

# The Freethinker

secular humanist monthly

founded 1881

Vol. 102, No. 12

DECEMBER 1982

25p

## RELIGIOUS INDOCTRINATION IN WEST SUSSEX SCHOOLS COMES UNDER FIRE

The new syllabus for religious education in West Sussex schools has come under fire from a member of the Council's Education Committee. Councillor Francis Avard (Liberal) described the syllabus as unsatisfactory "and in some places absurd and incomprehensible". He said it was a pity that local education authorities cannot leave religious teaching to the churches. "Unfortunately", he added, "religious education in schools is compulsory. Indeed it is the only compulsory subject".

Councillor Avard said that objectives for pupils in the seven to eight age group include worship. "But you cannot compel worship. How many adults silently declined to worship when they were at school? Worship and compulsion are incompatible. Some Christians are aware that the attempt to compel can be counter-productive.

"The objectives for the 11-12 age group in the syllabus include: 'to acquire a basic understanding of the place of religion in the world'. But it does not recognise that there are many other religions as well as Christianity in the world. Many young people in this group are able to grasp the fact that such wider concepts exist".

Objectives for pupils over 16 include "a spiritual comprehension of truths beyond the understanding". Councillor Avard said there was no response to his request for an explanation of the phrase. "This is like saying 'comprehension of the incomprehensible'. Adherents to other religions accept beliefs which cannot be understood. Christians call this superstition, which indeed it is. That is why I used the term 'Christian superstitions' in my remarks.

"It is important to recognise that there are those, among whom I include myself, who cannot accept any religion".

Worthing Humanist Group has also expressed concern about the contents of the new syllabus. Frank

Pidgeon, group Press Officer, has written to the Education Committee chairman urging a reconsideration of the implications of the amended syllabus. He reminded Councillor Shepherd that in the field of religion in school, teachers are dealing with "ultimate" or "fundamental" questions about living.

"If they regard their job as 'instruction' in these matters, they will instruct their pupils in their answers to ultimate questions; they will hand them a consistent set of answers and concerns. Religious instruction in this sense is what the 1944 Education Act required—it was, and still is, seen as a method of inducting children into Christianity.

### Education Without Bias

"It is, however, losing its educational respectability and is being replaced with 'education about religion', in which the ultimate answers of various religions and their conflicting accounts of the true nature of the world are presented with impartiality. . .

"A genuinely open approach to religious education would educate in religions without bias in favour of one against another, rather than instructing pupils in the 'truths' of one particular belief system. But many people—an increasing number—have no religion. Their outlook has no place for the supernatural nor for divine authority, yet they have a practical and effective approach to living".

Christmas and  
New Year Greetings  
to our Readers

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

## SPECIAL POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Inland and Overseas: Twelve months: £3.60;  
Six months: £2. U.S.A.: Twelve months: \$8.00;  
Six months: \$5.00. Overseas subscribers are requested to obtain sterling drafts from their banks, but if the remittance is in foreign currency (including Eire) please add the equivalent of 60p or US \$1.20 for bank charges.

Printed by David Neil & Co., South Street, Dorking, Surrey.

# NEWS

## A LENTON PASTORAL

*The Freethinker* has become a popular target for Tim Lenton, the Christian Weekly Newspapers columnist. And not surprisingly either; his rather arid "Square One" column is slightly livelier when it includes a few catty jibes about this publication.

Mr Lenton recently expressed the view that Christians who are prone to attacks of doubt should read Jim Herrick's history of *The Freethinker*, "in order to find out how weak the case against Christianity really is". If only a fraction of doubting Christians take his advice, *Vision and Realism* will become a best-seller. But Mr Lenton does not assist his readers to a renewal of confidence in Christianity; he leaves out information on how to obtain the book.

Tim Lenton accuses *The Freethinker* of setting up a caricature of "the Faith" in order to demolish it. Which "faith" is he referring to? That of John Paul II or Archbishop Lefebvre; of Margaret Thatcher or Lord Soper; of Cardinal Hume or the Rev Ian Paisley; of the Church of England or Jehovah's Witnesses; of Quakers or Exclusive Brethren; of Christadelphians or Unitarians?

If Mr Lenton's accusation is justified then according to the Oxford Dictionary *The Freethinker* depicts Christianity in a manner "that exaggerates certain characteristics, especially for comic effect". *The Freethinker* has always endeavoured to examine religious doctrines and systems of belief, and their impact on society. It is not necessary to exaggerate Christianity's unpleasing characteristics; history and human experience testify to its intolerance, aggression and arrogance. And the amusement we derive from the gullibility and daftness of religious enthusiasts does not compensate for the misery that Christianity has inflicted on the world.

*The Freethinker* has often pointed out that there is no love lost between Christians. Mr Lenton is forced to agree that this is "a charge still true in some quarters". In these ecumenical times Jesusites of various denominations (who only a few years ago would not have bid one another time of day) are on friendly terms. Just as freethinkers have always deplored discrimination against and persecution of religious believers by other religious believers, so we welcome the decline in hostility between Christians. But this change of attitude has not come about through a revelation from On High. It results from the realisation that Christianity is in such disarray that even fundamental differences have to be

# AND NOTES

glossed over. The tiny contribution *The Freethinker* has made to undermining the Christian edifice justifies its history and continued existence.

Mr Lenton complains: "While freethinkers are credited generously with initiating and carrying through many important social reforms, *The Freethinker* sees the Church as a reactionary force". He adds that when Jim Herrick has to admit that when the bishops do vote for reform it becomes "the bishops' reluctant acquiescence". Unbelievers are not alone in seeing the Church as a reactionary force and Mr Herrick is, if anything, too generous to the bishops. They resolutely opposed virtually every social reform until resistance was futile. That has not prevented religious opportunists from claiming that reforming pioneers were inspired by Christian teachings.

Perhaps the Bible House thinker will amaze us by compiling a list of social reforms that were initiated by the bishops.

## PRINCELY WARNING

Speaking in Toronto last month Prince Philip described the soaring world population as a time-bomb which, if unchecked, could lead to catastrophe. He described the statistics as frightening with the world population having increased from one billion to four billion in the last hundred years.

The Prince warned that non-renewable resources were being used up and renewable resources were being mishandled. "The more people you have, the more resources you demand", he declared.

It is to be hoped that Prince Philip's warning will be an effective antidote to the irresponsible speeches of Pope John Paul II and Mother Theresa.

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Although costs have risen, the price of "The Freethinker" has been maintained at 25p for nearly three years. But it will be increased to 30p in January. Details of the new postal subscription rates are given in the information panel on page 178. At 30p the 16-page monthly will still be excellent value, and thanks are due to its unpaid writers and contributors to the Fund whose generosity makes it possible. Readers are urged to increase the circulation by introducing the paper to new subscribers and promoting sales at meetings and conferences.

The Christmas season will enable Christians in Northern Ireland to take a short respite from savaging each other. In many areas they will remain at home behind locked doors and drawn curtains. Those who venture out to attend church services will do so in groups for protection from their fellow-Christians and followers of the "prince of peace".

Many will be mourning relatives and friends who have met violent deaths since last Christmas. Two of the most tragic families in the province must be those of Thomas Cochrane, a member of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and Joseph Donegan, victim of a random kidnap after Cochrane's disappearance. Both died at the hands of their fellow-countrymen; one was a regular worshipper at the Church of Ireland, the other at a Roman Catholic Church.

At the time of those killings Provisional Sinn Fein delivered a stinging rebuff to James Prior and the Westminster Government. By winning five seats and narrowly missing two others in the Ulster Assembly elections, PSF shattered illusions about the IRA being an isolated group that few people support voluntarily. Small wonder it is being said that the Maze hunger strikers did not die in vain.

How long will it be before British governments stop developing plans and policies for Northern Ireland with the Unionists uppermost in their minds? There is a constant refrain from Westminster and Fleet Street that Northern Ireland must remain part of the United Kingdom as long as that is the wish of the Unionist (Protestant) majority. Even shrewd commentators like Professor Bernard Crick are bamboozled by this assertion.

There are several points that are always overlooked by those who beat the big drum of Protestant majority rule. The Ulster Protestants have never been a majority in the generally accepted sense. They were a minority when Britain imposed partition against the wishes of the majority in Ireland. (It was necessary to partition not only Ireland but Ulster itself to guarantee the Protestants a built-in majority in six of the province's nine counties.) They are a minority within the United Kingdom today, and a referendum would almost certainly show that they remain within it against the wishes of the majority.

Catholic Nationalists, Protestant Unionists and the luckless servicemen who keep them apart are paying with their lives for policies formulated by political ostriches. There is considerable weight behind the argument that there would be a blood-bath if Britain withdrew and left the protagonists to sort out their differences. The risk is all the greater in a community that has been poisoned by religious bigotry and fanaticism. But it is a risk that will have to be taken sooner or later.

The Socialist Educational Association reports how one of its members in Lancashire tried to track down the origins of his local Church of England school. He suspected that although voluntary in status, it was not in fact a Church school. The Department of Education and Science traced the original trust deed which confirmed that the school had been set up without reference to any denomination. The Association's journal comments: "We know about undenominational voluntary schools but the non-denominational were new to us. They are religious, but not belonging to any church or sect. Yet here was a school the Church of England had appropriated, apparently without any right to do so". The DES say there are at least 20 such schools they can locate, and another 25 whose origins are doubtful.

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## OPENING TIME

Evangelical Christians and the sabbatarian movement in Wales suffered a severe setback last month. They were heavily defeated in a referendum which resulted in Sunday opening of most public houses. The unsuccessful campaign to keep Carmarthen "dry" was led by the Rev Hywel Jones, a Baptist minister who believes that alcohol should be obtainable on prescription only.

There were celebrations by pub owners and customers when it was announced that polls in 15 council districts left only Ceredigion and Dyfor "dry". Appeals from pulpits and supplications to the Almighty had been unavailing. The "openers" won a resounding victory and most Welsh public houses opened on Sunday for the first time in over a hundred years.

The Sunday Closing (Wales) Act of 1881 was passed at a time of religious fervour and revivalism. The valleys and villages were dominated by the chapels and nonconformist clergy. But the dog-collar dictators have been steadily losing power and influence.

Religious opponents of Sunday opening endeavoured to foster nationalist feelings against English immigrants and holidaymakers. They accuse "outsiders" of eroding the Welsh Sunday, although Welsh people have no compunction about drinking in their clubs on Sunday. And as visitors to or residents of England they visit public houses whatever the day.

The dubious claim that Welsh people treasured their "dry" Sunday has been demolished.

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Parishioners in the Dorset village of Allington recently organised a series of disco dances to raise funds for repairs to the floor of St Swithun's Church hall. During the first dance the floor collapsed.

## IT DEPENDS WHAT YOU MEAN

Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, spoke at a meeting of Edinburgh Humanist Group on 29 November. Her subject was "The Philosophy of Secular Humanism", and the NSS President asserted that the word "humanist" was almost meaningless without definition.

Miss Smoker said that secularists have always been willing to co-operate with committed Christians and other believers, in particular where co-operation has been possible without dishonesty. But she stressed the inadvisability of blurring the secularist standpoint. In her opinion, people of differing outlooks got on better together and had greater mutual respect if they made clear where and on what grounds they differed, as well as the areas where they agreed.

Referring to the word "humanist", Miss Smoker recalled that 20 years ago it was used interchangeably with atheist, agnostic, secularist, freethinker, rationalist—and was understood by religionists, as well as humanists themselves, as belonging to the area of non-belief. Since then, however, the meaning of the word had been widened to include anyone who, while believing in a god and an after-life, also regarded this life as important, though not paramount.

"Humanist" now signified very little unless given some qualification — for instance, "secular humanist" or "scientific humanist", in contrast to "Christian humanist" or "religious humanist".

### Christian Take-over

"During the 1960s," she said, "the word 'humanist' became the most popular label for the non-believer. Religionists used it patronisingly of those who did not share their beliefs, while they, in turn, accepted it gladly as a good-sounding, positive word.

"I did myself. But then, during the 1960s, Christians and other religionists began adopting the label for themselves — not to indicate that they put human beings before a supposed god, but merely that they considered human beings to be important, too.

"One day about 13 years ago I was asked by a fundamentalist clergyman what I called myself. 'A humanist,' I replied. 'Oh, I'm a humanist too!' was the response. 'In that case,' I objected, 'I'll have to find a different label for myself.' And since then I have used the word 'humanist' only after some such qualification as 'secular'.

"The use of the word 'humanist' has gone on widening ever since, so it has become almost meaningless. Journalists even tell us now that we have a 'humanist Pope'. But he is not, of course, humanist in the sense of the Edinburgh Humanist Group. A 'humanist' who rejects the only humane means of solving the problem of the world population explosion. . .!"

# Resolutions Passed at NSS Annual Meeting

The annual general meeting of the National Secular Society in London last month passed an emergency resolution opposing plans by the Bradford and Inner London education authorities to bring Muslim religious leaders into county schools. This would lead to the introduction of leaders of other religions, thus disrupting the educational community and sowing the seeds of religious strife. While recognising that the authorities were motivated by a desire to avoid discrimination against religious minorities, it was felt that the best way to do so was by amending the 1944 Education Act so as to abolish the daily act of worship and replace it with education in citizenship.

The meeting also noted with satisfaction that such a development is taking place in most county schools where morning worship has fallen into disuse in favour of social or citizenship education. It called for the legalisation of these changes in educational practice and as an interim measure for the amendment of the 1944 Act to allow students over 16 to opt out of morning assembly without reference to their parents.

## Peace With Justice

Recognising that it was a grave act of injustice against the Palestinian Arabs that a state based upon the religion of Judaism should have been established in their midst, and realising that lasting peace in the Middle East can be achieved only on the basis of justice rather than military might, the meeting urged that the following steps be taken: (a) The UN to use all legitimate means in its power to require Israel to withdraw to the borders drawn by the Partition plan of 1947 or, at least, to those existing prior to the 1967 war; (b) until then the USA to stop all military aid to Israel and devote the resources thus saved to the reconstruction of Lebanon; (c) the Palestinian Arabs to have the right of self-determination in the territory evacuated as above; (d) the UN subsequently to require reciprocal and simultaneous recognition by the Israelis and the Arabs of each other's chosen status.

The meeting supported the secularist minority in Israel in its struggle for a secular state, based on the Hebrew language rather than religion, with adequate safeguards for the Arab-speaking minority. It sent warmest greetings to the Israeli Secular Humanist Association, wishing it every success in its efforts. The meeting called on all nations to protect their Jewish minorities against discrimination and violence. It also urged Jews living outside Israel to withhold support from the Israeli Government in its unjust, fanatical and expansionist attitude.

In face of the Roman Catholic Church's denunciation of effective means of contraception while over-population is causing catastrophic problems in many parts of the world, a resolution was passed calling on the UN "to initiate a vigorous campaign in favour of family planning, together with financial aid where necessary for its implementation".

A resolution was passed calling for the abrogation by the nations of the world of the anomalous status of the Roman Catholic Church which, alone among the world's religions, enjoys the diplomatic status of a sovereign state. It was pointed out that the Pope's personal bodyguard, Archbishop Marcincus, who is said to have been involved in highly dubious dealings to finance extreme Right-wing groups in South America, had diplomatic immunity in the Vatican.

## Sunday Trading

The meeting expressed strong support for an end to restrictions on Sunday trading. It congratulated Mr Ian Sproat, Minister for Trade, on his forthright response to the campaign against reform by the Lord's Day Observance Society. It was agreed that Sunday trading should take place within the framework of a five-day, 35-hour week.

A resolution noted with concern "The failure of the Charity Commissioners to act upon the recommendation made by the jury in the Unification Church libel case that this body be struck off the register of charities". Another resolution deplored the introduction of prayer sessions at Coventry magistrates court.

A resolution calling for the protection of animals from suffering and exploitation was passed.

In view of the deep divergencies between the Government and the Church of England, manifested in connection with the Falklands thanksgiving service, the meeting called on both bodies to join with the NSS in urging Parliament to disestablish the Church.

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There has been a dramatic decline in church attendance in the small Durham town of Houghton le Spring. So the Rev John Stevenson has come up with various wheezes to boost attendance and to celebrate the centenary of All Saints' Church. On Christmas Eve he will dress up as Santa Claus to celebrate the Eucharist. The special attraction on Good Friday will be a showing of the Monty Python film, "The Life of Brian". Mr Stevenson commented: "You can't peddle heavy theology".

The country was seething with unrest 150 years ago and the Reform Act may have prevented violent revolution. But its supporters soon became disillusioned and the struggle for effective reform continued for another century. Edward Royle's books include "Victorian Infidels" and "Radicals, Secularists and Republicans". His latest, "English Radicals and Reformers 1760-1848" has just been published by the Harvester Press. Dr Royle is lecturer in History at the University of York.

One hundred and fifty years ago the political system of Britain was reorganised by the deliberate resolution of Parliament for the first time in modern history. Not since Cromwell's Major-Generals in the 1650s had English government been so thoroughly shaken up. The Scottish system was transformed for the first time since Union in 1707. Only the Irish—always more prone to interference from Westminster—had experienced recent upheavals in their representation in 1801 and 1829.

The fact that the Reform Acts of 1832 were passed is the most significant thing about them. The British Constitution which Burke had praised in the face of Thomas Paine in the 1790s had been revered as a natural growth, not the rational construct of mere man like the American and French Constitutions. Now, in 1832, it too was artificially reconstructed and, despite all disclaimers to the contrary, what was intended as a "final" measure inevitably came to be seen as only the "first step" to further reform.

Why was there parliamentary reform in 1832? Given that, short of violent revolution, an unreformed Parliament would have to be convinced of the need to reform itself, how was this accomplished? Since the 1770s Radicals had been calling in vain for a reform of the political system. In quiet years it was argued against them that reform was not desired. In years of upheaval, such as the 1790s after the French Revolution, and the period of unrest after the ending of the French Wars in 1815, it was argued that the times were too turbulent for reform. Yet there was another French Revolution in 1830, at the same time as the agricultural counties were seething with unrest, and still there was reform.

The most significant factor influencing the situation in 1830-1832 was a change in government. Parties were not the bureaucratically organised unities which they are now, but loose coalitions of like-minded people often grouped around different leading politicians. Whigs and Tories had much in common. In many ways the Tories were more

enlightened and less exclusive than the Whigs, but the latter thought of themselves as more tolerant and had traditionally associated themselves with moderate reform of Parliament. In 1830 Whigs dominated a ministry for the first time in over a generation.

This came about following the retirement and death of Lord Liverpool in 1827. Since 1812 he had led a strong, broadly-based Government of mainly Tories. They had introduced a number of important administrative, fiscal and humanitarian reforms, but they gave little encouragement to calls for parliamentary reform. Only a minority of MPs, chiefly radical-Whigs, were prepared to contemplate the eradication of political abuses and the extension of representation to the new industrial towns and the emerging middle class. No one, however, seriously considered the demands of Radicals for an extension of the franchise to all the people.

## Catholic Emancipation

In the late 1820s ultra-Tories were becoming increasingly suspicious of liberal-Tories whose fiscal reforms appeared to be responsible for agricultural depression. But, above all, the issue which loomed largest was that of granting full civil rights to Roman Catholics. In a desperate bid to unite Protestant opinion, full civil rights were granted to Non-conformists in 1828, but the return of Daniel O'Connell, a Catholic, at the County Clare by-election precipitated a new crisis the following year. As leader of the Irish people and backed by the Catholic Church, O'Connell had the power to threaten civil violence. The Leader of the House of Commons, Robert Peel, a stout Protestant, introduced a Bill emancipating the Catholics. It was reluctantly carried. "Orange" Peel became "Lemon" Peel.

Disillusioned Tories now refused to support their Prime Minister, the Duke of Wellington. If the Parliament of a Protestant country could betray Protestantism in the face of public opinion, then the House of Commons must be made accountable to public opinion. After a general election in 1830, in which reform became an issue, Tories joined with reformers in bringing a Whig coalition to power with the reform of Parliament as the first item on the agenda.

Public opinion was now whipped up by the radical and middle-class Press in Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, London and other centres of population. Political Unions demonstrated in large numbers. Against a background of urban riots and threats even of revolution, the Whigs forced their

Reform Acts for the various parts of the United Kingdom through both Houses of Parliament. That the process took over a year, precipitating a constitutional crisis between Lords and Commons, was in part due to the Church. When the Lords rejected reform in October 1831, they did so by the margin of the bishops' votes, 21 out of 29 of whom were anti-reformers. The opposition of the Lords was finally overcome only when the King was forced to promise to swamp the House with newly-created, pro-reform peers. Thus, the peaceful revolution was achieved.

### Reformers Cheated

In fact the Acts did remarkably little beyond satisfying the bulk of moderate, middle-class reforming opinion. The electorate in Scotland, it is true, was increased tenfold, but in England and Wales it was hardly doubled. Only one in five adult males in England and Wales had the vote after 1832. Householders with property valued at £10 a year were enfranchised in the boroughs, as were various categories of more prosperous tenants in the counties. Small, corrupt boroughs lost one or both of their Members, but as many seats were redistributed to the aristocratic counties as to the new industrial towns. The aim was to ensure a wide representation of substantial interest groups, subordinate to the dominant landed interest which the Acts aimed to strengthen. There was no attempt to equalise constituency sizes, no idea that individuals as individuals should have the vote. Working men, who had provided the fire in the belly of the agitation for reform, received nothing for their efforts. Property was enfranchised and they had little property beyond their own labour. As members of the agricultural or manufacturing community they were represented by their social superiors who, confident in their new Parliament, refused to pass a Ten Hours Bill for the factories, reformed the Poor Law so as to impose the dreaded "workhouse" means test, and indulged in a new wave of Irish coercion and trade union repression.

Disillusioned working men and sympathetic radicals soon realised that they had been cheated. Without universal suffrage, equalisation of electoral districts, the secret ballot, the abolition of the property qualification for parliamentary candidates, the payment of Members, and more frequent elections, the bulk of the people would have little chance of making much impact on Parliament and the laws under which they were obliged to exist. They would remain as subjects and not citizens in their own country. Not until the present century were these preconditions for democracy established, and then only imperfectly. It was to be a long struggle.

• Dr Royle's "English Radicals and Reformers 1760-1848" will be reviewed in a future issue.

## Karuna Anne

She would have been 20 next year. Perhaps she could have been. Perhaps she should have been.

Karuna was our first daughter, following two sons. The pregnancy was difficult. We would have lost her at three months but for the skill and care of an Indian doctor in Bangalore. Miscarriage is often nature's way. Should we have let nature take its course?

There was a false alarm a few weeks before birth which sent us scurrying 60 mad miles in a Jeep to get from our country home to the government hospital in Secunderabad, or was it Hyderabad? The cities are twins in central southern India, the heart and capital of the old Nizam's kingdom.

It was in that hospital that Karuna was finally born and a few minutes later she was shown to me. Our baby was a spina bifida child. If we kept her in India she would live for a little while, but only for a little while. If we flew with her to England operations might save her life. She might grow up but she would always be severely physically handicapped.

My first task was to tell my wife and to explain the options. She was too exhausted to share the decision-making. The choice was mine alone. I chose to keep her in India. In part I was thinking of her but I have always known that in large part I was facing the fact that I could not have coped with a severely handicapped child in my home.

She lived for a month. We loved and cared for her and her short life brought us a great deal of love and kindness from others. I shall always be grateful for her.

My story is told. Let others draw the moral.

LESLIE SCRASE

JIM HERRICK

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# Putting the Foote Down—"The Freethinker" Trial 100 Years Ago

J. R. SPENCER

J. R. Spencer concludes this series with the prosecution and trial of George William Foote, founder and first Editor of "The Freethinker". When the paper was launched in May 1881 it carried a ferocious anti-Christian proclamation that set the tone for what was to follow. The Christmas 1882 issue included several cartoons on the theme, "A New Life of Christ", in which episodes in his career were lampooned. He preaches the Sermon on the Mount from the balcony of a public house named The Mount; he "raiseth the dead" by hooking a body on a fishing line; he "cureth the deaf" by banging an enormous gong. The contents also included a poem by D. Evans entitled "Jocular Jehovah" and an anonymous one, "Good Young Men", which poked fun in Gilbertian style at "born again" twits of the mission halls and Sunday schools. This was the last straw for Sir Henry Tyler, MP ("that mass of pious imposture" as Foote described him), and battle commenced.

G. W. Foote started *The Freethinker* in 1881 with Charles Bradlaugh's help. They both wanted an aggressively anti-religious paper. Foote's editorial technique, however, was not so much to reason against religion, nor to rage against it, but to try to debunk it by making people laugh. The early *Freethinker* looked like an anti-religious *Punch*. It had profane jokes, "Acid Drops"—a column of real news showing religion in a discreditable light—and cartoons, usually of famous Bible scenes, like the one of Moses being shown God's back parts. To judge from booming sales, many readers did find all this funny. Some secularists, however, including the earnest Charles Bradlaugh, thought such flippant humour debased their cause. Thus Bradlaugh early dissociated himself from *The Freethinker* and transferred the proprietorship from the company he controlled to the secularist, W. J. Ramsey. But the world in general did not hear of this, and Bradlaugh was still linked with the paper in the public mind.

If there were secularists who disapproved of *The Freethinker*, the Mary Whitehouses of the day thought it wildly blasphemous and howled for a prosecution. The Home Secretary, Sir William Harcourt, sympathised with them. The Attorney-General, however, was firmly opposed to prosecution, and Harcourt deferred to his views.

Bradlaugh was in the middle of his monumental struggle with those who wanted to keep him out of Parliament because he was an atheist. One of his

opponents, the shady financier Sir Henry Tyler, MP, thought a blasphemy prosecution would be a useful additional stick to beat him with, and started a private prosecution over *The Freethinker*, with Bradlaugh, Foote and Ramsey as defendants. To conduct it, he briefed Sir Hardinge Giffard, QC, the most eminent and expensive barrister in the land.

The indictment reflected the weight of legal armament brought to bear. It was a dreadnought of 16 counts, comprising what at first sight appeared to be most of *The Freethinker* from January to June 1882. Like a big battleship, its size made it a target for counter-attack when still a long way off. Bradlaugh applied to have the indictment shortened, applied to have it severed so that he was tried separately, and—wisely, in the event—applied to have the trial moved from the Old Bailey to the Queen's Bench Division, where it would take place before none other than the Lord Chief Justice himself.

These legal manoeuvres took time and drew public attention to *The Freethinker*. Foote, defiant, capitalised on the delay by advertising his paper as "prosecuted for blasphemy", and making sure the new buyers were not disappointed in the contents. In his Christmas number for 1882 he surpassed himself. It had the famous cartoon of Moses seeing God's back parts, a cartoon-strip Life of Christ in the style of Handelman's *Freaky Fables*, an interview with the Devil, and a poem, *Jocular Jehovah*, with six verses like this:

That baldheaded beggar Elisha, you know, was a  
cheeky conceited old ass,  
Who always left trouble and mischief behind in  
the districts through which he might pass.  
When the infants were let out of school and made  
fun of his limited quantum of hairs,  
His tender Divinity settled their hash with the claws  
of a couple of bears.

This edition so outraged some Aldermen of the City of London that they now took a leaf from Sir Henry Tyler's book and instituted a second prosecution for blasphemy. A lighter and more streamlined model than Tyler's, it was based solely on the Christmas number, and named only Foote, Ramsey and the printer, Kemp, as defendants. It overtook Tyler's dreadnought, now firmly aground in legal technicalities, and reached trial at the Old Bailey in March 1883 while the earlier case was still pending.

At the Old Bailey, Foote and his co-defendants struck unlucky in their judge. Sir Ford North was a recent and surprising judicial appointment, a chancery lawyer who knew rather less about criminal



trials than the Pope, whose religious views he shared, but without his toleration of dissent. Throughout the first trial, which took place on 1 March 1883, he was undisguisedly hostile to the defendants. He directed the jury that if anyone denies the existence of God, or holds Him up to ridicule, that is blasphemy. "It is essential", he said, "that the law should deal with cases of that kind because these publications have a great tendency to pervert public morality and so interfere with the due observance of the law".

### The Serpent Awakes

Surprisingly, the jury failed to agree, despite this very unfavourable direction, and the trial was inconclusive. Whereupon to everyone's amazement North remanded the defendants in custody—an unheard of step in such a case—pending the retrial. At the retrial a few days later he was equally hostile. This time, however, the jury was less sympathetic. It listened unmoved to Foote's appeal not to awake "the serpent of religious persecution" from its lengthy sleep, and after North had repeated his hostile direction on the law, promptly convicted. The judge then turned to Foote and said: "I regard it as extremely sad to find that a person to whom God has given such evident intelligence and ability should have chosen to prostitute his talents to the works of the devil", and gave him twelve months' imprisonment. What happened next is described in *The Times*.

The sentence was followed by a scene such as had seldom been witnessed within the walls of the court. The gallery of the court was filled with persons who were evidently sympathisers of the accused, and there was also a large crowd in the Old Bailey of those who had been unable to find accommodation in it. When the jury gave their verdict a slight hissing was heard, but when the concluding words of the learned Judge fell upon the ears of those in the gallery a perfect storm of hissing, mingled with other cries, burst forth. This was kept up for some time, until the defendant Foote raised his hand as if to quell the tumult. Addressing his Lordship, he said, with great deliberation, "My Lord, I thank you—it is worthy of your creed". Upon that the tumult was renewed, the hissing being taken up by various sympathisers who had obtained admittance to the body of the court. Loud ironical cries of "Christian, Christian" rent the air, and were echoed by the large crowd which had assembled within the precincts of the court. A woman was carried out of the gallery in a swoon, while others uttered cries of lamentation. With some considerable difficulty the court was cleared by the city police.

Order restored, North then sentenced Ramsey to six months' imprisonment, and Kemp to three.

The demonstration in court against North's biased conduct and general severity was echoed outside. Even the ordinarily deferential legal Press attacked him. One thing came of this: three weeks later, he was quietly shunted off to the Chancery Division, to

spend the rest of his judicial career on conveyancing and trusts, matters less likely than cartoons of God's backside to raise his blood-pressure. But Foote, Kemp and Ramsey stayed in prison.

In April 1883, Ramsey and Foote were brought up from the cells to join Charles Bradlaugh for the trial of Sir Henry Tyler's original indictment in the Queen's Bench Division. Here, the atmosphere was far more civilised than at the Old Bailey. Notwithstanding his unfortunate history as prosecuting counsel in the Pooley case years before, John Duke Coleridge, the Lord Chief Justice, was a liberal-minded Anglican with views decidedly in favour of free speech. He allowed Bradlaugh to be tried separately and first. He put Bradlaugh's defence that he was not personally involved with *The Freethinker* at the time of the alleged blasphemies fairly to the jury—which acquitted.

### Conflicting Views

Then came the trial of Ramsey and Foote. Unlike North, Coleridge treated them with courtesy, and then directed the jury on the content of the crime of blasphemy in terms distinctly favourable to them. He said that the law permitted people to deny the existence of God, and even joke about him, provided they did not do so in the wrong sort of way. What was this kind of way? Earlier judges taking this line had said that it must not be done so as to shake the faith of the poor, but Coleridge interpreted the distinction quite otherwise. To be blasphemy, he said, the material must be calculated to offend and insult the feelings of a great majority of believers. So directed, the jury were unable to agree, and the trial aborted. Ordinarily this would have meant a fourth blasphemy trial; but the Attorney-General intervened with a *nolle prosequi*, and put a stop to further proceedings.

There was now a legal impasse. North had directed the jury that any laughing at God was blasphemy, and they had convicted. Coleridge had directed his jury that some laughing at God was permitted, and they had not convicted. One or other judge must be wrong, and if it was North, then Ramsey's, Foote's and Kemp's imprisonment was a glaring miscarriage of justice. At that time, however, there was no appeal in criminal cases against a misdirection, however gross, or against sentence, however ludicrously severe.

So there was nothing to be done about it except to petition the Home Secretary for a Royal pardon, or, failing that, a remission of part of the sentence. This was done. Indeed, the Home Secretary was flooded with petitions on their behalf, not only from individual secularists, but from important figures in national life, and even from some clergymen who

(continued on back page)

# BOOKS

WHY I AM STILL A CATHOLIC Edited by Robert Nowell. Collins £4.95.

In this symposium, seven lay people—all of them professional, articulate and introspectively honest—attempt to give their personal answers to the implied conundrum of the book's title. Being intelligent, thinking people, in the 1980s—"why", indeed?

Speaking, as it were, from a psychiatrist's couch, set against the fast moving background of the Roman Catholic Church in the British Isles, the seven contributors look back from personal perspectives over the past three decades, with occasional flash-backs to the first decade BC (Before the Council), when the coming volcano was seething just below the surface, and to the decade before that (the 1940s), when the Roman Church had more in common with its 16th-century self than with the present day. The resulting documentary collage is a startling one—more especially to anyone who still has a pre-conciliar image of the RC Church.

The Council referred to was, of course, the Second Vatican Council, inaugurated by Pope John XXIII—who, intending to "open the windows" to the winds of change, unwittingly set off the volcanic eruption. I myself still react with amazement to books like the one under review, in spite of the fact that my family connections as well as RC publications have enabled me to keep abreast of the revolutionary changes in Catholic liturgy, practice, theology and attitudes.

Any *Freethinker* reader who has taken as exaggeration my observation here, from time to time, that the Catholic Church is now Protestant should read this book. If the 16th-century Protestant Reformation meant, in essence, recognition of the individual conscience for self-direction, private judgment, freedom of discussion, the use of the language of the people, congregational participation, and constant return to the sources of alleged revelation, then the Catholic Church has now gone through that Reformation, and, in the past three decades—mainly, in fact, the past two decades—has not only caught up with four centuries of Protestantism but has even overtaken it, spilling over into "modern secularism" (to quote one of the seven authors, Bernard Bergonzi).

The degree of assimilation of these changes in the Church has naturally varied greatly, especially among the older generation, not excluding the clergy and the hierarchy; but this variation has only increased the force of the volcano. Now, however, it has taken over, so that only the few counter-revolutionaries led by Monsignor Lefebvre remain true, as they themselves claim, to the real Catholic

# FREETHINKER

tradition.

The present pope keeps one foot in the past, especially on sexual mores; but, for all his personal popularity, he does not enjoy the unquestioning acceptance by Catholics of everything he says on faith or morals, as his predecessors did until the death of Pius XII. No one feels necessarily bound by John Paul's pronouncements, and some of our seven authors obviously regard him as a country cousin who is apt to be something of an embarrassment.

It has thus become possible for Catholics to be critical not only of the Vatican but of orthodox theology. They now pick and choose, like Anglicans, as to what and how far they believe, and, at the furthest extreme, may attenuate their theology to little more than deism and their practice to next to nothing, religiously staying away from church for years on end—while (and this is the new thing that is the real theme of this book) continuing to regard themselves as members of the Catholic Church.

Millions of today's Catholics, including all but one or two of the authors of this book, would in my youth have broken away from the Church and, though never quite disowned by it, would have been dubbed "lapsed". That meant that they would have been regarded by their co-religionists as having put themselves outside the Church and the means of salvation unless and until divine grace brought them back to the bosom of Holy Mother Church. This required positive penitence and a humble return to the sacraments (particularly Confession), and, according to the prevailing myth, this reunion was frequently deferred for a precarious deathbed repentance.

Nowadays, a hard-and-fast break is far less likely. Many Catholics who are really no longer practising Catholics at all still regard themselves as members of the Catholic Church. And, though it is fashionable to consider labels of affiliation unimportant in comparison with actual belief and practice, I can well understand the importance with which these seven invest this particular label.

They are under nothing like the inner pressure that I experienced 33 years ago to come to a definite decision as to where they stand in relation to Catholicism—inside or outside. They feel able to give up as much of its dogma and practice as they choose whilst still belonging to the clan; so why force the issue? In my day, it could not be avoided. Faced as one was with the apparent immutability and alleged infallibility of the One True Church, with its emphasis on total obedience, there was

# REVIEWS

never the option of just sitting on the fence, which has now become quite a comfortable place to remain, indefinitely.

Reading this book, I kept asking myself whether, had I been ten or 15 years younger, I might never have needed to come down on one side or the other, and whether these authors (most of whom are that much younger) would, if a little older, have been forced as I was to relinquish the label after so much of the substance had evaporated. Partly, I found myself envying their escape from this trauma. But it was only the superficial envy of the footsore marathon runner for the comfortable spectator: I had completed the course, ordeal though it was, and could not but feel superior to those who had not.

Just as they would probably regard my out-and-out atheism as unnecessarily extreme, so I feel impatient with their vestigial mysticism—but would our ideas have diverged to this extent had our time of decision been the same? Perhaps I would have cut my marathon of philosophical enquiry short of the rational conclusions that shaped my atheistic humanism. I might, for instance, have been content to regard belief in life after death as “a matter of personal choice”, to quote the book’s first contributor and editor, Robert Nowell, instead of taking the view that the question of life after death must be, like everything else, a matter of evidence. And I might have accepted the idea of “absolute good for all men at all times”, to quote from the chapter by Piers Paul Read.

There is, however, a non-doctrinal difference between us which, though seemingly minor, is really the key to the question posed by the title of the book: the authors are (with one possible exception) impelled by a desire for solidarity with the historical Church, however tyrannical it has been in the past, while I am impelled by a desire to dissociate myself from that historical Church, however humanitarian it has latterly become. Whether this difference is the cause or the effect of completing that marathon I cannot say.

Robert Nowell expresses his desire for solidarity in this way: “Being a Christian thus means for me somehow accepting and coming to terms with the whole of the Church’s history and tradition, including all the disgraceful episodes that have marred the history of institutional Christianity—just as being human means learning to accept and come to terms with the whole of one’s life, including all the episodes one wishes had never happened”. A plausible analogy, but a false one: we do not wish to remain children all our lives. Indeed, as the Good

Book says, “I put away the things of a child”. Besides, there are philosophers other than Jesus and historical movements other than Christianity that can arouse feelings of genuine human solidarity, from the whole range of historical perspectives.

Mary Craig, the only woman contributor, recalls almost medieval incidents from her pre-conciliar convent education in Lancashire in the 1940s which paralleled my own in London in the 1930s. For Louis McRedmond, who has similar memories even later in Dublin, “Pope John arrived not a moment too soon”.

The childhood of Bernard Bergonzi, despite his Italian name, was spent in the same London borough as mine, but he was six years my junior, and those six years could well have been what saved the last thread of his faith from snapping before Vatican II came to the rescue. For him, the greatest strain had been the tension between an authoritarian tradition and his personal liberalism. Although, in pre-conciliar terms, he would now be regarded as “lapsed”, he likens his umbilical attachment to his childhood religion to that of many a non-practising Jew who remains rooted in Judaism.

Clifford Longley, the first Religious Correspondent of *The Times* to profess Roman Catholicism, was, like Robert Nowell but unlike the other five contributors to the book, a convert to Catholicism. But it now sits on him very loosely—to the extent that, alone of the authors, he is now reluctant to adhere to the sticky Catholic label, and he entitles his chapter “Keeping an Open mind”.

The last of the seven is James P. Mackay, a professor of theology and a “laicised priest” (“whatever that contradiction in terms may mean”, as the book’s editor comments), now not only a married man but a father in the biological sense. His views are ecumenical to the point of his being employed as a theologian in a Protestant university and of his admonishing the Pope to pay heed to the people.

When all the skins of the Catholic onion have been peeled away, and there is nothing tangible left, a strong aroma may nevertheless persist. But for how long?

BARBARA SMOKER

## THE FREETHINKER

32-PAGE CENTENARY ISSUE, MAY 1981

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MAUREEN DUFFY, MARGARET KNIGHT  
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**A MESSAGE FROM THE FALKLANDS: THE LIFE AND GALLANT DEATH OF DAVID TINKER, LIEUT. R.N.**  
Compiled by Hugh Tinker. Junction Books, £3.50

Christmas is a time for families to foregather and hence the time when grief is felt most keenly. In the nature of things many families are mourning someone; the fortunate ones are those where the missing person is a grandparent whose natural term of life has been accomplished and who can be regretted without bitterness. This year those doomed to suffer the tragic absence of a young life (both in Britain and Argentina) will include those bereaved by the Falklands adventure, among them the wife, parents and brothers of Lieutenant David Tinker, aged 25, killed in June on the *Glamorgan*.

*A Message From the Falklands* has been compiled by David's father, Hugh Tinker, from David's letters and poems, with linking narrative about his short life. Most of the early letters are to his parents; most of the later ones are to his wife, Christine, to whom he was married just over two years before his death. When the *Glamorgan* was ordered to the South Atlantic they were looking forward eagerly to their first settled home together. One feels increasing sadness as, with the time of his death inexorably approaching, one reads such statements as: "It's very exciting to think that it's only a few weeks until we move into our married quarters—a proper home for once. . ."—knowing he has only three months to live and will not see Christine again.

David went for a gruelling year to the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth straight from school. One wonders why the authorities find it necessary to keep lads feeling groggy from lack of sleep for long periods, or to force them to gulp down meals in ten minutes, very likely laying the basis for many a future stomach ulcer. The Navy then sent him to take a history degree at Birmingham University. He was later to question the Navy's wisdom in this, when from the Falklands he applied his understanding of history to a devastating analysis of Government policy.

In fact he was becoming more and more disillusioned with the Navy and was finding aspects of the life distasteful. He transferred from the Seaman to the Supply branch, partly because that gave him a greater chance of a short posting and life with Christine, partly because, as he wrote to her in November 1979, in his opinion senior Seaman officers were "all utterly useless and without brains. After Commander, it's all the people who go to the right cocktail parties and are utterly stupid and shout at each other who get on. The intelligent ones leave. . ."

David himself wrote to Christine on 16 April 1982: "I am *definitely* leaving the Navy in the next round of redundancies if I can". (Normally resignation was not permitted within five years of graduating at the Navy's expense.) He had already told a security man

that he would refuse to serve on a *Polaris* submarine. However, this did not prevent his fatal appointment as secretary to the Captain of the *Glamorgan*.

Falklands bound, he comforted himself, as we were all doing at the time, with the thought that the long voyage out would give ample time for negotiations, and that the affair would pass off without bloodshed. But from 1 May the *Glamorgan* was actively involved in hostilities, and David's comments on Mrs Thatcher and her Government are increasingly bitter. On 3 May he writes to Christine: "I hope that Maggie will have had enough of her war soon, and that we can all go home and become schoolteachers, vicars and ban the bomb enthusiasts". On 8 May: "Thatcher and Nott have stepped up this war . . . I cannot believe that Britain, after the experience of the First World War, can be starting another: but this is what Thatcher and Nott are doing. . . I just hope that the UN, USA and EEC have the humanity and wisdom to say: 'Stop fighting, and let's sort this thing out peacefully'".

On 14 May David wrote to his parents: "From the way that Maggie Thatcher has reacted one would imagine that the Russians were already in Bonn: not that we were fighting for a rocky island which Mr Nott had planned to leave undefended by mid-April! . . . The sad thing about all this is that everyone knows the complete hypocrisy of the government: which will never garrison the island sufficiently to defend it after all this is over, and is only fighting the war for its own political survival".

On 22 May he writes to his father: "It is easy to see how this war has come about; Mrs Thatcher imagined she was Churchill defying Hitler and the Navy advised a quick war before winter set in; the Navy chiefs also wanted maximum use made of the Navy to reverse the Navy cuts: which has happened. For (utmost) worth victory or defeat would have the same result; publicity and popular support, either congratulations or sympathy. The Navy thus overlooked the fact that we were fighting without all the necessary air cover, which is provided by the USA in the Atlantic and the Navy in the North Sea and the Icelandic Sea. . . Apart from the military fiasco, the political side is even more disgraceful".

In letters to Christine, and to his father and mother jointly, he is careful always to sound cheerful and confident, but in the one letter to his father also, and to friends, he writes of the realities of life in the Task Force. Thus on 6 May to a school friend: "We live on an air of tension here, not sleeping but just dozing, ready with our gear, waiting for the action stations buzzer announcing another air raid. The picture that Nott and his cronies are giving is not true. The Argentinian air force has the latest attack aircraft and missiles, which we just do not have. We long for nights, when their aircraft cannot attack us".



# LETTERS

He was disgusted by disparaging remarks about the Argentinians: "Despite what the press and public opinion say, they are brave men who have to do their duty as we do".

On 5 June he writes to Christine that the previous day while transferring stores between ships: "I walked into the hangar and found a nuclear bomb there. . . Of course it turned out to be a drill round, full of concrete. . .". In view of current controversies, one cannot but wonder what the truth about that "bomb" really was.

David is known to have been writing poetry during his last weeks. Alas! no poems have been found; presumably they were destroyed by the bomb which killed him. He had won a poetry award at school, and it seems likely that his mature poems from the Falklands would have had literary as well as human value. As it is, we must content ourselves with his letters.

Hugh Tinker's book is a most poignant document. Through it David Tinker may yet be enabled to make the contribution to national and world salvation that his senseless death, however gallant, was not.

If you feel you know it all, why not buy a copy of *A Message From the Falklands* to lend to any friend who still sees in Mrs Thatcher's Falklands escapade a fearless stand against aggression?

MARGARET McILROY

## OBITUARIES

### Mrs D. B. Hutchison

Dora Beatrice Hutchison, formerly of Muswell Hill Humanist Group, died recently at Pembury, Kent. She was aged 81. There was a secular committal ceremony at Tunbridge Wells Crematorium.

### Mr E. Roe

Eric Roe, who died suddenly at his home in Hailsham, Sussex, had a long career as a teacher and lecturer. His wide experience included work in a remand home and headships of schools for the children of servicemen. After a period of lecturing he spent three years in Nigeria where he helped to establish training colleges for technical teachers. He was a part-time lecturer at Hastings College for Technology.

There was a secular committal ceremony at Eastbourne Crematorium.

### Mrs E. L. Thomas

Edna Louise Thomas, of Findon, Sussex, has died at the age of 67. She had been ill for many years. There was a secular committal ceremony at Worthing Crematorium.

### IN DEFENCE OF ISRAEL

Your editorial equating Israelis to Nazis ("The Zionazis", August) was obscene, but well in keeping with your always pro-Arab and always anti-Israel attitudes. I recall that after the 1967 Israeli defeat of the Arabs your pages and readers' letters were saturated with similar material, but that after the mauling of Israel by the Arabs in 1973 not a single comment or protest featured in your pages.

The two columns on Zionazis are so virulent and inaccurate that they could only have come from Arab sources, but I should hate to think that Arab money is buying influence in your pages as well. I prefer to think that, as seems unhappily the case, the last thing Christians shed on the road to becoming free-thinking gentiles, is a distaste for the Jewish heritage (but not for the Arab heritage) which includes the Jewish claim to their ancient land of Israel, once again being valiantly and successfully defended against Arab rapacity.

An Indian Rationalist's tirade against Israel and Zionism as "settler-racialist" (September) is so hate-filled and so twisted that I am astonished that you gave him space for such unhistorical drivel taken straight from some propaganda sheet issued by arch-terrorist Arafat or his co-criminals. Just one example: re what is justifiably called the Land of Israel, he writes "a land the Jews were dispersed from in AD 85. . .".

Since when does a rationalist write AD? The last major Jewish rebellion (led by Bar Kochba) against Rome took place in 132 to 135 CE (Christian Era), but there were also lesser uprisings in subsequent centuries even as late as the sixth century CE, just before Mahomet's hordes invaded the land, after which it degenerated in every way until the Jews returned to reclaim it, beginning in the Middle Ages and gathering momentum in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Jews have stamped an identity on this disputed territory easily as emphatic as the English have stamped on England, and the Arab terrorists who seek to destroy Israel, as did the Romans, were themselves butchered by an Arab king, Hussein, in 1970, and now again in Lebanon by a long-suffering and tormented Israel. Unfortunately America, France and Italy rescued the defeated terrorist remnants from Arafat — who, incidentally, trained terrorists from Japan to Germany and Ulster—made straight to the Vatican and his friend, the Pope. Significant?

B. GOSHEN

### A THREAT TO ISRAEL

As a founding member of the Israel Secular Humanist Association, please allow me to reply to your leader (August) entitled "The Zionazis".

The use of such a racist term suggests that your knowledge and understanding of both Zionism and Nazism are defective. To equate the two is as accurate as calling the British "Anglonazis" for their role in the Falklands or in Northern Ireland. Racist terminology is, I suggest, no substitute for analysis and will not advance the cause of peace in the Middle East or anywhere else.

Assuming that respect for facts is common ground between us, you could have mentioned that the primary cause of the war in the Lebanon was the Palestine Liberation Organisation's programme to destroy Israel physically and its attempts to put itself



in a position to do so. No country that I can think of would turn the other cheek in face of such a threat to its population including, I submit, Britain. Your silence on this vital point raises questions about your objectivity.

As long as the Palestine National Covenant—the charter upon which the PLO ideology rests—continues to exist in its present form, it shows the organisation to be anti-semitic. For example, Article 20 of the PNC denies the Jews the status of peoplehood and thus any concept of national self-determination.

Article 6 provides that only the Jews who arrived in Palestine before 1917 are eligible to become Palestinian citizens after Israel is destroyed. (Needless to say, this amounts to an extremely small number of old people.) In contrast, Article 5 states that for Arabs, Palestinian identity is hereditary.

Jews who arrived in Israel after 1917 are all termed Zionists. The PLO and its allies have succeeded to some degree to make the term Zionist a questionable label. After all, is not Zionism racism according to their lights, and if they are fighting racism, is this not a good fight?

It seems that the PLO are their own worst enemies. They should have supported Camp David. Autonomy could lead to a separate Palestinian state because most Israelis don't want a million Arabs in their midst. But this would have meant taking a long term view and running a serious risk that the indigenous West Bankers and Gazaites might not follow the PLO's direction. Then Syria, Iraq and Jordan would be unable to extend their hegemony to the remaining areas of Palestine since the extension of their national boundaries (their national political goals) would be defeated. Keeping the PLO alive and kicking was self-serving no matter what misery the Palestinians suffered—not to mention the Israelis in this context. Absorbing fellow-Arabs, speaking the same language and sharing the same religion, was totally unthinkable in the Middle Eastern double-think that has become popular.

As far as autonomy and statehood is concerned, the average Israeli seems to have concluded that it makes little sense to hand territories over to those committed to Israeli's destruction. Just as important is the average Israeli's perception that the PLO is opposed to Israel's existence, not merely to the extent of this existence.

It is some of these core issues that remain unanswered and hence make your leader an unreliable guide. It is these same issues that are at the heart of what has been taking place these last several weeks in the Lebanon. Those who condemn the war absolutely are just as impractical as those who think there is a military answer to the Palestinian problem. Both approaches are barren. Only fresh thinking on all sides will now help.

GABRIEL GLAZER

## ALTERNATIVES TO MONARCHY

Philip Harding, commenting (October) on Julia Atkinson's article on the monarchy (August) admits that the British so-called constitutional monarchy (we don't have a constitution!) is imperfect, but falls back upon two well-worn and unsupported assertions: "It works well enough" and "there's nothing better to replace it".

I should like to see a Republican Association formed, among whose members would surely be such rationalists as those who support the NSS and even pragmatists of Mr Harding's mould, which would work to put forward logical and viable alternatives. It would

also publicise the view that the Head of any truly democratic State must be chosen by, accountable to and removable by its people. Would anyone like to join me in launching such a body?

A. E. STANLEY

55A Netley Road, Barkingside, Ilford, Essex

## ROYALIST RUDENESS

In the closing paragraph of his letter (October) Philip Harding brings up the question of the popularity of the monarchy, illustrated by the crowds that turn out to royal visits. He ought to know that any public spectacle—be it a royal visit or a village fete—will automatically attract a crowd. He seems to think that the view of the majority (as opposed to the "pea-brained" radicals, I assume), is necessarily the correct one.

Most people are royalists: fair enough, but then most people read no other papers but the tabloids. The staple reading diet of most women consists of beauty hints, knitting patterns, recipes, love stories—and the latest news of the Royal Family.

If the popular Press is to be believed, the majority of Britishers supported the Government over the Falklands war. One can only wonder at Mr Harding's judgement in his application of the term "pea-brained".

It should be pointed out that his use of this term and others to abuse those who do not agree with him may be very well for the average royalist—I have been "sent to Siberia" several times and know of at least one anti-monarchist who was threatened with violence—but it does not become anyone associated with free-thought or humanism.

Perhaps I should not refer to the term "Cardboard Cromwells" as abusive. After all, in spite of his religious fanaticism and many mistakes, notably that of making Charles I a martyr, Cromwell was responsible for undermining the concept of kingship by divine right and, more important still, for the practical introduction of parliamentary democracy.

MARIA TUGWELL

## A SIMPLE REMEDY

I was amazed to read a letter in the October issue of "The Freethinker" defending monarchy.

The fact that these people remain popular does not mean that it is morally right for a family to retain untaxed one of the largest incomes in the world.

The monarch remains head of the Church of England, an anachronistic link between Church and State that should be obnoxious to all supporters of a tolerant, pluralist society.

Of course the monarchy could be reformed, but it would be a lot simpler to scrap it. I am sure that we would find some other celebrities to launch ships, etc.

JONATHAN CARDY

## NOTHING PERSONAL

I am writing to express my disagreement with the pro-monarchist views of your correspondent Philip Harding. In my opinion, the monarchy ought to have been abolished long ago, since it is an undemocratic anachronism. The hereditary principle is incompatible with true democracy.

In this modern scientific age it is absurd that somebody should enjoy privileges of vast inherited wealth, fame and exalted status because of a mere accident of birth. Eminence should be attained by virtue of merit. The British royal family is just a branch of show-business, subsidised by the taxpayer.

Moreover, monarchy and religion are closely inter-linked, and royalist sentiments are inconsistent with

secularism. The monarch, who must by law be a member of the Church of England, is officially described as "Defender of the Faith" (Fidei Defensor) and the initials "F.D." are borne on every coin of the realm. The alleged mystique of the monarchy and the dogmas of religion go hand-in-hand, and undoubtedly are regarded by the Establishment as useful devices for keeping the lower orders in check.

An elected President, as titular head of State, would be considerably less expensive than the British monarchy. It is purely fortuitous whether a particular hereditary monarch has good attributes or bad.

A criticism of the monarchy as an institution does not imply any personal criticism. Indeed it is wrong to put quite ordinary people in such an artificial and exposed position. The days of kings and queens belong to the history books.

N. TOON

### SUPPORTING REPUBLICANISM

Philip Harding criticises the present and previous occupants of the White House because he considers them unprincipled crooks and buffoons and the present one a third-rate actor. Whether this is true or not, they were elected by popular democratic vote and two of them have been defeated by the same means. This is totally unlike British monarchs who are there for life be they good, bad or indifferent.

I agree with Mr Harding that not all United States presidents are a good advertisement for republicanism. But a great many are, such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson and Abraham Lincoln. These men were great progressive reformers. Can Mr Harding say this for any British monarch?

Before Mr Harding sneers at "cardboard Cromwells" let him reflect on England's greatness during the rule of Cromwell and contrast it with England's temporary decline during the restoration of Charles II, a crook and a buffoon if ever there was one.

J. H. MORTON

### THE FALKLANDS CRISIS

May I request space for just a few lines to reply to Mr Herrick's arguments against the defence of the Falklands (October).

First, he compares our armed defence, in the late 20th century, of land entirely inhabited by descendants of our own race and language, with the armed occupation, in the 18th and 19th centuries, of land occupied by inhabitants of different ethnic descent, language, civilisation and culture. A completely false comparison.

Secondly, he says in one sentence that he thinks "much longer should have been spent in seeking a negotiated solution". In the very next sentence he says: "It is clear that an honorable compromise might have been achieved, since some such agreement was being actively sought by the British Government in the years preceding the invasion". So it might if Argentina had not suddenly resorted to armed force. His second sentence makes nonsense of his first, especially since the negotiations are believed to have been in progress for 20 years or more.

A. A. H. DOUGLAS

### HISTORY LESSON

I have found the "inside information" in "The Free-thinker" on Pope John Paul II invaluable ammunition for argument. However, equating his fanatical and aggressive Catholicism with his national origins (October) strikes me as the same as suggesting all Frenchmen wear striped jerseys and have strings of onions around their necks. In short, this is an example of the kind of subtle racist stereotyping we are all

guilty of from time to time. The fact that we are all occasionally guilty of it absolves none of us.

I have also found coverage of political disputes which operate under the ostensible cover of religion lacking in credibility. To suggest that the Irish or Palestinian situations are solely the products of religious fanaticism seems to me either remarkably short-sighted or downright blinkered. As a student of history it has become clear to me that no religious dispute has ever had religion as its real reason. As a legitimation or as the means of popularising a particular power struggle religion has obviously been invaluable over the centuries, but surely the simple observation that history has seen just as many disputes between not necessarily religious creeds shows that humanists need to look somewhat further than their immediate distaste of religion to find a viable explanation for events.

SIMON KIRK

### ATHEISM, FREETHOUGHT, POLITICS, HISTORY

Books, pamphlets, and back issues of "The Freethinker".

For full list write to:

G. W. Foote & Co, 702, Holloway Road,  
London N19 3NL.

## EVENTS

**Belfast Humanist Group.** York Hotel, Botanic Avenue, Belfast. Tuesday, 14 December, 8 pm. Dr Peter Brooke: "Church Power in Northern Ireland".

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** Queen's Head, Queen's Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 2 January, 5 pm for 5.30 pm. Ted McFadyen: "The National Press—Use and Abuse of Power".

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

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

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

**Leeds and District Humanist Group.** Swarthmore Institute, 4 Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Tuesday, 11 January, 7.45 pm. Annual General Meeting.

**Lewisham Humanist Group.** Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 16 December, 7.45 pm. Saturnalian Party.

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

# FAIR Chairman's Warning Against Deception and Plausibility

"Cult activity has shown a worrying increase over the year", Pete Broadbent, chairman, Family Action Information and Rescue (FAIR), told members at the annual general meeting in Birmingham.

Mr Broadbent said that although public awareness has also increased, the sheer diversity of cults operating in Britain remains a cause for concern. The largest number of enquiries received by FAIR concern the Unification Church (Moonies), Divine Light Mission, Children of God, Rajneesh, Scientology and the Emin Foundation.

"We have over a hundred groups on file", Mr Broadbent told the meeting, "ranging from miniscule sub-Christian deviations, through a multitude of pseudo-scientific and marginally Eastern-based philosophies, to the more monolithic and well-known. What is common to all of them is their increasingly sophisticated method of deception and plausibility."

## Putting the Foote Down

were embarrassed at what had happened in the name of Christianity. But Harcourt, secretly pleased at what had happened, was obdurate. They served out their sentences.

## "The Freethinker" Survives

In a sense, both *Freethinker* prosecutions were a failure. Not only did Sir Henry Tyler's prosecutions fail to keep Bradlaugh out of Parliament; the prosecution over the Christmas number, although it landed the Editor in jail, failed to suppress the magazine. Sympathisers kept it going while Foote was in prison, and when he resumed the editorial chair on his release, he continued undeterred to print the same sort of matter which had landed him inside. Meanwhile, the prosecutors had noticed that the publicity attending the trials had helped to stimulate *Freethinker* sales, and decided that in future it was wiser to ignore it.

For secularists, however, Lord Coleridge's revised version of the offence was, paradoxically, in one sense a defeat. Whilst the crime was as North had defined it, there was widespread and mounting pressure in the country to abolish it; the milder version of the offence, which soon became the accepted one, took the pressure for abolition off. As *The Freethinker* reappeared as before, and no one prosecuted it, so people imagined that the crime of blasphemy was now a dead letter, and there was little point in bothering to abolish it. They little knew.

"Many of them seem harmless and will actually try to differentiate themselves from cults with such disclaimers as 'We're not like the Moonies, you know'. But underneath lurk the same tragic stories of personality disruption, family break-up and unquestioning obedience to a leader whose claims, to any rational person, would seem utterly laughable."

## An Impressive Record

Mr Broadbent reported that during the past year FAIR had answered over 1,400 letters received through a London box number. In addition a considerable amount of work is carried out by four regional organisations and by others in the London area who take on the job of individual contact, support and counselling of parents. That is a very impressive record for an organisation with no paid full-time staff or office accommodation.

The chairman of FAIR concluded: "I long for the day when we can wind up our affairs because the activities of extremist cults have ceased to threaten the minds of our young people. But as long as there are still those whose decisions about life, values and philosophy are being made for them by some self-appointed guru, there is still need for groups like FAIR to give them back their freedom of choice".

## Freethinker Fund

Denis and Faith Campbell read the history of *The Freethinker* and responded by sending a cheque for £100 to the Fund. Ralph Proctor, another generous supporter, has also donated £100. These and other contributions have pushed the monthly total to over £300, which is extremely encouraging. Our gratitude is expressed to all who help to keep *The Freethinker* on a sound financial footing. The latest list of contributors is given below.

Anonymous, £35; E. Brown, £1; D. C. and F. Campbell, £100; University of California, £3.50; R. E. Davies, 2; P. Forrest, £2.50; P. George, £16; H. H. Green, £2; F. R. Griffin, £4; E. Haslam, £3; H. Hilton, £1; F. Howard, £3; C. F. Jacot, £2; F. C. Jennings, £2; A. Joiner, £1; W. Lazarus, £5; J. Leenders, £1; E. Lewis, £1; F. Munniksma, £2; G. C. Newton, £1; W. Patton, £3; D. F. Paul, £2; R. Proctor, £100; J. B. Reader, £2; G. Reid, £1; J. V. Ruffell, £1; W. Scott, £3; D. E. Shoesmith, £3; J. A. Spence, £5; W. Stirling, £2; M. Villiers-Stuart, £8; V. Wilson, £4.

Total for the period 7 October until 5 November 1982: £324.