

The Freethinker

secular humanist monthly

founded 1881

Vol. 103, No. 11

NOVEMBER 1983

30p

NSS PRESIDENT LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN FOR "ATHEIST LIBERATION"

When Barbara Smoker addressed the Annual General Meeting of the National Secular Society on Saturday, 5 November, she remarked that it was exactly 34 years ago to the day and date, and almost the hour, since she finally rejected Christianity in favour of atheism. Miss Smoker, who became NSS President in 1971, told members at Conway Hall, London: "I would like to take this opportunity to launch a new slogan for the secular humanist movement—Atheist Liberation". She said that the National Secular Society had been campaigning for Atheist Liberation for the past 117 years—but under the 19th-century label "Secularism", a word that is in few people's vocabulary today. "I would not suggest we change the name of our Society to suit the modern idiom", she added, "but I do propose that from now on we use the umbrella slogan Atheist Liberation (or Atheist Lib, for headlines) in our various campaigns.

"Not until the birth of the Women's Liberation movement did most people—women as well as men—even realise that sex discrimination remained very much a fact of life, despite the female franchise and the Married Women's Property Acts. The introduction of Gay Liberation likewise opened the eyes of the public to the weight of social and legal discrimination that the 1967 Homosexual Act had left untouched. It also gave many gays the courage to 'come out'—this, in turn, giving strength to the movement.

"The analogous phrase, Atheist Liberation, could do the same for our own movement. It will certainly help the media to help us. At the recent commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the birth of our founder, Charles Bradlaugh, I was asked by some of the newspaper reporters what our slogan was.

That made me realise the need for one. Trying out Atheist Liberation on several people in the past few weeks, I find that it clicks.

"The response to it is never the sterile 'What does it mean?', as with Secularism, prompting a boring dictionary answer, but the very same question that Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation have always provoked: 'Why do you need it?' And that question is a profitable one, inviting an answer that will concern topical issues rather than dictionary definitions.

"The questioner will probably be astonished to learn that in many areas of life in Britain today one cannot be a first-class citizen without belief—or, at least, no obtrusive disbelief—in an ancient myth. It is generally supposed that religious belief or lack of it is a private matter that, on this side of the Iron Curtain, entails neither penalty nor privilege. But this is far from the truth".

Barbara Smoker then referred to the wide range of benefits enjoyed by churches and religious institutions. "First, there are the many monetary perks of religion. A religious organisation has automatic charity status, with its tax exemption and rates concession. A flagrant instance of the injustice this entails is the fact that when the NSS campaigns in favour of Sunday trading and Sunday entertainment it has to do so out of fully taxed income, whereas the Lord's Day Observance Society, on the opposite side of the same issue, enjoys tax exemption.

"Christian chaplains to hospitals, prisons, and the armed forces are paid out of the public purse, while secular humanists who wish to provide an analogous service are not only given no financial help for it but are often not even allowed to do it for nothing.

(continued on back page)

The Freethinker

UK ISSN 0016-0687

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

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

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

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

SPECIAL POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

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

NEWS

Atheists and Christians, pacifists and ex-servicemen, Socialists, Liberals and Conservatives took part in London's massive CND demonstration—estimated at 200,000 by the police—on 22 October. The same weekend an anti-CND campaign in universities and polytechnics was launched by the Academic Council for Peace and Freedom, sponsors of an open letter which was published as an advertisement in "The Times Higher Educational Supplement". It was signed by Professor Antony Flew and over 200 academics. Professor Flew was in less exalted company when he signed another letter "to protest at the increasing amount of Left-wing political propaganda" in "The Freethinker". The eight signatories to the letter (which is published on page 175) are a mixed bunch. They range from the letter's initiator, S. E. Parker, who has been a constant contributor to anarchist publications for many years, to a former Conservative local councillor. Professor Flew has been connected with Right-wing outfits like the Freedom Association and the Unification Church (the Moonies). And although willing to sign letters attacking CND and "The Freethinker", he refused to sign a statement against blasphemy law.

PARTY PIECE

A hitherto regular event did not take place during the Labour Party Conference in Brighton this year. There was no religious service, an omission that was "deeply regretted" by Methodist leader and veteran Socialist, Lord Soper. "I cannot help but feel", he said, "that this is not only a very regrettable trend in Labour Party affairs, but it is also indicative, as I see it, of the lamentable condition at the moment in which the Party finds itself".

A religious service has been held at the outset of the Conference for many years. When the Conference takes place at Brighton the service is held in Dorset Gardens Methodist Church. This church was the scene of a demonstration against the Vietnam war during the 1966 Conference. The demonstrators were later tried and two well known secularists, Jim Radford and Nicolas Walter, were sent to prison for two months.

Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist, United Reform, French Protestant, Quaker, Pentecostal, Christian Scientist, Unitarian, Jewish and Strict Baptist places of worship are all within easy walking distance of the Conference venue. There were, as usual, plenty of vacant pews on Conference Sunday. Homilies on religious truth and morality at

AND NOTES

political gatherings occasionally backfire. At last year's Conservative Party Conference, also in Brighton, one of the Party mandarins quoted lines from "his favourite hymn since schooldays": *In the strife of truth with falsehood, For the good or evil side, Then it is that the brave man chooses, While the coward stands aside.*

The speaker? Cecil Parkinson.

SUBSIDISING SUPERSTITION

Dole queues grow longer while the despair of Britain's unemployed millions deepens. Young victims of Thatcherism are among the worst affected by the policies of the Iron Lady they played no part in returning to 10 Downing Street. Their educational hopes have been dashed and they are being pressurised increasingly into participating in a huge confidence trick known as the Youth Training Scheme, which provides employers with cheap labour and enables the Government to doctor statistics.

At least one religious institution is taking advantage of the situation and is to receive Government funding for the training in evangelism of unemployed Christians. The New Hope Bible School at Peterhead, in Scotland's Deep North "bible belt", has announced that there are two qualifications for acceptance in their jobs opportunity scheme: to have been out of work for three months and, in the words of the school's founder, the Rev Cameron, "that they love the Lord Jesus".

The National Secular Society, in a Press release, described this criterion of a specific religious belief as "blatantly discriminatory". It points out that the religious clauses of the 1944 Education Act already result in vast sums from the public purse being used to subsidise religious indoctrination.

"But this new imposition means a State subsidy not only for indoctrination but also for religious discrimination in the provision of job opportunities at a time of widespread unemployment.

"While a private school may have the legal right to impose a religious test on its intake, the State funding of sectarian training for evangelist missionaries cannot be justified, and the Government has no right to operate such discrimination in job opportunity programmes. Granting a subsidy on the basis of the applicants holding a particular religious belief would be equitable only if, for instance, there were also training schemes restricted to those with no religious belief.

"Secular humanist bodies that have obtained recognition as educational charities (not, of course, for public funding, but merely for tax exemption as charities) have been consistently warned by the Charity Commissioners that the presentation of a one-sided viewpoint is 'propaganda, not education'. Is there one law for the theist and one for the atheist?"

Robin Wood, secretary of the Scottish Humanist Council said the Council was disturbed by the Government's encouragement and financial aid to a specifically Protestant group. "It comes at a time when more people are becoming aware of the division in Scottish society that is caused by separate schools for Catholics and Protestants".

Mr Wood added: "Even if the facility is offered to every other religious group the SHC would oppose such moves. The State should not be paying people to train for missionary work.

"The Government in its role as an employer should not lay down religious requirements. Neither should it allow its training schemes to be used for such a purpose".

MAYOR STAYS AWAY FROM CHURCH

Councillor Tony Prior, the Liberal Mayor of Chard, who was criticised for refusing to appoint a chaplain, is in trouble again. He issued a statement announcing that he would attend the Armistice Day ceremony and lay a wreath at the town's war memorial. He added: "The ceremony is followed by Matins in the Parish Church. Councillors who wish to join the deputy Mayor at this service are cordially invited to do so".

But this was not good enough for the Rev Basil Jenkyns, Vicar of Chard, who publicly denounced the Mayor for, in effect, refusing to be a hypocrite. Mr Jenkyns, like so many of his ilk, protests respect for those who do not share his religious faith. However, he expects them to participate in a superstitious charade as the penalty for holding office in the community.

The Mayor is not without his supporters. Mr L. J. Brice, chairman of Chard and District Liberal Association, said: "I wish to state that we shall continue to support our Mayor, Councillor Tony Prior, and respect him for the courage of his convictions".

And a correspondent in the *Chard and Ilminster News* retorted: "On reading the letter from the Rev Basil Jenkyns as to his thoughts on the Mayor, and the Mayor's supposed duties, my thoughts were 'How un-Christian', just as my thoughts some years ago at the time of the Aberfan disaster were 'How un-Godly'".

THE CHRISTIAN STATE

During last month's election campaign in Queensland, Australia, fundamentalist Christian red-necks worked themselves into a lather over the "atheistic attitudes" of Labour politicians. Leading the holy hullabaloo was the Premier, Mr Bjelke-Petersen, who has held the State on a gerrymander that would make even an Ulster Protestant blush. He warned voters that atheists, drug addicts, republicans and socialists were poised to destroy the Sunshine State.

Mr Bjelke-Petersen, whose National Party was returned to power, is a supporter of the Australian Festival of Light—and it shows. He told a Press conference that the Labour Party was determined to get everybody growing and smoking marijuana. Half of the Labour members would not take an oath on the bible.

"We are a Christian nation, I hope, and believe in Christian principles", he said. "If you don't acknowledge this and lead a Christian life it is a pretty sorry state of affairs.

"It is a serious matter to have a man of a materialistic nature running any business, particularly a government.

"You cannot have leaders who do not believe, or reject, parts of the Christian faith".

Queensland is Australia's most conservative, authoritarian and censor-ridden State. During a series of public lectures, Dr Ross Fitzgerald, a political science lecturer, gave an account of the Government's "very tight controls over what Queenslanders may read and see".

Censorship is operated by bodies like the Literature Board of Review and the Films Review Board. The former is not required to give notice of a ban nor to hear what the publisher or distributor affected thinks about it. Future issues of a periodical can be banned by the Board. It managed to ban 93 publications in 1972-73 alone, its record to date.

During its first six years of existence the Films Review Board banned 124 films.

Since 1969, theatre in Queensland has been suffocating under the threat of police prosecutions. In April of that year, Brisbane actor Norman Staines was arrested, fingerprinted, charged, convicted and fined \$15 (with \$50 costs), in default a month's jail, for uttering the last line of Alexander Buzo's play *Norm and Ahmed*. Despite evidence from a clergyman and the director of Queensland's cultural affairs to the contrary, the police prosecutor claimed the line was obscene in any context.

Dr Fitzgerald summarised the position: "Censorship reflects the nature of Queensland society—its moral traditionalism and the identification of the political elite with Christian fundamentalism and other conservative ideologies".

BRADLAUGH AND INGERSOLL

The 150th anniversary of two great freethinkers, Robert Green Ingersoll and Charles Bradlaugh, born in August and September 1833 respectively, was commemorated by the National Secular Society at a public meeting in London last month. The speakers were Jim Herrick and Nicolas Walter and the theme of the meeting was "Bradlaugh and Ingersoll as Critics of Religion". John White was the reader and Barbara Smoker presided.

Jim Herrick pointed out that attack on theology was a major part of Bradlaugh's career: "it was what initially brought him to prominence and it influenced his attitude to his other political concerns—electoral reform, republicanism, birth control, the right to self-determination in Ireland and India, his struggle to enter Parliament and his unremitting concern for the poor and the downtrodden". For Bradlaugh clearing the ground from religion was a necessary preparation for planting the seeds of reform.

Bradlaugh's conflict with the Rev Packer, a clergyman who overreacted to his sensible youthful questions about the Thirty-Nine Articles, led to a row with his family after which he left home. Bradlaugh's opposition to Christianity lay in a careful examination of religious writings and the militancy with which he criticised religion all his life stems from this incident. At an early age Bradlaugh displayed that independence and self-reliance, which was to make him leader of the freethought movement and a leading politician.

Bradlaugh's views on religion are to be found in his pamphlets—often records of public debates with clergymen or reworkings of articles. He always described himself as an "atheist", arguing in his essay, "A Plea for Atheism", that there was no concept of theism or the deity which he could comprehend or accept. When Huxley's neologism "agnostic" became fashionable, he said that an agnostic was an atheist with a top hat.

Bradlaugh demolished religion with the force of legalistic advocacy, debating point by point until the Christian case collapsed. His preference for the technique of debate was illustrated at the meeting by a reading of a dialogue between a priest and an unbeliever, originally published in the *National Reformer*.

The continuing relevance of Bradlaugh's anti-theological stance was referred to. Unfortunately, today the arguments between atheism and theism often go by default and are rarely discussed with clarity in public. Although criticism of the Bible takes on a new perspective at a time when literalism is less common than in the nineteenth century, there are still many today who defend the Bible while remaining surprisingly ignorant of its historical formation and its contradictions. Bradlaugh

succeeded in obtaining rights for atheists, but, alas, in the courts, in Parliament, in schools, they are rarely now used.

On display at the meeting was the New Testament which was used by Bradlaugh in administering the oath to himself in the House of Commons on 11 February 1884. Carlyle's gavel, still in the possession of the National Secular Society, was used in re-enacting a speech Bradlaugh gave to the NSS Conference in the year 1880: "This little hammer that I hold in my hand is the hammer used by Julian Hibbert, by Richard Carlyle, by Gale Jones. If you had told Richard Carlyle that before the wood had grown rotten its holder, without one wavering of principle, would stand in the legislature of the nation, he would have thought it a wild dream . . ." Bradlaugh concluded the speech with the over-optimistic, but still inspiring words: "I have hope in the future; hope in deliverance from the fears, the shackles, the fetters of the past. The age is not far off when men shall be free and equal, not in the dead level of that equality which can never come, but the age in which men rank higher than Kings, and priests are not".

Nicolas Walter began by saying that it could be an interesting study to compare and contrast Bradlaugh and the American, Robert Green Ingersoll, the two greatest freethinkers of the English-speaking world. In many ways they were remarkably similar—born within a few weeks, both largely self-taught, both brought up in very religious families, both soldiers for a short time, both self-made lawyers by profession, both famous and indeed notorious lecturers, both rather unsuccessful Liberal politicians and both anti-socialist. But in other ways they were very different—Ingersoll was much more comfortable, prosperous, cheerful, humorous and poetic.

After a short account of Ingersoll's life and work, Nicolas Walter emphasised a few aspects of his view of religion—his concentration on conventional Christianity rather than any sophisticated version and on straightforward criticism rather than any academic analysis; his slightly ambiguous use of the word *religion*, which he generally employed very negatively but which he occasionally appropriated to describe "the religion of humanity" or what was later called religious humanism; his use of the label *Agnostic*, which he insisted meant the same as *Atheist* in practice and which he employed more aggressively than usual; and his strongly positivist and positive view of the past and future of humanity, which was much more optimistic than Bradlaugh's realistic approach.

Nicolas Walter mentioned that Ingersoll had very little to do with the formal freethought movement and saw himself as a spokesman for ordinary people of all kinds. After John White had read three typically eloquent passages from his lectures,

Nicolas Walter ended with his creed: "Happiness is the only good: the time to be happy is now; the place to be happy is here; the way to be happy is to make others so".

NAUSEA TIME

Monsignor George Leonard, personal assistant to Cardinal Hume, is reported to have described as "lunacy" a call for the elevation to sainthood of Princess Grace of Monaco who died last year. The first indication that the bandwaggon is already on the move came at a Mass on the first anniversary of her death.

Princess Grace was Grace Kelly, an extremely popular film star before her marriage to the ruler of the musical comedy statelet of Monaco. So it is appropriate that the first steps towards making her a saint were made in Rome and Hollywood, two of the world's greatest show business centres.

Norman St John-Stevas, a prominent Catholic layman and Conservative MP, is an early supporter in Britain of the case for canonisation. Writing in the *Catholic Herald* he admitted that the suggestion had caused him "faintly amused shock". But he had since come to the view—why not? Why not indeed, bearing in mind some of the screwballs and mythical personages the Church has venerated.

Mr St John-Stevas warns his readers: "Canonisation is a long and expensive process. The result is that most of those who are raised to the altars of the Church are members of religious orders, reverend mothers and the like. Only they have the necessary 'back up' to get through the ecclesiastical mine-fields". To attain sainthood a person has to be lucky "and the money doesn't run out". Such frankness will not endear him to the pious gulls who take up such causes.

A major problem for the Princess Grace canonisation campaigners will be producing evidence of two "first class" miracles. One waspish creature (not associated with this journal) is reported to have said that her only miracle to date was winning an Oscar.

No doubt thousands of Roman Catholics the world over are even now praying for the conditions of sainthood to be fulfilled. But the most fervent prayers for Princess Grace's canonisation will be offered by the tradespeople and hoteliers of Monaco.

Pope John Paul II has agreed to start proceedings that could result in nearly 17,000 Franco supporters being declared "saints". Their names are on lists of priests and nuns who were killed during the Spanish civil war. The Roman Catholic Church backed the Fascists who, with the assistance of Hitler and Mussolini, overthrew the Republican Government.

Religion and Powers of Discrimination

BRENDA G. WATSON

Michael Duane's commentary on "What I Believe", a Paper based on a survey of pupils' attitudes to religion, appeared in the August "Freethinker". Brenda G. Watson, Director of the Farmington Institute for Christian Studies which published the Paper, believes that there are misunderstandings about religion and its role in education.

I, like the readers of your journal, pride myself on being a free thinker. I believe in the power of human reasoning provided it is unshackled by prejudice, blindness, arrogance and other such enemies to its free exercise. If I do not place religious faith as one such enemy it is because I have not derived my understanding of religion from the pages of *The Freethinker*! Every instance of religion which you write up, or to which you allude, in the August number, I would, equally with you, deplore. You begin your report of the Orange rally by noting that the "annual outbreak of Christian love" in Northern Ireland has again taken place, clearly intending the comment to be ironical. For this kind of behaviour is, of course, precisely what Christian love is not.

Religion is a blanket term like politics. Unfortunately, there are many examples of inept and indeed bad politicians on the whole spectrum from Right to Left. Equally, in religion there are multitudes of cranks, hypocrites, time-servers and a small proportion of criminals. But religion *per se* cannot be dismissed so easily. I, as a religious person, deplore and deprecate these as much as you; perhaps even more, because I can add to them a further category, that of blasphemy—to use the name of God as a cloak for swindling, as though it were a talisman to promote one's own well-being, or to incite civil war and bloodshed, is diabolical in the original sense of that word.

The use of the term Christian in reporting such incidents is from one point of view appropriate, as in the disastrous Lebanese situation when one party calls themselves Christian. But it should not allow us to be deflected into imagining that because they say they are Christians that they really are. "By their deeds ye shall know them". If their deeds belie what they say they stand for their hypocrisy is manifest. Even a minimal understanding of Christianity cannot but acknowledge that it teaches a God of love: this may be false in that there is no God or in that, if there is, this is a God of hate or a God of non-involvement. But if a person says he or she believes in a God of love and preaches violence then the illogicality follows as a matter of course.

I think there is an urgent need, whether in politics, religion or life in general, to learn afresh criteria for critical discrimination between what is sham and what is genuine, between what is peripheral and what is central, between what is negative and destructive and what is positive and creative. Any critique of religion must focus on those who, like for example, Francis of Assisi or Mother Teresa, are utterly genuine. And a mark of their genuineness is their own awareness of how far short they fall of really following the Christ whom they worship.

Assuming, therefore, that one is trying to engage with real religious belief and not with the many Aunt Sallys that can be put up in its stead the question of evidence is important. The natural status of any subject, be it science, history, psychology, etc, is determined by the clear-headed appraisal of the evidence appropriate to it. To dismiss anything without such careful consideration is not a rational activity. What I am asking for in schools is that children be enabled to think clearly in both science and religion on the basis of some understanding. If people dismiss religion on the basis of ignorance, this cannot have the support of those who claim to have a concern for rational behaviour.

I would like to make clear that I am not arguing for religious indoctrination. I abhor indoctrination of any kind, whether religious or atheist, as presumably your readership does. Hence I see education as concerned with giving children the skills with which to evaluate evidence. The kind of thing which Margaret Knight did with regard to studying the gospels is what should happen in schools. The results will not be predictable either for or against religious faith, but some of the problems attendant upon interpretation of evidence, the element of subjectivity, etc, may be disclosed to the great benefit of all of us who are concerned about building up a harmonious society in which religious believer and unbeliever alike can live in a manner appropriate to *homo sapiens*.

• See Michael Duane's reply (next page)

JIM HERRICK

VISION AND REALISM—A HUNDRED YEARS OF "THE FREETHINKER"

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Brenda G. Watson argues that "human reasoning" can be exercised "unshackled by prejudice". But who decides when personal preference becomes prejudice? What cultures do *not* succeed in creating emotional bonds so strong that in times of crisis reason is swept aside by patriotism? For how many has the reasoning of mutual disarmament won against fear of the "enemy"?

Her argument that Christian love is not Christian when proclaimed by the violent and the hypocritical is familiar. Those who use it cannot lose, since whatever does not exactly fit into their definition of "Christian" is not the "Real Thing". Her use of the word "blasphemy"—an emotive expression calculated to evoke horror and dread of divine anger—makes it clear that her God is otherworldly, extraneous to humanity and its concerns. There is the double bind that if you ask a Christian what she means by "God" the common reply, "God cannot be defined", puts the enquirer back to square one.

Brenda G. Watson claims it as a virtue that Christianity preaches a God of love. But a god of hate is, by definition, diabolical, monstrous. Even the Indian goddess of destruction, Kali, is also the Mother goddess, a perceptive embodiment of the experience that the mother has power over life and death. Christians must face the consequence of their assertion of God's omnipotence. She must, like Kali, be both good and evil. Theologians' attempts to deal with this problem by creating the Devil, thereby erode God's power!

The concept of infinite goodness/wisdom/love is part of the escapism generated by the anxiety and guilt that are intrinsic to competitive materialism. There is not, and cannot be, any human experience of such unlimited goodness etc. for the simple reason that I am not you and you are not me. It is not possible, therefore, for us to identify with each other to the infinite degree required by the concept "God". The Christian ambiguity about whether Christ was God or man reveals the dilemma. If God, then he was non-human and unavailable to human identification. If man, then he is man with all the human attributes of instincts, desires, aspirations and need for love, not a being to be worshipped.

On what criteria are St Francis of Assisi and Mother Teresa (the title reveals the Christian prevarication about sex, since you cannot be both a mother *and* celibate) judged to be "utterly genuine"? Some find total dependence on dogma degrading to the human spirit of enquiry. Who has disentangled the many myths about St Francis from the historical facts? Perhaps the ease with which he resisted the allurements of the whore at the inn may simply be

that, being homosexual, he found female sexuality unattractive.

Love is not the prerogative of Christians or any other sect. Its importance springs from the peculiar form of evolution taken by human beings. Whereas other creatures survived because they evolved armour, poison fangs, wings or camouflage, man divested himself of such equipment at an early stage and produced a large neo-cortex and the capacity for memory and speech. As an individual the human infant is notoriously vulnerable and requires nurturing over a long period—a period necessary for the full acquisition of language, itself essential for the bonding together and cohesion of many helpless individuals into an effective and lasting human group. The neo-cortex produces a continuous "fountain of symbols" that parallels and arises from experience. Symbols make communication and, therefore, social action possible. Memory makes possible the comparison between different events and, in time, the postulation of even better experiences. (The "logical" end of this activity when divorced from action in the real world is "the ultimate Good"—"God" for short—an indefinable abstraction because unreal.) It therefore makes choice possible. In this way we have evolved from the cave into high technology and from brute force into democratic discussion.

The human infant's experience of loving care makes it possible for her to exercise that loving care for others when she is an adult—a common finding is that the perpetrators of hideous crimes so often did not themselves experience such love as children. This human form of nurture is more economical than that of many other species. For every salmon that survives thousands perish. Human love keeps infant mortality low.

Perhaps Christ simply recognised this central fact of humanity when he preached the doctrine of love, because he saw that the Roman passion for uniformity, standardisation and centralisation posed a threat to the small, independent and relatively self-contained communities where people matter more than systems—a threat that has proved all too real since our own Industrial Revolution.

Cancer victim Hazel Lester refused pain-killing drugs so that her son, Adam, had a better chance of life. Her father told mourners at Canley Crematorium, Coventry: "I am very sorry if any of you are disappointed at the lack of a service here for her. I assure you these are Hazel's wishes". She was an agnostic and had asked for a memorial folk concert with the proceeds going to CND.

Martin Luther—the Flawed Legend

S. D. KUEBART

Martin Luther was born five centuries ago on 10 November 1483, at Eisleben, in Germany. He duly entered the priesthood of a thoroughly corrupt Catholic Church. Luther has been transformed by Protestant legend into "the great reformer" and by some non-Christians into a political revolutionary. In fact he became "the great reformer" by chance and remained fiercely conservative in politics. The 500th anniversary of Luther's birth is being celebrated by Protestants throughout the world and by the German Democratic Republic in whose territory most of the localities associated with him are situated.

Under the slogan, "The GDR Honours Martin Luther", the East Germans have refurbished all of the places that Protestant pilgrims, especially those from the West, will want to visit. They have issued commemorative coins, expensive calendars, books and souvenirs to show the world that the memory of Luther is being kept alive. Since it is unlikely that the Central Committee of the Communist Party have collectively "seen the light", we may hazard a guess that this sudden interest in the great reformer may stem from the same root that brought about Luther's reformation—money.

Not wishing to dwell on too many biographical details, it may suffice to say that young Martin, having taken an MA degree at Erfurt University, and about to embark on a promising career, took shelter beneath a tree during a thunderstorm and barely escaped death when lightning struck. Badly shaken, he took this as a sign from above and entered an Augustine monastery where he spent miserable years striving for fulfilment and certainty in faith. When the rigours of monastic life and the theology of Occam to which he became attracted failed to produce the desired results, Luther intensified his studies of the Bible and, it is said, found solace in the teachings of St Augustine.

In 1508 he became Professor of Moral Theology at Wittenberg, a small town on the Elbe river, where he was to remain for most of his life. It was here that on 31 October 1517, he nailed his famous 95 Theses to the door of the chapel of Wittenberg castle. One thing this scroll of defiance, that is reputed to have started the German Reformation, has in common with the equally famous Magna Carta is that everybody refers to it. But does anybody ever bother to actually read it? This is not all that surprising, since it would be necessary to visit reference libraries and one's Latin had better be good—but more of that later.

The events that aroused Luther's anger originated

far away from Wittenberg and had little to do with any aspect of the faith, but a great deal with politics.

In 1499 the Elector of Brandenburg had died leaving two sons as joint rulers. Since partition of the impoverished Duchy was in the interest neither of the Hohenzollern dynasty nor of the German Emperor, Albrecht, the younger of the two entered the Church while his elder brother made frantic efforts to buy him a suitable sinecure. He finally settled for the archdiocese of Mayence and Magdeburg which had fallen vacant. Alas, for the 24-year-old Albrecht, to be properly installed as Archbishop of Mayence and hence primate of Germany, the Pope had to be given his proper share. Pope Leo X, a man of very expensive tastes, fixed the so-called pallium money at the tidy sum of 30,000 guilders. The pallium, originally a cloaklike garment, had over the years been reduced to the size of a scarf. It was traditionally woven from lambs wool by virgin nuns and formed an important part of an archbishop investiture. Since the papacy had never been at a loss to find lambs for fleecing, it was perhaps a shortage of the second prerequisite that accounted for the diminished size of the vestment.

However, young Albrecht did not have "the ready", and since his diocese had recently changed hands in fairly rapid succession he could not raise it in taxes either. This is where Leo himself came to the rescue. Being a Medici, he knew all there was to know about money and suggested that if the House of Fugger could be persuaded to advance the 30,000 guilders he, in turn, would grant a sale of indulgences throughout the new archbishop's diocese. The overjoyed Albrecht readily agreed. A Dominican friar by name of Tetzel was given papal authority to sell indulgences and sent on his way, accompanied by a representative of the Fuggers to ensure the bank got its fair share, plus a juicy rate of interest.

Protestant lore has turned poor Tetzel into a devil incarnate in order to make their hero stand out. In reality he was a super-salesman any insurance company would be proud to employ. Provided one regarded indulgences as fire insurance policies, then Tetzel could accommodate any foreseeable risk; at a pinch he would even cover parties that had already come to grief.

But success brings adversaries. The secular rulers were loath to see their countries' wealth being drained to pay for the pallium of an impecunious prince. To many of them this must have been the proverbial last straw, for in addition to tithing, Rome at that time was extracting money to pay for the rebuilding of St Peter's, the war against the "infidel" Turks and the recently invented Jubilee year

celebrations.

Tetzel's activities did not go down too well with the local clergy either; their authority was being undermined by a colleague who promised to make souls jump out of purgatory and straight into heaven for a small fee. After all, if one could buy the Almighty's favour in a straight transaction, what use was the middle man?

It was when Tetzel began operating in the vicinity of Wittenberg, that his dubious sales technique attracted the attention of Martin Luther and this is where we return to the 95 Theses. Far from being the revolutionary and subversive pamphlet of Protestant history, it was little more than a set of propositions for discussion and probably intended as an invitation to Tetzel to come and argue the issue, as was the custom amongst clerics. Luther was no fool. Had he intended to castigate the prevailing malpractices of the Church, he would have known of more effective ways of dissemination than a sheet of paper written in stilted clerical Latin nailed to a church door where it could be seen by a few people, who were probably illiterate in any case. Tetzel, if he was aware of the challenge, did not take it up; he had the Pope's backing for his mission so why should he go and justify it to a country priest in some hick town?

Besides, the document was couched in such meek language that it is hard to understand why it caused all the furore in later years. For instance, Thesis No 71 expressly states that anybody who dares to challenge the validity of the Pope's indulgence is to be cursed and condemned. To soften the impact even further, he wrote to his immediate superior, Bishop Schulze, and to Albrecht (the very cause of Tetzel's sales drive), apologising for his daring and humbly explaining that his concern was with the abuses as practised by the Dominican. Luther was well aware what fate befell heretics.

His superiors were at first quite willing to accept his explanation and let the matter rest. But against all expectations, Luther's theses were taken up by a population that had grown tired of being bled white by successive popes, each one being more rapacious than his predecessor. Here, after all, was a learned theologian, one of their own who had spoken out against the greedy clergy, or so it seemed. Tetzel's lucrative enterprise began to falter; he occasionally had to put up with open hostility in towns where only months before he could rely on rich pickings. When he finally came to Brandenburg his takings had practically fallen to zero. Archbishop Albrecht was not amused and neither were the Fuggers. The Pope was beseeched to bring the "unruly monk" to order. But times had changed. Rome completely misjudged the prevailing mood of the country while the monk had found some powerful sympathisers.

When Luther was ordered to appear before an

ecclesiastical court to answer charges of heresy, he flatly refused to attend. What a change from the days of Pope Gregory VII who could make an Emperor grovel at his feet. Even the old weapons of Church ban and interdict had lost their terror. The popes of the Renaissance found it increasingly difficult to impose their authority on the vassal rulers of their own Church states and had to tread warily so as not to give offence to either Spain or France.

Friedrich, the Elector of Saxony, where Luther lived, was then ordered to extradite him. The demand was flatly rejected as was a similar request to the German Emperor. Pope Leo had finally got the message and asked Luther to appear before a papal legate to explain his views. Had Cardinal Cajetan listened to what Luther had to say a compromise could have been arrived at. But being a haughty curia Cardinal, and hating every moment he had to be away from Rome, he saw no point in arguing with a mere monk. Luther was given the choice between retraction or damnation. Knowing he had friends in the city of Augsburg where the meeting took place, Luther refused to recant and before Cajetan could have him arrested he was spirited out of the town.

From that time, open defiance of the Pope became the order of the day. In his famous dispute with the eminent Catholic theologian, Dr Eck, Luther questioned the pre-eminence of the Roman See over other Christian churches. In earlier days this would have brought him straight to the stake; the fact that he got away with it proved beyond doubt that the tide was turning against Rome.

In 1520 Luther published his main pamphlets and completed his break with the Church. Since now he preached open rebellion, the Pope had little alternative but to threaten the Church ban. When the papal bull reached Luther in Wittenberg he burnt it in a public place. The Church ban fell on him in January 1521. Not at all dismayed, Luther appeared before the new Emperor Charles V, at the diet held in Worms, where instead of retracting his writings as he was bidden, he made a personal confession of faith. Needless to say this did not go down well with His Most Apostolic Majesty and earned Luther the ban of the Empire into the bargain, which made him an outlaw. The Elector of Saxony did not foresake his prodigy and had him hidden away in Wartburg Castle where Luther spent a year translating the New Testament into German, one of his main achievements it unified the language and gave it an orthography it had hitherto lacked.

When, as a consequence of Luther's teachings, public disorders broke out, he left his castle hideout and returned to Wittenberg where it took all the eloquence he was famous for to pacify his followers.

(continued on page 171)

BOOKS

HOOLIGAN: A HISTORY OF RESPECTABLE FEARS,
by Geoffrey Pearson. Macmillan, £15 and £5.95

Britain, we are constantly being told, has finally gone to the dogs. The streets aren't safe any more; today's young people aren't made of the sterling stuff their predecessors were; violence, dishonesty, immorality and indecency are the rule instead of the exception. It's all the fault of permissiveness, the telly and the namby-pamby welfare state. Things weren't like this 20 years ago. What we all need is a stiff dose of Laura Norder. . .

Geoffrey Pearson skilfully dissects this perennial myth in a way that is both vastly entertaining and deeply serious, by doing just what its nostalgic adherents never do and looking back some 20 years in successive chapters to the contemporary, "unprecedented" horrors of each Golden Age. In the 1950s it was Teddy Boys, and return of the cat-o'-nine-tails was urged. Before Hitler's War it was football hooliganism and the degenerate influence of Hollywood in the cinema (upsetting the young with "eye strain and undue excitement"). Pre-1914, there was widespread lamentation at the "recent serious increase of ruffianism among city youths"—blamed by some upon "free feeding and old age pensions, strike pay, cheap beer and indiscriminate charity". At the turn of the century, the hit-and-run Demon Cyclist was striking terror into the hearts not only of timid old ladies but also of *The Times*, which complained of "the East End or suburban 'scorcher' dashing along quiet country roads and through peaceful villages with loud shouts and sulphurous language, and reckless of life and limb".

The original "hooligans" appeared in the 1890s: an unBritish phenomenon, and therefore branded with an Irish name. There was the usual Press sensationalism and the customary calls for floggings. Girl-hooligans were identified, and, by some, poet-hooligans (Kipling was blisteringly accused of preaching "Hooligan Imperialism").

In the 1860s, London was swept with a wave of panic at the outbreak of yet another "un-English" crime—garrotting (which aroused such xenophobia that deportation of resident foreigners was one of the remedies advocated). Not for the first or last time, Mr Punch devised some bizarre solutions in the shape of porcupine-like suits of armour for timid wayfarers (the book is copiously illustrated with contemporary cartoons). Even earlier, the Chartists had the middle classes quaking. And in pre-industrial times, apprentices were proverbially unruly and at intervals riotous.

So there is a repetitive scenario, down the ages, of the "unprecedented" scale of delinquency and rowdyism, with the timorous, indignantly respect-

FREETHINKER

able citizenry—or "boysonry"—baying for blood, spurred on by a sensationalist Press and abetted by authoritarian noises from sundry chief constables and other Establishment figures. Parliament, however, did not succumb to panic measures such as removing the presumption of innocence.

Pearson sees the main significance of the law-and-order myth in its politically galvanising effects upon a traditionalist Tory Right which sees its opponents on the Left, the Centre, and even apolitical civil libertarians as "subversive" because they don't accept the extremist solutions which the Right wants. But such "solutions" are themselves subversive of the rule of law and the tradition of democratic consent; to adopt them would surely involve throwing out the baby with the bathwater. It's our task, not the historian's, to find effective remedies. In seeking them, books like Pearson's can remind us that "our collective misunderstandings of both the past and present shape of our difficulties are so well entrenched that we cannot expect them to vanish overnight".

ANTONY GREY

COUNTDOWN! OR HOW NIGH IS THE END?, by
Patrick Moore. Michael Joseph—Rainbird, £8.95

Doomsday prophets, whether religious or quasi-scientific, seldom fail to gather respectable followings and have often been responsible for mass stampedes. Serious scientists smile at human credulity, but few are prepared to spend time discussing nonsense in order to enlighten the man in the street. In *Countdown!*, Patrick Moore brings common sense and dry humour to bear on the fantastic ideas of the past and present, taking us from mysticism and astrology through to pure astronomy.

The book begins with a brief but very funny catalogue of scares inspired by the Bible. They range from the one in the year 1,000, when people frantically built cathedrals in the hope of getting VIP treatment at the end of the world, to the fright caused by William Miller, an American who prophesied that the dreadful day would come in 1843. One can imagine the feelings of the gathering of Millerites, awaiting the end, who actually heard the Last Trump—sounded by one who came to scoff and stayed not to pray. Patrick Moore comments that the Bible can be interpreted to mean almost anything if you abandon logic.

Astrology, "the superstition of the sky", has links with end-of-the-world prophecy. In 1524 a conjunction of three planets in Pisces was taken to mean that the world would be destroyed by a great flood.

REVIEWS

Trade ceased throughout Europe and at least one Noah's Ark was built. It is of course nonsense to say that a planet is "in" a constellation—the planets are close to us on a cosmic scale while the stars are extremely remote.

The validation of some aspects of astrology claimed by the French husband-and-wife team, the Gauquelins, and endorsed with some reservations by H. J. Eysenck, is not taken seriously by Moore. The Gauquelins, he says, rejected all data which wouldn't fit what they were trying to establish—anything can be proved that way.

At some time or another every type of heavenly body has been regarded as a menace. Moore examines doomsday theories involving stars, planets and their satellites, asteroids and comets, and concludes that the likelihood of danger from any of them is too remote to be worth worrying about.

There remains that 20th-century phenomenon the flying saucer. In 1938 a radio adaptation of *The War of the Worlds*, by H. G. Wells, was broadcast in the United States in the style of a news bulletin. It caused what was probably the greatest mass panic in history, with thousands falling on their knees in prayer or stampeding into the countryside. Some people insisted that they saw the Martian fighting machines. Patrick Moore suggests this was the forerunner of the flying saucer sightings still reported from time to time.

Reluctance to accept the reality of such visitants is reinforced by the type of person who sees them. Moore knew those great authorities on the subject, George Adamski and Desmond Leslie, and heard at first hand their accounts of meetings with Venusians, Martians and Saturnians, all of whom quickly learned to speak broken American. He also knew a bird-watcher who photographed a very *rara avis* indeed, and established that Martians, like ourselves, wear braces to keep their trousers up. The truth, as modern space probes have shown beyond reasonable doubt, is that other than on Earth, life can exist nowhere in the solar system.

Life appears wherever conditions are suited to it, and we may assume that intelligent beings are scattered throughout our galaxy and others. They would not be the bug-eyed monsters of science fiction. The entire universe is made up of the elements we know upon Earth, which means that all life forms are built up in the same way as ourselves. It is therefore reasonable to believe that extra-terrestrial life will be of our own type. Moore's opinion here, incidentally, is one my training as a chemist led me to adopt many years ago.

The threat of nuclear destruction shows that

although we are technologically advanced we are still primitive in outlook. A civilisation which has learned to cross interstellar space must have passed through this crisis period, for if it had remained warlike it would have destroyed itself. Visitors from outer space will therefore not be hostile. We will have nothing to fear and a great deal to learn from them.

When the sun nears the end of its career it will flare up, and only then will Earth be annihilated. But we won't be around—there are 5,000 million years to go before the ultimate catastrophe.

R. J. CONDON

Norman Iles is again offering copies of "The Pagan Carols Restored", which contain the original words of 18 traditional Carols, freed from indoctrination. The price of £3.25 (including postage) and Mr Iles's address is 381 Marine Road, Morecambe, Lancashire.

Martin Luther—the Flawed Legend

Three years later, in 1525, he ratted on the peasants who, inspired by his writings, took up arms against their aristocratic oppressors. Luther could not afford to bite the hand that fed him.

His hatred of the Pope had by now reached pathological dimensions. In a pamphlet entitled *The Papacy instituted by the Devil*, he likened the Church to a lark and his former master to a cuckoo "who devours the eggs and in return shits cardinals into the nest". Other terms of address were "His Papal Hellishness", "Farting Donkey", and such gems as "Epicurean swine brought into this world by way of the devil's posterior".

Since Luther was a lifelong martyr to constipation, his preoccupation with things excremental may be understandable. Who knows—his famous boast, "when I break wind in Wittenberg, Rome shakes at it's foundation", may describe a seismic occurrence. In fact Rome took her time before reacting. It took almost exactly 100 years of disputes, compromise solutions and feverish activity by the Jesuits before the final showdown came in 1618 when the Catholic imperial armies tried to subdue the Protestant rebellion once and for all. The devastating 30-year religious war that followed left central Europe depopulated and in ruins. But did not change the *status quo*.

It would be churlish to deny the man's great personal courage and his stubborn resolution. But Luther never masterminded the events that became associated with his name. The time had come for a change. If Luther had failed, either Zwingli, Melancthon or even Henry VIII may have become known as "the great reformer".

The Dark Fantastic Story

JONATHAN GOODMAN

There is a "law" which says that "good causes attract bad advocates", and the truth of it is exemplified by attempts, some of them successful, to impose censorship on what we read, see and hear.

I don't want to be a racist. Honestly. But I am being pushed towards being one by the very people who talk most loudly and lengthily about the need for racial equality.

Don't misunderstand me: I am not against all forms of censorship. But I am angered by the over-reactive sort that, just to give a couple of examples, bowellerises the lyric of *Basin Street Blues* and bans *Sambo* children's books by Enid Blyton from certain public libraries. Where does it stop? No more black Othellos, simply because Shakespeare's character behaves rather stupidly? A bonfire of all the BBC's archive film of *The Black and White Minstrel Show*?

Let me tell you how this kind of censorship affected a friend of mine. His name is Stanley Ellin, he is an American, and he is a superb writer. As well as being a master of suspense, he has the gift of making his people and places three-dimensional, so it is not surprising that half a dozen of his stories have been filmed. He has won any number of literary awards, and President Kennedy, an early fan of his writing, bought copies of his books for the White House library.

Stan Ellin is a staunch liberal. He and his wife Jeannie are Quakers (come to think of it, I was introduced to them by an English member of the Society of Friends).

As far as I can make out, I first heard of the book that was to be called *The Dark Fantastic* in February 1981, when Stan ended a letter: "My book is a slog. I'm now on page 94,314, and will eventually have to cut 94,000 of those pages".

The following September, he told me that he was due to deliver the novel to Random House, his American publishers for a quarter of a century, by 31 October: "... a most complex story, an exhausting time of it. Yesterday I sat at the machine all day without typing a word, but I did learn after 15 years that it has a little key marked $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$. So it wasn't a dead loss".

By then, I knew what the novel was about. In a part of Brooklyn that was once white but is now almost solidly black, a half-mad, dying old white man plans revenge for the destruction of the world he knew: he intends to blow up the apartment house he owns, thus slaughtering the black tenants. A private detective innocently moves into this plan on a mission of his own regarding a tenant of the doomed building, and the old man and he enter into

a deadly collision course.

In December, Stan told me the bad news: "Well, I finally submitted *The Dark Fantastic* to my agent, and he reported back joyously that he regarded it as a gem. Whereupon my editor at Random House went into a state of shock on going through the script. In great distress, he phoned me to say that the book was not acceptable in its present form; severe 'modifications' were necessary, because he had been shocked by the racial venom—ideas and language expressed by one of the two protagonists. Unprintable if not unthinkable. . . I hate to leave Random House, but I feel that any revisions would only weaken a savagely powerful and meaningful tale".

6 April 1982: "*The Dark Fantastic* is still a sort of tiny tempest in a coffee pot. My agent seeks other publishers and we continue to send shock waves through the editorial ranks with the allegedly outrageous nature of the book. And meanwhile Random House has just invited me to lunch so that we can discuss 'modifications' of the text. Revisions is the old word I recognise; this modifications business strikes me as asking the writer not to touch up the work but to redraft it from a different viewpoint. I won't do that, but I will enjoy the lunch.

"Otto Penzler of the small Mysterious Press — who published my last collection of short stories—bombards me with pleas to give him the book for publication, while my agent, against the small publisher, hangs on to testing out the big ones. Thus, all is at sixes and sevens and possibly eights right now".

In August 1982, Stan told me that his "troublesome novel" had been rejected by 12 first-line publishers. "But I was pleased to find that although none wanted that controversial story without some drastic toning-down, many of them were ready to hand out an advance payment for my next opus, sight unseen. However, I wound up with Otto Penzler's Mysterious Press agreeing to publish without any option clause tying me to them. So I was free to inform Random House that I will not refund the advance but will deliver a book instead, late 1983. This made them happy, and now sticks me at my desk writing, like Sir Walter Scott, my way out of debt. But it is a good deal all around, especially since *The Dark Fantastic* will emerge in all its inglorious, with no revisions or reductions, early May. I may be lynched mid-May; if you never hear from or of me again, you'll know why".

However, towards the end of May, Stan wrote: "The Epic of *The Dark Fantastic* took a fantastic turn last week. Otto Penzler's press is so small that we expected the book to be generally disregarded

when it came to reviews. But at publication time last week, and out of the blue, appeared a dazzling review in our mighty *Publishers Weekly*, the bible of the trade, followed next day by an even more dazzling review in the American Library Association's advisory publication, followed next day by calls from various paperback publishers and a couple of movie producers.

"As a result of these goings-on I am, right now, dizzy. Joyful to some extent; suspicious that some nasty reviews will follow. It has been a bit too easy so far, if you know what I mean, and I hark back to that old line, 'Just because I'm paranoid doesn't mean that someone isn't following me'. Both reviews did mention that the book is calculated to stir up anger in some quarters; those quarters have not been heard from, but they are there. I hope Otto is as

prepared for this as I am".

A week or so later, I heard from Stan again: "The case of *The Dark Fantastic* becomes more and more comical, with *Newsweek*, our potent national news magazine, publishing a splendid and discerning review of the book. I wait to see what happens when Andre Deutsch publishes the English edition on October 20".

I wait, too. Before Andre Deutsch agreed to publish *The Dark Fantastic*, two other London publishing houses had rejected it on non-literary grounds. I have now read the book—not once but twice, the second time savouring its characters and incidents, marvelling at the way the suspense is built up, and looking forward to the brilliantly ingenious ending. I am sure that it will only increase racialism if people who haven't read it say that it will.

The Christian God of War

TERRY LIDDLE

November is the month when services are held in churches and at war memorials all over Britain in remembrance of those who died in the 1914-18 and 1939-45 wars. Anglican clergy play a prominent role in these ceremonies while the Church of England, and top military leaders are an integral part of the Establishment. Nevertheless we see signs of unrest over the Church's unquestioning condonation of aggression and jingoism. But however sincere Christian pacifists and supporters may be, their deity is a god of war.

It is not so long since British imperialism conquered with a gun in one hand and a bible in the other, while the ruling class put its bright sons into the Army and its dim ones into the Church. However, something is stirring in what has often been described as "the Tory Party at prayer". The Falklands memorial service was not the display of jingoistic rejoicing Mrs Thatcher wanted, and there has been criticism of Government policy on disarmament, housing and immigration. It has even been suggested that the more bellicose sentiments in the national anthem should be excluded. Lord Cranborne has complained that the Church of England is now "peopled by buffoons, rather like Social Democrats".

Have secularists been proved wrong? Has the Church of England become a force for peace and progress?

The Rev Kenneth Leech, Race Relations Field Officer of the General Synod's Board of Social Responsibility, has stated that the Church of England's strength "lies in the upper and middle classes . . . study of the Synod of 1975 showed that

99 per cent were middle class, 79 per cent of them upper middle class". Furthermore ". . . the Synod is considerably more radical than the Church at local level, especially in the suburbs where the *Daily Telegraph* is likely to be the newspaper of the average, committed layperson". So while a handful of well-publicised clerics have become "like Social Democrats", the majority of Anglicans remain loyal to middle-class, Judeo-Christian values—chauvinism, militarism and all.

It is therefore not surprising that according to the committed Anglican layperson's paper, "one of our more prominent Anglican bishops" now considers that "the Chiefs of Staff are the only people in our society who are of the calibre I expect". Of the gentlemen in question, three are Anglicans while the sole agnostic, Sir Keith Williamson, Chief of the Air Staff, subscribes wholeheartedly to the Christian ethic. No wonder, then, that the Naval Chief of Staff, Sir John Fieldhouse, regards attempts by some clerics never mind humanists, to redefine morality as being "morally decadent".

In practice this means that the armed forces remain the sole area of British society where homosexuality is an offence; gays are "got rid of administratively", according to Williamson. And it is not only homosexuality among men that is outlawed. Many women have their careers ruined and their characters blackened after being found guilty of activities which elsewhere have never been illegal. Divorce is also frowned upon in the services, and under certain circumstances "could still provide grounds for chucking someone out".

Some of the Church leaders may be trying to come to terms with the 20th century. But for the military top brass, Queen Victoria has never died.

The Christian God, a Latinised version of the Jewish Jahweh, has always been a god war. And Jahweh himself was no pacifist. If the bible is to be believed, the Jews or at least the Levite ruling caste, were guilty of human sacrifice and genocide on a large scale.

The Christians have also stained their altars with blood. It is impossible to estimate the numbers who perished in religious wars since Christianity became the state religion of Rome. The history of the papacy is one of bloodshed, with popes like John X and Julius II actually leading their armies in the field. In the wars between rival popes, Clement VII led his army to butcher the entire population of Cesena.

Their power in Europe apparently secure, the popes turned to the Middle East where the city of Jerusalem had been captured by the infidel followers of Islam. The Crusaders, urged on by Church hierarchy and religious fanatics like Peter the Hermit, left a trail of destruction and massacre.

In England, a king who imagined that he ruled by divine right went to war with a Parliament whose forces were led by Cromwell. After defeating the Royalists at Marston Moor, during a battle in which 3,000 men were killed, Cromwell declared: "Truly England and the Church of God hath had a great favour from the Lord". Victorious in England, he turned his attention to Catholic Ireland where the massacre at Drogheda is remembered to this day.

In more recent times Christianity justified black slavery and imperialist conquest. When Europe went to war in 1914, Russian soldiers marched to the front beneath religious icons; German soldiers had "God is with us" stamped on their belt buckles. Conscientious objectors who were atheists were told that as they didn't believe in God they could have no conscience. At Calais, in 1918, British soldiers forced to attend Sunday services responded by refusing to sing the national anthem, much to the chagrin of the visiting padre. They were the lucky ones. Millions of their fellows had died in a cruel war blessed by Christian churches which had blessed wars for centuries.

In 1936, Spain's Fascist generals revolted against the Liberal Government. They were backed by the Catholic Church. (I have before me a photograph of the Bishops of Lugo and Madrid and the Archbishop of Santiago giving the Fascist salute.) Horrific stories of churches burned, priests murdered and nuns violated were circulated to arouse the faithful to murderous zeal. In Ireland, the Archbishop of Armagh called on his flock to help the Spanish Fascists, and at his urging a group of Irish Fascists went to fight for Franco.

The Vatican, in exchange for huge financial assistance, made peace with the former atheist agitator, Mussolini, and supported his wars in Ethopia and elsewhere.

How good a Catholic Hitler was remains debatable, but he still described himself as such in 1940 and it was a Catholic priest who edited and rewrote parts of *Mein Kampf*. Massacres of non-believers and "heretics" were of the order of the day in areas like Croatia and Slovakia where Hitler's clerical allies held power.

The peace movement, wrote Joseph McCabe, was "started and chiefly supported by sceptics. Its leading exponents . . . were the Atheists Robert Owen and Jeremy Bentham". Today, when nuclear weapons could annihilate the human race, the peace movement is stronger than ever. But the fact remains that religion, like power politics, is a potential cause of war.

SUNDAY LAW TANGLE

Market stallholders who broke Sunday trading laws were fined a total of £515 by magistrates in Eastbourne, Sussex, last month. Charges against the 31 traders were brought by Eastbourne Council under the 1950 Shops Act. One of the defendants had been selling household goods and another sports equipment.

Most of the accused were unaware that they were breaking any law. Mr Ray Haine, a magistrate, commented: "The law is a tangle but the magistrates are not here to consider changes in the law. We are only here to enforce the law as it stands".

• In the latest issue of its quarterly journal, "Joy and Light", the Lord's Day Observance Society thankfully records its latest victories for Our Lord and His Day. "Through our persistent correspondence with Newark District Council", Sunday antique fairs have been stopped at Newark and Notts Showground. Two Scottish bands announced that they would not participate in this year's Best Band contest as the finals were being held on a Sunday. Girl Guides and Brownies decided to boycott the Torbay carnival because it had been switched from Wednesday to Sunday. Plans by a golf club to open the Old Course at St Andrews on Sunday have been turned down. Mr J. T. Isaacs, the LDOS's Southern Area Secretary, assures members: "We have been mindful of the works of the evil one". But on several occasions "the evil one" has stolen a march on the Sabbatarians. A Sunday Fun Run, with attendant wickedness like Morris Dancing, was held at Clifton Downs, Bristol, in aid of charity. A flower show at Bangor (Northern Ireland) has, for a second time, been extended to Sunday. And a Sunday carnival in aid of a Catholic priory included such depravities as dodgems, swings, helter skelter and a candy floss stall, all of which "clearly demonstrate the unscriptural nature of Roman Catholic teaching and practice regarding the Lord's Day".

LETTERS

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

We the undersigned, being regular readers of "The Freethinker", wish to strongly protest at the increasing amount of Left-wing political propaganda that is appearing in its columns. We consider that the proper function of a freethought journal is to combat religious superstition and to provide a forum for the exploration that entails. We do not think that it should serve as the mouthpiece of an overtly political party viewpoint since that will eventually alienate those freethinkers who do not share it.

S. E. Parker, Pat Britten, (Professor) Antony Flew, Antony Milne, J. W. Evitt, N. S. Thomas, Geoffrey H. L. Berg, Stephen Marletta

UNCENSORED VIDEO CASSETTES

I note with concern the report (October "Freethinker") advocating the virtual non-censorship of video cassettes for sale to adults.

My concern arises from the fact of the capacity for evil inherent in various degrees in all human beings, together with a capacity for infinite daftness in a minority.

At the present time it is possible—by means of trick photography, simulation, plus the innards of dead animals or suitable replicas—to produce something which would surprise a Caesar innured to the spectacle of utmost sadism and brutality at the Roman Coliseum. What is more, it can look like "the real thing", and as ancient Rome and other societies have shown, there is a possible market for that product.

There is no guarantee that some people will not hesitate to pay for seeing "the real thing", and I am sure there are citizens of Eastern and South American countries who, having already obliged the advanced civilised developed countries of the West with heroin and cocaine, will readily oblige us with the product of "the real thing" at the right price. Life can be very cheap in those countries.

Furthermore, here in Britain adults are quite capable of showing the worst videos to their own children, or leaving them about and the children learning how to switch on and watch them.

J. R. THEOBALD

A LONE VOICE?

I wonder if I am the only member of the National Secular Society who is in favour of capital punishment (not necessarily hanging—there are other methods). As a freethinker, of course, I am entitled to my own opinions and not bound by any organisation. But I have doubts whether membership of the NSS is consistent with such opinions. Am I the only one?

PETER CHAPMAN

BOOK WANTED

I wish to enquire if any "Freethinker" reader has for disposal at a modest price a copy of G. A. Wells' first book, "Jesus of the Early Christians" (1971). My address is 300 Rickstones Road, Rivenhall, Witham, Essex.

JOHN DOWDING

EVENTS

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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Queen's Head, Queen's Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 4 December, 5 pm for 5.30 pm. T. F. Evans: What About the Family?

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. Christmas in Eastbourne and Paris. Details from Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12, telephone 01-673 6234.

Leeds and District Humanist Group. The Swarthmore Institute, Leeds. Tuesday, 13 December, 8 pm. J. K. Elliott: The Nativity Story—Fact or Fiction?

Leicester Secular Society. Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Sunday meetings at 6.30 pm. 13 November, Karl Heath: Nothing. 20 November, Colin Johnson: The Reality of Drug Use. 27 November, Peter Tatchell: The Future of Socialism. 4 December, Brian Micklethwait: Freedom of Expression—a Property Rights Approach. 11 December, Andrew Legg: Community Work.

Worthing Humanist Group. Trades Club, Broadwater Road, Worthing. Sunday, 27 November, 5.30 pm. Ted McFadyen: The National Press—Use and Abuse of Power.

Freethinker Fund

The Fund total has improved considerably this month and appreciation is expressed to all those who have contributed.

Anonymous, £6.50; C. F. Ablethorpe, £1.40; M. C. Ansell, £2.40; K. M. Barralet, £1.40; S. W. Beer, £6.40; S. Bonner, £1.40; J. L. Broom, £1.40; E. Brown, £2.40; J. Busby, £31.40; E. F. Channon, £3.50; N. L. Child, £5; B. Clarke, £1.40; R. E. Davies, £10; N. H. Divall, £1; S. J. England, £1.40; S. Exley, £10; D. A. Franklin, £2.40; T. Haas, £4.40; L. B. Halstead, £6.40; F. C. Hoy, £3; L. T. Johnson, £5; A. Joiner, £2.40; J. L. Lewin, £2.40; P. L. Lancaster, £14.40; D. Lowe, £5; P. Meyer, £2; W. F. Negus, £1.40; J. F. Robins, £1; V. Sangharashita, £2.80; R. W. Simmonds, £1.40; L. H. Sparks, £1; G. S. Spiers, £2; A. E. Standley, £1.40; A. C. Stewart, £1.40; P. J. Spence, £1.40; A. Varley, £1.40; F. Wadsworth, £1.40; J. W. White, £1.40; A. E. Woodford, £4.50.

Total for the period 10 September until 4 October: £156.90.

New Atrocities by the Ghouls of Allah

A Paris-based human rights organisation has confirmed reports that political prisoners in Iran are having their blood drained before execution. It is being used for emergency treatment of revolutionary guards injured in street clashes and at the war front.

The widely respected International Federation of Human Rights has obtained a smuggled copy of a document which has been sent to prosecutors in towns and provinces. French lawyer Christian Rostoker, who recently visited Iran, said: "I have every reason to believe that this document is true".

The document states that lack of blood reserves has resulted in deaths at the war front. It directs that "reliable medical teams" will drain away the blood of people who have been condemned to death. After being transferred to special containers it will be taken

to health centres.

It is pointed out in the document that the Ayatollah Khomeini has ruled that the order "does not constitute a breach of Islamic law".

Since the beginning of this year 450 people have been executed in Ourmiah prison alone. Summary trials, lasting between two and ten minutes, are conducted by mullahs. The victims' bodies were not handed over to their families.

● **President Numeiry of the Sudan ceremoniously emptied a can of beer into the Nile to mark the start of an operation to rid Khartoum of alcohol. At the signal, beer and spirits worth over £3 million were poured into the river following the introduction of a law enforcing Islamic law on strong drink.**

"Atheist Liberation"

"The provision of church schools, for which the taxpayer and ratepayer meet 85 per cent of the capital cost and 100 per cent of the running costs, is a wasteful duplication of educational resources—as well as denying children access to ideas other than those of the home background, exacerbating the problems of Northern Ireland, and laying the seeds of racial violence in immigrant areas where non-Christian religious leaders are now demanding the same right to their own schools as Christian denominations enjoy. As for our State schools, the law still requires them to provide religious instruction and a corporate act of daily worship, as though Parliament can guarantee the existence of a god to be worshipped.

"The teaching of contentious subjects as though they were on a level with science or mathematics is grossly uneducational. There is also the inevitable injustice to atheist and agnostic teachers, who must either be hypocritical or jeopardise their career prospects.

"Every radio and television company in this country has its religious broadcasting department, with a special budget for every station or channel, monitored by the Central Religious Advisory Council. There is, of course, no comparable budget of time or money for broadcasting non-religious views—and these therefore largely go by default, apart from a token humanist occasionally participating in a religious programme, with Christian spokesmen invariably accorded the lion's share of time and the last word.

"Even a minority sect like Roman Catholicism—which now has fewer adherents in Britain than there are people of a secular humanist outlook—has many weekly hours of broadcasting time, both for its

religious services and in moral discussion programmes.

"In fact, the persistent idea that morality is associated with religious belief pervades the public consciousness and underlies not only unfairness in the media but school curricula and the survival of many of our archaic laws—such as the common-law offence of Blasphemy, successfully used, against *Gay News*, within the last decade.

"Law reform to allow freedom of choice in such personal matters as voluntary euthanasia is blocked on religious grounds, thus imposing a god-fearing ordinance on people with no god to fear.

"Atheists are often paid the back-handed compliment, 'You really are a good Christian!' Our old enemy, Mrs Whitehouse, prefers to bear false witness, such as her famous alliterative 'Disbelief, doubt and dirt'. We could retaliate with something like, 'Faith, fraud and forgery'. But it would be more profitable to establish the positive legitimacy of our own position—through Atheist Liberation".

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Founded 1866 by Charles Bradlaugh

Minimum annual subscription: £2

Details and membership application forms obtainable from the General Secretary, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL, telephone 01-272 1266

About 100 of the 700 who took part in a recent Dublin pilgrimage to Lourdes have suffered from a virus infection which lasted 36 hours.