

# The Freethinker

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## BARRAGE OF CHRISTIAN BIGOTRY AWAITS JOHN PAUL II

"We feel that your anti-social views cannot go unchallenged", the organisation People Opposing Papal Edicts (POPE) has told John Paul II in an open letter on the occasion of his visit to Britain. The Pope is reminded of his recent denunciation of family planning. His attitude on this question is described as "the most harmful of your Church's policies". It is not only Roman Catholics who are harmed by the Pope's enthusiasm for other people breeding. In the Third World, some 17 million children die of starvation every year. "You state, without evidence, that environmentalists exaggerate the problem of over-population. But even if that were so, the situation would still be horrific".

POPE informs John Paul II that in Britain more than 30 per cent of the induced abortions are carried out each year on Roman Catholics, who comprise 12 per cent of the population. The taboo on contraception is the main reason for this situation.

"You bear some of the responsibility. . . However strongly you denounce abortion, you cannot escape this responsibility, and you should not be left in ignorance of the social consequences of your edicts".

Secularist comment on the Pope's visit has been restrained and confined to consideration of his harmful social teachings. This is in marked contrast to the strident clamour emanating from his fellow-Christians in Protestant churches and groups. Their malevolence is based on religious fanaticism and theological quibbles.

An Orange Order march in London last month attracted far fewer supporters than its organisers hoped for. It would have been a thin turn-out without the contingent from Scotland who had been involved in drunken, rowdy scenes on the train bringing them to London. Judging by their comments on the BBC religious programme, *Sunday*, Orange hatemongers could aptly be described as

the Ku Klux Klan in kilts.

*The Reformer*, journal of the Protestant Alliance, has urged its readers to pray that the Pope's visit will not take place. They are encouraged by the biblical assurance, "The effectual fervent Prayer of a righteous man availeth much", and warned that "the volume of earnest prayer that he will be pre-



Tony Dallas

vented from coming must increase".

The Rev George Ashdown, Secretary of the Protestant Alliance, warns that if the visit takes place, "it will be a dreadful judgement on us nationally". He also urges prayers that the Pope will not come to Britain. But the "effective fervent Prayer" of

(continued on back page)

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# NEWS

## FALKLAND FOLLY

"We arrived early in the morning at Port Louis, the most eastern point of the Falkland Islands. The first news we received was to our astonishment that England had taken possession of the Falkland Islands and that the flag was now flying". Thus wrote Charles Darwin in his diary, 1 March 1833, when the *Beagle* called at the Falkland Islands. Those were the heady days of Empire, when great powers regarded themselves as having divine right to occupy any island, hoist their flag and lay claim to it.

Representatives of all the political parties at Westminster have been huffing and puffing mightily over the Falklands issue. Together with the gutter Press they endeavoured, with little effect, to arouse the nation to a state of war hysteria. Some of Fleet Street's more jingoistic hacks appeared to be gratified when the shooting commenced in the South Atlantic. But the nation has been curiously unresponsive; it is difficult to get worked up about an occupied pile of bird droppings 8,000 miles away.

Needless to say Church leaders got in on the act. The Archbishop of Canterbury's smarmy prayers for peace made the flesh creep. Cardinal Hume was concerned that if war broke out the Pope's visit to Britain would be cancelled.

The Government's claim that President Galtieri embarked on the Falklands adventure to divert attention from his country's economic and social problems was disingenuous. Of course no one knows better than Mrs Thatcher's party the usefulness of flag-waving and parades. The Falkland issue has been simmering for years and the Argentine action was not all that surprising. No doubt Galtieri is relieved that the people of his country are being diverted from serious domestic issues. Mrs Thatcher is probably feeling the same way. At a time when there are three million unemployed and her Government is pushing through a programme of asset-stripping, cuts in expenditure on social services and attacks on the education system, Mrs Thatcher need not be too unhappy about the Falkland diversion.

The Prime Minister's concern for human rights in Argentina was particularly nauseating. It is no secret that Argentina is ruled by a military dictatorship that has murdered thousands of trade unionists, academics and political opponents. Mrs Thatcher has said little if anything about this previously. The main reason for her silence has been that Argentina, like other Right-wing dictatorships in Latin America,

# S AND NOTES

is heavily backed by the United States whose puppet-strings reach to 10 Downing Street.

British firms, with enthusiastic support from the Government, have sold vast quantities of armaments to Argentina. So long as the weapons were used against the people of that country it was a case of turning Nelson's Eye as far as politicians and manufacturers were concerned. The possibility that the weapons might one day be turned on British forces was a secondary consideration when huge profits were to be made from the sale of armaments.

Mrs Thatcher has been trumpeting her insistence that the wishes of the Falkland Islanders must take precedence over all other considerations. She knows the likely reaction to change by an isolated community where a strong settler mentality has prevailed for generations. Their attachment to Britain is based on sentimental pride and delusions about the Mother Country. The situation in Northern Ireland — which cannot be resolved while the wishes of the Protestant minority are regarded as sacrosanct — should be a warning against allowing the tail to wag the dog.

Changed circumstances will force the Falkland Islanders to consider their position and face reality. They have little to show for hard work, primitive living conditions and loyalty to Britain. The large farms have been acquired by absentee landlords with few inhabitants owning any more land than the dirt under their finger-nails. If Argentina should propose a programme of reform, offering the land on a co-operative or long-lease basis to the islanders, their ardour for the British connection may be cooled.

War games are dangerous. It is absurd to risk a major confrontation over the remnants of an Empire that was acquired by aggression.

## ALL FOR JESUS

A 35-year-old Welsh preacher has made what many would regard as the supreme sacrifice for Christianity. Roger Cox, who lives in a village near Denbigh, prayed with his wife Elizabeth while he cut off his penis in the kitchen of their home. He threw it on the fire before being taken to hospital for emergency treatment.

Mr Cox, father of eight, later said: "I have always desired to serve my Lord as best I can without distraction. I prayed for this to come about. For the past 12 years my wife and I have discussed

the possibility of my becoming a eunuch".

His wife fully supported her husband's decision. Both belong to a Christian group. She added: "We've had eight children and we want to go on to different things. My husband wants to give the Lord 100 per cent service".

They confirmed that the DIY operation was carried out in accordance with St Matthew's Gospel, chapter 19, verse 12: "Jesus said 'Some men are born eunuchs, some men are made eunuchs by men, and some men make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake'". Rumours in the locality that he was threatening to perform the same operation on his children were denounced by Mr Cox as "evil gossip".

Mr Cox travels around the country in his own double decker bus preaching the gospel. He claims to have the power of healing.

## BUREAUCRATS RAPPED

The Local Government Ombudsman's ruling in favour of a widow who challenged the right of officials to dictate the wording of an inscription in the Book of Remembrance at Honor Oak Crematorium, South London, is a small but significant victory for civil liberty. Mrs Pauline Robinson was told that she could not use the word "communist" to describe her husband as it denied the religion of a Christian society. But councillors responsible for running the municipally owned crematorium have been told that it was "surely the right of all individuals in a free society to record their own tribute to the deceased". They have accepted the verdict of maladministration and apologised to Mrs Robinson.

It is disgraceful that Mrs Robinson was forced to take the case to the Ombudsman. A Marxist state that prohibited the display of religious epitaphs would rightly be denounced by Christians in this country for denial of human rights. Can they not recognise when the boot is on the other foot?

Crematoria and their chapels receive no financial support from the churches. In fact the older ones were built in the teeth of religious opposition. After losing the battle for the acceptance of cremation, as with most social reforms, the Christian churches behave as though they have exclusive rights to it.

Many crematoria chapels, although they are for the use of the whole community and maintained by the ratepayers, have a large cross fixed behind the catafalque. It often cannot be removed without difficulty. One crematorium superintendent recently made tentative enquiries about covering the cross during non-Christian funerals, but C of E representatives refused to countenance the proposal as though they owned the place. One of the two chapels at a Sussex crematorium (also owned by the

local authority) is reserved for Church of England services.

No one wants to deprive Christians of the right to display crosses or other symbols at their funerals. But these should be removable and not forced on those who do not want them. Crematorium officials should accept the wishes of the bereaved family in respect of epitaphs, music and non-religious ceremonies.

A number of civil liberty organisations have sponsored a statement condemning what they describe as the current "law and order" campaign. It has been sent to the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and the Minister for Race Relations. Sponsoring groups include the National Council for Civil Liberties, the Runnymede Trust and the Anti-Nazi League.

## EXIT AFTERMATH

Nicholas Reed, former general Secretary of EXIT, the voluntary euthanasia organisation, has lost his appeal against conviction for aiding and abetting suicides. But the sentence of two-and-a-half years' imprisonment has been reduced to 18 months.

After the trial of Nicholas Reed and Mark Lyons last year, EXIT issued a statement affirming that its primary aim remains the achievement of a change in the law, "so that everyone in Britain will have the right to medical help to secure an easy death if his or her life became intolerable because of incurable or incapacitating illness. There must be safeguards to ensure that the decision has been made after full consideration by the persons concerned".

"The legalisation of voluntary euthanasia is especially important for those who are too handicapped or too ill to take steps to end their own lives. The longer this change in the law is delayed, the more will people be driven by their compassion for the suffering into breaking the law, and in particular the law against aiding and abetting a suicide as it now stands".

This affair should be a salutary lesson to those who undertake the responsibility for running an organisation. The trial was a serious blow to the cause of voluntary euthanasia. Work over many years by devoted if largely unknown supporters was undone. Others will now have to pick up the pieces.

Nicholas Reed's dedication and energy could not be questioned. But his judgement in enlisting the services of his co-defendant was almost unbelievably inept. People contemplating suicide need guidance

by skilled and sensitive counsellors. They appealed to EXIT for help and were later confronted by the bizarre figure of Mark Lyons.

Nicholas Reed and his parents are deserving of our sympathy. The strain of a long Old Bailey trial, culminating in a harsh prison sentence now partly upheld by the Court of Appeal, was a distressing experience. It is to be hoped that when Nicholas Reed leaves Ford Open Prison in October he will secure a position in which his considerable talent and ability will be used to the full.

## DE-BAPTISM FORMS

Inspired by ex-Roman Catholic secularists in Belgium who recently sent signed declarations of de-baptism to their local bishops, the National Secular Society has prepared de-baptism declaration forms for the use of ex-RCs in this country in connection with the Pope's visit. Since the pastoral theme of the visit is the seven sacraments, the first of which is baptism, the NSS will collect duplicate signed copies of the de-baptism declaration for delivery to the Papal Nunciature in Wimbledon before the Pope's arrival there.

Two copies of the de-baptism declaration form together with a plastic tabard bearing the slogans, "Birth Control—Not Mind Control" and "Banning the Pill Leaves Famine to Kill", form part of an "RC Pack" being advertised by the NSS at 50p.

The wording of the de-baptism form is as follows:  
*I, ....., having been baptised in the Roman Catholic Church against my consent, before reaching an age of discretion, hereby revoke that baptism, renounce that Church, and reject its Creed. I object to the label "lapsed Catholic", since I have not apathetically "lapsed" from the faith—I have, after due deliberation, renounced it. Moreover, I wish to be excluded from future Roman Catholic statistical claims except for the statistics of apostasy. Signed..... Date.....*

Further information is obtainable from the National Secular Society, 702 Holloway Road, London N19, telephone 01-272 1266.

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# Romans Won—Whitehouse Nil

DAVID WEBB

In this article a professional actor, who is also Founder and Organiser of the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts, examines the background to "The Romans in Britain" trial. He asserts that Court time and public money spent on this debacle would have been saved if the Attorney General had intervened before the proceedings reached the Old Bailey.

for herself, Mrs Mary Whitehouse, CBE (Crown Bigot Extraordinary?) straightaway reported it to the police, alleging that it was "obscene" and demanding their investigation. The 1968 Theatres Act incorporates the same legal definition of "obscenity"—the ludicrous "deprave and corrupt" test—as that used in the 1959 Obscene Publications Act, notwithstanding that it is impossible to assess and thus to prove. This must also be the case, of course, when applied to theatrical performances. The Attorney General certainly appeared to think so, since he refused to give his required consent for the play to be prosecuted. Furthermore, he refused to allow Mrs Whitehouse to prosecute privately. She was furious.

I saw the play myself on 24 October 1980. On leaving the theatre I gave a filmed interview for the BBC television programme *Newsnight*, stating my views on the play and Whitehouse's interference. I went home to watch it. However, whereas my interview was completely omitted, one with the interfering lady was transmitted. It had been filmed outside the theatre whilst we were inside watching. She had been specially brought up from her Colchester home and stated, categorically, that she had no intention of seeing the play for herself. Her efforts to censor the National Theatre may, at that time, have been floundering, but the BBC was presumably much more of a push-over.

## An Evening at the National

I had no intention of being gagged by the Whitehouse Mafia and decided to give her a taste of her own medicine. On 27 October, therefore, I wrote to Sir Thomas Hetherington, the Director of Public Prosecutions, and asked him to institute legal proceedings against her for wasting police time by reporting a play as obscene which she had never even seen. He replied the next day saying that he had just advised the Metropolitan Police Commissioner that proceedings against the play would not be justified. In other words, it had not infringed the Theatres Act and the law had not been broken. However, he declined to act on my suggestion that she herself should be prosecuted. When he refused to reconsider, I asked him to give his consent for me to prosecute her privately, his consent being required under the Criminal Law Act of 1967. He would not do so. Love all, thus far.

The production continued playing its scheduled performances in repertoire, the management and director happy in the knowledge that it was not unlawful and that the Whitehouse-orchestrated hysteria would soon abate. Mrs Whitehouse's bitter humiliation at the hands of as eminent a member of the Establishment as the Attorney General was not,

Crippen, Thompson and Bywaters, Christie, acid bath murderer Heath and the Yorkshire Ripper had all been tried there. The setting was the notorious No 1 Court, the venue the Old Bailey and the date 15 March 1982. This time it was the turn of the boyish-looking, uncomplicated face of one Michael Bogdanov to appear in that chilling dock. His alleged crime? The particularly heinous one of directing a stage play in a way that did not meet with the approval of a lone woman who had not even seen it.

As with the committal proceedings at the magistrates' courts some eight months earlier, there were many occasions throughout this preposterous trial when one felt constrained to give oneself an almighty pinch just to make sure that it was really happening. Of one thing we could all be certain. It could only have happened here. The English were once again indulging their absurd obsession with matters sexual—or, rather more accurately, their absurd obsession with the repression of matters sexual, and, on this occasion, more especially with matters homosexual.

In October 1980, the National Theatre staged a specially commissioned play written by a serious playwright of no mean stature. The furore which followed has already assured *The Romans in Britain* and its author Howard Brenton a place in theatrical history, not because of the lack of critical acclaim it attracted (although, personally, I thought the savage attacks it drew from some critics were very misplaced), but for one tiny, 30-second scene of the simulated, attempted homosexual rape of a naked Celt by an invading Roman soldier in 54 BC.

The first outcry against it came from the then Leader of the Greater London Council, and himself a member of the NT Board, Sir Horace Cutler. He described it as a "disgrace to the stage" and later wreaked his revenge by reducing the GLC's annual grant to the theatre. No, it wasn't censorship, he said. It was just that he didn't think that public money should go to subsidise plays he didn't like.

After his emotive outburst on 16 October 1980, needless to say it was no time at all before the self-styled leader of the nation's Puritan Brigade took over the fray. Without even seeing the performance

alas, to be so easily assuaged. On 19 December 1980, she sent her solicitor, Mr Graham Ross-Cornes, to see the play and "set up" Mr Bogdanov ready for prosecution.

She and her lawyers had scraped the bottom of the legal barrel and came up with the extraordinary "loophole" device of Section 13 of the 1956 Sexual Offences Act, which deals with the so-called "unnatural offences" of indecency between men. Mr Bogdanov was subsequently charged with procuring an act of gross indecency between actors Peter Sproule and Greg Hicks on stage at the Olivier Theatre and also that he was party to the commission of such an act.

The committal proceedings took place at Horseferry Road Magistrates' Court on 29 and 30 June 1981. On behalf of the NCROPA I had organised a placard-carrying demonstration outside the court, fully convinced that the magistrate (Mr Kenneth Harington) would automatically throw out such an absurd allegation, giving Mrs W's knuckles a well-deserved rap in the process, and that would be the end of the matter. In spite of Lord Hutchison QC's submission that the prosecution was "a blatant attempt to circumvent the provisions and safeguards of the Theatres Act" and that there was no case to answer, the misguided magistrate committed it for trial at the Old Bailey and awarded costs for that hearing to Mrs Whitehouse out of public funds.

On 2 July 1981, I wrote to the Attorney General, Sir Michael Havers, to express anger and outrage at the court's decision. What had particularly infuriated me, too, was that, had the Sexual Offences Act been one under which private prosecutions could not proceed without the DPP's permission, there is no doubt in those circumstances, where he had already decided not to prosecute the play himself, he would certainly have refused his permission for this vexatious Whitehouse prosecution. I urged Sir Michael to initiate facilitating legislation immediately, so that this nonsense could never happen again.

### Tricks of the Trade

I was present, in the well of the court, on all four days of the Old Bailey trial. Lord Hutchinson, again acting for Bogdanov, asked Mr Justice Staughton, presiding, not to allow jurors who were members of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, the Festival of Light or the National Front. The judge agreed with the first two exemptions but, since the NF was a political party, not the last. (An NF group had demonstrated during a performance of the play on 7 November 1980, when eggs, flour and a firework were thrown on to the stage and I wrote at the time to Sir David McNee, the Police Commissioner, to ask if the matter was

being investigated and what steps the police were taking "to ensure the safety of both cast and audiences at future performances of this legally permitted play?")

I will not go into minute detail here about the proceedings which followed over the next three-and-a-half days, since they have been given saturation coverage by the media already. There were, however, some priceless moments during the trial. It was a joy to behold the sight of the bespectacled and bewigged Lord Hutchinson demonstrating to Mrs Whitehouse's solicitor how an actor could hold his penis in his hand with his thumb sticking out and give the impression to a member of the audience (especially one sitting some 90 feet away, as was Mr Ross-Cornes on his visit) of a genuine, sexual erection. As was his later attempt to differentiate between real and simulated acts on the stage, by reference to actual urination, which he accepted would be indecent, and staged urination, using the device of a water-pistol stuffed down one's trousers. He was most surprised when Mr Ross-Cornes said that he had never seen that done, although, since the solicitor also said later that he had never seen a performance of *King Lear* either, his ignorance was, perhaps, to be expected.

### Lucky Mr Smith

The first day of the trial consisted of the swearing-in of the jury and the opening of the prosecution's case by Mrs Whitehouse's counsel, Mr Ian Kennedy, QC. Her counsel at the committal proceedings, Mr John Smyth, QC, was apparently ill and unable to appear. Mr Kennedy seemed hesitant and uncertain about the case from the outset. Whether that was because he had taken over the brief at short notice or because of a sense of impending doom, I cannot tell.

In his introductory outline of the rape scene, Mr Kennedy referred to the considerable degree of tension that had been created in the theatre. He then went on to say: "If it continues too long, as long as it would need to in real life, then the impact on the audience would be lost and they would undoubtedly become bored. The moment people started to pass round the chocolates, that would be the end of the message of the play". The suggestion that a scene allegedly so disgusting and horrible could render even a single member of the audience into a state of chocolate-munching boredom, seemed to me a curious contradiction of what he was claiming as the shock impact of the supposed grossly indecent act he was prosecuting.

"The case was not about stage censorship", said Mr Kennedy. He then went on to say later: "One can make a telling point. One can get one's message across. One doesn't have to do it this way". He

should really have gone on to say, "One must only do it Mrs Whitehouse's way". If that isn't censorship, I'm Cliff Richard! He continued that "The Theatres Act of 1968 had not done away with the general law". But the preamble to that Act states, categorically, that it is "An Act to abolish censorship in the theatre and to amend the law in respect of theatres and theatrical performances".

### Expert Opinion

Mr Ross-Cornes, the prosecution's one and only witness, was then called to give his evidence and this continued into day two. It was hardly surprising to learn that, being a member of Mrs Whitehouse's organisation, he disapproved of nudity on the stage, and also "bad" language and urinating—presumably even with a water pistol. If one thing pointed out the ridiculousness of the charge more than any other, however, it was that, if the play had been directed by a woman, she could not have been prosecuted at all. Section 13 of the Sexual Offences Act only applies to males. Furthermore, if the victim of the attempted rape in the play had been a woman, Michael Bogdanov could not have been prosecuted — surely a case for the Equal Opportunities Commission!

Later on that day, after the Judge had sent the jury away, there was much legal argument, including the admissibility of Mr Ross-Cornes's evidence. He had gone to the theatre, seen the play and then gone backstage to confront Mr Bogdanov. But he had not, however, properly identified himself to the director or cautioned him in a way that a police officer normally would do, according to the Judges' Rules. The defence submitted that, since this was a private prosecution, Mr Ross-Cornes was, in effect, acting in the capacity of a policeman. After much discussion, which continued into day three, Mr Bogdanov went into the witness-box to give his version of their meeting.

The Judge ruled in the prosecution's favour. He also ruled in their favour on three other points. These were (1) that the Sexual Offences Act did apply to acts on stage, (2) that a simulated sexual act could still amount to gross indecency, and (3) that the motive of sexual gratification was not an essential part of the offence. The jury still did not return to court, because counsel for Mrs Whitehouse then asked for another 30-minute adjournment. About an hour later the Clerk of the Court mysteriously announced that the trial would be adjourned until the following day. Quite clearly, something very strange was going on.

When I returned home that Wednesday afternoon, my thoughts returned to the letter I had written to the Attorney General eight months previously and to which I have already referred. There was some-

thing else in that letter which I have so far not revealed. I wrote:

... in view of the extraordinary circumstances surrounding this case, would it not be an eminently suitable occasion for you to enter a stay of proceedings by "nolle prosequi", particularly since you yourself have been involved in the matter and have already decided, in effect, that the law was not broken? This would at least restore some temporary sanity to the legal process in this country and prevent the waste of any further vast amounts of public money on promoting and publicising the perniciously repressive aims and activities of this appalling woman.

*Nolle prosequi* is a device whereby the Attorney General can intervene and stop legal proceedings on an indictment.

In court next day my hunch that something dramatic was about to happen was soon to be proved right. First of all, Mrs Whitehouse was in Court herself for the first time since the hearing began and a fifth bewigged counsel was seated in the middle of the other four. He was there to represent the Attorney General and to invoke the *nolle prosequi* procedure to stop the case, just as I had urged him to do some eight months earlier. It was all over.

### Mrs Whitehouse Draws Back

It was also quite apparent that Mr Justice Staughton was most unhappy with the turn of events but was, of course, powerless to change them. The truth about what had really occurred has become twisted and confused. In court, Mr Kennedy said that it had been established that there was a *prima facie* case to answer but that if Mr Bogdanov were to be convicted, notwithstanding any sentence the judge might impose, his career and private life could be gravely damaged. This sudden tear-jerking demonstration of human compassion certainly rang hollow. As far as the law was concerned, Mrs Whitehouse had already established that there was a *prima facie* case to answer at the committal proceedings. For her to claim now that this was all she ever wanted to do, when she had already achieved that aim last July, was arrant nonsense.

A much more truthful reason was surely that proffered by Michael Bogdanov when he said that she had withdrawn the case because she knew the jury would reject it. His defence counsel were all ready to call a galaxy of celebrated witnesses, including Lord Olivier, Lord Goodman, Sir Peter Hall, Janet Suzman, Peter Brook, Trevor Nunn and the Rev Eric Mathieson, Chaplain to the National Theatre. If the case had gone on, her costs, already near the £20,000 mark, would have at least doubled

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# Secularisation and Secularism in Modern Britain (Part 2)

EDWARD ROYLE

This is the second part of an article based on Dr Royle's lecture given last year to commemorate the centenary of Leicester Secular Hall.

In the United States, which was formally "secular" at birth, the process of modernisation has been accompanied by increasing religious influences. And in France, where secularisation began to make an impact after the Revolution, there was clearly a revival of religious activities between Napoleon's Concordat with the Pope in 1802 and the accession to political power of the anti-clerical republicans, led by Gambetta and Jules Ferry, in 1879. Despite "modernisation", it is in those countries without an even balance of opposing religious forces, such as Italy, where secularisation has made least progress of all.

The progress of secularisation can also be measured in cultural terms. Despite the spread of many religious cults, no-one would seriously claim to-day that they are central to modern culture in the same way that religion was central two centuries ago. Religion has become a fringe activity. This is the point of the quotation from T. S. Eliot at the beginning of this article.

In this context it may be possible to see some connection between secularisation and modernisation. In G. J. Holyoake's phrase, we do now believe that "science is the providence of man". The signs of this are evident in our daily attitudes. We no longer fast against disease, as men did against the cholera, by Government decree, in 1832. Instead we rely on medicine. We expect to deal with all the eventualities of life, and to account for all our experiences, in naturalistic ways. Our reaction to the paranormal and supernatural is to seek to reshape our scientific hypotheses to take account of those phenomena which had appeared as exceptions. This is the scientific method. By definition, the supernatural cannot exist. Divine intervention, ghosts and such like were not surprises or problems in a culture which was not secularised. Today such things have to be given their rational explanation, because our whole outlook is rational and scientific—thoroughly secular and secularised. With Napoleon's atheistic astronomer, Laplace, we can say that we have dispensed with the God hypothesis.

Even the churches, it can be argued, have accepted this, for the churches have always been absorbed in their contemporary culture. In days of superstition, they were superstitious; in days of reason, they are rational. Only on the fringes of religion is

modern medicine rejected. Few modern Christians attempt to challenge seriously the standards and values of material culture. Even theology seems to have become secularised, with the "death of God" school, which stresses the immanence, not the transcendence, of God. Today, we have a secular church and a secular religion in a secular world.

Secularism as Holyoake defined it is thus compatible with certain aspects of the process of secularisation—of institutions and of culture—even though Secularists have been effective only in conjunction with greater forces within society.

In other respects, however, Secularism needs to be seen not as the new synthesis replacing the old thesis of religion, but rather as the antithesis to religion, dependent upon it and working with it, being destroyed with it when the new synthesis of a secularised society emerged. Secularism can be thought of more as the ally than as the enemy of religion. This can be seen if we accept for a moment that broader definition of religion which treats all social forms serving similar social functions in the same manner, whereby Secularism may be regarded as a religion.

## The Role of Organised Secularism

There was a great debate among 19th-century Secularists as to whether Secularism should be a cultural substitute for religion or not. G. J. Holyoake, rightly or wrongly, argued that religion served certain human needs, and that therefore the hold of religion could be broken only when Secularism could provide an adequate social-cultural substitute to meet those needs. He saw that the church—and more especially the chapel—played a central part in the lives of many people. Furthermore, in those places, such as Leicester, where Secular Societies became established over more than one generation, Secularism began to assume some of the trappings of religion. Secular hymns were sung; "sacred" readings were recognised; choirs and Sunday schools were formed; ceremonies for marking births and deaths were performed—there was even talk of a priesthood, though the Secularists never went so far as the Positivists in this.

On a narrow definition of religion none of this behaviour was, of course, religious, for its philosophy was non-transcendental; but on the broader definition, much of this nineteenth-century Secularist activity resembled so closely what went on in some chapels that it could be regarded as being of a kind with religious activity. Nor was this true only of that section of the Secularist movement which took



its lead from G. J. Holyoake. Such comments can equally be applied to the activities at the Old Street Hall of Science in London, the headquarters of Bradlaugh's movement. Such religious forms as singing solemn hymns and decorous behaviour at "services", it was argued, would prove particularly attractive to women, at a time when such behaviour was part of the accepted way of passing Sunday leisure time.

But those changing fashions, which we might associate with secularisation, undermined such activity. From the period just before the First World War, religious congregations began to decline, and with the decline in the cultural practice of church-going came a decline in Secularist congregations as well. The contraction of organised Secularism went side by side with the contraction of organised Christianity, and both groups came to face similar problems. There was the same apathy to be be-moaned, particularly among the young who seemed to be able to find better things to do with their leisure time. This was recognised by G. W. Foote as early as 1896 when he lamented the rising influence of the music hall. In explaining the failure of Secularism to maintain the peak of influence it had reached in Bradlaugh's day, he noted how, in those days: "Unless you went to the dram shop or the gospel-shop, it was 'Bradlaugh or nothing' on a Sunday evening". Both religion and Secularism have declined in the face of the secularisation of leisure.

Angus MacIntyre has written in *The Religious Significance of Atheism* of "the self-conscious ex-Christian atheist" who "continues to ask systematically the questions to which traditional theism gave the answers". This seems an excellent description of many Secularists during the heyday of Secularism in the nineteenth century. The vast majority of them had been brought up as Christians, and their Secularism was shaped by this fact.

### Attitudes to Religion

Chapman Cohen recalled how he had once told G. W. Foote:

"In spite of your constant and unsparing attacks on Christianity you yet appear to regard it as something intrinsically great, something to be dreaded, and treated with the deference with which a medieval Saint treated Satan. You despise Christianity as much as I do, but you appear to be somewhat afraid of it. You have not the easy-going contempt for it that I have; and I think the difference is due to the fact that you once believed in it and I never did." (*Almost an Autobiography*, London 1940).

This description seems to me to apply equally to Foote and to Charles Bradlaugh. The terms of their atheism were determined by Christianity. The cultural context of their atheism was religious, in the

same way that the cultural context of modern religion is inescapably secular.

G. J. Holyoake, who often appears as the champion of "religious" Secularism, curiously in this context emerges as more "secular" than either Foote or Bradlaugh. He criticised the last for his religious dogmatism—his positive assertiveness about a negative phenomenon, namely, the non-existence of God. Bradlaugh appeared to his critics—not without reason—to need the Christian's God in order not to believe in him. Admittedly, in his more philosophic moments, Bradlaugh could say, "I do not deny God, because I cannot deny that of which I have no conception". But Holyoake's complaint was that nevertheless Bradlaugh and his followers then behaved as though they were denying God. They had not emancipated themselves from the prevailing ethos. In this sense, the paradox is that Bradlaugh's atheism was part of a religious world.

MacIntyre also detects a second type of person: "the secularised unbeliever" whose attitude to theism is that he "sees no point in affirming it in the first place". In other words, he proclaims not that religion is an error, but that religion is an irrelevance. In formulating the philosophy of Secularism, Holyoake was moving towards this point of view. As such, Holyoake's Secularism was something more than Agnosticism. It was not merely a statement that man cannot know whether the atheist or theist is right; but that, so far as man on earth is concerned, it does not matter who is right.

### The Existence of God

To argue this, as Holyoake did, is of course rather negative and ultimately self-defeating. It was not, in the 19th century, a popular position to hold. In a world in which those who believe that theistic questions do matter are causing pain and suffering in the name of their god, it must matter to attack such views. But once men have been convinced that such issues are irrelevant, then the need for Secularism disappears.

In the 19th century, clearly this need was still there, for, as Cohen saw, many Secularists continued to believe that it was important to settle the issue as to whether or not God exists. But while they and the Christians were arguing the matter out, those broader cultural changes which I described earlier as part of the process of secularisation, were bringing more and more people round to the point of view that the argument and its conclusions were actually irrelevant. This is now the dominant position in England—though less so on the Celtic fringe.

We might argue, therefore, that Secularism, as an organisation and as a philosophy, needed a friend-

(continued on page 78)

**RECORD OF A FRIENDSHIP: The Correspondence of Wilhelm Reich and A. S. Neill. Edited by Beverley R. Planczek Gollancz £12.50.**

Wilhelm Reich never faltered in his belief that Freud's discovery of the libido was the centre and essence of his work. It drove him to continue his experiments until he detected the tangible force that he named "orgone". This, in turn, led him to oppose what he called "Freudism"—the doctrine formulated, he believed, by the International Association that led to the watering down of the concept of libido into a mere metaphor. As a result of his experiments he designed the "Orgone Box" or Accumulator, a box made of alternate layers of sheet iron and wood or other organic material. The patient sat in this box either at home or while talking to the therapist so as to gain from the concentration of orgone that the box provided. Many still testify to the fact that not only do they feel refreshed, but that injuries such as burns and scalds heal up much more rapidly than under normal conditions.

A. S. Neill had been running his school, Summerhill, for 12 years before he heard of or met Reich. He had become convinced that the instincts and natural impulses of children, if allowed to operate from birth without check, would result in happy, well-adjusted and unaggressive people. The sexual urges, being part of the child's hereditary endowment, should also be allowed free play, but Neill was realist enough to see that his school would be shut down immediately in this society if he put that belief into practice, a threat that he always saw as a very real impediment to the more complete development of his pupils.

To those already familiar with the work of the two men this book adds little to increase a deeper understanding of that work. It covers the period of their friendship from when they first met in Oslo in 1936 to February 1957, nine months before Reich was found dead from massive heart failure in the prison cell to which he had been committed for contempt of court when one of his assistants sent some books and accumulator parts to New York in violation of a court injunction.

From personal knowledge of Neill over more than 20 years up to his death on 23 September 1973, I can vouch for the fact that his letters convey his openhearted generosity of feeling, his moral courage and his warm loyalty and support of Reich to the very end. They show the vulnerable sensitivity that made his courage all the more remarkable. At no time did he pretend to Reich that he understood everything that Reich was urging on the world (who did then and who does now?) but his

intuition had seized on the core of Reich's thinking because he was already practising in Summerhill what Reich was preaching to an almost completely disbelieving and hostile world.

Reich, whom I knew only through a brief meeting with his wife Ilse, through many conversations with Neill, but much more through Ilse's brother, Dr Robert Ollendroff whom I knew for ten years before his death and with whom I underwent Reichian therapy for some time, appears as a much more complex figure in these letters.

Much of the early correspondence is about mutual friends, enquiries about health and family members, references to work and lectures, repeated invitations to visit one another and warm reminiscence of the few occasions on which they had met and talked far into the night over a bottle of Bourbon.

The later letters from Reich are filled with his concern about various people who had come to him full of enthusiasm but later appeared to him as treacherous and corrupted by the "red fascists"—the hard-line, Stalinist communists who had perverted communism into a rigid dogma and twisted Marx's flexible and important contribution to sociology and political thought into a fanatical creed.

Many of the letters contain tantalising references to books and documents many of which are lost or inaccessible, and to experiments made and documented by Reich but longer available. It is this lack of concrete detail and specific description of experiments that has given rise to doubts about Reich's scientific integrity. The Editor, in a 12-page introduction sets out a brief biography of each man and a sketch of their beliefs, but not enough to give body to the numerous references to Reich's work. Neill's work is well-documented in his own books and in books written by others.

Reich's later letters were written in the shadow of the McCarthy era, but the paranoia that clouds them was not created by that period. Much speculation has arisen about the cause of the irrational elements in Reich's last few years. The Editor refers to the suicide of Reich's mother when he was very young. The real point, for Reich, was that he had been the unwitting cause of that suicide by innocently revealing to his father the fact that his mother and his tutor were having an affair. Further, his virtual isolation from the local children in consequence of his father's determination to bring the boy up as a German in Bukovina, must have given rise to the belief, not only that he was a special person with a special mission, but to the belief that there must be something wrong with

# REVIEWS

everyone else—the theme of his emphatic declaration that the whole world was suffering from an “emotional plague”.

Of course the American Administration was unbelievably cruel to him. No evidence was produced at his trial that his work had ever harmed anyone: it remains a puzzle why he had not called the many people who had been helped by him. The Administration itself displayed paranoia in its petty decision to have his books and his equipment destroyed.

Until we are in a position to repeat Reich's experiments we must remain unable adequately to judge Reich's achievements in science. Many more claims are now being made in support of Reich—see, for example, David Boadella's *Life and Work of Wilhelm Reich*—but detailed descriptions of the experiments are still lacking. What can be said clearly is that therapy based on his writings, such as *Character Analysis*, is effective, sometimes quite dramatically, and has given rise to a number of schools of therapy based on the recognition that the body develops tensions, disabilities and malfunctions in response to emotional trauma, and that the return to health can begin with the release of the “armouring”, the muscular spasms, caused by those traumas.

MICHAEL DUANE

# TELEVISION

FOR CHRIST'S SAKE! Thames Television

This discussion on the Law Commission's proposal to abolish the “offence” of blasphemy, with the Church of England and certain screwball religious minorities wanting it extended to protect all religions, turned out to be small beer and loud talk that got the viewer nowhere in particular. For after all what is blasphemy but a plea for religious equality, as Chapman Cohen once said. And it was this point that was ventilated by the Rev Richard Harris, Dean of King's College, London. Mrs Mary Whitehouse, following in the footsteps of Mrs Ormiston Chant of Empire Promenade Crusade fame, made less sense than nonsense in her attempt to debate decently and rationally with Nicolas Walter.

I suspect the matter of blasphemy law—for and against—is so well known to *Freethinker* readers that there is no need to set out in detail the moves which followed the *Gay News* prosecution for blasphemous libel in 1977. But what is blasphemy and how does the law stand? Utterances, we were again told, are blasphemous if they contain any con-

temptuous, reviling, scurrilous or ludicrous matter relating to God, Christ, the Bible or the beliefs and doctrines of the Church of England. (Note how the Church of England is singled out.) So what about all those other religions?

After the *Gay News* prosecution the Law Commission considered the question of blasphemy law and in their report gave reasons why it should be abolished. The C of E published its reply in January, coming to the opposite conclusion and pressing that the law should be extended. Strong feelings are aroused in the religious by even talk of blasphemy.

Nicolas Walter argued a clear-cut case for the total abolition of blasphemy law. He said that the real problem was in having a special law for religion. His contribution contained several provisos regarding free speech and public order.

When it came to Mrs Whitehouse's turn we were taken on a ramble down discursive lanes and up side alleys with much of the er-er-er-ing that always accompanies St Mary's speech. Her approach has assumed—or so it appears to me—the populist zeal about it that biographers have ascribed to the late Horatio Bottomley. As with Bottomley's war loans and bullets speeches, so with this lady's superstitions and confessions when she saw or read something “blasphemous”: “It went very deep with me and was very personal—I feel it's an attack upon the Lord”. What kind of Lord can he be who needs Our Mary to protect him? Not Lord Longford, surely.

Apart from the unconscious fun, and its featherweight attempt to dispose of a heavyweight subject so early in the day in 25 minutes, the programme said little that was new or profound. Anna Ford, the anchor-woman, once again displayed her objectivity, after all those months as a newscaster, and was unimpressed by Mrs Whitehouse's by now well-known impersonations (of Mrs Pooter, A Girl's Best Friend and a down market Mrs Thatcher) that have become so much a part of her media personality. I prefer this custodian of public morals on the radio where I don't have to watch her.

What nobody asked Mrs Whitehouse was why she had the thundering nerve to mention the word “irrational” during her farrago of nonsense in what might have otherwise been a refreshingly serious programme.

PETER COTES

The Archbishop of Canterbury said during a recent interview with London Weekend Television that he hopes the Christian churches will be reconciled within the next 18 years. He added: “I dream of unity with Rome and with the great reform tradition and the Orthodox by the end of the century”. Dr Runcie described the Queen's role as head of the Church of England as largely symbolic.

# The Police and the People

TED McFADYEN

Civil Liberties in Britain are under attack from all sides. The Government, the Police Federation and the Press are conducting a campaign to mislead the public and divert attention from the fundamental causes of social unrest. The writer of this article is a journalist and a member of the National Council for Civil Liberties Gay Rights Committee.

It is now just about a year since the Brixton riots burst upon an astonished country, followed throughout the summer by similar disturbances in Manchester, Toxteth and elsewhere. It would be comforting to report that since then the Government had applied itself to some serious thinking about the underlying causes of the disturbances; it could have done a lot worse than pay some heed to the findings of Lord Scarman, one person at least who appeared able to make the connections between social unrest, mass unemployment and inner city deprivation.

But all the evidence of the past few weeks suggests that, while a minority in the administration may have a sneaking respect for this approach, they have been overwhelmed by loud cries from the Government for that popular Tory shibboleth, Law 'n' Order, and by equally loud cries from the police for increased powers.

It would not be too fanciful, indeed, to see the events of the past few weeks as an orchestrated campaign. First, in mid-March, came the publication by the Metropolitan Police of crime figures within the London area. For reasons it is not very difficult to discern, the Met chose to present these statistics broken down in ethnic terms. The popular Press is not backward in seizing on a sensation when one is handed to it on a plate, and it displays as much skill in dealing analytically and objectively with complex issues as an intelligent four-year-old (see *The Freethinker*, March 1982, p37). So we can hardly be surprised when the headlines appear: "Black Crime: the Alarming Figures", "Police Focus on Blacks as Crime Rate Rises"—and so on, in a depressingly predictable fashion. The brutally simple equation, Black equals Crime, has been firmly established.

In fact the figures published weren't even accurate. According to the *Guardian*, "muggings" were nowhere near the figure of 19,000 allegedly quoted by Scotland Yard but instead just under 6,000. The victims were not for the most part elderly and white but in the main between the ages of 21 and 30, and on Home Office statistics between 36 and 50 per cent more likely to be West Indian or

Asian. And of course it all depends on how you present the statistics. It is true that "robbery and other violent theft" offences increased by 34 per cent in 1981. That sounds alarming until it is pointed out that within the category of "serious crime" they accounted for only three per cent. And mugging, which dominates the headlines of our gutter Press with its emotive images of young blacks lurking behind every street corner, only accounted for between half and three-quarters of this three per cent sub-total.

Of course mugging is a brutal business and violence of any sort is to be deplored, but the immediate implication of this sort of misleading publicity, deliberately stimulating public fears, is to allow the police to demand increased powers. And again, crime comes in many different guises. What would be the figures, one wonders, broken down on ethnic lines, for crimes such as company fraud, tax evasion and financial misdemeanours of various types? Would the *Daily Express* or *Daily Mail* publish these headlines: "White Company Fiddles: the Alarming Figures"; "Police Focus on Whites as Stock Exchange Deals Double"?

Soon after the release of these figures and the resultant sensational publicity, James Anderton, Chief Constable of Greater Manchester, added his voice to the general chorus of appeals for increased powers. In fact he repudiated the whole concept of the linking of police forces with local government. What he described as "the halcyon days" when the interests of the people came first are gone; the problem is now so serious that "only an independent police force is the sole guarantee of people's freedom".

## A "Non-Political" Chief Constable

And Mr Anderton's solution? His recommendation is that police committees should be totally abolished and replaced by "non-political" police boards. His fear is that "a quiet revolution" is taking place; the prize is "political power to be wielded against the most cherished elements of the Establishment, including the Monarchy". And he goes on to suggest that "there is a long-term political strategy to destroy the proven structure of the police and turn them into an exclusive agency of a one-party State".

Mr Anderton's relationship with his own police committee is not, as is well known, suffused with that sweetness and light which the Chief Constable's own religious beliefs might be expected to reflect. It is this record of thorny disagreement which has presumably prompted him to seek a solu-

and, with an acquittal, she would probably have been landed with the defence costs as well. As it was, this interfering busybody had run up a £40,000 bill which the British tax-payer will have to find for the defence costs, which were awarded out of public funds, as were the costs of the committal proceedings.

But need any of this have happened at all? I think not. In the first place, the original application for a summons against Michael Bogdanov should have been refused. This was no ordinary case and had already received enormous publicity. The issuing magistrate must have known about it and that the DPP and the Attorney General had both refused to consent to a prosecution of the play under the appropriate Act. In other words it was not unlawful. It was irresponsible of him to ignore this fact.

### The Public Pays

Secondly, having got as far as the court, the committal proceedings magistrate should certainly have unhesitatingly thrown it out instead of sending it for trial. Thirdly, the Attorney General, who alone has the power to do so, and who was already much involved, should have intervened long before the case reached Old Bailey level. His reply to my request for him to do so said that he would consider taking such action "if and when he is asked to do so by the Defendant or his legal representatives". I am advised that he has the power to enter a *nolle prosequi* of his own volition but, in any case, Mr Bogdanov's solicitors had made several approaches to him in the interim. His long overdue intervention has resulted in a hefty bill for the taxpayer, a year of stress and anguish for Michael Bogdanov and his family and, at the end of it all, still no proper legal clarification of the situation which will have to be remedied by Parliament but a year later than was necessary.

Ironically, for all his "help" in mistakenly allowing her to continue her venomous action, until she got cold feet and then begged for his assistance to rescue her, Mrs Whitehouse is now attacking Sir Michael Havers for preventing the case from going its full course.

Freethinkers generally will not, I would guess, expect the last word in a controversy of this kind to be allowed a gentleman of the cloth. But there are, happily, exceptions, and the Rev Eric Mathieson is certainly one of them. Of all the many criticisms levelled against Mary Whitehouse throughout this ridiculous affair, none can be more uncompromising than his. He said that she had brought her case in malice and that "the spiritual fascism she advocates has got to be resisted. She has a good deal of egg on her face today—and hallelujah!"

tion for the police based not on closer co-operation with the public and a greater degree of accountability, but on a deliberate distancing of the police from democratically elected authority. Paradoxically, his fears for the future could turn out to be much more accurate than his political analysis would suggest. If there is any likelihood of a totalitarian "one-party State" just around the corner, it is much more likely to emerge from the present scenario of economic recession combined with mass unemployment and social unrest than it is from any sudden seizure of power by militant Left-wingers. The reins of power in this country have never been more firmly held by an extreme Right-wing administration, who have had the sense to build up a loyal and well-paid police force—indeed an increase in police pay was one of the first things that Mrs Thatcher did on taking office. Neither, so far as one can gather, are there many generals with Trotskyite views at the Ministry of Defence.

In effect therefore, we have a situation where strenuous efforts are being made to bring about stronger police control, and the dilution of accountability; a situation in which public opinion is being inflamed towards this end by inaccurate information disseminated by an unscrupulous Press; and a situation in which racism is being used deliberately as a divisive measure to aggravate people's fears for their own safety. It is not a reassuring background for the coming summer months.

## Freethinker Fund

Contributions to the Fund continue to arrive and Glasgow Humanist Society has sent a very generous donation of £65 to the Centenary Appeal. Increasing costs are always a problem. But it is important that the humanist movement has a campaigning journal that appears every month.

The list of contributors is recorded below with our thanks.

Anonymous, £2; B. Able, £7; C. Blakely, £4; J. W. Buck, £2; B. A. Burfoot, £2; E. Cecil, £2; B. Clarke, £5; C. F. Clarke, £10; J. B. Coward, £2; R. J. C. Fennell, £7; P. Forrest, £3; Glasgow Humanist Society (Centenary Appeal), £65; W. J. Glennie, £1; D. Harper, £7; J. K. Hawkins, £3; E. Hillman, £3; D. J. Holdstock, £2; H. J. Jakeman, £7; I. Jones, £2; E. W. Lambert, £5; D. R. Leighton, £1; W. K. Lloyd-Williams, £1; G. S. Mellor, £7; G. J. Mephram, £2; F. H. and U. Neville, £7; A. Oldham, £7; F. Pamphilon, £1; A. M. Parry, £3; V. S. Petherham, £2; R. Saich, £2; E. W. Sinclair, £10; T. Stevenson, £2; D. Swan, £2; N. G. Thanki, £1; N. Thomas, £15; R. L. E. Torode, £2; F. White, £1; D. T. Wood, £2.

Total for the period 5 March 1982 until 5 April 1982: £209.

# LETTERS

ly environment in which to grow. This was provided by the 19th century: a general assault on the religious institutions of the State; a growing disbelief in supernaturalism; a pattern of leisure in which forms traditionally associated with religion were still widely acceptable; and an intellectual climate in which the God issue could be seriously discussed and in which it was still thought sufficiently important to be argued about.

That age has gone, taking with it much of organised Secularism and religion alike. What remains for the Secularists to justify their continuing existence?

## Unfinished Business

First, there still remain people who like to spend their Sundays in a certain, traditional way, and who continue to think theological issues important and interesting. It is right in a free society that such people should be able to band together, whether Christian or Secularist, to behave and to discuss in this way. But it is true that there are not many such people left, and rather fewer on the freethought than on the Christian side.

Secondly, our contemporary culture is not completely secularised, though it is difficult in a free society—and Secularists have always maintained the fundamental right to a free society—to see how Secularists can do anything about this. Nevertheless, insofar as there are still people in the world who justify acts of barbarity in the name of religion, the God issue must retain some relevance and the attack on religion must find justification. This is as true for Northern Ireland as it is for Iran. Moreover, in such a campaign, as in the 19th century, Secularists are likely to find many Christians who share the same goals—up to a point, anyway.

The greatest remaining justification for Secularism, however, lies in the need to complete the secularisation of the institutions of the State. This was perhaps the greatest work of the 19th century, and it remains incomplete. Not only is there the surviving symbol of the Established Church in England and Scotland, but there is the continuing theme of "religion on the rates"—religious education in publicly-financed schools. Probably more importantly, there are still laws on the Statute Book which discriminate between the religious and the secular, or even between Christians and all others. Most blatant here are the peculiar Charity Laws by which bodies like the Rationalist Press Association are penalised. Blasphemy is still a common law offence.

Until such matters have been changed, there will remain a role for an organised pressure group dedicated to Secularisation.

## CONTROVERSIAL PAINE

Whether the programme on Paine will gain any awards let alone that for being the most important programme of 1982, as Peter Cotes suggests it should in his review (March), is rather debatable. Paine's ideas still generate much controversy. A great many individuals still see red at the mere mention of his name. The "Daily Telegraph", a prime example of the extreme right-wing gutter press, published a bitter editorial attacking him, and even the BBC dropped the New Year's Eve showing of the programme without explanation, thereby giving rise to fears of it being suppressed as have been other films made by Kenneth Griffiths.

Naturally I share Mr Cotes' hopes, though the programme was not without some defects, as the review indicates; not everyone takes kindly to Mr Griffiths' melodramatic style. However, it might gain an award.

I would like to make a point about a statement made in the review which I feel calls for correction. Since 1963 the Thomas Paine Society, jointly founded by Christopher Brunel and the present writer, has been very active in organising work to make the ideas and life of Paine better known and appreciated. This has included a constant campaign to have a TV feature on him. The fact that the BBC contacted the TPS with an appeal for help in making the Paine programme before filming commenced suggests that this long term campaign paid dividends. But there was no mention of the Society in the acknowledgements nor of Audrey Williamson's splendid biographical study of Paine, now regrettably out of print.

There are no "valiant Thomas Paine societies dotted around the world", just one Thomas Paine Society based in England. Efforts to form a Paine society in the United States, where there has been none since the society run by Joseph Lewis folded following his death, have come to nought. Mail addressed to one such body in New York has been returned unopened, and this "library" type body seems to be defunct. The society in New Rochelle though bearing Paine's name in its title, is essentially a local history group not a Paine society as such, though it does preserve his home there as a museum-cum-shrine.

R. W. MORRELL  
Secretary, Thomas Paine Society

## SHOCKED

As a regular reader of the "Daily Telegraph" I was shocked by the article by Ted McFadyen (March) in his references to Ken Livingstone and Anthony Benn. I have no doubt that his strictures on the popular Press are justified but I presume that it is catering for the tastes of their public.

It is hardly relevant to describe Mr Benn as having a genuine concern for our appalling social problems (which he shares with all right thinking people) when what is required is wisdom. If Mr Benn has been correctly reported in the Press it is clear that this is the one quality in which he is sadly lacking.

The law is made by Parliament and administered and interpreted by the Law Lords and Judges and to accuse the latter of political bias when their decisions go against you, as Mr Livingstone has done, bring his party into contempt. The only way to amend the law is through Parliament not through extra-Parliamentary activities and industrial disputes. I am afraid Mr McFadyen has fallen into the same error as the people he is criticising of being too emotional.

J. L. HUTCHINSON

# EVENTS

**Belfast Humanist Group.** York Hotel, Botanic Avenue, Belfast. Tuesday, 11 May, 8 pm. Annual General Meeting. Tuesday, 8 June, 8 pm. Canon E. P. M. Elliot: "What's Happening to Religion?"

**Berkshire Humanists.** Friends' Meeting House, Church Street, Reading. Friday, 11 June, 8 pm. Open Forum.

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** Queen's Head, Queen's Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 6 June, 5.30 pm. Barbara Smoker: "The Pope in Perspective".

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

**Glasgow Humanist Society.** Details of activities obtainable from Jim McCurdie, 14a Ellisland Road, Glasgow, telephone 041 649 9612.

**Lewisham Humanist Group.** Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, 27 May, 7.45 pm. John Evitt: "Divine Legatees—God's Will and Codicil".

**Merseyside Humanist Group.** 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. Friday, 21 May, 7.45 pm. Poetry Evening.

**People Opposing Papal Edicts (POPE).** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Friday, 21 May, 7.30 pm. Public Meeting: Panel of Speakers on "The Pope in Britain". Information from the National Secular Society, telephone 01-272 1266.

**Summer School at Beamish Hall, Durham, 21-28 August:** "Some Aspects of International Arrangements". Cost: £80.75; details from George Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, telephone 01-642 7896.

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

**West Glamorgan Humanist Group.** Friends' Meeting House Annexe, Page Street, Swansea. Friday, 28 May, 7.30 pm. Nicolas Walter: "Humanism With Feeling".

**Worthing Humanist Group.** Trades Club, Broadwater Road, Worthing. Sunday, 30 May, 5.30 pm. Annual General Meeting.

fanatics. He spoke of the media's frequent attention to supernatural matters and referred to a programme on reincarnation. The audience were then amused by his account of his experience in a previous life as a keeper of the Pharaoh's coffers. In more serious vein, he said that the multiplication of gurus in the East who found a following in the West was due to the success of science, for people sought something extra. However, the need to reflect, to turn inwards, to take stock for a while was common sense and could be found without the teaching of a guru.

## BIGOTED AND FANATICAL

Your correspondent Gordon Beeson (February 1982) repeats an oft told tale; indeed I have to confess that I have before now told this tale myself. But it has fairly recently been demonstrated that Marx never did ask Charles Darwin for permission to dedicate a later edition or a translation of "Das Kapital" to Darwin. For a handy review of the literature on this point, see "Marx and Darwin" in the Winter 1981 issue of "New Humanist".

Ray Watkinson, in the same issue, objects to my Reading colleague Dr Halstead describing "Marxism as a religion". But to meet that charge it is not sufficient, as Mr Watkinson does, to point out, quite truly, that Marx rejected "the whole idealistic notion of religion and faith". For those of us who do sometimes speak of Marxism as a religion are referring not to the supernaturalistic character of Marxist doctrines but to the bigoted and fanatical way in which these doctrines are maintained in defiance of the falsifying evidence of experience. We should be inclined to refer people like Mr Watkinson to, for instance, Leopold Schartzschild "The Red Prussian" (London: Hamilton, 1948); works which show Marx himself again and again persisting in assertions which he was in a position to know both were and are false.

ANTONY FLEW

**Andrew Sorrell, a Christian from Texas, is drilling for oil in Israel because he believes the Bible has shown him precisely where it is. His hopes are pinned on the blessing Moses gave to Asher, one of the 12 tribes of Israel: "Let Asher be blessed with children, let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil" (Deuteronomy 33.24). But it is generally believed that the reference in Deuteronomy is to the practice of treading pulped olives underfoot to squeeze out the oil.**

## NSS DINNER

Atheists were once smitten by thunderbolts from God according to old sayings. But now He might be using germ-warfare, said Barbara Smoker, presiding at the National Secular Society Annual Dinner at the Pavilions Arms, Westminster, on 28 March. She was referring to the illness of two of the guest speakers, James Cameron and Caroline Woodroffe. Their absence was regretted by all, but was not allowed to prevent the occasion being enjoyed by nearly a hundred secularists, who had travelled from many parts of the country to meet old friends and make new ones.

Larry Adler, famous for his harmonica playing and his willingness to support freedom of speech, entertained diners with a sparkling collection of jokes, and proposed a toast to the Society.

The Treasurer of the National Secular Society, G. N. Deodhekar, replied on behalf of the Society. He said that there was need for some rational, sane comment on the policies of the Pope, at a time when much of the opposition came from extreme religious

# Darwin: "The Battle for his Ideas Continues"

"By the time Charles Darwin died in 1882 the theory of evolution had revolutionised the way in which man viewed himself in the context of the natural world", Dr Beverly Halstead told a meeting in London on 26 April. It was organised to commemorate the centenary of Darwin's death.

Dr Halstead went on to say that the possible effects of Darwin's teachings terrified those authorities who relied on the power of the established religions as a bastion for the maintenance of the *status quo*. "Not surprisingly, the Church threw its own authority into the scales against evolution but by the time Darwin died had acknowledged defeat.

"In spite of acceptance, albeit reluctantly, of evolution, a rearguard action has continued to be fought by fundamentalist sects which believe that the Bible really does represent the word of their preferred deity, and that the poetic myth of the creation is to be taken literally. They recognise that once the truth of evolution is acknowledged, there will essentially be nothing left for their god to do . . .

"It is surely comforting for a child to believe in Father Christmas as it is for many to believe in a personal deity who watches over them. But as with

the child, there comes a time to grow up and dispense with childish things, while acknowledging their value at particular stages of development and maturation".

Dr Halstead said it was a sign of the uncertainty of our times that many people sought solace in religion at the expense of any form of rationality. It is therefore not surprising that there is a resurgence against the concept of evolution.

"The notion that man alone is responsible for his own destiny is frightening. How much more comforting it is to hand over such responsibility to a benevolent father figure. Although if the Old Testament is anything to go by, the supreme being is an astonishingly malevolent character, to say nothing of the twisted personality of his supposed son in the New".

One hundred years after the death of Charles Darwin is not a time to be complacent, Dr Halstead warned. "The battle for his ideas continues. It is important to be aware of the new battlegrounds and be prepared for action".

Professor John Maynard Smith, University of Sussex, also spoke at the meeting which was organised by the National Secular Society.

## Barrage of Christian Bigotry

Protestant opponents of the Pope's visit are unlikely to avail themselves much if book publishers, souvenir manufacturers, hoteliers and others out to make a financial killing, have any say in the matter.

The British Council of Protestant Christian Churches has issued a leaflet, *Why the Visit of the Pope Must be Resisted*. It declares that the vast majority of evangelical Christians "see the visit as a positive evil". How these Christians love one another!

The Council lists a number of Vatican wrongdoings and quite correctly accuses the Roman Catholics of supporting the rise of Nazism and Fascism in the 1930s. And not only in Germany, Italy and Spain—Cardinal Hinsley of Westminster told *Catholic Times* readers in 1935: "If Fascism goes under, God's cause goes under with it".

But the BCPCC's attack on the Roman Catholic Church's political record is blunted by the embarrassing fact that its own General Secretary, the Rev Brian Green, was the National Front candidate at North Islington in the 1970 General Election.

There has been an outpouring of adulatory guff about the Pope from publishing houses and Fleet Street. Graham Lord, reviewing Lord Longford's *Pope John Paul II*, in the *Sunday Express*, described

it as "a particularly unattractive mixture of cloying praise, po-faced humbug and sharp commercialism". Mr Lord could have fired a similar broadside at "They Shame us all", an article by his illustrious Editor, Sir John Junor. "They" are the people who are not joining in what Sir John lyrically describes as "a joyous affirmation of Christian faith in a world drenched with propaganda from the other side".

Sir John says that one does not have to be a believer to see in Pope John Paul II "a man who treasures human worth and dignity when others would grind them into the dust. . . It would be monstrous if Britain were to be the only nation on earth which treated him with rudeness and disrespect".

The *Sunday Express*, whose passionate concern for human dignity and worth is well known, mentioned the National Secular Society as part of "a major protest industry". Barbara Smoker, President of the NSS, wrote to the *Sunday Express* that its description of the Pope and his visit was sentimental twaddle.

"Why must we all pretend to agree with his disastrous policies. . . You think it is disrespectful to let the Pope know what the people of this country really think. . . We think it is more shameful to treat him like the Emperor with no clothes".