

# The Freethinker

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## SCOTTISH HUMANISTS DENOUNCE PROGRAMME FOR INDOCTRINATION

During his visit to Scotland Pope John Paul II adopted a hard-line attitude when he spoke about the role of Catholic schools. Addressing an assembly of students and staff at St Andrew's College of Education, Bearsden, he referred to "the importance of Catholic teachers as educators". And he left his audience in no doubt about which subject they should treat as priority: "It is necessary to stress the central point of Catholic education", the Pope declared. "Catholic education is above all a question of communicating Christ . . . The cause of Catholic education is the cause of Jesus Christ and of his Gospel at the service of man".

There is overwhelming evidence to show that in those areas where religion is a potent force it causes division and hatred. Violence motivated by religious intolerance and fanaticism is a traditional feature of Scottish life. But clearly the Pope and the bishops are determined to resist any move towards a fully integrated system of education. So the "them" and "us" outlook is fostered in children from their earliest years.

In contrast to the Pope's irresponsible and selfish defence of segregated schools, Scottish humanists have denounced Strathclyde Regional Council Education Committee's report on religious education and observance. They describe the report as "a programme for indoctrination in the Christian faith".

Glasgow Humanist Society, in a commentary on the report, declares that religion is not the basis of morality, "and unless this is made perfectly clear to young people we are putting them at risk. . . Many will not manage to find the secular basis of morality and will reject what they imagine to be religious morality along with religious belief".

The SRC Education Committee asserts that a religious framework in the education system involves more than the inclusion of a few periods

of RE in the timetable. "It involves wider aims, derived from a Christian view of man—the respect for people and also respect for truth. These aims should permeate the life and work of the school. Such an ethos for education is surely preferable to crude materialism".

Glasgow Humanist Society comments: "Had the word 'Christian' been removed from this passage and the word 'Muslim' been inserted, it could be supposed that this was taken from the works of Ayatollah Khomeini. He is successfully founding a society on religious principles which have a strong affinity with our Ages of Faith".

The Education Committee holds up religious education in Catholic schools as an ideal to be copied. "But", say the humanists, "the result of this indoctrination in Catholic schools is to continue the separation of our children from the age of five onwards". And the fact that the priesthood has the right to select teachers for these schools places the Catholic teacher in an inferior position to the priest.

### Divisive and Destructive

The benefits which are supposed to arise from religious education are shown to be hollow by events in Northern Ireland. "In no part of Britain is religion taken so seriously, and it would be unjust to Mr Paisley, for example, to claim that he is not a Christian. He is a deeply religious man as are his opponents on the other side".

Religious education is taught in Northern Ireland with a thoroughness that would satisfy even Strathclyde Education Committee. Consequently ". . . religious belief takes the place of rational argument, intensifies the bigotry and usurps the place of political discussion".

Glasgow Humanist Society declares that not only humanists but many Christians agree that religious teaching should be left to the home and the church.

# The Freethinker

Editor: WILLIAM McILROY  
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Vol 102 No 7 CONTENTS July 1982

SCOTTISH HUMANISTS DENOUNCE PROGRAMME FOR INDOCTRINATION . . . . .	97
NEWS AND NOTES . . . . .	98
Clotted Creme; Don't do as we do . . . . . Political or Pastoral?	
JOTTINGS DURING A VISIT TO TEXAS AND ARIZONA . . . . .	100
Beatrice Clarke	
NOT QUITE WHAT PRINNY HAD IN MIND	101
Ted McFayden	
OBITUARIES . . . . .	101
Mr J. H. Budd, Mrs M. H. Duschine and Mrs G. Fearnley	
THE FALKLAND CRISIS—RHETORIC AND REALITY. Jim Herrick . . . . .	102
BRANDING A BAPTIST AND BORING A QUAKER. J. R. Spencer . . . . .	104
FREETHINKER REVIEWS . . . . .	106
BOOK: Christina Rosetti: a Divided Life, by Georgina Battiscombe (Constable) Reviewer: Sarah Lawson	
CINEMA: Ticket to Heaven. Reviewer: Vera Lustig	
POPE-ON-THE-BOX . . . . .	107
Peter Cotes	
1882: THE AUSTRALASIAN SECULAR SOCIETY. Nigel H. Sinnott . . . . .	108
LETTERS . . . . .	110
Nicholas Reed, John Watson, Peter Chapman, I. Noel Treavett, Peter Cotes, Terry Liddell and Steve Richardson	
CHRISTIANITY A DISASTER FOR ABORIGINES . . . . .	112
GN APPEAL REFUSED . . . . .	113

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# NEWS

## CLOTTED CREME

The latest manifestation of human gullibility is a vastly expensive international advertising campaign to inform the world that "The Christ is now with us". It has been largely paid for by wealthy supporters of Mr Benjamin Creme, the Tufnell Park guru whose name is not unknown to collectors of bizarre sects and religious weirdos.

The text of the advertisement—it occupied a full page of *The Times*—is a predictable hotchpotch of questions, platitudes, slogans and promises. A newcomer, already in our midst, known as the Lord Maitreya, will be Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the fifth Buddha, the Iman Mahdi and Krishna rolled into one — a deity-kit from Heinzland to suit almost every religious and racial requirement. Readers have been told to "look for a man who is concerned with modern problems", a description that could apply to almost anyone from the Pope reading Catholic abortion statistics to Joe Bloggs filling in his tax form.

Apparently "the Christ" has been with us since July 1977. But, in the manner of Garbo, he has kept himself to himself. His location is known to "a very few of his disciples". There has, however, been more specific information about his whereabouts since the advertisements first appeared. It seems that he is living among the Pakistani community in the Brick Lane area of London's East End. But local religious leaders, determined defenders of the "closed shop" in such matters, have vehemently denied these reports.

According to the announcement, "humanity's evolution has been guarded by a group of enlightened men, the Masters of Wisdom". They have chosen to live in remote places, "working through their disciples". Lucky Mr Creme is one of that select band.

Now all this quasi-mystical guff about "enlightened men" and "masters of wisdom" is familiar to sceptics and others who enjoy the antics of people like Benjamin Creme. About 25 years ago the benevolent interest shown in human affairs by "wise men" who watched over us from outer space attracted considerable Press attention. These beings were a figment of the rather fevered imagination of one George King, who received a message that he was to be "the voice of Interplanetary Parliament".

This astonishing news was related by the "Cosmic Masters" whose big white chief was known as "Master Aetherius". Needless to say, Mr (later Dr) King soon attracted a band of equally dotty followers

# S AND NOTES

and the Aetherius Society was established in Britain and elsewhere.

When George King arranged the London appearance of Jesus Christ the venue was not seedy Brick Lane but Caxton Hall, Westminster. Of course he spoke through Dr King, and tape recordings of the divine dissertation were sold to those who could not be present on that momentous occasion.

Benjamin Creme has so far caused much public amusement and aroused the ire of purveyors of less esoteric forms of enlightenment. But Dr King and his Aetherius Society are virtually forgotten, and T. Lobsang Rampa is feasting his three eyes on the wonders of a Tibetan Valhalla. So the market is favourable for Mr Creme and Lord Maitreya of Brick Lane.

## DON'T DO AS WE DO . . .

Dr Rhodes Boyson, the Neanderthal Man of the education department, recently told the House of Commons that local school authorities had been instructed to keep their provision for religious education and the act of worship under review. He was replying to a question raised by Mr Ivor Stanbrook, MP (Conservative, Orpington), who imparted to his fellow-members the good news that during its 10-year history one school in his constituency "has never provided a corporate worship at morning assembly, and the headmaster tells me that he does not believe that hymns and prayers are any longer relevant".

"The 1944 Act should be enforced, with the teaching of religious education in schools and the statutory assembly at the beginning of the day", Dr Boyson snorted.

Mr Kenneth Marks, MP (Labour, Gorton), innocently enquired: "Would not the matter be taken more seriously if the Parliament that insists on such corporate acts of worship had more than a two per cent attendance at its own corporate acts of worship?" Dr Boyson replied—probably with considerable regret—that "such attendance is not compulsory here".

Mr Philip Tordoff, Lincolnshire's Inspector for Moral and Religious Education, said he was considering resignation after his conviction for indecent exposure. He is to face a disciplinary hearing. A council spokesman made the reassuring comment that "the offence was not in any way connected with the performance of his duties".

*Jim Herrick has produced a lively and highly readable story, centred on the life of one unorthodox journal. But incidentally, in his presentation of the setting of that story, he has written an exceptionally fascinating chapter of British social history, covering the past century's changes in beliefs, attitudes and conventions.*

—Barbara Wootton in a foreword to

## VISION AND REALISM—100 YEARS OF "THE FREETHINKER"

by Jim Herrick

Publication on 1 September 1982, price £2.

G. W. Foote & Co, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL, telephone 01-272 1266

## PASTORAL OR POLITICAL?

People Opposing Papal Edicts (POPE), an *ad hoc* organisation to publicise criticism of Vatican policies at the time of the visit to England of Pope John Paul II, held a public meeting in Conway Hall, London, a week before his arrival.

Barbara Smoker, in the chair, emphasised opposition to the Pope's pronouncements on birth control and said that most Catholics in the Western world disobeyed the papal ruling on contraception. One of the results, shown in a study as yet unpublished, was that about one-third of those applying for abortion were Catholics, although they only comprised one-eighth of the population.

A speaker from the Gay Action Group of the Liberal Party condemned the Pope's stance against homosexuality and expressed concern that the visit of the Pope might reinforce prejudice. A message from GEMMA, an organisation for lesbians who are disabled or isolated, objected to Vatican pronouncements which added weight to oppression and discrimination.

Madeleine Simms, speaking from the audience, pointed out that Gallup Polls before the Pope's visit indicated that 65 per cent of the population were not at all or hardly at all interested in his tour, something which she suspected was at best a polite response to questioners. The massive media coverage of the event was therefore quite out of proportion to the public interest. Another matter for concern was the cost to the public of the visit. A letter to the Government had produced a reply saying that the cost of the arrangements for the papal trip was not even known—a scandalous admission at a time of sweeping cuts in public services.

It was dishonest to say that the Pope only came for a pastoral visit, suggested G. N. Deodhekar of the National Secular Society. To placate Protestants,

the Pope's visit was not given the status accorded to a head of state. But the Pope had dithered over whether the Falkland crisis should prevent him travelling to England, showing clearly the semi-political overtones of his visit.

The meeting was not a large one. Attendance was no doubt affected by the uncertainty about whether the Pope would stick to his arrangements to come to the United Kingdom.

The British Humanist Association has a new General Secretary. Maeve Denby, who succeeded Kenneth Furness, has wide experience of voluntary organisations and public work. She is a former Oxford City councillor and parliamentary candidate. Organisations and campaigns with which she has been actively involved include the Campaign for Comprehensive Education, the Farmington Trust, the League Against Cruel Sports and the Community Health Council. Her first major BHA responsibility will be the annual general meeting and conference in London, 23-25 July. The conference theme is "Evolution Fights Back", and the speakers will include Dr Beverly Halstead, Dr Brian Charlesworth and Dr Harry Stopes-Roe. Details are available from the BHA, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8, telephone 01-937 2341.

## Freethinker Fund

We acknowledge with thanks donations which have been sent by the readers listed below.

Anonymous, £17; G. Allen, £4; J. Ancliffe, £1; C. Anderson, £1; P. S. Bethell, £2; S. Caverner, \$1.50; G. J. Davies, £3; M. Duane, £4; T. H. Ellison, £40; L. Goldman, £3; G. Glazer, £3; R. J. Hale, £2; G. Horner, £1; R. A. D. Hora, £2; B. A. Judd, £2; P. G. Lownds, £2; E. Martin, \$3; E. Peters, £2; R. H. J. Reader, 50p; C. R. Walton, £2; B. Whiting, £1; S. Williams, £2.

Total for the period 7 May 1982 until 7 June 1982: £97.50 and \$4.50.

The Pope's visit caused a split in Manchester's Jewish community. Dyan Chanoch Ehrentreu withdrew from the delegation to welcome John Paul II on hearing that it included Rabbi Robert Silverman, minister of the Manchester Reform Synagogue. He declared: "As a matter of religious principle, it is totally unacceptable for us to participate in a delegation representing the Jewish community which includes the representative of a movement which is not only alien to our beliefs and traditions but also seeks to undermine the very basic principles and observances of our faith". Rabbi Silverman commented: "It is really incredible what goes on in Manchester".

## Jottings During a Visit to Texas and Arizona

"Pray TV"—we began to watch this first episode of a video evangelistic soap opera. I thought I heard the family say that Jerry Falwell's approach was being challenged, but all we got was a fiery evangelist shouting from the pulpit against the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment): "Do you want your mother in the Army? Then you'll join with the secularists, humanists, homosexuals and other perverts . . ." Immediately the scene changed to the hero evangelist refuting the Falwell approach with a slick clergyman; then another switch of scene to his own simple congregation where he preached holding hands for togetherness. The television set was soon switched off, for I was in a feminist household.

The Women's Center in Houston celebrates the ninth anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision to legalise abortion. We attended with baby carrying a coloured balloon marked "I am a Choice". The strong fundamentalist lobby led by the Mormon and Baptists churches want to overturn the Court's decision. A case of Choicers versus Lifers. We lit candles in celebration. I can't think why for it looked more like an "in memoriam" service.

My attention is drawn by women to articles in *Ms*, the American women's magazine. The writer, Sonia Johnson, grew up in the Mormon Church but ex-communicated by her Elders in their 'court of love' because she marched with 20 others to Washington in ardent support of ERA under the Mormon banner, finally chaining themselves to the White House fences. The *New York Times* commented: "Mormons for ERA? Isn't that a little like astronauts for a flat earth?"

Conservatives are not all members of the Moral Majority, as was pointed out by the Arizona Senator, Barry Goldwater, in another article. Here are some of his points: "I will resist a religious outfit . . . or any other outfit . . . they're really taking more of a fascist line . . . Yes, I mean the Moral Majority . . . what the Right-to-Lifers contend is that life starts at the moment the seed is planted. I don't buy that. I don't think a life starts until the baby is delivered . . . I don't care how we amend the Constitution if a woman wants to get an abortion, she's going to get an abortion".

And here is something else from Goldwater's part of the country. In the *Phoenix Gazette* (Arizona) book censors are at work. They are demanding that William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and Ernest Hemingway's *Indian Camp* be removed from the required reading list of an important English course.

BEATRICE CLARKE

# Not Quite What Prinny had in Mind

TED McFADYEN

If the spirit of George Jacob Holyoake had been hovering anywhere near The Dome in Brighton over the Whitsun holiday weekend, he would no doubt have been fascinated to observe a confrontation of acute significance for him.

The Dome, situated in the grounds of Brighton's bizarre Royal Pavilion (built to the orders of the Prince Regent in a moment of eccentric extravagance), was the venue for the 113th Co-operative Congress, the annual get-together of the Co-operative movement, and the confrontation took place between delegates to the Congress and members of the British Field Sports Society. These tweed-jacketed hunting enthusiasts, complete with banners, unimpeachable county accents, and dogs (you're supposed to call them hounds, for some esoteric reason), were picketing Co-op delegates because the Co-operative Wholesale Society has had the wisdom to prohibit foxhunting on its 38,000 acres of farmland.

Why George Jacob Holyoake? The concatenation of circumstances is an intriguing one: readers of this journal will not need to be told that he was of course a founder of the secularist movement. But in addition he was one of the founding fathers of the Co-operative movement and, to add geographical

neatness to it all, he lived in Camelford Street in Brighton and indeed was the first President of the Brighton Equitable Co-operative Society. The Society's first premises, now a newsagent's shop, were at 32 North Road. The staff consisted of a manager, shop assistant and messenger. The Society is now the largest Sussex based retailing organisation.

Holyoake would have been pleased at the sight for two reasons—first, because it is part of free-thinkers' philosophy that animals should be protected, and indeed freethinkers have a long-standing reputation for their opposition to blood sports; secondly because the Co-op movement quite clearly shares this view. Indeed, they have formed their own campaign called "Co-operators Against Bloodsports" which distributed useful information to Co-op delegates.

According to the campaign, 73 per cent of the British public favour legislation to abolish blood-sports: a further 20 per cent have no firm opinion one way or the other; and only 7 per cent actually support foxhunting. The campaign takes the very sensible view that the CWS were right to prohibit foxhunting on its own land not only to prevent unnecessary cruelty, but because as landowners it is their duty to stop what they describe as "this obscenity" taking place.

Freethinkers can take heart: Dennis Landau, chief executive of the CWS, said that there was no possibility that the Co-op would change its mind over the ban. On hearing this the scarlet-coated hunters (if you want to make them furious, call it red), produced their final dire threat. "Unless you lift the ban", they warned grimly, "we will boycott Co-op products".

Co-op delegates appeared serenely unmoved by this threat. And come to think about it—when did you last see a huntsman park his horse outside your local caring, sharing Co-op while he popped in for a packet of cornflakes?

Now if it had been Fortnum and Mason's land, well. . .

## OBITUARIES

### Mr J. H. Budd

John Hayward Budd, who has died at the age of 81, was a *Freethinker* reader and a member of the National Secular Society for many years. There was a secular committal ceremony at Lambeth Crematorium, London.

### Mrs M. H. Duschine

Margarite Helene Duschine has died in a nursing home at Hove, Sussex. She was aged 84. Mrs Duschine was born in France and spent most of her life in Britain. She worked with a refugee relief organisation in Geneva for several years. There was a secular committal ceremony at The Downs Crematorium, Brighton.

### Mrs G. Fearnley

Gladys Fearnley, who has died at the age of 57, was a voluntary worker for many years in the Brighton and Hove area. She was actively involved with the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Family Planning Association. There was a secular ceremony when burial took place at Woodingdean Lawn Memorial Park, Brighton.

National Secular Society

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# The Falkland Crisis—Rhetoric and Reality

JIM HERRICK

Millions of words have been spoken and written about the war between Britain and Argentina over sovereignty of the Falkland Islands. The British Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and Pope John Paul II have spoken eloquently about the evil of aggression and the virtue of peace. Jim Herrick, a Council member of the National Secular Society and a former Editor of "The Freethinker", looks beyond the rhetoric.

"Blind and mentally handicapped workers in Birmingham started making Falkland Island badges today after the crisis threatened their jobs producing souvenirs for the Pope's visit to Britain". This was the gem the *New Statesman* found for its "These Falklands" column. The time for souvenirs, memorials and package tours of the Falkland Islands has not yet been reached. The war is in progress, as I write. Already both Mrs Thatcher and the Pope have filled the newspaper columns with the rhetoric of war and peace.

Many aspects of the Falkland crisis could be covered, but it is the rhetoric which I wish to examine. Mrs Thatcher and all British politicians have been sharpening their clichés and polishing their epithets. The Pope, whose "pastoral" visit to Britain was almost cancelled because of "political" sensitivity, sounded off about the need for peace almost every time he opened his mouth. I do not doubt their sincerity: those who believe the untruths they propagate are far more dangerous than those who proffer obviously deliberate lies. Truth is the first casualty of war, not only because of the management of news, but because the rhetoric wafts away the unwelcome realities of the original causes, the humanness of ordinary people on both sides, and the inescapable facts of geography and history.

The most obvious example is the way in which the Argentines become the "Argies" and the British "Our Boys". It is necessary to dehumanise the enemy to overcome the natural instinct to preserve rather than destroy life. The *Sun* is beneath contempt in its fostering of this kind of nationalistic enmity, but Mrs Thatcher herself squarely opposed any sense of balance. In condemning the BBC coverage of events Mrs Thatcher showed a warrior's determination to discriminate "them" from "us": "I understand there are times when we and the Argentine are almost being treated as equals and on a mutual basis, and that there are almost occasions when commentators say, 'If the Argentine did something and the British did something. . .'. If that is the case, it gives offence and causes great emotion among many people".

She has no objection to emotion of a different hue. At the Scottish Conservative Party conference on 15 May, Mrs Thatcher said, after a rapturous reception and fervent singing of "Land of Hope and Glory"—"Our service is to all who cherish liberty"—and claimed that the Falklands was "one of those insidious tests which, throughout history, evil has used to undermine the resolve of good". Such stirring language has been used by MPs of all political parties. Michael Foot has floundered lamentably in search of a formula which loyally supports the Government while urging moderation and trying to preserve his reputation as a peacemaker.

I am amongst those who are stirred by appeals to defence of liberty and deplored the Argentine dictatorship at a time when leading Conservatives were visiting Buenos Aires in search of expansion of trade. But I cannot see that the sending of a major task force and the loss of hundreds (maybe thousands) of lives were the only way to solve this dispute. I have been amazed and saddened at the speed with which the British nation has been bamboozled into believing that the fine flow of words represents the actuality of the Falklands situation.

## The Westminster Warriors

How has the nation been convinced? Participants in the first Parliamentary debate on the Falklands crisis have much to answer for. The extraordinary crisis measure of a three-hour Saturday debate gave sufficient time for MPs to work themselves into a fever of indignation and excitement.

Does the historic parliamentary chamber encourage a loss of reason? Do ghosts of Wellington and Palmerston beckon modern MPs to misapply past rhetoric to current situations? The historical references during that first debate were many: the Suez crisis, the destruction of Von Spee's squadron by a dispatch of another "Invincible" to the Falklands Islands in December 1914, the Duke of Wellington, and, of course, the fall of Chamberlain's Government. It would be a tragedy if an eternal guilty memory of appeasement in the 1930s led to an assumption that the invariable response to disputes, even armed ones, must be a show of military strength.

After three hours in Parliament, the rhetoric of ensuring that "foul and brutal aggression does not succeed in the world" (Michael Foot) was well under way. This is not the place to argue in detail why I think it such a false argument (it has been impressively argued by Peter Jenkins in the *Guardian*). However, I must indicate why it seems to me to correspond so little with reality.

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Although the enemy is a dictator, Britain has not embarked upon a crusade against Latin American dictatorships and will continue to arm such leaders when the war is over. The democratic rights of self-determination for the Falklanders are worth very considerable respect, but major resources of a democracy are not spent on behalf of every minority within the nation. Deaths from lack of hospitals and disrupted lives through unemployment have to be placed against possible resettlement of some groups of the population; such priorities came into the abandonment of Greek Cypriots and the removal of the inhabitants of the island of Diego Garcia for the sake of a military base.

Britain is said to be demonstrating to the world that aggression does not pay. But we are demonstrating that military might is the only way of resolving disputed territories. And far from upholding the rule of international law, precipitate and massive military action shows that disagreements cannot be sorted out without resort to arms. The United Nations, whose weakness is deplored, is further weakened by immediate unilateral military action, however genuine the grievance.

The first Parliamentary debate committed Britain to sending a task force at once. Edward du Cann, MP, said: "The world must face the fact that if one tolerates a single act of aggression, one connives at them all. In the United Kingdom, we must accept reality". Alas, the UK abandoned the realities of the dispute for the rhetoric of nationalism, the inexorable (and irreversible) logic of military action, and the defence of injured national pride.

### The Blinkered Lady

As the crisis shifted from the War of Thatcher's face to the War of Thatcher's face-lift, jingoism and narrow-mindedness increased. I shall never forget Mrs Thatcher turning to journalists outside No 10 Downing Street after the recapture of Georgia and calling out, "Rejoice, gentlemen, rejoice!" No one can doubt Mrs Thatcher's firmness of purpose, but where is the wisdom, the vision, the humanity of someone who can say, while the war was taking place, she "would not use the word magnanimity over the Falklands"?

The Pope's statements about the Falklands crisis have possessed a very different tone. He has stressed that suffering occurs on both sides and that war is an unsatisfactory way of solving disagreements between nations. I am no admirer of John Paul II's reactionary theology, rampant mariolatry and senseless attitudes to contraception and sexual freedom. His pronouncements about peace have been impressive, yet his credibility must be examined in relation to the institution which he heads and the Christian tradition he upholds.

His strongest peace speech was made at Coventry, where the crowd was half the size predicted. He said that the "scale and horror of modern warfare—whether nuclear or not—makes it totally unacceptable as a means of settling the differences between nations", which markedly contrasts with the Government's enthusiasm for military victory.

### A Voice for Peace

He firmly linked peace with a struggle for human rights and human values: "Wherever the strong exploit the weak; wherever the rich take advantage of the poor; wherever great powers seek to dominate and impose ideologies; there the work of peace is undone; there the cathedral of peace is destroyed".

Very fine sentiments. But what of the history of a Church whose exploitation of the weak, whose wealth and whose imposition of power would fill volumes? Even assuming that we are prepared to say that past misdeeds of a changing institution cannot be held against it for ever, the current Vatican activities cannot be forgotten. Is there no attempt to exploit the weak and poor, to obtain followers and their money, to enlarge the world power of Catholicism? The credibility of the Pope's good words become a little hollow to anyone who thinks about the deeds and organisation of the Church he leads.

In one of his prayers for peace, the Pope prayed to a "God of Peace". What is the God of Peace doing creating a world where simultaneously Argentines slaughter Britons, Iranians kill Iraqis, and Israelis attack Lebanese?

If the Pope can genuinely become a powerful figure calling for disarmament and non-violent settlement of disputes between nations, I shall not want to follow him, but I will at least hope that that part of his message is heard. I am ambivalent about a Pope who opposes nationalistic wars, but encourages nationalist sentiments by kissing the tarmac whenever he alights from a plane into a new country. And I find that the pleas to a "God of Peace" are the words of an illusionist and conjuror.

Freethinkers prefer to base pleas for peace on hatred of the perils and suffering of humankind, not the vagaries of an unkind deity. The rhetoric of peace should not be based on the unreality of an illogical illusion.

Mrs Thatcher's and British MPs' war rhetoric and the Pope's peace rhetoric are sharply contrasted. I know which I prefer. Yet they are both in danger in practice of promoting activity that is the opposite of what they claim to stand for. The Pope's generalities did not allow him specifically to condemn Thatcher's and Galtieri's war-mongering. Mrs Thatcher's fine defence of liberation, freedom and democracy has led to one of the saddest, silliest and most avoidable wars in our history.

# Branding a Baptist and Boring a Quaker

J. R. SPENCER

A hundred years ago "The Freethinker" and its most malevolent opponents were on a collision course and when the Christmas 1882 issue appeared it shocked Victorian England. The contents included a poem entitled "Jocular Jehovah" and the notorious cartoon, "Moses Getting a Back View" (of the Christian deity). Although it was Charles Bradlaugh that Sir Henry Tyler and his friends wanted to put down, no doubt they were content to see the paper's Editor, George William Foote, in the dock and to hear the Roman Catholic Mr Justice North sentence him to 12 months' imprisonment. J. R. Spencer, Fellow, Selwyn College, Cambridge, has written a series of articles on famous blasphemy trials to mark the centenary of the blasphemous "Freethinker". The first article is devoted to two 17th-century victims of Christian intolerance. John Traske and James Nayler, both religious oddities, suffered greatly at the hands of their persecutors. The arguments against freedom used for three centuries were curiously similar to those we hear from contemporary defenders of blasphemy law and Christian privilege.

John Traske's case in 1618 is the first well-known case where a man was punished in the secular courts rather than by the ecclesiastical authorities for expressing unorthodox religious views. It therefore marks the beginning of blasphemy as a criminal offence and the start of the legal journey which led to the trial and imprisonment of G. W. Foote, the first Editor of *The Freethinker*, almost a century ago.

Traske was a semi-educated man from Somerset, who after initial rejection as a candidate for the priesthood was ordained by the Bishop of Salisbury. About 1616 he went to London and achieved instant success as a revivalist preacher. His message was extreme fundamentalism: the Bible is all literally true, and forms a complete code of conduct for every aspect of life.

His troubles began when one of his followers, a tailor called Hamlet Jackson, asked why, if this is so, Christians eat pork and keep Sunday instead of Saturday. Traske could not answer this: which perhaps explains his initial rejection as an ordination candidate. On reflection, he decided that for the last 1,600 years Christians had been in error, and launched a preaching campaign to get them to keep Saturday and give up pork.

Under Elizabeth I, the Church of England had been placed in a theological position half-way between Catholicism and Protestantism, and everyone was required by law to accept this compromise. Worship, other than Anglican worship, was a criminal offence. The High Commission — the

Anglican version of the Papal Inquisition — was set up, and empowered to arrest and indefinitely detain those who held unorthodox views. By his preaching, John Traske was therefore playing a dangerous game. As if he had not done enough to attract the hostile attention of the authorities already, he then decided he could work miracles, and offered to cure James I of gout. Not surprisingly, in the autumn of 1617, Traske and his followers found themselves the prisoners of the High Commission.

The High Commission found Traske a difficult prisoner, and they tried to soften him up by making him eat pork. In response to this, he wrote a long and disrespectful letter to the King. This got him into far deeper trouble. Instead of being dealt with by the ecclesiastical authorities, whose powers were limited, he was handed over to the Star Chamber, which could order flogging and mutilation.

## Christian Justice

On 16 June 1618 Traske was tried. His main offence in the eye of the Star Chamber was that he "very insolently and presumptuously wrote a most scandalous letter to the King's most excellent Maiestie . . . and thirtie two tymees useth the uncivil terme of Thow and Thee". Nevertheless, they took the opportunity to condemn him for preaching "Jewish opinions" as well. He was sentenced to be publicly flogged from the Fleet prison to the Palace of Westminster; to be there pilloried with one ear nailed to the Boards; to be branded on the forehead with the letter "J" for Jew; to be then whipped from the Fleet prison to Cheapside, and there pilloried with the other ear nailed to the boards; to pay a fine of £1,000; to be degraded from the Ministry and to be imprisoned for the rest of his life.

The flogging, branding, nailing, etc. were all duly carried out. Traske did not spend long in prison, however, because he was released on publishing a grovelling recantation, in which he thanked his "Holy and Tender Mother the Church of England" for punishing him so thoroughly in his own best interests.

The reconciliation to his Holy and Tender Mother did not last long, however, and he wandered from sect to sect for the rest of his life. When he died in 1636 he was a member of the group which later became the Congregationalists.

The sabbatarian sect which Traske had founded in 1617 survived the moral shock of the defection of its leader, and even the defection of Hamlet Jackson, its chief disciple, who took his fundamentalism to its logical conclusion and fled to Amsterdam to be

circumcised a Jew. It survived persecution: Traskes's wife, also arrested by the High Commission, remained steadfast, and spent 16 years in prison.

The Traskites—eventually renamed the Seventh Day Baptists, continued as a sect in England until the early years of this century. By then, like many other religious oddities, they had exported themselves to the USA and flourish there to this day. In the last century, it was their influence which led the Seventh Day Adventists to take up observance of the seventh day. So in terms of objects achieved, the Star Chamber's attempt to suppress John Traskes's unorthodox religious views was hardly an outstanding success.

After the Civil War in the 1640s, the Puritan fundamentalists who had previously been persecuted by the Church of England came to power. They in their turn began to persecute two new religious groups which preached views opposed to their own: the Ranters and the Quakers.

Both of these two groups shared the notions that God is present in all men, and that men should be primarily guided, not—as orthodox Puritans said—by the Bible literally interpreted, but by the personal revelations of the God within: what Quakers called “the Inward Light”. The Ranters pushed these ideas to the limit, and reached the pantheistic idea that there is no God outside nature, and the Antinomian idea that the “saved” can do no wrong. Although the Quakers rejected existing forms of Christianity, they did not go to these extremes of heresy; but they were equally objectionable to orthodox Puritans nevertheless.

### An Illegal Trial

To suppress the Ranters, the Puritan Parliament passed two Blasphemy Acts which made it the crime of blasphemy to preach various Ranter doctrines. Quakers were often prosecuted under these Acts as well; but Oliver Cromwell, who was now in power, was more tolerant than his followers, and took to intervening to stop the prosecution of Quakers for blasphemy.

The early Quakers had the strange habit of “performing Signs”. For example, Solomon Eccles, following his Inward Light, stripped himself naked except for a loincloth, put a pan of burning brimstone on his head, and wandered through the streets of London shouting “Repent! Repent! Remember Sodom and Gomorrah!”

At Bristol in October 1656, James Nayler did something similar. He and others enacted a kind of pageant of Christ's entry into Jerusalem; he rode in on a horse, while other Quakers walked bare-headed beside, chanting “Holy! Holy!” and strewing their garments in the way. The Bristol magistrates, in no mood for signs, arrested them and informed Parli-

ment, which was in session. Parliament assumed that Nayler was claiming to be Christ, and — like the ancient Jews with Jesus—they took this for appalling blasphemy.

They also saw in this incident the chance to crush Nayler, and, through him, the movement of which he was one of the leaders. In order to hit him as hard as possible—and lest Cromwell intervene to frustrate proceedings in the ordinary courts—Parliament decided, quite illegally, to conduct the trial itself.

The trial, if it can be called a trial, consisted of 11 days of Parliamentary debate during which enraged Puritans said, over and over again, how horrible and sinister the Quakers were. Nayler was assumed to be guilty, and was given no opportunity to make a defence. Having voted him guilty of “horrid blasphemy”, Parliament resolved to mutilate him rather than stone him to death. After full discussion of which bit to cut off how, they decided that he should be flogged through the streets of London, and later through Bristol as well; that he should be branded on the forehead with “B” for blasphemer; that he should be indefinitely imprisoned; and—exquisite detail of cruelty—his tongue should be bored through with a red-hot iron.

Nayler's suffering when he was flogged through the streets were so great that a group of London citizens petitioned Parliament to remit the rest of the punishment, but this was refused. Every bit of the hideous sentence was meticulously carried out. A new Parliament eventually released Nayler in 1659, when he at once went back to his career as a Quaker missionary. His health was broken, however, and he died the following year.

One of the most interesting features of the Nayler incident is the similarity of some of the arguments which were used against him in Parliament to some of the pronouncements which were made three centuries later in the course of the *Gay News* trial. One of Nayler's Parliamentary opponents declared: “Shall we suffer our Lord Jesus to be thus abused and trampled upon? My conscience would fly in my face if I should be silent!”

Those words were uncomfortably echoed by Mrs Whitehouse explaining why she started her prosecution: “I don't think Jesus Christ has ever been more real to me as a person than he was at that particular moment. I felt I had to do something; I thought immediately of His crucifixion and the way people turned and went away and left him, and I thought I would be like those if I did nothing. . .”. Some of the Puritans' apocalyptic remarks on the disastrous effects of religious toleration in their time could be exchanged word for word with Judge King-Hamilton's comments on the excessive permissiveness of these days. And no one would notice the difference.

# BOOK

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI: A DIVIDED LIFE by Georgina Battiscombe. Constable £9.50

The problem for Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) was how to have a fulfilling life and be a poet under the strictures of Victorian middle-class womanhood. The problem for Georgina Battiscombe is how to represent this life in a readable way, especially when the protagonist is more than usually retiring, something of an invalid, a devout Anglo-Catholic and a spinster. All the important things in her life were internal events, and it is hard to be sure even what they were. Her life must be put into some kind of meaningful chronological order and made interesting to the onlooker peering at it from the distant perspective of the 1980s. Amazingly, Georgina Battiscombe has succeeded in this object.

The Rossetti children had a privileged, intellectual Victorian upbringing. They were, if it is possible to apply fractions to the genes of nationality, three-quarters Italian. Their father, Gabriele, was a Neapolitan exile and their mother, Frances, was descended on her father's side from a distinguished Tuscan family. The children, Maria, Dante Gabriel, William and Christina, were never shunted off to a nursery, but spent their days with their parents and met their parents' friends. They went to museums, theatres and the zoo. At home they played chess, made a toy theatre and played a sonnet-writing game. They left London for holidays in Buckinghamshire with their grandparents and later, when the family had more money, at the seaside. Christina had the reputation as a child of being affectionate, clever, self-confident and witty.

Something rather mysterious happened to Christina during the four years between her 12th and 16th year. At 16 Christina is "retiring, introverted, mistrustful of the world and of her own self. The tempestuous child has become an almost painfully controlled young girl; she, who was once so confident and confident, now shuts herself away from outside contacts behind a screen of shyness and almost impenetrable reserve". She may have had a nervous breakdown or physical ill health. During these years Gabriele Rossetti was gravely ill and had to give up his professorship at King's College. The whole family became impoverished and anxious. At about this time Frances Rossetti and her two daughters took up Tractarianism (later called Anglo-Catholicism).

Christina Rossetti's religion was of the greatest importance to her, but "the tension between the type of religion she practised and the natural bent of her temperament was peculiarly acute. The

# FREETHINKER

change from a passionate, confident child to a repressed and reticent adult was partly self-induced". As the action of her life took place mainly inside Christina's psyche, that is where Georgina Battiscombe channels her attention, but she very commendably resists the temptation to resort to those gratingly novelistic devices of impossibly precise conversations and interior monologues. She also avoids the pitfall of pointless speculation and does not try to manufacture scandals, love affairs, feuds, or other devices to charm the wool-gathering reader.

Indeed, Georgina Battiscombe devotes half a chapter to demolishing the thesis of another biographer, Lona Mosk Packer, that Christina had a long-running secret, but chaste, love affair with William Bell Scott. Packer has constructed this love affair out of supposition and the "evidence" of the poems. But poems are never evidence of anything except imagination. (Is Craig Raine secretly a Martian? Is Ted Hughes concealing from us his black feathers?) It is absurdly naive to read anybody's poems as a kind of versified diary, unless there is some persuasive reason to connect them with specific events in the poet's life.

Poet though she was, she was nevertheless obsessed with the details of religious dogma. Poets have to be interested in some details, or they would not bother to rewrite poems or ponder over the *mot juste*, but a mania for detail seems ill suited to one who was so absorbed with the eternal themes of love and death. How far was hers a "divided life" and how far did she just have a many-sided personality like the rest of us? Not all of Christina Rossetti's poetry was gloomy, and in her letters she exhibits a charming sense of humour. She was doubtlessly sexually repressed, but yet she could write sympathetically about illegitimacy. Christina Rossetti's life became a round of piety and familiar duty, but in many ways it was not a dull life. Her brother William lists some fifty well-known Victorian intellectuals and artists whom she knew, not counting the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

A good biographer does not need to rely on exciting events in her subject's life to pull her book through when her writing is uninspired, nor does a good biography even need a likeable or admirable subject. Georgina Battiscombe writes about Christina Rossetti's outwardly uneventful life in such a way that we find the description absorbing and the subject sympathetic.

SARAH LAWSON

# REVIEWS

## CINEMA

**TICKET TO HEAVEN.** Selected Odeon Cinemas.

*Ticket to Heaven* is the story of Dave (Nick Mancuso), an average young Canadian teacher who has just broken up with his girl friend. A friend invites him to spend a few recuperative days in a rural commune with a group of boisterous, squeaky-clean young people. Dave's new-found brothers and sisters gently deprive him of liberty and privacy and introduce him to a hectic regime of singing, chanting, a noisy ritualistic game called "love-bombing", to group therapy, religious indoctrination and the worship of his "true" parents, a middle-aged Indonesian couple whose portraits adorn the commune's temple.

Worn down by exhaustion, compounded by the low-protein diet, Dave, recalcitrant at first, becomes a member of the sect, and participates in fundraising activities—collecting money from the general public for a bogus charity. This is not seen by the cult as fraud but as a highly commendable way of saving those whom they have defrauded from themselves.

Dave's family, risking imprisonment, manage to abduct their carefully-watched son and intern him in a motel where a de-programmer visits him. After a long and painful struggle he unscrambles Dave's mind. The film ends with a freeze-frame of Dave, restored to what is laughingly called normality.

The film is a very graphic and watchable portrayal of the various stages of brainwashing—the manic camaraderie, the tender coercion—and of different kinds of acolytes who make up such a sect and help to reinforce its values. But surely we know this by now, through television documentaries and reports by de-programmed Moonies. The film tells us too little, too late. It is too limited in its frame of reference, and lacks the resonance I believe such a film should have. Moonies and other extreme sects (the film, of course, creates a fictional cult, but one closely modelled on the Unification Church) are only the *reductio ad absurdum* of other religions and ideologies of the Right and Left, with their hollow slogans, suppression of the individual (although I suppose individualism could be regarded as an ideology), insistence on slavish obedience and self-sacrifice, and yielded threats about what will happen to those who stray.

*Ticket to Heaven* recreates the intense hothouse

atmosphere of a cult, but the film's single-minded didacticism is its weakness as well as its strength. It has an immediate, short-lived impact, but no resonance. I felt I was being bludgeoned into adopting the film's simplistic, self-righteous attitude, rather than being needled into asking questions or into seeing the connection between the fanaticism of adherents to a cult and that of followers of other extreme sects or ideologies. To be pressured into acquiescence by a film which purports to condemn such "programming" is a sad irony indeed.

The film makes no attempt to address the many questions that pose themselves about sects. Why do apparently normal people join them? Are such people really so "normal"? What is wrong with our society and with organised religion that these sects have mushroomed, notably in the United States? Dave's bewildered father says that he has never been able to get his son to come to synagogue, but this is not explored in the film. Admittedly director R. L. Thomas may be trying to make some comment about our mercenary, tawdry values by shooting a dialogue between Dave and a friend by a shop window where remarkably cheap denims were on display, but somehow I doubt it.

I do not see the proliferation of cults as an illness, but as the symptom of a malaise of our so-called civilisation and I think that a film about cults which fails to take this on board is being smug and dishonest. It's a sign of blinkered vision—and blinkered vision is what cults are all about.

VERA LUSTIG

## Pope-on-the-Box

The little old Pope proved himself to be no puppet-on-a-string when he exposed himself to media coverage. He may have been an actor; so was Ronald Reagan. But whereas the American President was a bad actor, John Paul II has charmed rather than alienated. Nobody other than a churl would deny him his outstanding achievement in making the huge effort to ensure coming over as a public performer. This he did with flying colours. A "plus", then, for being such a good trouper (in the theatrical sense of the word).

Now that John Paul II has come and gone, exuding charisma on the way and leaving a trail of razzmatazz behind, we must assess the cheerful, kindly-looking man for what he says and does, as well as for what he only says. Considering the number of times he said the same thing—not in different ways but repetitiously in the same way—his "press" was remarkably good.

Arriving and departing he asked us to pray for peace and showed us that he was praying for it too.

In London, Manchester, Liverpool, Scotland and Wales he implored us in that pleasing, well-projected voice in the same old terms to pray for peace. And it did seem to some of the faithful at one time that he was the epitome of Good while to his enemies (Paisley and his bully-boys) he epitomised the Bad. Then we remember the wars down the ages, those religious wars in which one side always represented the goodies and the other the baddies.

The travelling, warm and human Pontiff loves little children and hates war. He also forbids euthanasia, even under the most distressing circumstances when life is no longer tolerable to someone suffering a living death. He teaches that marriage vows must under all circumstances be honoured, and however incompatible the couple have turned out to be they must remain married whatever the cost. He condemns abortion, and if the mother's life has to be compared in importance to the embryo it's the mother who may have to be sacrificed. Now this isn't good, fair or peaceful, however well the public relations industry dresses it up.

John Paul II far outstrips Billy Graham for all the latter's high-powered, evangelical public relations backing. Both men put the messages of their respective churches across, and although it was peace on earth to all men, the "all men" were not specified. We recalled that Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Holy-Rollers and the way-out cults were men (and women) too.

The Pope champions a broad church in which Christians of all sorts and sizes are taught to love one another and work together. But the basic aim is to bring about a greater understanding of Christianity.

The papal circus rolled off to entertain the people of Argentina—the Argies, as the *Sun* newspaper describes them. The Pope at least differentiates between the people "over there" who are members of the fascist junta and those who are not. This non-stop kisser of babies, cuddler of celibate priests and recipient of endless bouquets can do no less than have a word in the ear of the generals, admirals and air marshals who lead the fascists in Argentina. He could tell them where to get off and demand (at the risk of excommunication for refusal) an end to the injustices of military dictatorship.

The Falklands war was described by a Church leader as the one cloud over John Paul II's visit to Britain. But as a *Guardian* correspondent commented: "It is indeed brave of the Pope to arrive in Britain and condemn the war, particularly considering how the media have been treating Tony Benn for doing the same thing".

**PETER COTES**

During the 19th century the influence of British freethought lecturers and journalists spread far beyond our own shores. There was considerable emigration and many of those who went abroad played an important role in establishing organisations in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. This article commemorates the centenary of the foundation of one such organisation.

The origins of secularism in Australia are still a little obscure. It was presumably imported into the various colonies by immigrants, mainly from London and the industrial north of England, and aided in its growth by sellers of "advanced" literature from Britain and America.

In 1871, when the radical Welsh Unitarian, William Lorando Jones, was prosecuted for blasphemy in New South Wales, he received support from a Sydney Secular Society, but whether this was a formally constituted organisation is uncertain. An earlier secular society is supposed to have been founded at Newcastle, New South Wales, in 1865. By 1875, at any rate, there was a Freethought Association of Brisbane (Queensland), and at about the same time an Adelaide Secular and Free Discussion Society in South Australia. Magazines more or less sympathetic to freethought, such as John E. Kelly's *Stockwhip*, Joseph Wing's *Spiritual Inquirer* (and his later *Reformer*), John Tyerman's *Progressive Spiritualist and Freethought Advocate* and E. Cyril Haviland's *Freethought*, came and went; and in Melbourne a Fitzroy Secular Academy was opened by George S. Manns, secretary of the local Democratic Association. By July 1880 the *Sydney Bulletin* was painting a patronising verbal portrait of the typical colonial freethinker—"half educated but not unintelligent".

In Victoria's booming capital, Melbourne (which briefly outstripped Sydney in size), the freethinkers at first found niches for themselves in bodies such as the Victorian Association of Progressive Spiritualists, the Sunday Free Discussion Society, and the Democratic Association. In 1882, one of the Spiritualist Association's star performers denounced spiritualism as a fraud and decided to form an organisation of his own. He was Thomas Walker, born in Lancashire in 1858.

The Australasian Secular Association was founded on 17 July 1882 at a meeting in the Masonic Hall, Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, chaired by James Pedley and attended by some 60 people, "including a few ladies". Its objects were "to maintain the principles and rights of freethought, and to direct their application to the secular improvement of man-

kind". A copy of the proposed rules mentions that they were based on those of the National Secular Society, with "such alterations and additions as was deemed necessary". Walker was elected president and James Donovan became the first secretary. By 1883 the Association had 600 members and in August of that year held an intercolonial freethought conference, graced by the Hon (later Sir) Robert Stout of New Zealand.

The ASA had a few middle-class members, such as Joseph Wing, Henry Keylock Rusden (early advocate of birth control) and the brilliant young lyric poet, Bernard O'Dowd, who produced the *Australasian Secular Association Lyceum Tutor* (1888) for its children's classes. By and large, however, the membership was composed of earnest working men and small shopkeepers. Early members included Montague Miller (who had fought at the Eureka Stockade), Stephen Cummin (who had sheltered Peter Lalor after Eureka), the Andrade brothers (anarchists and booksellers), A. W. Eustace (artist and gold miner), A. D. Downs (Punch and Judy showman), Isaac Selby (itinerant lecturer), and Martin Farkas (formerly lieutenant to Kossuth). The indomitable Joseph Skurrie joined about 1886 and became ASA spokesman on the Bendigo goldfields.

## A Shady Character

Thomas Walker's allegations of spiritualist fraud wore down the patience of the VAPS leader, William Henry Terry (1836-1913), a reasonable man not normally unsympathetic to freethought as he imported and sold secularist as well as spiritualist literature. So in September 1883 Terry, in his paper the *Harbinger of Light*, revealed — with careful documentation — Walker's shady past. In Toronto, in 1874, a man had been burned by phosphorus ignited by Walker "while attempting to simulate spirit manifestations". The man had died of complications and an inquest held Walker (who had already left Canada) responsible. Walker resigned as ASA president and decided it was time to go walkabouts: he quit Melbourne for Sydney where he subsequently became a poet, playwright, birth control advocate, and member of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly. Later he wounded a clergyman while "drunk and disorderly", then became a temperance advocate. His motto, by the way, was "Charity never faileth".

At about this time, in London, Charles Bradlaugh received a request from the ASA for an approved lecturer. The man chosen was Joseph Symes, a vice-president of the National Secular Society who had hoped (in vain) to edit *The Freethinker* while G. W. Foote was in prison for blasphemy. Symes arrived

in Melbourne on 10 February 1884 and swiftly revived the ASA's fortunes: his packed and profitable lectures offered stuffy Melbourne a wealth of new ideas (often delivered in a provocative style); and the success of his paper, the *Liberator*, transmitted freethought ideas the length and breadth of the Australian colonies and New Zealand. The Association, in its heyday, campaigned for free speech and against sabbatarianism, organised a library and mutual improvement classes, and had thriving branches. It even had a choir (largely poached from the VAPS in 1882).

The good times were not to last. Symes's boots-and-all atheism went down badly in some quarters, as did his opposition to racialism (particularly slander of the Chinese). Other members, especially some of the anarchists, resented his advocacy of birth control; and Symes was bitterly opposed to anarchism. But the Melbourne Anarchists' Club was organised within the ASA in 1886 and by 1888 the Association itself was a divided shambles, split into pro- and anti-Symes factions, both of which claimed to be the authentic voice of freethought.

The pro-Symes faction sunk their funds into building a splendid Hall of Science, which was opened by Symes in 1889. But in Skurrie's words, "the traitors in the camp were conspiring to overthrow the man who had built up a great Freethought movent in Australasia". Pitched battles (literally) ensued for possession of the building, and as a majority of the trustees of the land were of the anti-Symes group, the courts eventually found against Symes in 1891. He did not regain control of the building until 1897, by which time both secularist factions had been wiped out by the economic depression of 1893.

The "armies of reason", the shining hope of Australian freethought, had foundered in a morass of farce and venom. Bernard O'Dowd returned to Catholicism (but later moved on to Unitarianism); Isaac Selby became an evangelical and delighted in commenting that the secularists, whose "mildest and perhaps most prevalent vice" was slander, were "throwing away their ammunition on the Gibraltar of Christianity".

## Different Paths

Joseph Symes and his devoted second wife, Agnes, struggled on with lecturing and publishing with great hardship until 1904. Symes returned to England in 1906, where he was feted by the NSS, but died there at the end of the year. H. K. Rusden remained in Melbourne—he was secretary of the Royal Society of Victoria and later became an advocate of cremation. Joseph Skurrie travelled widely in search

of work, settling for 15 years on the goldfields of Western Australia. He returned to Victoria about 1915 to take part in socialist and anti-conscription agitation, and died at the age of nearly 92 in 1949 (he even wrote a novelette in his 90th year). Some of the anarchist faction drifted to Sydney, but Montague Miller went to Western Australia, became a pioneer communist and died in 1920. Thomas Walker read a poem over the coffin, covered by a red flag and Miller's miner's rights.

Walker himself moved to Western Australia (where he died in 1932), becoming a journalist and president of the West Australian Rationalist Association. He entered state politics and became at various times Attorney-General, Minister for Education and Speaker. He opposed capital punishment and mistreatment of Aborigines, legislated against cruelty to animals and encouraged the spread of irrigation, education and local libraries. About 1918 he recruited a young Englishman, J. S. Langley, to go to Melbourne and try to repair the fortunes of freethought in Victoria.

### Years of Decline

In Britain secularism grew steadily, peaked in the 1880s, declined, stabilised and survived. Social conditions in small colonies were rather different from those in populous, industrial Britain, and Symes's inflexibility, the spiteful fanaticism of his enemies and the trade depression of the 1890s ensured that the ASA, which burst on the scene like a great shooting star, soon burned out. "It was their tragedy", Barry Smith has remarked of the Melbourne secularists, "that their independence and argumentative devotion brought only bitter personal estrangement amongst them, destruction upon their society, and made of their cause a laughing stock".

The Association's success in Melbourne was slight, but in its heyday the ASA encouraged other freethinkers to come out to Australia, and at least three of them, William Whitehouse Collins, Wallace Nelson and William Willis, distinguished themselves in other parts of Australia or in New Zealand. Only the odd tattered volume survives from the ASA library, but its once proud Hall of Science still stands, as Brenan Hall. It was bought in 1913 by Archbishop Daniel Mannix and now forms parts of St Vincent's Hospital, Fitzroy.

*Note.* Outlines of the lives of the following have already appeared in *The Freethinker*: H. K. Rusden (March 1980), Joseph Skurrie (September 1978), Joseph Symes (August-September 1977) and William Willis (October 1978). The writer gratefully acknowledges his debt, in preparing this article, to Dr F. B. Smith's "Religion and Freethought in Melbourne 1870 to 1890" (MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 1960).

## LETTERS

### THE EXIT CASE

I was astonished to read in your normally reliable newspaper the tissue of falsehoods and inaccuracies in the article "Exit Aftermath" in the May issue.

You claim that the Reed-Lyons trial "was a serious blow to the cause of voluntary euthanasia" and that "work over many years by . . . supporters was undone". As a matter of historical fact, over 580 new members joined EXIT following the trial, and not one of the Society's 20 prominent supporters resigned as a result of it. Indeed, the only evidence ever quoted for such "damage" has been a statement by the Chairman that "damage had been done", without giving any supporting evidence.

You denounce what you call my "almost unbelievably inept judgement" in enlisting the services of Lyons, in apparent ignorance of the fact that Lyons' services were originally enlisted by my predecessor, Mr C. R. Sweetingham, so that I was actually continuing an already existing arrangement. This fact is widely known, and was reported in the "Guardian" after the trial.

Lastly, you pour scorn on Lyons' abilities as a counsellor, in ignorance of the fact that this is a highly debatable point, and that several witnesses at the trial attested to his kindness and sensitivity as a counsellor.

I am sorry that you have been misled by such biased and inaccurate information, and I trust that you will set the matter straight.

NICHOLAS REED

The Editor replies: Nicholas Reed implies that because people joined EXIT and prominent members did not resign, the trial did not damage the cause of voluntary euthanasia. Of course he has been shielded from criticism made both by EXIT members and from people who would otherwise have become members. Who can possibly doubt that the publicity arising from the trial besmirched the organisation and the cause in the public mind? It is now highly unlikely that any Member of Parliament will dare to advocate law reform. Opponents of voluntary euthanasia will fully exploit revelations made in court.

Mr Reed claims that Mark Lyons' unsuitability as a counsellor of people contemplating suicide "is a highly debatable point". Obviously Nicholas Reed believed that he was suitable for such work, having described Lyons on his EXIT membership card as a "doctor of divinity, medicine and philosophy". Lyons was a "faith healer" who told the court that he received healing powers and instructions from a "puppet master" through a small hole in the top of his head.

Nicholas Reed refers to a "Guardian" article—published after the trial—in which it was claimed that Lyons' "counselling" services were originally enlisted by a former General Secretary of EXIT, the late C. R. Sweetingham. The allegation was based on a statement made by Mark Lyons and by "other evidence" (unspecified). It is unfortunate that the "Guardian", having made this allegation against a dead man, could not find space to publish a rebuttal. One of the main criticisms levelled at Mr Sweetingham was that he was too cautious and conservative. Those who were close to him maintain that while Mr Sweetingham may have used Mark Lyons' voluntary services about the office, he would not have referred people in distress to him.

## CATHOLICS AND CONTRACEPTION

In its open letter to Pope John Paul II, People Opposing Papal Edicts (POPE) stated that in Britain more than 30 per cent of the induced abortions each year are carried out on Roman Catholics who comprise about 12 per cent of the population, and that this can only be due to the taboo on contraception. It is widely held that Roman Catholics are using artificial contraception as much as other members of the population, so how can this be blamed on their not using contraception.

I think it is unfair to blame the Pope for the many millions of children who starve to death. After all, not everyone is a Catholic in the Third World where parents often have big families in the hope that their children will provide them with assistance in their old age.

JOHN WATSON

## WE'LL TAKE YOUR WORD FOR IT

I should like to point out an error in the News and Notes item, "All for Jesus" (May). Removal of the penis does not create a eunuch, and Mr Roger Cox is deluding himself if he thinks so. He has merely removed the means, not the desire. Removal of the testicles is needed to make a eunuch (ask any farmer), perhaps an even more daunting DIY operation!

PETER CHAPMAN

## COVERAGE OF PAPAL VISIT

Now that the circus has moved on, those of us who keep the BBC in business with our licence money would very much like to know why the tour of the showbiz Pope was given so much coverage—hogging our screens and the radio waves every day.

After all, this is nominally a Protestant country, although most of the population would not care a hoot if the Archbishop of Canterbury got into bed with the Pope, the Chief Rabbi and the Ayatollah Khomeini. As John Naughton pointed out in "The Listener" of 27 May, insofar as the British believe in anything, it is television snooker—an opinion well supported by the Research note in the same issue.

I. NOEL TREVETT

## APOLOGY

R. W. Morrell, secretary of the Thomas Paine Society, was right to remind me—as my review of the television programme on Paine clearly omitted "credit where credit is due"—of both his and Christopher Brunel's association as joint founders of the Society.

As to Audrey Williamson's admirable biography of the great man, I have already put my appreciation on record in a letter to "The Spectator" (1 September 1973) when I took issue with that periodical's reviewer, Richard Luckett, whose poor opinion of Miss Williamson's work on Paine I took much exception to. On that occasion I remembered to say it in print.

PETER COTES

## "THE MISERY OF CHRISTIANITY"

I am trying to obtain a copy of "The Misery of Christianity", by Joachim Kahl (Pelican), now out of print. If anyone has a second-hand copy for sale would they please contact "The Freethinker" office.

JIM HERRICK

## EVENTS

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** Programme of Summer and Autumn activities from Mr W. McIlroy, 32 Over Street, Brighton, Sussex, telephone Brighton 696425.

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

**Havering and District Humanist Society.** Harold Wood Social Centre, junction of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road, Harold Wood. Tuesday, 3 August, 8 pm. H. S. Randhawa: "How Tricycle Driving Kills Indians at 33".

**Humanist Holidays.** 24-28 December: Christmas at a central Brighton hotel. Details of this and other holidays from Mrs Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12, telephone 01-673 6234.

**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.

**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.

## PATHOLOGICAL HATRED

Judging by her letter (April) I seem to have well and truly excited Margaret Moulton's feminist ire.

In order to make my position clear, I should perhaps originally have written that Radical Feminists see heterosexuality as a plot by men to enslave women. This is certainly the view of some Feminists I've talked to. According to them, masturbation and lesbianism are fine, but heterosexuality is anathema. Given that many of their meetings and publications are forbidden to men, it is difficult to find out exactly what Feminists do think. I understand that while many of their demands are quite justified, there is within their ideology an element of pathological hatred for men and all things male—hardly a humanistic outlook.

Yes, I would like to see the Race Relations Act repealed. It is one of the most ineffective items of legislation ever to reach the Statute Book.

Freedom, if it is to have any meaning at all, must mean freedom for those with whom we disagree, religionists and racialists included, as well as for those views we share. But many of those who cast themselves in the role of freedom fighters tend to forget this.

TERRY LIDDLE

## AGAINST BIGOTRY

It is good to see that at least one radical journal is not afraid to speak out against a minority who seek to dignify their hatred of men by equating it with the continuing battle for equality of all people.

We are well aware of forces in society, official and otherwise, that are working to restrict personal freedom. It is a great pity that our opposition is fragmented by small groups of intolerant termagants who latch on to organisations and use them as an outlet for crude, anti-men bigotry.

STEVE RICHARDSON

# Christianity a Disaster for Aborigines

Be properly addressed

Charles Perkins, chairman of Australia's Aboriginal Development Commission, recently told a Church synod some hard truths about the churches' role in keeping the Aboriginal people a depressed group in society.

Looking forward to the country's bi-centennial celebrations in 1988, Mr Perkins said that many social myths will have to be rejected. One such myth "denies a 50,000-year pre-colonial history and subjugates it to the glorification of a mere 200-year post-colonial period". Such a notion has been supported by all the major institutions and to a large extent the Church.

Referring to the Aborigines' "appalling health conditions, disastrous housing conditions, unemployment rate between 60 and 90 per cent and no security of land tenure", Mr Perkins declared: "I feel compelled to remind you of how the Church has helped to mould this country. The disastrous results of Church-inspired legislation which sanctioned the break-up of Aboriginal families for reasons of conversion are obvious to this day.

"At Doomadgee, in the north-west of Queensland, missionary activity has created nothing more than a lack of social cohesion, political indecisiveness and a cultural atrophy".

He went on to say that the Church in Australia has been treated far more generously by the Government than the Aboriginal people have been.

"We certainly do not own, by grant or otherwise, large tracts of valuable land in the major cities. Whenever we have been granted land it has been land that the pastoral or mining industries have not wanted".

Mr Perkins recalled that in 1980 the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace decreed that all unused churches should be returned, without conditions, to the Aboriginal people. But except for one school, now the Aboriginal Medical Service, this has not happened.

"It is not the time for any more equivocation on the part of the Catholic Church", he added. "Nor is it the time for the Anglican Church to indulge in multi-dollar pomp and circumstance in the form of a new cathedral to mark the bi-centennial celebrations when the original inhabitants of this country are homeless and hungry.

"While nobody disputes that man cannot live by bread alone, the Church must break what bread it has with others. I feel sure that the only way for the Church to continue to mould the public morality in this country and to give Governments a proper lead, is for the Church to be seen to practice what it preaches. . .

"I would ask the Church to force our various Governments, as only the Church knows how, to allow for more funds for positive Aboriginal programmes that assist in overcoming disadvantage".

## GN Appeal Refused

The European Commission on Human Rights has refused to take action on an Appeal by *Gay News* against a "guilty" verdict following the trial for blasphemous libel at the Old Bailey in 1977. The Commission decided not to submit the Appeal to the European Court of Human Rights. It is three years since the application was made and the decision was taken at a closed session.

Andrew Lumsden, the paper's present Editor (he succeeded Denis Lemon, a co-defendant in the case, who resigned earlier this year), has announced that legal advice is being taken. If it is possible to challenge the decision then *Gay News* will fight on.

In a statement to *Gay News* readers, Mr Lumsden refers to the Law Commission's forthcoming report on blasphemy law. He writes: "If this proposes either abolition of the current law, or substantial amendment of it, a draft Bill can be laid before Parliament, with a view to the Government initiating new legislation.

"One guiding principle is missing from all this—though it may be advocated in whatever final report

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the Law Commission comes up with. The principle is absolute separation of Church and State (as in most modern Western states). Were this accepted, or could it be enforced via other Constitutional freedoms of speech, it would be impossible for the UK blasphemy law to survive for more than another year or so.

"There is no question in our minds but that the constitutional muddle of Church and State in the UK is fundamentally responsible for the survival of the archaic provision under which Mrs Whitehouse initiated proceedings against us".