

The Freethinker

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FORMER EDITOR'S WARNING AGAINST NOSTALGIA AND SUPERSTITION

"Brighton and Hove Humanist Group is part of a quiet, steady countering of superstition — and not always so quiet, I'm glad to say", declared Jim Herrick, a former "Freethinker" Editor, who was guest speaker at the Group's Silver Jubilee celebration on 19 March. "I have often been struck by how radical and progressive groups enjoy their anniversaries, their centenaries, the memories of their significant steps", he added. "It is partly that while we have no gods and no revered teachers, we are ready to remember and learn from the work of remarkable people. It is partly, I suspect, that we all enjoy the excuse for a bean-feast". Humanists from Sussex, Surrey, Kent and London, including representatives of local and national organisations, were present.

Jim Herrick said that humanists have a long tradition, from the ancient Greek 'hinkers' attempt to understand the world, to the Renaissance emphasis on human potential, to the secularist campaigns for the rights of atheists, and the ethicists' determination to separate morality from religion. He added that despite this long tradition, "we believe there was no Utopia in the past and there will be no Utopia in the future. We are realists knowing that reform is a continuous process and progress is never complete.

"Progress has become a dirty word in the 20th century. After two world wars, innumerable smaller wars all over the world, the holocaust of the Nazi destruction of the Jews, the invention and use of the atomic bomb, the realisation that growing wealth is not an automatic rule of nature—after change so rapid that it is hard for the human mind to adapt—it is no longer easy to believe in progress in the way that Bradlaugh did.

"The idea of steady, inevitable progress was always ridiculous, a transference of the religious illusion of heaven to the secular sphere. But the

problems of the future must not numb us into apathy or frighten us into looking only backward.

"There is a wave of nostalgia for the past sweeping across the Western world. We must not be caught, ostrich-like, burying our heads in the sunny sands of a happier yesteryear.

"There is a tendency to look back wistfully at the supposed certainties of the past, to wallow in television programmes about nannies and Edwardian gentility, to surround ourselves with polished pine-wood and copper kettles, imagining it was bliss to be a country clergyman writing a nature diary a century ago. Use of rose-tinted images of the past by trendy advertisers is comparatively harmless. But the backward thrust by politicians and churches is dangerous.

"Nostalgia for the past is a form of superstition—an untested, unverifiable belief that the past is a pleasant country".

Submerged by Superstition

Referring to the upsurge of cults and superstition the speaker asked: "Who would have thought that breakfast time television would have its resident astrologer?"

"The growth areas of the mainstream religions appear to be in primitive fundamentalism. It is the charismatics, the evangelicals, the new puritans, the exorcists, who are the coming party. The Archbishop of Canterbury, hovering over a divided Church, has sat so firmly on the fence for so long that one fears for the state of his backside. We recall the words of Sydney Smith: 'I have only one illusion left and that is the Archbishop of Canterbury'.

"Today we are in danger of being surrounded and submerged by superstition. And I make no distinction between Christianity, Islam and the Moonies. Super-

(continued on back page)

The Freethinker

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NEWS

SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT

"The churches are full in the south of the United States, but they are almost as segregated as the schools used to be". That is the conclusion drawn by Maeve-Anne Wren, whose detailed survey of the situation has been published in the *Irish Times*. She quotes one white clergyman in South Carolina: "If a black person decided to visit a white church he would get into real trouble".

It is not surprising that the Rev Ian Paisley's Free Presbyterian Church is putting down roots in this foetid swampland of Christianity, conservatism and racism. For in America's Bible Belt, "the denominations are as tenacious, the preachers as political, the controversies as bitter and the belief as pervasive as in Ireland".

One power-house of evangelical Christianity is the Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina, of which Paisley is a trustee. This establishment has been in the news because of legal moves that may deprive it of tax exemption. It forbids not only interracial marriage but interracial dating among the students. (All courting couples have to be accompanied by a chaperon when they meet.) Dr Jones, university chancellor and son of the founder, explains: "We do not believe, as biblicists, in interracial marriage. God wants the nations segregated. . . The current agitation to bring races together is a Satanic effort".

Evangelical Christianity is now widely regarded as the chief enemy of civil rights and racial and sexual equality in the United States. It is closely linked with the alarming increase in membership of the Ku-Klux-Klan. One black clergyman commented that "the Klan takes the cross and makes it a symbol of terror. Yet those righteous Christian people get upset about pornography but do not condemn outright murder and killing of people".

But another Christian, speaking at a Klan rally in Mississippi, was adamant that God is on their side: "He put the seas between the races. God did not intend to have a mongrel race on earth. Read the bible. . . It will not get better until every single black gets out of this country. We are about to have a race war".

John Furman, a young Alabama lawyer who keeps tabs on the KKK, believes that there are even more lunatic and vicious elements at work. According to Mr Furman, "there is a much greater danger from the more fanatical elements of the Moral Majority—the Christian Patriots". This is one of several Right-wing groups which stockpile food and weapons in

S AND NOTES

deserted places and train "for race war and Armageddon".

Racist statements in public by the Rev Jerry Falwell, leader of the Moral Majority, are now commonplace. Falwell is the acknowledged *Führer* of the Christian Right. Fiercely conservative, he mobilised mass support for Ronald Reagan during the presidential election campaign. Every Sunday Falwell broadcasts his Old Time Gospel Hour television programme to an audience of millions. He also runs the fundamentalist Liberty Baptist College in the Virginia town that bears the embarrassingly apt name of Lynchberg.

Biblical teachings fostered the slave mentality in generations of America's black people. The Christian churches played a major role in keeping the blacks in their inferior places—the fields, plantations and kitchens of white fellow-Christians.

The Rev Charles Butler, president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, recently preached at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Alabama, where Martin Luther King's father is still a pastor. The theme of his sermon was that only in the Cross can disunity be overcome.

Fortunately, fewer and fewer black people are being hoodwinked by such nonsense. They are coming to realise that the Cross was a symbol of terror and divisiveness for centuries before the Ku-Klux-Klan crawled out of the woodwork.

"NOT OF OUR SORT"

It is not only the Unification Church that breaks up families and destroys friendship. The ultra-Fundamentalist and authoritarian Jehovah's Witnesses operate a system of "disfellowship" which compels members to cut themselves off from those who have been expelled or have left the sect. Such intolerance and insensitivity causes what one former American member, Mr Peter Gregerson, recently described as "heartache and pain" in many families.

Mr Gregerson, who was interviewed in the BBC Radio 4 religious programme, *Sunday*, spoke of his experience after 50 years in the movement. He wrote to the headquarters posing a number of questions that puzzled him. For this lapse from grace he was disfellowshipped and is now shunned by Witness friends.

Mr Gregerson also related what happened to another former Jehovah's Witness. He had never married, having chosen to devote his life to the sect's work. But he made the mistake of mentioning

some scriptural teachings which were causing doubt in his mind. Although over 90 and living alone, he was disfellowshipped and abandoned by the Witnesses.

Jehovah's Witnesses, usually operating in pairs, appear on thousands of doorsteps with a set of simplistic answers to the most fundamental problems of life. Most people regard these missionaries as an infernal nuisance, although baiting them can be fun if you have time to spare and the ability to keep a straight face.

They exude overwhelming confidence in the bible and loving concern for all humanity. But behind the friendly countenance and plastic smile it is easy to detect the single-mindedness and fanaticism of those who labour for Jehovah God, as they call him.

The appearance of happiness and contentment among Jehovah's Witnesses is often deceptive. Many of them, having become emeshed in the organisation, are under great strain. Congregation leaders (they are actually known as "overseers") are rigid and domineering. The lives of the Witnesses are programmed and they are discouraged from mixing with those who are "not of our sort".

The sect's bosses direct the world-wide work of Jehovah's Witnesses from their headquarters in Brooklyn, USA. Their hard-nosed, dictatorial attitude has caused considerable resentment among their minions in the United States and elsewhere. It even became necessary to issue a warning against softness with expelled members and those who have left the fold. This took the form of three articles in *The Watchtower*, 15 September 1981.

In "Godly Conduct Towards Others", Witnesses are reminded of the "benefits" derived from studying the bible in learning "the godly way of dealing with other humans. . . How thankful we can be that Jehovah God provides us with guidance in dealing with the wrongdoer". Needless to say, Jehovah God's guidance and methods are well suited to the mentality of the Brooklyn dictators.

When a member is disfellowshipped, or leaves of his own accord, the consequences can be extremely serious, particularly if his relatives remain in the sect. For, we are told, the expelled one "is not a mere man of the world who has not known God nor pursued a godly way of life. Rather, he has known the way of truth and righteousness, but he has left that way and unrepentantly pursued sin to the point of having to be expelled. So he has to be treated differently".

How is he to be treated? The bible "commands Christians not to keep company or fellowship with a person who has been expelled from the congregation. Thus 'disfellowshipping' is what Jehovah's Witnesses call the expelling and subsequent shunning of such an unrepentant wrongdoer".

A member who decided to leave the movement "should appropriately be viewed and treated as are

those who are disfellowshipped for wrongdoing". Wrongdoing usually means nothing more depraved than asking awkward questions.

Expulsion or resignation "implies more than ceasing to have spiritual fellowship", *The Watchtower* declares. Paul is quoted: "Quit mixing in company . . . not even eating with such a man". So Jehovah's Witnesses are forbidden to join an expelled person "in a picnic, trip to the beach or theatre, or sitting down to a meal with him".

How should the faithful respond if an ex-Witness calls out a cheery "Hello" in the street? "We all know from our experience over the years", *The Watchtower* warns grimly, "that a simple 'Hello' to someone can be the first step that develops into a conversation or maybe even a friendship. Would we want to take that first step with a disfellowshipped person?"

In "If a Relative is Disfellowshipped", it is conceded that "Christians may face tests because of a relative's being disciplined". Readers are reminded that Jesus had something to say about those who put family before him. "For I came to cause division, with a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother and a young wife against her mother-in-law. . . He that has greater affection for father or mother than for me is not worthy of me". *The Watchtower* adds bluntly that "true Christians realise that they cannot put family before God".

Of course there are practical problems if a Jehovah's Witness is expelled or simply leaves the congregation. Blood and family ties remain, but does that mean that in the family circle everything remains the same? "Definitely not! Family members—while acknowledging family ties—will no longer have any spiritual fellowship with him. . .

"Christians related to such a disfellowshipped person living outside the home should strive to avoid needless association, even keeping business dealings to a minimum".

The Watchtower assures us that a Jehovah's Witnesses wedding "can be a happy social occasion". But the appearance of a disfellowshipped or disassociated relative at the reception can be as disconcerting as that of Banquo's ghost on another occasion.

"Many Christians, relatives or not, might conclude that they should not be there, to eat and associate with him, in view of Paul's directions at I Corinthians, 5:11. Thus, sometimes Christians may not feel able to have a disfellowshipped relative present at a gathering that normally would include family members".

Other Christian churches which are not so fussy about such matters are suitably admonished. How many of them comply with God's clear wish in this regard, *The Watchtower* enquires. "Their 'tolerance' is unscriptural, unchristian", it adds.

"Are you concerned about mugging?" is the

opening gambit used by some Jehovah's Witnesses at the present time. Who isn't? And of course they have a biblical text for this as for every other question. Jehovah's Witnesses are themselves social muggers. They do violence to truth, family loyalty and human happiness.

SPELLBOUND IN STREATHAM

The Archbishop of Canterbury has ordered that every diocese in the country should have a clergyman who is capable of dealing with black magic. The Church of England is alarmed by the success of its competitors in the superstition industry, and priests are being specially trained in exorcism.

One South London clergyman, the Rev Graham Hayles, recently met a group of witches who do their thing in suburban Streatham. Mr Hayles concluded that they were lost souls. "They have been misled by Satan and are drawing upon Satanic influences", he said.

Mr Hayles met one couple, Nigel Bourne and Zeldye Bates, who are "handfasted" (married under witch law). He said their house was a "sad" one. They tried to convince him that witches do not go in for such excesses as human sacrifice. However—and far worse in the eyes of some puritanical Christians—they do believe in sex before marriage. "It's also a good idea in spite of it", quipped the cheerful Nigel.

Witches believe that celibacy is a sin. One way and another virginity appears to be a lost cause on Streatham Common these days.

Men and women are on an equal footing in witch society. Women enjoy far more respect and rights than they ever did in the Christian churches—although that isn't saying a lot.

Witches are drawn from all classes and professions. But they are so put off by dead bodies that undertakers are excluded. Anyone connected with the gloomy trade must find another job if he wants to become a witch.

Five years ago Nigel Bourne and Zeldye Bates received about 25 letters a week from enquirers. Now they get up to 500.

All this interest in witchcraft has led to a boom in sales of ritual equipment like goats' skulls and voodoo dolls. One shop in Leeds has 20,000 customers on its mailing list. It can supply a portable black magic circle for £100. And at £26.50, a "getting a job" set of spells, incense and mini altar is a snip for any undertaker who wishes to exchange the coffin for the coven.

After the success of the BBC's *Breakfast Time* television programme with its resident astrologer, the new bosses of ITV's ailing *TVAM* may consider introducing a *Witch Thought for the Day* to boost the ratings.

The Freethinker in 1982

R. J. CONDON

For the active secularist, the sheer weight of useful information in *The Freethinker* can be something of a handicap. Successive issues tend to get stuffed away in cupboards—at least mine do—and it is often difficult to find particular items. *The Freethinker* bound volumes are a simple and tidy answer to the problem. These handsome books are economical too—you need only buy one a year.

An eventful year, 1982 is well reflected in the latest volume. The centenary of Darwin's death occurred at a time when, according to Sir Edmund Leach, "many well qualified scientists of the highest standing would today accept many of Wilberforce's criticisms of Darwin". Wilberforce was of course the bishop who came a poor second in debate with Thomas Huxley. The demolition of Leach by a later Huxley, Sir Andrew, forms the first front page article of the year. Darwin's work is further vindicated by Dr Brian Charlesworth.

For the first time ever a Pope visited Britain—who recalls it now? The uncritical and often euphoric media coverage of this near non-event naturally finds its antithesis in *The Freethinker*. For example, Barbara Smoker's examination of John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio* reveals this Pope, in the Editor's words, as "the most reactionary pontiff since Pius XII". Here, as always when dealing with aspects of Roman Catholicism, Miss Smoker is a worthy successor to Joseph McCabe, the former Father Antony. Nobody hammers the Great Lying Church more thoroughly than its own disillusioned followers.

Freethinker readers, as their letters show, are sharply divided as to whether or not the Falklands war was justified. But as Jim Herrick and others point out, it was certainly accompanied by a great deal of religious and political hypocrisy.

Mrs Mary Whitehouse is something of a *bête noire* with *The Freethinker*, judging by the frequency with which her holy name crops up in this volume. David Webb writes an entertaining and informative article on the lady's prosecution of Michael Bogdanov for allegedly staging an obscene play, *The Romans in Britain*. We learn what went on behind the scenes—the trial itself must have been hilarious—and note with satisfaction that the litigious she-dragon of Dead Lane came out of the affair, in the words of a reverend gentleman, with "a great deal of egg on her face".

From its earliest days organised freethought has had a leaning towards republicanism. If we reject the notion of a god, we may be expected also to look with disfavour on those privileged persons who are still treated by the Establishment as the gods they once claimed to be. Julia Atkinson has a go at the British monarchy and makes a point that had

occurred to myself: that but for the accident of their exalted births, few would want to know the dreary and vulgar occupants of Buckingham and umpteen other palaces.

The Freethinker does not confine its criticisms to Christianity, and rightly so, for a number of other religions have gained a firm foothold in Britain and are becoming increasingly arrogant in their demands for privileges. Frances Hix shows that, where Jewish and Muslim ritual slaughter are concerned, religious cruelty to animals is upheld by our laws, while Anthony Milne reminds us that the kind of atrocities committed four centuries ago by Christian churches are commonplace today in the Islamic theocracy of Iran.

Mention must be made of the Editor's own considerable contributions, in "News and Notes" as well as elsewhere in the paper. The range of topics covered is almost encyclopaedic, all dealt with in characteristic vigorous and straightforward style. Evil cults like the Unification Church are very properly lambasted, while reports on the lunatic fringe almost write themselves — there is never a shortage of material.

Book reviews are of consistently high quality, no doubt because reviewers are selected for their knowledge of the matters under discussion. I have reservations, though, about the length of some of them, despite having been guilty myself in this respect on occasion. It is to be hoped that it is not the case, as an author once put it to me, that "people keep the review and don't buy the book".

Theatre, cinema and TV reviewing is in the able hands of Peter Cotes, Vera Lustig and Jim Herrick. They deal with productions of interest to freethinkers which tend to get scant notice elsewhere in the media.

Regrettably, it is not possible to mention every good thing in a volume of nearly 200 pages. Items which particularly appeal to me include Nigel Sinnott on Garibaldi, Barry Duke on the decline of the anti-sex Festival of Light, Edward Royle on the Reform Act of 1832, J. R. Spencer's series of articles on Famous Blasphemy Trials, and David Forbes on the divisiveness and victimisation resulting from compulsory religious instruction and worship in schools.

The Freethinker has always been open to contributions from religious believers, including the clergy. An open letter from Canon John Hester, Vicar of Brighton, and the reply by the Editor are models of civilised debate, each contestant arguing emphatically and without rancour. So why not end this review with a tribute from the Canon? *The Freethinker*, he says, is in quality second to none. Amen to that.

• See display advertisement on back page.

Church Schools Take the Cream

BARBARA TURNER

Voluntary schools can be used either wittingly or unwittingly as a cover for the kind of social and "academic" selection which the abolition of the 11-plus examination was meant to end. They can also frustrate the plans of education authorities faced with the need to reduce the number of schools in line with the decline in the school population.

Voluntary schools can be either "aided" or "controlled". Most schools are aided and are overwhelmingly Anglican or Catholic. They are schools which can manage to raise a proportion of the funds needed for maintenance and improvements and which often have an income from endowment foundations and bequests.

The governors must provide a site and school buildings but the Secretary of State can make a grant of 85 per cent towards the cost of extra building and can make a loan to governors and managers towards their share. The LEA has to provide ancillary buildings, which become the property of the trustees, and playing fields, which become the property of the LEA. The LEA is responsible for most repairs and maintenance and for teachers' salaries. The governing body is responsible for appointing the teachers and for the religious curriculum in a primary school and the secular education in a secondary school. It also controls the use of the school.

Controlled schools are mainly Anglican schools which have become unable to raise money for improvements. The total running cost is paid by the LEA. There is no provision for the establishment of new controlled schools.

The National Secular Society has estimated that of the £300 million which schools cost, only £4.5 million comes from church finances. The Socialist Educational Association believes that the Church's contribution is only half of one per cent of the total cost.

Some want to see Church schools abolished. Others would be content with greater accountability. In 1980, one in five children attended Church schools. Fewer and fewer are members of a church and even those are not always practising members, but Church education is not declining.

Voluntary controlled schools have the majority of their governors appointed by the LEA, but voluntary aided schools are allowed to have up to two thirds of the members of the governing body appointed by the Church.

Clearly, there is a lot of room for conflict on policies between a voluntary school and the Education authority. The decisions taken by voluntary

schools will have repercussions on other schools and on the whole community.

The biggest problem is the distortion caused by the admissions policies of voluntary schools. The Church of England advises governors to choose children whose parents are active in Church activities, have been confirmed or baptised in the Anglican Church or have a commitment to another Church. Other favourable features are brothers and sisters already in the school, residence in certain areas, special social or medical reasons and the desire to pursue certain subjects.

On the whole, such children will not be those who are likely to present special problems to schools. Those who do will be left to the State system, whose schools may be damaged by the existence of voluntary schools alongside them.

Serious problems can arise when Church schools are oversubscribed at a time when the general school population is falling. State schools will close or suffer from falling rolls and voluntary schools can choose from a wider area and become even more selective.

Private Education at Public Expense

Church schools tend to remain all-white schools and can select on grounds of ability even within a supposedly comprehensive system. However worthy is the management of a voluntary school, it will not be as accountable to the Council and the community as a State school. So if a higher proportion of State schools close, the principle of local democracy is attacked.

The London Borough of Barnet, which of course is partly represented in Parliament by that former Tory Secretary of State for Education, Margaret Thatcher, is currently giving the go-ahead to several new voluntary aided Jewish schools, some of them formerly private. At least one is sticking to its title of grammar school. At the same time Barnet is closing State schools. It would not be far-fetched to see this as an attempt to get private education on the rates.

Cumbria is facing the special problems of voluntary schools in rural areas. Tiny village schools tend to be religious schools and they cannot easily be disturbed by the Education authority even though it foots the bill for what may be very wasteful staffing. Country children can be enjoying a pupil staff ratio of perhaps 12 to 1.

The voluntary aided schools' power to appoint staff can allow and even welcome teachers totally opposed to the wider aims of the Education authority and hinder redeployment of staff made necessary by demographic changes.

Joseph Symes on Phallic Worship

NIGEL H. SINNOTT

British secularists who emigrated during the 19th century often pioneered freethought propaganda in their new surroundings. Joseph Symes was one of the most active and successful of such "missionaries" during the 20 years he lived in Australia. He wrote and published anti-Christian works, but predictably it was his pamphlet on phallic worship that provoked a storm of protest from religious opponents.

Joseph Symes (1841-1906) was a Vice-President of the National Secular Society who went to Melbourne and became President of the Australasian Secular Association. He contributed to the first number of *The Freethinker* in May 1881 and, just before he died back in Britain, wrote for this paper a series of articles on his "twenty years' fight in Australia" (23 September - 18 November 1906). A more recent account of Symes's intriguing life has been given in *The Freethinker* of August and September 1977.

In both Britain and Australia Symes travelled widely giving lectures on behalf of the secularist cause. He was also a prolific writer of articles, novelettes and pamphlets. For 20 years in Melbourne, despite enormous hardships, he ran his own paper, the *Liberator*, which was clearly modelled on *The Freethinker*. Many of his pamphlets were published in London by Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant under their imprint of the Freethought Publishing Company; others were published in Victoria under such imprints as the Liberator Printing and Publishing Company, the Liberator Publishing Office, the Freethought Book Depot, and A. T. Wilson (Agnes Wilson became Symes's second wife).

Symes's most famous—or infamous—and perhaps most successful pamphlet was first published in Melbourne, under his own name, in 1887. It was called *Ancient and Modern Phallic or Sex-Worship* and sold for one shilling. Only five copies are known with certainty to have survived, and it seems that this pamphlet was never re-issued in Britain.

Joseph Symes first became interested in phallic worship while travelling as an NSS appointed lecturer and visiting a museum in South Shields in the 1870s. This interest deepened on his journey out to Australia: he called at Naples (January 1884?), went to a museum and there examined exhibits from Pompeii in a room from which ladies were excluded. Later on he frequented the Melbourne Public Library (now the State Library of Victoria) and consulted a French work on the subject which was normally kept from the public gaze. "This masculine and prudish monopoly of such articles and

books," he commented, "requires resistance, and may take a generation yet to destroy." Symes applied what he learnt to the Bible which he claimed was "saturated" with traces of sex worship.

Symes's sentiments were not exactly shared by his more orthodox contemporaries, least of all by the *Australian Christian World* which greeted his phallic worship pamphlet with a tirade that Symes republished with evident glee:

We could hardly have imagined it possible for a human being to sink low enough to write . . . We have forwarded copies to Sir Henry Parkes and to the Social Purity Society . . . For we have no hope for the future of this country if the Christian public tolerates the circulation of such literary filth.

Sir Henry Parkes (1815-1896) was born on the Stoneleigh Abbey Estate, Warwickshire; and his rags-to-riches life story is outlined by A. W. Martin in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (vol. 5, 1974). In his radical and republican days, around the 1850s, Parkes denounced the "dung-hill aristocracy of Botany Bay"; but by 1887 he was Australia's most eminent statesman and in January of that year formed his fourth ministry as premier of New South Wales.

Blasphemous and Obscene

One of the surviving copies of Symes's pamphlet is held by the Mitchell Library, Sydney (part of the State Library of New South Wales). By a strange irony of fate, this must be the copy sent to Sir Henry Parkes, as it contains the following letter:

The Australian Christian World Newspaper and Publishing Company Limited.

80 HUNTER STREET
Sydney, September 27th 1887

Sir Henry Parkes, KCMG
etc. etc.

Sir,

Under separate cover I have forwarded to you a publication which I trust will lead you to take some action. This book is being publicly sold in the streets of Sydney to young people, and it is *erased* exposed for sale in the window of the Free Thought Book Depot, Castlereagh Street. I think you will agree with that nothing more blasphemous or obscene could be printed, and that the distribution of such literature will have the tendency to sap the foundations of Society. From the parts I have marked, and especially those at the end of the pamphlet, you will at once see the character of the book. If, Sir Henry, you can, on the ground of its obscenity, prohibit the sale of such a book, you will protect Sydney against a curse infinitely worse than typhoid or small-pox.

I am, Yours Obediently
Paul Clipsham
(Editor, *A. C. World*)

(continued on page 57)

The concept of a Welfare State has long been a thorn in the flesh of the Thatcher-Tebbit-Joseph school of politician. Their capture of the Conservative Party and election to Government enabled them to embark on an unprecedented campaign of vandalisation against the educational, medical and welfare services. Recent "leaks" to Fleet Street indicate that they intend to intensify their wrecking activities.

Not long ago, anything in the nature of a "leak" would have caused immediate concern. This is not a reference to the kind of difficulty suffered by citizens as a result of the recent water strike, forced upon the public by a number of men who were determined to act for themselves with self-reliance and a sense of personal responsibility rather than relying on the advice given them by the bureaucracy of the central government machine. The reference is rather to something that has become distressingly familiar in the last few years—an escape for public consumption of news or facts that our masters or mistresses (if the word is not misunderstood) would prefer to keep from us until, in their wisdom they think it right and proper, and, of course, safe for us to know what it was that was withheld in the first instance. In short, the subject is the recent publication in the respectable *Guardian*, of the outline of the contents of "certain confidential papers" which have come into the possession of that newspaper.

Those of us who now accept without any more than a mild show of interest that secret Foreign Office papers are freely and regularly available in taxi-cabs, wine bars and similar places of resort, may be mildly surprised that these latest documents emanate from the so-called "Cabinet's Central Policy Review staff". It is, indeed, the Government's "Think Tank" that has sprung this particular leak.

It is reported (and we must make it clear that we take the documents themselves and all comment based on them with even more than our usual scepticism) that, while the leaks have been greeted in official circles with a mixture of emotions, ranging from anger to embarrassment, there has been little attempt to suggest that the ideas contained in the documents do not give a clear indication of certain lines of present Government thinking. Indeed, it is further reported, although our above remarks about scepticism apply with even greater force to this rumour (if rumour it be) that the Head of Government herself, through her so-called "family policy group", has now ordered all Ministers to help with the preparation of a family policy to be written into the Conservatives' manifesto for the next General Election.

To do more than give a bald summary of the ideas that are put forward in the documents that have come into the possession of the *Guardian* would require a stricter pen and, perhaps, a straighter face than we can hope to command. Yet the main lines can be indicated fairly briefly.

One of the central themes is that ways should be considered to encourage families to reassume responsibilities taken on by the State (for example, responsibility for the disabled, elderly and unemployed 16-years-olds), and further, "to encourage responsible and self-reliant behaviour by parents". Studies of the relations between parents and children should be instituted and there should be serious attempts to "identify major influences on children, e.g. parents, schools and teachers, peers, the media". (It is not thought that the word "peers" in this context refers to members of the House of Lords but almost any interpretation is permissible.) Children should be trained to manage their pocket money; professions that at present purport to help people to obtain such welfare and similar benefits as they may feel legally entitled to should have their powers and activities restricted, and people should be encouraged to use their own initiative in these matters. There should be help for parents to set up their own schools and more aid should be given to schools with a "clear moral basis". (In case this term may not convey anything in particular to our readers, it must be explained that religious schools are referred to here.)

There is much more in the proposals which deserves just as serious thought as will undoubtedly be given to the ideas already quoted. Sadly, considerations of space and the need to keep matters on an even keel of readability do not permit extended treatment.

Friends of the Welfare State

In case anyone should feel alarmed, it must be remembered that the Prime Minister has asserted, not once, but at least twice, that it is not the purpose of her administration to destroy the Welfare State. She has added, in response to specific questions not very long ago, that in her carefully considered view her own Government has done more for the health and welfare services than have previous governments. We sigh with relief but, returning to the leaks from the "Think Tank", most readers would feel that it would be at least possible for some features of the present Welfare State to be fundamentally and radically changed if many of the proposals were to result in specific policies and those policies were put into effect—if that were possible.

One of the suggestions, not mentioned so far, is

that wives should be encouraged, and even induced with financial help, to give up work in which many are engaged at the moment and to return to the home. Let us imagine a specific instance. Suppose, in relying on the advice given by the "Think Tank" (and what is a "Think Tank" for if we do not seek to change our lives in accordance with its advice?), Mrs X, a married woman in a small town, gives up her work in a local light engineering factory (the one in the area that has not yet closed) and stays at home. She finds certain difficulty in adjusting herself to the fact that her husband, now redundant for well over a year, is in the house all day. Yet she follows the advice she has been given and bends herself energetically to teaching her children how to manage their pocket money (this is not as hard as it might sound for, despite some reports to the contrary, there is very little of the commodity in question for them to learn to manage) and in co-operating with her neighbours in preparing plans for setting up a school of their own. (There are several schools already provided by the County Council but, as asked above, what is a "Think Tank" for if . . .?) The thing that worries her most is that, whereas her mother, aged 80, severely handicapped with a broken hip and needing attention for 24 hours each day, was receiving that attention on an adequate if not lavish scale in a local authority home for the elderly until Mrs X changed her way of life, she is now in the small spare room. Looking after her mother takes up more time than Mrs X can spare from the additional duties that she has now undertaken.

Future Plans?

There are other thoughts that come to mind. First, if the Government really wants the whole basis of family life to be carefully examined, this will mean a great new access of work and probably public esteem for professional sociologists who, for some time now, have been told, a little contemptuously (perhaps by members of this very same "Think Tank" or their close collaborators), that their particular subject is not a true academic discipline at all but is, in the witty term frequently used, "a non-subject". Secondly, and this is the thing which, above all others, convinces us that these proposals deserve truly serious thought, they are the product of the joint thinking of eight Cabinet ministers. Of those eight, seven went to the universities of Oxford or Cambridge and six went to public schools with, properly, Eton in the lead. (The one who did not go to university is Mr Norman Tebbit, but he has been educated in the university of life.)

From this, we are justified in assuming that the educational basis, not to mention the close knowledge of the lives of the great majority of the inhabitants of these islands, on which the various

proposals are founded, could not be more substantial. Any suggestion that few of those families that can afford to send their children to Eton or Harrow or Winchester or Shrewsbury, ever come into close contact with Mrs X and her family, can be dismissed as yet one more example of the "politics of envy" which did so much damage to our land in the years before 1979.

It is reported—but all the qualifications that have been entered above must be borne in mind—that other "Think Tank" documents will shortly be made public. These contain plans to restore horse-drawn traffic to our streets in order to persuade horses to stand on their own feet, and proposals to encourage all strong-minded members of the public to set up their own Church of England, slaughter-houses, fire brigades, police forces and armed services as practical means of promoting "self-respect and a sense of individual responsibility".

For further news—watch this space!

Joseph Symes and Phallic Worship

Such sentiments are not unknown nearly a century later!

Just as interesting, perhaps, is the "depot" to which the Rev Paul Clipsham (1850-1924) refers. In 1887 the bookshop at 109 Castlereagh Street, Sydney, was being run by Symes's friend William Willis (1830-1894), who had been a bookseller at Charles Bradlaugh's Hall of Science in Old Street, London, before migrating to Australia in 1884 and being twice elected president of the New South Wales branch of the Australasian Secular Association. (A sketch of Willis's life has been given in the October 1978 *Freethinker*.) Like Symes, Willis had found favour in the NSS as he staunchly supported Bradlaugh and Annie Besant when they republished Charles Knowlton's birth-control pamphlet, *Fruits of Philosophy*, in 1877.

As far as is known Sir Henry Parkes took no action against either Willis or Symes's pamphlet. The publication itself ran to several editions, including a seventh, published by A. T. Wilson (c. 1891) "with an Appendix", and a "new and enlarged" edition issued by Agnes in 1898. Poor Clipsham! Literary "typhoid or small-pox" was obviously catching among the late 19th-century Australian reading public!

Acknowledgements

The State Library of Victoria and the library of the Ministry for Conservation, Victoria, kindly provided the writer with a copy of the text of Symes's pamphlet. Paul Clipsham's letter was discovered independently by David Tribe and Dr Frank M. C. Forster of whom the latter obtained a photograph of the document (many thanks). The Clipsham letter is published by kind permission of the Mitchell Library, Sydney.

BOOKS

OFFENSIVE LITERATURE: DECENSORSHIP IN BRITAIN 1960-82, by John Sutherland. Junction Books, £5.95

In 1966 the publisher John Calder asked me to help him in mobilising witnesses to defend *Last Exit to Brooklyn* against the private prosecution launched by the puritanical MP, Sir Cyril Black. The Defence of Literature and the Arts Society grew out of the widely felt concern over that case, and I served on its executive committee for most of the next 15 years, so I had a ringside seat at the procession of "obscenity trials" chronicled in this book. Much of what we helped to defend wasn't at all literary or artistic (and some of it was barely literate): but, as the DLAS' most distinguished chairman, the late Will Hamling, MP, once said, "a piece of low-grade rubbish must be as important to us as *Ulysses*, even though that principle may lose us both sympathy and battles".

And, given the built-in haphazardness and illogicality of the obscenity laws, low-grade rubbish sometimes got off while works with some pretensions to literary and artistic merit were condemned. As successive prosecuting lawyers—egged on by Mary Whitehouse and her censorious Christian cohorts—vied with their defence brethren in unearthing new vantage points, and solemnly distinguished between "the flea of indecency and the louse of obscenity", it became plain that the real stupidity lay not in the law's details but in its very existence. For efforts to ban the expression of ideas, however unsavoury and unpalatable they may be, are absurdly self-defeating; the usual result of the public cavortings of Mrs Whitehouse and similar smuthounds has been to give far greater publicity and much wider circulation to the items they decry, besides providing some picquantly comic public spectacles.

Such British barminess deserves a historian who is also a good raconteur, and I have enjoyed recalling the highlights from *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to *The Romans in Britain* in Mr Sutherland's lively company. The 1960s provided a rich brew—"sensational" television, plays and films, flower-power, drugs, rock music, tough talk, ostentatiously relished sex. It was the era of "permissiveness"—a term I've never accepted as valid, because of its authoritarian assumption that some superior folk have the right (or duty?) to give and withhold permission for the rest of us to live the way we want to. The ebullience of the sixties led to "a drive against youth radicalism conducted with ruthlessness and frequent illegality by the police", who used obscenity and related oppressively vague charges such as "conspiracy to corrupt public morals" as instruments for "breaking butterflies on wheels" (as even *The Times* headlined

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its critical leader comments on the Alice in Wonderland-style *Oz* trial which cost the public purse £80,000).

The "crunch years" were 1970-71, with the trials of *International Times*, *The Mouth*, *Little Red School Book* and *Oz*. They also saw the emergence of hordes of "consonious populists" headed by Mrs Whitehouse and the Festival of Light, goading the authorities to increasingly oppressive tactics in the name of public purity. In response, there was a defensive rally by what became known as "Mortimer's travelling circus"—a band of unshockable expert witnesses prepared to vouch for the "therapeutic" properties of any accused item, however insignificant or indeed seedy. The years from 1973 to 1977 were, Mr Sutherland thinks, "confused and shabby", culminating in the acquittal of the wide-mouthed Linda Lovelace's intimate confessions of her oral agility, *Inside Linda Lovelace* (which some found a bit much to swallow).

By the end of the Seventies the porn industry had grown from a hole-and-corner, furtive activity into a multi-million pound blatant money-spinner. Its opponents became alarmed and somewhat hysterical. We were becoming "a nation of masturbators", said David Holbrook; pornography, portentously proclaimed the up-market literary buff George Steiner, was "the main component of the cultural hell above ground" which led to Nazi death camps. Burgeoning home videoporn was accompanied by mass corruption in the upper reaches of Scotland Yard's obscene publications squad. Faced with all this official and unofficial seediness, the public mood has swung back towards repression, and militant feminists nowadays make uneasy bedfellows with Whitehouse (though she doesn't burn down sex shops and they don't pray in public, so far as I know).

Under Thatcherdom, the Williams Report's eminently sensible proposals have been shelved and a window-dressing (in every sense) Indecent Displays Control Act placed on the statute book. Honest sex education in schools is a hot potato, and Iron Britannia seems all set to lead the election stampede towards a curiously selective set of "Victorian values" which will no doubt include renewed sexual prudery.

Will the British never grow up? Our adolescent obsessions with sex veer between the Scylla of outraged sanctimoniousness and the Charybdis of smutty sniggering, leading to a public preoccupation with pornography out of all proportion to its social significance. It's more sad than funny. But there are

R REVIEWS

some good belly laughs, and a thorough chewing over of the main bones of contention, in Mr Sutherland's workmanlike book.

ANTONY GREY

THE ANASTASIS by J. Duncan M. Derrett. Drinkwater, £5

THE FOREIGNER by Desmond Stewart. Hamish Hamilton, £9.95

THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FOR JESUS by G. A. Wells. Prometheus/Pemberton, £8

"Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh". This is one of the few true statements in the Bible; it is especially true about books on Jesus, even though the most conscientious Christian scholars now agree that there is virtually no reliable material for such books, and the study of them certainly tends to weary the flesh. But here are three recent books on Jesus by outsiders—authors who are not members of the Christian establishment which has almost monopolised the subject for 1,900 years—and it is interesting to see what they offer.

J. Duncan M. Derrett, who is a professor of Oriental Law, has produced a book about the supposed Resurrection of Jesus. Like many people who don't believe the Gospel stories, he assumes not that they are complete inventions but that they are distorted versions of historical events. He argues that Jesus wasn't resurrected from death but was revived from apparent death, and was able to communicate with his followers for a few days before dying, and that his body was then cremated to remove all awkward traces. The argument is ingenious but it is based on virtually no evidence, which makes it impossible to take very seriously.

Desmond Stewart, who was a writer specialising in the Middle East, produced before his death in 1981 a book on the life of Jesus. He used not only the canonical Gospels but also various apocryphal texts and plenty of pure speculation. For example, he argues that Joseph took the pregnant Mary away from Galilee to avoid scandal, that Jesus was born and brought up in Egypt before returning to Palestine as "the foreigner" of the title, that the story of the resurrection of Lazarus hides an account of the initiation of John into an Osirian mystery cult, that the Crucifixion was not at the Passover but in midsummer, that Jesus's cry from the Cross was addressed not to God (*Eloi* or *Eli*) but to the Sun (*helios*), that Jesus was not resurrected from death

but that his body was temporarily buried and subsequently cremated by his enemies, and that his supposed posthumous appearances were collective hallucinations. Again, the arguments are ingenious, but they are based on virtually no evidence, which makes them impossible to take very seriously.

G. A. Wells, who is a professor of German, has produced a quite different kind of book which should be taken very seriously. Unlike the other two authors—indeed unlike most authors in this area—he is a genuine scholar, concerned only with factual evidence and rational discussion. Like his previous books, *The Jesus of the Early Christians* (1971) and *Did Jesus Exist?* (1975), *The Historical Evidence for Jesus* (1982) presents strictly factual and rational arguments for the hypothesis that Jesus may never have existed as described in the New Testament and that the Gospel stories are theological rather than historical documents.

Wells is the leading modern exponent of this mythicist theory, for which he is well known in the freethought movement (he is also Chairman of the Rationalist Press Association), and his work is a model of this particular argument and of the scientific treatment of such problems in general. He combines the traditional scepticism of freethinkers for more than a century, from Dupuis and Volney down to J. M. Robertson, with the impartial scholarship of German biblical critics for a similar period, from Baur and Strauss to Ernst Haenchen. His writing is refreshingly free from speculation and polemic; its main defect is that it is very detailed and rather academic, so that readers must work hard to follow it.

For readers who are prepared to make the necessary effort, the ideal course would be to read all three books in sequence. Although they inevitably overlap to some extent, they cover different aspects of the subject and they progressively correct and refine the whole argument. (Unfortunately the first is out of print, but the second is still available.) The first two tend to divide the subject by topic; the third tends to divide it by document, discussing first the texts of the New Testament and then its various books and groups of books (there are also chapters on semitisms, on Jesus's family, and on the Turin Shroud). The final result is certainly a cogent criticism of the authorised version and the various revised versions of Jesus's life, though I am not entirely convinced after reading all 900 pages of these books. But Wells presents all the necessary material and provides all the relevant arguments, which is more than anyone else does; what is now needed is an equally serious book by another scholarly freethinker taking a different view, like Archibald Robertson's *Jesus: Myth or History?* (1949): until then, Wells holds the field.

NICOLAS WALTER

The first time you step down off a pavement and join a protest march is a traumatic experience. You are making a statement as you stand there self-consciously in the gutter (since marches, as every experienced demonstrator knows, never start at the time announced). You are not only challenging Authority, but deliberately distancing yourself from the puzzled, sometimes insulting, but most often simply apathetic majority who stay safely on the pavement, looking at you.

For many of my generation, it was CND that brought this first unforgettable experience. Anyone who went on those early Aldermaston marches will have vivid memories: the feeling of warm friendship which overcame the physical exhaustion, the stunning visual impact when the march stopped at the top of a country road and you saw stretching behind you a multi-coloured panoply of banners and people, like something out of Henry V; the triumph of the culminating march up Whitehall on the final Easter Monday, taking up the whole width of the road; the music and the songs; the ubiquitous, anorak-clad figure of Peggy Duff, cigarette in mouth, white hair straggling in the wind, giving off her usual air of controlled distraction.

All these nostalgic memories have been triggered off by *The CND Story*, a collection of articles by some 40 CND supporters, published to celebrate CND's 25th anniversary, and ably edited by John Minnion and Philip Bolsover. The early years are remembered by Mervyn Jones; Jo Richardson writes of providing tea for 20,000 one weekend (Jan Mikardo calculating he carried two tons of water). The problem years of the '60s are recalled by Frank Allaun, whilst Edward Thompson and Joan Ruddock write of the upsurge in the 1980s. The theme of "words, music and marches" is explored by Adrian Henri and Adrian Mitchell.

CND has faced two big problems during its first 25 years—and indeed is still confronted by them—its relationship to party politics, and its stance on direct action. One of the themes of the early movement, and one which Canon John Collins strongly advocated, was the importance of attempting to get Labour Party support which would eventually, it was hoped, translate itself into Government policy. When the Labour Party conference, in 1960, went unilateralist, this was seen as a major triumph. Alas, not only was the decision reversed in the following year but, as Frank Allaun writes, the two Harold Wilson governments of 1964 and 1966 carried on the Conservative administration's nuclear weapons programme almost without alteration.

Direct action came to the fore when the Committee of 100, headed by Bertrand Russell, had its first demonstration in February 1961; it was entirely

non-violent, and it brought 4,000 people to sit down outside the Ministry of Defence. Later in the year, 32 people were arrested at a sit-down, and many went to prison for two months. Bertrand Russell himself was imprisoned for a week.

Canon Collins was opposed to direct action, and it was this, together with their very different personalities, that brought about the split in the movement and the resignation of Russell as President. But CND as a mass movement continued to grow, attracting final figures of 100,000 and 150,000 in Trafalgar Square on Easter Mondays. Essentially, as the editors point out in their succinct introduction, it was the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963 and the shift of attention to the Vietnam war which led to CND's decline in the 60s.

One radical and welcome change which has been brought about in the renewed and powerful CND we now have is the part that women play in it. Greenham Common—the best thing that happened in a depressing year though not a CND sponsored event—is symptomatic of the initiatives that women are taking to further the cause of nuclear disarmament (and please will somebody strangle those pompous Right-wing men on radio and TV who refer to the Greenham Common women as "well-meaning ladies"—far too emotional, of course, not *realistic* as we men are). Alison Whyte contributes a useful chapter on the links between feminism and the peace movement and makes the point that "in the women's movement we have learned to value our own experience—to regain control over our own lives and not allow others to make decisions on our behalf".

Now, with over a quarter of a million local members, over a thousand local groups and 60,000 national members, we have a strong and revitalised CND movement. In recent months it has won major victories—the pressure from local authorities which led to the cancellation of the Government's Hard Rock exercise; the substantial number of people who are opposed to the installation of Cruise and Trident missiles; and most recently the report by the British Medical Association which flatly contradicts Government assertions that society could survive a nuclear attack.

The CND Story is well-timed to coincide with this welcome resurgence; it is also essential reading for all who support the peace movement.

TED McFADYEN

Thousands of children from orphanages have been sent to their deaths by Iran. They jump in front of tanks and explode mines after being told that their sacrifice will ensure them a place in Heaven. Martyrdom cards are issued, entitling them to extra food. A human rights worker who visited Iraq and talked to Iranian boy prisoners revealed this practice last month.

OBITUARY

Mr F. Cook

Frank Cook, aged 72, died in hospital at Worthing after a long illness. He had no religious beliefs and there was a secular committal ceremony at Woodvale Crematorium, Brighton.

Dr S. Crown

Dr Saul Crown, who has died at the age of 85, was closely associated with the humanist movement for over 40 years. A native of South Africa, he came to Britain as a young man and trained at Guy's Hospital, London. He was well known to members of South Place Ethical Society and a former committee member of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society. Dr Crown moved to Brighton in 1977 and joined the local humanist group. He attended a meeting shortly before his death.

There was a secular committal ceremony at Woodvale Crematorium, Brighton.

Mr J. W. Pendry

James William Pendry, who died in hospital last month, aged 63, had been visually handicapped for most of his life. Eight years ago he lost his sight completely.

He spent some time at Worcester College for the Blind and then went to Oxford where he studied economics, politics and philosophy. After teaching for a time he went into the Civil Service. Like several members of his family, Mr Pendry was a keen freethinker.

There was a secular committal ceremony at Guildford Crematorium.

Freethinker Fund

Thanks are expressed to those readers whose names appear on the latest list of contributors.

B. Aubrey, £2; A. M. Ashton, £1.40; D. G. Baker, £20; P. Barbour, £6.40; D. Bressan, £1.40; J. W. Buck, £1.40; J. Busby, £1; N. Collins, £1.40; F. Crang, £1.40; P. D. Crowden-Longstreath, £6.40; D. W. Donovan, £5; J. Dwyer, \$12; K. Evans, £6.40; W. T. Ford, £1.40; J. D. Groom, £2; R. E. Hutton, £5; F. W. Jones, £2.40; J. H. Joseph, £1.40; A. G. Jowett, £6.40; J. C. W. Lewis, £2.50; E. Litten, £2.40; J. L. MacLennan, £1.70; A. A. Montagu, £3; J. W. Mooney, £6.40; L. Patel, £1.40; M. Perkins, £1.40; R. G. Peterson, \$6; N. Stevenson, £1.40; G. B. Stowell, £6.40; D. C. Taylor, £3; M. Tolfree, £1.40; S. Trent, £5; A. P. Woods, £2; G. N. Wright, £6.40.

Total for the period 3 February until 3 March: £117.20 and \$18.

LETTERS

CHURCH DISESTABLISHMENT

The National Secular Society welcomes Tony Benn's call last month for disestablishment of the Church of England—a cause with which we have been associated since our foundation by Charles Bradlaugh, MP, in 1866. But we would go further than Mr Benn, who said nothing about disendowment: surely disestablishment and disendowment of the Church must go together. It would be unjust if the wealth donated (mostly compulsorily) by our ancestors were to remain in the possession of a Church to which only a minority of the population is now committed. Its historical privileges in law, especially its fiscal privileges and its special protection under the blasphemy law, are also an anachronism. We therefore call for the C of E to give up its establishment, its inherited wealth, and its legal privileges. Those who support its doctrines should support it financially and be subject to the same law as every other system of belief or non-belief.

BARBARA SMOKER

A HUMANIST VIEWPOINT FROM ISRAEL

I wish to comment on T. C. Thompson's letter (February) concerning the name of the Israel Secular Humanist Association and also his reference to the views expressed by Gabriel Glazier, in his letter (December 1982).

The inclusion of "Israel" in the name of our association has a purely geographical meaning. The name affixed to an organisation is seldom satisfactory, as it usually is a consensus of what is thought best at a certain time and place.

In 1967 Isaac Hasson published advertisements calling on atheists to establish an Atheist group. The first meeting decided on the name Secular Association. The reason for this was that the term "secular" was then more commonly used and acceptable.

In 1980 we re-organised as the Secular Humanist Association. At that time the term "Humanism" was used to emphasise the anti-nationalist trend.

T. C. Thompson's views and those of our Association are identical. He seems to confuse our position with that of Gabriel Glazier. Certainly Mr Glazier, by mentioning that he was a founder member of ISHA, confused your readers. He is no longer active in the Association.

In order to clarify ISHA's stance on the disputed issues I hope that you will publish our Press Release dated 26 June 1982. The text is given below.

The Association believes that the Israeli Government, striving for liquidation of the Palestinian national entity, brings to question its moral justification for its war in Lebanon.

The Association warns that one of Israel's goals in Lebanon is liable to be the annexation of the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza Strip as a result of the favourable conditions caused by this invasion.

The Association warns against the possibility of annexation designs in southern Lebanon.

The Association believes that the continuation of this war will only result in additional victims and a further entanglement of Israel in an endless conflict—which could consequently result in a prolonged "holy war" between Muslims and Jews and, first and foremost, a revocation of the achievements of our peace with the Egyptian People.

The Association believes that the Israeli Government's political involvement in the internal affairs of

Lebanon is liable to widen ever further the ethnic-religious discord in that country. We hope that the Lebanese people will be given a chance to solve their ethnic-religious disputes peacefully. Lebanon's solution is: a country which has a secular and democratic constitution which grants citizenship to all its inhabitants, disregarding their religious, ethnic or national origin.

The Association warns against the further expansion of militarist and chauvinist tendencies in Israel after this war is over. We warn against the possible personality cults around a political or a military leader.

The Association solemnly mourns the dead and expresses heart-felt sympathy and hope for the wounded on all sides of this previous war. We also express our anger in the wanton devastation and destruction caused by this invasion of Lebanon—which totally contradicts the declared aims of the Israeli Government at the start of its most recent Lebanon adventure.

The statement was signed by the chairman and two members of the secretariat.

SARA HASSON

Editor, "Humanist Alternative"

PO Box 36965, Tel Aviv, 61369, Israel

A SOPHISTICATED REPLY

May I request a few lines be given so that I may "clear my name"? I am not, never have been and hopefully never will be, an apologist for Christianity. However, I do seem to have become both a hopeful sign for "The Freethinker's" Christian readers (the journal informs me that Tim Lenton of Christian Weekly Newspapers finds me so) and a target for freethinkers of the rather more bigoted variety. My "glib" letter, referred to in the February issue, was not intended to imply that National Secular Society members can see no further than the ends of their anti-religious noses. What I was calling for was a rather more sophisticated analysis of events than a simple equation of war having a religious content therefore the war must have been caused by religious zealots.

Take, for example, the reference to the Crusades. Indeed the legitimization of the barbarity of the crusaders was religious and I would be the first to point out that Catholicism was corrupt, sold indulgences (absolution) to crusaders in return for a share of the booty and was far less tolerant of the religions they conquered than the vanquished had previously been of the victors. Yes, Christianity was the code by which life was conducted. But that is not the whole story.

Popes tended to call for crusades when either the coffers were rather empty or because it served their purpose in the imbroglio of European politics. Often the title "crusade" was granted to a military expedition after it had begun. Nevertheless, the reality behind reconquering God's land which has been stolen by the infidel had much more to do with the opening up of trade routes and therefore profitable mercantile activity or the employment of the dispossessed sons of the feudal aristocracy than it had to do with some pure religious inspiration. This is the sort of insight I was calling for in my letter. Let the Christians and the bigots be quite clear that I have no interest in the defence of an organised superstition. But let me make it equally clear: when superstition becomes organised on the scale that now surrounds us we must look deeper than its doctrinal pronouncements and find where its power lies and why the moral and ideological justification it can provide is so eagerly sought by those who rule or aspire to rule.

SIMON KIRK

PORN AGAIN

With regard to the discussion of pornography and censorship (March issue), should some debate on power-relationships in societies not be included?

While racist literature and cartoons are banned by almost all groups, this is not the case with sexist material. Apparently hard-core porn is a liberation for some men and to try to stop it is an interference with their civil liberties. I would suggest that the reason for this situation is that the objects of consumption in porn works are women, children, animals and masochistic gay men. As these groups are either quite powerless or almost powerless in society, any resistance that they should offer to the porn industry is considered to be illegitimate. They should suffer in silence.

In contrast, some ethnic and religion-based groups are represented as fighting for their rights and this is the justification for their violence. It is male and political. The violence done to subject groups, either real as in "snuff" films, or fantasised, is not represented in male politicised terms, therefore it is supposedly a liberation; the victims enjoy it really (like rape) and no woman has any right to resist it.

Not many porn-shops have been burned down by women's groups yet; children and animals can't speak or act for themselves and I can't speak for male gays, but any resistance so far has been minute, compared to the very large, well-funded porn industry and its covert but important male supporters.

Of course female violence might, just might, be legitimate if it is done in support of male political groups.

BRENDA ABLE

THE CASE FOR CHRISTIANITY

I am sure your readers have already seen more than enough of my name in "The Freethinker", though I suppose I must be flattered that you should think my unimportant Christian Weekly Newspapers column worth attacking at such length.

I would like, however, to make one or two comments in response to your editorial remarks (February) which contained rather more anger than I have observed in Christians of my acquaintance. (I have no doubt, on the other hand, that you will be able to list many well-known Christians who are far angrier than you are!)

Anger is not a Christian characteristic. It may be appropriate on rare occasions, as I am sure you would agree. But a reading of the New Testament reveals these particular Christian traits: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, fidelity, gentleness and self-control.

"You shall have no other god" is not an angry command. It is simply, like all the commandments, an expression of what is best for people. Putting other "gods" — ambitions or objects of worship, or possessions — in place of God leads to dissatisfaction, frustration or worse. You may not agree; if so, I am afraid that does not make me even slightly angry.

You ask: "Could there be a more inordinate ambition than the attainment of personal salvation?" Salvation is not an ambition but the acceptance of an offered gift. It is available to anyone who wants it, now.

Atrocities, terrorism and torture have been carried out by religious people—because man is basically religious. They have been carried out largely by people with two legs (each), but this does not mean you can blame war and violence on the fact that people have

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. York Hotel, Botanic Avenue, Belfast. Meetings on the second Tuesday of the month at 8 pm.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Queen's Head, Queen's Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 1 May, 5 pm for 5.30 pm. Harry Stopes Roe: The Use and Abuse of Darwinian Evolution.

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

Harrow Humanist Society. The Library, Gayton Road, Harrow-on-the-Hill. Bernard Crick: Orwell on Individualism and Socialism.

Havering and District Humanist Society. Harold Wood Social Centre, junction of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road, Tuesday, 3 May, 6 pm. Parliamentary candidates: Why I am Standing for Parliament.

Humanist Holidays. Broadstairs, Kent, 9-16 July in Dickens country. Details from Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12, telephone 01-673 6234.

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Swarthmore Institute, 4 Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Friday, 13 May, 8 pm. Maeve Denby: Humanism—the National Scene.

Merseyside Humanist Group. 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. Friday, 20 May, 7.45 pm. Raymond Freeman: The Similarities Between Fundamentalist Christianity and Marxism—a Humanist View.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 28 April, 7.45 pm. Maeve Denby: Humanism Today.

The Progressive League. Chelwood Gate, near East Grinstead, Sussex. Spring Conference on the Influence of the Media. Speakers include Celia Fremlin, Gareth Griffith, Brian Murphy and Anthony Smith. Full details from the booking officer: Jack Small, White Cottage, Burtonhole Lane, Mill Hill, London NW4.

Scottish Humanist Council. Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Saturday, 21 May, 10 am until 6 pm. Annual Conference. Details from Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, telephone 0563 26710.

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

Worthing Humanist Group. Trades Club, Broadwater Road, Worthing. Sunday, 24 April, 5.30 pm. Public meeting.

Newspaper reports are always required by "The Freethinker". The source and date should be clearly marked and the clippings sent to the Editor at 32 Over Street, Brighton, Sussex.

two legs. Obviously violent people want to justify themselves; if they can use a belief (whether a perversion of Christianity or something else) to do so, they will. That does not make it right. You will recall, perhaps, that Jesus did not even allow the use of a sword in self-defence.

Christianity does not support slavery or the belief that women are inferior. In the New Testament there is advice to slaves and masters of a kind which, if followed, would abolish slavery very quickly. Few followed it, of course. Eventually, as you know, Christians in this country were deeply involved in the abolition of slavery.

As for women, Jesus treated them with a love and respect which was quite revolutionary, and the Bible accords them equal status with men in the sight of God.

I acknowledge that ugly and vicious things have been done — and are still being done — by people who call themselves Christians. If they called themselves freethinkers it would not alter anything. It is very easy and tempting to judge superficially (we all do it at times), but surely it is necessary to look a bit further than what people call themselves for an explanation of their actions.

Violence by Christians is not condoned anywhere in the Bible. The Old Testament is pre-Christian and is a history of a quite different world — a violent one which neither you nor I could hope to understand in any depth, and one in which the Ten Commandments stand out like a beacon.

TIM LENTON

MISQUOTE

The misquote of Protagoras in the front page article (February), "Man is the master of all things", is rather unfortunate since Protagoras in fact wrote "Man is the measure of all things". Christians have often suggested that the earth and all within it is made for man's mastery, but secularists accept a less exploitative, more harmonic relationship with the universe.

The full quotation is: "Man is the measure of all things, of the reality of those which are, and of the unreality of those which are not", and there is much uncertainty about interpretation of the aphorism, as is discussed in James Thrower's excellent study of unbelief in the ancient world, *The Alternative Tradition* (Mouton, 1980).

JIM HERRICK

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6.30 pm for 7 pm

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Sir Keith Told: Young People Turned Off By School Religion

Sir Keith Joseph has been told by a group of prominent Christian educationists that the school day should no longer begin with a religious assembly. The Christian Education Movement's general council — most members are school heads or religious education advisers — told the Education Secretary that there should be more flexibility "in the time, style and content of assemblies".

Mr John Sutcliffe, secretary of the CEM, said: "It is the experience of many school heads if they labour Christianity it turns some young people off". They would prefer the content of assemblies to be unconnected with Christianity or any world religion.

But in Liverpool, a notorious hotbed of Christian bigotry, the Roman Catholic Archbishop Worlock responded angrily to alleged proposals by Labour councillors to end religious schooling in the city. Councillor Dominic Brady said there is an uneconomic duplication of church and local authority schools. He believed that "separate religious education is divisive and outdated".

Unfortunately the Labour Party has no intention of ending religious schooling in Liverpool. The fuss arose following a distorted report in a local newspaper. Roman Catholic Member of Parliament, David Alton (Liberal, Edge Hill) got in on the act

by putting down an early day motion in the House of Commons, condemning Labour policy as "damaging and disruptive".

It is true that many Roman Catholic and Church of England schools have closed in Liverpool. Condemning the opportunism and hypocrisy of the Liberals, the Labour Party pointed out that the Government's policies were enthusiastically endorsed by a coalition of Conservatives and Liberals. As a result, 26 Roman Catholic schools in the city have been closed.

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Nostalgia and Superstition

stition is not countered by sensationalism, but by quiet common sense which endures when the flag-waving is over.

"That steady common sense is a characteristic of humanism. And that is why it is an aspect of masses of lives without being a mass movement".

Political leaders also provide evidence of a tendency to step backward. Speaking of Mrs Thatcher's desire to restore Victorian virtues, Jim Herrick said: "I fear she has also learned from the Victorian vices of hypocrisy, jingoism and a desire to keep the rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate. And there is no doubt that she would like to see Church schools play an even larger part in the education system, something which education vouchers would favour. She would also like to see religious charities play a bigger part in the provision of welfare.

"The problems of tomorrow are never the problems of yesterday, and one of the lessons of history is that it never repeats itself. I have always thought that a great problem with politicians is that they are always trying to resolve the problems of their youth. And so we saw Mrs Thatcher imagining that she was Churchill standing up to Hitler when she

was prosecuting a war so absurd that commentators talked about two bald men fighting for a comb".

In conclusion, Jim Herrick said that while talking about the past and the future we must not forget the present — the only time in which we really exist and really achieve happiness.

Professor James Sang (president), R. J. Delaurey (chairman), Joan Wimble (secretary) and Theo Doble (founder member), also spoke. Isabel Davis, an early member of the group and at 90 still the active literature secretary of nearby Worthing Humanist Group, cut the birthday cake.

Humanists from other parts of South East England attended the function. They included G. N. Deodhekar (chairman, G. W. Foote & Co.), Chris Morey (National Secular Society council member), Terry Mullins (NSS general secretary) and Barbara Smoker (NSS president).

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group was formed in 1958 on the initiative of the late Daisy Hobman (D. L. Hobman, the social historian). Affiliated to the British Humanist Association and the NSS, its association with the latter continues a tradition of organised freethought in the town that goes back over a hundred years.