

The Freethinker

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ANGLICAN CHURCHMAN AND LABOUR MP CALL FOR DISESTABLISHMENT

"The purpose of established religions is to restrain the mind and suppress the imagination in favour of acquiescence and submission to authority—however benign, however tyrannous", Brian Sedgmore, MP, told an audience in Conway Hall, London, shortly after his election as Labour Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch. Speaking at a National Secular Society meeting on the question of Church disestablishment, Mr Sedgmore added: "In established religions, God, hell and heaven dull the senses, numb the mind and direct them to a life hereafter in order to deflect them from the pained conflicts here and now".

Referring to an announcement that Dr Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury, had voted for a Social Democratic Party candidate in the General Election, Mr Sedgmore commented: "Rarely has such an awesome and awkward truth been released by a Church more noted for its belief in supernatural fantasies than in the public disclosures of verifiable facts".

Mr Sedgmore added that since Margaret Thatcher came to power the institutions of State have been assiduously manned by and in the interests of the Conservative Party.

"The parallel between what Thatcher has done with what Communist countries in Eastern Europe do is all too obvious.

"When all the institutions of State, from the Bank of England down to the Citizens Advice Bureau in Reading, are run by Conservative Party placements, the State is not a reflection of the nation but of the Conservative Party. A Church which was an independent moral and spiritual force would not want to identify with such a State, or want its affairs even partly controlled by such a State".

Recalling the memorial service at St Paul's

Cathedral for servicemen who died in the Falklands conflict, Mr Sedgmore said: "Whether those who died did so for their country or for some other malign purpose is for history to say.

"What is indisputable is that the Prime Minister tried to use the memorial service at St Paul's for Party political purposes. And she expressed her displeasure — according to reports by 'spitting blood' — when the Church refused to glory in the slaughter of war and tried to place the death of those concerned in the context of a Christian message for peace".

Mr Sedgmore spoke of the diversity and plurality of religions and cultures in Britain, and an "extraordinary large number of social, political and economic strands which come together to produce moral and ethical responses.

A Very Privileged Church

"The established Church of England is a small but privileged voice in a very big field. By virtue of its established position, its messages are given preferment in our schools, our universities, in our legal system and in many other spheres of public life.

"If the message of the Church of England is strong and convincing then it will stand on its merits, without established privilege, without the coercion that is the inevitable concomitant of that privilege, without the protection of the law which stifles both criticism and ridicule. The blasphemy laws are indeed obscene.

"The plurality and diversity of churches, religions and antichrists in our society provide perhaps the most powerful democratic argument for the disestablishment of the Church. . .

"If things don't change, in 20 years' time we shall

(continued on back page)

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NEWS

A GENERAL REFLECTION

Few freethought voices will be heard in the House of Commons after a General Election which saw the return, with a commanding majority of seats although fewer votes than in 1979, of the most Right-wing and authoritarian Government of the post-war years. Fortunately, Brian Sedgemore captured the new Hackney South and Shoreditch seat for Labour. Renee Short held on in Wolverhampton North East. But the defeat of Christopher Price (Lewisham West) and Patricia Hewitt's failure to take Leicester East were bitter disappointments.

The election campaign was as predictable as the outcome. Labour had to contend with an almost unanimously hostile Press. The Social Democratic Party, fighting its first General Election, realised that the honeymoon with Fleet Street was over, with the newspapers reverting to their usual pro-Conservative bias.

Mrs Thatcher's bandwagon hit an occasional bumpy patch but it was unstoppable. The revelation that the Conservative candidate at Stockton South had been a National Front parliamentary candidate in 1974 was scarcely noticed by a Party that is constantly denouncing extremism.

Social Democrats blamed their misfortunes on the electoral system, although they were quiet on the subject when, until recently, they belonged to a Party that benefits from the first-past-the-post system. There is now wide support for electoral reform. The reformers claim that proportional representation would enable people to vote according to their convictions. But any reform must include a secret ballot to safeguard democratic rights.

However, such reforms are unlikely for a considerable time, and meanwhile the Liberal-SDP Alliance will have to sort out a number of problems. The Alliance held up well at national level, but it was a different story in many constituencies. Liberals with a good record of public work and activity, and who may have nursed a constituency for years, were bitterly resentful when an SDP Johnny-come-lately stepped in and nabbed the parliamentary candidacy. Many of them, hesitant about campaigning for someone whose next move may be joining the Conservatives, went to work in neighbouring constituencies where a Liberal was the Alliance candidate, leaving the SDP candidate to paddle his own canoe. Quite simply, a lot of Liberals don't trust the SDP. Another Party's renegades are dubious allies.

Liberals accepted David Steel's role as second fiddle to Roy Jenkins, but radical elements in the Party — particularly supporters of CND — will not

S AND NOTES

be so accommodating now that the SDP leadership has been taken over (not in a particularly democratic manner) by the snooty and imperious cold warrior, Dr David Owen. He is a very skilful operator, and Mr Steel may discover that the claret glass has been replaced by the poisoned chalice.

Denis Healey caused a rumpus by accusing Mrs Thatcher of glorying in the Falklands slaughter. There is nothing to prove that the Conservative leader actually gloried in the slaughter, although her jingoistic and sycophantic supporters certainly did so. And every name on the casualty list notched up thousands of votes for the Iron Lady. It was fun watching two formidable political thugs doing battle. But Mr Healey should know that the stiletto is often more effective than the bludgeon.

London's Wembley Conference Centre was the venue of a Conservative rally which at times looked like rising to the level of similar gatherings at Nuremburg and Olympia. Mrs Thatcher harangued the faithful. But it was not all heavy politics. A programme of sophisticated entertainment was provided by the comedian Kenny Everett ("Kick Michael Foot's Stick Away"), soft porn film star Robin Asquith, who offered to drop his trousers, Jimmy Tarbuck, Bob Monkhouse and Monty Modlyn. It is noteworthy that Conservatives' artistic standards and tastes have risen with their electoral fortunes.

It should be a matter of profound concern to the humanist movement that within three days of the Conservatives' victory the prospect of a return to capital punishment had become a major topic. Memories of the judicially murdered Derek Bentley and Timothy Evans are fading, but the blood lust is undiminished. It is appropriate that the real prospect of a revival of this barbaric practice comes at a time when we have a Conservative Government led by Mrs Thatcher. For there are no more ardent advocates of the noose than those of the True Blue Rinse Tendency.

Even in these godless times the Lord's Day Observance Society's quaintly named journal, "Joy and Light", relates examples of how the faithful are defending "our Lord and his day". The current issue carries an uplifting report from Northern Ireland (where else?) about a sabbatarian family who stopped Sunday fishing contests on a stretch of the Upper Bann river which they own in Co Armagh. A member of the family said their action was "a personal decision taken in accordance with our Christian beliefs. . . First of all it was swings on Sunday, then fishing. Whatever next?"

ANOTHER CULT

The School of Economic Science, described as a quasi-religious-cum-philosophical cult, has been condemned as evil and corrupt. It has come under attack from several quarters, and the Rev Graham Dowell, Vicar of Hampstead, London, has compared it to the Moonies.

The Rt Rev Michael Marshall, Bishop of Woolwich, claimed last month that he had saved over 30 people from the organisation. He accused its leaders of manipulating followers and wrecking their lives.

The SES is an educational charity which, with the associated Independent Education Association, runs schools and courses in more than a dozen countries. It has four single-sex schools in London. Discipline in the schools is strict and parts of the morning assembly are conducted in Sanskrit.

The Aged Pilgrims Friend Trust has sent out a "no television" directive to its tenants in 12 homes and centres which it owns in various parts of the country. The Trust is officially non-denominational but draws most of its support from the Strict Baptists. Mr John Doggett, chairman of the central council, told residents that the absence of television "enhances the Christian environment of the homes". The ban does not apply to staff and it is known that Mr Doggett and most members of his committee have television sets in their own homes.

VOICES OF REASON

A 17-year-old Muslim pupil at Belle Vue Girls School, Bradford, has criticised attempts to establish Muslim schools in the city. After the secretary of the Muslim Parents' Association had declared on a television programme that "no intelligent, sane, practising Muslim" would disagree about the need for such schools, Bilquis Rehman wrote to *The Times Educational Supplement*: "This is simply not true". She added that pupils who are going through the education system in the city should be consulted.

Bilquis Rehman declared that she was "more than satisfied with the schools that I have attended . . . and the way these schools have adapted to meet the needs of Muslim girls. . . Segregation of Muslim children from other children can only lead to disaster.

"I know we cannot ignore the fact that racial prejudice does exist, but this move would cause great setbacks to the improvement of racial harmony. I also feel that this could lower the educational standards and greatly disadvantage Muslim girls. . .

"It would be a tragedy if Muslim girls were not able to reach their full potential".

She posed the question how segregationists planned to maintain the present standard of education "when

it is unlikely that the present staff would wish to work in a Muslim school and when there is a lack of Muslim teachers in the country”.

Bilquis Rehman is not alone in her opposition to separate schools. A referendum on the proposal that Belle Vue Girls School should become a Muslim Voluntary Aided School was arranged. Only 48 pupils voted in favour and 513 against. An overwhelming majority evidently agree with Bilquis Rehman: “If we are to live, earn and maintain our families in this country then it is absolutely necessary for us to have some idea about Western culture”.

A Bradford teacher told the annual conference of the National Association of Head Teachers in Harrogate last month that she was breaking the law by not meeting the requirements of the 1944 Education Act. Mrs Shirley Woodman was proposing a motion calling on the Government to repeal the section of the Act which makes religious assembly and education and worship compulsory in schools. Mrs Woodman told the delegates that the Act was passed when Britain was a predominantly Christian country. “Many of our colleagues in multifaith areas have been breaking the law for some time”, she said.

The conference accepted an amendment calling for a working party to consider the question and report next year.

MOONIES RETREAT

The Unification Church has decided to call it a day in Britain. This country is no longer their main European base, and the Rev Sun Myung Moon, founder and boss of the brainwashing outfit, has withdrawn most of his full-time dupes to the United States.

The Moonies’ retreat is believed to be a direct result of their disastrous skirmish with the *Daily Mail*, which accused them of brainwashing converts and breaking up families. Dennis Orme, the Church’s British director, brought an unsuccessful libel action. The Moonies had to foot their own and the newspaper’s legal bills. Mr Orme is no longer the British director.

Moon’s extreme Right-wing views make him politically respectable in the United States where he has a business empire. But even there his reputation has become rather tarnished. There has been much unfavourable publicity over the plight of young people who fell into his clutches and of their parents’ distress. The religious charlatan was also avoiding tax payment; worse still, he was found out.

Requests from many quarters, including the Government and a High Court jury to investigate the Moonies’ registration as a charity have been resisted by the Charity Commissioners. In their annual report, published last month, the Commissioners said that registration was a matter of law which they had to apply. Registration as a charity

was not an indication that they approved of an institution’s purpose or of those who administer it.

The Commissioners’ dilemma is understandable, and they must be aware that many of the rival religious groups that would like to see the Moonies clobbered would not themselves survive an investigation of their charity status. The Unification Church has exploited human gullibility more successfully than most. But it is only one of many similar organisations which cause social mischief and wreck the lives of those who come under their influence.

THE TAXMAN COMETH

The United States Supreme Court has ruled that tax authorities can remove charitable status from schools and colleges which practise racial discrimination. There are hundreds of such institutions throughout the country, most of them owned and staffed by fundamentalist Christians. They claim that their discriminatory policies are based on biblical teachings.

Although these schools are not acting illegally, the Inland Revenue Service decided that they should not be subsidised by the Federal Government. The Goldsboro Schools in North Carolina and the Bob Jones University, of which the Rev Ian Paisley is a trustee, took the IRS to court. The Christians lost their case and will have to cough up half a million dollars in unpaid taxes.

President Reagan, mindful no doubt of his debt to the Moral Majority, entered the fray — on the wrong side. His declaration that the revenue authorities would not be allowed to withdraw tax exemption from educational establishments which practised racial discrimination caused a storm of protest. Civil rights organisations and others complained that the taxpayers were subsidising racism and religious bigotry. Two hundred Justice Department officials signed a letter of protest.

The episode has caused the Administration considerable embarrassment, linking it with two rather unsavoury “educational” institutions. It has also drawn attention to Reagan’s overall record on civil rights and his aim to dismantle race equality safeguards which have been won through bitter struggle over the last 20 years.

● One of ex-President Nixon’s aides who went to prison for his part in the Watergate break-in has entered the service of the Lord. Jeb Stuart Magruder, second in command of the notorious Committee for the Re-election of the President—which came to be known as CREEP—is now an ordained minister in the First Presbyterian Church. Virtually all of the Watergate conspirators were committed Christians. Charles Colson, widely regarded as the most odious creep of the lot, became a full-time evangelist when he left prison.

into the minds of the people by vast military parades before political leaders who remain aloof from the people on the ramparts of the Kremlin.

That Alexander Solzhenitsyn should have fallen

victim to religious propaganda after so powerfully revealing in his books the undying courage and vision of the human spirit remains a tragic and mysterious loss.

Honest to Goodness

DAVID TRIBE

Twenty years ago John A. T. Robinson's "Honest to God" was published and became a controversial best-seller. The Bishop of Woolwich, as he then was, shocked his fellow-Christians with ideas they regarded as radical and new. The author thought they were not radical enough; the writer of this article does not think they were all that new either.

Suppose you were the Editor of SCM Press when a manuscript turned up from a clergyman's sickroom, full of tortured prose, italics, capitals and quotes, regurgitating the agnostic views of three Germanic theologians, one of them dead. How big a print run would you order? Would you even publish the damned thing (and some of your readers would regard it as literally that) at all? This is no idle speculation, for in 1963 it was the problem confronting the Rev David L. Edwards, who writes about it in "Twenty Years After" (*Church Times*, 11 March, 1983).

In the event, Mr Edwards went ahead and published. Of course he had little alternative as he had previously asked the author, John A. T. Robinson, to contribute to a series of "SCM Paperbacks". What made the deal more attractive from a publisher's standpoint was the fact that Dr Robinson was better known as the Bishop of Woolwich. Among other claims to fame he had already gained notoriety by giving evidence at the trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Then he had found what most people saw as a long-winded account of a jolly good fuck between a randy gamekeeper and a sex-starved lady of the manor to be sacramental. The manuscript's appeal was also heightened by its jazzy title, *Honest to God*. Mr Edwards tells us that "Mrs Robinson dreamed up the title". I assume this is not the hot number from *The Graduate* but the bishop's lady wife. Doubtless Jesus loves her, too, more than she will know, for he has not received such good—or at any rate extensive—publicity since gaining credit for the miraculous evacuation of Dunkirk. "We had originally printed only five thousand for the British market", but the book has already sold over one and a quarter million copies: "better than any new

theological book had ever done in the world's history".

The publisher offers his defence for having failed to recognise a potential bestseller. As an old-fashioned publisher who believes that circulation, at least of serious works, is directly proportional to merit, Mr Edwards should be acquitted. Only in retrospect has he found that "any wool in the Bishop of Woolwich's mind turned out to be very widely attractive". Just months after publication, when 350,000 copies had already leapt from the printing presses, the author himself admitted in *The Honest to God Debate*: "It is a safe assumption that a bestseller tells one more about the state of the market than the quality of the product".

Not only is *Honest to God* derivative in what passes for modern theological scholarship, but latitudinarianism, broad churchmanship, modernism, radical Christianity or whatever pious unbelief now calls itself is as old as Christianity itself. Early Christians of a philosophical bent speculated freely on the nature of the universe, the Godhead and Jesus of Nazareth. There was endless debate over key dates in the Christian calendar — supposed events that most clerics today talk about as if they are authenticated in the Public Record Office. Some Church Fathers spoke of Jesus as another prophet and others as a phantom or illusion—both schools of thought motivated by a belief that the Incarnation of God was a contradiction in terms. Some gnostic theologians went so far as to proclaim that Yahweh, the creator of the physical world, was intrinsically evil himself (a far more satisfactory explanation of the origin of evil than egomaniac angels or apple-eating anthropoids), and that the world of the true God was one of pure spirit. For the first five centuries of the Christian era a widespread heresy was the conviction that sacraments were no magic door to salvation but were efficacious only if the officiating priests were worthy men. In other words, even more important than being honest to God was being honest to goodness. That extensive period was the time it took the church to establish its orthodoxy and factitious unanimity. No wonder the bishop said, in the preface to his blockbuster: "The one thing of which I am fairly sure is that, in retrospect, it

PUBLICATIONS

will be seen to have erred in not being nearly radical enough".

In the same preface Dr Robinson hailed "those who feel compelled above all to be honest *wherever* it may lead them". There was a time when heresy led to the stake or the gallows, and later to the dungeon or exile. Later again, it led to unfrocking or excommunication, professional suicide or social ostracism. Yet later, agonising agnostics suffered all the pains of religious yearning or psychological trauma. Happily, scepticism no longer leads to death or durance vile. Professional Christians do not need to abandon Oxbridge teaching careers, resign holy orders or leave the worshipping community. Indeed, they do not even need to be reverent agnostics. They can now be "contemporary" atheists. In a later book, *The New Reformation?* (1965), the bishop asked, "Can a truly contemporary person *not* be an atheist?" He answered his own question: "I believe there is an important sense in which a person who is fully a man of our times *must*—or, at any rate, *may*—be an atheist before he can be a Christian".

What Dr Robinson did not explain was why a truly contemporary person would want to be a Christian. Apart, that is, from gaining the doorway to one of the many mansions in his Father's house on earth that remain for those who do not let mere unbelief interfere with their giving "general assent" to the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Augsburg Confession, the Apostles' Creed or any other formulary. What are the immaterial attractions of religion if God is "intellectually superfluous", "emotionally dispensable" and "morally intolerable"—in other words, irrelevant, useless and immoral? Can the appeal lie in the Gospel Jesus (historical or mythological—what the heck), a self-righteous fanatic who rarely bothered to practise the tolerance he preached, who believed in demons and hellfire, and who would brand many of the social views of Margaret Thatcher as "wet"? Perhaps a truly contemporary Christian is proud of the Church's record in waging crusades, conducting witch-hunts, justifying slavery and apartheid, supporting dictators, burning or banning books, subjugating women and children, denouncing abortion and effective contraception, falsifying history and amassing wealth.

It would be nice to see a bishop write about *Honest to Goodness*.

JIM HERRICK

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The Oxford Movement

EDWARD ROYLE

The Oxford Movement was initiated 150 years ago by a group of Anglicans who were determined to reform their church. Through its Tracts for the Times, the Movement provided the clergy with intellectual stimulus. It attracted a large number of followers, some of whom, notably John Henry Newman, later defected to Rome.

On 14 July 1833 the Rev John Keble, Fellow of Oriel College, preached the Assize Sermon in Oxford. The occasion might have been one for emphasising the close links between Church and State, or for denouncing the evils of revolution on the anniversary of the falling of the Bastille in Paris on another 14 July 44 years earlier. Instead he launched himself into a passionate defence of the Church and a denunciation of the Whig Government for an act of national apostasy. What grieved him was the proposal that nearly half the bishoprics in the established Anglican Church of Ireland should be amalgamated and that the surplus revenues should be appropriated for purposes to be decided by Parliament.

This seemed a denial of the privileged position of the Anglican Church. Coming on top of the granting of full civil rights to Nonconformists (in 1828) and Catholics (in 1829), it seemed the prelude to the disestablishment of the Church throughout Ireland, England and Wales. The time had come for Churchmen to take a stand.

Such feelings had deep roots in Anglican history. The old High Church of Queen Anne's reign had maintained a theologically positive view of the Church as the Body of Christ on Earth, whereas Latitudinarians had regarded the Church as a heavenly abstraction to which earthly bodies merely approximated. Those holding this "low" view of the Church seemed quite happy to work with the secular authorities and even to tolerate a certain amount of Protestant Dissent. High Churchmen, on the contrary, relished the independence and dignity of the Church above all merely mortal devices.

Allied to this view was a deep piety and spirituality which had roots reaching back into the 17th century. Such feelings had fed another "Oxford Movement" in the early 18th century—that of the Wesleys—but the fervour of the Evangelical Revival had flowed mainly in Low Church channels. This was not enough for a group of Keble's fellow dons in Oxford in the 1830s. Another Fellow of Oriel, J. H. Newman, came himself from a strongly Evangelical background. Indeed his brother, Francis—later a prominent freethinker—went on an evangelical mission to the Near East. But Evangelical

theology lacked warmth, beauty and mystery. By the 1830s it had lost its poetry.

Keble was a poet, who has been likened to a more Christian version of Wordsworth. In 1827 he published *The Christian Year*, a collection of poems for Sunday and Holy Day devotion—some of which have become well-known hymns: "*New every morning is the love, Our waking and uprising prove*". Spirituality, piety, mysticism, poetry and a sense of the unique character of the Church—these were the forces which inspired Keble in July 1833 and which led a group of likeminded friends—E. B. Pusey, R. H. Froude, J. H. Newman (all of Oriel) and others—to come together to form an Association of Friends of the Church and to begin publishing a series of Tracts for the Times in which they expounded their beliefs.

These tracts were issued between September 1833 and 1841 when Newman's Tract XC unwittingly marked the beginning of his departure for Rome in 1845, which broke up the movement into Anglo-Catholics and Roman Catholics. Many felt that the conversion of "Tractarians" to Rome was a logical step, given the nature of the theology which some of their followers were beginning to expound with less than academic caution: the confessional and the priesthood of the clergy; the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacraments, the elevation of the Host, and the practice of the Reserved Sacrament; candles and vestments; veneration of Mary and the saints; emphasis on elaborate ritual and music; the claim that the Church of England was the true Catholic Church in England.

During the 1830s the Oxford Movement remained a small, academic matter—not yet really a movement at all in the popular sense. But those of a High Church disposition began to be influenced by them, and gradually a new generation of clergy began to seep and then to flood out into parochial life in the second half of the 19th century. Undoubtedly these new ideas about the Church did much which was beneficial. Other-worldliness detached the priest from those material obsessions which had so secularised and blunted the effectiveness of the 18th-century Church. From the point of view of the Oxford reformers one no longer had to be a gentleman to be a priest; priests could be classless in an increasingly class-ridden society. They could devote themselves entirely to the work of the Church, being pastors and servants of their people, not lords and masters. When the young Annie Besant went in need to talk to Edward Pusey she found his intellect hardened against her doubts but his spirit warm and helpful.

Freethinkers may feel sympathy with the Oxford Movement, for they are in agreement over the

rejection of the rational basis for religion. Both in the 19th century found Protestantism untenable and saw the real division between men to be, in the words of Ingersoll, "Rome or Reason". The Oxford reformers re-established the Church on a higher plane of thought and they were right to seek such a defence. To base one's ideas on a logic "which passeth all understanding" is to render oneself impregnable to rational criticism. The freethinker may be sceptical but he cannot undermine such people in the way that he could attack Christians who claimed a rational basis to their belief as did the 18th-century Natural Theologians.

What freethinkers may legitimately argue is that the consequences of the Oxford Movement were undesirable, on the widely accepted premise that rotten fruit grows on rotten trees (dubious logic but with biblical support). The point about pastoral care made above is valid but should not be exaggerated. The revival of earnestness in the clergy came before Tractarians had made much impact on the parochial scene. The introduction of poetry and soaring music into public worship, and the restoration and imitation of the medieval architectural heritage can

be regarded as culturally enriching by those whose tastes lie in that direction. But many features of that Ritualistic Movement which developed out of the Oxford Movement in the later 19th century appear to have been deliberately obscure, confusing poetic mystery with mystification.

When Isaac Williams, a gentle and poetic soul, advocated in Tracts LXXX and LXXXVII reserve in communicating religious knowledge, he was striking a blow at both the democratic theology of Protestantism ("the priesthood of all believers") and at the very principle of modern free thought. This was a characteristic of the Oxford Movement with which it is less easy to have sympathy. Pusey had been influenced by the German school of liberal theology in the 1820s, but he like the others hardened into conservatism in the 1830s.

There was another way forward for the Church at that time. Broad Churchmen like Thomas Arnold sought to liberalise the Church and accommodate it with the modern world. The Oxford Reformers deliberately rejected this path. Perhaps they were wise in their generation to reveal their Church in its true colours.

The Repression of Atheism

DAVID BERMAN

Until recently atheism was considered not merely false, but an aberration: a mental and moral disease. Its pathological study goes back at least to Plato's *Laws*, Bk X, where atheism is described as a "disease" and "corruption of mind". Although this opinion has by no means been abandoned, it has steadily lost ground since the 18th century. Given that nearly half the world is now officially atheistic, it is hard for theologians to deny the existence of at least some reasonable atheists.

Indeed, since the work of Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, it is religion that is seen as the sickness. Yet a pathological examination of the pathology of atheism is still lacking. Apart from its historical interest, such a study should cast light on the fear which atheism continues to evoke, even in sensible people. It may also help to explain the resistance some agnostics feel towards taking the decisive step—to avowed atheism.

There has been, I have argued elsewhere, a widespread and potent (but not conscious) tendency to repress speculative atheism.¹ Consider the following puzzle which David Hume presented in 1748, but to which he never offered a solution:

There is not a greater number of philosophical reasonings displayed upon any subject than those which prove the existence of a Deity and refute the fallacies of *Atheists*; and yet the most religious philosophers still dispute whether any man can be so blinded as to be a speculative atheist. How

shall we reconcile these contradictions?²

Hume was right in not trying to unravel these apparent contradictions, for the key to it—the theory of repression—was developed only in the next century. Very briefly, religious philosophers such as Henry More and John Balguy had fought atheism in two (inconsistent) ways: consciously they tried to repulse it by argument, while unconsciously they hoped to prevent it by doubting or denying its existence. Their denials, to use a helpful image of Freud's, placed a guard at the door of the (public) mind. "No one", they said in effect, "could be so stupid, or so depraved, as to be an atheist". Although this inhibitive tendency has now lost much of its potency and depth, it may nonetheless be lingering in someone who feels that atheism is an impossible position; or as Plato put it in the *Laws*, that no one has "ever yet continued till old age constant in the [atheistic] view", even though "people suffering from this disease are always springing up". Thus a patient may be helped by diagnosing his physician; in short, by a pathology of the pathology of atheism.

Notes

1. "The Repressive Denials of Atheism in Britain in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries", in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* (1982); 35 pages.
2. *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, sect XII; in *Hume's Essays and Treatises* (1777), vol 2, page 159.

BOOKS

BEYOND THE PALE: THE CHRISTIAN POLITICAL FRINGE, by Derrick Knight. Caraf Publications Ltd, St James's Vicarage, Highfield Street, Coalville, Leicestershire, £3.50

Have you heard of the Christian Affirmation Campaign? The British League of Rights? The Christian League of South Africa? The International Christian Network? The Biblical Creation Society? The World Anti-Communist League? I hadn't until I read *Beyond the Pale*. But I'm glad I know about them, and numerous other similar bodies, now.

All are extreme Right-wing, avowedly Christian groups, mostly (but not all) Protestant, run by people who are fanatically racist, pro-apartheid, fundamentalist-biblical, Creationist (believing that Darwinism is the spawn of the Devil), anti-Communist, and who adhere to the "Satanic-Jesuit-Zionist-Marxist conspiracy theory" of history so beloved of the Nazis. Some of these people—such as Lady Birdwood—are familiar names to students of the rabid Right. Others—like Bernard Smith and Donald Martin in this country and the Rev Fred Shaw (Methodist) in South Africa, who founded the (South African Government-backed) Christian League of South Africa—are less well known but more influential.

According to these people, the support given by the World Council of Churches to racial integration and to groups fighting segregationist governments in (formerly) Rhodesia and (still) South Africa is simply part of a worldwide Communist plot. The mainstream British churches are run by "subversives", the Archbishop of Canterbury is a Soviet agent (alas, poor Runcie! I knew him well . . .), all the bishops are Communists and the World Council of Churches is run by the KGB.

Utterly dotty? Maybe: but, as Derrick Knight points out, all these themes are old favourites of South African Government propaganda, which justifies apartheid with biblical arguments. And he discerns South Africa as the co-ordinating impetus, and often, paymaster, behind these and similar groups' bids for world attention in recent years. Still more sinister, he traces personal and organisational links between several of them and overtly fascist and anti-semitic groups such as the National Front, the British Movement, League of St George and British Israelites, as well as with more "respectable" Right-wing organisations like the Monday Club, Tory Action, the Institute for the Study of Conflict and the British Council of Protestant Churches, of which the Rev Ian Paisley is Vice-President. Some operate world-wide, and have affinities with other dubious anti-Communist groups such as the Moonies.

For a sceptical critic of conspiracy theories, Mr Knight (who now works for Christian Aid) doesn't

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do too badly himself. In fact, he postulates that the prevalent paranoia of these groups leads them to imitate what they believe their enemies are doing, and to engage in conspiratorial activities that are basically anti-democratic. Because they have the backing of a powerful and paranoid government—that of South Africa—they are able to publicise their own cranky theories in various Western countries, and have contributed to the marked rightward shift which the political centre of gravity has undergone in both Britain and the United States since the advent of Thatcher and Reagan. (Indeed, Mr Knight reveals the droll fact that the South African Government has been warned by its agents in the United States to dissociate itself from some of its Southern contacts there because they are "so far to the Right that it definitely hurts our image in associating with them".)

These Christians indulge in indiscriminate smears of their opponents and lobby vigorously for their own point of view while protesting that they themselves are "not political" and that politics ought to be kept out of religion. In a May Day week which has seen Michael Heseltine branding CND as the tool of Moscow and Cardinal Hume rebuking Monsignor Bruce Kent for becoming "too political" (while the Pope conspicuously refrained from similarly admonishing Cardinal Glemp), this scenario seems less funny than it otherwise might. There is usually just a grain of truth in paranoia—but clearly, the paranoid fantasies of the lunatic Right are being given more plausibility by the Conservative and Republican parties—if only for electioneering purposes—than is democratically healthy.

Ideology, whether political or religious, befores clear perception and fosters burgeoning humbug. What detracts from the value of Mr Knight's book for me—essential reading though it is—is the occasional whiff of humbug in his own stance, as when he professes shock that these birds of a feather *should* flock together, and that they endeavour to conceal the fact; and his naive assumption that those whom he describes as "desperate people seeking their basic freedoms" and "liberation movements acting against oppressive and even illegal regimes" can by no stretch of the imagination ever plausibly be labelled "terrorists". Unfortunately, life isn't as simple as that. Personally I increasingly abhor ideological arguments and jargon, of whatever hue, and prefer to use old-fashioned political categories like "tyranny"—an accurately descriptive label which fits the governments of both South Africa and the USSR.

REVIEWS

The main lesson of *Beyond the Pale* is that religious belief all too easily lends itself to the big lie. The chief enemy of human freedom, happiness, peace and progress is irrationalism, and when this is compounded by religious bigotry in an age of high technology, we are all increasingly at risk of a nuclear holocaust. If that occurs, the particular political or religious ideology of the person who presses the fatal button won't matter: they, of course, will believe that they had no alternative, because they will be paranoid. Religion, far from being the answer to paranoia, is a major ingredient of the problem. The more fanatical religious belief is, the more it will express itself in paranoid political activity; and all religious people, because they believe in something that is fundamentally irrational, are slightly potty. Far too many of them, as readers of the *Freethinker* well know, are more than somewhat potty.

ANTONY GREY

THE HUMANIST EVANGEL by Lucien Saumur. Prometheus Books, £10.95

A title from the Rationalist Press of the United States, founded by Paul Kurtz a few years ago. The jacket says that "Lucien Saumur is a computer scientist . . . whose avocation is the study of ethics", which might almost be inferred from the text. The thesis is that Humanists and their organisations have failed to make any notable impact because they have failed to recognise what they stand for; they have got lost in a confusion of "humanitarian" and "socialistic" tendencies. Instead, they should identify themselves with and announce to the world the true nature and purpose of human beings, which is for each to seek his own good as he desires it. Humanism is a religion by default, because the historical religions deny this truth of human nature and proclaim otherwise. Therefore humanists have no alternative but to announce the true evangel. "Ultimately, there is only one reason that one should want to do something. And it is that *his* action serves *his* interests and produces the good to satisfy *his* needs as dictated by *his* feelings and desires. Any other reason is invalid and meaningless". To think otherwise is self-deception by the misuse of language. This is humanist morality, with the claim that none other is rational.

The argument is that the West is implicitly humanist in this sense, because that is how most people live. However, they are made to feel guilty

and unsure by what they are told in the name of religion. Once humanists resolve to make this their message, announce it boldly, demonstrate it rationally, and show how to apply it to controversial questions, such as abortion, people will be reassured, and will gain confidence to set about resolving all kinds of differences rationally, to give everyone a chance to serve his interests and fulfil his desires. Humanism will have conquered the West, on the road to the time when all people will be humanists because it is so obvious that they are not aware that it is possible to be otherwise.

This is an amusing example of a systems analyst applying his mind, if not his technique, to an historical society. You have a model, and ask, What would happen if . . . ? What you have left out destroys the validity of your conclusions. All the same, the new setting induces new views and compels some fresh thinking. Lucien Saumur rushes in where philosophers have trodden warily, and found no evangel waiting for reason to uncover. No harm done.

H. J. BLACKHAM

SURVIVING THE FLOOD, by Stephen Minot. Gollancz, £8.95

Noah's Ark was a vehicle all right, and in Stephen Minot's novel it is a vehicle for satire, social criticism and slapstick. Ham, now 900 years old and the last eye-witness of the Flood, wants to set the record straight and correct the inaccuracies of the Official Report.

To begin with, there were more than the traditional eight humans on board the Ark: Noah and his wife, Shem and Japheth and their wives, the young unmarried Ham, great-grandfather Methuselah, two widowed grandmothers, various children, and a large number of servants. The committee drawing up the Official Report also suppressed the facts that there were other survivors outside the Ark and that the servants on the Ark mutinied.

Noah the patriarch was actually a coarse authoritarian oaf, Japheth was a lazy drunkard, and Shem was proud and lecherous. As the family typifies all the Seven Deadly Sins and quite a number of the lesser vices, you may wonder why it was chosen to survive the Flood. Ham, the relatively virtuous and thoughtful narrator, wonders why too, and is haunted by the sight of people trying to clamber on board the Ark and later by the sight of floating corpses.

The Ark also sustains quite a subtle load of symbols. Noah keeps the Ark shuttered for most of its voyage to protect the inhabitants from the heart-rending sight of other humans on rafts and rooftops. Ham steals a glimpse and is struck by remorse and guilt. Only Noah, in a priest-like role, goes on to the open deck and knows Revelation. The others are kept

Bookshelf

This column will appear occasionally at first to provide information about new and re-issued books of particular interest to freethinkers. Postage charges are given in brackets.

literally in the dark in the fetid interior of the ship. The Ark consists of several decks, and their hierarchy soon becomes symbolic of social strata and the mechanisms of power over the oppressed. The lowest deck is for the unclean animals, the next for clean animals, and the third, containing the kitchens, for the servants. Above that is the family's deck, and at the very top are the apartments of the ancient Methuselah. Patriarch though he is, his family is not fond of him: "What's he done for any of us for the past 100 years?" snaps Noah. (He dies on the journey and has to be buried at sea. The ceremony is badly bungled and his unweighted corpse is left floating grotesquely in the flotsam-laden floodwaters. Down come the shutters again to protect the Ark passengers from the awful truth.)

"Whenever great men are gathered to record a crucial event, there is far more concern for the artistry of invention than for the facts as they occurred", Ham says. What's more, when the tapestry depicting the family history is damaged by fire during a friendly family brawl, the women repair it, making little changes to it as the fancy takes them. History is altered as they stitch: statures are diminished, beards and robes change colour. And how true, Ham wonders, are other handed-down traditions? Should the servants really be considered as barely human? Are women really only men's chattels? As the youngest son he has no power to change things, as he quickly learns when he tries. In the emergency occasioned by a leak in the Ark the mutiny is forgotten and masters and servants alike man the bucket brigade. Admirable-Crichton-like, the resourceful servant Sapphira takes command and the kitchen is ransacked for containers to bail out the Ark with. When the flap is over, however, servant-master relationships return to normal; nothing has really changed.

Stephen Minot has a noticeable penchant for scenes of pandemonium that remind me of certain 19th-century American regional humourists. Animals escape or there is a fist-fight, and Minot describes slapstick actions and reactions in carefully hilarious detail. The companionways of the Ark see numerous wild chases, flapping uncaged seabirds, vengeful brothers, frightened servants, and escaping pigs. Sex in various guises helps to pass the time, as it often does on cruises. There is much lyrical cavorting in the hay on the lower decks and more slapstick as Ham and the nubile Sapphira, making love precariously in the kitchen, topple into the lukewarm cauldron of soup.

Surviving the Flood is an imaginative mix of the outrageous and the serious, filling in for us the unrecorded details of the well-known story in Genesis 6-9 and demonstrating along the way that for all its risible possibilities, the Flood is still a potent legend.

SARAH LAWSON

The Worm in the Bud was first published in 1969 and is now a paperback. If we believed in compulsion, the Christian purity brigade and others who pine for the good old days would be made to read Ronald Pearsall's brilliant study of sex life among all classes in Victorian England. Adultery, backstreet abortion, sexual ignorance, rape, incest, sadism, male, female and child prostitution, uncontrolled breeding, death in childbirth . . . then the libertarians came along and spoiled it all. Price £3.50 (60p). G. W. Foote & Co, 702 Holloway Road, London N19.

A Message From the Falklands, Hugh Tinker's compilation of his late son's poems and letters, is enjoying a much wider circulation as a Penguin paperback. This one will not be on Mrs Thatcher's bedside table. Price £1.95 (25p). G. W. Foote & Co.

The Dark Side of the Moonies tells how one victim escaped from the evil Unification Church. Erica Heftman writes: "When I regained my mind I looked back at the horror of it". Price £2.50 (25p). G. W. Foote & Co.

Bertrand Russell's massive autobiography, described by Philip Toynbee as "a marvel of lucidity, intelligence and wit", consists of 750 pages. Price £4.50 (65p). G. W. Foote & Co.

Vision and Realism is indeed a volume which provides a different insight into the social life of Britain from that of almost any other work of our day". The Rev John Rowland pays this compliment to Jim Herrick's history of *The Freethinker* in a review published in *The Unitarian*. Price £2 (25p). G. W. Foote & Co.

Joe Nickell's *Inquest on the Shroud of Turin* is bad news for a rather specialised sector of the second-hand clothing trade. Professor Nickell and a team of experts go to work on the precious relic and make shreds of the shreds. Price £10.95 (including postage). *Prometheus Books*, 10 Crescent View, Loughton, Essex.

When Uri Geller hit the headlines ten years ago he made followers and fools out of great institutions and public figures in the United States, Britain and elsewhere. Gullible mystery-mongers swallowed his claims hook, line and bent spoon. In *The Truth About Uri Geller*, James Randi (known professionally as The Amazing Randi) spills the beans on a fellow-trickster. Price £6.95 (including postage). *Prometheus Books*.

Gullible Scientists

R. J. CONDON

Two young American conjurors, Steve Shaw and Mike Edwards, have given a severe jolt to the fashionable study of parapsychology. Project Alpha was started in 1979 by Missouri's Washington University on a grant of £300,000 from millionaire James McDonnell. Leading physicist Peter Phillips was in charge, with a ten-strong team of researchers and a specially equipped laboratory. A call went out for psychics to come and be tested.

For many years professional magicians have warned parapsychologists, usually in vain, against being taken in by tricksters posing as psychics. Shaw and Edwards decided to teach the gullible scientists a lesson. First they contacted veteran conjuror James Randi, who four years earlier had exposed the spoon-bending nonsense of Uri Geller. The latter, it may be remembered, hoaxed a British scientist into declaring that the laws of physics might have to be rewritten. Randi wrote to Phillips offering his services as a detector of trickery, stressing that only magicians knew what to look for. Phillips declined — in his laboratory no trickery would be possible.

Thereupon Shaw and Edwards went to work. "It really wasn't a problem getting accepted", Edwards said later. "We just bent a few keys when they weren't looking. It's a trick almost any magician can do, but they were completely baffled by it".

Other wonders followed. The liquid crystal display of a quartz clock became indecipherable—Edwards had secretly cooked it in a microwave oven—and cutlery curled by the trayload. As the word spread other researchers raced to Missouri. One, Berthold Schwartz, wrote: "I handed Steve my camera . . . when the film was examined there was nothing that we could recall being filmed. In its place were frames that resembled a woman's torso, breast, nipple and thigh". Something Freudian here, evidently—Shaw had simply spat on the lens.

"We'd have terrible attacks of conscience", said Edwards. "We would go on the town after the sessions and wonder how we could keep doing it to them. They weren't foolish people, they just desperately wanted to believe we had special powers. They were so trusting. They'd give me a drawing inside an envelope, put me in an empty room for ten minutes, then ask me to describe the drawing. All I had to do was open it and have a look". Project Alpha flourished on this kind of diet for three years, until Randi exposed the hoax in a science magazine.

It is the old familiar story of academics assuming that degrees in, say, biology or mathematics qualify their holders to detect trickery in a field where those disciplines have no relevance. They even neglect their homework, or they would know that paranormal phenomena of all kinds have repeatedly been exposed as fraud or delusion, often by the despised

conjuror.

Shaw and Edwards admitted fooling the scientists, but Uri Geller still keeps up his pretensions. He surfaces occasionally, protesting injured innocence and hoping for a comeback. Two or three years ago he was in Britain demonstrating his amazing powers for the readers of the *Daily Mirror*. From the top of Blackpool Tower he projected an image by telepathy, and marvellous to relate an appreciable number of *Mirror* readers received it correctly. And what was the image? You'd never guess—a tree!

Dr Robert Edwards, test tube baby pioneer and reader in physiology at Cambridge University, has been awarded "very considerable" damages against the Press Association. The Association's medical correspondent wrote an article stating that Dr Edwards experimented on human embryos. The story was circulated to newspapers and he was subjected to what was described in court as "very hostile publicity". Christian pressure groups were the most venomous critics of Dr Edwards and one of them demanded intervention by the Director of Public Prosecutions. "The Times" newspaper, which published three articles based on the PA report, had already apologised in open court.

OBITUARY

Mrs E. Davison

Elvina Davison died last month at the age of 69 after several years of declining health. She and her husband Tony were well known to members of Humanist Holidays which they joined in order to share holidays with people who, like themselves, had no religious beliefs. She eventually became chairman of Humanist Holidays.

Mrs Davison took a degree in botany, zoology and geology at Reading University and her working life was devoted to teaching. She was highly successful in her profession, not only in terms of examination results but in the improvement of teaching methods. In the early 1960s she promoted new techniques recommended by the Nuffield Research foundation. She pressed ahead with their implementation, often in the face of considerable difficulty and opposition. She was involved in a wide range of social work.

There was a secular committal ceremony at Aldershot Crematorium.

Mrs D. Percival

Dorothy Percival died in hospital last month. She was aged 90. There was a secular committal ceremony at The Downs Crematorium, Brighton.

Mrs S. Winckworth

Sylvia Winckworth, who died shortly before her 95th birthday, was a founder member of Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.

LETTERS

NOT TO BE TRUSTED

It is ironic that Francis Bennion's letter praising the British Government's support for the Falklanders was published at the same time as Robert Fisk's book, "In Time of War".

Mr Bennion claims that "Britain . . . deserves credit for not leaving some of her people in the lurch just because they were very few—and very far away".

Britain, like all imperial powers, uses colonies and settlers' fears and prejudice for her own ends. Robert Fisk gives an example of this in his book. In 1940, when Britain was paying fulsome tributes to the people of Northern Ireland for their war effort and encouraging them to volunteer for the armed forces (which thousands did), Churchill was trying to do a deal with de Valera. The war leader proposed that if southern Irish ports were made available to British ships a plan for the unification of the country (i.e. a sell-out of the North) would be arranged.

It was de Valera's obduracy and distrust, not Britain's reluctance to leave some of her own people in the lurch, that prevented the deal being struck.

ROBERT K. STEWART

REPRESENTATIVE

Francis Bennion refers to our "representative Government" in his defence of the Falkland adventure. In fact a large number of British people were opposed to or had serious doubts about the exercise even before they realised the long-term cost.

How many of those who were caught up in the initial euphoria generated by the worst elements in Westminster and newspaper offices actually believed that hundreds of men would die over a handful of islands, the distant remnants of an Empire? How many defenders of freedom, like Mr Bennion, had a word of reproach for the military dictatorship in Argentina before the Falklands dispute?

The latter-day Empire loyalists were quite ready to join in the flag-waving and in sending others to their deaths. Meanwhile, the "patriots" were safely sleeping in their beds 8,000 miles away.

PAUL JACKSON

QUESTIONS

Would anyone wage war if aggressors could be born again as paupers in a nation they had attacked?

Would anyone practice bigotry if Caucasians could be born again with brown, red or yellow skins?

(The Rev) RAY BRUBAKER

VICTIMS OF SCORN AND HATRED

As a freethinker, I am proud to own that I am a woman who is against violence against women. I am at a loss to understand the degree of outrage and the insulting language of David Webb's article in "The Freethinker" (June).

He apparently fails entirely to appreciate that the condoned publication of material that is often illustrated by degrading photographs of women, reducing them to their sexual potential only is all part of a socially accepted attitude that condones trivialis-

ation and humiliation of women, and written, physical and verbal contempt of women. It may not lead directly to crimes against women, but it certainly assists in providing an atmosphere in which the violence of hatred and contempt can happen.

This "pornography" is quite different from an open celebration of sex and sexual activity, from freely published literature on contraception, abortion, paedophilia, homosexuality etc. The purpose of real pornography is not to banish the barriers between the sexes, to liberate, educate, share ideas and love—it is generally there to exploit sexual frustration and unhappiness. There's always profit in someone's unfulfilled desires.

All we ask, as women, is that we don't become the victims of the scorn and hatred of women so evident in David Webb himself. Who does he think he is, equating feminists with Hitler's genocide squads? Isn't he rather over the top on this one, and does "The Freethinker" really find itself so wedded to the freedom-from-censorship principle that it has to print such rubbish?

RITA CRAFT

PORNOGRAPHY AND LIBERTY

This is a feminist's reflection on David Webb's article on pornography and censorship. The Women Against Violence Against Women title is certainly uneuphonious, possibly deliberately so as many women in the Liberation movement are interested in deconstructing accepted canons and criteria which they feel are out-of-date and long overdue for change. Acronyms are a customary short-hand of our times; do the rules of Greek rhetoric still apply? If so, a good deal of quite usual language must be changed.

Why is "The Freethinker" so anti-feminist? Is there no space in this paper for articles which show how brutal and sexist the main world religions have been and in some cases still are? Is there no space for showing up those residual patriarchal practices which took their origins in Christianity and Judaism?

Are women only allowed to resist oppression if this is seen as part of some male political expression? Are women, girls, and boys under the age of consent, allowed to say "no" in their own right or only in the right of some controlling male, an individual or a corporate entity? Pornography represents an extreme of violence against women and other powerless groups, this violence, in the main, is metaphorical, visual and verbal, it is still violence, it is still an expression of unjust male power. To describe pornography as liberation is the same as describing paedophilia as liberation, enforced incest as liberation, enforced homosexuality as liberation; to allow more liberty to pornography and its exponents is to allow even more power to those who already have a totally inequitable amount of power, that is, adult males.

This is not to say that to decriminalise pornography is solely a matter of male individual power. Does Mr Webb not know that pornography is very big business and organised on a global corporate level, comparable to the drug trade? Pornography is a lucrative form of capital and is more to do with the maximisation of profit than the preservation of civil liberties.

However, since much of the argument in Mr Webb's article was about individual liberty, I should like to suggest that he changes sex and takes a walk or a bus ride in some areas of London, he could then experience other people's liberty at first hand, the male people that is "The freedom and dignity of man" does not extend to women in our streets. or in our laws and vocabularies. Women are manifestly much more at

EVENTS

risk of violence than men, even to object to violence verbally is, as we see in Mr Webb's article, suspect. And does he not know that some porn productions, such as "snuff" films/videos and animal porn, are not harmless pleasures but involve actual real killings and tortures? Liberty certainly does not "belong of right to all".

BRENDA ABLE

A JEALOUS GOD

In the course of a rather long letter I was necessarily brief in my reference to Exodus 20:3. No doubt similar considerations prompted Paul Rogers (June issue) to quote Exodus 20:4,5 without 6, which is part of the same sentence and a vital balance to the previous statement.

God's jealousy in this context is for the purity of his people and his relationship with them; if this was not maintained the whole earth and everyone in it would have been headed for destruction. With so much at stake, some of the "excesses" of the Old Testament may be a little easier to understand.

Through Jesus Christ a permanent way of reconciliation to God has now been opened, and so the situation is changed, as the New Testament clearly reveals. As "The Freethinker" repeatedly and rightly points out, not every so-called Christian seems to appreciate the distinction.

I am not sure what my "conception of social justice" has to do with this, but Mr Rogers can be assured I have no desire to call myself a humanist.

TIM LENTON

BEING ALIVE

Recently I heard someone say (as an excuse for not giving up smoking): "After all, I've only got one life to live". I think many today hold this "one life only" belief, and I sometimes wonder how it strikes, say, a blind person or anyone condemned by circumstances to a life of suffering. I can't believe in any life after death for one's particular self or ego. And although presumably the "self as such" will go on being born (provided Nature continues to propagate us), the idea of being reborn but each time a different person can have little meaning for those now living — except, perhaps, for those who regard one's ego as incidental (and one isn't born with it) and for whom the promise just of "being alive" again is sufficient.

In any case, no one can stop being born, and without any say as to either the advantages or handicaps one may come into the world with, but life does have "its moments" and even the less fortunate, one hopes, may sometimes find joy, just in "being alive".

H. A. GURNEY

Harold Evans, of Sandwich, Kent, who was well known for his miserly ways, left £171,000 when he died earlier this year. Referring to his wife in a will made 16 years ago, he said: "I verily believe that she is sufficiently provided for". Mrs Evans now lives in an old people's home where she shares a room to save money. Her husband left her £200 and the rest of his fortune to the Salvation Army.

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. Programme of events during the summer obtainable from Joan Wimble, Flat 5, 67 St. Aubyns, Hove, Sussex, telephone Brighton 733215 or 696425.

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 07-607 4755.

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

Turkey has legalised abortion during the first ten weeks of pregnancy. Women who are over ten weeks pregnant will be required to produce medical confirmation proving that the operation is necessary. Mother Theresa of Calcutta was unable to attend an anti-abortion rally in London on 25 June because of illness. Speaking at a similar rally in Madrid she described both abortion and contraception as murder.

Freethinker Fund

Donations to the Fund help *The Freethinker* to balance its books and readers have never failed to respond to appeals for financial support. But a much wider readership is the best guarantee of the paper's future and we urge individuals and local groups to promote sales.

The latest list of Fund support is given below and thanks expressed to all of them.

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Total for the period 7 May until 9 June: £93.25 and \$6.

be a very poor country indeed, a backward, fractious island off the coast of North West Europe with a culture in an irreversible decline. In such a society, those who control our destinies will want to see the power of the established Church increased, not weakened”.

Canon Colin Buchanan, Principal of St John's College, Nottingham, was the second speaker. He said that the connection of Church and State has pre-Reformation roots, but the recent pattern is directly derived from the Reformation period.

“The best analogy I can draw is to compare the medieval Church of Rome with a latter-day multinational corporation.

“Its headquarters were in Rome, its subsidiary companies in every country in Western Europe. There was suspicion that the wealth of the local subsidiaries was all converging secretly on Rome, with Rome calling the tune behind the scenes, and that the company's servants were disloyal to the State in which they worked, concerned only for the interest of Rome, their true employer.

“So Henry VIII expropriated the English subsidiary and nationalised it. All orders from Rome were cancelled. All employees working for the nationalised company had to renounce loyalty to Rome. England, in the person of Henry VIII, put in its own management to replace those who would not accept the new loyalty.

“And so it has been since. The monarch, as supreme governor of the Church of England, appoints the managers—clad in purple”.

During Edward VII's reign a new, strictly English, product was worked out for the nationalised company to market. The company was granted a total monopoly of the market.

“If people wanted Christian worship, and Parliament told them they had better want it, then they must needs resort to the parish church and get Cranmer's uniform State product”.

Tolerance, Non-Conformity and Atheism

The formal disconnection of Church and State went a long way in 1662 and in the years following, when it became clear that non-conformity would not go away. The disconnection went further when non-conformity earned “tolerance” in 1689, and further still when Roman Catholic Emancipation came in the 1820s.

“For much of the intervening period the people of England showed little inclination to worship or belong to the Church at all. Practical atheism set in during the early 18th century and has been a dominant feature of the English social scene since”.

Canon Buchanan recalled that the Oxford Movement began 150 years ago as a protest against State interference with the Church. Through this move-

ment the Church was asserted “as an identifiable society . . . with an inner knowledge of God” and therefore “should not be subjected to a secular authority”.

In the present century the situation has become more tolerable for the Church which, by the State's permission, can exercise choices of its own without recourse to Parliament.

Canon Buchanan continued: “I see the Church in England as a small company of believers, who, even if they are one eighth of the nation, are outnumbered by a great mass of unbelievers. Certainly they may be a folklore penumbra around the Church, rolling in for baptisms, churchings, marriages and funerals. . .

“The hard facts drive us to call a spade a spade. We do not view the nonattender as a Church of England Christian who happens each week not to come, though he might have thought about it. Baptised he may be, but Christian in any recognisable New Testament sense he is not.

“The Church is in a New Testament kind of relationship with society, small and in some ways powerless, but with an ever-clearer picture of her mission. She is not a trustee of England culture, though she is inevitably the custodian of certain ancient monuments. She is struggling to assert her own divine life”.

Politicians' Pet Poodle

While the time has come for reform, the evidence is that it is unlikely to come from the State side. The existing governmental powers and leaders seem to like to have some hope of getting the Church to back the State's policies with rites and ceremonies.

“The politicians may want a pet poodle Church”, declared Canon Buchanan, “but the Church of England itself ought not to.

“I therefore dare to hope that we shall seek by stages first to appoint our own bishops and secondly to run our own affairs in other respects. As to the first, the Church is agreed in principle. Party leaders in the mid-1970s took the opposite view — that Downing Street should have some residuum of powers. So we settled for that.

“We were told that if we pushed for more we might lose the bishops in the House of Lords. I say push—and let us lose them. . .

“The general Synod needs to have complete powers over the internal rules of the Church of England, under the laws of the land but not organically emeshed with them as now. With these powers the Church of England might well decide that non-worshippers were, in effect, non-members. . .

“The effect would be to draw firmer lines between believers and non-believers. This is a process which is happening all the time, and the progressive steps of disestablishment we have already reached reflect it”.