

## The monolithic view of mirrors

It is with a close and warmly sympathetic interest that all men of good will, whatever their creed, are following the vigorous debate now going on within the Carthaginian Monolithic Church on the vexed question of rear-view mirrors.

It has long been the teaching of the Church that looking backwards while travelling forwards is categorically and explicitly forbidden by God, since it was for doing this that He visited instant fossilisation upon Lot's wife.

In this context 'looking back' has always been interpreted as frustrating the natural forward gaze of the traveller, whether by turning the head (*visus interruptus*), or by the interposition of a mechanical device such as a mirror.

Carthaginian Monolithic theologians claim that looking back is not only divinely prohibited, but can also be seen by the light of reason to be contrary to natural law, since it is patently interfering with nature to inhibit the inherent tendency of fast-moving objects to collide, and is frustrating the natural consequences of the act of driving.

Moreover, they argue, there is a strong aesthetic objection to looking back, since it must plainly detract from the spontaneity of the driving act, and they point out how much more insipid life becomes if the spice of the un expected is removed altogether. It must in all fairness be pointed out that the keen interest of the Monolithic clergy in preserving spontaneity and avoiding insipidity is entirely altruistic, since they do not themselves drive.

These arguments notwithstanding, the Church has long recognised the need to prevent cars smashing into the back of one another indiscriminately, and Monolithics are permitted to avoid it by abstaining from driving altogether, or by driving only during the so-called 'safe period,' between midnight and six a.m., when the chances of being crashed into are greatly reduced.

Nevertheless, there is a sympathetic - indeed, anguished - realisation among many Monolithic leaders today that self-restraint alone may be inadequate to meet the situation. The question was less crucial in the days when the main effect of the doctrine was to prohibit Monolithics from sitting with their back to the engine in railway carriages. But the increasing popularity of the motor car is putting an intolerable burden upon the accident wards of the world's hospitals.

There is intense sympathy, too, for the great strain undergone by Monolithic drivers who have been run into from behind perhaps thirteen or fourteen times already, and who now scarcely dare drive home to see their wives if it involves turning right, or pulling out to pass a parked car.

It is to this agonising problem that 'the box' may provide an answer. 'The box' is a rearward radar scanning device which scientists are still testing. 'Liberal' Monolithics believe that a scanning aerial cannot be said to 'look' back in the natural sense of looking, and that the radar screen does not deflect the natural forward gaze of the driver, like a mirror, but is a natural part of his natural forward view.

It is emphasised that even if 'the box' were to be accepted, it could never be used for merely selfish purposes, to avoid a crash simply because a crash was not desired, but only where a driver had already had three or four crashes, and there were genuine grounds for believing that another one

might have a serious effect upon his health.

(O. J. SPROUT: / *must say, I'm greatly struck by the responsibility and fair-mindedness with which Mr Frayn is treating this thorny subject.*

MRS SPROUT: / *agree with you, Sprout. He's not a Carthaginian Monolithic himself, is he?*)

All the same, some authorities doubt if the box could ever be an acceptable compromise. They believe that the only hope would be to develop a device which would make the safe period principle more reliable - making absolutely sure that the road behind the car was kept clear by scattering perhaps nails or broken glass, perhaps small high explosive bombs.

(SPROUT: *You know, I don't think he's a Carthaginian Monolithic at all, Mrs Sprout. That's the beauty of it. To me the whole article suggests the best tradition of agnostic liberal journalism.*)

Non-Monolithic observers can only look on at this debate with sympathy and understanding. They may be sure that it will be carried through with utter sincerity and a genuine sense of urgency, and that everyone on both sides will do his best, and play the game according to the rules.

(MRS SPROUT: *There were tears in his eyes in the last paragraph, Sprout.*

SPROUT: *In mine too, Mrs Sprout. I can only say that the whole inquiry was conducted with the beautiful reverence and respect which the subject demands.*)

*Michael Freyn*

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