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# BOOKS

**SHAKY RELATIONS** by Edward Blishen. Hamish Hamilton. £8.95

This book is primarily about the author's relations with his father. Blishen senior was clearly a very difficult man. He had been a civil servant in a fairly responsible position and retired to a bungalow on the South Coast with his wife. There, Edward and his wife, Kate, used to visit them:

"How pleasant, we thought as so often before, if we were received with smiles, if there were tea in the garden, and jokes. The extent to which this was *not* how we were received appalled us. My father was at his grimmest; his voice clipped and cold."

Father Blishen always had a bitter touch which impelled him to put all others in the wrong, in small matters as well as in more important ones. He suspected and distrusted foreigners. On an early page we learn that he reserved some of his fiercest invective for Australian cricketers, as seen on television and considered them "such a set of unsporting, near-villainous characters as never before composed a cricket team". At the same time, it is revealed that he had deep contempt for the new rulers of black Africa: "Those little black dictators — They make us laugh, you know". He would launch into long and fierce attacks on dogs for fouling the footpath and on seagulls for fouling his roof. He dug up long forgotten family troubles, involving a paternity order brought against him and the perfidy of his own brother who, it seemed, might have given evidence which could have exonerated him. He wrote letters full of clear and unpleasant insinuations and when they produced the expected responses, he accused his son of deliberately searching the letters for traces of double meanings. Yet, on the last page of the book, Edward Blishen could think, with both amusement and sympathy, as he watched the thick black smoke rise from the chimneys of the crematorium, how furious his father would have been. "Should have thought they could do better than that," he would certainly have said.

Counterpointed, as it were, with this picture of the shaky relations between Blishen and his father is an account of shaky relations of a different kind. Blishen tells of his visits to Africa under the auspices of the British Council. He took part in Book Weeks, lectured and gave interviews. He was trying to encourage native writers and was convinced that a new literature was coming into being. All the time, however, he was troubled by uneasiness and doubts. He refers to a long poem by a writer named Kota, who had recently been appointed director of the National Theatre of Uganda. The poem had differing qualities:

# FREETHINKER

"Wickedly funny, it was a cry of horror — an echo of a cry uttered by many of the most sensitive African writers. And what caused the horror was the easy smashing of the old African world, not only by intrusive Europeans but by their African imitators, and the easy adoption of alien habits."

When back in this country and working in the BBC, presenting programmes on African literature, he felt that, while, as a result of his experiences, Africa had begun to grow inside him, there was still something missing. He was made the butt of a piece of satirical writing by a visiting African who mocked his enthusiasm for "Westernised African writers and their Western flatterers":

"I saw that the crooked occasion contained a crooked truth. In relation to African writing I had been a paternalistic figure, necessarily guilty of patronage, and my genuine interest in the literature, and my real admiration and affection for this writer or that, made things no better."

The contrast between the feelings of resentment that Blishen feels towards his father and the sense that African writers are justified in feeling some resentment towards himself gives the book its peculiar flavour as a study in two types of paternal attitude. The bitter-sweet taste is strangely attractive. There is much in the book about sickness and death. The death of his wife's mother and father as well as that of his own father and a serious illness of his mother cast sombre shadows but laughter is never far away. Thus, when reflecting on the care with which his mother insisted on his father's pyjamas being crisp and neat on his visit to hospital, he recalls her endless worry about the condition of her children's underwear and the impression that this would make on ambulance men, nurses, surgeons and others if they happened to be knocked down by a bus. "Such marvellously clean underpants and vests" these public servants would cry, looking down on our little bleeding bodies."

As in previous autobiographical books by Edward Blishen, there is a sense of failure and disappointment in *Shaky Relations*, rather than feelings of success or achievement. Yet, it is for this reason that the book is most appealing. Blishen has a remarkable gift for taking fairly ordinary feelings and presenting them to the reader in such a way that they seem as important as they did to the author himself. There may be nothing very profound in this latest chapter in his autobiography but the father-son relationship and the attitude of the white races to the "subject peoples" are part of our human



# REVIEWS

predicament. To help us to look at them afresh, through eyes unblinded by the distortions of authoritarian views, whether in politics, religion or personal life, with both sympathy and understanding, is to do something which may be small but is eminently worth-while.

T. F. EVANS

**THE UFO VERDICT: EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE** by Robert Sheaffer. Prometheus Books. \$15.95

Sheaffer is a systems analyst from Washington DC, and a member of the UFO Subcommittee of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICP), which was founded in 1976 under the sponsorship of the American Humanist Association. His fellow Subcommittee members are the noted UFO sceptics Philip J. Klass and James Oberg. The latter has written a very brief and unenlightening forward to this book.

I am not alone in deploring not only the use of the term "paranormal" (since it signifies that which lies outside the range of normal scientific investigations), but the association between that term and UFOs. Most UFO reports have nothing to do with what is usually called "the paranormal". But Sheaffer is more than the sceptic he calls himself; he is what ufology calls a "debunker", that is someone who believes that UFOs do not exist, and finds a conventional explanation for every UFO report. This has led him to scoff at other ufologists as "UFO believers" (a gross over-simplification) and to fail to discriminate between ufologists of various persuasions. He has also omitted to define what he means by a "UFO", with the result that the reader is unclear exactly what "does not exist".

This is a book about the UFO movement in the USA as much as about ufology, and offers many fascinating insights. It shows that the rivalry and personality clashes that beset British ufology are just as common, and even more acrimonious, in the USA. At times the account is amusing. But the author is not well-informed about the UFO movement in Britain (occasionally called "England"). For instance, he repeats a claim made by a British ufologist that Adamski's "flying saucer" was a soft-drink vending machine, unaware that the designer of the machine subsequently admitted that he had modelled it on Adamski's photograph! He is also ignorant of British UFO organisations and personalities.

Sheaffer is a diligent and (almost) totally objec-

tive investigator of UFO reports and rightly concludes that many reports arise from misperceptions of objects which, if not familiar to the public, are familiar to experts. His investigation of Jimmy Carter's UFO report and his analysis of the abduction alleged by Betty and Barney Hill are particularly laudable. They expose the gullibility not only of the public and the press but of many ufologists.

The book is full of such debunking, some of it rather tedious to follow. But the trouble with prejudice, which is what a debunker exhibits, is that it over-simplifies and sometimes leads to a distortion of the evidence to suit preconceptions. Thus, in discussing alleged UFO photographs ("UFOTOS") he frequently notes how computer analysis has shown the photographs to be faked. But when, as in the case of the Trindade Island photographs, computer analysis did *not* show them to be faked, he does not mention this fact, preferring instead to dwell on the photographer's reputation for trick photography. And while concluding that the "Floyd" UFO was a balloon, he (untypically) offers no evidence that any particular balloon had been identified. It is also curious that although he concludes that at least one of the stimuli for the New Zealand UFO films was the Japanese squid fishing fleet (which employs very powerful lamps), his plates 40 and 41 show that at the time the fleet was in the Sea of Japan! His conclusion that the McMinnville photographs are faked, because a shadow indicates a timing inconsistent with the witness's account, has since been invalidated by Maccabee's analysis which shows that the shadows are consistent with the account.

Another defect is his apparent avoidance of cases which might be more difficult to explain. He avoids the Socorro (New Mexico) incident, and chooses the Delphos (Kansas) case as the best CE2. He claims that "*there are no close encounters that are truly of the second kind*", but plainly he is ignorant of the (Scottish) Livingston Case, which I investigated. By selecting cases that do have conventional explanations he appears to show, and indeed claims, that there are no truly baffling UFO reports. While he is right in demonstrating the extent to which careless observation, mythology and sensationalism turn otherwise mundane events into UFO reports, he is mistaken in concluding that "the phenomenon exists only in the imagination of the observer".

The book is padded with chapters on witchcraft and fairies, implying that there is as little truth in UFO reports as there was in reports of witchcraft and fairies. Such comparison is to be expected from a member of CSICP, making UFOs guilty by association. The evidence for UFOs is far more hard and objective than ever it was for witchcraft or fairies.

In claiming that ufology "as a whole represents a regression to prescientific modes of thinking" Sheaffer is out of step. There are such reactionary



ideas, but most serious ufologists are moving towards formal scientific examination of the phenomenon. UFO buffs certainly do exhibit "a reaction against reason and science", but serious ufologists have little in common with the buffs. Sheaffer's views will not help to form a climate in which objective scientific investigations can proceed. He claims an attitude of "healthy skepticism". Rather I would accuse him of displaying unhealthy scepticism. A sceptic should be someone who suspends judgement, is given to questioning truth or facts, or is critical and incredulous. He should not be someone who pronounces a verdict before hearing all the evidence.

It would have been better if Sheaffer had told us not only what the verdict is, but what was the charge! It is not clear whether he is charging all other ufologists with belief in "creatures cruising the skies in celestial crockery", or whether he is merely charging ufology with inadequate investigation. What is on trial? UFOs or ufology? Oberg claims that the verdict in "in". My verdict on *The UFO Verdict* is that the case is "not proven"! Another reviewer has concluded that Sheaffer has "neatly tied up the whole UFO field and dumped it in the river". Mixing even more metaphors, I fear that he may have dumped the baby with the bath-water.

STUART CAMPBELL

**THE PENGUIN BOOK OF WOMEN POETS.** Edited by Carol Cosman, Joan Keefe and Kathleen Weaver. £2.50

If there were to be another work like R. M. Wilson's *Lost Literature of Medieval England* about the lost literature written by women, it would run to many volumes. Miraculously, some of this ignored literature has survived and in the past few years plays, novels, essays and poems by women have been coming to light, some of them previously out of print—some of them, indeed, never in print before.

This anthology and other new collections are important because they show the unsuspected wealth of women's creative writing. If this fat Penguin does nothing else it at least gives some idea of the scope of women's poetry. If there are any remaining male chauvinists who still ask sneeringly what of any importance women have written, this collection should stop them in their tracks. Curiously, its very size and inclusiveness remind us of what has been left out. Only one woman poet of the classical Latin period is known, for instance. A certain Sulpicia had the privileged education, the leisure and encouragement to write serious poetry. Kassia lived in ninth-century Byzantine Greece and is said by the editors to be "the only woman poet of distinction in Byzantine history". Were they really the only women to write poetry worth remembering? What other poets of genius might there have been

among women of all cultures if they had had merely the ordinary opportunities of free-born men? It is important to remember that until very recently half of the world's artists or potential artists rocked the cradle while being told that they ruled the world, really.

Perhaps because a Penguin book must appeal to a mass audience, its feminism is very low key. The editors wish only to redress a long-standing imbalance; no one could take exception to such a laudably objective aim. For real feminism that dots the i's and crosses the t's we have to go to something like Louise Bernikow's anthology of British and American poetry, *The World Split Open* (The Women's Press). Ms Bernikow has attempted to get at women's special perceptions of the world, whereas the editors of the Penguin book have thought it enough to present an overwhelming amount of neglected material written by women since 1000 BC.

Both approaches are useful. We need to be inundated with forgotten world literature, and we need to be shown a selection of the shamefully neglected literature of our own language. It is painfully easy to see how the neglect has come about. The evidence is everywhere. Why are women poets still often called "poetesses" if not to show that they are not quite the same as real poets, who, because "poetesses" are distinguished from them, are therefore men? Why is "virile" regarded as praise among critics of poetry and other arts? It is a wonder any women have had the courage to buck the pervasive belittling of their labours.

But where *did* they find all these poets? The more distant the culture from my own, the more I am charmed by little touches that show, for example, that a recognisable, aware human being lived in ancient Egypt and wrote "So small are the flowers of Seamu/Whoever looks at them feels a giant". And: "Looking at my reflection in the still pool—/My arms full of flowers—/I see you creeping on tip-toe/To kiss me from behind,/My hair heavy with perfume". Kassia also records telling observations in her epigrams: "You meet your friend, your face/Brightens—you have struck gold".

I confess that I cannot easily pin down a specifically feminine sensibility in these poems. The male concerns of war and seduction are missing, as you might suppose, and poems of love and lament are prominent, but is there something exclusively feminine? "The Unknown Child" by Elizabeth Jennings describes the feeling of a woman for an unborn, unconceived child, a feeling men can approach only through imagination and empathy. Certainly feelings not dependent on literary conventions (masculine conventions, after all) are abundant in these women's poems.

Almost three-fifths of the book represents the



nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Large though the volume is, it is compressed. Among the more modern poets are very prolific writers, yet their lifetimes are represented by one poem each. It is the history of the world in a few chapters, useful as a handbook but necessarily so condensed that the resulting impression is a breathless slur. Still, it is a rich and valuable collection, a jewel box of poetry.

SARAH LAWSON

**AUSTRALIANA: THE HALFWAY HOUSE TO INFIDELITY**, by Dorothy Scott; **THE BIBLE—HUMBAG AND HORROR**, by Michael Glass.

In November of last year the Unitarian Fellowship of Australia and the Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church jointly launched Dorothy Scott's book, *The Halfway House to Infidelity: a history of the Melbourne Unitarian Church, 1853-1973* (approximately £4 paperback, also available in hardback), a work that will be of especial interest to students of the history of the Ethical movement and of radical and universalist Unitarianism.

What has jokingly been described as "the Communist Church in Grey Street", East Melbourne, is in fact Australia's nearest equivalent to South Place Ethical Society. I say nearest because *Freethinker* readers attending a Grey Street morning service would probably be reminded not of South Place as it is today but as it was, say, in the 1930s—or even of Stanton Coit's Ethical Church (but with fine modern architecture). On the other hand the consensus of Grey Street's spokesmen in, say, the last twenty years has been much further to the political left than the official or semi-official views of SPES.

Dorothy Scott's book is a thoroughly researched account of an institution which, despite its small membership, attracted a number of distinguished personalities including Bernard O'Dowd (lyric poet of no mean talent) and Henry G. Turner (prominent banker). It is interesting also to compare the social history of the predominantly middle class Unitarian Church with that of the more plebeian Australasian Secular Association (also Melbourne based), though the latter is outside the scope of Dorothy Scott's book.

One of the problems that this "halfway house" clearly faced was that many people tended to pass through it rather than stay in it—just as they often did in British freethought bodies (hence G. W. Foote's simile about secularism being a bit like a Turkish bath). South Place, by contrast, has rather more of a family—or even dynastic—tradition. Most of the problems faced by the Melbourne Unitarians, such as high turnover of members, seem very much the same as those experienced by nearly all other Australian freethought bodies, but Grey Street seems to have solved the problem of modern "relevance" quite well. Like South Place, the Mel-

bourne Unitarians also have a great history of dispute over leadership, policy and doctrine—often degenerating into sheer personality squabbles.

\* \* \*

The Rationalist Association of New South Wales has recently published Michael Glass's *The Bible—humbag and horror* (price about 15p but 50 per cent discounts apply to bulk orders). This is a 20-page duplicated pamphlet, but the method of printing should not deter potential readers as the Sydney-based Association excels in the art of stencilling (as perusal of their journal, *Rationalist News*, will show).

With its rather eye-catching title one might have expected this pamphlet to be a heavy-handed, melodramatic hatchet job. It is in fact far from this: it is judicious, well thought out, and detailed without being ponderous—a nicely balanced, well-honed scalpel in fact.

Michael Glass does not just harp on "the nasty bits", but points out that, taken together and overall, the Old and New Testaments often contain contradictory passages, particularly as regards the end of the world, life after death, slavery, the rôle of women, and accounts of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Incidentally, the author points out rather neatly that "the New Testament is more oppressive towards slaves because it allows Christians to hold fellow Christians in slavery. This was something the Law of Moses did not allow Jews to do to other Jews."

The pamphlet also challenges orthodox traditional ideas by means of quotations from Ecclesiastes—a book for which your reviewer has a sneaking regard as poetry. (I doubt if St Paul and the writer of Ecclesiastes would have made an amicable dinner party!) As Michael Glass rightly points out, "The Bible might contain passages of great beauty and power, but we cannot afford to forget that it contains passages that have brought such savagery and destruction on the human race."—Amen! And in the latter context the sections on "Witches", "Weapons for Persecutors" and "Anti-Semitism" contain grim examples.

All in all this pamphlet is an excellent cheap read, and should make a good freethought propaganda standby.

NIGEL SINNOTT

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# THEATRE

**ONE WOMAN PLAYS** by Dario Fo and Francis Rame.  
The Cottesloe, The National Theatre

Playlets written for a cause — whether woman's rights, gay rights, or social justice generally — can easily be dry and simplistic. These three short plays and an epilogue are no more than extended sketches, but they are lively and far from simple-minded. Yvonne Bryceland, as the "One Woman", wakes up to the drudgery of domestic and maternal existence squeezed in between sleep, husband and the factory in the first play. In the second play she tells the "Same Old Story" of how the love between woman and man is transmuted into subjection. The story is enlivened with funny and erotic comment on sexual roles and a crude but hilarious modern fairy story in which a rag doll curses and swears and exchanges dialectical remarks with a "red" cat.

The most substantial and enjoyable item was "A Woman Alone" which combined the everyday and the bizarre to powerful effect. A woman locked in her flat is besieged by a peeping Tom in a facing window, a heavy breather and a husband on the phone, a crippled brother-in-law reading pornography, and the hand of a young lover curling round the door (the best played part for one hand that the theatre is likely to see). She is also sustained and disturbed by the blare of loud music from stereo, radio and television which she surrounds herself with. She counters with a constant flow of gossip through the window and a mounting anger against her surreal and frightening prison. Eventually she reaches for the shot gun—that ultimate symbol of male aggression—to retaliate against her oppressors. Humour remains through all the bizarre, frenetic encounters, the sanity that leavens the madness and anger.

The epilogue in which the myth of Medea is reworked from a feminist angle is the only humourless part of the evening. It concluded with a powerful appeal for a "new woman" and was densely poetic, but made a rather austere conclusion to so earthy an evening. Yvonne Bryceland's solo performance was remarkable for its energy and enormous range of moods. I can imagine an even robust performance at an Italian bar or communist congress, where the stand-up comedy might have come over even more successfully than in the polite atmosphere of the National Theatre. An awareness of centuries of oppression of women is a major theme of our times, and though *One Woman Plays* are not major works they are biting and entertaining tracts for today.

JIM HERRICK

# Centenary Appeal

We are very gratified at the continuing generosity of readers towards the Centenary Appeal. The appeal will remain open until the end of the year. Many thanks to the following: B. Able, £9.50; W. Aikenhead, £3; H. W. Armstrong, £5; K. M. Barralet, £2; S. Beer, £10; E. K. Beeson, £1; P. Brown, £2; B. J. Buckingham, £6; J. Burman, £25; A. M. Chapman, £22; R. D. Clamp, £5; O. Eigel-dinger, £5; C. W. Evans, £3; A. Garrison, £2; L. Goldman, £3; W. R. Grant, £2; R. R. Grindrod, £5; E. D. Gwinnell, £3; R. Hoare, £4; R. Hopkins, £1; F. C. Hoy, £25; J. R. Hutton, £2; P. Kincaid-Willmott, £3; J. J. King, £2; N. Litten, £5; H. Madoc-Jones, £5; S. D. M. McDonald, £2; W. J. McIlroy, £10; A. L. Millard, £2; J. H. Morten, £2; F. Munniksma, £3; A. Murray, £2.50; B. E. Parfrey, £1.75; D. F. Paul, £5; R. B. Ratcliffe, £3; D. Redhead, £1; D. Ross, £7; K. C. Rudd, £3; W. Shannon, £7; K. Sharpe, £2; P. Somers, £2; S. E. Sykes, £3; David Tribe, £20; J. Vallance, £10; R. Vincent, £7; F. Walker, £5; C. R. Walton, £2; J. A. Watford, £1; G. Williams, £1; D. Wright, £4; Anon, £5; Anon, £10; R. W. McCoy, US\$8; E. McGue, US\$20; J. Dwyer, Aust\$5.

Total for the period 18/6/81 to 18/7/81: £281.75.  
Total for the year to date: £2,585.15 and \$67.

# OBITUARY

ALFRED VOGEL, who had come to this country from Czechoslovakia as a refugee from first the Nazi and then the Communist regimes, and had long been a member of the NSS, died at the end of May, aged 82, and had a secular funeral at Randalls Park Crematorium, Leatherhead.

STANLEY BIRKIN, a lifelong atheist, active secularist, *Freethinker* reader, and dedicated Labour Party member in Nottingham, died suddenly while on holiday in Wiltshire last month at the age of 69, and was cremated at Salisbury Crematorium, the President of the NSS officiating.

# WORLDWIDE

## SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, according to a correspondent, atheists are banned from being immigrants or even receiving permanent residence permits. On the state-controlled radio and television, atheist views are outlawed. The National Education Act of 1967 specifies that education must be "national and Christian in character", and a law blocks all white teachers from



permanent posts unless they join the "whites only" South African Teachers Council, which only lets teachers join if they sign a statement saying that they support Christian beliefs in teaching.

### NORWAY

The death of Kristian Horn (b. 1903) has been announced. He was founder of the Norwegian Association of Ethical Humanism and contributed to the establishment of the International Humanist and Ethical Union.

Kristian Horn was a professor of botany and a famous teacher; he devoted much of his life to the humanist movement in Norway. Horn introduced civil confirmation as an alternative to the youth ceremony of the church and he prepared a teaching plan for moral education which is now becoming more and more popular as an alternative in Norwegian schools. He saw his ideas spread considerably during his lifetime and the membership of the Human-Etikk has now passed 10,000.

We regret that the conclusion of W. McIlroy's "Jottings" last month was unfortunately omitted. Here are the final paragraphs continued from the July Freethinker page 119.

A bed and a meal can usually be obtained at any of the Army's 42 hostels. But they must be paid for. David Jones, disguised as a dosser, visited 27 hostels. He said that he desperately needed accommodation for the night, but had only £1. "Nothing doing", "I can't let any bugger in", "No money, no bed", "You're not sleeping here", were some of the replies he received. Examples of callousness, officiousness and even violence towards residents were given.

*For God's Sake Care!* lifted the curtain on the twilight lives led by thousands of homeless people in Britain today. Many of them are by no means inadequate, and securing decent accommodation is often the first step on the road to self-reliance and independence. But a large number of those who sleep in hostels are young and jobless, former inmates of mental institutions and old age pensioners. What kind of society consigns them to the tender mercies of the Salvation Army? There is a cold, patronising phoneyess about the charity of people who shout hosannas to the Salvation Army's welfare work and at the same time support politicians hell-bent on dismantling what remains of the social services.

The programme had scarcely ended when "Operation Whitewash" began. But David Jones and Claudia Milne have brought to the surface the suspicions of many social workers and others, that whatever its public image, the Salvation Army is

a money-grubbing, bureaucratic monolith, whose chief priorities are profit-making and spreading its crude, "repent-and-be-saved" brand of Christianity.



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**Correction.** It was inadvertently stated in the leaflet advertising "The Freethinker" cartoon competition that George Melly was the originator of the cartoon character "Trog". This should have said that George Melly wrote the script for 16 years for "Trog's" cartoon character Flook.



## NSS ANNUAL OUTING

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## THE FREETHINKER CENTENARY APPEAL

This year we are celebrating the centenary of The Freethinker. Since it was founded 100 years ago, The Freethinker has "fought the good fight" against irrational and intolerant attitudes and championed many important social reforms.

The Freethinker survived the imprisonment for "blasphemy" of its founder and first editor, boycott by distributive agencies, two world wars and financial crises. Its survival would be described in some circles as a miracle; its continuation is vital to all who value the principles it promotes.

Please respond generously to this special Centenary Appeal.

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Please send donations to The Freethinker Centenary Appeal, 702 Holloway Road, London, N19 3NL.

(Cheques, etc, should be made payable to G. W. Foote & Co.)

## THE FREETHINKER CENTENARY ISSUE

Special 32-page issue still available.

Contributors include: H. J. Blackham, Edward Blishen, Hermann Bondi, Brigid Brophy, Maureen Duffy, Margaret Knight, Dora Russell, Barbara Wootton.

Obtainable at the following rate (including postage): 1 copy 50p, 2 copies 95p, 4 copies £1.85.

From G. W. Foote & Co, 702, Holloway Road, London N19 3NL.

## THE FREETHINKER

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LONDON N19 3NL

TELEPHONE: 01-272 1266

UK ISSN 0016-0687

The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Publishers or of the Editor.

"The Freethinker" was founded in 1881 by G. W. Foote and is published mid-monthly. Material submitted (including Letters and Announcements) must reach this office by the 20th of the preceding month.

### SPECIAL POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Inland and Overseas: Twelve months: £3.00 Six months: £1.75  
U.S.A.: Twelve months \$7.00 Six months: \$4.00

(Overseas subscribers are requested to obtain sterling drafts from their banks, but if the remittance is in foreign currency [including Eire] please add the equivalent of 55p or US \$1.00 for bank charges).

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## SOCIALIST SECULARISTS *e prop*

The Socialist Secularist Association was *formed* earlier in the year. It is an organisation for agnostic and atheist socialists. *STOOD*

The SSA writes:

"The radical dissenting tradition has been atheist as well as protestant, but it becomes increasingly difficult to detect signs of radicalism and dissent in Christianity. Religion in general, and fundamentalist religion in particular, is the world's most oppressive trans-national institution. Not for nothing has the Church of England been called the Tory Party at prayer, while the description of Roman Catholicism as the enemy of the workers remains as true as when it was first written. Consequently, the christian socialist position becomes increasingly untenable."

Further information from Terry Liddle, 83 Gregory Crescent, Eltham SE9.

## EVENTS

**Harrow Humanist Society.** Audrey Williamson: Science, Radicals and the Age of Reason. Wednesday, 9 September. 8 pm. Gayton Road Library, Harrow.

**London Secular Group.** (Outdoor meetings) Thursday, 12.30 pm at Tower Hill; Sunday, 2-5 pm at Marble Arch. (The Freethinker and other literature on sale.)

**Merseyside Humanist Group.** Ships and Sails and Sealing Wax: A walk round Birkenhead. Monday, 17 August. 7.45 pm. Meet at 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead.

**South Place Ethical Society.** No Meetings August. Ethics for Today—a course of seminars by Peter Heales organised jointly with London University Department of Extra-Mural Studies. Commences Tuesday, 29 September. The English Radical Tradition—a 24-session course given by Peter Cadogan also organised jointly with the London University Department of Extra-Mural Studies. Commences Thursday, 1 October.

**Gay Humanist Group.** Meeting second Friday every month at 7.30 pm in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London.

**National Secular Society membership only £1.**

Apply to 702, Holloway Road, London N19 3NL.