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RELIGIOUS CHARLATANS WRECK LIVES AND CAREERS OF YOUNG DUPES

Last month listeners to the BBC Radio 4 programme, "Snapping", heard first-hand accounts of how dangerous religious cults operate. Inadequate diet, sleep deprivation, deception and isolation are some of the methods by which they reduce intelligent young men and women to automatons. Cult members are often terrified of the consequences if they leave. An ex-member of the Church of Bible Understanding refused to be named in case of reprisal. Most participants in the programme were Americans, but coincidentally the British-based Family Action for Information and Rescue (FAIR) published a statement by its former chairman, Tony Freeland, whose twin brother John is recovering from a second mental breakdown after leaving the Moonies.

John Freeland first became involved with the Unification Church in 1974 and was out of contact with his family for long periods. He became a full-time worker for the Church. His wife, a Swedish Moonie, was selected for him at 24 hours' notice by the Rev Sun Moon, founder and leader of the movement.

When John Freeland joined the Unification Church he told his brother Tony that he was in "a wonderful Christian movement", with personal responsibility for the souls of millions of people. He disappeared for a time, his only contact with the family being an occasional telephone call or letter to say that he was working for God. His relationship with his mother broke down completely, causing her considerable distress.

Some months later John Freeland telephoned his brother, begging to be taken away from Rowlane Farmhouse, a Moonie establishment near Reading, in Berkshire. Tony Freeland drove to Rowlane Farmhouse to collect his brother and later recalled: "I hardly recognised him. He had lost two or three stones and was in a state of deep shock, with sunken, glazed eyes".

Within 48 hours John Freeland was admitted to a psychiatric hospital where he remained for six weeks. During that time he was convinced that all his family — past, present and future — would be "spiritually damned".

John Freeland was eventually discharged from hospital and took up a responsible post with a wine firm in Bristol. But the Moonie grip was not totally broken and he rejoined in 1976.

He finished up at the Moonies' Lancaster Gate headquarters in London. Two days after informing Michael Marshall, his "spiritual supervisor", that he "could not take any more", John Freeland underwent a second mental collapse. It was described by his brother as "tragic and unnecessary".

Freedom—Moonie Style

John Freeland's situation is particularly difficult, as his brother explains. "Because the Unification Church, as his employer, has not paid his National Insurance contributions, John can draw neither unemployment nor sickness benefit. His State pension is also substantially reduced.

"It has frequently been stated by the UC that their members are free to leave the movement if they so wish. But how can they be free to leave if they have no homes outside the church; no unemployment or sickness benefits? . . . Members encouraged to give all their money and possessions to the movement, yet the UC does not assume responsibility for the payment of National Insurance contributions, thus denying the ex-member the very basic dignity to which he is justly entitled. . .

"Members are told that if they leave they will spiritually die; they give up their freedom, their minds, their souls. They get no peace from the awesome threat of spiritual damnation. . .

(continued on back page)

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NEWS

YEAR OF THE HUMBUG

The first quarter of 1982 is not ended, but clearly it can be designated International Year of the Humbug. Numerous cases could be listed, but Poland is the outstanding example of a nation being cynically and callously exploited. For despite the expressions of sympathy and concern, religious leaders in Rome and sabre rattlers in Washington don't care a fig about the Polish people. Their real aim is to foment a full-scale civil war that will result in a return to rule by Right-wing politicians, militarists and Church hierarchy. Pentagon "advisers" would be invited into the country and Poland become an American springboard in central Europe.

Here in Britain, friends of labour at the Conservative Central Office, the BBC and Fleet Street have wept buckets over the sufferings of Polish trade unionists. "Poland is a tragedy, harrowing the consciences of everyone in the West", wailed a *Daily Telegraph* leader writer. "A brave people is again being destroyed", hiccupped Lord George-Brown in the *Sunday Express*.

How odd that newspapers which conduct a continuous smear campaign against British trade unionists should be so admiring of Polish workers. BBC announcers and interviewers who can scarcely mention a trade union or Arthur Scargill without a sneer, seem to be afflicted by a lump in the throat every time they refer to the Gdansk shipyard or Lech Walesa.

And for how long has the Roman Catholic Church been a champion of liberalism and workers' rights in Poland? Its pose as the defender of freedom and democracy is utterly fraudulent. The Church has been an unrelenting foe of personal freedom and social reform all over Europe. But its record has been most unsavoury in Poland, where it guarded the interests of the country's reactionary, repressive, Jew-hating ruling class with notable fervour.

Chancellor Kreisky of Austria was right when he declared that the Roman Catholic Church could hardly be considered to possess the credentials to lead a workers' movement. He was completely justified in attacking the "boundless hypocrisy" of the United States for leading the Western campaign against the Polish authorities. This reflected the Americans' double standards, and ignored what is happening in Latin America.

It is not surprising that many genuine supporters of human rights have serious misgivings about Solidarity. Pictures of Lech Walesa humping a

S AND NOTES

whacking great crucifix around, and other Solidarity leaders grovelling before bishops, do not inspire confidence. But honest doubt or even disapproval is preferable to the odious humbug of Solidarity's alleged friends in the West.

Some of these "friends" of the workers appeared in *Let Poland be Poland*, a 90-minute television spectacular shown in the United States last month with all the vulgar razzmatazz of a presidential election campaign. It was devised by one of President Reagan's friends, a Mr Charles Z. Wick, whose previous artistic achievements include a production of *Snow White and the Three Stooges*. Prime Minister Thatcher, Reagan's stooge at 10 Downing Street, added her predictably tasteless contribution to the proceedings.

The United States, ruled by big business, militarists and religious fundamentalists, is in no position to pass judgement on Russia or the Polish authorities. The two-bit actor who presently occupies the White House, and his predecessors, have backed notoriously oppressive and corrupt regimes when it has been in America's interest to do so. While mouthing platitudes about freedom and independence, Americans have meddled in the affairs of other countries. Their agents have murdered political and trade union leaders, and subverted governments that would not submit to Washington.

In all this the United States has been actively supported or excused by successive British governments, most politicians and church leaders. It is little wonder that their expressions of sympathy with the Polish people sound so hollow and hypocritical.

KEEP YOUR HAIR ON

Mrs Joan Campbell, described by one of her neighbours on the Isle of Lewis as "deeply devout", has been deprived of full membership of the Free Presbyterian Church. She had been a practising member for many years before committing the transgression that resulted in church privileges being withdrawn. Her offence? She decided to have her hair cut.

The church elders based their ruling on a literal translation of 1 Corinthians, chapter 11, verse 1: "But if a woman have long hair, it is glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering". The Rev Donald MacLean, clerk to the Free Presbyterian Synod, confirmed that in the Church's view a woman who has her hair cut acts "in disobedience to the word of God".

Free Presbyterians attend prayer meetings on most nights, including Saturday. Women, who have no say in Church affairs, are expected to wear their hair in a tightly wound bun at the nape of the neck. Wearing of slacks is forbidden and make-up is taboo.

Members of the Free Presbyterian Church, men and women alike, adhere to the belief that a woman's "proper place" in church is a lowly and silent one. They follow to the letter St Paul's command: "Let your women keep silence in the churches. For it is not permitted unto them to speak. . . And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands, for it is a shame for women to speak in church".

RPA LOSES THREE STALWARTS

Three people who were prominently associated with the Rationalist Press Association have died.

Lord Ritchie-Calder, President of the Association since 1973, was born at Forfar. He started work as a newspaper reporter at the age of 15 and went on to become a popular writer on scientific matters. He was created a Life Peer in 1966.

Ritchie-Calder gained considerable first-hand experience of the effects of unemployment, poverty and disease which were widespread during the 1920s and 30s. He worked closely with John Boyd-Orr, and was described as that great nutrition expert's spokesman in journalism.

They were colleagues again in the post-war years when Boyd-Orr, who had become Director General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, invited Ritchie-Calder to be his special adviser. He continued his association with the UN for several years, and in 1961 was appointed to the Montague Burton Chair of International Relations at the University of Edinburgh.

Ritchie-Calder was deeply concerned about population growth and the consequent pressure on resources in many parts of the world. In a message to the National Secular Society on the occasion of its centenary (1966) he wrote: "The world has perforce become a neighbourhood beset by problems for which religion can provide no answers. They have been created by the ingenuity of man and only the ingenuity of man can resolve them. When the National Secular Society was founded and when Bradlaugh was agitating for birth control the world's population was probably 3,250,000,000. . . By 1995 it will be over 6,000,000,000. Half a million years for *Homo sapiens* to reach the present figure; thirty years for *Homo insapiens* — unthinking man — to double it. Science, by its medical advances, has given us death control. Organised religion still discourages birth control".

Professor P. S. Florence, an Honorary Associate

of the RPA, died in Birmingham where he lived and worked for many years. He was aged 91.

Philip Sargant Florence was born in the United States but was educated and spent most of his life in Britain. A distinguished economist and social scientist, he was a lecturer at Cambridge from 1921 until 1929. In 1929 he succeeded J. F. Rees in the Chair of Commerce at the University of Birmingham. He was Dean of the Faculty of Commerce and Social Science from 1947 until 1950.

Professor Florence retired in 1955 but remained active as a lecturer, consultant and writer well into old age. He was made an honorary CBE in 1952. His published works included *Logic of Industrial Organisation*, *County Town* and *English County*.

Constance Dowman, former General Secretary of the Rational Press Association, died suddenly at her home in Stanmore, Middlesex. She was 66.

Nicolas Walter writes: Constance Dowman devoted her entire adult life to the service of the humanist movement and her entire working life to the Rationalist Press Association. In 1932, at the age of 16, Constance Kerr came to its associated publishing company, C. A. Watts & Co., as an invoice typist on the *Thinker's Library* (which had begun in 1929 and continued until 1951, selling four million copies of 140 freethought titles). She later became the secretary of F. C. C. Watts, the managing director of the RPA (and the son of C. A. Watts, its founder).

She became a member of the RPA in July 1938 and a life member in June 1969. In September 1938 she succeeded Miss J. M. Bridge as Executive Secretary of the RPA, and in April 1941 she became the Secretary (her salary then being raised to £300). In November 1946 she became a Director of the RPA, and in January 1954 her post was retitled General Secretary. Her marriage to George Dowman, a prominent member of the South Place Ethical Society, took place in 1954. He died in 1974.

Mrs Dowman retired from full-time employment at the RPA in June 1975, after working there for 43 years and administering the organisation for 34 years (both longer than anyone before or since). She remained a Director until her death and was also the Honorary Secretary of the Rationalist Benevolent Fund. Her connection with the RPA lasted for very nearly 50 years, and her contribution to its work was more devoted than that of anyone except C. A. Watts and F. C. C. Watts themselves.

She was also active in other humanist organisations. She became a member of the South Place Ethical Society in April 1948 and a life member in April 1969. She served on the Committee three times (1959-1962, 1970-1973, 1975-1978), and she was a Trustee from 1975 until her death. She joined the Committee of the Humanist Housing Association in 1967, was Vice-Chairman from 1974, and

Chairman of the Finance Sub-Committee from 1979.

In all her work for the humanist movement, Constance Dowman said little and did much. She practised her principles in her private as much as in her public life, being a loyal and generous friend, and caring for her husband until his death and for her father until her own. She was one of the very few people who are genuinely irreplaceable, and her very sudden and relatively early death will be widely regretted.

The Orthodox Church of Greece has condemned civil marriage as "an act of adultery and prostitution". It has called on the Socialist Government to change plans to make this form of marriage legal. A resolution passed during a meeting of the General Synod declared that only religious marriage could legalise wedlock. The Synod decided to send a deputation to the President and Prime Minister of the Republic to underline the Church's strength of feeling over this issue.

CRUMBS!

The *Daily Telegraph* reported recently that a Bavarian farmer by the name of Johannes Glump has been taken to Augsburg County Court for refusing to pay his annual church tithe amounting to 12 loaves of bread. The proceedings were brought by the Augsburg episcopal tax office who were anxious to establish an ancient church right.

At a first glance, this does not seem an outrageous demand. After all a precedent had been established when the founder of Christianity accepted five loaves—and two thousand years of inflation have to be taken into account.

Alas, to farmer Glump the 12 loaves were the proverbial last straw, for besides leaving his mite on the collection plate whenever he attends a live performance at his local church, he is also obliged to pay £370 a year in church taxes. Church taxes are levied on all members of the various denominations and are usually assessed at ten per cent of a person's annual income tax. The mind boggles at the sums flowing annually into the church coffers if a small farmer has to part with nearly £400. The Lord provideth handsomely indeed.

However, there is hope for Farmer Glump if he follows the example of thousands of his equally outraged compatriots. He can sign a simple form renouncing his church affiliation. With the £370 thus saved at a stroke, he can keep his local priest in bread—and himself in schnapps if he hankers after "spiritual" uplift.

S. D. KUEBAK T

Surely Not Mr Livingstone, I Presume?

TED McFADYEN

More daily newspapers are read in the United Kingdom per head of the population than in any other country. The five popular dailies—Express, Mail, Mirror, Star and Sun—have a total circulation of 12,848,000, compared to the trifling 863,000 of The Times, Financial Times and Guardian. The influence exerted by newspapers and BBC current affairs programmes like PM is enormous. Their stock in trade is creating Labour and Trade Union scapegoats, trivialising serious affairs and glorifying nonentities.

to present their political opponents in the worst possible light. The only thing that should surprise us is the blatancy of their misrepresentation.

Mr Livingstone, of course, is not the only figure to fall victim to this sort of treatment. Tony Benn has been consistently vilified by the Tory Press for years and, whether or not one agrees with the persistence of his tactical approach vis-à-vis the Labour Party, the fact remains that Mr Benn is, like Mr Livingstone, a deeply serious politician with a genuine concern for our appalling social problems, and moreover—as can be seen from his published works—an intellectually gifted man. Yet the very mention of the word “Benn” can cause mild-mannered, middle-aged conservatives living in Cheltenham or South Kensington to froth at the mouth with rage, so effectively have they been conditioned by leader writers of the *Daily Telegraph*.

Character Assassins

The daily Press is not of course the only culprit. It would be encouraging to report that the BBC, in keeping with its Reithian principles, maintains an unbiased approach. Unhappily, such is far from the case. On BBC radio and television, the skilful use of emotive language conveys its own value judgements: words like “henchmen” are used to describe trade union officials while management representatives are “colleagues”. Experienced interviewers like Robin Day are too ready to adopt a hectoring tone when dealing with labour or trade unions, while their attitude to management or Government spokesmen may be little short of sychophantic.

Another classic example of this kind of character assassination is that of Robert Mugabe, formerly portrayed by the media as a bloodthirsty savage intent on ruin and destruction, yet somehow miraculously transformed, after the satisfactory transfer of power in Zimbabwe, into a dignified and statesmanlike figure.

The other side of the coin is the astonishing ability of the Press to glamorise people whose claim to public notice is, to say the least, tenuous. Many of these are people who, if sensible judgements prevailed, would be remarkable only for their numbing mediocrity.

All this is damaging enough, but of course much deeper than the propensity of the media to blacken decent individuals and glorify nonentities is an implicit set of standards which the Press seeks to impose upon society, and which are in themselves deplorable. “Sex Change Bishop in Mercy Dash to

A few weeks ago Ken Livingstone, Labour leader of the Greater London Council, was one of the guests in the BBC radio programme, “Any Questions”—at least I am assured by the *Radio Times* that it was Ken Livingstone. But for anyone accustomed to reading the violent and abusive outbursts against Mr Livingstone published by the media, the experience of hearing him on “Any Questions” came as something of a shock.

For here was this person whom, so we have been told for months, is incompetent, intolerant of opposition and stubbornly determined to impose his “crazy” schemes upon London (like bringing down transport fares to a reasonable level, for a change). What in fact came across in “Any Questions”—and indeed in other interviews I have heard with Mr Livingstone—was a strong impression of a serious, thoughtful person deeply concerned with London’s social problems and anxious to find workable solutions. Incidentally, he also seems remarkably patient with the wilder forms of abuse heaped upon him, and from which he was unable to escape even in this programme.

Ken Livingstone is also quite clearly deeply committed to anti-sexism. In commenting upon the iniquitous rape verdict of a fine instead of a prison sentence, he made the point that this simply reinforces society’s implicit belief that women may be treated as second-class citizens. And when the question of the woman stalker at a Rugby match was predictably raised, he was the only one of the speakers who refused to gain an easy laugh with a nudge-nudge ho-ho reply and addressed himself seriously to the real point — that it was simply another opportunity for the gutter Press to indulge their schoolboy fantasies.

So why is the real Mr Livingstone so utterly different from the mythical character portrayed for us in the media? The answer is obvious: the gutter Press is for the most part Tory-dominated, and it is in the interest of the proprietors of these papers

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The Archbishop of Canterbury's submission to the Law Commission, in which he proposes an extension of blasphemy law to protect other religions in addition to Christianity, is examined in this article. J. R. Spencer, Fellow, Selwyn College, Cambridge, argues that rather than being regarded as a form of protection, blasphemy law has been used as an offensive weapon by Christian zealots against critics and dissenters.

Speaking on behalf of the Church of England, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Runcie, has told the Law Commission that the crime of blasphemy should not only be retained, but considerably extended. He declared: "We would suggest a new offence in these or similar terms: 'publishing matter which vilifies, ridicules or insults the fundamental beliefs of Christianity or the fundamental religious beliefs of any religious group, knowing that this is likely to insult or outrage their feelings, to provoke a breach of the peace, or to disturb public order and tranquillity'."

The Archbishop adopts the position that the present crime of blasphemy is necessary to prevent outrages being committed upon the Christian section of the community. Therefore, he argues, its benefits should be extended to other religious groups.

Dr Runcie's report contains not a word about the history of the offence of blasphemy, or the uses to which it has been put. Could he have said that what he did if he or his advisors had done their homework?

Far from being used to repress outrages upon Christians, the offence of blasphemy was originally part of the apparatus whereby the Church and State used to compel universal conformity to Anglicanism. Its ultimate origin is *Traske's* case in 1618, where the Star Chamber ordered an eccentric puritan to be whipped through the streets, and pilloried with his ears nailed to the boards, for preaching that Christians ought to observe the Jewish sabbath and dietary rules.

In the late 17th century, the offence passed into the law of the ordinary criminal courts, and was then energetically used by and on behalf of the Church of England to stamp on religious revisionists within the fold and religious rivals without. Thomas Woolston, an Anglican clergyman, was imprisoned in 1729 for denying the literal truth of the Miracles. The Baptist Benjamin Keach was prosecuted and pilloried in 1664, and the heresiarch Lodowicke Muggleton in 1677.

Unitarians were repeatedly prosecuted and imprisoned. In 1720, however, the trial of one, the

eccentric Edward Elwall, miscarried. After his acquittal, the clergyman behind the prosecution told him he wished he had been hanged—a fate which had actually befallen the Unitarian Thomas Aikenhead under the more stringent Scottish blasphemy laws in 1697. The story of Elwall lends peculiar point to the Archbishop's observation that "reasoned criticism of religious belief is built into the ethos of the Anglican Church in a special way"!

Later in the 18th century, Church and State ceased to bring blasphemy prosecutions against fellow-Christians, but exploited the offence with occasional zeal against Deists. Thus Jacob Ilive was pilloried and imprisoned in 1756, and Peter Annet in 1763. In the 1820s, the Society for the Suppression of Vice, an Anglican Evangelical pressure-group, launched a barrage of prosecutions over the sale of Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*, which, according to one estimate, landed as many as 150 people in prison.

Offensive Christians

In the 1840s, Henry Phillpotts, Bishop of Exeter, stirred up the authorities to prosecute the followers of the Deist Robert Owen in the Co-operative Movement. Charles Southwell and George Jacob Holyoake were among his followers who were later prosecuted for blasphemy and imprisoned. These last prosecutions engendered criticism, and the Church of England and the central Government authorities ceased official involvement in blasphemy prosecutions thereafter.

However, private zealots continued to use blasphemy prosecutions to lock up atheists in the name of Christianity. Charles Bradlaugh was unsuccessfully prosecuted, and G. W. Foote, the first editor of *The Freethinker*, was prosecuted twice and imprisoned on the first occasion. It was in the second of Foote's two trials in 1883 that the law was watered down, when Lord Chief Justice Coleridge restated the offence as "vilification" of Christianity rather than mere denial. Many believed that this would curb the harsh uses to which blasphemy prosecutions had been put. Alas, they were wrong.

A considerable witch-hunt took place between 1911 and 1921 against a group of atheistical socialists. Their leader, J. W. Gott, was prosecuted some five times for distributing atheistical propaganda, and four times sent to prison. In two of the prosecutions, juries disagreed, and the prosecutor went to the length of a second trial. At his last trial, the second jury convicted, but recommended him strongly to mercy; whereupon the prosecutor told the judge that Gott was "an atheist and socialist

of the worst type", and he was sentenced to nine months imprisonment with hard labour.

In all of these prosecutions the law was used, not defensively, to protect from outrage and attack, but *offensively*, to seek out and put down views the prosecutors wished to suppress.

The same is true no less of the other main type of blasphemy prosecution—where the law has been used in attempts to censor and suppress imaginative literature not to the puritan taste. The most remarkable incident of this type was when the London Society for the Reformation of Manners used blasphemy prosecutions in 1702 as a move in a campaign to have the London theatres closed. The Society began with propaganda. They objected, they said, to Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* because putting the devil on stage weakened belief in eternal damnation, and they also claimed that the theatres were supported by the Jesuits and the French in a conspiracy to corrupt public morals as a prelude to military conquest! Then they paid informers to go to plays, and tried to prosecute the entire cast of both London theatres for blasphemy uttered in the course of acting, *inter alia*, Ben Jonson's *Volpone*. The prosecution the Society for the Suppression of Vice brought over Shelley's poem *Queen Mab* in 1822, the New Zealand prosecution over Siegfried Sassoon's poem *Stand To* in 1921, Lady Birdwood's attempt to prosecute over a London play in 1971, and Mrs Whitehouse's prosecution of *Gay News* are all in this tradition.

Adequate Protection

The harassment of religious believers is odious. Of course it should be criminal to defile churches and graveyards, interrupt religious services, to obstruct and insult believers in the street, and to spread hate propaganda against them, like, for example, pamphlets accusing the Jews of sacrificing Gentile children. But these types of harassment are already covered by a whole range of offences, which apply without discrimination to all groups. Blasphemy prosecutions have never been used to stop this sort of thing, even when Christians were the victims, and no extension of blasphemy is needed to cover the case where the victims are non-Christians. Blasphemy prosecutions have been exclusively used by believers to harass others, and the result of such an extension of the law would simply be to enable the opposite numbers of Bishop Henry Phillpotts and Mrs Mary Whitehouse in every other faith—from Muslims to Moonies—to join in their kind of fun.

Unfortunately, the Archbishop is not the only influential person to propose the extension of the crime of blasphemy on the ground that it is needed to defend believers from harassment. Lord Scarman advocated this course in his judgement in the

Gay News case, with remarks about the need to penalise the pollution of mosques.

Unfortunately, the general public assumes that when Archbishops and Law Lords pronounce on the law of blasphemy, they know what they are talking about. Consequently, pronouncements from such elevated quarters start to make an extension of the crime of blasphemy look a political possibility. A grim thought, this, as the centenary of *The Freethinker* is passed, and the centenary of the prosecution of its first Editor, which was thought to have narrowed the law, approaches.

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Surely Not Mr Livingstone

Royal Corgis: Taxpayer Fools the Bill" is the favourite fantasy headline of Fleet Street journalists. Its implication is the cynical one that in order to sell papers you must pander to people's worst instincts; that particular fantasy headline has all the ingredients most newspaper proprietors want to peddle—sex, religion, royalty, animals and indignant taxpayers.

People used to worry about the tendency of the popular Press to blur comment with news. Such an anxiety seems trifling today, when we are confronted with half a dozen popular papers whose main characteristics are an unremitting sexism, shown not only in the obvious "page three" way but in practically every news story which involves women; an emphasis on an acquisitive materialism which is both competitive and snobbish; an explicit intention to entertain their readers with mindless trivia rather than give them information about the real world; and a hypocritical attitude to sex which pretends to deplore promiscuity but wallows in columns of unnecessary court case detail (an offence committed as much by the "quality" *Daily Telegraph* as by the popular papers).

In a recent article in *New Socialist*, Ken Livingstone writes about his attitude to the Press. He describes how the Labour group on the GLC have appointed a Press Officer who will act "as a total barrier with media contacts"—not in willing co-operation, note. "Our broad line now," he writes, "is to give any TV or radio interviews—because that gives you direct access to people—to co-operate with the 'quality' papers, and basically not to bother with the gutter Press".

That's an example that should be followed by the rest of us as buyers and readers of newspapers. When it comes to the popular Press—don't bother.

World Freethought at Lausanne

JIM HERRICK

The 39th Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers was held recently in Lausanne, Switzerland. Formed in 1880 in Brussels, the Union had Charles Bradlaugh as one of its founders. Jim Herrick, a former Editor of "The Freethinker" and a leading member of the National Secular Society, attended the Congress as an individual participant.

Lausanne is a modern-looking city set amidst age-old mountains beside a beautiful lake. Freethought is a philosophy for a modern world with age-old traditions and inspiring possibilities.

As I strolled through the streets before the Congress opened, I passed one named after Edward Gibbon, and was reminded that he had spent much of his youth and early manhood in Lausanne, and there first read Pierre Bayle, the great French sceptic who wrote: "Je suis protestant, parce que je proteste contre tous les religions". ("I am protestant because I protest against all religions".) That spirit of protest was very much alive at the World Union of Freethinkers Congress.

A banner across a main street proclaimed the Freethought Congress and I came across posters around the town. The Swiss Association of Freethinkers, who were to prove such hospitable organisers of the Congress, had been working hard at publicity. Publicity was the good reason for a short delay in the opening meeting of international representatives, for one of the WUF leaders was taking part in a radio interview about the Congress.

The Congress proper opened with a public meeting at which a well-known Swiss journalist and broadcaster, M. L. Albert Zbinden, gave a talk on the subject of "Tolerance and Dialogue". Albert Zbinden argued eloquently that we live in a period of relativity and incertitude, where tolerance and dialogue are essential for survival. Despite a plethora of books and electronic forms of communication there is little real dialogue. There is a barrage of information and words, but a failure to create a desire for knowledge, for intelligence, for imagination.

We are all orphans of Marx and Freud, living in a century where all ideas are relative and as a consequence there is crisis of identity, cynicism, nihilism and an anti-intellectual climate. The fall of ideologies and churches has taken away certitude, but this has left us in a better position to face reality. This means goodbye to the heroic individual—and even freethinkers no longer have martyrs. Today we must all travel with uncertainty, and live with a pluralism of truths; the truth of science for understanding the world, of Marxism for under-

standing society, of technology for daily living. For this we need tolerance—which is not a weakness but a positive virtue and a constructive force. As well as political democracy we require a democracy of ideas and beliefs, provided they are compatible with justice and progress.

Speaking of the need for dialogue, Zbinden said that the reign of the cross, the crescent, and the hammer and sickle was a triumph of violence and non-dialogue. Two major moves towards peace would be a shift in the world disequilibrium of food and resources and adherence to the international rights of all people. Oppression, torture and war, can be seen as broken communication, a double crisis of dialogue and tolerance. He concluded on an optimistic note suggesting that everywhere there were people of goodwill and hope and that to live without certainty, but with greater tolerance and dialogue was a real possibility.

A brief summary cannot do full justice to an elegant and complex lecture. Questions were less abstract and concentrated on specific injustices, such as the lack of time allocated to freethought on Swiss Radio.

Unity and Progress

The more formal part of the Congress was opened by M. Gremlin, from Luxembourg, the President of the World Union of Freethinkers. He said WUF had contributed to the secularisation of the world and pointed out that although most people are freethinkers without knowing it, the tasks of world freethought are not over. "Freethought", he reminded the Congress, "is independent of political parties, although individuals will be active in political groups". He saw freethought as a union of progressive forces, "the force of liberty, liberty of conscience, the right of man, the liberation of the social economy and the desire for social justice". Albert Bossart, President of the Swiss Freethinkers, emphasised that the aim of WUF was to provide contact and to discuss problems of general importance throughout the world.

Representatives from individual countries then gave accounts of the activities in their own areas, a session which provided interesting comparisons and contrasts between freethought organisations in different parts of the world. From the Freireligiöse Bund in Germany came an emphasis on the freethought contribution to the gathering momentum of the peace movement. (On a weekend when many European capitals saw massive demonstrations against nuclear arms, disarmament was a frequent topic at the Congress.) To see the arms race as inevitable and the arms budget as taboo was a form

of fatalism and mysticism, according to the German representative; peace would come not from heaven but from the struggle of ordinary people. This representative also suggested a world day of Freedom of Thought to be held on 10 May, the day of burning of books in Germany in 1933.

For a Secular Europe

The Belgian speaker said that freethinkers in his country were concerned with moral actions on behalf of prisoners, secular morality in education, teaching about birth control and a campaign to initiate secular ceremonies at birth, puberty, marriage and death. The President of the French Association of Freethinkers said that they had recently achieved an increase in press publicity and their paper *La Raison* had had an increased circulation. However, there was the paradox that at a time when young people rejected religious belief the number of Christian marriages and burials was increasing. Although Mitterand's socialist Government had abolished capital punishment and made moves to break cycles of poverty, freethinkers were not optimistic about their aim of completely secularising education, for the Catholics remained a powerful political lobby.

An Italian delegate spoke of the decline in the number of priests and the contempt of the young for the politics of Catholicism. However, Mussolini's Concordat with the papacy had never been repudiated and the papacy had interfered in referendums about divorce and abortion.

Erik Hartikainon, Secretary General of the Union of Freethinkers in Finland, gave an account of his attempts to get the United Nations to recognise the rights of atheists in its declaration concerning the elimination of intolerance resting on any religious belief. The Finnish Freethinkers attempted to influence the relevant ministers, who were sending comments on the UN draft proposals, but he was doubtful whether it could have much impact. Finnish freethinkers were also attempting to obtain the right to offer their own secular religious education within the Finnish educational system.

Erik Hartikainon, who has striven energetically nationally and internationally for recognition of the rights of atheists, drew the lesson that international freethought was without power: "In the World Union of Freethinkers we are sometimes proud that our structure and organisation is free, and that our organisations all play their own independent role. Without wishing to open conflicts at the heart of our organisation, I would like to point out that disparate as we are, we are without power."

A Dutch freethought representative spoke of the regular television and radio slot which they presented and which resulted in numerous enquiries. From an Austrian delegate came a historical account of the difficulties of freethinkers under Kreisky's

government, because of the alliance between Social Democrats and the Catholic Church at times of election. (Is there a warning here for Britain?) Frank Schütte, from West Berlin, looking to a future free from all dogmas, spoke of the dangers of the growth of the radical Right in Europe, and called for co-operation between unbelievers throughout the world.

My impression of freethought in Europe, from the diversity of reports given, was one of a movement which is stirring towards greater action and co-operation than in recent years. Disarmament, social justice, the power of the papacy and encroaching anti-intellectual superstition are issues across Europe.

Although only an individual participant, I was given the opportunity to speak about the position in Britain. I said that I was delighted to be present, since there had been no direct contact between British freethought and WUF in recent years. I also mentioned Bradlaugh's part in founding WUF and referred to matters of importance in the future, such as the demand for schools from non-Christian religions and the threatened visit of the Pope. In conversation I found that *The Freethinker* (whose centenary I mentioned) was widely known amongst European freethinkers and that the subject I was most frequently asked about was Northern Ireland.

Voices of America

From beyond Europe came two forceful atheist campaigners, Madalyn Murray O'Hair of the American Atheists, and Lavanam, of the Atheist Centre, Vijayawada, India. Madalyn Murray O'Hair spoke as someone who had been many times imprisoned for her atheism. She is known worldwide for her successful legal case pursued to the United States Supreme Court in 1963, which established that Bible reading and prayer ceremonies in the public schools (State schools) of the United States "constituted an impermissible religious ceremony". The US, she said, was a leader in the world, and everywhere people aspired to reach its standard of living. Yet it was a country saturated with religion—with militarists and their Jesuit advisers planning the destruction of the human race, evangelicals preaching Armageddon and the final holocaust, and TV and radio filled with the message of Jesus. She gave an alarming picture of science under attack, and of threats to the position of women, education and free expression of human sexuality.

Her son, Jon Murray, Editor of *American Atheist*, at a later stage in the Congress said he was impressed with the civilised atmosphere of the occasion. It was impossible to speak from an atheist platform in America without being shouted down.

(continued on page 46)

BOOKS

THE CHEESE AND THE WORMS by Carlo Ginzburg, translated by John and Anne Tedeschi. Routledge and Kegan Paul. £7.95.

By examining the story of Menocchio, a 16th-century Italian miller, we may learn about a whole substratum of peasant culture, says the historian Carlo Ginzburg. But this is no reconstruction of the life of a typical miller. Menocchio, whose full name was Domenico Scandella, was accused of heresy, tried twice by the Roman Inquisition, and finally burned at the stake. To read this account of his trial is to be thrown into a strange world where wrong opinions are a serious crime and dignified Roman Church officials take a deep and straight-faced interest in what this miller and sometime Mayor has been saying to his friends in provincial Friuli.

Menocchio believed that the world originated in putrefaction from which something like curds formed, like milk turning into cheese. The curds were the traditional elements: fire, earth, air and water. Angels then sprouted from this cheese world like worms. Still worse, in the eyes of the Church, was Menocchio's contention that the sacraments and laws of the Church were merely a profitable business. Priests and the rest of the hierarchy were unnecessary, he said, because the spirit of God existed within every person. Menocchio insisted to the Inquisition examiners that Jesus was not divine and that the soul was mortal. Although the soul died with the body, there was a Paradise, but not a hell or purgatory. Roman orthodoxy threw up its hands in shock at these ideas and called poor Menocchio to account.

Menocchio had a vernacular Bible and had read Mandeville's *Travels* and a few works of popular theology, but his reading took place through a filter of peasant oral tradition, a curious pre-Christian amalgam which Ginzburg traces as far as is possible 400 years later.

Menocchio's tragedy was that he was ignorant, but not quite ignorant enough. He was literate but uneducated; he occupied a very dangerous middle ground between Church theologians and simple peasants who took everything on faith. His real tragic flaw was that he could not keep his mouth shut. Menocchio enjoyed a good discussion about religion, especially if he could have the floor most of the time. He was convinced that he had stumbled onto the truth and that the hierarchy of the Church was keeping something from the common people. At his first interview with the Inquisition examiner he was anxious to explain his beliefs. Menocchio imagined that his "artful mind" and his haphazard reading were enough to persuade the examiner to

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his way of thinking; he seemed glad to have a man with an intellect equal to his own with whom to discuss these weighty matters. Back home in Montereale his only disciple was Melchiorre Gerbas, a carpenter and the town dolt.

But the Inquisition examiner remained notably unconvinced of Menocchio's peculiar pantheism and his belief that a man had seven souls and two spirits, and of course the business about the worms and the cheese. The Roman Inquisition (not to be confused with the Spanish Inquisition or the medieval inquisitions) was a relatively humane institution. The examiner had argued with him and tried to get him back onto the right track, but when Menocchio was adamant, the poor little miller was declared not merely a heretic but a heresiarch. But still he was not sentenced to death. He was sentenced to life imprisonment and made to wear a penitential garment.

After two years in a filthy prison at his family's expense, Menocchio petitioned to be released and demonstrated a grovelling conversion to orthodoxy. Back in Montereale, he seemed to keep his promise not to talk about religion with anyone. He took up his old place in the town; he was entrusted with a financial office in the parish, and he became a schoolteacher and itinerant guitar player as well as a miller. But poor Menocchio couldn't go on indefinitely passing up chances to favour his townmen with his opinions. Little by little he got careless.

He dared to mention in the marketplace that the Gospels were false, Jesus had been only a mortal man, the clergy were all parasites and God was neither a creator nor a trinity but everything in the natural world. Soon his blasphemies reached the capacious ears of the inquisitor and Menocchio was arrested. Fifteen years had passed since his first trial by the Inquisition. Menocchio was an old man now and tried to submit to the authorities, but his passion for speculative thought was too much for him. Once again he was found guilty, but this time, as he was a recidivist, he was burned at the stake.

Professor Ginzburg uses this story, interesting in itself, to support his hypothesis that in preindustrial Europe there was a flourishing peasant culture quite apart from the culture of the dominant classes of society. In spite of the systematic repression of this peasant culture in Catholic countries, there were complex and reciprocal influences between the two cultures. The evidence is intriguing, and it is greatly to Professor Ginzburg's credit that he does not read more into it than is justified.

SARAH LAWSON

REVIEWS

EVOLUTION FROM SPACE by Fred Hoyle and N. C. Wickramasinghe. Dent £7.95.

Sir Fred Hoyle and Professor Chandra Wickramasinghe have gained a well-earned reputation in their own chosen field; they have also gained a well-earned reputation for their excursions into other people's fields. There is a qualitative difference between these two brands of reputation. This review is concerned with their entry into the field of organic evolution.

It is not their first attempt; they recently put forward a modified Erich von Daniken theory to explain life on Earth. Their theory, developed further in the present volume, *Evolution From Space*, coincidentally catching the popular market as evolution is a topic of conversation and heated debate among biologists, and when the so-called "scientific creationists" are winning some major successes in the United States as well as in the Natural History Museum, London, here come Fred Hoyle and N. C. Wickramasinghe proclaiming that on scientific grounds there must be a god—"a giant silicon chip in the sky".

The argument that they use to come to this conclusion is part of the stock-in-trade of the creationists which any biology student can see through with very little effort. They claim that the odds against life arising by random processes are so astronomical, one is forced to postulate the existence of a cosmic intelligence.

Since the time of Charles Darwin the concept of evolution has become firmly rooted. There are two basic aspects; one is the historical record that evolution has taken place, descent with modification; the other was the idea of natural selection based on the recognition that more offspring are born than survive to produce the next generation. Unlike the activities of animal and plant breeders, this selection is natural, not artificial, hence the term "natural selection". With any range of features in a population, the changes that occur in the environment will act as a filter, so that changes which appear as one generation succeeds another will, in hindsight, give an appearance of having followed a direction. Changes may be random, but natural selection channels them.

If we start with the chemical elements, their characteristics are a consequence of the number of electrons in their outer shells which determine their fundamental features. Take the carbon atom—

with four electrons in the outer shell it becomes stable when a further four are attached. The simplest way for this to be accomplished is when four hydrogens attached to produce the gas methane. Strings of carbon atoms with attached hydrogens form fairly readily—and these substances are the hydrocarbons. The fundamental properties of the elements lead to the synthesis of long chain polymers, given the right environmental parameters. Playing the Hoyle random game, the odds against this happening by random collisions would be astronomical. An elementary knowledge of chemistry removes much of the mystery.

What is far more serious is the way in which Hoyle and Wickramasinghe have leapt onto the current anti-evolution bandwagon with utter disregard of the mass of data that has accumulated over recent decades relating to the origin of life. One can only imagine it is some kind of deliberate perversity. This reviewer finds it incredible that the authors are completely ignorant of the experiments of Miller and Urey in the 1950s and of Sidney Fox more recently. Every schoolboy has heard of the Miller experiment in which an electric discharge through a mixture of ammonia, carbon dioxide, and steam resulted in the formation of complex organic molecules: amino acids—the building blocks of proteins. Certainly every popular book for young people gives an account of these epoch making experiments. Can the authors have been so cloistered for three decades not to have come across this?

Surely it cannot be that they did know of the Miller and Fox experiments and deliberately chose to ignore them, to pretend they had never happened, and by the sin of omission to have set out deliberately to mislead their readers by presenting a case unsullied by the existence of contrary evidence? One would not have expected such a thing of such gentlemen, hence there must be some other explanation. One cannot help wondering what it might be. Their ignorance of the fossil record is equally stupefying, having swallowed uncritically the latest trendy views against Darwin's gradualism.

They write: "Species change in jumps, not in small steps. They go from one mountain summit to another by way of a helicopter provided by a supply of cosmic genes." What can one say about such embarrassing stuff? Only echo J.K. Stephen?

Two voices are there : one is of the deep
And one is of an old half-witted sheep.
Forth from the heart of thy melodious rhymes
The form and pressure of high thoughts will burst :
At other times—good Lord! I'd rather be
Quite unacquainted with the ABC
Than write such hopeless rubbish as thy worst.

BEVERLY HALSTEAD

THEATRE

SUMMER by Edward Bond. The Cottesloe Theatre at the National Theatre, London

Edward Bond is a rare dramatist who always retains a firm hold on the human and political dimension of life, on the everyday and the historical perspective of humanity. In *Summer*, a flat on the sea shore of an Eastern European country becomes a meeting point for Marthe, a dying woman with memories of appalling war-time deaths, and Xenia, an exiled landowner's daughter with imperishable love of her childhood seascape and lingering pride and guilt, and their children, David and Ann, summer lovers.

Marthe, who is dying of terminal cancer, was a servant to Xenia in the old political order; her life was saved when her mistress asked for her release after she was one of several hundred hostages taken by the Germans during the war to be killed on a nearby island. She feels she is dying a second time—and faces death with a truly humanist distaste for eternity and respect for life: "How could you find anything beautiful if you looked at it forever? . . . Why fall in love if it lasts forever? . . . No one could bear more than one life. . . Without death there's no life. No beauty or love or happiness. . ."

Memories of the atrocities of war-time are intensified by an exchange with a German tourist on the beach. He had been a soldier responsible for many deaths and had loved the young Xenia, as the distant landowner's daughter dressed in white. (The German tourist is the least convincing character.)

There is no escape from the past. Xenia insists upon the kindness of her patrician family, but in an intense exchange with Marthe, the night before her death, the conflict and corruption of the past force their longstanding antagonism into the open. Kindness, Bond implies, is not enough. Individual goodness is useless in the face of a crooked system. (He rather skates over the potential crookedness of the new order in this abstract people's republic.)

Anna Massey's sharp, distressed Xenia and Yvonne Bryceland's tired, humane, agonised Marthe captured the audience in a deeply moving play. The two young lovers seemed rather forced, especially in a homage to fertility at a time of death. The play is written in lines of arresting directness that linger in the mind, although giving conversations a slightly unreal quality at times. *Summer* is produced with poetic intensity and simplicity by Bond himself. It is a play which will appeal to those who share its essential concern for mercy and justice.

JIM HERRICK

TELEVISION

CHOICES, BBC 1

This new Sunday evening programme started off with a bang. The format was a panel of commentators—three minor public figures in the first of the series—whose job was to discuss the propositions put forward, and Libby Purves chairing the discussion with a refreshingly rare objectivity.

The sole woman on the panel, Clair Rayner, confessed to being an agnostic. She certainly seemed able to see two sides to both the questions discussed, which were: "That religion is harmful and should not be practised or propagated in schools", and "That killing for sport is immoral".

The two male panellists who dealt with these reasonable and humane motions either sat on the fence (Gerald Priestland, BBC Religious Affairs Correspondent), or violently opposed them (John Selwyn Gummer, the Tory MP with a Wodehousian name whom I have previously had the misfortune of hearing, I fancy, airing his ultra-Right prejudices in sham fights radio listeners occasionally encounter in the "Any Questions" programme).

But there was no sham fighting in Miss Purves's programme. She had lined up the redoubtable Barbara Smoker, who will doubtless forgive the pun if I say how thoroughly she flummoxed Mr Priestland and gummed up Mr Gummer. The latter emerged from his reactionary entrenchment and positively had the nerve to suggest that because he had the right to send his children to schools where religion was taught, such a state of affairs should be part of every school's syllabus—irrespective of whether the parents and ratepayers are Buddhists, Muslims or followers of any other, or no, religious faith at all.

Miss Rayner looked dubious, Mr Priestland was quietly ill at ease and Miss Purves moved on to less tendentious matters—those that concerned "all God's creatures great and small". But even here the irrepressible Mr Gummer seemed to think—despite considerable evidence to the contrary—that there was too much exaggeration by supporters of anti-blood sports campaigners. He seemed to imply (by a rare lack of imagination for at least some of "God's creatures") that it was good sport for men and women. Surely that is all that mattered. But was it? But is it? Why not call such "sport" by its real name, entertainment for sadists, and have done with it?

Altogether a disturbing programme for what it all too often revealed.

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This production—written, devised and narrated by Kenneth Griffiths—was a red letter achievement for the BBC and world television in general. It was a programme so rich in texture, so liberal in spirit and so brave in conception, that it proved worthy of its subject.

The actual life of Thomas Paine was more intensely dramatic than any other of his day. And if its television adaptation had a fault, it was a desire to embellish and embroider the stuff of real life drama in order to press points home that were already apparent to the majority of adult viewers.

Few other reservations need to be attached to a critical appraisal of its merit; a major credit to all concerned. Its director scored for a warm understanding of his theme; the photographer for such stunning pictures of the times; those at graphics for selecting "still" portraits and cartoons so stunningly shot; a scriptwriter whose brain child this so clearly was.

Judged by any standards, I shall be surprised if *The Most Valuable Englishman* does not come in as the Most Important Programme of 1982 when the awards are ladled out at the end of this year.

Thomas Paine, born at Thetford, Norfolk, was a man for all nations because he was a friend of all humanity. To do him justice in a 90-minute profile, even in a film of such steely delicacy as this, might seem an impossibility. But the production took in filming abroad—in Boston, New York, Washington, Philadelphia and Paris, thereby covering the most important incidents from his birth in 1739 until his death some 72 years later.

I liked what the presenter said about those early years, but resented the manner in which he said it—too jumpy and hysterical, one felt; and "melodramatics", if they had to come, were premature. But although I thought "confound the actor", at this juncture, when he was depicting Our Hero, my early doubt and resentments were soon dispelled as the television film swung into its stride.

This gentle crusader, whose pen was his sword, was one of the first trade unionists and "feminists" before he ever set sail from England. He gave the United States its "Statement" in *Common Sense*, and France the aims and objects of its Revolution through his *Rights of Man*. In Lewes, Sussex, he lived for some years, before he was 30, fighting for the rights of his fellow-excisenen. In America, his struggle against the slave trade was said to have influenced Abraham Lincoln; whilst the great American Declaration of Independence owed its authorship to him. "Whoever may have written the Constitution of Independence, Tom Paine was its author," observed Mr Griffiths quoting Cobbett.

Although the world has for so long been in Paine's debt, there is a curious gap concerning him

in the history books. When discussed, for the most part, he is even today reviled. And certainly the treatment meted out to him in his lifetime by the governments of Britain, America and France was deplorable. "My religion is to do good", said Paine; for such men, life, with its many and varied superstitions, is never easy.

There was much fast cutting from one sequence to another, as the narrator here entered and there exited, putting on and taking off many overcoats on the way—all the way. But what mattered in the long run? Not method, so much as overall fidelity to the subject's heart. The sum result was an enhancement of pleasure; an enlightenment for our neglected education concerning one of the world's greatest freethinkers. It served to dignify a type of entertainment too often meretricious with its lack of style and outpourings of trash.

The only previous production I can recall that dealt with Paine was done in such an inept and pretentious manner by the La Mama Group — a fringe theatre company from New York which played in the West End in the early 70s — that, before the advent of this television presentation, I had feared the worst. But whereas the stage "theatricals" showed off at Paine's expense to those who had either no knowledge, or only the merest acquaintance with his writings, Griffiths took as his medium—to get to the greatest audience in the country—an art form not previously noted for its efforts to ventilate the truth about "the best of causes".

By so doing, Griffiths has encouraged still further that interest in Paine's works that has hitherto been left to the efforts of solitary individuals like Christopher Brunel in England and valiant Thomas Paine societies dotted about the world. There was a deservedly long list of credits, and without wishing to carp or deal in non-essentials, I missed seeing the names of certain Paineites who help to keep his name alive, some of whom the producers of this film must have researched at one time or another.

Moncure Conway's *Life* springs to mind, as does Chapman Cohen's masterly introduction to *The Age of Reason*. Both, a treasure trove for the makers of this searching television tribute to the author of *Common Sense*, *The Crisis*, *Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance*, *Agrarian Justice* and, arguably, the finest achievement of them all, *The Age of Reason*.

Paine moved from country to country; if failing to move mountains, he succeeded in changing political systems. His works were noble declarations upon which governments were founded. His sayings have gone into the common language of democratic utterance.

It has been said of Bernard Shaw that his prefaces were superior (and far more far reaching in the effect) to his enjoyable plays. Paine, unlike Shaw,

did not write prefaces to his works. But 125 years after he died, *The Freethinker's* own Pioneer Press had the benefit of a preface by the paper's then Editor to its printing of *The Age of Reason*. This still stands as the best written introduction of them all to *The Most Valuable Englishman Ever*.

PETER COTES

LETTERS

CHURCH MICE

I would like to think that Barry Duke ("Encircling Gloom: the Festival of Light Ten Years On", February) is correct in thinking that there are some "better adjusted and more tolerant" Christians who regard the Nationwide Festival of Light, Mary Whitehouse and assorted allies as "an affront and embarrassment to their kind of faith". My own experience is that such Christians are conspicuous by their absence—or, at any rate, their silence—and I am beginning to wonder whether they may not be a figment of Barry Duke's charitable imagination.

Most dismaying, to me, is the total and continuing failure of any spokespersons of the Anglican hierarchy to rebuke even the worst of the NFoL/Whitehouse brigade's incessant, intolerant and Pharisical utterances. Like the Holmesian dog that was silent in the night, not a single bishop or Church House functionary has barked at the blasphemy prosecution or at the malevolent evangelical attacks upon homosexuals and other disadvantaged minorities. Indeed, as you report elsewhere in the same issue, Archbishop Runcie, hiding behind Mrs Whitehouse's petticoats, now seeks to refurbish and extend the preposterous blasphemy laws.

It is possible, I suppose, that part of the reason lies in the political balance of forces in the Church of England, and the powerful evangelical lobby in Synod. But I cannot help having a sneaking suspicion that even "modernist" Christians feel themselves beleaguered by atheism nowadays, and instinctively feel that they have more in common with the Festival of Light's "fellow-soldiers in Christ"—even if a trifle misguided at times—than with Godless humanists, however tolerant, reasonable and socially concerned.

It would be nice to see a refutation to this letter from some reputable Anglican source—but somehow I don't expect that you will receive one!

ANTONY GREY

FREE THOUGHTS ABOUT CATHOLICS

In "Catholics and Crime" ("News and Notes", January) Catholics were described as "the docile majority". Is this a true description when most Catholics defy their Church's teaching on birth control?

It is true that a large number of Catholics go to church when they are told to do so, but in the area of sexual morality most of them are freethinkers. Heterosexual Catholics favour birth control and some gay Catholics are organising.

With reference to the description of Pope John Paul II as reactionary, I have been very critical of him until recent months. But he has been doing all in his power to warn the people and governments of the world of the threat of nuclear warfare.

JOHN WATSON

OBJECTIONS TO PORNOGRAPHY

Terry Little writes that "radical feminists regard sex as a male chauvinist plot to enslave women" ("Sex Shop Censorship", January).

"Love Sex—Hate Sexism" is a feminist slogan. What they object to in pornography is that it portrays women as objects to be used and disposed of by men, reinforcing their attitude towards women. There are non-oppressive ways of having a sexual relationship.

ROGER LEWIS

HITLER AND THE CHURCH

R. J. Condon's excellent letter in the January issue mentions that "Hitler lived and died a Catholic in good standing with his Church".

I cannot believe this to be true. I remember his rise to power 50 years ago, and until his death in 1945 he showed no signs of being or practising as a Catholic. His suicide hardly confirms Mr Condon's view.

P. M. RAMBAUT

World Freethought at Lausanne

Lavanam, from the Atheist Centre in India (on a globe-trotting tour to promote positive atheism), described the position in India. He said that Asia was moving towards a post-religious society. Although the East was thought of as a place of gods and superstitions, it also had a modern atheist movement to offer. Atheism had been present in ancient India, and from the old and modern tradition came agitation for separation of church and culture and for social development.

On the final morning of the Congress motions were passed calling for disarmament and redistribution of resources for the development of social justice in the Third World, and for opposition to the claims of the Catholic Church (like all other religions) with its modern style but traditional intransigence of dogma.

At the conclusion of the Congress those present went to the Park of Valency in Lausanne where a wreath was laid on the memorial to August Forel (1848-1931) to commemorate the 50th anniversary of his death. Forel was a famous Swiss scientist, renowned for his research into the social organisation of ants. He was also a psychiatrist, sociologist and apostle of anti-alcoholism. He was a freethinker who abandoned religion at the age of 16, and developed a "universal, lucid and generous" freethought philosophy which he proclaimed throughout his life. His attitude to women's rights and his belief in sexual education for young people were ahead of his time. One of his ideals was a universal language which could reduce human conflict.

One of the advantages of international congresses is the knowledge it brings of distinguished freethinkers, such as Forel, not always as widely known as they should be. Britain has previously played an active role in WUF which was called the International Federation of Freethought when founded in 1880 with Charles Bradlaugh and Herbert Spencer

present.

The name was changed in 1936 when an important congress in Prague saw enormous arguments over the extent to which a world freethought movement should be politically involved in the struggle against fascism. That congress was fully reported in *The Freethinker* by Charles Bradlaugh Bonner, who was himself to become President of WUF. Sadly, on the last occasion on which the Congress was held in London (1966), Charles Bradlaugh Bonner died. Links between Britain and WUF have not been close in recent years, but in the age of international communication and the world as "a global village" let us hope that worldwide links of British freethinkers can be strengthened in the future.

A most relaxed moment of the Congress took place at a reception in a house which Voltaire had visited. While living on the outskirts of Geneva, Voltaire had put on performances of his own plays at his house in Lausanne. Voltaire was the most international of campaigners, fighting intolerance, injustice, superstition and fanaticism in all corners of Europe. Such internationalism and energy should be an inspiration and example for the future of the World Union of Freethinkers.

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. York Hotel, Botanic Avenue, Belfast. Thursday, 15 April, 8 pm Tape and slide presentation: "Living as a Humanist".

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Queen's Head, Queen's Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 4 April, 5.30 pm. Professor James Sang: "Darwinism—100 Years After Darwin".

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

Harrow Humanist Society. The Library, Gayton Road, Harrow. Wednesday, 10 March, 8 pm. Professor Fremlin: "Practical Problems of Conservation".

Humanist Holidays. Easter 1982. Explore the Gower Peninsula; stay at hotel on Swansea sea front, 7-14 April. Details from Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12; telephone 01-673 6234.

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Swarthmore Institute, 4 Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Tuesday, 9 March, 7.45 pm. C. Mack: "The Scientific Origins of Religion".

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, 25 March, 7.45 pm. Daphne Davies: "Ivan Illich on Today's Problems".

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

London Young Humanists. Adams Arms, 4 Conway Street, London W1. Sunday, 21 March, 8 pm. Leah Levin: "Contemporary Slavery".

Merseyside Humanist Group. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. Friday, 19 March, 7.45 pm. Molly Goldsworthy: "The Place of Voluntary Organisations in Caring for the Mentally Ill".

Muswell Hill Humanist Group. 30 Archibald Road, London N7. Wednesday, 24 March, 8.15 pm. The Social Democratic Party.

Scottish Humanist Council. Annual Conference at the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, Saturday, 24 April, 10 am-5 pm. Details from Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Details of activities obtainable from Roy Saich, 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth; telephone Kenilworth 58450.

Worthing Humanist Group. Trades Club, Broadwater Road, Worthing. Sunday, 28 March, 5.30 pm. John White: "A Celebration of Life and Humanity in Prose and Poetry".

PUBLIC MEETING

to commemorate the Centenary
of Charles Darwin's death

Speakers:

BEVERLY HALSTEAD
JOHN MAYNARD SMITH

Chair:

BARBARA SMOKER

MONDAY, 26 APRIL, 7 pm

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
London WC1

Organised by the National Secular Society
702 Holloway Road, London N19
Telephone: 01-272 1266

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

ANNUAL DINNER

Speakers include:

LARRY ADLER
JAMES CAMERON
CAROLINE WOODROFFE
BARBARA SMOKER

SATURDAY 27 MARCH 1982,
6.30 pm for 7 pm

The Pavilions Arms, Page Street, Westminster,
London SW1.

Vegetarians catered for.

Tickets £7.50 each

From National Secular Society, 702 Holloway
Road, London N19. Telephone 01-272 1266.

"Blasphemy" Editor Leaves *Gay News*

Denis Lemon has relinquished the editorship of *Gay News* which he founded ten years ago. It is reported that he is working on ideas for a new magazine about the arts and lifestyles for a general readership.

Widely admired for his professionalism and enterprise, Denis Lemon built up *Gay News* from modest beginnings to a journal of international standing. Writer Francis King believes that during his ten years at *Gay News* Denis Lemon "made only one grave error of judgement. That was to have accepted a bad poem from a good poet".

The bad poem was James Kirkup's *The Love That Dares to Speak its Name*. Mary Whitehouse, an authority on poetry, made a grave error of judgement by initiating a prosecution for blasphemous libel. She was cheered on by evangelical nuts, encouraged by the Archbishop of Canterbury and assisted by the Crown.

Denis Lemon was tried at the Old Bailey in July 1977 before Judge King-Hamilton, President of the West London Synagogue. He attracted considerable public support. British people don't like narks, particularly when they resort to using obsolete laws. *Gay News* readers rallied around and saved the paper from financial ruin (which many still regard as being the real object of the prosecution).

While members of the jury were out considering their verdict a group of pious Christians were

huddled in prayer. Their prayers were answered. Denis Lemon was found guilty. The *Gay News* trial sparked off a controversy about blasphemy law that is still raging. Denis Lemon was recognised to be a person of far greater courage and integrity than any of his squalid attackers.

Freethinker Fund

Although the Centenary Appeal closed at the end of 1981 the *Freethinker* Fund carries on. It is gratifying to record that readers continue to send donations, particularly at a time when costs are increasing yet again.

Thanks are expressed to the latest list of contributors. Anonymous, £25; J. Ancliffe, £2; N. G. Baguley, £3; E. Barnes, £1; N. J. Barnes, £1; Belfast Humanist Group, £2; I. G. Bond, £1; P. W. Brook, £27; P. Brown, £2; L. C. Clarke, £2; M. Clowes, £5; F. Crang, £1; A. Crowle, £3; A. C. Fancett, £2; D. Goldstick, \$2; E. A. C. Goodman, £2; L. B. Halstead, £2; H. C. Harding, £2; E. M. Hay, £3; F. Howard, £2; F. C. Hoy, £2; E. C. Hughes, £3; M. D. Jeeps, £2; I. Liebowitz, 50p; E. J. Little, £7; R. McQueen, 50p; E. A. Morris, £1; J. S. Murray, £3; E. A. Napper, £3; P. S. Neilson, £3; L. Patel, £2; G. B. Stowell, £7; U. K. Trapar, £3; R. J. M. Tolhurst, £5; J. Vallance, £7; M. A. Webster, £2; C. R. Wilshaw, £3.

Total for the period 1 January until 2 February 1982: £142 and \$2.

Religious Charlatans Wreck Lives

"I expect the cost to the tax-payer for a bed in a psychiatric unit to be in the region of £200 per week. As a registered charity the UC does not pay tax and is therefore completely unaccountable for the welfare of its members who have given their all to serve the movement."

We trust that the tragic story of John Freeland is sent to the Charity Commissioners and the DHSS. It should also make academics like Professor Antony Flew, of Reading University, not far from Rowlane Farmhouse, consider their position.

Professor Flew has attended Moonie conferences in Seoul and Hawaii. He is probably attracted to the Unification Church's extreme Right-wing political stance. But an academic of his status, who is also Vice-President of the Rationalist Press Association, should note a comment in *Biologist*, journal of the Institute of Biology: "Academics have, amongst other responsibilities, the duty to safeguard the well-being of the young people who study at their universities, a duty we believe those who accept Unification Church largesse are patently failing to fulfil".

Spiritualist Ghouls Prey on Disaster Families

Widows of men who died in the Penlee lifeboat disaster are being pestered by mediums claiming to be in touch with the dead. They have received letters and telephone calls telling them where to find bodies still lost at sea.

A spokesman for Penzance police described the activities of such cranks as "sick". Superintendent John Allen said: "They describe in great detail the position in which the body is lying. The women have been terribly distressed by this.

"We can't do anything because none of these self-styled mediums has actually committed a criminal offence".

Eight men from the village of Mousehole, in Cornwall, died when their lifeboat was wrecked six days before Christmas.