

# The Freethinker

secular humanist monthly

founded 1881

Vol. 102, No. 8

AUGUST 1982

25p

## "THIS NAUSEATING SPECTACLE"— VICTORY SERVICE AT ST PAUL'S

"Accustomed as we are to the inconsistencies and hypocrisies of religion, the National Secular Society cannot but express the revulsion felt by non-believers", declared Barbara Smoker, President of the NSS, in a Press statement on the Service of Thanksgiving "to mark the end of the Falklands conflict" at St Paul's Cathedral on 26 July. "And not only non-believers but many Christians have similar feelings about this nauseating spectacle. To the non-believer, however, it is not only hypocrisy, but hypocrisy within superstition. It is hypocrisy to pretend that the 'service of thanksgiving' is anything but a nationalistic victory celebration".

When the Prime Minister first announced in the House of Commons that a "thanksgiving" service would be held, Mr Alan Clark, the blimpish Conservative Member for Plymouth, Sutton, urged her to congratulate the Mayor of Plymouth on his initiative in staging a victory parade. This Mrs Thatcher did with alacrity. She added that victory parades could be organised in other towns, but informed the House that "it has not been decided if there will be a final victory parade". If so, it would have to be delayed for some time.

She did not reveal if the date of a "final victory parade" would be connected with the timing of the next General Election.

The NSS President pointed out that the vanquished Argentinians, although a far more religious people than the British, are unlikely to hold a thanksgiving service "to mark the end of the Falklands conflict. But the Christian prelates of this country, both Protestant and Catholic, fail to see this, and allowed themselves to be exploited by the Prime Minister in the naive belief that the formula 'to mark the end of the Falklands conflict' would be taken at face value and that their professional thanks to the deity would be thanks for peace, not for victory.

"This shows a sensitivity that the churches have acquired in the last few decades (probably due to humanist influence), but it also shows amazing political naivety. The Prime Minister's religious outlook is a simple one — God exists to serve her political ends".

Miss Smoker had earlier published a letter in *The Times* and the *Guardian* in which she argued that "a god who deserved credit for ending the war must, in all logic, deserve blame for allowing it to start in the first place. The true purpose of the service can only be to give simple and unthinking people the comfortable feeling that the deity was on our side, and so, by lending the 'task force' retrospective justification, consolidate the internal political advantage it afforded the Government".

### Questions for Believers

She concluded the NSS Press statement with several questions: "Why do the dead men need the prayers of these prelates? Was the whole thing part of God's design—or, even more irrationally, was it not?"

"The only explanation that is put forward for the divine creator's allowing his plans to be thwarted by his creatures, both human and demon, is 'freewill'. But if God's preventing a war from starting would violate freewill, how is it that he can interfere after a few hundred deaths and a few thousand injuries to bring the hostilities to a close? If he did not interfere at all, what is he being thanked for? And why should Galtieri and Thatcher enjoy so much more freewill than the servicemen on either side?"

"All the evidence is against the existence of a god of love and peace, unless utterly incompetent".

(continued on back page)

# The Freethinker

Editor: WILLIAM McILROY  
UK ISSN 0016-0687

The Freethinker was founded in 1881 by George William Foote and is published mid-monthly. The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Publishers or of the Editor.

Articles, Reviews, News Reports, Obituaries, Letters and announcements should be sent by the 10th of the preceding month to the Editor at 32 Over Street, Brighton, Sussex (telephone Brighton 696425). Unsolicited reviews should not be submitted.

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Postal subscriptions, books orders and donations to the Freethinker Fund should be sent to:

G. W. FOOTE & COMPANY,  
702 HOLLOWAY ROAD, LONDON N19 3NL,  
(Telephone: 01-272 1266)

## SPECIAL POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Inland and Overseas: Twelve months: £3.00;  
Six months: £1.75. U.S.A. Twelve months: \$7.00;  
Six months: \$4.00. Overseas subscribers are  
requested to obtain sterling drafts from their  
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Printed by David Neil & Co., South Street, Dorking, Surrey.

# NEWS

## THE ZIONAZIS

*The terrible truth is that religion and ideology can make otherwise decent people do the most terrible things. And those who think they are chosen by God, be they Islamic or Jewish fanatics, are blinded by their faith to be among the most callous.*

The "terrible truth" in this extract from a Jewish reader's letter to the *Guardian* newspaper is illustrated by appalling acts of savagery inflicted on the people of Lebanon. The eyes of the world are at last being opened to the racial, religious and nationalistic fanaticism that motivates Israel. Only people who believe that they are fighting a "holy war" are capable of the atrocities being committed by Israel in recent weeks.

It was not a PLO zealot but a respected Israeli philosopher, Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who described the invasion of Lebanon as an expression of the Judeo-Nazism which, he claimed, has gripped his country since the 1967 war. In a recorded interview, an Israeli soldier declared: "I would like to see all of the Palestinians dead because they are a sickness wherever they go". If the word "Jews" were substituted for "Palestinians", his statement could have come straight from Himmler's diary.

Israel seeks to justify the carnage she has created by claiming that PLO terrorists used bases in Lebanon from which to conduct its operations. What does she expect from people who have been deprived of their homeland and are faced with annihilation? One of Menachem Begin's political mentors, Vladimir Jabotinski, founder of an openly racist Zionist organisation, said: "The application of suitable methods aimed at the creation of an ethnically pure Jewish state will always be necessary. . . We should constantly create situations of *fait accompli* as well as explaining to the Arabs that they must leave our lands and withdraw to the desert".

The German Nazis' "final solution" to the Jewish question was the concentration camps; the Zionazis' solution to the problem of the Palestinian Arab is "withdrawal to the desert" or extermination by bombing and shelling.

It is utterly hypocritical of the Israelis and their supporters to denounce terrorism. They indulged in guerrilla warfare and terrorism before and after the founding of their state. One of the most notorious murder squads was led by Begin himself. At the present time Zionist agents and supporters murder opponents and intimidate Jewish critics of Israel. One of their victims, Mrs Marion Woolfson, was attacked

# AND NOTES

at her home in London a week after she published a letter critical of Israel in *The Times*.

The United States—a country whose social and political life is poisoned by anti-semitism—is Israel's most committed supporter in the west. This policy is not rooted in sympathy for the Jewish people but is part of her overall anti-Communist strategy in the Middle East. America's real intentions are obvious. Begin and his Zionist henchmen have never had any qualms about collaborating with anti-semitic elements when it has suited their purpose.

As with most wars, religion is a crucial factor in the Middle East conflict. The Right-wing Christian Phalangists support the Israeli forces and are even more ruthless. (The Phalangists are an unsavoury left-over from Spanish fascism and have been closely associated with other neo-Nazi forces.) Israel itself is in the clutches of the rabbis whose power and influence is equal to that of the mullahs in Iran. Fundamentalist Christian groups in the west are praying for Israel's victory which they see as a fulfilment of biblical prophecies.

Race, religion, nationalism and the glorification of militarism have inflicted incalculable miseries on humanity. The Palestinian Arabs are the latest victims of aggression and colonisation carried out by Israel with support and connivance by many western countries.

The Arabs will not "withdraw to the desert" and recent events have had a profound influence on international opinion. The world community, including a large proportion of Jewish people, may now respond to Bertrand Russell's message shortly before his death to the International Conference of Parliamentarians: "A new world campaign is needed to bring justice to the long-suffering people of the Middle East".

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## **A PRIESTLY PRODNOS**

The Royal Earlswood Hospital at Redhill, Surrey, was the scene of the Christian Dirty Tricks Department's latest "victory", albeit a short-lived one.

Roman Catholic chaplain Father Barry Wymes contacted LIFE, the anti-abortion organisation, when some members of the staff informed him that a 20-year-old girl's pregnancy was to be terminated. LIFE then reported the matter to the local police, and because of these protests the girl's parents, who had not seen her for ten years, had to be traced. On hearing the doctors' assessment they raised no objections and the operation was carried out.

The circumstances of the case were particularly distressing. The girl, who has lived at the hospital for the last ten years, suffers from epilepsy and is mute. She was 20 weeks pregnant before her condition was realised.

A spokesman for East Sussex Health Authority explained that an abortion was decided upon because "the girl is severely handicapped and suffers from major epileptic seizures which have increased in frequency and severity during the pregnancy. Under the circumstances there is a serious risk to her health and possibly her life if the pregnancy continues". But such humane considerations did not deter LIFE from attempting to prevent the termination.

Hospital patients are particularly vulnerable to the ministrations of both official and freelance religious crusaders. It is disgraceful that a necessary operation on a mentally handicapped girl was delayed because of interference by a clerical busybody and LIFE spies.

## **MOON ON THE WANE?**

The Rev Syung Sun Moon is the best known crook in America at the present time. After a trial lasting six weeks the founder of the World Unification Church (the Moonies) was sentenced to 18 months in jail and heavily fined for tax evasion and conspiracy last month.

The Korean-born religious charlatan and Right-wing political demagogue was accused of avoiding tax payment on the interest from a £1 million bank deposit. He tried to conceal the fraud by ordering his aides to forge documents and commit perjury. One of them was fined and sent to jail for six months.

Two weeks before the trial ended, more than 4,000 of Moon's followers, following his orders, were married at a mass wedding in Madison Square Garden, New York. Some of them had met only a few days before; others could not even speak the same language.

A stretch in prison will not be a new experience for "The Second Lord of the Advent" as Moon is known. He was jailed three times in North Korea.

His followers claim this was because of his anti-Communist opinions. Opponents say that he was charged with violation of public morals.

Meanwhile the Unification Church in Britain continues to enjoy the benefits of registration as a charity. Sir Timothy Kitson and other Members of Parliament have been putting pressure on the Charity Commissioners to implement a jury's recommendation that the Church's charity status should be investigated. The recommendation came at the end of a High Court libel action against the *Daily Mail* which the Moonies lost.

This new development in the United States will increase public disquiet about the Unification Church and the privileges it enjoys as a registered charity. Letters calling for action by the Charity Commissioners should be sent to MPs at the House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1.

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**Policing costs in London alone came to £200,000 during Pope John Paul II's recent British visit. This was announced by a Minister at the Home Office. The Catholic Church would be charged only for police services on private property. Local authorities in areas visited by the Pope will have to find huge sums to pay for extra security. It is also reported that there will be 28,000 fewer social workers. This will result in a loss of 11,000 places in homes for the elderly, 3,000 in homes for children and 1,400 in homes for the mentally handicapped. It is already known that 28,000 teachers will have to be sacked if local authorities are to keep within the Government's expenditure aims for education.**

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## "FREETHINKER" HISTORY

In his review of *The Freethinker*, volume 101 (1981), on page 122, Nigel Sinnott expresses the hope that former editor Jim Herrick will continue to contribute to its columns. Not only does Mr Herrick still write for *The Freethinker* and give considerable assistance to the present editor, he has written a history of the paper's first hundred years. Entitled *Vision and Realism—100 Years of The Freethinker*, it will be published next month by G. W. Foote and Company at a modest £2 plus 25p postage.

This book will be of immense interest to *Freethinker* readers and to students of social history. The author's original intention was to write a pamphlet. But he found so much fascinating material in the hundred bound volumes that the work was considerably expanded. It will include illustrations and an index.

Barbara Wootton, who has contributed a foreword, declares that she is "happy to commend this book to others in the confident expectation that it will bring them as much enjoyment and enlightenment as it has to me".

## CHRISTIAN CENSORS RETREAT IN CORNWALL

Prospects are not too rosy for the Cornwall-based Community Standards Association. This is the organisation of Christian snoopers, informers and censors that campaigns for the withdrawal of books by authors like Laurie Lee and Margaret Drabble from school reading lists. Its members also make a point of not seeing films and then exerting pressure on local authorities to ban them.

But all the letter-writing and praying seems to be having little effect. The latest Newsletter from Miss Ann Whitaker, the Association's founder-secretary, contains little to cheer the members. She angrily reports that "pressure from local cinema managers and half-hearted attitudes to censorship" resulted in the disbandment of the Cornwall Film Censorship Panel. Most of the councils withdrew from the Panel, and one of them, Restormel, has actually allowed *The Life of Brian* to be shown. It was previously banned throughout the county.

The CSA is a vigorous opponent of agencies like the Family Planning Association and particularly of Brook Advisory Centres which dispense sensible and realistic advice to young people who are, or are contemplating, "doing what comes naturally". Little wonder the Community Standards Association is in a tizzy over the news that Marks and Spencer, the nation's leading retailers of twin sets and other useful apparel, have promised the Brook organisation an annual grant of £4,500. CSA members are urged to write to Marks and Spencer "deploring this object of their benevolence".

Any *Freethinker* reader who wishes to congratulate the firm on its financial support for Brook may wish to note that the head office address is St Michael's House, Baker Street, London W1.

Miss Whitaker also records that she addressed the annual conference of Mary Whitehouse's organisation, the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association — very much a case of preaching to the converted. Less comfortable was her appearance on a television programme with Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, who "contended that God did not exist". That confrontation must have been an unnerving experience for the pious Miss Whitaker of Tremore Manor, Bodmin.

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**Members of a new and as yet unnamed religious sect have been baptised in the sea at Brighton. Ian Chisnall and Jan Mansell "went under" in order to illustrate openly their commitment to God through Jesus Christ". The immersion took place very appropriately near a children's playground named after Peter Pan.**

The religious clauses of the 1944 Education Act are often given a wide berth by teachers and sometimes ignored altogether. But the "act of worship" still has a divisive and harmful effect. The author of this article makes a timely call for more active opposition to religion in school.

from those who do not. At best the performance is a flop, a non-event. At worst it can lead to contempt for human rights. The examples I have referred to above are not fiction, although the most offensive remarks have been expurgated. They reveal the inevitable effects of group psychology.

It would be rare indeed to find a headteacher saying to the pupils: "I have just conducted a little service for the sole purpose of complying with the 1944 Education Act. Of course I don't believe all those disgusting stories in the Bible and neither do most of the teachers. Why don't you all ask your parents to give you notes so that you don't have to attend? Then I can abolish the whole charade".

Such a headteacher would encourage the children to question the need for corporate worship, and suggest that this powerful pressure to conform is a violation of pupils' and teachers' rights to choose and openly acknowledge their own beliefs. But such a headmaster is unlikely to exist in England.

The scene moves to a school staff-room . . . "Did you see Miss Roberts today in assembly? Well of course you didn't. She wasn't there. Mr Yates had to supervise her class. She doesn't believe in 'acts of worship'. It's all very well for her, but what about the other teachers? I think she's being a bit selfish. I mean, none of us actually like morning assembly, do we? But we put up with it. She missed the union meeting too. It was announced at assembly, but nobody told her about it. She will soon change her mind".

### The Cost of Freedom

A few weeks later, Miss Roberts applied for the job of headmistress of a Comprehensive. At her interview a member of the panel asked if she was aware of the religious requirements of the 1944 Education Act. Rather than make a promise she had no stomach to fulfil, Miss Roberts replied that she would interpret the term "act of worship" rather freely.

The local vicar was on the panel. Naturally he paid tribute to her honesty and courage. The letter of refusal stated quite categorically that her failure to get the job was entirely due to her lack of experience in the organisation of sporting activities.

The "escape clause" in the 1944 Act is no answer to the problems of non-Christians, be they teachers, pupils or parents. Regardless of what "alternative arrangements" are made, withdrawal of children is no less problematical than non-withdrawal. Withdrawn children are frequently persecuted. The "act of worship" is socially harmful and the only solution is to get rid of it, along with the RE lessons.

Morning assembly, which takes place every day in some schools, less often in most, is both sacred and secular. A hymn of praise, a reading from a sacred book, a few short prayers usually constitute the sacred part. "The hockey team will play . . . the chess club meets . . . the following pupils are in detention. . ."

Can this very ordinary ritual be of any social significance? You get some kind of uplift singing in a choir of several hundred. Does it matter what the words mean? It makes for human warmth—an orderly start to the day. Feelings of antagonism are duly calmed. A sense of routine is established.

"Only bad people do not go along with this feeling. They are children whose parents withdraw them from the act of worship. They must be different from us. Quite probably they don't know about the hockey team or the chess club. It serves them right. They should be here.

"What about Françoise, for instance? Her mother is French. No wonder she's an atheist. 'Hey, Françoise, why don't you come and play with the rest of us? Think you're better than everyone else, don't you?'

"Look whose with her. It's Tanvir. He's a Paki. That's why he dodges assembly. The Vicar told us last week that Islam isn't as good as Christianity. That's why Europeans are better than Pakis. We're more civilised.

"Gerald doesn't go to assembly either. He's Jewish. We were reading about them today in the Bible. They killed Jesus, you know. They deserve to suffer, don't they? . . ."

There are still some humanists around who seem to think that withdrawing their own children from "act of worship" is the end of the matter. Others take refuge in the private sector—there are atheistic schools for those who can pay. But what about the majority who can't pay?

The sense of corporate identity for which the ceremony we have been discussing has so often been valued is socially divisive, quite independently of whether or not children attend it. This is true inside each particular school; it is also true in the context of education as a whole.

The more the act of worship succeeds in "uniting" those who participate, the more it divides them

# The Monarchy Show

JULIA ATKINSON

Incredible outbursts of excitement erupt every time a royal visit, engagement, marriage, pregnancy or birth is announced. Even minor members of the Royal Family are mobbed when seen at the theatre, racecourse or church, and the arrival of Prince William of Wales provided fans with another opportunity to besiege Buckingham Palace. Julia Atkinson examines some of the reasons for such enthusiasm over what she describes as "a dull bunch".

*According to the medieval ritual books, the King should spend the night before the Coronation in prayer. For all that can be said to the contrary, Queen Elizabeth may have done the like; certainly the sense of spiritual exaltation that radiated from her was almost tangible to those of us who stood near her in the Abbey.—"The Work of the Queen", by Dermot Morrah.*

The year 1981 was a glorious one for hard-core devotees of the Royal Family, but a deeply depressing one for republicans. The Royal Engagement, the Royal Wedding and the Royal Pregnancy hogged the headlines in every newspaper; the shops overflowed with souvenirs even more tasteless than usual; the covers of women's magazines, true to form, came out in an unsightly rash of Royal portraits. A foreign visitor could be forgiven for thinking that Britain is inhabited by a race of fanatical royalists. Thanks to the power of superstition and the influence of the media, the Royal Family has won the same sort of undeserved esteem enjoyed by its old comrade-in-arms, the Church.

It seems incredible that the alliance between monarchy and religion should have survived into the latter part of the 20th century, but the "gruesome twosome" is far from dead. An astonishing example of this was seen in 1975, when Prince Charles went to Papua New Guinea to take part in its independence celebrations. His visit coincided with a local political crisis. The people of Bougainville, a small off-shore island, had declared their own independence in protest against Rio-Tinto-Zinc, whose copper mines were literally destroying their homeland. In a speech to the rebels, our future king quoted an epistle of St Paul: "Everyone must obey the State authorities, for no authority exists without God's permission. Whoever opposes the existing authority opposes what God has ordered, and anyone who does so will bring judgement on himself".

God has certainly smiled on the Windsors. They have held the British monarchy for two centuries, and during this period they have accumulated a

vast fortune. The exact amount is a closely guarded secret. The Queen's investments are also secret, but it is known that she has substantial shareholdings through "Bank of England Nominees Ltd". In the mid-1970s their holdings in only 19 British companies were worth £95 million, which would bring in over £5 million per annum. Add to this the income from the Duchy of Lancaster, the revenues of the Royal farms and estates, the unknown family wealth and the Civil List — the Queen's Social Security cheque from her subjects — and it is plain that Queen Elizabeth and her family have much to thank God for.

Of course, the Royals have had to make a few sacrifices in order to hold on to their tax-free loot. Their private lives may be practically non-existent, but when they manage to escape from the world's vulgar gaze they have a choice of 11 homes in which to recuperate. The upkeep of these retreats, together with that of the 121 "grace and favour" residences, costs about £2½ million per annum. If this amount of money had been set aside every year since the Coronation in 1952, enough houses could have been built to resettle every homeless or badly-housed family in the United Kingdom.

The amount of public money spent on the Monarchy Show as a whole is estimated to be at least £10 million every year. This includes servants' wages, pensions for retired staff, office equipment, telephone bills and of course the Royal Family's lavish private transport. One item alone, the rarely used yacht *Britannia*, costs the Ministry of Defence almost £2 million per annum—which makes it twice as expensive as the entire Queen's Flight of planes and helicopters.

## Footing the Bill

It would be interesting to know if the Windsors contribute anything at all towards the cost of their lifestyle. But like everything else connected with the Royal finances, this information is carefully concealed from the public. However, bearing in mind their undeniable popularity, one wonders if even in these difficult times there would be much adverse reaction to an exposé of the Royal Rip-off.

Why is it that the British public is willing to spend so much money on this fabulously rich family? In attempting to understand the appeal of the monarchy, it is important that we look on the present Royal Family as a group of ordinary people who by pure chance have been placed in a unique situation. Without their glamorous trappings the Windsors would be a dull bunch indeed. It would be unfair to dwell on the personal shortcomings of the Royals—after

## COMMEMORATION OF EARLY CREMATIONIST

A statue of the eccentric and colourful Welsh doctor, William Price, has been unveiled at Llantrisant, Gwent. He was an early streaker who often removed his clothes in public, and defended unpopular causes like atheism and nudity. But it is as a founding father of the cremation movement that Price is best remembered.

Dr Price's association with the Chartists forced him to flee the country. When he returned, his native Wales was in the throes of religious revivalism. That did not deter him from advocating liberal principles. He gave his services to the poor free of charge and was a pioneer of bone-grafting.

The great scandal which established the right of cremation occurred in 1884. Dr Price was then a very old man and when his baby son died he attempted to burn the body. It was snatched from the flames, but Price won the court case that followed.

Nine years later hundreds of people witnessed Dr Price's own cremation outside Llantrisant. The newly erected statue faces the field where Dr Price was cremated.

Today there are 219 crematoria operating in Britain, 11 of them in Wales.

## Freethinker Fund

There has been a marked decrease in donations over the last three months. The current total is only £76 compared to £209 received during March. *The Freethinker* is Britain's only monthly journal that deals with current affairs from a humanist perspective. The generosity of readers makes it possible to produce the paper at its present size and price. Its continued existence depends on the efforts of readers to increase the circulation and a wider response to the appeal for funds.

We thank those readers listed below who have sent donations and urge others to follow their example.

C. Bayliss, £2; G. Beeson, £1; J. L. Broom, £2; B. J. Buckingham, £3; D. M. Ford, £2; A. E. Garrison, £4; J. Gibson, £3; J. F. Glenister, £2; E. A. C. Goodman, £5; R. Grieve, £3.50; R. Grindod, £5; E. C. Hughes, £5; R. Humphries, £2; S. Hunt, £3; J. W. Krugel, £4.50; D. Lemon, £4; S. D. McDonald, £5; H. L. Millard £2; D. Redhead, £1; K. C. Rudd, £3; N. J. Severs, £2; A. E. Standley, £2; C. Stephenson, £2; R. J. M. Tolhurst, £5; J. D. Verney, £2; J. A. Watford, £1.

Total for the period 8 June 1982 until 6 July 1982: £76.

all, the age when kingship required some degree of intellectual ability is long gone—but it should be obvious that if it were not for the mystical aura of monarchy which surrounds them, they would have lived their lives in total obscurity. It is the ancient institution of monarchy itself, rather than the Royal personages, which still exerts a morbid fascination over the minds of many Britons.

Secularists will be well aware of the fact that they live in an irrational society. The belief that there is some sort of connection between religion and morality obstinately refuses to die out, and it is complemented by a similar and equally absurd idea—that a pro-monarchist attitude and patriotism go hand in hand. Republicans who make their views known can expect to receive letters from infuriated royalists, telling them that they should be prosecuted for treason. Although this view is almost too ridiculous to deserve comment (surely no one could accuse Oliver Cromwell of being unpatriotic), it is typical of the lack of logic displayed by many royalists.

### Distortion of History

There is another interesting parallel between religiosity and monarchism. While it is at least possible to argue with such outlandish concepts as the Holy Trinity and the Divine Right of kings, present-day Christians and royalists have largely abandoned such primitive ideas. Their beliefs are usually so vague and confused that argument is virtually impossible. I have known several royalists who, on being forced to admit that the monarchy is of no practical use, were reduced to claiming that "at least it doesn't do any harm".

It is my contention that the monarchy, which is first and foremost a relic of the feudal era, does a great deal of harm. Whenever the Royal Family appears in public, the crowds lining the streets indulge in the sort of behaviour usually reserved for the return of a national hero—cheering, shouting, flag-waving, pushing to get near the Royal Presence. When we consider that the objects of this adulation are distinguished solely by their ancestry and wealth, the spectacle is seen in its true colours—a repulsive display of deference more befitting the Middle Ages than the 20th century.

This reverence for the monarchy takes root at an early age, a fact which was brought home to me during the Silver Jubilee celebrations in 1977. A television reporter was interviewing a group of working-class school children, one of whom said that "if there weren't any kings and queens we wouldn't have any history!" If this kind of attitude is widespread, and thanks to the media it probably is, the new royal father can confidently look forward to a long and profitable reign as King Charles III.

# Shaping Tomorrow, or *Laissez Faire*?

TOM CAVALIER-SMITH

A biologist examines a report which was compiled by a group of Methodists and published under the title, "Shaping Tomorrow". Dr Cavalier-Smith concludes that they ignore realities and their project is an exercise in self-deception.

The emptiness of Methodist Christianity is shown in this report by 60 Methodists, mainly technologists, engineers and physical scientists. It purports to examine nuclear power, the electronic revolution, unemployment, and the applications of our contemporary biological revolution, from a Christian viewpoint. But what do we get? Just a bland summary of ideas current in the secular world for a decade, interlarded with occasional pseudojustifications from biblical sources and an intellectually worthless chapter on "God in a Changing World".

When discussing "Man's relationship to nature" the authors admit that "in practical decision making" the Christian's position "is no different from that of the humanist". Time and again the authors say when confronting—or rather evading—any difficult question, that the individual must make up his own mind.

It is abundantly clear from the report that Christianity provides no specific ethical guidance to help with our current problems. This does not prevent the authors scraping around for scriptural or doctrinal "support" for their views, which is not unduly difficult as the Bible and Christian traditions are sufficiently varied to support many conflicting ethics.

They lean heavily on the parable of the talents in their strong support for nuclear energy, the electronic revolution and technical progress. Wealth creation is a Christian duty and the unions are inhibiting investment by demanding too high wages—shades of Margaret Thatcher! But they altogether ignore Jesus' teachings of the Sermon on the Mount: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth"; "Consider the lilies of the field . . . they toil not, neither do they spin"; "Take no thought for the morrow". There is strong scriptural support for the idea that wealth, work and technology are anti-Christian evils.

As 17 of the 38 people who made major contributions to the report work for the Atomic Energy Authority, their almost unqualified support for nuclear power and their recommendation that when you don't understand something you should trust the experts, comes as no surprise. While cautioning readers against seeking "facts" from sources with a commercial or political axe to grind, the report con-

veniently omits to mention that the grinding of professional or religious axes can also deafen one to alternative arguments.

It is not that their conclusions—which in so far as they say anything definite are largely sensible and humane—which are objectionable, but the intellectual sloppiness and self-deception of their attempts to bolster them by Christian apologetics. Nuclear power is "an instrument of God's love"; "God intends the earth to be a workshop rather than a museum"; "the very message of Jesus' own life is the willing acceptance of risks in the pursuit of God's loving purpose". One can hardly doubt that their attitude to nuclear power stems more from secular technological culture and their professional roles in it than from the Gospels.

The authors say that our discovery of nuclear power "just when recoverable stocks of oil and gas can be seen to be running out, might be regarded as evidence of God's care for mankind". If you believe that you can believe anything! N. W. Pirie was right: "Faith seems to be an occupational hazard for physicists" (*New Biology*, vol 16, 1954).

The chapter, "God in a Changing World", is a complete negation of the scientific approach outlined at the beginning of the report. It says that if most people cannot understand general relativity it is not surprising that nobody properly understands theological notions like divine creation, implying that this somehow makes such notions intellectually respectable. But relativity, unlike theology, makes specific predictions many of which are confirmed with remarkable precision, and some people do understand it; whereas nobody understands the theology of creation, which explains nothing.

## Question but no Answer

After asserting that "God is there in the whole of nature", they ask, "what do we mean by the statement?" but fail to answer their own question. If one has no idea what a statement means it is absurd to go on to ask "what are our reasons for believing this to be so?". Their answer is that "when you have the right explanation it hits you with a sense of beauty and simplicity". But what the statement explains is not specified: moreover, scientists know from bitter experience that such powerful subjective feelings can also occur when you devise or hear beautiful and simple explanations that later turn out to be wrong, and so are invalid as criteria of truth.

Very sloppily, the report equates their statement



about beauty and simplicity with Occam's razor, earlier stated admirably as: the hypothesis "which incorporates the fewest assumptions and requires the fewest independent components in the one to be preferred". They are blissfully unaware that Occam's razor cut God's throat long ago: Laplace's statement to Napoleon, "I have no need of that hypothesis", is still scientifically valid.

The authors' views on contraception, artificial insemination, test tube babies, abortion, genetic engineering, factory farming, conservation and unemployment are indistinguishable from those of many humanists. The emphasis given to work and unemployment is welcome; specific recommendations are studiously avoided, no doubt because they are difficult to devise or much more controversial than the usual platitudes. This continues the Gospel tradition of concern with personal ideas and attitudes, rather than specific social improvements that usually require a difficult choice between conflicting ideals.

### False Claims

The report does nothing to help decide priorities. Like many scientists and religious people the authors largely ignore, or show antipathy towards, practical politics—our chief social means (other than violence which also is hardly discussed) of shaping the future.

Trapped within their own theological traditions, the authors often falsely claim as Christian humane attitudes and values found in peoples of all beliefs. They arrogantly imply that scientists who are not Christians have no social conscience: "If those people who are concerned for the welfare of mankind desisted from being involved in some areas of research, then there would be no one with a social conscience at those points where human knowledge and understanding is being pushed to its limits. We believe that there must be a Christian presence among those who are discovering God's universe". Why it should matter to humanity whether the discoverer of penicillin or nuclear fusion is a Christian, an atheist or a polytheistic animist we are not told.

Sir Geoffrey Allen, former chairman of the Science Research Council, wrote in the preface that man "is incapable of living up to his own standards and ideals let alone those of his Creator's", and that the report is "based not on their own human wisdom but on God's as authoritatively revealed in the scriptures". The report says "Christ *certainly* existed", "The Gospel is *eternally* true", and speaks of "the *fact* of the resurrection" (my italics). Such dogmatism, based purely on authority, is totally alien to the scientific spirit—the authors themselves earlier said "the scientist acknowledges no authority other than that of the observable" — but is deceitfully labelled "intellectual grounds" for belief. As a biologist myself I am ashamed that the Editor of

the document who sanctioned this violation of critical scientific faculties was apparently a biologist (the only one associated with the report).

### The Deceivers

Although Sir Geoffrey contrasts divine and human ideals, the report itself does not attempt to make this impossible distinction. The Christian god emerges as a highly anthropomorphic human creation with the useful function of strengthening the believer's human preconceptions. ("We serve God by seeking to serve our fellow men".) The first criterion for judging new technology is: "Is it likely to change society in a direction more compatible with God's ultimate purpose? To answer this question, we need to have done much thinking on the sort of society *we* (my italics) wish to achieve". So God's purpose is what *we* want! A very convenient self-deception.

The modern Methodist emerges as a humanist in religious disguise, but whose outworn, threadbare and intellectually woolly clothing covers only his own eyes.

## SCANDAL AND GOSSIP PLAGUES NEW ARCHBISHOP

It has been announced that Archbishop Joseph Bernardin is to succeed Cardinal Cody as the Archbishop of Chicago. He was chosen instead of the burly ex-football player and bodyguard to the Pope, Archbishop Paul Marcinkus, an American. Archbishop Marcinkus' job is administering the Vatican City and he has been involved in banking. He is associated with the Banco Ambrosiano, whose chief was found dead in London in mysterious circumstances two months ago.

The new Archbishop of Chicago already has plenty of troubles on his plate. He inherited the scandal surrounding his predecessor who was accused of misusing Church funds. Mrs Helen Wilson, a relative of Cardinal Cody whose name has been linked with the alleged irregularities, is to sue the Chicago *Sun-Times*. Although official investigations into the affair have been dropped, private legal actions will keep it in the public eye for some time to come.

Archbishop Bernardin has also had to defend Procter and Gamble, the soap company, against allegations that their trade mark, a moon and stars, is a satanic symbol. It is also claimed that the company has fallen under control of the Moonies. The Archbishop says he is saddened by the rumours circulating among "many religious persons and church congregations".

The diocese of Chicago has the largest population of any in the world.

THE FREETHINKER, Volume 101, 1981. Edited by Jim Herrick (January-August) and William McIlroy (September-December). G. W. Foote & Co, £7.50

1981 was the little-celebrated, 600th anniversary of the Peasants' Revolt, the 100th anniversary of the present Leicester Secular Hall, and it also marked the very successful centenary of what Clifford Longley, Religious Affairs Correspondent of *The Times*, described as the "courageous and at times outrageous tradition" of *The Freethinker*.

Mindful, perhaps of the occasion, Editor Jim Herrick started the January issue with a headline calculated to please even Eva Ebury (that stalwart open-air vendor of secularist literature, who insists on rumbustious headlines for ready sales of *The Freethinker*); "Born-again Atheist Attacks Christian God as a Tyrannical Figure". There are no prizes for guessing that this referred to National Secular Society president, Barbara Smoker, inaugurating yet another open season on orthodoxy.

Bound volumes of *The Freethinker* are always a pleasure to own. My personal treasures are some lovingly collected in Australia in the first decade of this century by Henry (Henri?) Blampied. Like old volumes of *Punch* and the *Illustrated London News*, *The Freethinker* in hard covers never ceases to be eminently readable, in this case as a chronicle of freethought history-as-it-happens, leavened with swashbuckling humour. The attractively bound and indexed centenary volume, like those of the 1880s, is bound to become a collector's item. If our spiritualist friends could ever contact G. W. Foote and Chapman Cohen "on the other side", I think they would be found none too displeased with last year's issues.

1981 was a time for deserved celebration and self-congratulation, and the May Centenary Issue was naturally the highlight of the year. It was good to see good poetry (particularly Maureen Duffy's) creeping briefly into the paper, plus cartoons and, of course, a rich medley of prose contributions from the pens of Harold Blackham, Edward Blishen, Hermann Bondi, Brigid Brophy, Barry Duke, Antony Grey, Jim Herrick, Margaret Knight, Sarah Lawson, William McIlroy, Dora Russell, Barbara Smoker, David Tribe, Nicolas Walter and the mysterious "Indian Rationalist". David Tribe, a former Editor, has placed on record his amazement at the number of prestigious writers who gladly contribute to *The Freethinker* gratis: he can hardly have been disappointed with the centenary number, which also contained a portrait of G. W. Foote and a reprint of an article by Joseph Mazzini Wheeler, who almost wrecked his health in the paper's service around the period of Foote's trial for blasphemy.

# FREETHINKER

The other issues cover this paper's traditional areas of concern, such as church privilege and establishment, religion in schools, birth control, abortion, euthanasia, rights of women and Sunday freedom. Madeleine Simms takes another look at the anti-abortion lobby; R. J. Condon looks back on 20 years' service to freethought in the January issue and forsakes the mythicist theory of Jesus to discuss fluoridation in the April number. It was good to see Margaret McIlroy returning to these columns with a review of Carolly Erickson's book on Queen Mary Tudor, and to read two interesting reviews by David Reynolds, once *The Freethinker's* youngest Editor.

1981 was also the year of The Wedding; but *The Freethinker* had not forgotten secularism's republican tradition and marked July with an editorial on "Do We Need the Monarchy?" Christmas was commemorated with a superb cartoon, "Mary and Child", with the child Freethought being throttled below a bespectacled, grinning face that looks sort of familiar! (It was worthy of the tradition of "Moses Getting a Back View".)

*The Freethinker*, of course, has its serious side. The practical and moral problems of handicapped people are sensitively dealt with, from different viewpoints, by Henry Marshall and James MacDonald. Benedict Birnberg reviews a book on statute law, Albert Beale looks at pacifism, and Julian Meldrum tries to clarify the issues in the contentious debate on paedophilia. The "new nonsense" is not forgotten, with Antony Grey reviewing a book on the Moonies, John Maddox writing on the paranormal, and Beverly Halstead on creationism and the latest attacks on science.

*The Freethinker* has sometimes been jocularly referred to as "the atheist's parish magazine". In truth, however, it has rarely been parochial in outlook. Apartheid in South Africa and the creation "science" court case in the United States are given ample coverage; Harry Stopes-Roe looks at atheism in India; and the paper also examines Islamic fundamentalism and abortion in Italy. As a resident of Australia I was impressed by the August editorial, devoted to the deplorable plight of many of the Aborigines: it outlined allegations of mistreatment of Aborigines by certain Benedictine missionaries and gave a grim account of the destruction of the Djeri people by the Lutherans.

I have sometimes wondered if a paper with an international readership should devote as much space as *The Freethinker* does to London film and theatre reviews. However, after reading Vera Lustig's review

# REVIEWS

of *Tess* (June), soon after seeing the film myself, I began to feel that mine was an unworthy and philistine reflection. I also commend the same reviewer's judicious comments (April) on a printed report about female "circumcision".

Space precludes my detailing all the items in 1981 that took my fancy. I would briefly list Dr Jeremy Cherfas on astrology, Brian Sedgemore's review of *Debts of Honour* (by Michael Foot), Jim Herrick on George Eliot, Brigid Brophy on blasphemy law, Harold Blackham on Voltaire, Edward Royle on "Before 1881", and David Tribe on Royle's *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans*.

1981 also saw a change of editors. After seeing the paper through its centenary celebrations Jim Herrick relinquished his post in August in order to have time for his other literary interests. He had been Editor for about five years and had sometimes to combine the task with that of being general secretary of the NSS. With the able assistance of Barry Duke he had ensured the paper's high standard of content, variety, news and liveliness. Let us hope he will still contribute.

The September issue came out emblazoned, "Sex Education: Government Ministers Yield to the Breeders' Lobby"—a fair indication, to old hands, that William McIlroy was back in the editorial chair, for the third time forsooth! His style is very much his own, though his "Jottings" are at least reminiscent of "Acid Drops" and "Sugar Plums" of the paper's earlier days. McIlroy's knuckleduster prose does not please everyone, but a man who can turn out brickbats with an alliterative polish like "a sleek, melon-faced megalomaniac named the Rev Sun Myung Moon" cannot be entirely bad.

There is the only cruel sport of which I, as a vegetarian, can approve: McIlroy baiting the Lord's Day Observance Society. Like the Pope's mule, he puts the hoof in with a mixture of righteous indignation and almost innocent relish (with joy and at least a little light): the result is invariably hilarious. His prime victim for 1981 was Mr John Stokes, MP, who bemoaned the passing of a Golden Age when "Church and State were one" and opined that there was "something to be said for fining people who did not attend church regularly". McIlroy dealt with the "Anglican Ayatollah" (September) as leniently as possible, without effusion of blood.

By now it should be unnecessary to emphasise the present and future relevance of *The Freethinker*. Developments over the past five years should surely have exploded the naïve and complacent nonsense we used to hear about how all the freethought

causes had been won and that the gains were secure. Therefore I simply conclude by saying that the centenary volume is a first-class read, both at the humorous and serious levels. It is a labour of love and skill, as well as of iconoclasm, worthy of the tradition of "the best of causes".

Well done, thou good and faithful servant!

NIGEL H. SINNOTT

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**TEACH YOUR OWN** by John Holt. Lighthouse Books, 27a Sydney Street, Brightonsea, Essex. £5.95

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Two young friends of mine are upset by the reactions of their two boys to the local comprehensive school in Islington. The boys complain of bullying, theft of their pocket-money under threats of violence, and prolonged boredom in the classroom. Most lessons quickly degenerate into interminable chats about football and the merits of different football clubs, banded about as slogans rather than as reasoned arguments.

Approaches to teachers, the Head and the Governors produces, so far, nothing but resigned despair and complaints of money cuts, shortage of good teachers and the difficulties of finding suitable materials for mixed ethnic groups. The parents are faced with the choice of ignoring the boys' now genuine headaches and sickness at the prospect of school, moving to another area without any guarantee that the local school will be better, or withdrawing the boys from school and educating them at home.

*Teach Your Own*, by the author of *How Children Learn*, that very popular and sensitive observation of children in school and at home, looks at the reasons why an increasing number of parents are taking their children out of State schools and educating them at home with friends. It also examines closely the practicalities of setting up a broad-based educational programme for children, using not only books and materials immediately available, but the resources of the locality and the publicly provided by educational institutions like parks, zoos, libraries and museums.

The book also examines the requirements of the law and the experiences of those parents who have run foul of the law in seeking to educate their own children. Although it is based on American and Canadian law and experience, it is close enough to our own scene to be helpful. Those who would like information more directly applicable to this country can approach Education Otherwise (same address as Lighthouse Books).

Those already familiar with John Holt's writings will know that he keeps his feet firmly on the ground and eschews vague theory.

MICHAEL DUANE

# The Romans Under the Stuarts: Cleaning up the Stage in 1702

J. R. SPENCER

Mary Whitehouse's prosecution of Michael Bogdanov, who directed the National Theatre production of "The Romans in Britain", is the latest example of how Christian busybodies endeavour to impose their standards on others. But for over three centuries the Theatre has been a target for religious and political censors. In this article, the second in a series on famous blasphemy trials, J. R. Spencer relates how Restoration plays were attacked by Evangelical crusaders in the early 18th century.

Mrs Whitehouse is neither the first purity campaigner to prosecute the stage, nor the first to find the prosecution did not come up to expectations. In 1702, the Societies for the Reformation of Manners tried to clean up Restoration comedy by prosecuting all the actors of both London theatres for blasphemy and indecency.

The Societies were a body of Evangelical Christians who, to their credit, were deeply concerned with the ugly features of contemporary life. However, like the Ayatollah's followers in Iran, they believed that the evils of contemporary society were entirely due to departure from traditional religious and moral values, and therefore set about enforcing the full letter of the law on such matters as Sunday observance, swearing and indecency. To this end, they recruited a team of informers to spy on their neighbours, and with the information they supplied, instituted hundreds of prosecutions.

Their arch-villain was the Restoration stage, against which they waged first a propaganda war. Some of their arguments, like the theory that blasphemous plays had provoked God to send a recent terrible storm, seem merely quaint today. But substitute "communists" for "French Jesuits", and the following has a distinctly modern ring about it:

It is more than a little suspected, that it hath been and still is one grand design of those priests and Jesuits, who adhere to the French interest, to introduce and keep up these public play-houses on purpose, (1) to obdurate the conscience of believers . . . that they may thereby be prepared to . . . tolerate and encourage those vices that are so destructive to a nation, (2) to mollify and effeminate the English valour, that we may be broken in pieces when our martial neighbour shall invade us.

The Societies received powerful support when in 1698 Jeremy Collier, the foremost pamphleteer of the day, wrote his celebrated attack on the theatre, *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness*

*of the English Stage.*

Some years earlier, when the Court of King's Bench had fined Sir Charles Sedley for exposing himself from the balcony of an inn in Covent Garden, the pious Sir Matthew Hale, the Chief Justice, had said that the King's Bench had a general power to safeguard public morality, and invented the common law offence of indecency. He developed this theme in *Taylor's* case in 1676, when he ruled that the common law courts also had intrinsic power to punish blasphemy—despite the fact that the Commonwealth Acts of Parliament which made blasphemy punishable in the common law courts had lapsed on the Restoration of Charles II. The Societies remembered all this, and turned from a propaganda war to a war of prosecutions.

## The Players on Trial

Their informers accordingly went to various plays, and while the rest of the audience watched or ogled the orange-sellers, they studiously noted all the blasphemous and indecent expressions they could find. In due course the entire cast of both London playhouses found themselves on trial before Hale's successor in the Court of King's Bench for indecency and blasphemy at common law.

The veteran actor Thomas Betterton and the rest of the Lincoln's Inn Fields theatre cast were prosecuted over Vanbrugh's *The Provok'd Wife*. This was odious to the Societies because it seemed to justify a wife's infidelity; but they also objected to it because of the scene where the brutal husband gets drunk and swears when disguised as a clergyman! John Powell and the Drury Lane cast were prosecuted over passages in Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, and other plays. The Societies took exception to this passage from Crowne's *Sir Courtly Nice*:

—Nay, his salvation is a looking-glass, for there he finds his eternal happiness. . .

—At least his priest is his claret glass, for to that he confesses all his sins, and from it receives absolution and comfort.

—But his damnation is a looking-glass, for there he finds an eternal fire in his nose.

Amazingly, Betterton and his cast were convicted.

The case against the Drury Lane cast, however, was thrown out on a technicality—whereupon the Societies announced that they would prosecute again. Before this, however, and before Betterton and his cast could be sentenced, Queen Anne intervened to stop the proceedings by *nolle prosequi*. Because the plays over which the Societies had prosecuted had

been censored and licensed by the Lord Chamberlain, the Queen was persuaded to view the prosecutions as a slight on her royal authority and the taste and judgment of her officials. She did however instruct the Lord Chamberlain to be stricter in future. When acting on this he later tried to cut out the entire first Act of Shakespeare's *Richard III* (edited by Colley Cibber), the theatre managers rebelled and began to put on unlicensed plays. The resultant feud festered on until in 1737 Parliament made it a crime to stage an unlicensed play—a provision which lasted until the Theatres Act 1968.

### A Small Achievement

Victorian critics credited the Societies with a victory for decency in cleaning up the Restoration stage. Given that the Societies disapproved of Jonson's *Volpone*, Marlowe's *Faust*, *The Tempest* and *Macbeth*, it is not surprising to learn that they themselves regarded the prosecutions as a dismal failure, and went on to press unsuccessfully for theatres, like brothels, to be forbidden by law. Given the range and extent of their disapproval, they were disappointed. All they managed to achieve was to make Vanbrugh have Sir John Brute disguise himself as his wife instead of as a parson for the purpose of getting drunk when *The Provok'd Wife* was later revived.

*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"

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For the first time since the state of Israel came into existence more people emigrated than came to settle in the country. The number of immigrants in 1981 was 15,000 and the total of emigrants was 26,000. It is also reported that a growing number of Jews leaving the Soviet Union choose to settle in countries other than Israel.

# LETTERS

## CATHOLICS AND CONTRACEPTION

John Watson (July letters) questions the statement that more than 30 per cent of induced abortions in Britain are carried out on Roman Catholics, who comprise about 12 per cent of the population. But research findings published in the "Journal of Bio-Social Science" for July 1972 show that in one particular north London hospital at that time 30 per cent of all abortion patients gave their religion as RC—and presumably some would not have admitted it. A recent study, also carried out in north London, has produced a figure of just over 30 per cent, but this has yet to be published. Studies in other parts of the country vary from 20 to 40 per cent.

It is true that many Catholic women nowadays disobey the Church's teaching on contraception — but usually only those who are married, while most of the RC abortions are carried out on the young unmarried. It may seem strange that Catholics who are "sinning" against their faith by indulging in pre-marital sexual activity should jib at taking precautions against pregnancy, but the first sin can be explained away as uncontrollable impulse, whereas the second would have to be planned in cold blood and might therefore preclude absolution. Besides, why risk damnation in order to avoid something that might never happen anyway? The Pope's recurrent denunciation of what is "unnatural" seems almost to condone "what comes naturally" but not any artificial means of contraception.

In RC countries (especially the poorer RC countries), where contraceptives are unobtainable, the situation is worse. And even non-Christian countries are affected by the RC policy on contraception: 30-odd years ago, when UN agencies proposed to include in their aid to the Third World birth-control education and facilities, this was defeated by RC members of the relevant committees in obedience to the Vatican. Since then, the world population has doubled, in spite of the hundreds of millions that have died of malnutrition before reproducing themselves. The latest statistic for children dying of starvation is 17-million a year.

John Paul II has not, of course, been in power long enough to bear much responsibility for the present size of the world population. But what of the future? His "Familiaris Consortio" firmly reiterates the sexually repressive policies of his Church, including a complete prohibition of any birth control other than "periodic abstinence", and states (without evidence) that the dangers of over-population are being exaggerated.

Even if the earth's resources were shared out more fairly, it would be impossible to feed three times its present population — which, at the current rate of increase, will take only another 50 years to reach.

Because the Pope believes in a life of bliss after death, he thinks it is better to allow 17 million children to be born this year to starve to death after weaning than to prevent their being born at all. Those of us who do not share his belief cannot condone this pointless human suffering.

BARBARA SMOKER

## DISSENT

R. W. Morrell (May) and Peter Cotes (July) put on record their high opinion of Audrey Williamson's biography of Thomas Paine. Not all admirers of Paine share their view, and I wish to put on record my low opinion of the book.

ARTHUR FREEMAN

## C. R. SWEETINGHAM AND MARK LYONS

Having spent many hours working side by side with the late C. R. Sweetingham in the office of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society during the ten years preceding his resignation as General Secretary, I was astounded at the allegation that Mr Sweetingham sent Mark Lyons out on any mission whatsoever (Letters, June). Indeed, I had been present when Mr Sweetingham had received requests for help or advice on the termination of life in some very distressing cases; these had Mr Sweetingham's sympathy but he made it clear that he could not assist in any way. Sweetingham was resolute that the law must be observed and was steadfast in his belief that the cause of voluntary euthanasia was so manifestly humane, sensible and practical that it would be legalised in due course.

Had it been fact that Lyons was initiated by Sweetingham in his nefarious visits, it would surely have been revealed in court in defence of Nicholas Reed.

Furthermore, Sweetingham was strongly opposed to the publication of the booklet, "Self Deliverance". Since its publication many people have joined EXIT (formerly the Voluntary Euthanasia Society), mainly to obtain a copy of the booklet. Because medically controlled voluntary euthanasia is now more remote than before—as those who have recently approached Parliamentarians are unfortunately only too well aware—the wherewithal of suicide has a correspondingly greater appeal than hitherto. Hence it is to be expected that membership of the Society will increase for this reason alone.

CHARLES WILSHAW

## A WORRIED MAN

I cannot allow the allegation made against the late Charles Sweetingham in your July issue go unchallenged. Having worked with him for some years, I protest strongly at the suggestion he enlisted the services of Mark Lyons or anyone else for such nefarious purposes. This would have been entirely out of character. He was always extremely careful not to do anything that would bring the Society into disrepute and risk losing the invaluable support of its many prominent members, which included a number of clergymen and medical people.

Although I had no knowledge of Mark Lyons whatsoever, I was actually working in the office when Nicholas Reed, as a new young member of the Executive Committee, first began "dropping in" to gain further information about the Society. I know only too well how disturbed Mr Sweetingham was by Mr Reed's interpretation of the Society's Aims. I heard him repeatedly point out they aimed only at changing the law, not breaking it. However, Mr Reed appeared to consider such an attitude was getting the Society nowhere, and that something more positive should be done. But Mr Sweetingham remained adamant.

I ceased working at the office but kept in touch with Mr Sweetingham for some time. He was extremely worried as to the future of the Society and, later, very much against the proposed publication of the booklet, as were several other members. Following the decision of the Annual General Meeting to go ahead and publish, I immediately severed my connection with the Society, and learned later that a number of the Executive Committee and other prominent members had resigned over the same issue.

The last time I saw Mr Sweetingham he was greatly saddened by the change in the direction of the Society, and expressed the fear that irreparable damage was being done.

E. ISABEL DENCH

## GARIBALDI

Heartiest congratulations to Nigel H. Sinnott for his really excellent article on Garibaldi ("The Man in the Red Shirt", June).

I wonder whether any foreign visitor to this country has ever evoked such enthusiasm as Garibaldi did when he came here in 1864. The Government, although Liberal (of Palmerston, Russell and Gladstone) was friendly disposed, but not at all happy about such an outburst of enthusiasm for the radical cause. I am sure Queen Victoria was not amused.

Rationalist visitors to Rome should make a point of seeing the monument to him—scowling towards the Vatican—on the Janiculum (Monte Gianicolo) where he and his forces made their last stand in the defence of the Roman Republic in 1849. The plaque on the pedestal of the statue to commemorate the centenary of his birth (1907) does not use that Christian chronology, but the year 2660 instead—the date from the traditional founding of the City of Rome. Nearby is a statue of his first wife, Anita, as she appeared fighting in the same cause. Around about it is a circle of Garibaldians who are less well known.

The Museum of the Risorgimento has mementoes of Garibaldi, including the seat which he occupied when a member of the Italian Parliament, 1875-77.

R. J. M. TOLHURST

## BRITAIN AND THE FALKLANDS

I found your News and Notes item on the Falklands (May) to be quite unbalanced. For a moment I thought I was reading "The Militant".

The Falkland Islands were unoccupied before the British settled there and nobody can blame them for wanting to remain British. You offered no criticism of the Argentines such as the way their Catholic priests were blessing and encouraging their troops. Our Parliament was united, with a few exceptions, and had full backing from the United Nations to repossess the islands.

At my place of work and at home there was overwhelming support for the actions of our leaders and a pride in our country for standing up to a nasty bunch of religious backed fascists.

KEVIN BYROM

## ANIMALS IN LABORATORIES

I am grateful to Frances Hix for her article on the cruelty of ritual killing of animals for religious minorities and bringing the subject of animal abuse into the open ("Ritual Slaughter in Britain", June issue).

Would she, I wonder, spare a thought for the ritual torture of animals on the altar of so-called progress. Every week 90,000 animals die in British laboratories. They are poisoned with weed-killers, lipsticks, paints and oven cleaners, etc. They are burnt, scalded, mutilated and irradiated. Electrodes are implanted in their brains, alcohol and drugs are force fed so it can be observed how long it takes them to fall off a rotary bar onto an electric grid—all this without anaesthetic—and are left to die often in extreme pain.

Even so called progress is not a valid reason for this barbarism as scientists themselves admit that animal testing gives little or no indication of human reaction. Drugs tested on animals and considered safe have had disastrous results when given to humans (Thalidomide and Eraldin to name only two).

I do not believe that vivisection is a medical issue. It is a moral issue and medical people and scientists are no more equipped to decide such ethical matters than any other thinking, rational person.

The human race has chosen to hunt and torture animals, ravage the finite resources of the earth,

pollute the environment and create the means of destroying the world many times over. We have failed in our responsibilities to the earth and our fellow creatures and leave behind a trail of death and destruction.

ANN CROWLE

### RITUAL AND OTHER SLAUGHTER

It is good to see "The Freethinker" extending its concern to include the rights of animals by printing Frances Hix's article. However, there is a misleading understatement in your introduction to her article. You say "thousands of animals end their lives in the slaughterhouse every year". If only this were all! In fact 450,000,000 animals are killed every year in this country for people to eat (Ministry of Agriculture figures).

Frances Hix's readers may be interested to know of the long discussion on ritual slaughter appearing in the first three issues this year of the journal of the Vegetarian Society UK. Copies can be obtained from the Society at Parkdale, Dunham Road, Altringham, Cheshire WA14 4QG, price 35p each.

HAZEL BROTHERS

### OMISSIONS

Sarah Lawson's review of Georgina Battiscombe's "Christina Rosetti: a Divided Life" (July) doesn't mention the most interesting things about the book and its subject from the freethinker's point of view.

Sarah Lawson takes a very narrow view of Christina Rosetti's life and work. We cannot know whether she was "sexually repressed", but we may say that she wrote some of the most moving poems in English about sexual love. We do know that she was obsessed with Anglo-Catholic Christianity, but we may also say that she wrote some of the most moving poems in English about religious despair. Sarah Lawson says nothing about the nature or quality of her poetry, although this is the only reason for the book—or the review.

One significant point left out by Sarah Lawson and puzzled over by Georgina Battiscombe is the mutual affection and admiration between Christina Rosetti and Swinburne which should remind us that neither orthodoxy nor unorthodoxy are as simple as they seem. Another is the failure of her religion to bring any comfort on her deathbed, some of her last utterances being meaningless appeals for forgiveness and hopeless screams of terror, which should remind us that religion has much to answer for.

NICOLAS WALTER

### A GRACIOUS MESSAGE FROM A CHRISTIAN READER

I hope the Reverend Canon John Hester has now learned that when Christians lick the boots of atheistic humanists, they get their heads kicked. ("An Open Letter to a Parishioner", June.)

CHARLES OXLEY

The enterprising Warwickshire Humanist Group has published a booklet entitled "Natural and Supernatural". In its pages we find humanist views on ghosts, astrology, extra-sensory perception and "life" after death. Those quoted include Isaac Asimov, Richard E. Leakey, John Lennon, James Randi and H. G. Wells. The booklet costs 95p (add 15p for postage) and is obtainable from Roy Saich, 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth, Warwickshire.

## EVENTS

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** Queen's Head, Queen's Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 5 September, 5 pm for 5.30 pm. Jim Herrick: "Humanism, War and Peace".

**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.

**Gay Humanist Group.** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Friday, 10 September, 7.30 pm Roy Burns: "The Gay Community Organisation".

**Glasgow Humanist Society.** Information regarding meetings and other activities are obtainable from Norman Macdonald, 339 Kilmarnock Road, Glasgow, G43, telephone 041 632 9511.

National Secular Society

### ANNUAL OUTING

including visits to  
Hever Castle and Down House  
(home of Charles Darwin)

Sunday, 12 September 1982

Cost: £5.50 including entrance fees  
Details from NSS office, 702 Holloway Road,  
London N19 3NL, telephone: 01-272 1266

According to a report in "The Spectator", Prince William of Wales might not have seen the light of day and his parents could have considered the possibility of aborting the foetus. The evidence given is that the typed official announcement of the birth had the time of arrival in hand writing. So it may be—as some newspapers had already hinted—that the sex of the baby was known to Palace officials before the time of his birth. One suggestion is that the Princess of Wales had had amniocentesis during pregnancy to test for Down's syndrome (mongolism). In the course of the test—which involves drawing off fluid surrounding the foetus—the sex of the baby would have been revealed. An intriguing question arises: if such a test had shown an abnormality would a termination of pregnancy have been arranged?

# World Population: Survey's Grim Warning

"Man has left his footprints on the moon, but his greatest challenge is to secure a tolerable existence for everyone on earth". These are the opening lines of a new Population Concern publication, *The Shape of Things to Come*, which was introduced at a Press conference in the House of Commons last month.

Population Concern aims to raise awareness about the nature, size and complexity of world population, particularly as it affects the social and economic development of mankind. This new survey is a notable contribution to that end.

It points out that over the last 25 years the less developed countries of the world have done what it took Western Europe a century to achieve. But the rapid growth in population that has simultaneously taken place has negated many of the improvements. "During this period, more food has been produced, more children educated, more jobs created, more wealth accumulated: but more has not been enough, and many of these achievements have been swept away like sandcastles before an advancing tide—of people".

The human population reached its first thousand million around 1830. A century later it reached the second thousand million; the third was achieved in 30 and the fourth in 15 years. The main reasons for this growth in world population have been the effects of revolutions in agriculture, industry and medicine. The UN estimates that the world population could stabilise at 10.5 thousand million by the

year 2110. But it could be as high as 15 thousand million.

Already the number of undernourished people in the world is estimated at 450 million, nearly half of these being children under the age of five. A large proportion are on the verge of starvation.

"Each year in the developing world approximately 12 million infants die — with diarrhoea, intestinal diseases and malnutrition among the main causes. Unplanned pregnancies too soon, too close and too many are also a major cause of the alarming rate of infant mortality".

Although 118 governments officially support the provision of family planning information and services, about 500 million couples do not have access to them. In 20 developing countries one-third of the women interviewed by World Fertility Survey researchers said that their last pregnancy was unwanted. The fact that abortion is the main method of birth control in many countries is clear evidence of the need for family planning services.

*The Shape of Things to Come* contains a mass of disturbing facts and statistics. Everyone concerned about population growth, resources and the environment should obtain the report at £1.75 from Population Concern, 27-35 Mortimer Street, London W1. Presentation copies should be dispatched forthwith to Mother Theresa, Pope John Paul II and other breeding enthusiasts.

## "This Nauseating Spectacle"

Whitehall reports of "an unholy row" between the Dean of St Paul's and the Prime Minister as to whether the Argentinian dead should be mentioned at the service were leaked to the Press. It appears that the Archbishop of Canterbury, head of the ecclesiastical branch of the Civil Service, and Cardinal Hume were called in to settle this delicate post-conflict conflict. Both agreed that the souls of the Argentinians as well as the British dead should be commended to the Almighty.

Mrs Thatcher blew her coiffured top. This was her show and she wasn't going to be upstaged by the Argies who had their own Christian leaders to pray for them.

Nicolas Walter, Managing Editor of the Rationalist Press Association, said of the service: "It shows that even if the country isn't Christian the Establishment is. And established Christianity is a form of paganism involving prayers or thanks to a tribal god of battle".

Jo Grimond, Liberal MP for Orkney and Shetland

and a former party leader, was one of many public figures who expressed reservations about the wisdom or decency of holding the service. He declared: "I find it embarrassing that the Prime Minister should talk of the Falkland spirit over strikes, but invoking the Almighty as the Government's ally would be insupportable. . .

"We know that this was one of the most unnecessary wars in history. Are we to have the blessing of the Church on British errors condoned—far worse compounded—by Argentinian errors and aggression?"

"Most wars are due to self-defence, atavistic rushes of blood to the head, or the need to bolster the prestige of governments. If there is to be a sermon at St Paul's, 'Bind your kings in chains' might be an appropriate text".

Dr Kenneth Greet, Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council, spoke for many Christians when he told the Methodist Conference: "Victory in the Falklands was undoubtedly a victory for the arms salesmen, a victory for militarism and a triumph for divisiveness".