

The Freethinker

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"PURITY" CAMPAIGNER REBUFFED OVER LETTER TO PARENTS

The arrogant actions of "Responsible" Society member, Mr Maurice Franks, headmaster of Myton School, Leamington Spa, have led to considerable controversy in the area. He arranged corporate membership of the Christian pressure group for the school and wrote to parents of 1,200 pupils asking them to support his stand against "declining moral standards". Councillor Bernard Kirton, chairman of the school governors, commented: "Mary Whitehouse shares similar views. I don't". Another County Councillor, Dr Ian Henderson, is quoted in the local newspaper: "Morality is finding your own way without hurting others, the old John Stuart Mill philosophy".

George Broadhead, spokesman for the Warwickshire Humanist Group, said that the assumptions made by Mr Franks are twofold.

"First, he takes it for granted that all, or a majority of parents are in sympathy with his own narrow moral code.

"Secondly, he assumes, with an arrogance typical of many Christians, that moral behaviour can only be based on religious belief".

Mr Broadhead described the "Responsible" Society as one of a coterie of self-righteous pressure groups which "hanker after the Victorian-style family unit where wives and children are reduced to unquestioning chattels of a lordly paterfamilias.

"But since the subjection of women is no longer feasible to that extent, they campaign vigorously to assert and uphold parental authority, indignantly denying that children, including teenagers, should have any rights, or even any opinions, which conflict with their parents' views or wishes.

"The parents of course are visualised as being of a certain sort: properly married and monogamous; morally sound (i.e. practising Christians) and, above all, implacably opposed to their daughters being on the Pill.

"That a headmaster should be permitted to inflict his own antediluvian prejudices on parents and children by arranging off his own bat corporate membership of this reactionary society for the school, and sending out its propaganda at ratepayers' expense, is quite outrageous".

Benita Parry, in a letter published by the *Leamington Spa Courier*, said that the "Responsible" Society package was not "an innocent gift to anxious mothers, fathers and community workers.

"For it is what they do not say that tells all. The dogmatic defence of the way of life that existed before the 'permissive society' asks us to accept that all was then well in a world which created and tolerated poverty, racism, exploitation and the build-up of nuclear weapons. . .

Voice of Authority

"The approach of these communications proclaims obedience to authority and prohibits examination of the moral basis to this authority. The paranoid style of both the bulletin and Mr Franks' letter will be familiar to those who have read the literature of the so-called and misnamed 'Moral Majority' in the United States or the Festival of Light in this country. . .

"These campaigners for purity would have us believe that feminists, secular humanists, socialists, artists, writers, producers and directors, who can be shown to deplore the debasement of sex (which is not the same as a dishonest concealment of sex) are of the same ilk as porn-merchants, all godless libertarians united in corrupting a decent society".

Benita Parry pointed out that Maurice Franks is headmaster of a school which has a significant proportion of Asian pupils.

"That he can write and speak about 'the highest

(continued on back page)

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Vol 103 No 5 CONTENTS May 1983

"PURITY" CAMPAIGNER REBUFFED OVER LETTER TO PARENTS	65
NEWS AND NOTES	66
Standing up for Jesus; Christian Meddlers; Child's Play; Operation (White) Rabbit	
THE POLICE BILL— A THREAT TO FREEDOM	68
Ted McFadyen	
"FOR NO REASON WHATEVER SHOULD THE CHAIN BE BROKEN"	70
Sarah Lawson	
SECT MANIA	71
Terry Liddle	
THE CONFUSED GENERATION	72
James Hemming	
JOTTINGS MADE DURING A VISIT TO NEW ZEALAND	73
Beatrice Clarke	
FREETHINKER REVIEWS	74
BOOKS	
Inquest on the Shroud of Turin, by Joe Nickell Reviewer: Barbara Smoker	
Man's Search for Himself, by Rollo May Reviewer: Michael Duane	
TELEVISION	
A Message From the Falklands Reviewer: Peter Cotes	
LETTERS	77
Francis Bennion, A. E. Smith	
GAY ATHEISTS AND CHRISTIANS IN LIVELY DEBATE	78
OBITUARY	79
DPP URGED TO IGNORE HYSTERIA OVER "MORNING AFTER" PILL	80

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NEWS

STANDING UP FOR JESUS

Tony Benn, MP, constantly vilified and misrepresented by Fleet Street guttersnipes who are not fit to wipe his boots, was treated with a degree of civility on the occasion of his recent lecture at St James's Church, Piccadilly. By some odd mischance the Press accurately reported his argument for disestablishment of the Church of England, although *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* weighed in against any suggestion that this important sector of the State machine should be completely privatised.

However, most commentators overlooked Mr Benn's confession that he had, over the years, "become more and more interested in the relevance of the social teachings of Jesus the carpenter of Nazareth, about peace, justice and the brotherhood and sisterhood of humanity, from which so much of our Socialist faith derives . . . I regard myself as a serious student of the teachings of Jesus — nothing more and nothing less".

Tony Benn spoke of Jesus in general rather than specific terms. This lack of detail is understandable. There is nothing new about it either. Generations of Christian Socialists and other opportunists have paraded a nebulous figure of doubtful lineage, contradictory birth narratives and egotistical pretensions to divinity, as the greatest social reformer, revolutionary and pacifist of all time.

The social teachings of Jesus are as relevant as can be expected of an itinerant preacher who accepted all forms of superstition, had little concern for the affairs of this world believing that "the kingdom of God is at hand" and who extolled the virtue of meekness. Certainly they do not merit serious study or adulation by radicals and reformers.

The Sermon on the Mount is often advanced as supreme example of the teachings of Jesus. But if there were any of a militant tendency who went along to hear his plans for social revolution they must have been disappointed. "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them", he told his followers. The abolition of slavery, an end to the subjugation of women and the advancement of human rights were not on the agenda that day.

Pacifists often claim that Jesus was the first and greatest of their number. But Jesus had a dusty answer for anyone who assumed that he had come to bring peace on earth: "No, I tell you, but rather division; for henceforth in one house will five be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided, father against son and son against father". Christianity still divides nations, communi-

AND NOTES

ties and families.

The chief concern of Jesus was inculcating the importance of personal salvation, not the development of social policy. He urged obedience to the powers that be, however tyrannical; acceptance of, rather than resistance to oppression; contentment with the position, however inferior, that human beings found themselves in. He counselled: "... do not be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself". Nowadays we hear similar platitudes from Mr Benn's political enemies as they deliberately wreck the nation's educational and welfare services.

Whether the New Testament Jesus is a mythical, historical or composite figure has been disputed for centuries. But the black record of his followers and their churches is beyond dispute. In all the struggles for freedom, justice and progress they have been on the side of tyranny, oppression and conservatism.

Tony Benn, by perpetuating the legend of Jesus the social reformer, inadvertently allies himself with reactionary elements in society. For they will exploit his interest in "the social teachings of Jesus", not to advance progress and human betterment but to encourage others to waste their talent and energy promoting religious superstition.

Mr Benn's views on disestablishment, although original, were cogently presented and have revived discussion on the relationship of Church and State. This is particularly valuable at a time when Rome's take-over bid for the Church of England, by law established and by Anglo-Catholics undermined, proceeds apace. But it is a pity that he considered it necessary to sugar the disestablishment pill with a tribute to the Galilean chippy.

Public Meeting

DISESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Speakers:

CANON COLIN BUCHANAN
BRIAN SEDGEMORE

Chair:

Barbara Smoker

MONDAY, 13 JUNE, 7.30 pm

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
Holborn, London WC1

Organised by the National Secular Society,
702 Holloway Road, London N19,
telephone 01-272 1266

Police made 60 arrests and troops were called out to quell religious riots in Karachi last month. Shops, houses and cars were burned as rival Muslim groups battled over the ownership of a mosque. Seven people were killed and many injured in a long-running battle between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims.

CHRISTIAN MEDDLERS

Physicians of antiquity taught that insanity was due to brain disease. But where Christianity triumphed it was held to result from possession by evil spirits. Of course such superstitious beliefs were not exclusive to the Christian religion. But Christians conducted their reign of terror against the supposed evil forces with a ferocity that caused incalculable mental anguish to millions.

In ages of Christian dominance investigating the cause of illness was a dangerous business to physicians who might have arrived at conclusions that were not in accord with biblical teachings. Medical discoveries were denounced as "flying in the face of Providence". So for centuries the bones of a saint (even a mythical figure) were regarded as being more efficacious than medicine; a scriptural quotation more authoritative than a scientific treatise; a lifelong shunning of soap and water was not an indication of mental instability but evidence of holiness.

Belief in evil spirits is a delusion that many enlightened Christians would prefer to forget. But that is easier said than done in view of the New Testament "fact" that Jesus cast out evil spirits. Paul believed in them and the Church did battle with demons for centuries.

During the last 20 years there have been disturbing manifestations of this form of superstition, sometimes with tragic results. Now it is reported that the Matthew Trust, a mental health pressure group, is recommending exorcism at Britain's four special security hospitals. Members of the Trust's council include Lord Longford, the Bishop of Chester and Malcolm Muggeridge. (The latter, after trying the holy water temperature for some years, was recently received into the Roman Catholic Church.)

Peter Thompson, director of the Matthew Trust, believes that a significant number of patients at Broadmoor, Moss Side, Park Lane and Rampton may be victims of "spiritual possession". Mr Thompson is a former Broadmoor patient. After leaving that establishment he became Press officer for the Festival of Light.

Dr Edgar Udwin, medical director at Broadmoor, has expressed his firm opposition to the exorcism proposal. It is to be hoped that other medical authorities will resist any attempt to impose Christian mumbo-jumbo on patients and those responsible for them.

CHILD'S PLAY

A notice on the door of Mr and Mrs di Giacomo's flat in Florence informs visitors: "Here the Madonna weeps. Visiting hours 9.30-12.30 and 16.30-19.30".

Madonnas tend to be tearful of eye in Italy, particularly if funds are low or the Communist Party looks like doing well in an election. The latest craze started when Tonino, the di Giacomo's ten-year-old son, announced that the Madonna in his parents' bedroom turns the waterworks on for him. She also talks to Tonino through her tears (which he collects in a sugar bowl) and told him that by drinking them he will have the power to cure illness by touch.

A procession of sick people have been calling to collect some of the miraculous tears.

The Archbishop of Florence has taken an interest in the "miracle", although it is not clear if this arises from belief in the boy's story or a desire to protect the Church from future embarrassment. He met the family at a convent and had a long talk with Tonino. But although the lad is only ten, he exercised his proprietorial rights and refused to hand over the painting (a mass-produced copy of a 15th-century work by Filippo Lippi) to the Archbishop.

Real tears are being shed by some of the di Giacomo's neighbours. Because of the crowds that gathered outside the block of flats where they live the bingo club has been closed.

OPERATION (WHITE) RABBIT

The Dutch Reformed Church is urging white South Africans to breed more prolifically. The Rev D. T. Moolman, a Church leader in the Eastern Cape, has criticised white couples who "wanted the pleasure of sex but not the responsibility of children".

The Church's encouragement to whites to increase the size of their families comes at a time when the Government is threatening to enforce birth control if black people do not reduce the size of their families. At present, white couples produce 2.7 children per family and the Rev Moolman says this should be increased to four.

If the present birth rates are maintained there will be in 1985 about five million whites, one million Indians, three and a half million coloureds and 24 million Africans.

The Dutch Reformed Church is one of the main props of apartheid in South Africa. It has been expelled from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

An investigation conducted in The Netherlands has revealed that more than 44 per cent of the population aged 16 and over do not belong to any church. Only 22 per cent attend church at least once a week.

The Police Bill—

Under the heading "Too Much Power for the Police", the following comment appeared in a national daily paper on 15 March:

A Bill now before Parliament would give the police wide and new powers to search and seize confidential information from innocent citizens. It would enable them on the authority of a circuit judge to ferret through doctors' case books. Rummage in priests' records. Impound reporters' notes. Crime is on the increase. But would this illiberal measure really do anything to help the police catch more burglars, muggers, pickpockets and car thieves? We do not believe that it would.

Ah well, you will say, a typical liberal comment from the *Guardian*. But it wasn't. It was the *Daily Mail*, that ardent supporter of law 'n' order, that stout defender of the police, that voiced this opinion.

Something must be wrong, you say? Indeed it is. For after an almost stealthy passage of the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill through its first stages in the Commons, unnoticed by almost everybody, the Committee stage of the Bill has triggered off protests about it from the British Medical Association, the Criminal Bar Association, the Law Society, the National Association of Probation Officers, the National Union of Journalists, and indeed church people—Anglican Bishops, Roman Catholic Bishops, and the Methodist Conference.

Some comments made by eminent persons have also been remarkable. A former Law Lord, Lord Salmon, was quoted in the *Guardian* as saying: "This Bill is going to do a great deal to harm the liberty of the subject". And the Suffragan Bishop of Shrewsbury, the Rt Rev Leslie Lloyd Rees, said he was prepared to go to prison if the Bill became law and police attempted to search his premises.

So what is it all about? How is it that, in the "free and democratic society" we're constantly being told we live in by the Conservatives, we can find ourselves confronted, with next to no warning, with a Bill outlining powers described by the GLC Police Committee Support Unit as "falling only just short of those found in the Prevention of Terrorism Act"?

The Bill's origins have been presented as being contained in the Report of the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure; when introducing the Bill in the Commons the Home Secretary claimed: "The Bill appears after a prolonged and intensive period of consultation". In fact, many of the proposals in the Bill originate neither from the Royal Commission Report nor from the Home Office's response to it. Some of the Report's recommendations have been adopted and some amended; most important is the inclusion of new police powers that were *not* considered in the Royal Commission Report and have only become public with the publication of the Bill.

a Threat to Freedom

TED McFADYEN

So what are the major provisions of the Bill that have caused all the uproar? Those relating to *powers of detention* are probably the most startling (though not, as we shall discuss later, those that have prompted the most protest).

The Bill seeks new powers to hold a suspected person for up to 48 hours without being allowed access to a solicitor or the courts; and new powers of detention for questioning of suspected persons in police custody *for up to 96 hours*. (The current situation is that there is a 24-hour period of detention between arrest and charge in non-serious cases, and "as soon as is practicable" in serious cases.) The GLC Police Committee Support Unit has commented on this: "The provisions on detention contain one of the most serious attacks on the liberty of the subject". And in the January 1983 issue of *Policing London*, the Committee comments further: "The provisions in the Bill relating to access to legal advice contain so many exceptions that they are virtually meaningless".

Provisions relating to *stop and search* are also disturbing. Under the present law the police already have the power to stop and search a person reasonably suspected of possessing illegal drugs, firearms, items connected with terrorism, and—in London and some other major cities—stolen goods. Under the new Bill the police may also have the power to stop and search someone reasonably suspected of carrying an offensive weapon, or articles which could be used for theft or burglary. The worrying point here is that the definition of "an offensive weapon" is extremely vague. It could be any weapon which could be used offensively — banner poles or placards, umbrellas or combs, keys or even credit cards.

The new power to stop and search also applies to vehicles. Coaches going to CND demonstrations or trade union marches or any sort of radical event could be stopped and searched if police decided it was in their interest to do so. It is easy to see that this power could be used as a delaying tactic, to prevent people arriving at demos on time.

Powers of arrest may also be extended. Under the present law, the police have the power to arrest without a warrant someone reasonably suspected of committing an arrestable offence (i.e., an offence carrying at least five years in prison), and there are other statutory powers to arrest without warrant. The Bill proposes a major extension of the powers of arrest, by giving the police a new power to arrest for any offence where the suspect refuses to identify him/herself, or where the police officer believes that the name and address given are false, or (amongst other possibilities) for obstructing the highway, or affronting public decency.

But it is Clause 10, that which deals with police powers for inspecting confidential records, that has aroused the storm of protest. The Bill suggests a new power for a magistrate to authorise a search of premises where the owner is *not* suspected of an offence, in order to find evidence relating to "a serious arrestable offence". This new power would apply to the confidential records of professional advisers and other people likely to receive information in confidence, such as doctors, priests, social workers and so on. It is primarily this proposed power that has prompted the organisations we mentioned earlier to press for amendments to the Bill.

The National Council for Civil Liberties has been spearheading the campaign against the Bill. They have played a major part in alerting the professional organisations and the public generally to the Bill, and thus in ensuring the publicity which we have seen in the past few weeks. Currently the NCCL is also briefing members of the House of Lords, and also the three Opposition parties. In addition they have produced leaflets, briefings, articles for the Press, and provided speakers for many meetings on the subject.

Currently, at the time of writing (mid-April), the Bill has finished its Committee stage in the House of Commons. In early May it moves to the House of Lords; the NCCL is hoping that, as a result of pressure from the Law Lords, there may be some amendment relating to the proposed powers of detention in police custody, especially the provision for 96 hours detention in serious cases between arrest and charge. But the chances of materially affecting other sections of the Bill are not seen as high.

For humanists who feel strongly about the question of civil liberties and police powers, it is still not too late to protest. The National Council for Civil Liberties, 21 Tabard Street, London SE1 (telephone 01-403 3888), will be happy to provide leaflets, briefings, and general practical advice on how to campaign against the Bill.

● *As we were going to press it was announced in the House of Commons that the Government had decided to exclude from the scope of the Bill all confidential records of the medical profession, ministers of religion, social workers and other voluntary bodies with similar roles. The same will apply to journalists who will not now be required to reveal their sources. While welcoming these concessions, which came in the wake of enormous public pressure, it is disturbing that if the Bill is passed even in its amended form (which seems likely) it will give extensive new powers to the police.*

"For no Reason Whatever Should the Chain be Broken"

SARAH LAWSON

Most people receive at least one chain letter in a lifetime and then sensibly consign it to the waste paper basket. But to the gullible, the fearful, or the superstitious, receipt of such an unsolicited missive can be a distressing experience.

During my teens in Indiana I had a dozen pen-pals who wrote to me more or less regularly. We exchanged photographs and such exciting personal information as our height and favourite colour. We mentioned our friends at school and no doubt went into the trivia of our uneventful lives in excruciating detail. Occasionally I would get a chain letter from one of them. One chain involved sending a handkerchief to the top name on the list, adding my own name to the end of the list, and then collecting a haul of handkerchiefs from the epistolary progeny of the six friends to whom I sent the chain. (It all went wrong somewhere: I never got any handkerchiefs, not even one.)

Another one I remember adopted a hectoring tone. "Send this letter on to ten people, or else", it seemed to say. If I didn't do this, something very bad was likely to happen, very bad indeed. There were examples of people who had kept the letter. They lost money, they and their families had accidents, caught diseases, died, they lost their jobs or their homes. Their names were sometimes given, and one was an American general in the Philippines. His wife died soon after he received the letter and failed to send it on. Those who did continue the chain won lotteries and in general had wonderful financial luck.

Even then I saw the absurdity of these claims. Who had written this letter in the first place? How had he known, sitting down before his blank sheet of paper, that the thing would have "been around the world nine times"? How did he know about the unfortunate American general and the rest of the variously sick, poor, jobless, or dead people who had broken the chain? Who could take this surrealist nonsense seriously?

I was reminded of this a few weeks ago when I received, anonymously from Willesden, where I do not know anyone, the descendant of that old chain letter. Here was the same ludicrous threat of what had happened to these victims of bad luck after, but also apparently before, the writing of this self-important letter. It was, as nearly as I could tell, the very same letter, allowing for a few changes that may have crept into it in 25 years. There is a blank space at the top and under it the words: "This quote

has been sent to you for good luck". Somewhere along the line the quote has disappeared — failed, perhaps, to catch some vital plane on one of those nine (or more) trips around the world. "The original is from The Netherlands", says the first paragraph, but the second adds confusingly: "This chain comes from Venezuela and was written by Soul Anthony De Sholl, a missionary in South America".

Twenty-five years ago I probably sent copies of the letter to some of my teenage pen-pals and then sat back to await my good luck, the sudden fortune, the dramatic turn of events in my young and circumscribed life. But now, what shall I do with it in my sceptical maturity, no longer having pen-pals? How could I send this tripe to anyone I know, let alone 20 people? And who sent it to me — what anonymous acquaintance afraid not to send it on, but afraid to admit to superstition?

Chain of Superstition

But suppose, just *suppose* for a moment that something bad did happen; I know perfectly well that this letter cannot cause any kind of "luck", good, bad, or indifferent, but yet: "You will receive good luck within four days of receiving this letter, providing you will in turn send it back out. *This is no joke* . . . Devan Parmila received the chain and not believing it, threw it away. Nine days later, he died". Poor old Devan Parmila. Poor old General Welch in the Philippines. Lucky old Constantine Dios, who received the chain in 1930. "He asked his secretary to make 20 copies and send them. A few days later, he won a lottery for \$2,000,000 in his country". Cause and effect: thunder makes the milk go sour, incantations make the sun come up, sacrifices end the drought.

Like a pagan taunting the gods, I put the chain letter in my informal "pending" tray, where things have been known to stay for months. The four days passed quickly. OK, bad luck, where are you?

Last week I learned that I had won £50 in a literary competition. So much for the chain letter. Or would I have won £200 with its help? If I had sent the wretched thing on, would this prize seem like the quick *quid pro quo* of Dame Fortune? There would then perhaps seem to be a weird and uncomfortable causality. If something is going to cause something else, I want to see the gears, or at least I want to see a place where gears might plausibly be.

(continued on next page)

In the United States of born-again Christian Ronald Reagan, fundamentalist sects are growing at an alarming rate and many of them are developing features "chillingly" similar to the People's Temple before the mass suicide at Jonestown, says a psychologist, Lowell Streiker, who treats ex-members of these violent cults.

A growing band of defectors have reported that the sects are heavily armed and are training for guerilla warfare in the belief that soon will come the "great tribulation" in which they must defend themselves and their property from the Anti-Christ. "The warnings and appeals which I am receiving from ex-members of these sects and the families of present members are chillingly similar to what I was hearing from concerned relatives of People's Temple members in the six-month period immediately preceding the Jonestown tragedy", Streiker declares. He played a leading role in counselling survivors and their families after Jim Jones and 900 of his followers, convinced there would be an attack on them at any moment, killed themselves. Later he founded the Californian-based Freedom Counselling Centre which undertakes world-wide research into cults and helps their victims.

The new sects are described by Streiker as "ultra-fundamentalist, charismatic deliverance groups". They grew out of traditional American fundamentalist groups, but "have taken the cardinal doctrines

of evangelical fundamentalism to an aberrant extreme".

Streiker continues: "I am dealing with phenomena that are unbelievable. They literally believe there are witches and that witches should be burned. We have reports from every part of the country about exorcisms taking place. A person loses his job or a cow gets sick—that is caused by a demon and it has to be expelled. It's like the Dark Ages. I have seen a list recently of eight children who died in fundamentalist groups recently because of abuse. Children are not vaccinated. God is the only healer. They do not treat operable tumours. We are facing new outbreaks of polio".

According to Streiker, the membership of these dangerous sects ranges from a handful to several thousand. A Vietnam war veteran who had quit one of the sects told the psychologist that it had enough guns and ammunition to arm 20,000 people. The man claimed to have taken part in military training and the stockpiling of weapons at various sites all across America. Recently there have been violent episodes involving sect members in Memphis and elsewhere.

Streiker states that the sects are difficult to identify because often they do not name themselves and seek to retain their anonymity by telling unashamed lies. Members may be ordinary citizens, but once a sect gets a grip on them it takes over their income and property. Members follow the sect leader blindly and obey orders without question, giving up jobs and homes if told to do so.

One of the largest of the sects has been called by non-members "the shepherding movement". It is thought to have some 30,000 members but remains hidden from public scrutiny because it has no name and its members deny it exists.

Streiker says the new sects, unlike older groups such as the Moonies, do not even make the pretence of being a conventional religion. He states, "They are blatant in the manner in which they express their vision that they are above the law. All cults really believe they are above the law, but these ultra-fundamentalist sects have no restraint about showing it".

As far as we can tell there are no such sects in Britain. But it may only be a matter of time before they cross the Atlantic.

"For no Reason Whatever. . ."

The letter was, could only be, an odd little eccentric wheel connected to nothing whatever — no invisible driving rods, no belts, no teeth fitting into other teeth. To believe in its efficacy would be to believe that incantations make the sun come up.

But where do these chains come from? Could this really be the same as the one I received all those years ago? If it had "been around the world nine times" then, what has it been doing in the meantime? Who composed it, and why? What accounts for the curious urge to confer "luck" on an endless string of strangers and to pretend to know the effect before the cause exists?

The letter has left "pending" and gone to my collection of shopping-list fodder. It would be charming to think of people all over the world sending letters to one another until everyone became a link in a stupendous chain of humanity, but it is infinitely less charming to think of them offering good luck under certain conditions, and extinction or poverty otherwise.

The Rev Denys Goodman, Rural Dean of Bath, has urged theatregoers to boycott performances of "Lady Chatterley's Lover" at the city's historic Theatre Royal. He described the production as "regrettable and unnecessary". It has been highly praised by critics and audiences in other parts of the country.

In this article, based on a lecture at the Golden Jubilee conference of the Progressive League, Dr Hemming examines some of the fundamental questions facing humanity today. While not despairing over the human condition, he warns against the single, simplistic solution to problems like over-population, violence in society, exploitation and the misuse of resources.

We cannot do better as members of the Progressive League than to start with a flash-back to one of its original supporters—H. G. Wells. Wells' earlier work had been marked by great optimism, but, from 1939 to his death in 1946, H. G. was deeply engaged in combatting the confusion, inconsistencies and hypocrisy that, even then, were plainly impeding the advance of mankind and womankind. Then, in 1945, the year before his death, he published *Mind at the End of its Tether* in which he made the case that human problems had outrun human capacities; that the species, *Homo Sapiens*, was losing grip, was failing to adapt fast enough, was in danger of extinction.

Now, 40 years later, the same question hangs over our heads, but in a more acute form. Today humanity is punch-drunk with problems—personal, national, global—as never before in history. Hence the widespread sense of helplessness and hopelessness and the flight into violence, alcoholism, drugs (both the approved and not-approved kinds), depression and suicide. If we compare the present with the swinging, self-assured Sixties, we are at once aware of the depth of the frustration and despondency that has intensified across the world. We cannot any longer see a clear way forward. We feel blocked in a cul-de-sac.

The message from all that is clear enough: adapt or perish, as Wells pointed out. And that is not just in relationship to the obscene threat of nuclear annihilation. If there were no nuclear weapons, we should still be involved in potentially terminal crises: world over-population, the destruction of the environment, the squandering of irreplaceable resources, economic chaos, the inability to offer a significant role to millions of workless people, the appalling gap between the have and have-not populations, which produces, at the same time, obesity clinics in the wealthy nations and malnutrition clinics in the poor ones.

H. G. Wells saw all this coming. Now we are right in the middle of it. What can we do? This is for sure—there are no single solutions. It is fatuous to see the answer in monetarism, authoritarian communism, a return to Christian fundamentalism,

or in any other of the over-simplified, and therefore dangerous, solutions that are being bandied about. The more confused people are the more they snatch at single solutions, or charismatic leaders, to get them through; but the answer does not lie in that direction. Instead, we should look for patterns of cooperative action that can regenerate hope by dealing simultaneously with several problem areas.

For a start, two issues should be at the top of every political agenda: (1) Ending the arms race, (2) The conservation of the planet. The two are inter-linked because we cannot defend the world from the gradual fatal erosion of the planet which is at present taking place without releasing for creative purposes some of the fantastic wealth which is now being squandered on weapons of destruction.

Supposing for a moment that an international operation was launched directed to taking water and electricity to all the arid areas of the world. Such a vast project could be funded by a few per cent of the annual armaments budget and also would give the displaced resources of the armaments industry something useful to do. More fertile land would raise the standard of living world-wide, lead to a decrease in population growth—which follows better living standards—and increase the market for the consumer goods which the more technological nations are so good at producing but, now, do not know what to do with.

A New Style of Leadership

This is not Utopian fancy but practical possibility—a ten-year project to transform the world. All it needs is a statesman bold enough and imaginative enough to give a lead to the world. It could even be the next British Prime Minister. The effect upon the morale of the world of seeing the great powers co-operating for the good of mankind would be stupendous. As we can see in any family, any institution, any industry, any political party, any nation, division is itself depressing and demoralising. Conversely, a sense of unity and cooperation is stimulating and exciting.

I offer that idea not as *the* cure-all but as an example of the sort of solutions for which we should be looking today—solutions that are productive in themselves and which tackle several problems at the same time.

Another multiform approach—this time at a national level—could be a drive to replace the dominant style of leadership by the democratic style of leadership in all our institutions. Participant instead of hierarchical organisation is more productive and, for all the individuals concerned, more fulfilling. This has been established for years, but

we still muddle along without any clarity of social action to assure that leadership roles are made available *only* to the democratic/participant style of leader. It is arguable that autocratic leadership does more damage annually in this country—and other countries—than any other social factor.

A third broad project—again at the global level—would be to set to work on an International Declaration of Human Values. All the traditional ideological/religious systems are, at present, in acute conflict, if not in collapse. We need a system of agreed values that rises above all those wrangles and can be agreed as a moral blueprint for mankind. It is a necessary partner to the Declaration of

Human Rights. The United Nations should take responsibility for this initiative and encourage worldwide debate on the issues involved.

So, I would suggest, we of this confused generation should not give up in despair. If mind is at the end of its tether then, perhaps, we have to cut the tether—start thinking and acting in new, more comprehensive ways. The Progressive League has taken a useful part in solving many of the problems that harassed society at the time Wells was writing. But one great problem—the problem of adapting to our vastly changed world—is still with us. I hope that the P.L. will take this particular issue on board in the years ahead.

Jottings Made During a Visit to New Zealand

BEATRICE CLARKE

"More Buddhists, Agnostics as Main Churches Slide", announced the Wellington *Evening Post* in half inch black headlines. There followed a report that New Zealand's atheists and buddhists have sharply increased in number; this information was taken from the 1981 census figures. It revealed that the question "Religion" on the census form continues to infuriate many people and there was a very significant increase since the 1976 census in those who do not wish to specify any religion. Out of a population of about three million people, approximately 46,000 now claim to be either agnostic or atheist.

Jim Lakin, retired Head of the Adult Education Department of Victoria University, Wellington, drove me to the humanists' annual barbecue at the home of Mr and Mrs van Gorkem, about 40 miles out of Wellington. There I heard about the work of the group and their sponsorship of a Kampuchean family named Lao. The New Zealand Government had allowed 150 Kampuchean refugees to settle there, provided each family was sponsored by an organisation. Although few in number, the Wellington humanists took on the formidable task of being responsible for the family—parents and two children—for accommodation, practical advice on employment as well as teaching them the English language. They are now considering the possibility of helping to bring the elderly grandparents to join the family.

Another guest that afternoon was Jack Mulheron, secretary of the Committee for the Defence of Secular Education. I had already read his rejoinders in the Wellington newspaper, *Dominion*, to criticism that had been made of his views on integrated schools. Jack Mulheron, formerly a teacher, but now in government administration, explained how he first came across the invidious introduction of Roman Catholic doctrinal teaching in the schools through their "integrated schools" lobby, without the public being aware of what was going on. Taxpayers' money

was being used not only to maintain privilege but to promote sectarian doctrine.

He added that even the powerful Presbyterian Church was concerned about this matter. Secular state schools were being closed down due to falling numbers and teachers were unemployed with very little possibility of obtaining posts in Roman Catholic "integrated" schools.

From Australia we heard, through the *Sydney Morning Herald*, that at a Hare Krishna school unwitting children were being trained to become Krishna preachers wandering the city streets; and taxpayers subsidise such religious indoctrination.

Back again to the Wellington *Evening Post* with a headline: "Blonde Model Stranded by Identity Swap".

The story concerned a 19-year-old Swedish model who was duped by her Columbian lover into visiting New Zealand. He later used her passport and ticket to smuggle out of the country a Columbian lady named Susie Schuster before American drug squad representatives had her extradited to face charges of conspiracy in the illegal import of cocaine into the United States and laundering millions of dollars of drug syndicate money.

Susie Schuster had already been freed by the New Zealand authorities although a High Court judge had granted the American application for her extradition. She had tried to leave New Zealand several times but was warned that the American authorities would arrest her wherever she landed on her way back to Columbia.

Interviewed about her experience in prison, the socialite Susie recalled: "I had to be strong and I gained strength through my bible and God. . . I prayed a hundred times a day . . . I reached him through the bible and he helped me through".

Cocaine pedlars now have God on their side—if only they pray!

BOOKS

INQUEST ON THE SHROUD OF TURIN by Joe Nickell. Prometheus Books.

Dethroned King Umberto of Italy, who owned the Turin Shroud by inheritance, has recently been in the news by dying, having changed his will shortly before his death so as to leave the "shroud" to the Vatican. Some years ago he had given permission for a small piece of the cloth to be subjected to carbon-dating. This was never carried out, however, as Umberto's permission was vetoed by the Archbishop of Turin, as custodian of the relic—supposedly on account of anti-royalist politics, but more likely, perhaps, because he did not share the ex-king's simple faith that the authenticity of the relic would be vindicated by scientific dating. The Archbishop probably feared that the age of the linen would turn out to be something in the region of 600 years rather than 2,000—in which case, interest in it would be sure to wane, and with it the income of the archbishopric. Whether the Pope will now allow carbon-dating of his new possession is a matter for speculation. Even without it, the case for the "shroud" has already been torn to shreds—as this, the latest book on the subject, reveals.

Literature on the Shroud of Turin is mostly either written for the gullible by the con-man or for the gullible by the greater gullible. Here, however, is the antidote.

Not only does Mr Nickell write from a sceptical viewpoint; he bases his case on the research of experts in relevant disciplines, using proper scientific methodology. The result is such an effective exposure of the medieval fake—and, more pertinently, of the extravagant arguments made on its behalf in recent years—that it is indeed the Shroud book to end all Shroud books.

For that very reason, however, it is unlikely to enjoy the popularity of its predecessors. Very few of the tens of thousands of people in America and Britain who have read the books purporting to prove the authenticity of the shroud, let alone the millions who have seen the film about it—*The Silent Witness*—on television will be bothered to read a book on the other side. And what film company or TV production unit would consider "The Spurious Witness" worth making? Sensational fiction has a more ready market than cold fact.

Besides, human gullibility being what it is, many people could read this book, with its complete demolition of the case for shroud-belief, and still manage to explain away the facts in favour of the fiction.

Therefore, whilst admiring the American thoroughness with which a panel of seven relevant experts has investigated and reported the evidence, I feel that

FREETHINKER

there are worthier projects on which to expend so much high-powered effort. Even if the book succeeds in silencing the professional shroud-pushers, people generally will go on remembering sensational claims rather than the refutation of them. There is always some other superstition ready to take the place of the one refuted. Are sceptics to devote their lives to refuting superstitions, one by one?

However, since the work on this one has been done, the book is certainly worth reading. Although its basic line of argument is not new—I myself made many of the same points in my article, "No Shroud of Evidence", in *The Freethinker* of May 1978—argument that was based previously on non-super-natural possibilities is here based on scientific evidence. In this age of experts—especially in the USA—common sense is not enough: it has to be backed up by expert opinion to cancel out that of the pundits whose professional methodology succumbs to wishful thinking in favour of magic.

The main body of pro-shroud scientists shown up in this book is the Shroud of Turin Research Project (STURP), set up in the USA in 1977 with a panel membership of 40 scientists, said at the time to comprise "Baptists, Lutherans, Mormons, Episcopalians, Jews, Roman Catholics, and agnostics". An American rationalist, Steven Schafersman, who queried the inclusion of agnostics, was told "Yes, STURP does have one agnostic". One agnostic among 40 scientists! Even so, a few of the selected members (notably the distinguished microanalyst, Dr Walter McCrone, who discovered traces of pigment on the cloth) were later to abandon belief in the "shroud" as their investigations proceeded—whereupon they found they had been "drummed out" of the team.

Anatomical deductions from the Jesus image included such unfortunate findings as that one leg must have been considerably shorter than the other, and that the space between the front and back images, to accommodate the top of the head, is so inadequate as to suggest microencephalism. Other anatomical anomalies persuaded a Dr Zugibe (who nevertheless remains a firm believer in the "shroud" hypothesis) that Jesus was afflicted with a rare hereditary disease called Marfan's syndrome!

In my 1978 article I suggested that the available evidence was consistent with a 14th-century artefact made by placing the linen strip over a metal bas-relief figure of the traditional Christ crucified, and—since it was at that time stated (erroneously) that there was no sign of pigment on the cloth—that the image had been imprinted by scorching. Only the

REVIEWS

last part of my theory turns out to be wrong: the actual method of manufacture seems to have been a brass-rubbing technique using iron-oxide pigment, most of which has sloughed off by now but which promoted local yellowing oxidation while in contact with the linen.

Since the book is written as a howdunnit, with the solution in the final pages, the author might well prefer reviewers to refrain from revealing it, but I feel justified in enabling *Freethinker* readers (many of whom would certainly not read the book, however tantalisingly I reviewed it) to tell the forger's secret whenever the subject crops up.

Much of the book is necessarily technical, but it also contains ironic comments that made me laugh—though many of the facts are laughable enough in themselves. In a chapter on medieval relics, the author writes "No less than three churches had the corpse of Mary Magdalene; another had, alas, only her foot". And "Someone, somehow, had obtained a vial of sweat from St Michael when he had contended with Satan".

The Middle Ages, however, had nothing to teach the 20th-century pro-shroud pundits in the matter of absurdity. For instance, an anatomist who took measurements from the shroud in 1946 detected a "slump" in the figure's right shoulder, from which he was able to deduce that the man depicted had been a right-handed carpenter. More recently, the Rev Francis Filas of Chicago claimed that he could make out the marks left by coins placed over the eyes of the shroud figure—and, moreover, that one of them had been minted in the reign of Pontius Pilate in about 29-32 AD. This was widely reported, quite straight, in the media—but not the commonsensical comment by Dr Marvin Mueller of the Las Alamos National Laboratory (one of Mr Nickell's team), that "The magnified weave patterns in the image areas function somewhat as a Rorschach test—one sees what one wants to see". Another shroud-critic, looking for evidence of the alleged coins, said "Yes, and if you look a little more closely, in the upper right-hand corner, you can see Donald Duck . . . and, why, over there, on the left, is Mickey Mouse".

Dr John Robinson (ex-bishop of *Honest to God* fame) appeared in the film *The Silent Witness*, in which he actually stated that the evidence for the cloth's being the genuine Jesus shroud was so overwhelming that "the burden of proof" had now shifted to the sceptic. This was, of course, totally unjustified. Nevertheless, Joe Nickell has risen to the challenge, and all those pompous pro-shroud pundits

should be made to eat his book.

Perhaps, on the other hand, they have already been sufficiently punished by the preposterous advertisement in American tabloids for a "miracle cloth" bearing a replica of the shroud image. Announcing that it is "Guaranteed the Most Powerful Miracle Cloth Ever Created", the advertisement reads:

The "Shroud" is the only cloth that has ever been accredited with possessing astonishing powers so strong, it was once draped over a dead man who immediately revived, as reported by Dr Paul Vignon in his book *The Shroud of Christ*. . . You do not have to just read about other people's miracles. You can have them for your own self. . . This miracle image is on such fine linen cloth that it can very easily be folded down as small as a pocket check book, so that you can take it with you to win at bingo, the races, card games, the casino and other games of chance. Take it with you to buy your lottery tickets and touch it to your entry form when you enter a sweepstake or contest. You will win, or your money back. . . Money will come to you as it never has before.

No doubt the manufacturers of this "miracle cloth" made far more out of it than the manufacturer of the original full-size one. They must have been laughing all the way to the bank. Many of the more serious proponents of the "shroud" were understandably upset by the advertisement, and a group of evangelicals who had offered to raise funds for STURP quickly backed out. But one cannot really commiserate with them: they have been hoist with their own petard.

Mr Nickell's book is both readable and reliable. I have found only one unjustified conclusion in it: the conclusion that, if carbon-dating were carried out and showed that the flax of which the linen was made grew more recently than the alleged lifetime of Jesus, this would finally destroy the case for authenticity. It sounds reasonable enough, and I used to share that assumption myself—till the day I asked an executive member of the British Society for the Turin Shroud how his Society would react if carbon-dating were carried out and it revealed an impossibly late date. "Oh", he nonchalantly replied, "we don't expect the date to come out right: you see, the Resurrection would entail a burst of radioactivity, and that would nullify the tests completely". So they have their excuse ready in advance, rather than be forced by the evidence to relinquish their favourite superstition.

Some people just ask to be duped.

BARBARA SMOKER

Inquest on the Shroud of Turin is published by Prometheus Books, 700 East Amherst Street, Buffalo, NY 14215, USA. It is obtainable in the United Kingdom from Prometheus Books, 10 Crescent View, Loughton, Essex, at £10.95 (including postage).

When this book first appeared in 1953, America, after having condemned the barbarity of the concentration camps and incinerated the populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the name of freedom, was fighting a savage war with the Soviets in the Third World for world domination. It had yet to suffer the humiliations of Vietnam and Watergate.

Statements such as: "We are confident enough of our military strength, but we fight defensively", ring with a strange naiveté for a reader who has just listened to President Reagan's latest outburst against the "evil" of communism, or who has witnessed the steady build-up of nuclear power to a point when each side could obliterate the people of the world 20 times over.

Thirty years ago Rollo May was to the forefront among people of the stature of Maslow, Fromm, Sullivan, Reich and Horney in reformulating some of Freud's central concepts to make them more accessible to ordinary men and women. They made it possible for us to understand the problems of violence, loss of faith, drug addiction and existential despair.

The book retains much of its original freshness and impact, but suffers from the retention of passages couched in the style of 30 years ago. Some re-writing would have undoubtedly increased its appeal today. The first two chapters describe the forms and causes of our anomie—the emptiness, lack of purpose, "other-directedness", the vacuity of T. S. Eliot's "hollow men", and the desperate drive to maintain the appearance of sociability while missing the joy and refreshment of real human contact.

The causes are seen to lie in the loss of those values that inspired Riesman's "inner-directed" man, dramatically portrayed in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, or in the compartmentalisation of life that leads to collapse as in Henrik Ibsen's *The Doll's House*—causes that arise in the breakdown of a particular form of society and in the loosening of the psychological and emotional bonds that had previously held it in a coherent form. It was left to Erik Erikson in *Childhood and Society*, Erich Fromm in *The Fear of Freedom* and Wilhelm Reich in *Character Analysis* to explore the relationships between character structure and the social process in the much more detailed ways that we demand today.

In moving from a description of our predicament to prescriptions for action, May convincingly makes clear the need for each new generation to detach itself from suffocating reliance on the parents and their values and outlines how this may be done without destructive rebellion. But there is an old-fashioned air about his description of the birth of self-consciousness, necessary to begin the process of detachment.

Self-consciousness is not some mysterious faculty or stage of growth; it follows from the child's acquisition of language and the transition from reference to himself by his name, as if he were indicating a third person, to the use of the personal pronoun "I" and "me". The "long-protracted period of infancy and childhood in human life—in contrast to . . . the puppy . . . prepares the child for this difficult task" of becoming a separate individual, but for the simple reason that it takes a long time to build up and perfect the intimate immediacy of linguistic association with sensory experience, especially in the internalised language of thought.

The quality of the self-consciousness is a product of the quality of experience and reflection, these being, in turn, dependent on the values of the society, the quality of the education and the models available to the young person.

Other topics covered in this book are Freedom, Religion and Courage about which Rollo May writes with grace and insight, using many felicitous examples. This is a book for those setting out in life, whether in a professional career or in some lifetime commitment like marriage. It asks questions that too often in the press of living are brushed aside or left for the indefinite future.

MICHAEL DUANE

TELEVISION

A MESSAGE FROM THE FALKLANDS. Yorkshire Television

Perhaps the time will come when the letters and poetry of Lieutenant David Tinker will do for the years ahead (in the event of some of us surviving any possible nuclear holocaust) what the poetry of Edward Thomas, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and Rupert Brooke did for that First World War; called the *Great War*, presumably, because it engulfed the world. Meanwhile, the slaughter, disablement, hardship and sacrifice, entailed in both lives and horror, due to the "little" Falklands expedition, which our PM ordered us to "rejoice" about, has gone on. And one year later, in the new series, *First Tuesday*, televised by ITV at a late hour of night — why must they always give us the most telling programmes, the ones where we are asked to think and feel, so late in the schedules?—the redoubtable Jonathan Dimbleby presented *A Message From the Falklands*, a view of a pointless war (pointless that is from the servicemen's viewpoint, if not the politicians) as seen through the letters and poetry written to his young wife at home in England, and now graphically, posthumously, published in book form, from a young Welsh Lieutenant who perished when his ship, *Glamorgan*, received a direct hit.

LETTERS

They are sad and touching letters that David writes to his "Dear Christine", not often matched, in war writings, for their wit and wisdom and uncanny prophecy of what doom was to come. They make exhilarating reading, whether we are asked to share the few opening deliberately facetious love notes (they all breathe the boy's devotion for the girl) or those warmly but seriously expressed, in the form of despatches from the ship "out there". And so, from the journey en route, young David is laughingly expressing the "throw-away" line and eschewing any attempt by his Government to make him (and his kind) a hero with "We're off to do a bit of wog-bashing", to the arrival and the ghastly truth that is penetrating his mind: "Reality is dawning quickly".

But the anger comes when the victim realises the swindlers' confidence trick: "It is almost like a gigantic spoof".

He is writing regularly whenever he can get the chance, and Margaret McIlroy has already touched in the pages of this paper with great clarity upon the idyllic verse that Tinker was encouraged to write to Christine and his parents during the remaining short time he had left to him. But it is the warning note of the young serviceman's letters, seeing things from on the spot, and being in no two minds about the impending fate of those who would suffer from this expedition, that one is finally left with. The cold anger has now succeeded the fun and high spirits, although it is still "Maggie" and not yet "Mrs Thatcher": "I hope Maggie will have had enough of her war soon. Then we can all go home and join the Ban the Bomb marches".

Later he's insisting, "The war is a dreadful place", and weighing up the political advantages even now with the task force in action, of saving further loss of life. "I doubt whether Mrs Thatcher will compromise—it will end up by giving a million pounds to every Falklander—the news is so completely fuzzy—it all seems such a total waste. . .".

The book is fine from which Mr Dimpleby drew, and based, his programme, representing as it does the most constant indictment of our "rejoicing" Prime Minister's escapade that we have had, apart from the great James Cameron's pieces in the *Guardian* newspaper every Tuesday. And like Cameron's vigilant reminders (surely the best and bravest in contemporary British journalism?) David Tinker's pieces will be long remembered.

PETER COTES

Life after death is the subject of a degree course which starts at St David's University College, Lampeter, Wales, in October. The MA course will examine resurrection and reincarnation.

BRITAIN AND THE FALKLANDS

T. F. Evans (March) claims to review a book about the Falklands war as an impartial observer. He concludes that the war was "fundamentally irrelevant". He says that agreement is possible only on the bravery of the combatants and the sadness of their deaths and injuries. I believe a wider agreement is possible.

In the same issue of "The Freethinker", Barbara Smoker says we can't win against muddled thinking. I want to ask freethinkers to unuddle their thinking about the Argentine invasion of the Falklands.

Here is a factual proposition not one word of which anyone but an opponent of truth could disagree with: on 2 April 1982 the Falklands were forcibly and illegally occupied by troops whose presence the people living there detested.

Here is another true statement: if British military action had not been taken, the Falklands would still be under Argentine rule.

Those two statements are not "fundamentally irrelevant" to the islanders. What T. F. Evans means is that they are "fundamentally irrelevant" to him. But then T. F. Evans is 8,000 miles away from the Falklands, and sleeps safe in his bed at nights. Is his standard really the one for humanists to adopt? It is usually described as "I'm all right Jack".

Barbara Smoker rightly asks for unuddled thinking. This requires us to separate out the two propositions stated above from various other possible propositions about the Falklands, such as "Britain is to blame for not having made her intentions clear", or "Britain made many mistakes in this affair", or "Britain should work towards ultimate transfer of sovereignty by agreement". We should not blur the borderline between the various propositions.

Britain (that is our representative Government) no doubt deserves blame for many things. I think she deserves credit for not leaving some of her people in the lurch just because they were very few—and very far away.

FRANCIS BENNION

KRISHNAMURTI

The article, "The Bishop and the Messiah" (March) requires some amplification regarding the present activities of Krishnamurti. He is not concerned with "Eastern philosophy". He is against all gods and religions and gurus. I really wish I had a mind like his.

A. E. SMITH

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Gay Atheists and Christians in Lively Debate

A challenge thrown out to a gay Church by the Gay Humanist Group led to more than 50 people taking part in a lively debate in the library of Conway Hall, London. **Barry Duke reports.**

The challenge was GHG's response to a report in the London based newspaper, *Capital Gay*, that the Metropolitan Community Church was going to launch a campaign named "Operation Resurrection". According to the report, the Church would be sending groups of their members into gay bars to "witness". American MCC campaigner, the Rev Nancy Wilson, would be coming to London to help launch the operation.

Chris Messenger, secretary of London MCC, was quoted as saying: "We are a pretty heathen country really. Worship in the States is part of their way of life. Our gay population here is much more anti-religious than American lesbians and gays seem to be. We will just be trying to bring Christ and religion into conversation as naturally as possible".

Brian Parry, GHG press secretary, replied: "Gays have probably suffered more because of religious-based bigotry than any other section of society. Quite apart from the fact that there is no logical proof of the existence of the christian god, or any other god, why should we believe that after centuries of persecuting homosexuals Christians are going to turn over a new leaf.

"It is true that many believers now take a more reasonable line on the question of homosexuality. But this has happened not because of any revelations from above but because believers have been forced to drop one article of faith after another in the face of scientific advances and the growth of secularism which has accompanied it. And a good thing too.

"We hope that our colleagues in the Gay Atheist League of America and in similar organisations in other countries will be able to help their nations to achieve the same state of heathenism that Chris Messenger says we have reached here. GHG will certainly be helping in the struggle to deprive religion and all superstition of the disabling power it still retains.

"We intend to challenge the Rev Nancy Wilson to a public debate when she comes to London. Let's see if she can convince people of the relevance of Christianity in a more sober atmosphere than that to be found in bars".

The challenge was accepted and the debate was on the question, "Do Gays Need God?"

Antony Grey, representing GHG, said his first response to the question was to say, "Like a hole in the head!" He went over some of the well known arguments about logical proofs for the existence or

non-existence of god then got down to brass tacks: "The practical reason why I no longer count myself Christian, which I once did, or think that there is a god, is the way in which so many of those who profess Christian belief treat or mistreat their fellow human beings—and in particular their fellow human beings who happen to be gay.

"I've always found that even the most liberal, not to mention the most closeted, of gay Christians, have this great albatross around their neck — traditional sexual morality. And what traditional sexual morality says is that what is right or what is wrong depends on the presence or absence of physical sexual contact—which is only allowed within marriage where it is apparently sinful not to do it, in contrast with all other circumstances where it is sinful if you do do it!"

Christian Voices

He then read some quotes from an American leaflet which included gems like: "I believe in capital punishment and I believe homosexuality is one of those things that could be coupled with murder and other sins" (Dean Wycoff, Moral majority). From Garry Potter of Catholics for Christian Political Action came: "When the Christian majority takes over this country (America) there will be no Satanic churches, no more free distribution of pornography (sex education), no more abortion on demand and no more talk of rights for homosexuals". And from closer to home: "Legalising homosexuality attacks the very cement of society" (Ian Paisley, MP). And: "Nowadays I'm obliged to tell my cadets that the law no longer punishes two consenting adults who have homosexual behaviour in private, but my conscience tells me that I must teach them that it is an abomination in the sight of god" (A Christian policeman in charge of cadet training in his area).

Antony Grey concluded: "I hope I've made it quite clear what label our most persistent and vociferous enemies wear—that of professing Christians. . . By their fruits shall ye know them.

"What are the fruits of evangelicalism? Just some of which I have personally experienced are arrogance, bigotry, condescension, deviousness, fanaticism, humbuggery, ignorance, malice, unscrupulousness and untruthfulness. . . I would like to say to Nancy her real and urgent task doesn't lie in the gay bars of Britain but in the straight churches of America, amongst those homophobic committed Christians who hate us so much because we are the Calibans of their repressed sexuality.

"Mary Renault put her finger on it when she said: 'I have yet to be persuaded that the word com-

EVENTS

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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Queen's Head, Queen's Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 5 June, 5 pm for 5.30 pm. Chris Morey: Church and State.

British Humanist Association. Summer Course at Debden House, Loughton, Essex, 15-19 August. Current and Future Problems of Society: What Can we do? Speakers include John Davoll, Celia Fremlin, Richard Scorer, Harry Stopes-Roe. Approximate cost: £61. Details: Margaret Chisman, 41 Penn Road, London N7, telephone 01-607 4755.

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.

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

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 26 May, 7.45 pm. John Evitt: Unholy Bibles, or Chapmen of Parnassus.

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. Friday, 17 June, 7.45 pm. Judith Phillips: Equal Rights and the EEC.

Scottish Humanist Council. Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Saturday, 21 May, 10 am until 5 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, 22 May, 5.30 pm. Annual General Meeting.

The proposal by a Muslim pressure group to set up five Voluntary Aided Islamic schools in Bradford has caused consternation among educationists and community workers. Now the city's Asian Youth Movement has expressed opposition to the scheme. Mr Johnny Rashid, the Movement's chairman, declared: "Once such a trend develops it might be irreversible and could easily spread to other areas". The views of young Asians should be considered by local education authorities. They did not want to attend "wog schools" and setting up separate schools for Muslims could lead to a racist backlash.

mitted, if analysis is pressed home, will ever be found to mean anything which does not boil down to a state in which something else matters more than truth. There is nothing amusing about committal—the victims of that slaughter lie strewn around. So I for one would like to commit myself to not being too committed!"

Nancy Wilson told her audience that the MCC had about 28,000 members in nine countries, mostly in the USA, and she was one of seven on the board of elders of the denomination. She said she was not here "to drag people out of the pubs and convert them to Christianity but primarily to help in a programme of church renewal for MCC London, MCC Birmingham and MCC Copenhagen.

"I'm a lesbian, a feminist and a Christian", she said, "and there are many places in the world where that seems to many people to be contradictory. But I don't mind embodying what appears to be a contradiction because it's not a contradiction in my own spirit.

"I say in answer to the question, Do Gays Need God?, there are many millions of gay people who think that they do need God. I believe God is angry over the oppression of all peoples, and especially gay and lesbian people. If there is anything that makes God weep and be angry it is the oppression that goes on in the name of God".

Some people felt the GHG members should have shown a bit more anger themselves. It was remarked that humanists in general are too polite when arguing with religious adherents. But good humour prevailed throughout the meeting and it was generally agreed that it had been an enjoyable occasion for everyone.

OBITUARY

Mrs E. Lamont

Elsie Lamont died just before her 93rd birthday and there was a secular committal ceremony at Croydon Crematorium.

George Mephram, chairman of Sutton Humanist Group, writes: Elsie Lamont became a member of Sutton Humanist Group after it was formed in 1956 and was a loyal supporter of its activities. She joined in many of the centres organised by Humanist Holidays and was well known to humanists throughout the country.

Elsie enjoyed her last few days writing to her friends in the humanist and other movements. She was a splendid letter writer and her letters brought a great deal of pleasure to others.

Elsie Lamont will be remembered with much affection and high regard. Her independent spirit and determination to help others in whatever way she felt able, as well as to enjoy what life had to offer her, had been and will remain an example to us all.

DPP Urged to Ignore Hysteria Over "Morning After" Pill

A move by Life, the anti-abortion pressure group, to have the British Pregnancy Advisory Service prosecuted for supplying a "morning after" contraceptive pill has been referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions. Barbara Smoker, president of the National Secular Society, expressed the hope that the DPP will come out firmly against Life's pernicious nonsense. The Society urged the DPP "to take a commonsense view of the matter and not allow Life to waste the time of the courts, to impede the humane work of the clinics and, above all, to force thousands of women to proceed with unwanted pregnancies.

"Underlying the Life hysteria is the old idea that a fertilized human egg has a unique immortal soul—but what if the egg divides a week or so later, to become identical twins or triplets? Do these have only a half or one-third of a soul each? Besides, the number of spontaneous abortions at this stage far exceeds the number of successful pregnancies, and all these millions of fertilized human eggs finish up in the sewers: does the Life lobby suggest that every woman who has a late period should preserve the results for Christian baptism and burial?

"Since the whole course of 'morning-after' contraception has to be completed within 72 hours of the sex act, what we are talking about is a microscopic ball of undifferentiated cells, compared with

which a maggot is a very high form of life indeed. To equate this with a developed, conscious, human baby is utterly absurd".

Diane Munday, British Pregnancy Advisory Service's public relations officer, confirmed that BPAS is continuing to provide this emergency treatment at eight of its advisory service centres throughout the country. Before providing this service, BPAS looked very carefully at the medical information and the legal situation.

"The current Life action is a means of gaining media attention", she said. "BPAS deplores the fact that a pressure group should scare women in this way. We find it ironic that Life is taking this stand over the post-coital pill but not prepared to take similar action over pre-coital IUDs, although it is known that the coil acts in the same way by preventing implantation of a fertilised egg.

"It is doubly ironic that the most prominent of the anti-abortion organisations is opposing a development which could prevent the need for some abortions".

Freethinker Fund

The latest list of contributors is a long one and the monthly total very encouraging. Increasing costs are a constant problem to a journal like *The Freethinker*. But the loyal and generous support of its readers enables *The Freethinker* to celebrate its 102nd birthday this month.

G. A. Berg, £2; G. R. Bigley, £1.40; B. Boulier, £1.40; C. A. Brierley, £20; R. R. Brown, £3; P. R. Buckland, £1.40; B. A. Burfoot, £2.40; E. Cecil, £1.40; G. F. Clarke, £2.40; L. C. Clarke, £2; T. Cornish, £1.40; J. R. Coward, £1.40; E. C. Davis, £1.40; S. Eadie, £6.40; H. G. Easton, £1.40; B. Everest, £2; J. R. Edwards, \$5.50; P. Forrest, £4.40; K. R. Gill, £1.40; W. J. Glennie, £1.40; G. Greig, £32; W. C. Hall, £1.40; D. Harper, £6; J. K. Hawkins, £1.40; D. J. Holdstock, £1.40; H. J. Jakeman, £6.40; M. Lilly, £1.40; C. W. B. Lovett, £1.40; A. J. Martin, £2; G. S. Mellor, £6.40; M. Mephram, £1.40; C. Morey, £1.40; J. A. Morley, £6.40; A. M. Nicholls, £1; A. M. Parry, £3.40; D. F. Paul, £1.40; In memory of J. W. Pendry, £25; T. J. Peters, £3.40; V. S. Petheram, £6.40; P. E. Ponting-Barber, £2.50; P. N. Rogers, £6.66; J. E. Rupp, £21.40; R. I. Saich, £6.40; A. E. Smith, £1.50; M. Smith, £2; F. A. M. Stevenson, £5; R. J. M. Tolhurst, £8; R. K. Torode, £6.40; A. Verlet, £2.40; E. S. West, £1.40.

Total for the period 4 March until 6 April: £213.86 and \$5.50.

"Purity" Campaigner Rebuffed

possible standards of personal conduct' as being those 'based on Christian ethics' demonstrates the arrogance, ignorance and insensitivity of those who would appoint themselves watchdogs of a community's virtue and raises the question of whether his own personal conduct is either moral or responsible".

The "Responsible" Society was formed in 1971. It is part of a network of Christian front organisations which campaign to undermine reforms gained mainly in the 1960s. Sex education is the Society's particular bugaboo and it conducts pop-gun warfare against agencies like the Family Planning Association.

Schools have long been a prime target of fundamentalist Christian groups. The Community Standards Association came unstuck when it attempted to censor books on school reading lists. It is now gratifying to note that the "Responsible" Society's recruiting sergeant in Leamington Spa has been sent off with a flea in his ear.