

# The Freethinker

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## BRITAIN'S CHANGED SOCIETY: "WE HAVE BEEN SET BACK HALF A CENTURY"

"We are living in an increasingly dangerous era", Jo Richardson, MP, declared when she spoke as Guest of Honour at the annual dinner of the National Secular Society on 5 April. She said it was dangerous from the point of view of all those who believe in freedom of thought. "And", she added, "it is dangerous for those in society who, lacking opportunities for a broad education, and faced constantly with a barrage of so-called wisdom from the Press and the media, can be forgiven for absorbing and being brainwashed into accepting principles which are deeply reactionary.

"People who are unemployed, who live on appallingly low incomes and have to struggle daily for a half-way decent and dignified life, have no time or energy to sit back and think what is being done to the values of their lives, and their perception of those values is moulded by what they read and see".

The Labour MP for Barking said that however much people may hate the Government, Mrs Thatcher's values of thrift, "which she is always talking about and never exercises herself", law and order, and conformity to rigid Victorian values, makes millions of people fearful of those whom they perceive not to conform to the image which is presented to them.

"It happens to a greater or lesser extent to us all", she said.

"But those outrageous concepts are less easy to challenge if your whole life is made up of one long struggle to exist.

"It results in prejudice and bigotry, increasing racism, fear and hatred of people who are gay or lesbian despite the increasing numbers of those who want to declare their sexuality.

"It results in divisions between those with a job and those without, between blacks and whites,

between progress and regression.

"It makes it easy for sanctimonious and cant-ridden, Mary Whitehouse-style groups to impose their standards. It makes it more difficult for genuine individual freedoms to prevail and for collective freedoms to become established".

Referring to the inferior position of women in Britain today, Jo Richardson said that a few years ago they were beginning to realise their true potential as half the talents and resources of society.

"Along comes Mrs Thatcher, herself a woman who has managed to keep all her options open — a good State education, two university degrees, marriage, children and the support to give her a third career in politics.

"Yet she has systematically, through her policies, gone about pushing women back into the home, cutting those services which exist, encouraging low-paid, part-time work as a way of forcing down wage levels for other workers. She has slashed the NHS and local authority help for the elderly and infirm, throwing more on to under-funded voluntary groups together with reliance on women doing the caring at home.

"Though not directly responsible, her style has encouraged the New Right to gain confidence in hitting women further with their attempts to deny them the right to control their own fertility. There is a new breed of Tory MP who pontificate about moral standards. They should look at their own".

Jo Richardson said that the Government and its attendant New Right groups have changed society in Britain and distorted people's natural values.

"Make no mistake, we have been set back by more than half a century. I hope that an incoming Labour Government will have the courage and the backing to reverse that, and to start on the road to

(continued inside back page)

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# NEWS

## "YOU SCRATCH MY BACK . . ."

Although the synagogue in Rome is only two miles from the Vatican, Pope John Paul II has become the first occupant of the papal throne to enter the building. Accompanied by five cardinals, the white-robed pontiff greeted a cheering congregation — which included the Chief Rabbi and the president of Rome's 20,000 strong Jewish community — with upraised clenched hands, while a choir chanted Psalm 130.

This highly publicised event, described by one observer as "deeply moving and unprecedented", is being exploited by the Church's public relations departments to persuade the world that Christian anti-semitism is now a matter for the history books. But the presence outside the synagogue of the ultra-reactionary Archbishop Lefebvre's stormtroopers, distributing leaflets calling for John Paul's replacement, was a reminder that nearly two millennia of Christian-inspired anti-semitism cannot be disguised by theatrical appearances at which the Pope is an adept.

Of course the Roman Catholic Church is not the only Christian body that has fostered fanatical hatred of Jews. It has simply been doing it for much longer than the others. In our own time there was little to choose between the Christian churches in Hitler's Germany on that issue. Protestant churches and most of their leaders gave ideological support to the Nazis. It is indisputable that Hitler remained a God-believing Christian; it is an historical fact that he was not excommunicated nor his *Mein Kampf* included in the Index of forbidden books that were contrary to Catholic faith and morals.

Jewish religious leaders are well aware that western Christian society, of which the papacy is a cornerstone, is riddled with anti-semitism. True, politicians do not generally appeal to racist attitudes in public. That does not prevent their canvassers from doing so on the doorstep. Similarly, the Pope's assurance to a synagogue audience that he does not believe Jews are collectively responsible for Christ's death will not eradicate anti-semitism amongst the Catholic faithful.

Why, then, the elaborate ceremony and ecstatic welcome for the head of a church which for many centuries persecuted, forcibly converted and murdered countless numbers of Jews? Perhaps the answer lies in the presence at Rome synagogue of the Israeli ambassador. The Vatican does not yet recognise Israel, a country whose need for recognition and allies becomes increasingly desperate. Establishment of relations between the two would be

# AND NOTES

a diplomatic coup of the first order for Israel.

For its part, the Roman Catholic Church is anxious to secure internationally recognised special status for "holy places" in Jerusalem. A close tie with Israel would advance that aim and at the same time strengthen the Vatican-White House relationship. It could also endanger Catholic communities in Islamic countries, but John Paul II, or his successor, may be persuaded that is a risk worth taking. And Jewish religious leaders have few scruples when it comes to advancing Israel's interests.

The two-hour palaver at Rome synagogue may mark the beginning of negotiations that will benefit only the forces of nationalist aggression and religious superstition.

## SPECIAL FOR SOME

Readers will know that the Shops Bill was defeated at Second Reading in the House of Commons. It was lost by 14 votes, exactly the number of Ulster Unionists who temporarily suspended their boycott of Westminster to vote against a reform that would have applied to England and Wales only. They did so in the knowledge of approval by their murderous Protestant supporters, whose fervent devotion to the Sabbath restrains them from petrol-bombing, stoning and assaulting their fellow-citizens on the holy day.

Half-truths and outright lies were a notable feature of the anti-Sunday freedom campaign. The biggest whopper of the lot was uttered in the House of Commons by Donald Stewart, MP (Scottish Nationalist, Western Isles), who declared: "There is no demand for the Bill". With characteristic Christian arrogance he added: "The fourth commandment is an integral part of the moral law of God and is therefore binding on all men".

The campaign that was mounted against the Bill revealed that hypocrisy and double standards are rife among Christians of all denominations. The worst offenders of the lot were Anglican and Roman Catholic church leaders who supported the Keep Sunday Special movement while turning a blind eye to the vast amount of Sunday trading that goes on in their churches' shops and clubs.

Less than a fortnight before the Commons vote a representative of the Consumers' Association went on a shopping spree at Coventry Cathedral gift shop, purchasing an assortment of goods that were being sold illegally. These included a Bible, as well as a more useful and reliable guide to local pubs. Also on sale were bookmarks, key-rings and jigsaws, which could hardly be described as devotional

although they bore representations of a well-known trinity — Mickey Mouse, Kermit the Frog and Winnie the Pooh.

Under the present law a certificate of indemnity can be issued for the sale of souvenirs at buildings of historic importance. But goods on sale at Coventry Cathedral could not by any stretch of the imagination be described as souvenirs. And even the slickest public relations operator would find it difficult to produce a convincing argument that a building opened in 1962 is of historic importance.

The extent of Sunday trading at Coventry Cathedral alone was illustrated by the Provost, the Very Rev Colin Semper, when he declared that if the cathedral is forced to close its shop on Sundays there would be a cash crisis. The cathedral depends on tourists' money for half its income. The Provost and the Bishop of Coventry, the Rt Rev Simon Barrington-Ward, were both keen supporters of the Keep Sunday Special campaign.

The defeat of the Shops Bill will encourage sabbatarian narks and informers whose activities have brought hundreds of traders before the courts. Fortunately the magistrates appear to be unaware of Exodus 35-2: "On the seventh day you shall have a holy sabbath of solemn rest to the Lord; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death".

• Never on a Sunday, page 70

## A FLAWED TRIBUTE

In her youth Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot, the celebrated novelist) was deeply affected by evangelical Christianity. Her father was a pillar of the Established Church and she attended a school run by the Misses Mary and Rebecca Franklin, daughters of a Baptist minister. In her reminiscences the novelist described the Franklin sisters as "women of stern integrity, highest aims, simple fervent piety".

Mary Ann was 17 when her mother died in 1836. Five years later she met Charles and Caroline Bray, who were to exercise a profound influence on the future novelist. After a period of evangelical enthusiasm, Charles Bray abandoned Christianity forever. His wife, a former Unitarian, was of like mind, and it was under their hospitable roof that Mary Ann Evans met Robert Owen, John Bright, Richard Cobden, W. J. Fox, J. A. Froude and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

When, in 1842, Mary Ann declared that she could no longer attend church, her father was outraged, blaming the Brays for her decision. He refused to discuss the matter, and because of his intolerable attitude Mary Ann went to live with her married brother and his family for a time.

It was Charles Bray who suggested that she should translate D. F. Strauss's *Leben Jesu*. Her translation,

published in 1846, was eagerly welcomed by nineteenth-century rationalists. In 1854 she published a translation of Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christenthums* under the title *The Essence of Christianity*.

She and G. H. Lewes (who was already married) lived openly together for many years. Needless to say this arrangement shocked the initiators of Victorian values.

George Eliot had a profound distaste for evangelical Christianity. After her death in 1890 there was talk of burial in Westminster Abbey. T. H. Huxley commented: "George Eliot is known not only as a great writer, but as a person whose life and opinions were in notorious antagonism to Christian

practice in regard to marriage, and Christian theory in regard to dogma".

Readers are assured that what follows is not lifted from the "This England" column of the *New Statesman* (although it might well have been). Funds were raised for the erection of a most impressive statue in Nuneaton, near George Eliot's Warwickshire birthplace. The recent unveiling was marked by a celebration luncheon at the George Eliot Hotel where the proceedings commenced with a rather pompous pronouncement of grace. Worse still, prior to the unveiling of the statue visitors were entertained by a local band. Its repertoire included *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

## Separate Muslim Schools

BARBARA SMOKER

The National Secular Society is appalled by the news that the London Borough of Brent has decided that the Islamia Primary School in Brondesbury Park should be accorded voluntary aided status.

This fundamentalist Muslim school, run by the Islamic Circle — which, among its many fanatical prohibitions, does not allow any musical instruments within the school walls — is thus likely to become the first (but hardly the last) voluntary-aided Muslim school in Britain.

Establishing separate Muslim schools out of rates and taxes may seem a progressive step, in line with multi-racial education and bi-lingualism; but in fact it would be a most divisive and irresponsible course of action, which the National Secular Society views with alarm, for Muslim (and Sikh) schools would not only segregate the children of Asian origin from the host population, they would also divide them from one another, importing to this country the religious strife and bitterness that exists on the Indian sub-continent. And they would inevitably exacerbate the existing prejudice and discrimination against Asians. Indeed, most responsible Asian community leaders themselves realise the danger of this, and are counselling their followers not to support the demands of a fanatical, short-sighted minority for separate education. Most Muslim parents also realise that state schooling is in the best interests of their children.

It is surely bad enough that we already have in this country Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Jewish schools that segregate children according to their religious background. The divisiveness that this causes — as is seen at its worst in Northern Ireland — would be greatly increased by the addition of denominational schools for immigrant religions, with

segregation on the basis of skin colour as well as creed.

The National Secular Society, which, since its inception in 1866, has urged the abolition of all church schools, now points to the added danger that their existence poses today: making it impossible, in the name of equity, to refuse Muslims (and Sikhs) the same right to state-subsidised segregated schooling as Christians and Jews — with all the social harm that such a policy is sure to build up for future generations.

Parliament should therefore begin to phase out state subsidies to denominational schools of every kind, to encourage integrated schooling. This would also make economic sense, since not only is the dual system of education notoriously wasteful of resources but at least 85 per cent of the capital cost and 100 per cent of the running costs of church schools are paid for out of the public purse.

We are also opposed to the other Muslim demand that their traditional faith and practices should be adequately provided for in the state sector. It is not for the school to provide for any religious teaching or practice. Schools are not to be used as part-time mosques — nor, for that matter, as part-time churches, synagogues, or temples. There are enough out-of-school hours for religious instruction and services without trespassing on the time required for legitimate school subjects.

If religion is taught at all in the county schools (as required under the present law, which we wish to see repealed), then certainly Islam should take its place alongside other world religions: provided, of course, that the teaching is objective and that alternative world views — disbelief (including secular humanism) as well as a range of beliefs — are accorded comparable time and respect.

# Keep it Dark!

PETER COTES

The British Board of Film Censors is a quasi-official body and part of the censorship apparatus. In approving what the great British public might see on the cinema screen, particularly during the 1930s, the BBFC mandarins' decisions were often an odd combination of repressiveness and daftness.

The drama-documentary is an art-form well suited to television. When in the hands of such directors as Norman Swallow (a fine writer also), John Willis and Ken Loach, it can sometimes vie with theatre and cinema entertainments at their best. Some of the recent miners' strike protest films, taken on location, served to remind us of such theatrical milestones as *Six Men of Dorset* (Miles Malleston's account of the Tolpuddle Martyrs) and *Waiting for Lefty* (Clifford Odets' contribution to the Capital versus Labour union struggles that rent America apart in the Thirties).

Sometimes crucial issues are trivialised by their television treatment, but less frequently than in the weekly series, the serial and that deadly diet of "soap" that passes for so much to be seen nightly on the small screen. Then the less critical are suffocated by the false values that condition the viewpoint of millions of viewers who find in routine fare merely an extension of what television is all about, and certainly what it has been sustained by since the advent of commercial television in the mid-Fifties — the advertising "split". The mythology of the ad-men in excelsis, the hidden persuader at his most refined and the peddler of brash escapism, has long been with us.

In days of old the film industries in both the United States and the United Kingdom had self-appointed censors (appointed, that is, by the moguls who made so much of the trash served up to us). A gentleman called Will Hays was the Czar of Hollywood, decreeing what could safely be shown to "family audiences" throughout the world. He occupied a position of enormous importance and played safe with his taste at the time — not entirely dissimilar to that of Mrs Whitehouse so many years later. Playing down to the lowest common denominator, he found so much that was offensive and tasteless fixed in his mind alone. But his code was quickly adopted elsewhere by those sitting in judgement on the Drama and the Film.

Over here we had the British Board of Film Censors, often acting as repressive agents of various governments and were largely dependent upon the type of general secretary they happened to employ at any one particular time. The thinking of this Board was later to be followed when the present Government appeared to be "leaning on" the BBC's

Board of Governors to forbid the showing of a film on Northern Ireland — a move successfully resisted by the production staff. It is also illustrated in an Independent Television Authority that dictates "guide lines" to be followed by the commercial television companies.

What the film industry started in the way of Mrs Grundy — better known in the early days as a Mr Brooke Wilkinson, BBFC secretary and the embodiment of "Victorian values" — we have inherited in a form of censorship that is pointless and often hypocritical. Such artists of the cinema as Adrian Brunel and Ivor Montagu did splendid service in opposing what the BBFC and its minions stood for.

Wilkinson was autocratic and diplomatic in turn, depending upon which side you were on. He was at his most relentless during the 1930s, and his reign at the BBFC was the subject of a television drama-documentary presented by the adventurous Channel Four. *The Secret Diaries of the Film Censors*, written by Jeffrey Richards, narrated by Julian Pettifer, with performances from actors imaginatively directed by David McMahon that had been expertly cut into the well-researched archive material, the programme proved a revelation.

Today's run-of-the-mill expressions — bum, nuts, nappies, belly, masochist and even sex appeal — and such subjects as homosexuality and Royalty were out. Subjects that came under the heading "unpleasant" and were banned from visual representations included cruelty to animals, indecorous dancing, a surfeit of underclothes, controversial politics and, needless to say, members of the opposite sexes in bed. Christ was taboo, ditto any friendly foreign power. So much so that up until war was declared the British film, *Pastor Hall*, remained on the shelf for many months because it had been written by the German communist dramatist, Ernst Toller, and was based on the life of Pastor Niemoeuller, who was one of Hitler's victims.

Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole*, a film that starred Deborah Kerr and, as her working-class mother, the lovely Mary Merrall, had been made not only as the film of an already successfully produced play on the London stage three years previously, but as a criticism of social conditions in a Britain suffering from mass unemployment and poverty that gave rise to The Means Test and the Jarrow Marches. It was to be three years after completion before *Love on the Dole* was first shown on the screen.

Two of the Board's top vetters were depicted in *The Secret Diaries of the Film Censors* as essentially below par intellects. One was a former military officer and a master of foxhounds; the other was a genteel upper-crust lady from the shires. They were

obsessed with looking for "dirty" lines, admitted to little knowledge of literature and judged films by the same standards as they would any amateur play production given by the Band of Hope in a village hall. Senseless regulations laid down by a Board whose secretary was a "stuffed shirt", were made worse by the fact that such views were narrow and insular in the extreme.

Fortunately, Brooke Wilkinson was succeeded as secretary of the BBFC by a cultivated, cultured and highly intelligent man who, to the best of his ability, stamped his own progressive point of view on the "product" that had to be seen and less often "weeded" out. Certainly, if John Trevelyan had not taken over when he did — and his reign lasted, alas,

for only twelve years (1958-70) — it is doubtful whether such films as *Tom Jones*, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, *Whose Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and *The Young and the Guilty* (a film I directed at Elstree) would ever have been seen, in more or less their natural states, with relatively few cuts. They and countless other "victims" of Brooke Wilkinson's scissors would never have passed the test of that censor's assistants, whom Eisenstein, the great director, met when he visited London and was later to write: "One of them was blind, he probably deals with the silent films. Another was deaf, and so he gets the sound films".

Time Marches On. . .

## Never on a Sunday

TED GOODMAN

The Shops Bill was killed by Tory back-benchers in the House of Commons on 14 April. So ends that attempt to allow all shops to open on Sundays.

Since much of the opposition to the Shops Bill came from Christian Sabbatarians, it is appropriate to investigate the link between Christianity and Sunday. It commenced in 321 when the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great ordered that "the venerable day of Sol (the Sun)" be a public holiday, thus instituting a seven-day week in place of the existing eight-day one. He was (and remained until his death-bed baptism in 337) a worshipper of Sol Invictus, the Sun-god, and was Pontifex Maximus (Chief Priest). His decree was therefore made to honour that God, not the Christian one.

The Christians had celebrated the Lord's Day on Saturday (Saturn's Day), which coincided with the Jewish Sabbath (but was not a Roman holiday). When Sunday became an official holiday they made that their day of worship instead. It was merely a matter of convenience, so that their day of worship would be on a holiday.

When the Roman Emperor Theodosius I made Christianity the official religion in 392, the Christians tried to replace the name Sunday with the title "Lord's Day". In the Mediterranean provinces the new name was adopted, viz: Domenica (Italian), Domingo (Spanish and Portuguese), Dimanche (French) and Kiriakey (Greek). In the less Christian northern provinces the old name Sunday, Sontag, etc survived amongst the pagans (ie rustics).

Similarly, the Christian Church tried to replace the pagan planetary names of the other weekdays with numerical terms based on the Lord's Day as first in the week. This succeeded only in the Greek-speaking

East and in Portugal. In Greece Monday is called Theftera (second day), Tuesday is Treaty (third day), Wednesday is Tetarti (fourth day), Thursday is Pempti (fifth day), Friday is Paraskayvee (preparation day) and Saturday is Savato (Sabbath). Similarly in Portugal the weekdays are Segunda Feira (Monday), Terca Feira (Tuesday), Quarta Feira (Wednesday), Quinta Feira (Thursday), Sexta Feira (Friday) and Sabado, ie Sabbath (Saturday).

The months, however, retained their pagan names: January after Janus, the god of doors, February after the Februa (purification) of the the festival of Lupercalia, March after Mars, the god of war, and May after Maia, goddess of growth.

The bigots who stopped the Sunday Bill's progress to the Statute Book were therefore protecting a law based on Constantine's prohibition of Sunday labour (except where necessary on farms) to honour the Sun God, more than 16 centuries ago.

English Sabbatarian legislation started in earnest during the Puritan era with the Sunday Observance Act 1625 which severely restricted business and entertainments on Sundays. Further Sunday Observances Acts followed in 1677 and 1780. Finally came the Sunday Entertainments Act 1932, Shops (Sunday Trading Restriction) Act 1936, the Retail Meat Dealers' Shops (Sunday Closing) Act 1936, the Shops Act 1950 and the Cinemas Act 1985.

Part four of the Shops Act 1950 deals with Sunday trading. It stipulates that every shop, save as otherwise provided, must be closed on Sunday. Under Section 53, Jewish shop owners can apply to the local authority for permission to close on Saturday instead. Contraventions of the prohibitions on Sunday opening are punishable by a fine. The purposes for which a shop may open in England and Wales on Sunday are set out in the fifth schedule to the Act.

The goods which a shop may legally sell in England and Wales on Sunday are as follows: intoxicating liquors; take-away food; confectionery and ice cream; flowers, fruit and vegetables; milk and cream, not including tinned and dried milk or cream but including clotted cream where sold in tins or otherwise; medical and surgical appliances, but only at premises registered under Section 12 of the Pharmacy and Poisons Act 1933; aircraft, motor cycle supplies and accessories; tobacco and smokers' requisites; newspapers, periodicals and magazines; books and stationery from bookstalls at, and only at, terminal and main line railway or omnibus stations or at such aerodromes as are approved by the Secretary of State; guide books, postcards, photo-

graphs, reproductions, photographic films and plates and souvenirs but only at Art Galleries, Museums, Gardens, parks, or ancient monuments, or at zoological, botanical or horticultural gardens; photographs for passports; requisites for any game or sport at premises where such games or sport is played; fodder for horses, mules, ponies or donkeys at any farm, stables, hotel or inn; transaction of Post Office business; transaction of the business carried on by a funeral undertaker.

The law is illogical, usually honoured in the breach. In March, at the General Synod of the Church of England, it was pointed out that the gift shop in Canterbury Cathedral was breaking the law. The Archbishop thereupon ordered its closure!

## More Thoughts for Today

T. F. EVANS

There is no shortage of fatuous and glib solutions to contemporary and often complex problems. In times of change and crisis we are advised to have recourse to the Bible. Right-wing journalist Paul Johnson recently told church leaders that they should ignore the problems of this world and teach the Ten Commandments. T. F. Evans considers the consequences in the unlikely event of the bishops accepting Mr P. Johnson's advice.

"Faith in the City", the Church of England report, created a fine stir, as we have seen. Some of us felt from the beginning that the combination of politics and religion was calculated to stir the blood of those who were concerned with either, both or even neither. We thought that, to use a term from other forms of show business, the story would run and run. In the last few weeks, the rift between Church and State which, ideally some think, should speak with the same voice, has shown signs of being healed. At least representatives of the Church and some Government Ministers have been able to talk to each other without acrimony.

Nevertheless, there is still some smouldering. Not so long ago, there was a BBC "Any Questions" programme on which the Church report was raised. (No doubt by accident, three members of the team of four had strong religious convictions.) Not all the speakers were particularly forceful in their comments. When the last speaker made a contribution, it was very different. This speaker was the outspoken political journalist, Paul Johnson, who has amended his views somewhat in the last few years. Indeed, his change of attitude would make the experience of Saul (or Paul) on the Damascus road look like a slight shift of emphasis. It would not be too much to say that Mr Johnson, at one time editor of the left-wing weekly, the *New Statesman*, is now a born-

again Thatcherite. He was indignant about the bishops. His remedy was simple. Instead of meddling in politics, the clerics should stick to their proper duty, which was to teach the Ten Commandments.

This rang a bell at once. Nearly all of us have heard of the Ten Commandments. Not all of us could recite them. Of those who could recite them, a substantial minority at least would think them of historical value only. Many would consider that an attempt to run 20th-century life on the basis of these old precepts would be ill-judged and could be very disturbing. Thus, in Bertolt Brecht's play, *Mother Courage and her Children*, there is a song about such great people as Solomon, Julius Caesar, Socrates and Saint Martin. All had great qualities and these are mentioned: wisdom, courage, logic and charity respectively. The poet observes at the end of each verse that, in the long run, the virtue practised by each great man had done him no good and he would have been better off without it. The final verse begins with a word about ordinary people:

There's Ten Commandments unto which  
All proper folk pay heed,  
But which of them has helped a bit?

The implication is, of course, that the commandments have not helped those who lived by them, and the final lines hammer the sardonic message home:

If that is what religion has brought us to,  
How blessed is he with none at all.

The sceptical attitude of Bertolt Brecht is clearly not good enough for Paul Johnson. He thinks that we should all return to the rules that were laid down on a far-off mountain many years ago. In the 20th century, however, the attitude of many people to religion, whatever their overt genuflections in the direction of orthodox observances, has come to be

very much like that expressed in the last line of the Brecht song. To put it in another way, it is what is said by Fluther Good, the irrepressible carpenter and drinking man in Sean O'Casey's play, *The Plough and the Stars*:

There's no reason to bring religion into it. I think we ought to have as great a regard for religion as we can, so as to keep it out of as many things as possible.

Whole libraries of books have been written on the construction, interpretation and practical implications of the Ten Commandments. The readers of this journal are probably no more willing to engage in a close investigation of the Commandments than the writer is equipped to lead such an enquiry. Nevertheless, a few random thoughts come to mind. First, anyone who does not already know the poem is referred to "The Latest Decalogue" by the Victorian, Arthur Hugh Clough, a piece of elegant satire, which for its mixture of humour and humanism is one of the things that persuades some of us that the call for a return to Victorian values may be followed, as long as we are free to choose which Victorian values are to be adopted. The first lines of the poem set the tone:

Thou shalt have one God only: who  
Would be at the expense of two?

In the interests of space, we will leap over graven images and names taken in vain. When we come to think about the Sabbath day, we find ourselves plunged into a current controversy. Paul Johnson must know that the party of the Church, the party of traditional values, of the roast beef of old England and other burnt offerings, of Oxbridge and the Eton and Harrow match, of the right people and those lesser people who, whatever their status or colour, know their place and stick to it — this party that stands for all the best in the country as we have always known it, is proposing to cast aside the fourth commandment. It is proposed that the High Street shall be as lively and as noisy on the Sabbath as it is on the other six days. Were the money-changers driven from the temple for this? Indeed, it seems that the temple, hitherto alive on one day of the week only, is to be transformed into a supermarket and kept busy every day of the year. (We cannot believe that Christmas Day or Good Friday will remain untouched by the rising tide of commercialism.) It is little wonder that the Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops of Liverpool should have been driven into the arms of the trade unions, who, as everyone knows, are alone in thinking of their rights. We wonder if all this is what Mr Johnson wants.

When we examine the requirement that parents should be honoured, we are faced with difficulties that are just as great. Not so long ago, Mrs Victoria Gillick was defeated in her attempts to ensure that

parents should be given ultimate rights over the sexual conduct of their children. There was perhaps some justification for her stand. The decision of the House of Lords went against her. Here was the highest court in the land, an institution not noted for decisions that could always be called "progressive" saying, in effect, that children were not to be regarded as the mere appendages or possessions of their parents, but that the community itself shall have regard to the interests of the children, not simply to those of the parents. A recent decision of the General Medical Council has clouded the issue but, if the purport of the commandment in question has not been entirely negated, it can no longer be construed as meaning that parents should always have the last word and that children should always be obliged to defer to them.

It would be painful to dwell for too long on the commandment against killing. It might be too much to say that it is no longer taken entirely seriously. Yet, an increasing number of otherwise worthy citizens who would certainly think twice about taking a hatchet to one of their own family — and it is in the sanctity of the home that most murders are committed — would cheerfully drive a car after having drunk enough to make the possibility of a fatal accident very real. Even worse is the fact that, as civilization makes progress, if that is the right word, one of the areas in which the greatest steps "forward" are taken, is in the preparation of more ingenious and efficient ways of killing our fellow human beings. In the "Don Juan in Hell" scene in Shaw's *Man and Superman*, the Devil comments on the readiness of the human race to invest in the means of death compared with its reluctance to spend money on life itself. Thus:

the people run about the streets yelling with delight, and egg their Governments on to spend hundreds of millions of money in the slaughter, while the strongest Ministers dare not spend an extra penny in the pound against the poverty and pestilence through which they themselves daily walk.

This is true as ever it was. It applies, alas, to governments of all political persuasions. In spite of this, few of those who campaign most enthusiastically for a return to the Ten Commandments have established a reputation for opposition to the immense expenditure on armaments throughout the world. So paradoxical is our thinking that supporters of CND, for example, are branded in many countries as enemies of peace.

It would be both futile and distressing to spend too long on the subject of adultery. Standards have changed drastically. Much nearer the time of Moses himself, the examples of David and Solomon do not suggest that the seventh commandment worried them overmuch. In our own time, much valuable progress has been made in the direction of sexual liberation. There is nevertheless a distinction between liberty



and debasement. Even the most fervent champions of freedom may have thought a little about a recent item of news. It was announced that a so-called pop star was to marry his lady-friend of some years' standing (that may not be the right word) since she was now pregnant. At the same time, however, he was leaving another lady in the same condition. His manager, invited to comment, is quoted as having said that "there can hardly be a man who has not regularly slept with two women at the same time". This may or may not be so. What is true is that the gentleman's conduct will have no serious effect on the attendance at his concerts or the sale of his recordings. We do not suggest that it should.

On the other hand, a Cabinet minister lost his post recently, it seems, for no other reason than that it was decided that a man who committed adultery should not serve in a high position. Many have done so in the past and even may be doing so today. This particular incident is far too involved to be given detailed examination here. To do so would mean a number of questions being asked on the lines of "Who knew what and when". Yet, it does mean that if, with Mr Johnson, we are to continue to keep this particular commandment as one of the inflexible rules of our life, we should have to add some such rider to the words, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" as, for example, "if it might cause embarrassment to those whose interest it is to present thee to the public as someone who is entirely trustworthy in thought, word and deed".

Even if we cannot accept Mr Johnson's prescription, we cannot deny that his prompting has caused us to look at some recent happenings in a fresh light. Thus, there has been much news since Christmas of events which have turned our minds to those final prohibitions against stealing or coveting. (Incidentally, a sober dictionary definition of the word "covet" is "desire eagerly", although the usage has come to imply that the object shall be someone else's possession. This may be just as well. If it were not so, we would have to look very carefully at the entire advertisement industry which is designed to persuade us to "desire eagerly".) The apparently interminable Westland saga, various share dealings, the developments in the newspaper world and the impending "Big Bang" on the Stock Exchange have made us reflect yet again on how money is made in our society.

We have known for a long time that things have been done by the unions in Fleet Street, for example, that could not be defended. We have always been ready to admit that a worker who does not give his employer good value for his wages is just as much a thief as the criminal who breaks into a house and robs the celebrated elderly widow of her life's savings. Against this may be set what one newspaper has called "the unseemly wheeling and dealing in the stock market over the past month". From our

position of Olympian detachment, we find it hard to draw a moral distinction between the relatively simple practices of errant trade unionists and the more complicated and sophisticated manoeuvres by those who work in the world of share dealings, company promotion and the money markets. Moreover, as Oliver Goldsmith put it, "Laws grind the poor, and rich men rule the law".

It might be objected that none of this takes us very far. This may be true. However, it is always a valuable exercise to look very carefully at what is submitted as a simple cure for the ills of society or the world. Mr Paul Johnson recommended churchmen to concentrate on teaching the Ten Commandments. It is hardly possible that he really knew what he was saying. To return to the Church of England document with which we started, the good thing is that the hard facts of life today have caused some people, not hitherto known for their radical solutions to life's problems, to look again at some of the facile remedies that have been mouthed through the years and to find that something more is needed. We may not agree with the Church of England in anything else, but in this particular domain it has set an example to all of us to continue to reconsider the ideas by which we live. This must have a value.

## AIDS Risk Must be Taken, says Archbishop

Archbishop O'Brien of Edinburgh has declared that the Roman Catholic Church will never sanction abortion even if there was risk that the child would be born handicapped. He was commenting on a statement by Dr Ray Brettle, an AIDS expert and consultant at Edinburgh City Hospital, that he would "strongly advise" an abortion if a woman was shown to have the virus. Dr Brettle is presently treating AIDS babies and believes that as many as 50 may be affected.

According to Dr Brettle, research has shown that a woman who reacts positively to a test for the virus runs a greater risk of developing the disease if she becomes pregnant. And there was a 50 per cent chance that she and the child will die within four years.

Archbishop O'Brien said: "The fifth commandment cannot be overturned just because there is a risk that a child may be born with a handicap, even if that handicap is a serious one".

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A new organisation has been formed to oppose the ordination of women. The Women Against the Ordination of Women has written to the Church of England's 43 diocesan bishops. Membership strength of the new group is unknown, but it includes priests' wives and career women.

**VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA: EXPERTS DEBATE THE RIGHT TO DIE**, edited by A. B. Downing and Barbara Smoker. Peter Owen, £14.95

It can be said at once that what we have here is the most authoritative and comprehensive work dealing with the problem of euthanasia that has been published in this country. It is not entirely new, but rather a revised, enlarged and updated version of a book that was first published in 1969. This edition was timed to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, the first of what has since become a worldwide federation of "right-to-die" societies. About half the contents have been added to the original version and, in addition, it contains much useful information, in appendices, including an updated selected bibliography, addresses of the main societies throughout the world and some account of earlier attempts to change the law in this country.

Although this is clearly a work of propaganda, being designed to enlighten the public on an issue that is peculiarly liable to evoke hostility, misunderstanding and prejudice, it is not narrowly partisan. Two of the most substantial, as well as most forceful and subtle, contributions are by avowed opponents of voluntary euthanasia. The first of these is by Luke Gormally, director of the Linacre Centre, here described as a "research and study centre in the field of health care and ethics". Although a professed Catholic, Gormally argues his case on the basis of general ethical principles albeit of a "non-utilitarian" kind. This leads him to conclude that: "The only reason for killing a man which is consistent with recognizing the true dignity of human beings is that he deserves death". This excludes "human pain, misery and dependence" the usual reasons advanced in defence of voluntary euthanasia.

The second antagonist, Yale Kamisar, a Professor of Law at the University of Michigan, offers "Some Non-Religious Objections" to voluntary euthanasia legislation. He labours, for what it is worth, the popular "wedge argument" even going so far as to remind us about the horrors of the Nazi euthanasia programme. Also, like all opponents of voluntary euthanasia, he expresses concern about the effects which legalization might have on those hovering on the brink of suicide: "Will we not sweep up, in the process", he asks, "some who are not really tired of life, but think others are tired of them; some who do not really want to die but who feel that they should not live on because to do so, when there looms the legal alternative of euthanasia is to do a selfish or cowardly act?"

Neither objector, however, is permitted the final word. Barbara Smoker, herself a renegade Catholic

turned humanist who is one of the two co-editors, takes it upon herself to reply to Luke Gormally. Rather than trying to answer each of his arguments in turn, however, she seeks to undermine his basic position which she sees as essentially a religious position in secular guise. To this end she injects a strong vein of commonsense into the discussion. "We firmly deny", she concludes, "that people should always have to live as long as possible whatever their condition" and adds "Our viewing of the sanctity of life cannot be divorced from the quality of life".

Glanville Williams, a British Professor of Jurisprudence from Cambridge, is here appropriately assigned the task of replying to Yale Kamisar who had cited his writings at some length. Williams counters Kamisar's use of the wedge argument by simply pointing out that: "no proposal for reform, however strong the arguments in its favour, is immune from the wedge objection". Wisely, in my opinion, Williams does not try to rebut the suggestion that legalizing voluntary euthanasia could in due course lead to legalizing cases of non-voluntary euthanasia. Instead he declares himself willing to countenance certain cases of non-voluntary euthanasia such, for example, as its application to hopelessly defective infants. As for the elderly invalid about whom Kamisar was so concerned who: "wishes for euthanasia . . . partly because he sees his beloved ones breaking under the strain of caring for him", Williams professes himself unable to see "how this decision on his part, agonizing though it may be, is necessarily a matter of discredit either to the patient himself or to his relatives", and adds "there are limits to human endurance". This is bravely spoken. Supporters of voluntary euthanasia would, I think, gain more respect if, like Williams or Smoker, they frankly admitted that it might have consequences that went beyond the strictly voluntary principle, although the Society itself is surely right to confine its remit to the issue of voluntary euthanasia as the necessary first step towards a more rational approach to death.

Although the strongest opposition to voluntary euthanasia is religiously inspired, we learn here that a National Opinion Poll published in 1985 shows that not only is there an overall 72 per cent majority in favour of legalizing voluntary euthanasia under proper safeguards, but each of the major religious denominations into which the sample is broken down shows a majority in favour of the proposal. Even among self-declared Catholics a majority of 54 per cent was recorded although, not surprisingly, among atheists the figure reaches 89

# REVIEW

per cent.

In the present volume those who write in support of voluntary euthanasia as avowed Christians include the late Rev A. B. Downing, a former chairman of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society and one of the co-editors of this volume, Professor Joseph Fletcher of the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Mass., and the late Very Rev W. R. Matthews who was Dean of St Paul's from 1934 to 1967. Hence, those who still regard voluntary euthanasia as un-Christian would do well to read what these authors have to say and then think again. Even Catholic opinion is changing. Appendix 4 gives the Vatican's Declaration on Euthanasia of 1980. This makes it clear that doctors are permitted to give pain-killing drugs even when these shorten the life of the patient always provided that this is no part of the doctor's intention in prescribing the drug. It also permits patients to forego extraordinary medical measures aimed at prolonging life if these are deemed excessively burdensome since this does not, in the Vatican's eyes, amount to suicide. Non-Catholics may regard such distinctions as casuistical but we should be glad that Catholics are at least moving towards a more rational position.

In general the case for passive euthanasia has come to be far more widely accepted in medical circles. Given the high technology now available in medicine the case for letting well alone on occasion becomes ever more pressing. Nevertheless, not all doctors are content to settle for passive euthanasia. Readers should turn to the chapter entitled "Active Voluntary Euthanasia" by that intrepid Dutch pioneer, Pieter Admiraal based on the talk he gave in London in April 1985 at the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society. Dr Admiraal, an anaesthetist from Delft, now regularly administers lethal injections to his patients, at the hospital for terminal cancer, at their special request, providing they fulfil all the conditions which the Dutch authorities now demand. If they do, then Dr Admiraal is secure in the knowledge that no prosecution will be brought against him, a situation that has come about in no small part thanks to his own fearless campaigning on this issue. He is openly contemptuous of his colleagues who are content to rely on passive euthanasia alone. In many of the conditions which he specifies here a "discontinuation of therapy" may lead to a protracted death of perhaps many weeks. "Would anyone dare to assert", he asks, "that this amounts to the peaceful death as desired by the patient and his family?". Another eminent, indeed world-famous, surgeon who supports active voluntary euthanasia is Christiaan Barnard.

Barnard, as he tells us, was brought up in a strict Christian faith but he can no longer share the Christian view that suffering may have spiritual value. "I have never seen anyone ennobled through suffering", he writes.

The ethics of euthanasia are here most cogently presented from the humanist point of view by the philosopher Antony Flew. He insists that the onus falls not on those who seek to change the law in this respect but, rather, on those who would deny us the right to voluntary euthanasia. "Why should people, in this matter", he asks, "be restrained by law from doing what they want?". He then proceeds to examine some of the standard objections to legalizing voluntary euthanasia. For example the Hippocratic Oath is often invoked in this connection. But, as Flew points out, even if we accept that doctors today should still be bound by this ancient vow originally made to Apollo, the clause which says "I will use treatments to help the sick according to my ability and judgment" may conflict with that other clause which says "I will not give anyone a lethal dose if asked to do so" which is usually cited as sufficient condemnation of euthanasia. Eventually, Flew, too, has to cope with the wedge argument quoting, for the purpose, G. K. Chesterton's aphorism that: "the proponents of euthanasia now seek only the death of those who are a nuisance to themselves but soon it will be broadened to those who are a nuisance to others". Such arguments, he points out, rest on two assumptions both of which can be challenged. First, that "the supposedly inevitable consequences are indeed evil and substantially worse than the reform would remove"; and, secondly, that "these supposedly inevitable consequences really are inevitable consequences".

There is no room in such a review as this to discuss the contributions of all 17 authors, but I will mention lastly two others. Those who still believe that provision of more hospices can obviate the need to legalize voluntary euthanasia would do well to ponder the piece by Dr Colin Brewer. Even if society were in a position economically to provide hospice treatment for all terminally ill patients who desired it, this would still not meet the needs of some who should surely have the right to die. Brewer reminds us of the notorious case of young James Haig "paralysed in all four limbs following a motor-cycle accident, who burnt himself to death in the flames of his specially constructed bungalow because, not wanting to live, he could not manage to die in any other way".

I would also commend the eloquent final chapter by Mary Rose Barrington, a lawyer, entitled "The Case for Rational Suicide". She stresses the unnecessary additional suffering that a suicide must now endure owing to the fact that, in the present state of the law, he dare not involve others in his action. "The melancholy result", she writes, "is that

a decision that cries out for moral support has to be taken in cheerless isolation, and, if taken at all, is usually deferred until the victim is in an additional state of misery". Later on she points out the paradox that: "although laying down one's life in battle is generally considered praiseworthy, to lay down your life to spare yourself pointless suffering, to release medical staff so that they can tend people who would have some chance of living enjoyable lives . . . to release your family and friends from anxiety and anguish, *these motives are considered shocking*".

After reading a book such as this one feels truly puzzled. Given that the objective is manifestly humane and reasonable, why are our legislators still,

after 50 years, so reluctant to introduce the necessary amendments to the law? And, even more perplexing, why is the medical profession, almost everywhere outside the Netherlands, so strongly opposed to such legislation? Is it just caution? Are they being pusillanimous? We have learnt to come to terms with sex but are we still petrified by the taboos surrounding death? Yet, there was almost no opposition to the Suicide Act of 1961 despite all the centuries during which suicide was regarded with such abhorrence. Perhaps, then, it is still not too much to hope that humanity will eventually learn to live with assisted suicide.

JOHN BELOFF

## Origins and Evolution on BBC2

BEVERLY HALSTEAD

BBC 2 Television regaled us recently with two programmes on evolution, a two-hour block buster hosted by Jonathan Miller called simply *Origins*, and a more modest *Horizon* programme in which Richard Dawkins of *Selfish Gene* fame sought to convince the audience that, contrary to the received wisdom, "Nice Guys Finish First". It is seldom that in the space of a few weeks one can watch programmes covering similar territory with such dramatic contrasts.

First, in *Origins*, Jonathan Miller covered the origin of man, of life and the universe. The approach was novel; this time we did not end with evolution culminating in ourselves, but rather we began from the present and set off backwards at a spanking pace, on the inexorable descent shedding the audience along the route, so that by the time the final conclusion was reached that there was no starting point, most of the audience must have already vanished down a black hole.

The final astronomical part was too abstruse for my liking, which simply means that the content was exceptionally dense or I was.

The origin of life section was a typical *Horizon* format with Cyril Ponnampereuma and his colleagues demonstrating the ubiquity in the universe of the building blocks of life. The latest on the curious sea floor ecosystem associated with volcanic vents, where the energy for life comes from within the earth and is independent of that from the sun, provided food for thought. This section was scientifically sound and to my mind exceptionally interesting. But when we came on to the discussion of man's origins and the process of evolution, we were presented with a parade of American pundits, with the refreshing addition of a number from South Africa, as a counterbalance to only hearing of Leakey and his colleagues and rivals. It was good to see material from Swartkrans in South Africa, but frustrating for

some of the more sensational evidence of this site being the accumulation of the remains of leopard meals, not to have been shown, such as the australopithecine child that had been carried off in the jaws of a leopard to be eaten up a tree overhanging the Swartkrans fissure.

Elizabeth Vbra spoke of the difficulties in recording gradual change in evolution which lead inevitably to the Eldredge and Gould theory of punctuated equilibria, where most of the time nothing much happens and then this equilibrium is punctuated by sudden change, "a new idea of recent years" vouchsafed Jonathan Miller! Well, this has been chewed over since 1972, and the consensus is that the pattern of evolution is one of gradual change, but at particular points the tempo of change is accelerated so we now have the notion of "punctuated gradualism".

There were a few canards that made one sit up; the idea of the extinction of the dinosaurs being a consequence of the impact of a 15km diameter meteor being stated as a well known fact (which I had considered had been demolished some time ago). This part of the programme seemed ridiculously out of date, with a few Americans and friends riding their hobby horses. It illustrated more clearly than usual the BBC's apparent policy of quitting Albion's shores and whizzing across the Atlantic for anything to do with science. British contributions to these topics were hardly in evidence, yet it is British scientists who have to a large extent debunked the excesses promulgated by Jonathan Miller.

Having been unduly irritated by BBC2, it was with a certain trepidation I sat down to view *Horizon* on "The Nice Guys Finish First". Here was Richard Dawkins of Oxford, author of *The Selfish Gene*, a *cause celebre* that delighted the racist National Front who saw in the title (it is doubtful that they either read or understood the contents of the book)

support for their views and hence aroused the ire of the radical Left (who also neither read nor understood what it was all about).

So what did we get? It was in fact one of the most brilliant and I would venture to suggest important pieces of popular science that BBC2 has been privileged to broadcast. Here was an exceedingly articulate major research figure in his field explaining in a simple straightforward way, perhaps one of the most important theoretical concepts in evolution theory to have emerged this century. In a nutshell he demonstrated that, with natural selection in the concept of survival of the fittest, the race does not in fact go to the apparently strong, the macho tough guys, the bullies, but it is the nice guys that win in the long run.

This seemingly unlikely scenario came out of getting computer experts to produce a winning strategy in the "Prisoner's Dilemma" game where both players move simultaneously in ignorance of

one another. Robert Axelrod in his book *The Evolution of Cooperation* (Basic Books £13.50) showed the tit-for-tat strategy was always the winner.

This is very simple, it always begins with a cooperative move, thereafter it imitates the previous move of its opponent. If provoked by an opponent it retaliates, but then wipes the slate clean and reverts to cooperation.

As Dawkins concluded (*Listener*, 17 April p.10) "a simple computer game has shown that the qualities that make for success in a fundamentally competitive world are niceness, lack of envy and forgiveness . . . The tit-for-tat strategy is always ready to initiate a new round of cooperation and, after one swift and firm retaliation, is already to forgive and forget and it is these very qualities that earn it its individual success. Now will somebody translate Axelrod's book into Arabic, Hebrew and Russian and prepare a comic-strip summary for the White House?"

## Scottish Humanists Say Nuclear Weapons "Must be Condemned Unconditionally"

The Scottish Humanist Council held another successful annual conference at the Cowane Centre, Stirling, on 12 April.

A statement on Peace, Security and Justice was circulated in advance and was the main subject for debate during the morning session. It affirmed that humanism stands for responsible, caring behaviour, based on rational consideration of the available evidence and in the interests of others. Humanists are deeply concerned about the future of the human species and of the planet, both of which are threatened by the massive accumulation of nuclear weapons.

The statement, which was carried almost unanimously, continued: "In the modern world there is no basic reason why nations and religions should not be able to coexist peacefully, in tolerance of alternative economic, political, social and ethical systems.

"Throughout history, the use of force in self-defence has been seen as legitimate, but the needs of self-defence have been unscrupulously exaggerated by ambitious tribal, national and religious leaders.

"Humanists favour peaceful coexistence and the resolution of disagreements, whether local or international, through discussion and compromise, without the use or threat of force. Where it becomes necessary, force ought always be kept to a minimum, be exercised under democratic control, and be proportionate to the end which it serves.

"Since the effects of the use of strategic nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction

must always be disproportionate to any conceivable gain, their use must be condemned unconditionally".

The conference called on the humanist movement and all responsible people to commit themselves to creating a saner world.

"The threat is unprecedented, but there is hope that mankind will respond in an unprecedented manner".

## LETTERS

### EVOLUTION AND RESPONSIBILITY

Outcomes of physical and biological evolution cannot be "pure chance", which by definition would be always and only chaos. Nature seems to be a self-organizing order, as James Hemming says, modified by chance occurrences (*Letters*, April). What I question is the kind of "scientific wholism" applied to the universe, by which he sets such store. For if the universe is a system, it seems evident that it is an open-ended one, in which chance plays the part that makes it so. That means that we cannot study its parts in the context of the whole. Admittedly, this is proper on the local scale where we can apprehend the context which makes the whole.

The main point, however, as concerns Humanists, is in James Hemming's last paragraph. We know something about the biological evolution of species; we know something about the historical development of human cultures. Above all, we know the responsibility for the management and future of the planet that rests with humankind now that we have accelerating knowledge and control of the environment and of

genetic processes. This does not and cannot depend on a particular view of the mechanics of physical and biological evolution. Human life and mind are what they are and are capable of becoming, and any reductionist theory is self-refuting. To get into our bones the awesome responsibility of our position is what matters most. If the scenario sketched in the book helps to do that, well and good. But I don't believe that it is necessary, and I doubt there are grounds for it to mean what it says.

H. J. BLACKHAM

## HUBBARD'S CAREER

I can assure the Public Affairs Director of the Church of Scientology that I am never careless with facts. In autobiographies or biographies, however, it is sometimes difficult to discover what the facts are, and here one must use deduction.

Even if one had access to every court in every place where L. Ron Hubbard had ever been, their records would not list arrests and sometimes would not list every case or the name of every defendant. But educational institutions invariably list academic qualifications, so if Michael Garside knows that Hubbard was a nuclear physicist he can readily produce the proof.

I thought it was clear in my article (The Freethinker, March) that I did not believe the story about his announcing the invention of a new religion as a path to riches. Unlike the other two allegations, it is intrinsically implausible. Though "penny" is American slang for cent, I doubt if it's common. Moreover, I believe "dime a line" was hack remuneration at that time, while "ridiculous" is more English than American. Finally, the psychology (or at least the admissions) of charlatans is more subtle than the quote suggests.

If it is any comfort to Mr Garside, let me say that in any conflict of testimony between Hubbard and the CIA or a South African Minister for "Information", I should be quite likely to believe L. Ron.

DAVID TRIBE

## GOOD ENOUGH

If the word "good" derives from God and the word "God" derives from good, then and then only, the tribute from Mr Norman Podhoretz that appeared in The Times to his friend, the late Sir Huw Weldon, makes sense. It is when Santayana is quoted to endorse a point of view, felt rather than known, that some unease could be felt by the reader. For that good man was a sceptic. Born of parents who were both deists, he grew up to form his own opinions, and belief in a deity was not one of them. But Podhoretz, not content with good, dubbed Sir Huw "godly".

We have recently been reminded, in a biography of Margaret Cole, that the subject thought "fellowship to be heaven, and the lack of fellowship hell". Many of those who had the privilege of knowing Sir Huw might well think that such a description if applied to him got it about right.

They are giving a service of "thanksgiving" for Huw's life in Westminster Abbey this month. But that won't make my old friend other than a freethinker any more than similar services, in similar venues, for such folk as Thomas Hardy, Vaughan Williams and, just the other day, Philip Larkin, made them after death any different in opinion to what they were in life.

PETER COTES

The House of Lords has ruled that Pakistani "postal" divorces are not valid in English law. Last month five Law Lords dismissed an immigration appeal by Ghulam Fatima who was refused entry to Britain to marry her fiancée. He had pronounced the Islamic "talaq" divorce against his first wife and notified her by post. Under Islamic law a man may divorce his wife without recourse to a court of law by saying "talaq" ("I divorce you") three times.

## Freethinker Fund

This month *The Freethinker* celebrates another birthday, its 105th. When the paper first saw the light of day in 1881 — eight pages, one penny — the country was embroiled in a debate over Charles Bradlaugh's attempt to take his seat in the House of Commons, having been elected to represent Northampton. *Freethinker* founder and editor, G. W. Foote, incensed Christians by declaring that the new publication would "wage relentless war against superstition in general, and Christian superstition in particular". This policy was eventually to land him in Holloway Prison for 12 months for blasphemy.

Taking a world view in 1986, clearly the greatest threat to peace and human welfare comes from those countries that are in the grip of religious mania. In Britain, Christian superstition remains enemy number one, although we recognise the menace of Islam, Judaism and imported cults.

*The Freethinker* has survived for over a century, thanks to those who have written articles, helped to build the circulation and increase its influence. There has always been a generous response to appeals for financial support, and the latest list of contributors to the Fund is given below.

E. C. Hughes, £1.20; R. A. Hunt, £2; J. McCorrisken and R. Peterson, £3 each; M. A. Aitchison, E. C. Davis, N. Ferguson, A. George, M. D. Gough, J. K. Hawkins, A. T. Horton, O. Kaplan, S. D. Kuebart, G. Lucas, H. M. Merrill, M. D. Powell, F. Stevenson, D. Swan, J. E. Westerman and A. P. Woods, £1.40 each; G. R. Bigley, E. Cecil, C. Lovett and A. F. Pendry, £2.40 each; D. Bressan, £4; A. J. Martin, £5; C. Blakeley, R. Fennell, S. P. Harvey, H. J. Jakeman, G. S. Mellor, A. Oldham, F. Pidgeon, P. E. Ponting-Barbour, R. K. E. Torode and P. D. Wrightson, £6.40 each; M. O. Morley, £8.40; D. Harper and Sutton Humanist Group, £10 each; P. Crommelin, £11.40; O. Grubiak, £16.40; J. Dahlby, £17.60; E. M. Ruffell, £25; Iconoclast (in memory of Allan Flanders, Edith Moore and Jack Walton), £300.

Total for March: £513.

# EVENTS

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** New Venture Theatre Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton, Sunday, 1 June, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. Public meeting.

**Edinburgh Humanist Group.** Programme of Forum meetings from the secretary, 59 Fox Covert Avenue, Edinburgh, EH12 6UH, telephone 031-334 8372.

**Gay Humanist Group.** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Meetings on the second Friday of the month at 7.30 pm.

**Humanist Holidays.** Information regarding future holidays is obtainable from Gillian Bailey, 18 Priors Road, Cheltenham, GL52 5AA, telephone 0242-39175.

**Glasgow Humanist Society.** Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Norman Macdonald, 15 Queen Square, Glasgow G41 2BG, telephone 041-424 0545.

**Lewisham Humanist Group.** Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 24 April, 7.45 pm. Discussion: The Role of Organised Humanism.

**Norwich Humanist Group.** Programme of meetings obtainable from Philip Howell, 41 Spixworth Road, Old Catton, Norwich, NR6 7NE, telephone Norwich 47843.

**Shelley Celebration.** Altwood School, Maidenhead, Berkshire, Saturday, 24 May, 11 am - 5.30 pm. Speakers: Denzil Davies, Eric Heffer and Paul Foot. Tickets £5 (£3 if unemployed) from V. Price, 61 Alma Road, Windsor.

**South Place Ethical Society.** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Saturday, 17 May, 2.30 pm. Memorial Meeting for Betty Beer and Fanny Cockerell. Sunday, 18 May, 11 am. D. Wedgwood: Why Morality Without Religion? Wednesday, 21 May, 7 pm. Lord Fenner Brockway: Moncure Conway, his Life and Message for Today (the 62nd Conway Memorial Lecture); Chairman: Michael Foot, MP. Sunday, 1 June, 11 am. D. Taylor: The Punjab and Indian Democracy.

**Sutton Humanist Group.** Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 14 May, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. R. G. Medlow: The Need for Electoral Reform.

**Warwickshire Humanist Group.** Friends Meeting House, Hill Street (off Corporation Street), Coventry. Monday, 19 May, 7.45 pm for 8 pm. Public Meeting.

Unlike their more enlightened counterparts in Brighton, the town councillors of Bournemouth do not allow nude bathing on local beaches. Now a campaign has been started to get the ban lifted. Those who support the campaign include the **Naturist Foundation group**, which, according to the **Bournemouth evening newspaper**, "would like a section of the beach where its members can hang out".

tackling the basic inequalities which have so sadly deepened".

T. F. Evans, proposing a toast to the Guest of Honour, said that Jo Richardson has earned for herself a place of distinction in the political world, extending far beyond the limits of those who share her own allegiances and special interests.

She has been a worthy successor to that great line of British non-conformists from Thomas Paine onwards who have preserved the liberties of the individual, so often trumpeted by those of other opinions, often at the very moment when they were seeking to curtail those liberties.

"With such splendid principles, she has always been found in the forefront of movements for the liberty of the individual, and against those many repressions which, in the interests of so-called security, property interests or other specious pretexts, it is sought to impose upon us.

"We wish her well in all those endeavours. We hope that she may succeed in frustrating those eminent champions of personal morality and public decency, Messrs Winston Churchill, MP, and Geoffrey Dickens, MP, always remembering that the kind of restrictions on broadcasting and television that these paladins wish to impose are usually the forerunners to censorship of a more blatantly political type".

Proposing a toast to the National Secular Society, Christine Bondi referred to a vital human activity which concerned her and the movement. She said our concerns about religious education and Church schools should not blind us to the much broader aspects of education.

After quoting Disraeli's 1874 statement, "Upon the education of the people of this country the fate of this country depends", Christine Bondi said "it is a quotation from a prime minister, and judging from its sentiments it could have come from the lips of almost any prime minister this century, other than the present incumbent of the post.

"From 1870 until a few years ago State education appeared to be moving ever forward and upward. There were plenty of things wrong with it and we had wandered along some rather peculiar blind alleys in the process. But by and large we appeared to be making progress in many ways, opening doors to give greater opportunities and more open choices to more and more of the younger generation.

"In my view, this process has now come to a halt and indeed gone into reverse. There are many and varied reasons for this. The attitude of the present Secretary of State is undoubtedly a contributory factor, but I must be honest and admit that to identify him as the begetter of all the problems would be both facile and false. I think it must be said that if the people of this country really had the

genuine respect for education that is found in many other countries, and not least in some developing countries, then those responsible for the decline I have mentioned would never have got away with it".

The speaker mentioned some of our educational failings. First, there was the problem of over-specialisation. Secondly we have "an extraordinary lack of respect for technological and practical education, largely the consequence of failure to implement fully the 1944 Education Act". Technical schools were not provided as part of what was supposed to be a three-prong modern grammar and technical secondary system, so that when comprehensive schools were introduced the technical component was lacking.

In addition to these problems, we now have the very considerable problem of the teachers and the general sense of insecurity that is being engendered in everyone that is connected with education.

"A situation which was already poor has in many places become disastrous. Parents who can afford it turn to independent schools, creating an even greater divide in our society which needs no help in creating divisions. Teachers are in a state of despair produced by lack of respect and recognition for what they have been trying to do, which is reflected in their low pay. It is almost impossible to recruit maths and physics teachers for a whole variety of reasons and in that area we have already reached crisis point. As somebody said to me recently, all we have left is the panic button and the time may have come to use it. . .

"I am sure that it goes without saying that we want the best for all children. That means we want a thriving State education system in which all children have the opportunity to be part of a community where they can feel that they are participating with children from all backgrounds, without divisions by race, religion, sex or social status. As H. G. Wells wrote: 'Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe'. At present there seems to be a conspiracy to ruin State education".

Responding to the toast to the Society, Chris Morey, a member of the management committee, picked up the educational theme of the previous speaker.

He referred to a West London education authority that had begun to question the position of Christians on its education committee. Instead of kicking them off, though, it had decided to retain the Anglican and Catholic representatives, plus one other to represent all the rest including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Jews — some task.

"Schools", he said, "were now promoting multi-cultural education, but the prevalent attitude to religion in society represented a weak link in any programme of multi-cultural education. All religions are entitled to some esteem, but all must be subject

to critical scrutiny in the education system".

Chris Morey said he had been musing on how religion could be put in its place, and had lighted on the possibility of taking an existing piece of legislation and amending it.

"It occurred to me to take the Sexual Offences Act, delete 'sex' and insert 'religion'.

"All religious acts would be unlawful unless between consenting adults in private.

"Religious acts by force, fear or fraud — religious rape — would be a criminal offence.

"Religious acts with persons below the age of consent would be an offence.

"Religion with close members of the family — religious incest — would be illegal.

"Soliciting for religious purposes, running a religious house and living off religious earnings would all be stopped.

"There would be provisions against religious displays and, most of all, there would be an offence of gross religiosity.

"Unfortunately", the speaker concluded, "Secularists are too libertarian to promote such legislation".

The NSS dinner attracted guests from many parts of the country, representing a wide range of organisations and interests. It was held at the Coburg Hotel, London, and the Society's president, Barbara Smoker, was in the chair.

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**The Roman Catholic Church in Britain could face massive tax bills of up to a million pounds following the discovery by Inland Revenue officials that parishes have been claiming refunds on charitable income they never collected. An investigation of 17 dioceses will be conducted, with the financial affairs of Northampton, Newcastle, Leeds and Hexham already under scrutiny. The church authorities have also decided to exercise greater control over some parishes where the faithful have been asked to put their financial offerings into marked envelopes.**

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