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FAMILY PLANNING: ROYAL COUPLE URGED TO SET AN EXAMPLE

A senior lecturer in zoology at Aberdeen University has written to the Prince and Princess of Wales urging them to have no more than two children. Bob Ralph wants the royal couple to set an example that will influence people on the question of population control.

He wrote: "I urge you to consider limiting your family to the two children you have and to speak out and say why, so the urgency of the problem of world population might begin to percolate into people's minds . . .

"I am appalled at the inevitability of the population of Africa doubling in the next thirty years. What kind of Band Aid, Live Aid or Sport Aid will we need then?"

"Since I was born in 1941, the population of the world has doubled. If I should make it to three score years and ten, it will have doubled again.

"We are not coping at present. What chance will there be a generation from now?"

Mr Ralph was critical of the United Nations new five-year plan for Africa, which does not mention population. "These countries are going to be bursting at the seams in another generation", he said.

"Before the war, Cairo was the only city in Africa with a population of more than one million. Now there are nineteen, and by the end of the century there will be about fifty. By the same time, Mexico City will have 24 million people".

Mr Ralph said that the practice in China of having one child per family would be regarded as an intolerable invasion of our rights and freedom.

"I don't see any difference between a society which tells me I can marry only one person and a society which tells me that I can have only one child", he added.

There has been an unprecedented growth in world population over the last 150 years. It reached the

first thousand million around 1830, and the second thousand million a century later. The third and fourth thousand million mark were reached within thirty and fifteen years respectively.

The United Nations estimates that the world population could stabilise around ten thousand million within 25 years. Other authorities argue that it could be considerably higher.

New developments in agriculture, public hygiene and medicine have all contributed to population growth. Average life expectancy in the industrial areas of the world is about seventy years. In the last 35 years average life expectancy in the developing world has risen from 42 to 54 years.

It is incredible that the UN does not mention population in its latest plan for Africa. During the present century Egypt's population has quadrupled. If Kenya's present rate of growth continues, her population will be doubled by the end of the century.

National governments and specialist organisations in the field are aware of the potentially disastrous consequences of unrestricted population growth. But their programmes of education and information invariably face fierce opposition from religious quarters.

The Roman Catholic Church, particularly since Pope John Paul II became pontiff, has intensified the crusade against contraception. Other Christian societies for the promotion of moral panics have campaigned vigorously and often unscrupulously against abortion and sex education.

• Israel's Prime Minister has expressed concern over a report showing a sharp decline in the world Jewish population. This includes a drop in the ratio of Jews to Arabs in Israel. Mr Peres is urging Jewish parents in Israel to have at least four children.

The Freethinker

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NEWS

FAMILY PARTY

The Conservative Party, from the Prime Minister herself to the Conservative Family Campaign, has been creating a big hoo-ha about the importance of the family, and particularly the welfare of children. Mrs Thatcher made it the theme of her speech to the gathering of gorgons at the annual conference of women Conservatives in London last month. Several new Right-wing religious pressure groups have been formed, producing a welter of pamphlets and other "pro-family" bumf.

The Conservative Family Campaign has called for "a complete overhaul of the tax and social security system to ensure that marriage and the family are supported and strengthened". The Campaign's sponsor, Peter Bruinvels, MP for Leicester East, put it more bluntly: "It is now a question of altering our laws to conform in a Christian way, but it is also recognised that our tax laws encourage couples to live together, but not as man and wife. Any new tax incentives . . . should reverse that trend by making it pay to get married". Christian Conservatives are, in effect, calling for penalisation of single people, homosexual and unmarried couples living together, because their life style does not "conform in a Christian way".

The ideal family unit in the eyes of the Christian Right is one where, in the words of the CFC, "father provides and mother cares". The Campaign's symbol is a large C with an inset of Mum, Dad and three children. Nothing wrong with that — there are thousands of such families living happily in a secure and loving environment. But it is only one of a variety of family arrangements. There are many couples who choose to live together without the endorsement of Church or State. Their rights are as important, and their children are as loved, as are those of people who are "properly married".

The Christian Right would like to turn the clock back to a time when an unmarried mother was pointed out in the street and her child carried the stigma of bastard throughout its life. "Respectable" married women were expected to settle for a lifetime of subordination, child-bearing and drudgery. It was the duty of unmarried daughters and sons to forgo their independence and care for elderly parents.

Conservative Christians are not only a hard-faced, intolerant bunch; their professions of concern for children's welfare is thoroughly hypocritical. Children have suffered more than most under the Thatcher regime. Broken homes, family disruption, marriage breakdown are frequently the direct result

AND NOTES

of Government policy on employment, housing and social services. Nursery schools have been closed, the cheap and healthy school meals service ruined, children's library services are curtailed, and the supply of schools books and equipment is usually inadequate.

Even child cancer sufferers on arriving for treatment are turned away because of a shortage of beds at paediatric cancer units. One consultant paediatrician recently commented: "It happens every week. Often parents come and we have to say 'just hang around and we may be able to create a bed for your child'. They wait around and then we have to say 'sorry, we have not got a bed today, get in touch with us tomorrow'".

That is the reality of the party of the family and of Christian Conservatives who, as Mr Bruinvels put it, "want to protect the family and live by the example of our Lord".

CHRISTIANITY CAN DAMAGE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Power for Living is yet another collection of superficial, cloying words of wisdom and exhortations to "get right with God". Needless to say it originated in the United States, being "commissioned" by Arthur B. DeMoss, a wealthy insurance executive, and written by Jamie Buckingham of Florida. Contributors include the creepy Charles W. Colson, ex-President Nixon's former hatchet-man who, after being disgraced by the Watergate affair, embarked on a new career as an evangelist.

The British edition, which is being distributed free of charge, includes the inevitable testimony by Cliff Richard. Viscount Tonyandy who, as George Thomas, was Speaker of the House of Commons, is also wheeled on.

Susie Sainsbury is another "born again" worthy who tells "what God can do" to a person's intellectual faculties. The wife of the Conservative MP for Hove, Sussex, recounts how, in the mid-Seventies, she received an invitation to join something called "a group of Parliamentary wives for Bible study". Although a Christian, Mrs Sainsbury did not possess a Bible and had to buy one. It was a most unwise investment; she found Jesus and lost her marbles.

We move forward a decade and discover Susie Sainsbury figuring prominently in one of the most extraordinary trials of the century. The defendant was a confidence trickster named Derry Mainwaring Knight. He told an Anglican vicar, the Rev John Baker of Newick, Sussex, that he had been

deeply involved in Satanism. But, glory be, like Susie Sainsbury he had also "discovered Jesus", although in rather different company to the Parliamentary wives for Bible study. God had spoken to him during a demonstration on the roof of Hull Prison where he was serving a sentence for rape. However, in order to escape from Satanism, to which he had been dedicated at the age of eight by his lesbian grandmother, he needed a lot of money to purchase, and then destroy, items of regalia that bound him to the forces of evil.

Sussex-by-the-sea has a large population of gulls, not all of the feathered variety. The vicar of Newick approached a number of wealthy Christians and repeated Knight's cock-and-bull story. Meetings of prospective donors took place in what was described as "an atmosphere of religious fervour in which they felt themselves to be in receipt of direct messages from God in the form of pictures, signs, voices and providential coincidences".

The money rolled in. Michael Warren, an evangelical Christian and former High Sheriff, donated £36,000; Gordon Scutt, a company director, gave £25,000; Lord and Lady Brentford, Lord March and Lord Hampden loosened the aristocratic purse strings. Fools and their money were parted to the extent of over £200,000, much of which Knight spent on items of Satanic regalia like a Rolls Royce and a lady named Samantha Sprackling.

Probably the biggest donation of the lot came from Susie Sainsbury (listed in the "Eight Who Found Success" section of *Power for Living*). She parted with £79,895, a hefty sum even for a Sainsbury who writes that she has "a place in Heaven, a gift no money can buy".

Promises of power and success are a notable feature of current evangelical propaganda. But it is regrettable that so many who are influential and affluent, whether by personal achievement or inheritance, use their wealth to promote Christian superstition and irrationality. *Power for Living* is a typical example of such folly.

BROTHERLY BUST-UP

Hell nor the Militant Tendency hath no fury like an evangelical hornets' nest that has been disturbed. Nevertheless, although of a timid disposition, the present writer will dutifully record that the Rev Herbert Carson, chairman, and Mr Robert Horn, editor of *Evangelical Times*, have been given the elbow.

Mr Horn was under fire for some time because of his alleged bias in favour of the charismatic movement. But he had the support and confidence of Mr Carson. Both were effectively isolated by a rather neat move by the company's majority shareholder, Mr Willis Metcalfe. Two new directors were

appointed, one of whom, the Rev T. Omri Jenkins, is now chairman. The editorial staff resigned, and the paper's offices were moved from Thornton Heath to Welwyn where the June issue was cobbled together.

The new board published a statement in which they virtually called Mr Horn a liar because of his claim that a publisher, through the good offices of a director, tried to influence the contents of a book review. Looking to the future, the directors say it is not their intention to take a new road. *Evangelical Times* would return to the old one, "just as Isaac returning to redig the old wells . . . which had been stopped by the Philistines". Nasty!

Perhaps it was to ward off sordid suspicions about a power struggle that the directors assure readers of *Evangelical Times*: "This paper is not our paper . . . it is our desire that it will be an instrument of our sovereign God". We believe you — but it would be nice to have been a fly on the board room wall.

The One Above was subjected to a particularly tiresome ear bending session last month. Sunday, 22 June was observed as a day of prayer by the newly formed Women Against the Ordination of Women. Two other groups, the Movement for the Ordination of Women and Priests for Women's Ordination, appealed for "a wave of prayer" on the same day in support of their cause.

A MAN OF PROPERTY

The Nationwide Initiative for Evangelism held a conference in Gloucester to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the ordination of George Whitefield, described by a religious weekly as "one of the greatest evangelists of all time". Whitefield was a native of Gloucester who became a foremost Wesleyan preacher both in Britain and America.

It is rather doubtful if any reference was made during the proceedings to one embarrassing fact concerning the great evangelist. Whitefield was a forthright defender of the institution of slavery, and in fact he owned a number of slaves. Like most Christian slave-owners, he had no difficulty in justifying his position by opening the Bible. Whitefield once said of his human property: "I trust many of them will be brought to Jesus".

Whitefield died at Newburyport, Massachusetts, in September 1770. In his will he bequeathed his American property to the fearsomely pious Countess of Huntingdon, who founded several chapels and a seminary for the training of preachers. The property included 75 slaves.

"BIBLE BELT" ATROCITY

Leo Franks, a factory owner, has been pardoned more than seventy years after he was lynched by a mob of Christian Jew-haters in the heart of America's "Bible belt". The Georgia Board of Pardons and Appeals has exonerated Franks of the murder of a 13-year-old factory worker named Mary Phagan.

Franks was found guilty at his trial in 1913. He protested his innocence throughout, and evidence which came to light in 1982 has resulted in the posthumous pardon. It is now generally accepted that the killer was an ex-convict named Jim Conley who worked as a janitor at the factory. It was largely on his testimony that Franks was convicted. But Conley's evidence was so dubious that, despite the wave of anti-Jewish hysteria, Governor John Stanton commuted the death sentence on the eve of execution.

There followed one of the most vicious incidents in American history. Franks was abducted from the prison by a mob and lynched. Postcard photographs of his body twisting at the end of a rope were published and circulated throughout the Deep South. Jews fled the area and there was a resurgence of Ku-Klux-Klan activities.

The *Miami Herald* reported that the rope was cut in pieces and distributed among the local population, some of whom displayed these souvenirs of the atrocity in their homes. Others used them as book-marks in Bibles.

Freethinker Fund

Once again a substantial donation from a veteran supporter, Mr W. E. Gerrard, has enabled the Fund to reach an excellent total. The Edinburgh Humanist Group has also shown its support in a practical way. Readers' contributions, whatever the amount, help to ensure the future of *The Freethinker* as a vehicle of secular humanist opinion.

The latest list of contributors is given below and we thank all of them.

P. Kennedy and L. Leibowitz, £1.20 each; J. Ancliffe, H. Barrett, B. M. Chatfield, S. E. Collis, J. B. Coward, P. A. Forrest, F. Greenlaw, N. MacDonald, P. A. Pistorius, J. A. Ryder, A. C. Stewart, C. R. Walton, E. Westman and A. E. G. Wright, £1.40 each; D. A. MacIntosh, £2.40; B. Humphreys, £2.50; F. B. Edwards, £2.80; L. V. Keen and F. T. Pamphiliou, £3.40 each; P. Stiehl, £4.40; E. R. Gomm, £4.70; B. Clarke, £5; R. J. Tutton, £6.40; E. Willis, £17.80; Edinburgh Humanist Group, £25; W. E. Gerrard, £260.50; M. Holsie, \$3; C. Wiggan, \$5.

Total for May: £360.30 and \$8.

The Nature of Christian Belief

H. J. BLACKHAM

Last year the House of Bishops agreed to reflect on issues raised during a General Synod debate. Their report is "in part a reply to particular questions . . . in part reflection on some of the wider underlying issues".

The Church of England was composed of compromise on grounds of political expediency in the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559. If it was to be a national church, with constraints, it had to provide fair latitude to liberty of conscience. It could not be exclusively Biblical like the sectaries. It could not be solely traditional and authoritarian like the Church of Rome. It could not be merely rationalistic like the Deists. The "judicious Hooker" a little later in *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1594) argued for due attention in church government to all three sources of the faith, the Bible, tradition, and reason; and this formula is referred to in a footnote as "a time-honoured Anglican phrase" in *The Nature of Christian Belief*, the Statement by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England, published last month.

Within the national church thus established, there developed three internal divisions and traditions, parties labelled at one time High, Broad, Low; at another, Catholic, Modernist, Evangelical. This was bound to be an uneasy partnership, and at times the tension provoked public indignation, the High Church veering to Romish practices, the Broad to secular views. There were desertions, and even the possibility of schism. (Compare the Bishop of London's recent threat of secession if women are admitted to ordination.) For this reason, in 1922 the Archbishops appointed a Commission on Christian Doctrine, composed of representatives of these schools of thought, 25 members in all, including a few first-class minds. The Commission collaborated for fourteen years before their report was published in 1938, a volume of 242 pages. Archbishop Temple, then the chairman, said in his Introduction: "The Commission was appointed because the tensions between the different schools of thought in the Church of England were imperilling its unity and impairing its effectiveness". He said that they held in a single fellowship, as heirs of the Reformation as well as of Catholic tradition, not only those attached to these parts of their inheritance, but also "those whose attitude to the distinctively Christian tradition is most deeply affected by the tradition of a free and liberal culture which historically is the bequest of the Greek spirit and was recovered for Western Europe at the Renaissance". The recent document of only 39 small pages is addressed to a recrudescence of this recurring predicament of the

Church of England, in special connexion with the Bishop of Durham's openly expressed rejection of the traditional form of belief in the resurrection of Jesus and in his birth of a virgin. These are symbolic expressions of the Christian faith he does profess, and preach. The 1938 Report stated:

The possibility cannot be excluded that . . . a symbolic character may attach to the truth of the articles in the Creeds. It is not therefore of necessity illegitimate to accept and affirm particular clauses of the Creeds while understanding them in this symbolic sense.

Why then the fuss? There had been a storm of protest, clerical rather than lay, which was reflected in a debate in General Synod on 13 February 1985: and the way chosen to allay disquiet was to charge the Synod's House of Bishops with the task of answering the questions raised. Their report is prefaced by their own Statement, followed by what is described as an Exposition of it, in five sections, of which the central two deal with the Resurrection and the Virginal Conception, and the last with "The Individual and Collegial Responsibility of Bishops for the Faith of the Church". The first two form a background to the exposition, an Introduction setting out certain considerations to be borne in mind, and a section on Faith and History, a general preliminary to what is worked out for the two particular articles of faith.

What is the upshot? Do the Bishops allow the legitimacy of understanding articles of the Creeds in a symbolic sense, recognised in the 1938 Report? Their preliminary six-point Statement declares that they are united in their adherence to the apostolic faith set forth in the catholic Creeds; they affirm faith in the Resurrection of Jesus as an objective reality, not as a way of speaking about the faith of his followers. "As regards the Virginal Conception of Our Lord, we acknowledge and uphold belief in this as expressing the faith of the Church of England, and as affirming that in Christ God has taken the initiative for our salvation by uniting with himself our human nature, so bringing to birth a new humanity". They conclude this Statement by making room for openness. "There must always be a place in the life of the Church for both tradition and enquiry". This has always meant "that there can be a proper diversity in the understanding and expression of the Christian faith". Of course, "proper diversity" excludes tampering with the faith. Openness does not mean that it is open to question.

The Introduction, in 15 paragraphs, starts with the Declaration of Assent required of ordinands as a condition of their being authorised to teach as officially approved representatives of the Church of England. The assent is to faith in what is revealed in the Bible and set forth in the catholic creeds.

The Bible multiplied notorious heretics. The inherited Christian faith of orthodox believers was settled by the Church Councils, first at Nicaea in 325. The vocation of the Church, however, is "to proclaim afresh in each generation" the scriptural and credal faith it has inherited. "If this 'proclaiming afresh' is an exciting vocation, it is also an exacting one. At various periods it can be both painful and precarious". One such period is now, because of the alienation of the public at large from the inherited faith. Trying to re-establish communication with that public involves at the same time dialogue may be a "mark of vitality and openness to the Holy within the Church, unafraid of controversy, which Spirit", so long as there remains "a common mind on the essentials of the Gospel". It all adds up to the need for "openness in the context of faithfulness". "The question for us is this: how can this best be achieved in the circumstances of the Church of England today?" Laying themselves on the line in this conclusion to their preliminary considerations, the Bishops then go on to discuss the general relation between faith and history.

They come nearest to a philosophic statement in distinguishing between the sentences, "Jesus who was dead is alive again", which in form conveys information, and, "God raised Jesus from the dead", which implies the first but goes further in that it also implies a purpose. Since "God" is the alleged author of the act, how it was done cannot be explained, but why it was done is known as an outcome "of that trust in God and understanding of his purpose which had grown out of the experience of Israel in general and of the disciples' relationship with Jesus in particular". Faith is a personal response to an understanding and acceptance of the second statement expanded to embrace this documented historical experience implied. It is conceded logically that if the first statement could be disproved, the second statement could not be true. Therefore, "historical fact does matter". That leads on to the question of the relationship between symbolic expression and objective reality. A fiction may symbolically express an objective reality independent of the human mind. What they seem to be saying is that to understand and accept a credal statement symbolically is to grasp its full and proper meaning as an objective reality irrespective of historical actuality, which may be inaccessible or even in principle indiscernible (eg, virgin birth).

They ask:

was the Resurrection of Jesus "something that happened", in the sense that it would be true that "Jesus is risen", whether or not anyone had ever believed it or experienced any evidence of it?

To that question we reply, "Yes, we believe that Jesus's Resurrection was something that happened, regardless of observers, narrators or believers. Jesus truly died and was buried, and as truly rose again to eternal life".

A belief independent of evidence is logical nonsense. The logical form of the above statement in its independence of evidence is as an inference from propositions assumed in the context of the OT/NT historical experience previously mentioned. It does not have the cogency of a necessary inference. It is not faith informed by reason; it is reason serving faith; "historical fact does matter", but that fact is here personal trust of a people, collectively and individually, in their God's intelligible plan for them and for the world. The credibility is said to be reinforced by the experience of Christians in the world, by the pattern of things as they are experienced, interpreted by this clue.

This section ends with a resounding statement:

The faith which is the teaching of the universal Church, and which this House reaffirms as the teaching of the Church of England, is this: that our Lord truly experienced human death; and that that state was ended and wholly overcome; that the mode of existence of the Risen Lord was one in which his full human nature and identity, bodily, mental and spiritual, were present and glorified for eternal blessedness; and that this mode of existence was observed and experienced, and its essential secret grasped, by numbers of his disciples in personal encounter.

The "essential secret" to be grasped is that Jesus manifested in his life and death, completed in his resurrection, "human life as it is meant to be but never in this world has been; perfected, eternal human life".

But just as the Resurrection, though unseen and indescribable, is affirmed as objective fact because Jesus was dead and is alive, so the Virginal Conception, though equally a divine mystery, is also affirmed in the Creeds as objective fact because the Scriptures relate that Jesus had no human father.

Christian theology asserts the full and equal humanity and divinity of Jesus; he is the second Person of the Trinity; he was the one crucified under Pontius Pilate. If virginally conceived on the initiative of the Father, he was not fairly human. However, he was the first manifestation of the new re-created human nature, which all might inherit. That was the divine Plan, the "essential secret". Resurrection and Virginal Conception are necessarily linked in the Creeds.

This House acknowledges and upholds this belief as expressing the faith of the Church of England and of its historic teaching, affirming the truth that in Christ God has taken the initiative for our salvation by uniting our human nature with himself, so bringing into being a new humanity.

In the last section, the Bishops reconsider and restate their ecclesiastical responsibility in 16 paragraphs. One main point:

A bishop may properly enter into questionings on matters of belief, both because as a man of integrity he will feel any force there is in such questionings, and also because as a leader part of his responsibility

on behalf of the Church is to listen honestly to criticisms of its faith and life. But in all he says he must take care not to present variant beliefs as if they were the faith of the Church; and he must always make as sure as he can that his hearers understand what that faith is and the reasons for it.

How does the Bishop of Durham fare in this implied judgement? Has he denied his affirmation as an ordinand? Has he shown himself unfit for "the episcopal function" of "guarding" the faith of the Church?

Bishop Jenkins is an engaging maverick, with all his own way of saying things, someone who cannot be put down or called to order; the can will not contain him. If he believes he is a Christian, he is not in the category of an adherent of Militant Tendency; he is not a defector nor a conspirator. Let the House of Bishops say what they have to, the Church of England is not poorer for such as he. Gerald Priestland, former religious affairs correspondent of the BBC, just back from South Africa, said that *The Nature of Christian Belief* was not about what matters; it was fiddling whilst Rome burns. The accusation is about as irrelevant as the accused were said to be; but Priestland is not a bishop, nor in orders, and is loud-mouthed. *The Nature of Christian Belief* is a private document, internal to the Church of England, addressed to the General Synod that commissioned it. It is not apologetics. *The Field* (14 June), remarking in an editorial that "It has taken the House of Bishops 16 months to produce a report stating what are those Christian beliefs which they exist to proclaim", goes on to say that it is carefully worded and is the result of many redrafts. "The Bishop of Durham has helped to concentrate the ecclesiastical mind". It recommends the General Synod, when it debates the Report on 6 July, to concentrate on the bedrock of faith; "otherwise 'modern' thinking, if not the gates of hell, shall prevail against it". In effect, it classifies "modern thinking" with meddlesome intrusions on that other sacred cult, blood-sports, and (next page) bullfighting, by ignorant and prejudiced outsiders.

However, the Church of England is a missionary church, and the Report says that the bishops are called to take a leading part in that mission in today's world. It has not been yet reduced to the bunker or the laager. The outsider, therefore, is entitled to examine this document critically; and can be thankful that the Bishop of Durham has so concentrated the ecclesiastical mind that it has been forced to expose its thinking painstakingly, to its adherents primarily, but incidentally to the public.

To go to the root of the matter, from an outside point of view, take the formula said to be distinctive of the Church of England, derived from Hooker, that due attention should be given to the Bible, to tradition, and to reason, and take it together with

the remark of Archbishop Temple in the 1938 Report that the Anglican Church included those whose attitude was most deeply affected by the liberal spirit of Greek culture. This implies superficial understanding of Greek culture, or else admits a Wooden Horse into the citadel of faith. There was never a Greek philosophy, only a diversity of contradictory alternatives openly taught: scepticism, eclecticism, pragmatism, dogmatic Idealism, dogmatic materialism. Delphi was the centre of Greek religious life; its oracles were framed to safeguard infallibility; and such practices were outmoded and rejected by the educated in classical times, with the spread of rationalism. Greek liberal culture gave an equal footing to a religious and to a secular view of human life. The House of Bishops have not been so openly rash as Archbishop Temple. For them, to paraphrase Hume, reason is and ought only to be the slave of faith. They make that entirely clear. Even those who have "lost their reason" are not deprived of its use.

Reason subtracted, the source of the faith lies in the Bible and tradition, the Bible authoritatively interpreted by tradition, expressed in the Creeds defined by the Council of Nicaea and its successors. Two points here. (1) The Council at Nicaea was under political duress. Like the Anglican Church in 1922, Constantine could not have the differences and divisions within the Roman Church imperil the unity and impair the effectiveness of the Christianity he had adopted as the religion of the Empire. Pressure was imposed in convening the Council to obtain a resolution, whatever the formula adopted. (2) For differences and divisions there were, and radical ones. Multiple interpretations of the faith were as prevalent as Greek alternative philosophies. Such intellects as Origen's were fertile in heresies. And there was Tertullian. The faith was totally inalcitrant to the categories of Greek philosophy, when its first simplicity was exposed to examination. The Arian dispute particularly had concentrated the ecclesiastical mind — and the political will. The idea of the Trinity could not be made intelligible. It was repugnant to many, on different grounds. All that could be done was to produce a formula, devised to represent what was held to have been the impact of Jesus on his disciples. The upshot is that there is only tradition. The Bible itself was composed of tradition. New Testament theology is constructed of Old Testament prophecy.

Faith is propagated by and through tradition; that is, it is immediately and ultimately faith in the faith of another, and cannot go beyond that. Either one and all are brought up in the faith, or in a more open society one is drawn sympathetically to enter into the faith of another, and may reach the point at which one decides to adopt it as one's own. All religions are traditions of this kind, first and last. Christianity was no exception; far from it, if one

goes back to the unsettled thinking before the Councils, not inferior by any means to the counsels that prevailed. Abounding heresies and schisms since that time make more than a footnote to the story. Perhaps one should not be amazed at the degree of confidence that believers seem to enjoy all the same. Belief is not handicapped by what one wants to believe. After all, science also is a cultural tradition.

An Unnecessary, Albeit Charming Fiction

PHILLIP ADAMS

If a triangle made a god, it would give him three sides — Charles de Montesquieu

I don't say that God is dead. I stand with Camus and say "we have divested the universe of its lights and illusions". Yet I don't share Camus's emptiness or feel God's absence. To me God didn't suffer some recent fatality as a result of philosophical terrorism. To me, he never lived.

I don't believe in god. Or, if you prefer, God. Haven't believed in Him (or Her or It) since I was six.

It's about that age when God first arises. You ask your parents the age-old questions about how everything started, how everything began. "Where did everything come from?" And you're given the answer "God". "God made everything?" "Yes". "But . . . who made God?" This eminently reasonable question usually provokes a quick change of subject.

Being finite creatures, born to die, we humans insist on beginnings. Things must have beginnings, it stands to reason. At the same time, fearing death, we don't like to have endings. So we yearn for life after death. Thus we have a lopsided universe with, on the one hand, a beginning, a creation, and on the other, life everlasting. And we don't see what an unbalanced view that is — to postulate an existence that must have a beginning but must not have an end.

It's astonishing that people still believe in God. One would have thought that by the middle of the twentieth century, surrounded by nuclear missiles, felt-tip pens and Vitamin B capsules, that He would have faded away like that other improbable invention, the Cheshire cat. Yet He lingers on and, in some ways, looms larger and loonier than ever. Despite the attacks of the feminists, He is still a he, His face an identikit made up of fragments of Michelangelo, Sir Robert Menzies and, latterly, Ronald Reagan.

Yesterday upon the stair
I met a man who wasn't there.
He wasn't there again today.
How I wish he'd go away.

The comparison is worth thinking about, but that is another theme. This has been about the nature of Christian belief (and in principle about all religious belief), exposed in this cautiously composed exposition by the House of Bishops, not precipitate, sixteen months in gestation, but precipitated by volatile remarks of a cleric who was nevertheless made a bishop.

Remember that poem from childhood? Shades of God on the stairway to Paradise. Non-existent yet persistent. A lingering echo of old ideas and ancient prayers, thumbing His enormous nose at rationalists, humanists, atheists and sundry heretics. Yet in a sense He has disappeared. Fewer and fewer people are confident of what He looks like, if He looks like anything.

The idea of God according to Michelangelo, bearded and ancient, has taken a bit of a pounding. People who believe in God say they don't believe in *that* sort of god as it would be, clearly, silly. So instead of giving him human shape, they back-pedal and speak of God as a spirit, a force, an idea. Some of the more sentimental, more desperately ecumenical, even talk of him as Love. Or they will say that God is simply everything.

Not many people believe in Thor, Atlas or Zeus any more. Somehow a name like that makes God too specific, too humanoid. But there's something satisfyingly simple about "God". Something elegant about those three letters, It's more of an abstraction, an equation, a symbol. Most of us are too sophisticated to believe in a god with features as the Egyptians did. Or one with octopodal arms like those quaint Hindu gods. We want an elusive, abstract sort of god these days, one that's more compatible with the world's microscopes and telescopes. A god that's graduated from the Gospels to the Big Bang.

Despite what you might have been told, ancient Egyptians weren't into mysticism. To them the after-life was as solid and substantial as this one. They actually packed their suitcases. They tried to take one of everything with them, physically, into the next world. It was an inventory that included themselves, their bodies. Hence mummification and tombs full of wine and cheese.

Well, today's Christian fundamentalists seem similarly literal. Like the Egyptians, mysticism eludes them. Hence their Lego religion with its Meccano morality, with ideas bolted together so strictly, so rigidly, that they're beyond question. Hence they oppose divorce, hate the rather eclectic, imaginative process of evolution, and sternly impose their beliefs.

Dora: Rebel With a Cause

If I did believe in a god, I would believe in one with a sense of humour, one you could joke with. I would applaud his prodigious originality, and the humour expressed in the incongruities of creation. Anyone who, for example, created sex is clearly a consummate practical joker. But the fundamentalists are a humourless bunch. Theirs is the Old Testament God of vengeance, discipline, law and order. They see God as a grumpy old bugger glaring balefully down at an unworthy world, just aching to demolish it, to judge and to pulverise. The only pleasure they seem to feel is self-righteous indignation. Their brand of Christian soldiering evokes the brutality of the Crusaders and the Cossacks.

As a rough rule of thumb, the greater the certainty, the more ringing the conviction, the less the humour, the greater the cause to fear. The fundamentalists have created God in their own mean-spirited, frightened and humourless image. If there was a god, I think he would dislike fundamentalists as much as I do.

I'm irritated by the way sophisticated Christianity, if that's not a contradiction in terms, patronises followers of the older, simpler faiths, dismissing their dreams and mythologies as charming, child-like attempts to explain the unexplainable. What they fail to see is that all religions are bed-time stories to ward off the darkness, to soothe us in our fear of death. All religions, Hinduism, Catholicism, Islam, are so much whistling in the dark.

Consequently I don't see God as a great, huge, overwhelming idea — I see him as a very small one. A very small, nervous idea. A timid, pipsqueak of a notion against the immeasurable, preposterous, inexpressible vastness of what is and is not. It's a bit like the Wizard of Oz. When you finally confront him he's such a little bloke hiding behind all the theatricals, closer to a garden gnome than Goliath.

Religious people try to convince us of the grandeur of God in everything from Beethoven's Ninth to Gothic cathedrals. Notwithstanding the exhilaration of such human achievements, they remind me that, in the final analysis, God is limiting, inhibiting, blinkering, hampering, restrictive. Oh, God may provoke big, self-indulgent emotions, but so does patriotism. When taken too seriously, as both frequently are, religion and patriotism become brutalising dogmas. They are, of course, closely related phenomena: in the final analysis, the worst forms of intellectual provincialism.

The idea of God is big in only one sense. God is not love so much as ignorance. He is a measure of the enormous amount of things we don't know. What we cannot comprehend we call God. As such, He's an idea that will shrink and diminish as we learn and discover more. But given that there will always be sizeable things we don't understand, He will never entirely disappear.

"Porthcurno can never seem quite the same, now that Dora Russell has died". It is appropriate that this tribute to the veteran campaigner for many good causes appeared in her local newspaper, *The Cornishman*, a few days after her death at the age of 92. For although she was a figure of international standing who had known and worked with many of the century's most eminent personalities, she found time to play an active role in the life of the community that was her home for over sixty years.

Ian Hope, Labour prospective Parliamentary candidate for St Ives, described Dora Russell as "a woman with a clarity of vision, a person whose hopes for a future for the generations to come should be an inspiration to us all."

"With those of us who believe in a better world, she achieved much more than she ever realised, especially for the rights of women. Her ideas, her faith and her courage rank among the truly great people of our time".

Despite many calls on her time and energy, Dora Russell was always keen to support *The Freethinker*. When Ronald W. Clarke's massive biography of Bertrand Russell, to whom she was married from 1921 until 1935, was published, she readily agreed to review it (December 1975). She contributed an article to our centenary issue (May 1981) and was a *Freethinker* reader until the end.

There was a secular funeral at Penmount Crematorium, Truro, on 10 June, and a memorial meeting at Conway Hall, London, on 8 July.

Dora Russell's autobiography appeared in three parts — *The Tamarisk Tree: My Quest for Liberty and Love* (Elek/Pemberton 1975, Virago 1977) describes her life up to her divorce from Bertrand Russell; *The Tamarisk Tree 2: My School and the Years of War* (Virago 1980) describes Beacon Hill school; *The Tamarisk Tree 3: Challenge to the Cold War* (Virago 1985) describes her life from 1943 to 1984. The second volume of *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell* (Allen & Unwin 1968) gives his version of their relationship; *The Life of Bertrand Russell* (Capc/Weidenfeld 1975), by Ronald W. Clark, gives a more impartial account. *The Dora Russell Reader* (Pandora 1983), edited by Dale Spender, is an anthology of writings dating from 1925 to 1982 (including articles from the *New Humanist* and *The Freethinker*).

• See pages 107 and 110.

Amnesty International has expressed concern over the detention of six Egyptian converts to Christianity for refusing to recite the Muslim creed. They are accused of defaming the Muslim faith, a "crime" that could result in five years' imprisonment.

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Yesterday's newspaper is out of date by midnight — if not before. When it becomes the day before yesterday's, it begins to become a little more interesting; by the time it is a week old, it has reached almost the stage of historical record and assumes a certain authority that it never had, if it ever had it at all, except when it was read for the first time. If this is true of a daily paper, it is true also of a periodical that appears at longer intervals. The monthly *Freethinker* is no doubt opened with feverish fingers and read with a no less excited mind from cover to cover. It may be referred to once or twice in succeeding months but, in the nature of things, much is forgotten. It is an experience, in some ways refreshing, in others perhaps a little disappointing but always salutary, to look through the bound volume of a whole year, if not immediately the New Year starts, then around about the first quarter (even if these notes do not reach the readers until a short time later).

The value of such a survey of a year's record of humanist, secularist and freethinking opinion generally is that it enables the reader to assess the force of that strand in public outlook at the present time. Of course, the opinions that find their regular outlet in the press, on radio and television and in other organs of expression are vaguely, but not expressly, allied to the orthodox middle-of-the-road, kind of ill-defined Church of England complex of views that recruits to the armed forces are treated as holding, when they have no clearly formed views on anything at all.

It is sometimes said by frustrated or just ageing "reformers" that, in the words of Jimmy Porter in Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger*, "there are no good causes left". If anyone, weary with campaigning that does not seem to bring any result or depressed at pushing against what seems to be an immovable wall of superstition and prejudice, really believes that there are no causes worth struggling for, he or she need look only at the twelve front pages of *The Freethinker* during 1985. There will be found statements, more often than not both forceful and provocative on subjects of urgent controversial interest. Thus, during the year, the subjects have been either anti-religious in the broadest sense, dealing with religious charlatans, the operation of blasphemy laws in this country or abroad, the Pope and the strange death of his predecessor, and ritual slaughter of animals in accordance with the dictates of certain sects; or, on the other hand, indirectly religious, dealing with subjects in which religious doctrine or prejudice prevents

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free discussion of the issues. These include embryo research, the right to abortion, Sunday trading and religious or racial segregation in schools. Finally, there are the social themes on which freethinkers plead for liberty in the broad sense of the free dissemination of and access to information; the dangers of taxing books and other publications; and the whole question of the rights of the citizen against an executive that wishes to impose some forms of censorship.

Among the individual articles that catch the roving eye a few months or even a year after they first appeared are Jim Herrick's introduction to his new book, *Against the Faith*; Barbara Smoker's authoritative and, of course, deliberately provocative contribution on two of her favourite themes, the beginning and end of life, the embryo and euthanasia. The series of articles on forgotten freethinkers, by Andrew Whitehead, in which he brought to light such names as Chatterton, Boon and Aldred, was an especially happy idea. It might be extended in future issues.

Such contributors as Harry Stopes-Roe, Karl Heath and James Hemming are among those whose articles struck the reviewer as having things in them that were of interest and value at the time they first appeared and continue to have relevance some time later. The same applies to the excellent reviews of books and other works. In this connection, while there were notices of two plays, *Mother Courage* by Bertolt Brecht and *Waste* by Harley Granville-Barker, both of which when first produced challenged traditional thought and opinion and do so still, it might be possible to expand the reviewing of works of this nature. Thus, an increasing number of works of literary interest tend today to deal with controversial issues. This applies not only to the theatre, but to novels, films and perhaps above all, to broadcasting. Television and sound radio are claimed by many observers of society to be the most potent educational influences (for good and ill) to which we are all regularly subjected. Perhaps *The Freethinker* could look more closely at these than in the past. To take one line of approach — judging from the broadcasting time given to religion, the casual listener and viewer would think that Britain was still a predominantly Christian country as in previous centuries, just as the amount of time given on the broadcasting media to farming and agricultural topics would suggest that she is still a largely rural community.

A danger with a journal that espouses one particular point of view or line of thought is the one-track approach or undue concentration on one

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THE HUMAN FACTOR, Independent Television

set climate of opinion. Fortunately, *The Freethinker*, for the greater part, avoids these pitfalls. It does so, first, because freethinkers, although by definition taking great delight in attacking the religious and other orthodoxies, are, by nature, essentially disputatious and like few things better than proving that they are nearer the true lack of faith than their brethren or sistren, who profess roughly the same notions. Thus — and the editor is to be congratulated on this — there is always a page or two of lively, pertinent and entertaining letters, ranging from the penetrating and constructive to the scatter-brained and wrong-headed: it would be almost to bring about a breach of the peace, if one said which category makes the better reading. An example appeared, however, in the January number. The editor of *The Humanist Theme* confessed that he had hesitated about renewing his subscription to *The Freethinker*. This brought forth a spate of letters, as perhaps it was intended to do. Other correspondents kept the pot boiling merrily, and, although the debate was closed in May, there were faint echoes still to be heard in September.

Such an exchange of views, even though some of them tended, in the old phrase, to generate more heat than light, has the effect of causing readers to re-examine their own attitudes. Each will draw his or her own conclusion but, without wishing to start another long correspondence, may a brief statement be put forward? This is that the freethinker, and therefore *The Freethinker*, should continue to challenge with vigour and resolution those opinions based on superstition and the prejudice that arises therefrom. They should be countered by views and judgments based on the freely ranging intelligence and those views should be expressed fairly — thus, for example, acknowledging that, while immense harm has been done and is still being done in the name of various religious beliefs, great good has also accrued from the work of those who thereby have been persuaded to serve their fellows — and that expression of anti-religious views should always be guided by a cool balance and a strong sense of the ridiculous. This final quality may be one of the powerful weapons we have. In short, some more wit and satire in the pages of *The Freethinker* might make the journal more readable and effective even than it is at present.

T. F. EVANS

Dora Russell's personal courage at the age of 92, after having suffered a serious physical assault only a short time earlier, was no small achievement in itself. And this fact was vividly brought out in ITV's *The Human Factor* screened eight days after her death when the weird happening that occurred in the lonely house that Dora made her home for over sixty years was recounted by her. It was left to the producer/director and a sensible, self-effacing interviewer, to bring out the similarity of this crime to that of an attack (with fatal consequences) many months earlier on another peace campaigner, Hilda Murrell, about whose murder questions are still being asked in and out of Parliament by Tam Dayell, MP.

Despite age, her illness and personal sorrows, the freethinker and fighter for women's rights, campaigner against nuclear arms and champion of numerous law reform societies was in fighting form as the thirty-minute programme unfolded. A wide field was covered by the lucid and unfudged replies she gave, with characteristically expressed candour to queries about subjects affecting our, rather than her, future. It put every other political programme seen on a prayerful Sunday in the shade; so often a day when politicians immerse themselves in ambiguities; finding it for the most part impossible to give straight answers to any of the 64,000-dollar questions hurled at their heads. Coded replies are the order of the day.

Apart from the youthful old lady's zest for life, contempt for the forces of reaction and sympathy for her fellow-humans, some of Dora Russell's last utterances deserve to be recorded on the printed page, and the programme was a bonus for those who do own videos. For those *Freethinker* readers who don't, but treasure the "sayings" of such freedom fighters, Dora's views, so cogent and exciting, cannot be reproduced or even read without a *vision* of Dora being seen as she expressed them.

Viewers heard what she thought about the Government of the day ("We used to talk about the private firms who made armaments as 'merchants of death'. Why do we not do so any longer?"); youth ("We want young people who can think clearly and don't mind going out into the world to tell those who are confused the truth"); nuclear deterrence ("I don't see how you can deter people from being terrified when you tell them that such weapons exist"); compassion and nature ("Creature life is being destroyed by people who are ruthless . . . we don't think much nowadays about caring for our neighbours"); religion ("It's our job to take care of

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the world, not religion which is fancy and superstition").

And on she went, distilling wisdom before nearing the end — her last public appearance at the 50th anniversary celebration of the Abortion Law Reform Society where she confided (straight to camera) that if one has to have a religion the Quakers are the best of the bunch. She added: "I like to think of eternity as life going on, not of having a soul after we die, but like the animals".

It was typical of the woman that almost the last

words she uttered, in a programme that did great credit to its producers, should have embraced the entire animal kingdom. For if the Bomb is dropped, then all the species will be made extinct, nobody can flee to the funk holes or bunkers. Our last vision of Dora Russell was a shot in a "frozen frame" uttering a warning: one that we deny hearing at our peril, "I can tell you that the way the world is I shall not be sorry to leave it. One does not wish to live very long".

PETER COTES

LETTERS

VIOLENCE IN SOCIETY

B. L. Able's letter (June) reveals numerous problems which have little to do with the question of "male" violence, and nothing at all to do with Antony Grey's review of Mary Whitehouse's book. Apart from an inability to quote in context, B. L. Able has three problems.

First, a failure to recognise that violence is not a male prerogative, and that it is not restricted to the physical, let alone sexual, variety. Statistically, you have more chance of being assaulted on the streets if you are a white, 17-year-old male. As most violence takes place in the home, and rapes by people known to the victim, it would appear that young men have more to fear on a night out than B. L. Able. Spreading her fears is dishonest and is no solution.

Secondly, her letter reveals the inability to differentiate public concern and propaganda, morality and moral panics, Christianity and compassion. I wonder why it is always those lacking this ability who assume that their analysis is the only one available, viable and correct. I wonder why the more simplistic the analysis, the more dogmatic the presentation.

Thirdly, given the tone and content of her letter, is it any wonder a less discerning reader would suspect "man hating", if not a little "fascism", in her outlook? B. L. Able did not take issue with anything in Antony Grey's review; rather we were treated to a series of half-baked assumptions and assertions. B. L. Able clearly cares for children and is concerned about the proliferation of sex crimes. But she knows nothing about the history of freethought and is arrogant to assert that freethinkers do not share that concern and anxiety.

Freethinkers have always been in the forefront of movements for social reform, women's and children's rights. They have also — rightly — led sex reform movements. That is because we understand something B. L. Able does not — fundamentalist religion has been the enemy of all four. Our attacks on Mary Whitehouse's deliberate attempts to exploit serious social concerns are based on the premise that the creation of modern folk devils will not solve the problems that worry B. L. Able. Sometimes our defence of freedom involves defending things we may not personally agree with; this is inevitable. Would B. L. Able have opposed those freethinkers who defended *The Well of Loneliness*? This novel on a lesbian theme was denounced by moral crusaders as pornographic, obscene and likely to lead to attacks on young women.

B. L. Able's choice of words and fellow-campaigners (Geoffrey Dickens!) reveals both her real motives and

inevitable desperation of her type of feminism. For ten years they blamed porn for violence. Now that the availability of material declines and sex attacks increase, they are lost for an argument. Unable to do anything themselves, they now align with the Moral Right.

It is this desperation that has led to B. L. Able's "fear of freedom" and to useless concentration on male violence themes. The results are predictable. The feminist movement is splitting as it did in the United States, and Mary Whitehouse will turn the clock back. If B. L. Able does not join our ranks she will gain her persecution of paedophiles at the cost of several "feminist" freedoms — no abortion on demand, no contraception for unmarried people, persecution of lesbian groups, women forced back into the home, etc. B. L. Able should read Whitehouse's book. It is the futility of this approach that has led other feminists like Sue Wise, the Manchester University social worker, to abandon the simplistic theories and start again. She had tried to put B. L. Able's theory into practice and found it wanting. It failed to prepare her for the facts she found. Women abuse children too. Sue Wise is now working on a theory based on real experience, and suggests that other feminists do the same.

B. L. Able will not, of course, agree. She already has her answer — Women Against Violence Against Women. Their record includes fire bombing sex shops, damaging books and magazines in book shops, trying to ban lesbians who wear high heels from London's Gay Centre and attacking innocent males in Brixton because they "looked" like paedophiles! This has had no ultimate effect on the incident of sex crimes.

One reason why the media, the courts and care agencies are full of cases today is that the Erin Pizzays of this world have brought the question of violence to the nation's attention in a way that Women Against Violence Against Women never have. But the attention and concern would not exist if society had not become more caring, and freethought can take some credit.

As for B. L. Able's demand that freethinkers start thinking about power and coercion, it is her section of the feminist movement that is just catching up with the freethinkers. Power and coercion for WAVAW involves using such tactics against others. Thankfully, their influence is declining.

I suggest that if B. L. Able really wishes to feel "less scared" about male violence, she does the following. Engage in practical rather than emotive, fear-inducing propaganda; avoid at all cost any alliance with religious fundamentalists and hypocrites; join those freethinkers actively engaged in campaigns for law and social reforms.

B. L. Able has become a victim of her own propaganda. The solution is clearly in her hands, not ours.

JOHN CAMPBELL

A WOMAN AGAINST VIOLENCE

I wish to add my support for B. L. Able (Letter, June).

The quality of life is being eroded. Freedom is for the criminals to enjoy! Women, children, law-abiding people, workers are unable to enjoy complete freedom because the criminals can operate without fear of the law that they are so well practised to evade, manipulate for their own purposes, and should they be found out the penalty (if any) is ridiculously low.

I am a freethinker (meaning I believe in no God). But I think criminals should be dealt with according to their crimes. I do believe in capital punishment for murderers of children, torturers of innocent old harmless people, bloodthirsty monsters who for everyone's sake should be done away with.

Even if such people were able to "repent" and reform, how could they possibly live with themselves. Would they not wish to die? Would they not be condemned to a life of mental torture with the memory of their crime?

(Miss) JEAN WATSON

WEAKNESS OF THE CHRISTIAN CASE

In reply to Steuart Campbell (Letters, June), my review of Michael Arnheim's book, *Is Christianity True?* (April), was not intended to be a literary appraisal so much as an advertisement to other humanists of a good, readable book, no more or less, that exposes the fraudulent nature of Christianity.

I must admit this is the first of its kind I have read. I'm pleasantly surprised to learn that there are "hundreds" of other books of secular criticism; but one is quite enough for me. As all religions are palpable nonsense I see no point in delving further into their abstruse creeds, nor to studying in depth the countless erudite rebuttals. Indeed, lengthier, more philosophical, criticisms may give a spurious academic credibility to religious doctrines.

For example, it matters little what Arnheim or anyone else says about whether the phrase "Son of Man" is Messianic or not, since this is a theological issue. For if the major supernatural claims of the gospels can be demolished as being untrue then Christianity is untrue. Campbell says that other critics say that some of the "events" on which Christian belief is based are true. But no miraculous or paranormal event has ever been proved to be true according to the rigorous demands of scientific evidence, not even telekinesis. Any believer will seize upon such a book, saying, "Even secular critics admit some of our beliefs are based on truth".

But this is not good enough. Christianity depends utterly upon the truth of its historical assertions, and cannot afford to have doubts, errors, or misunderstandings creep in, with Christ's tomb sometimes empty and sometimes not. Arnheim shines by merely reminding us of this vital fact.

ANTONY MILNE

FROM TERRORISM TO RESPECTABILITY

I was interested in your pertinent criticism (News and Notes, June) of Mary Kenny's article in the Sunday Telegraph advocating capital punishment for terrorists, as I wrote to her after reading it pointing out that many of those once regarded as terrorists, eg de Valera, Begin and Mugabe, later became respected heads of state. According to her own argument, then, these men should have been executed. Ironically, one of them (de Valera), was praised by Mary Kenny in her article for having had his opponents hanged once he assumed power. Needless, perhaps to say, I have, to date, received no reply from the ferocious columnist.

JOHN L. BROOM

ORDER IN THE UNIVERSE

Can we sort out the Hemming-Blackham dispute? (The Freethinker: March p42, April p62, May p77, June p93). On James Hemming's first point in his latest letter, I would seek to mediate; no dispute is necessary. Is the universe a single system? H. J. Blackham pointed out that it is open-ended, in that chance plays a part; surely James would accept this point? I cannot quite understand what Harold meant by saying for that reason we cannot study the parts of the universe in the context of the whole; but surely James would agree that we cannot conceptualise the universe as a whole, so it cannot be an effective context of any study. On the other side, if all James Hemming means by saying that the universe is a single system, is that it "has derived from a single source" (at the "big bang"), then surely H. J. Blackham would not deny "this obvious truth"? Finally, H. J. Blackham does not deny the value of holistic thinking as a method; it has been fundamental to much of modern science, from the start.

But the second and third points are more serious. James Hemming's repeated attacks on what he calls "reductionism" are a sad cause of dissension and disruption. There should be no antithesis—antagonism—between the "holistic" approach to understanding, and what would better be called the "synthetic". Humanism wants both. The synthetic approach looks inside things and processes and sees how they are made up, synthesised, and how the parts or aspects interact with each other and with the outside world. The holiest approach takes the whole as a whole, and sees what it does in itself and in interaction with the outside world. But it is all a matter of point of view; every element or aspect in a synthetic approach is itself a whole, which the synthesiser treats holistically; and there is no true whole but the Universe, which no mind can encompass as a whole.

Even if one's own interests and talents lie one way, one should not denigrate the other. I use the word "synthetic" as the complement of "holistic" because "reductionist" has been turned into a term of abuse. James's intemperate remarks on "reductionism" are somewhat unhelpful, and tend to mislead.

For James Hemming, however, "holism" is not just a method, it sometimes is a claim. And this leads me to the third point. Sometimes the claim is a good one; but sometimes it is a bad one. James Hemming causes dismay and frustration amongst the proponents of the modern theory of evolution when he represents it as claiming that "random interactions alone account for the actual results of the long slow process" of evolution (p149 of his book); and infers that the universe has a not-yet-understood "self-organising" capacity, on the ground that clearly this idea will not do. Neo-Darwinian theory may account for the evolution of Homo sapiens, or it may not, but to reject it on this type of argument is simply a misunderstanding. One must take due account of natural selection as well as random variation if one is to find the "ratchet effect" of Roy Silson's very helpful letter (June). That makes the argument much more complicated than Hemming allows.

But I would not like this letter to be entirely negative! In other parts of the book James Hemming speaks from his own knowledge and experience, and he provides much to inspire Humanists.

HARRY STOPES-ROE

The Curry Mallet church magazine has published an appeal to anyone interested in music: "Please help to form a choir and join our one lone singer, Mrs Bawler".

Dora Russell, who has died at the age of 92, was well known as an enthusiastic campaigner for many radical causes — liberty and equality, happiness and peace, the rights of women and children — and she also supported the free-thought movement for nearly three-quarters of a century.

Dora Winifred Black was born on 3 April 1894 in Thornton Heath, Surrey, into a middle-class family with naval and clerical connections and liberal opinions. Her father was Frederick William Black, a senior civil servant (for which he was knighted) and then a successful businessman in the oil industry; her mother was Sarah Isabella Davisson. Dora had a happy and secure childhood and a good traditional education at Sutton High School. She won a scholarship to Girton College, Cambridge, in 1912 and got a first-class degree in modern languages in 1915. She began postgraduate research on the thinkers of the French Enlightenment and became a research fellow of Girton College, but she never settled into academic life.

She really wanted to be an actress, but she gradually turned towards politics instead. As an undergraduate she had already lost her faith and became a humanist and a feminist, joining the freethinking Heretics Society and supporting the Suffragettes, and during the First World War she was attracted by socialism and pacifism. But before she became involved in Left-wing activity she joined her father as personal assistant in the official British War Mission to the United States in 1917 (for which she was awarded the MBE), and back at Cambridge she continued her research, also becoming secretary of the Heretics and a contributor to the *Cambridge Magazine* in 1918.

At this point her career was given a new turn by her association with Bertrand Russell. They had first met in 1916, and they met again in 1919 and became lovers. From the beginning their relationship was complex. He was a well-known upper-class intellectual more than twenty years older than her, and she was young and beautiful, independent and determined. In 1920 he refused to take her with him on a Labour delegation to Russia; so she made her own way there and back, spending several weeks in Murmansk, Petrograd and Moscow. Unlike him, although she never became a Marxist or joined the Communist Party, she was deeply impressed by the Communist regime — an issue which caused trouble between them at the time and for her for a long time afterwards. They were reconciled on returning to Britain, and she contributed a chapter on her observations to his book *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* (1920). She then accompanied him when

he travelled to China and Japan as a visiting lecturer. On their next return to Britain, he was divorced from his first wife and they were married just in time for the birth of their first child (John, who succeeded his father as Earl Russell in 1970).

Their marriage lasted for a decade, and was in some ways the peak of her career. They lived very busily and happily in London and Cornwall (their daughter Kate being born in 1923). He wrote *The Problem of China* (1922), and together they wrote *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization* (1923), expressing their anxiety about continuing industrialization. She also became prominent in both party and sexual politics. She took a leading part in the 1922 and 1923 general election campaigns, when he stood as Labour candidate for Chelsea, and she herself stood in the 1924 general election (at the age of thirty, she was just old enough to do so). In 1923 she took a leading part in the campaign supporting Rose Witcop and Guy Aldred when they were prosecuted for publishing birth control information, and in 1924 she took a leading part in the campaign to persuade the first Labour Government to support the official provision of birth control information at health clinics, forming the Workers' Birth Control Group and taking the issue to local authorities, trade union branches and Labour parties all over the country. In 1926, after working on the Penzance Strike Committee during the General Strike, she moved the successful motion at the Labour Party Annual Conference at Margate which first committed the party to the cause of birth control.

At the same time she began writing her own books — *Hypatia: or Women and Knowledge* (1925) in C. K. Ogden's To-day and To-morrow series, and *The Right to be Happy* (1927), two tracts for the times. In 1922 Russell had given the Moncreux Conway Memorial Lecture to the South Place Ethical Society; in 1927 he gave the lecture to the South London branch of the National Secular Society which was published as *Why I am not a Christian*, and became an Honorary Associate of the Rationalist Press Association. She joined the RPA at the same time, and began speaking at its meetings, especially on issues relating to women and children. Russell wrote a successful book *On Education* (1926), and in 1927 they opened their own school at Beacon Hill in Sussex, taking a small group of young children with their own and teaching them on progressive principles which then seemed revolutionary but now seem commonplace in theory, if not yet in practice. (The only schools which were equally libertarian at that time were those of Margaret McMillan and A. S. Neill.) Religious indoctrination was excluded, and science, history and politics were all treated on radical lines. Discipline was minimal

and free expression was encouraged. Beacon Hill became a shining light of the movement for free education.

The marriage was an open one from the start, but it turned out to be too open — or not open enough. Russell, who wrote a notorious book on *Marriage and Morals* (1929) and an optimistic book on *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930), had begun a series of affairs which she accepted. In 1928, during her first lecture tour of the United States, she began an affair with Griffin Barry which Russell accepted at first but which eventually destroyed their marriage. In 1929 she revisited the Soviet Union, and then helped to organise the London congress of the World League for Sexual Reform. She wrote *In Defence of Children* (1932), another tract for the times, and also much freelance journalism.

In 1931 Russell succeeded his brother as Earl Russell, but he and she both kept their established names. In 1930 she had a daughter (Harriet) by Griffin Barry, which Russell accepted; in 1932 she had a son (Roderick) by him, which Russell did not accept — instead he left her for his current lover, and began the legal process which led to their divorce in 1935. The prolonged and painful end of their relationship left scars which never healed. The personal tragedy was intensified when her lover Paul Gillard died in mysterious circumstances in 1933.

Despite the turmoil she continued the school, thought it had to leave Beacon Hill, and she also continued her political activity. When the left-wing Independent Labour Party seceded from the Labour Party in 1932, she stayed with the ILP. She was a founding member of the League of Progressive Societies and Individuals in 1932, of the National Council for Civil Liberties in 1934, and of the Abortion Law Reform Association in 1936. The Progressive League later held many meetings at her school, and she was able to take part in the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of all three organisations. Her closest colleague in the later years of the school was Pat Grace, whom she married in 1940; he died in 1949.

When Beacon Hill finally closed in 1943, under the pressure of the war, she followed her father's footsteps into the civil service, working for the Ministry of Information for seven years. Her main job was on *Britanski Soyuznik* (British Ally), a British government Russian-language weekly paper which was widely circulated in the Soviet Union from 1942 to 1950; she was the science editor from 1944 to 1950.

In 1950, freed at last from the demands of work, she turned to feminist and pacifist activities, and especially a combination of the two. She was active in many women's organisations (including the Six Point Group, the Married Women's Association, the International Women's Day Association, the National Assembly of Women, and especially the

International Committee of Mothers), and from 1951 to 1963 she travelled in women's delegations and to peace conferences all over the world. Some of the organisations and events she was involved in were Communist fronts or were part of the peace propaganda of the Soviet Union, but her work nevertheless helped to create the climate of public opinion which eventually led to the rise of the non-aligned peace movement. (Russell was involved in similar work during the same period.) In 1957 she was a founding member of the National Committee for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Tests, the organisation which acted as the springboard for the formation of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in 1958. From May to September 1958 she led the Women's Caravan of Peace across Europe to Moscow and back. She supported both CND and the Committee of 100, but was unable to take much part in either organisation because of the prominence in them of Bertrand Russell.

For a time she was much preoccupied with personal and family affairs (including the mental illness of her elder son and the paralysis of her younger son after a mining accident), but in the 1970s she resumed some of her old activities. She returned to the freethought movement, becoming an Honorary Associate of the RPA in 1974, speaking at RPA and NSS meetings, and contributing to the *New Humanist* and *The Freethinker*. She became an object of attention and even veneration in the revived women's liberation movement, being frequently interviewed in private and in the media. She produced more books, including a three-volume autobiography, *The Tamarisk Tree* (1975-1985), and *The Religion of the Machine Age* (1983), which she completed sixty years after beginning it in the light of her visits to the United States and the Soviet Union, and in which she expressed her lifelong opposition to the mechanistic view of the world and of humanity, anticipating many of the ideas of the ecology movement. (She was active in the Conservation Society.)

During the 1980s she became active in the revived nuclear disarmament movement, being a strong supporter of the Greenham Common women's peace camps, and she took part in peace demonstrations to the end of her life.

Dora Russell died on 31 May 1986 at her home in Cornwall. She had an extravert and extravagant personality, pouring her life into her work and her work into her life right up to the end. She could be silly or wrong, but she had a big heart and it was always in the right place. She provoked disagreement and debate, but she always won admiration and affection. She will be remembered above all for her energy, her generosity, her courage and her youth. Everyone who met her felt better for it, and she tried to make the world better every moment of her life.

Divorce Referendum: "Ireland has Disgraced Herself Again"

Dr Garret Fitzgerald's attempt to introduce divorce in the Republic of Ireland has failed after what he described as "an unscrupulous campaign of distortion and misrepresentation" by the Church-backed anti-divorce lobby. Roman Catholic bishops and priests used their considerable influence, particularly in rural areas, to persuade the public to vote against reform. A representative of the Divorce Action Group commented: "Ireland has disgraced herself again". And although Catholic reactionaries are jubilant, the bishops agree in private discussion that civil divorce cannot be postponed indefinitely.

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Details of summer programme obtainable from Joan Wimple, Flat 5, 67 St Aubyns, Hove, BN3 2TL, telephone Brighton 733215.

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. Friday, 8 August, 7.30 pm. Public Meeting. A speaker on the Gay's the Word case.

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.

National Secular Society. Annual outing on Sunday, 14 September. Details from NSS office, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL, telephone 01-272 1266.

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

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 13 July, 11 am. Debate between the Rev Keith Ward and Harry Stopes-Roe: Science, Religion and God.

Sutton Humanist Group. Details of summer programme obtainable from George Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, telephone 01-642 8796.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Georgina Coupland, 117 Pennard Drive, Southgate, telephone 01-828 3631.

Worthing Humanist Group. Programme of meetings obtainable from Bob Thorpe, 19 Shirley Drive, Worthing, telephone 02846.

The Church threw its full weight behind the anti-divorce campaign. Over a million leaflets were distributed and virtually every priest denounced reform from the pulpit. Celibate clergy became the country's leading experts on marriage and sexuality. The loony religious Right, veterans of anti-contraception, anti-abortion and anti-sex education battles, were the most vociferous opponents of reform. The more acceptable face of reaction was presented by groups with innocuous names like Family Solidarity and the Irish Housewives Union. In fact the Catholic campaign was master-minded and financed by shadowy organisations like the Knights of St Columbanus and Opus Dei.

The anti-divorce lobby was extremely well funded. A considerable amount of money was left over from the 1983 anti-abortion campaign, for which contributions had been sent by bishops from all parts of the world, particularly the United States.

The ultra-conservative Archbishop Kevin McNamara of Dublin compared the legalisation of divorce to the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Dail member Alice Glenn, who opposed her own (Fine Gael) party on the issue, blamed divorce in Britain for every social issue from football hooliganism to drug abuse. The good lady ignored the fact that figures for drug addiction and street crime in divorce-free, church-ridden Ireland, are among the highest in Europe.

After Fr Patrick O'Brien, one of the few priests supporting reform, spoke at a meeting organised by the Divorce Action Group, he was instructed by the Bishop of Tuam not to make further public statements. Another priest declared in a sermon that Fr O'Brien should be suspended — from the end of a rope.

Perhaps the most difficult problem facing Irish social reformers was illustrated during a radio programme when the interviewer asked two young women what they thought about divorce. "We don't think about it at all", one of them replied. "We're Catholics, and we're voting 'no'".

Spiritualist Gloria Stephens, of Harlesden in North London, who believed that she had been a Roman goddess in a previous life, stabbed her two sleeping grandchildren to death. She thought the world was about to be destroyed and if they died together their spirits would be "beamed up" to safety in a spacecraft. Her plea of manslaughter on grounds of diminished responsibility was accepted at the Old Bailey, and she was committed to a secure hospital.