

The Freethinker

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"EVIL PRACTICES" OF SCIENTOLOGISTS DENOUNCED IN COMMONS

The "Church" of Scientology has revived its policy of "disconnecting" members, a practice it was forced to abandon in Britain 15 years ago following a parliamentary investigation. "Now the old reign of terror is back", says a former senior executive of the cult who has been declared a non-person. And Anthony Beaumont Dark, MP (Conservative, Birmingham, Selly Oak), has called for a top-level inquiry. He said: "I thought these evil practices had been stamped out".

There is plenty of evidence that the sect is up to its old tricks and has been disconnecting many of its dupes. Disconnection is "a fact of life", admitted Michael Garside, the public affairs officer.

Ronald Biggs, who lives in East Grinstead, Sussex, where the sect has its British headquarters, resigned because of its disconnection policy. He had been a member for 22 years.

He said that once he left the sect he was effectively disconnected. "Even though nothing official has been ordered, everyone knows.

"I am divorced, but my family are in the group still. My son was always very close to me, but he wrote to say that he must disconnect. Resigning is taken to be an act of hostility.

"My son has believed that it is necessary not to speak to me or visit me, even though it is very upsetting. . . .

"You become a non-person. You see somebody in the street and they turn their head away".

Mrs Vicky Ballard, who also lives in East Grinstead, joined the Scientologists in 1972 and became commanding officer at the sect's headquarters. She "worked hard . . . lived, slept and ate to help the Church". She became unhappy over developments in recent years and was removed from her post. Her husband was told not to sleep or live with her. Their

two children who attended a school run on Scientology principles were suspended.

Three Sussex doctors have also resigned from the sect in protest against the exorbitant fees being charged for courses. A course of 12½ hours of religious instruction can cost £4,000.

The sect has 200,000 members in Britain. It has shops in London, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Plymouth and Edinburgh. The annual British turnover is £2 million and much of this is channelled to America.

The Scientology movement was founded by L. Ron Hubbard, a flamboyant American who was born in 1911. He had a chequered career as a novelist, film script and science fiction writer. Hubbard, or rather his followers, claim he is a philosopher, naval war hero, archaeologist and master mariner. He has also been credited as being "one of the prime movers in the US effort of getting man into space"—quite an achievement for someone who apparently left university without even the American Bachelor's degree.

In 1950 he was taken up (or over) by the editor of a highly successful science fiction magazine. His book, *Dianetics: the Modern Science of Mental Health*, became a best-seller. Wealthy businessmen, scientists, students and other seekers after truth rubbed shoulders at his lectures which were extremely profitable.

It was in 1955 that L. Ron honoured the United Kingdom by setting up shop in London's Notting Hill area. He gave a series of lectures and before long highly priced tape recordings and books were available to the Scientology fraternity in this country.

By 1959 there was enough money to purchase Saint Hill Manor on the outskirts of East Grinstead.

(continued on back page)

The Freethinker

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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT PROBES SECTS

Appeals to the Charity Commissioners by a High Court jury, Members of Parliament and even the Prime Minister to take action against the Unification Church (the Moonies) have gone unheeded. But the Commissioners may soon be forced to extract their collective finger and do something about harmful religious sects which enjoy charity status.

There is to be a debate in the European Parliament next month and Richard Cottrell, MEP for the Bristol Euroconstituency, claims that it will be the first time that anything has been done about sects in a parliamentary sense. The debate follows a two-year investigation during which 600 sects have been identified.

Guidelines for such groups have been drawn up, but the right to hold a religious belief is not questioned. "If people want to say God is an orange and lives in a dustbin, that's up to them", Mr Cottrell commented.

But one outcome of the investigation could be the banning of the Children of God from Britain. A "black library" of their documents is in the hands of the Serious Crimes Squad at Scotland Yard and a report has been sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions. It is alleged that the sect uses female members as prostitutes to lure recruits and also encourages child abuse.

The proposals include guaranteed access to members of sects by family and friends. There should be clear identification of sects during recruitment and fund-raising. The Parliament will be asked to consider harmonising laws on tax exemption and charity status for religious groups.

The report states: "Almost all the new religious movements have inspired controversy in one form or another, with accusations of fraud and other fiscal improprieties, and, in the social sphere, frequent criticism on the grounds of causing distress within families and psychological harm to recruits".

The Unification Church is lobbying in Brussels and Strasbourg against the proposed guidelines.

Sir Michael Havers, the Attorney-General, has rejected a call to prevent judges from becoming Freemasons. In a Commons written answer he said that Ministers had no power to alter judges' conditions of appointment and tenure. Austin Mitchell, MP, said that freemasonry was detrimental to the judges' "fair and efficient exercise of their responsibilities". Mr Mitchell's request for a Masonic ban in the police force was also turned down.

AND NOTES

MYTH DEMOLISHED

Another pious myth has bitten the dust. The House of Loreto, one of the Roman Catholic Church's most popular shrines, was not transported by angels from Nazareth to Italy in order to save it from infidel. According to Father Guiseppe Santarelli, of the Universal Congregation of Antiquity, it was transported by sea by a family whose surname was Angeli (Angels). "Recent archaeological data proves it", he says.

The relic and shrine industry was exceedingly profitable and the Church encouraged acceptance of authenticity on the flimsiest evidence. A deputation went to the holy land and visited the site of the house which had been removed by the Angeli family. They declared that the dimensions were identical to those of the Loreto house. Another shrine opened up for business.

According to legend, the Virgin Mary's house was moved by a celestial Pickfords at the end of the 13th century. It was deposited at Loreto and for centuries was visited by the faithful. The miracles accumulated and so did the pilgrims' offerings. A Basilica was built over the house.

In 1920, Our Lady of Loreto was proclaimed patroness of Italian airmen. Her guidance as they dropped gas bombs on Abyssinian villages a few years later was much valued by Mussolini's air crews.

FOUR MINUTES TO DOOMSDAY

"If any of you atheists knew that you had only an hour to live, you would get down on your knees and turn to God". How often have unbelievers had that puerile rejoinder thrown at them in discussion with Christians.

Well, a very large number of people must have thought that the end was nigh when a nuclear warning system was triggered off accidentally in the Midlands last month. Thousands of people in the Coventry and Nuneaton areas had their slumbers disturbed by the wail of sirens. Some telephoned the local police and radio stations. Others chatted with neighbours. Most turned over in bed and went back to sleep.

There were no reports of people praying in the streets or rushing to the churches. But with only four minutes' warning they would not have made it before the big bang. Or perhaps they realised that Christianity, like the Government's protect and survive propaganda, is a gigantic confidence trick.

"A NATIONAL TRAGEDY"

The Republic of Ireland's laws on contraception and abortion have been formulated to meet the wishes of the Roman Catholic Church and its agencies. Sex education is largely the preserve of celibate priests and nuns. It is a situation to gladden the hearts of SPUcites, LIFEers and similar religious pressure groups in Britain. Next time you hear their "sanctity of life" parrot-cry, just remember this tragic story of two victims of sexual ignorance.

Ann Lovett was a bright and popular 15-year-old pupil at the Convent of Mercy secondary school in Granard, Co Longford. The third youngest in a family of nine, she went to school with over 400 other pupils on Monday morning. She had managed to keep her full-term pregnancy secret. Superior Sister Immaculata said: "Nobody had any idea of the predicament that poor Ann was in".

On Tuesday she left home as usual at 9 am. But she was not in the classroom that day. Instead she made her way to a grotto in the local churchyard where there is a statue of "Our Lady". She lay there in labour for seven hours until a schoolboy found her rain-soaked and semi-conscious.

It was not a doctor or the girl's family, but the parish priest, who was the first to be informed. The doctor was called and an ambulance took Ann to Mullingar Hospital where she died almost immediately. A member of the staff said that if she had been under medical care from the time of labour she would still be alive.

The body of Ann's 6½-pound baby, a boy, was found in the churchyard. They were buried together the following Friday.

Nuala Fennell, Women's Affairs Minister in the Irish Government, described the affair as "a national tragedy". She called for a full investigation, "regardless of whose sensibilities are hurt. . . The girl must have been in an appalling state of fear".

Mary Harney, a Dail back-bencher, welcomed the Minister's statement. "I am appalled to think that this could happen in Ireland of 1984. It is a disgrace that nobody appeared to know that she was pregnant".

But national concern over the tragedy has not been welcomed in all quarters. Canon Kilfillon, the parish priest, said that whoever gave the news to Dublin "was only spreading scandal".

The Rev David Armstrong, a Presbyterian minister in Limavady, Northern Ireland, has been threatened with dismissal for extending Christmas greetings to Roman Catholics in the town. His action caused a storm of protest and the Session of his church has called for his removal. Presbyterians are among the most fervent followers of the Prince of Peace in Northern Ireland.

THE MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF "GOD'S BANKER"

The Roman Catholic Church's Institute of Religious Works (the Vatican Bank) is to pay 250 million dollars to the creditors of the Italian Banco Ambrosiano. The collapse of the latter left debts of over 1,200 million dollars and caused a major scandal in international banking circles.

Roberto Calvi, the bank's president, fled to London and went into hiding. It was known that he was fearful for his life. He was later found hanging under Blackfriars Bridge, his pockets stuffed with stones. The Calvi family strenuously denied he had committed suicide.

The settlement is a serious blow to Vatican finances. Long-term loans are being arranged and heavy interest rates will have to be paid. Assets are also being sold to raise cash. It is reported that these include 50 million dollars' worth of quoted shares in Europe and the United States. Property holdings and a 51 per cent stake in a Swiss Bank will also be sold.

The Vatican's denial of any responsibility for Banco Ambrosiano dealings has always been regarded with considerable scepticism. Signor Calvi was known as "God's Banker" and Archbishop Marcincus was a key figure in banking circles. And no one believes that the Church's agreement to pay such a vast sum to creditors is motivated by charitable feelings.

Several questions remain unanswered. If Signor Calvi did not commit suicide—and that now seems to be highly unlikely—or meet his death accidentally, which is out of the question, who killed him? And on whose instructions did his killers act?

The Vatican has good cause to want the Banco Ambrosiano affair settled and forgotten.

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The Critics' Case Examined

NIGEL SINNOTT

A former Editor of "The Freethinker" considers accusations by a small group of readers that the paper is biased in favour of the Left.

Since I left the editorial chair 11 years ago I have largely confined my contributions to these columns to distant, safe, historical subjects. I am moved to depart from this practice by the feeling that the present controversy over politics and the death penalty in the Letters columns has generated not quite as much light as it has heat.

I have been a *Freethinker* subscriber for 20 years—more than half my life—and during that time have studied, in some depth, the history of the secularist and freethought movement. I mention these facts to establish my *bona fides*.

As Chris Turner has rightly pointed out (January), journals are "living things" in certain senses, and this is particularly true of *The Freethinker*. The paper was started with the intention that it should be a mouthpiece of militant freethought, and if this gave offence in orthodox (or reverent agnostic) circles, so much the better! The paper has always, to some extent, echoed the views of its editors on matters outside theology. Obvious examples are G. W. Foote on the Anglo-Boer War and Chapman Cohen on the First World War, Versailles and the rise of fascism. These views were often contentious, such as Foote's opinions on the Boer War.

The classic story for me is the one about the visit of a security official to Chapman Cohen during the 1914-18 War. This gentleman asked Cohen what steps were being taken to ensure that information in *The Freethinker*, which had and has a wide overseas distribution, did not fall into "enemy hands". Cohen's reply was that the paper was dedicated to the frank and unfettered discussion of intellectual matters and that if he received a subscription from Kaiser Wilhelm a copy of *The Freethinker* would be dispatched forthwith to the address given.

It is a fact of history that the freethought movement has always been radical and generally critical of the status quo. If that makes it left wing, so be it, but I think we all know that *The Freethinker* would be shut down by a Left-wing totalitarian government just as promptly as by a rightist one. Even if the package of views that most *Freethinker* "loyalists" hold are generally leftist, the fact remains that the paper has never shunned people simply because of their political opinions. The late Herbert Cutner, I gather, had very conservative political

views, but this did not prevent his being an able and prolific contributor to these columns.

Recent critics have something of a case as regards the Falklands War. During this period the paper did seem to over-represent the Bennite view, though I doubt if such views got much of a fair hearing elsewhere. For the record, I very strongly supported the war. I felt that if the British Government had not taken the gun covers off it would have become a lilliputian laughing stock in the eyes of the world. I also reckoned, rightly, that if the British succeeded in retaking the Falkland Islands this would bring down a Buenos Aires junta that had already murdered thousands of Argentinians. I was disappointed that the British did not first shoot up Argentinian mainland airstrips as this might have saved a lot of lives, not least of the brave Argentinian pilots, had they been grounded. I should emphasise that the tragedy was not lost on me at the time of two bodies of mainly young men being set at each other to shore up the reputations of a fascist clique on the one hand, and a seedy but democratic régime on the other. I was also gratified to learn (I am resident in Australia) that the British public sensibly ignored efforts by the yellow end of Fleet Street to whip up blood lust and mindless hatred.

However, while *The Freethinker's* comments on the Falklands War seemed to me one-sided, I suspect that the poor representation given to the pro-war party had more to do with lack of contributions rather than to censorship of those submitted. My only criticism is that the paper made no mention of the fact that the junta announced that divorce had been abolished in the Falklands as Argentina was "a Catholic country". I would like to hope that it was omitted only because the Editor did not hear about it.

The paper's critics have a much weaker case on the other matters, such as capital punishment and nuclear disarmament. The freethought movement has a long history of involvement with crime and punishment, war and colonialism, from the days when Bradlaugh campaigned for the abolition of flogging in the British Army. Whether we now like it or not, the movement—as a matter of history—has been in the forefront of issues such as abortion (for freedom of choice), contraception (in favour), the death penalty (against) and flogging (against). The movement was rent violently over contraception in the 1870s—it was a bitter issue—but the National Secular Society "faithful" made what I regard as the right choice and have survived with pride.

Let me illustrate what I mean by another issue, animals. I have been a consistent freethinker for most of my life but more recently have also become a born-again vegetarian. Remembering Bradlaugh's motto of "Thorough" I have gone the whole hog and become a vegan. This does not mean that I

expect the rest of the freethought movement to follow me or *The Freethinker* to publicise my views to the exclusion of all others; but Margaret McIlroy's excellent review of *Assault and Battery* (January) is proof that *The Freethinker* is still concerned about animals, even if I do not agree with all of the reviewer's comments. G. W. Foote faced up to the animal question at the beginning of this century: he decided it would be too divisive to commit the movement to vegetarianism but he ensured that "the extension of the moral law to animals" became one of the objects of the National Secular Society. By contrast, a few months ago I heard an Australian middle-class humanist airily dismiss Professor Peter Singer as "more interested in animals than humanism" despite the fact that Singer had championed the freethought position (and continues to do so) on matters like abortion and *in-vitro* fertilisation. This adds to the reasons why I call myself a freethinker or a secularist rather than a humanist.

Perhaps it will not be long now before a few disaffected readers are driven to complaining in *Humanist News* about *The Freethinker's* sloppy, old-fashioned Left-wing sentimentality about "dumb brutes". In theory, at least, it would not be impossible for a public hangman or a master of foxhounds to be elected President of the National Secular Society or appointed Editor of *The Freethinker*. If it happens, however, I shall not resign or cancel my subscription: I will just take myself off to a quiet corner and slash my wrists!

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Seven Roman Catholic priests and the archdiocese of Los Angeles are being sued by 22-year-old Rita Milla who claims that the priests seduced her. She says that one of them is the father of her 16-month-old daughter. The relationships started when she was 16 and thinking of becoming a nun, Miss Milla told a Press conference. Asked why she agreed to have sexual relations with seven priests she replied: "I trusted them and felt they would know what was a sin and what was not a sin".

Ignorance as a Way of Life

MADELEINE SIMMS

Effective contraception has enabled couples to control their fertility and plan to have children in accordance with their wishes and means. It has contributed to the dramatic reduction in maternal and infant mortality rates. Yet for over a century sexual freedom and responsibility have been under attack by religious opponents, usually Roman Catholic. In this extract from a lecture to the annual meeting of the National Association of Family Planning Doctors, Madeleine Simms looks at two examples of how the Catholics operate.

There are some rich and exceedingly well-organised pressure groups in this country. Profoundly anti-feminist in their ethos, they detest particularly what the late Cardinal Heenan was wont to refer to as "the contraceptive mentality", which he predicted rightly would lead to all kinds of tiresome demands — for privacy, freedom, confidentiality and self-determination — which the Roman Catholic hierarchy regarded as threatening to the traditional social order.

In his revealing autobiography, *Not the Whole Truth*, the cardinal relates how, as a young parish priest in the impoverished borough of Barking, he managed to prevent the opening of a birth control clinic for married working-class women. This he accomplished with the aid of an organisation which he describes as "non-sectarian and non-political". The organisation in question was the League of National Life, and it was roughly as non-sectarian and non-political as Life, SPUC, The Responsible Society and similar groups.

Heenan, the parish priest, worked hand in glove with the local deputy medical officer of health, a Dr O'Connell, whom he describes thus: "The prospect of a Marie Stopes clinic in his area was traumatic to this man of refinement. He decided that if this plan went through he would retire from the health service and take up music as a career". A versatile fellow indeed!

However, this sacrifice proved unnecessary. Heenan himself paid for the hire of a hall in which to hold a protest meeting and arranged the speakers — all under the umbrella of this non-sectarian, non-political league. "I was happy to assure her", he writes, referring to the organisation's secretary, "that the League need provide nothing but its name".

The faithful duly turned up at the meeting in large numbers and loudly applauded the denunciations of birth control unleashed from the carefully selected platform. The local councillors received a letter from their Catholic priest stating: "It is only fair to inform you . . . that you will forfeit any reasonable expectation of a Catholic vote at the

next elections if you assist the passage of any motion to further what Catholics regard as morally and socially unsound". That did the trick, and the working-class mothers of Barking had to continue to patronise their friendly neighbourhood back-street abortionist.

Now of course all this took place half a century ago, and the Catholic hierarchy no longer threatens politicians in such a crude way—at least not over contraception and at least not openly. But the technique of persuading or encouraging other individuals and other organisations to be seen to sponsor your own sectarian lobbying is still alive and well. . .

I cannot now recall why this piece of history should remind me of Mrs Victoria Gillick, the Catholic mother of ten whose campaign against confidentiality between doctors and their young patients has been in the headlines. She held a fringe meeting on the very first night of the last Conservative Party conference where she was to be seen by several million television viewers rabbiting on about her well known obsession, while the British economy and Mr Cecil Parkinson's career were collapsing all around her. (While I have the bad taste to mention Mr Parkinson, let me add that this former chairman of "the Party of the Family" voted to destroy the Abortion Act in 1975 and again in 1978. He evidently disapproved of abortion, though not of getting his secretary pregnant. Victorian values indeed!)

The slightly bemused interviewer asked Mrs Gillick whether she thought the issue of contraception for under-16s was really all that important, what with all the other things that were going on in the world. Her eyes grew as round as saucers as she assured him that of course she did.

What Mrs Gillick's campaign illustrates is that the strictly political problems we now face in the field of contraception are really residual ones. They concern contraception for young children only. Twenty years ago we should have been very glad to have only this little matter to worry about. So let us keep a sense of historical perspective about it all. But although the problems are residual, they are nonetheless real for all that, if only because it is even more dreadful for a young girl to have an unwanted pregnancy than it is for an older woman to do so.

Those who wish to prevent the young obtaining sound contraceptive advice are also those of course who wish to prevent the young obtaining sex education. They believe very positively in Ignorance as a Way of Life. Mrs Gillick and her backers have collected a considerable number of signatures from parents in many parts of the country who are apparently riddled with the same sexual anxieties as herself. MPs have been busy presenting these petitions in parliament. One of them, John Golding,

the Labour Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme, for example, presented a petition "signed by Mrs Frances C. Campbell, the area chairman of the North Staffordshire Catholic Women's League, and more than 300 North Staffordshire residents". He pointed out that this petition was identical to all the others in its wording. It urged the Home Secretary to ensure that parents be given "statutory rights" to be consulted before any contraceptive drugs or devices be given to their daughters whilst they are under 16. And there was a preamble about the family being the "natural and fundamental group unit of society".

It is not too difficult to obtain several hundred signatures outside a large Catholic church on any Sunday. It simply requires a certain amount of organisation and a few well chosen words from the pulpit. In *The Lancet* of 19 November 1983, the parliamentary correspondent drew attention to the work of the Knights of St Columbia and the Catholic Mothers Union in helping with this lobby.

Every time such a petition is presented in parliament the mandarins in the Department of Health quake with fear and trembling. Yet the Roman Catholic Church in this country represents only ten per cent of the population and not all its members toe the line on these matters. But its power of organisation is formidable.

We know full well that if this question were put fairly and honestly to the parents of this country they would reply overwhelmingly that they preferred their young daughters to have medical confidentiality and sound contraceptive advice, rather than an unwanted pregnancy, an illegitimate baby or an abortion. Only a monster would not. But the trouble about this Silent Majority is that it is silent, while the Roman Catholics and their friends are busy and noisy.

People are silent because they cannot take the antics of the Catholic lobby entirely seriously. They know that all this fuss concerns a handful of children who have disastrous relations with their parents, sometimes for a very good reason. So they are grateful to caring organisations like the Brook Advisory Centres that are prepared to accept these unwelcome responsibilities thrust upon them by neglectful parents, braving media hysteria to protect the welfare of some rather deprived youngsters.

It is rather ironic that the most stirring of all editorials in support of Mrs Gillick's campaign have come from that virtuous newspaper, the *Sun*, famous for its page three photographs of naked girls only a few years older than those Mrs Gillick wishes to protect from knowledge about contraception. When will she and all those other defenders of purity take on Rupert Murdoch or the porn barons of Fleet Street?

Holy Year pilgrims, including bishops, have complained to officials over the attitude of confessors at St Peter's Basilica in Rome. They have been described as impatient, rude and even brutal. One official of the Central Committee for Holy Year said: "I have heard of the pain and sorrow from the brutality of some of the confessors at St Peter's Basilica from priests and sisters who are on pilgrimage to Rome".

Freethinker Fund

The first list of 1984 contributors is given below, and although the amount donated is encouraging it is well down on the same period last year. *The Freethinker*, with its limited circulation and no revenue from advertising, needs the financial support of those who realise the need for such a journal. We hope that individual readers and local groups will help to bridge the gap between income and expenditure by contributing to the Fund and endeavouring to increase the circulation of *The Freethinker*.

Anonymous, £10; F. A. Avard, £1.40; N. I. Barnes, £2; D. Behr, £12; I. F. Bertin, £1.40; H. J. Blackham, £1.40; H. K. Campbell, £6.40; A. C. F. Chambre, £1.40; P. R. Chapman, £1.40; N. Child, £6.40; F. T. Chirico, \$6.60; R. Craft, £1.40; A. Crowle, £1.40; J. W. Darling, £1.40; M. Davies, £5; A. F. Dawn, £1; A. A. H. Douglas, £1.40; F. G. Evans, £6.40; J. Gauley, £1; R. Gerrard, £2.40; Q. Gill, £5; G. Grieg, £6.40; R. Hall, £1.40; J. T. Haslett, £1.40; F. Howard, £4.40; F. C. Hoy, £5; J. R. Hutton, £2.40; M. D. Jeeps, £6.40; J. Lippitt, £5; J. Lloyd-Lewis, £1.40; E. A. Napper, £1.40; P. S. Neilson, £3.40; A. Oldham, £6.40; R. J. Orr, £1.40; S. L. Parfitt, £1.40; V. S. Petherham, £3.40; J. B. Reader, £2.40; W. H. Rogerson, £1.40; R. V. Samuels, £1.40; D. Scarth, £11.40; W. Shaw, £1.40; D. E. Shoesmith, £3.40; W. Shuttleworth, £6.40; G. Swan, £1.40; C. Szafr, £1.40; G. G. Thanki, £1.15; V. Tharpar, £1.40; V. G. Toland, £1.40; J. Vallance, £15; W. Walker, £1.40; T. Wallace, £10; P. K. Willmott, £1.40; C. Wilshaw, £2.40; F. Woolley, £1.40; D. Wright, £2; J. Young, £1.40.

Total for the period 1 January until 2 February: £190.95 and \$6.60.

The Gay Humanist Group has announced the names of eight new vice-presidents. They are Sir Hermann Bondi, Brigid Brophy, Dr James Hemming, George Melly, Barbara Smoker, Dr Harry Stopes-Roe, Angela Willans and Sir Angus Wilson. The GHG's principal aim "is to bring the Humanist philosophy of life to the attention of Britain's gay community as a valid, positive alternative to religion . . . the Humanist outlook is in sharp contrast to that of most world religions which are overtly hostile towards gay people in their struggle for equality".

Writer, Artist, Socialist—150th Anniversary of William Morris

RAY WATKINSON

William Morris, who was born into a prosperous middle-class family at Walthamstow on 24 March 1834, became a major literary, artistic and political figure in Victorian England. He studied for holy orders at Oxford, but abandoned the faith and later pioneered the Socialist movement. As an artist and designer, William Morris did much to combat the ugliness that resulted from the Industrial Revolution.

William Morris was born on Quarter Day, so the event had symbolic satisfaction for his father, also named William, who hoped his son would carry on the private banking business he had established in the City of London. But 24 March is also the eve of Lady Day, and for the baby's mother, Emma, it would be no less symbolic of her dream of a son who would grow up to be a bishop.

Neither parent's dream was to be realised. Their son grew up to be famous as a poet and artist who influenced the whole field of decorative design. And in the last 15 years of his life—with no remission of creative work—he was an outstanding leader of the Socialist movement of the 1880s and '90s. All those things that made him famous in his own day, and still important in ours, were the very opposite of their dreams for him.

In 1843 the family moved into handsome Woodford Hall, with 50 acres of park and garden, a hundred of farm land, a private gate into the churchyard and another into the hornbeam glades of Epping Forest. Mr Morris obtained a coat of arms, rising yet higher in the scale of gentrification.

The next year he bought a place for his son at the newly founded Marlborough College. He also invested £272 in a mining venture with his brother and two stockbroker neighbours. They struck it rich where the Tamar and Tavy join and the Cornish lodes of copper and tin spill into Devon. For a decade the Devon Great Consols Mine was the most lucrative in the world. Within five years a one pound share was changing hands at up to £800.

Three years later Mr Morris died suddenly and intestate. His estate was proved at a nominal £60,000 which was divided in equal shares between the eight children and their mother. They moved back to the Water House, Walthamstow (now the William Morris Gallery).

In 1848 William went to Marlborough College. There he found little teaching, no organisation, but a good library. And within walking distance lay the mysterious Silbury Hill, the stone circle of Avebury and the Vale of the White Horse to stir his imag-

ination. All this ended with the school mutiny in 1851. He was taken away to study privately under a learned young clergyman who drew him towards fashionable Anglo-Catholicism.

Two years later he entered Exeter College, where, as at Marlborough, he was disappointed by the intellectual torpor of his tutors, but filled with delight by the still mediaeval city. He fell in with half-a-dozen other young men, not all meant for the Church, but for commerce, law and engineering. Coming from Birmingham they knew a life utterly unlike his, but shared his interest in literature and history. They read Tennyson, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Kingsley and Dickens — and Ruskin's *Modern Painters*.

Freed from his father's irksome ambition, William Morris was now gradually being liberated from his mother's alternative dream. At the end of his Oxford years he articulated himself to the diocesan architect, the distinguished and still young G. E. Street. His friend, Burne-Jones, embarked on a painter's life under the guidance of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Rossetti first saw Morris as a rich young man, full of feeling and enthusiasm, an ideal patron. But he soon realised that Morris was also a poet on his own level, and more besides. He was easily persuaded to give up architecture for painting and for three years Morris worked hard to master that art, while writing a great deal of vivid, dramatic poetry, published in 1858 as *The Defence of Guenevere*.

He married the daughter of a groom in one of the Oxford livery stables. She was Jane Burden, whose face we know well from a dozen Rossetti pictures. He bought a plot of land near Bexley and there built his Red House, with steep roofs, tall chimneys, green lawns and flower beds. He furnished and decorated the house with the help of friends. Morris gave up painting to form a kind of artists' co-operative with these friends, undertaking to design and make everything from stained glass and furniture to tiles, embroidery and jewellery. They won two awards at the Exhibition of 1862, and for the next five years at Red Lion Square, Holborn, worked on commissions from architects, private patrons and even the Ministry of Works. Morris and his group had become a force to be reckoned with.

In 1875 Morris bought out his partners and there was a new entity in the world of decorative art. The co-operative had been based mainly on single commissions; now Morris aimed at the market. The new work was directed not at a few clients but at many customers. Wallpapers, chintzes and woven fabrics could be bought by the piece and the yard by scores

of people furnishing their homes. Morris learned a dozen crafts in order to design for them, to teach his small work-force and to control quality.

William Morris had become increasingly appalled at the squalor of the industrial world, the inexorable drive of the profit motive with the exploitation and degradation it generated. The concerns he felt as a young man at Oxford were re-asserted; he could not rest until he knew what underlay this squalor and what should be done about it.

He set about new reading — More's *Utopia*, the works of Robert Owen, Fourier, Cobbett and J. S. Mill. From Ruskin he had caught one central thought in the famous chapter of *Stones of Venice* on "The Nature of Gothic" — a study of work-relations no less than of art.

In the late 1870s Morris was suddenly drawn into activity over the "Eastern Question" — the agitation against Disraeli's policy of backing the Turks when their massacre of Bulgarian subjects aroused indignation here and brought threats of war against Russia. He became an active member of the Eastern Question Association, made his first public speeches, worked with Gladstone and other Liberal MPs and, for the first time, working-class leaders of the trades unions. As Gladstone's commitment lessened and the middle-class Liberals largely faded out, he saw a hitherto unsuspected factor in his political world — the organised working class. And to The Working Men of England, in May 1877, he published an impassioned appeal which did more than call them to support the persecuted Bulgars; it called on them not to wait for a lead from their social betters but themselves to give the lead.

The Social Democratic Federation was formed in 1883 and Morris joined on the understanding that it would declare itself socialist. He became the first SDF treasurer and from then until the end of his life he worked, thought and spoke for the socialist cause. He read Marx's *Capital*, then available to him only in French, wrote for the Federation's paper, *Justice*, and made the acquaintance of Eleanor Marx, Edward Aveling, Belfort Bax and Andreas Scheu.

Morris and his friends became distrustful of Hyndman's highly personal and dubious dealings with the Tories. They broke away from the SDF and formed the Socialist League. It was Morris who edited and largely subsidised its paper, *Commonweal*, and his political commentaries, articles and reviews, less known than his other work, show a far-sighted and realistic grasp of the Socialist cause and its needs. As he entered the 1890s, a new venture, the famous Kelmscott Press commanded his interest. And again what he did had far-reaching effects on type and print design.

In all his diverse and productive life there was a deep logic of development, never shirked by Morris, leading to the expression of his socio-political

ideas in romance, lecture, speech and poem, his politics never separable from his art. If there is one book in which his life and thought find full expression, it is *News From Nowhere*. It was read by thousands in Britain and translated into French, Russian, Italian and German.

The first book about Morris, begun with his sanction by Aymer Vallance, was *William Morris, his Art, his Writings, and his Public Life*. This reflects exactly the terms on which he agreed to help Vallance. Famous as a poet and artist, perhaps more notorious as a Socialist, he was not prepared to have the parts of his life separated with his socialism buried under more acceptable achievements. He came to Socialism out of his passion for art and his outrage at the squalid underside of the richest empire since Rome. Early in his public life he had written to Charles Rowley of the Ancoats Brotherhood: "I have only one subject to lecture on, the relation of art to labour".

And it was from that focus, which holds art and work to be inseparable, first suggested to him by Ruskin, that both practical and theoretical commitment came. Art and work for William Morris were not opposed, but complementary necessities of life.

The Humanist Case

There was a spate of letters from Christians in "The Scotsman" newspaper at the turn of the year. One correspondent requested a positive statement of humanist belief and Freethinker reader, Professor William Walker, duly obliged. Here is an extract from Professor Walker's letter.

For the humanist, the universe is a mass of more or less organised energy, of various, complex but patterned distribution. Our chief and only reliable knowledge of this universe comes from science. This is because science has severe limitations implicit in its method: its relatively modest declarations (apart from its applied achievements) are endlessly checkable and vulnerable to experiment and further checkable observation.

Mystical and theological declarations, by contrast, may be poetical and grandly imaginative, but are boundless and utterly uncheckable in any universal, communicable way. This means that they are all but useless as knowledge.

This is not to say that the humanist case rests on science in the main or even in part. No, it rests primarily on powerful philosophical arguments advanced by Hume, Kant, Russell and others against any need for a "first cause" such as a god of any

(continued on page 43)

BOOKS

POLITICAL TRIALS IN BRITAIN, by Peter Hain. Allen Lane, £12.95

The thesis of Peter Hain's latest book, *Political Trials in Britain*, is that the creation of statute law, the interpretation of civil law and the enforcement of criminal, civil and administrative law mirror the values of the governors rather than the governed in society. Conscious that power in the modern corporate State is highly concentrated and likely to become more so as the authoritarian state supercedes it, Hain argues that an understanding of the law is impossible without acknowledging that British society remains rigidly stratified, leaves wealth in the hands of a tiny minority and allows decisions to be taken in the interests of the ruling class by the ruling class.

Hain's thesis is bound to cause offence to those brought up on the idea of the law, especially the common law, as a seamless thread which adapts the actions, traditions and rights of yesteryear to the circumstances of today. Where legal text books talk about high-minded notions of justice and relate these to concepts of freedom and liberty Hain sees a selective utilitarian philosophy used to back up the seedy corporate consensus of a fearful conservative Britain.

The fairy tales set out in legal text books cannot be accounted for by the ignorance of their authors. Written by lawyers for the benefit of lawyers, the text books, like the pages of the *Sun* newspaper, are intended to reflect the ingrained conservative prejudices and philosophical indifference of their readers. Those readers, educated for the most part at public schools, subsequently become solicitors, barristers and judges. Inside many of them is a policeman trying to get out, a moralist wanting to tell others how to behave, a politician blaming the country's ills on the victims rather than the perpetrators of those ills.

Deep down though, every lawyer, past and present, except Margaret Thatcher, knows that in interpreting existing laws judges in Britain make new laws which reflect the prevailing political and economic conditions as seen through the eyes of those anxious to preserve order and hold off change. Since the law exists and always has existed to uphold authority rather than the rights of individuals it would be surprising if it were otherwise. The existence of the odd deviant judge or a judge like Lord Denning, who from time to time has suppressed his High Tory principles in favour of the interests of the individual, only serves to emphasise the truth of Hain's conclusion that "the judiciary is the Conservative Party in court".

According to Margaret Thatcher "judges give

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decisions on the law and the evidence before them. They do so totally impartially". Alas for Margaret Thatcher's naivety many of the judges that I came across as a barrister, such as Sir John Donaldson, Mr Justice Lowton, Judge Ossie Mackay and Mr Justice Melford Stevenson would have been offended by her assertion that they were "impartial". Partiality, bias and extremism were their main and in some cases only strengths.

When Lord Denning said of an appellant, "She would never make a schoolteacher, she had a man in her room at night" and Judge King-Hamilton said of someone I was defending, "If there were fewer back-street abortionists like you, there would be less promiscuity" they were reflecting Mrs Thatcher's partial Victorian values. They owed their ability to express and reinforce these values in their decisions to the Lord Chancellor who appointed them. They and he were and are part of what E. P. Thompson called "the secret State". Their appointments like those of Magistrates took place by processes that were masonic in flavour and intent.

Almost every tenet of British justice which most people accept as true without a second thought comes under Hain's hammer.

There's "one law for all", says Lord Scarman. Not so, replies Hain. When a "snatch squad" arbitrarily arrests "ringleaders" at a demonstration, or a policeman in Britain stops and searches people for no other reason than that they are young and black, it's clear that some of us are expected to obey more law than others.

On the tablets of stone at Bramshill College it says that policemen are politically neutral. In that case asks Hain how comes it that Mr James Anderson, the Chief Constable of Manchester, who feels that the major task for the police in the future is not solving crime but dealing with political dissidents, would be rapturously received at any Conservative Party conference? And why do the boys from Special Branch infiltrate trade unions rather than masonic lodges?

Every schoolboy knows that we're all equal before the law. Tell that says Hain to the man in Northern Ireland languishing in prison after a trial without a jury in which the only prosecution witness was a supergrass.

Well no one can deny the strength of our jury system, based as it is on the fact that they are selected at random. Wait a minute, says Hain. Didn't Brian Sedgemore first report on jury vetting in 1972 in *Private Eye* under the pseudonym Justinianforthemoney and subsequently force the Attorney-General

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to admit that the practice had existed ever since the War.

As the rostrums tumble a sense of unease takes over. Political influences in the system are seen not as occasional blots but as all pervasive. In this important book Hain's historic perspective may be weak, but there's no doubting his political strength and the wealth of detail which breathes life into the analysis.

BRIAN SEDGEMORE, MP

THE PENGUIN BOOK OF HOMOSEXUAL VERSE,
Edited by Stephen Coote. Penguin, £3.95

No anthology is completely satisfying, because it is never complete. For me a successful poetry anthology must contain some surprises I have not come across before, some once slightly-known pieces which have been difficult to track down again, and some old favourites which come afresh in a new context. On all these counts this anthology is successful.

There are, some extraordinary omissions: W. H. Auden is represented by a slight squib rather than *Ganymede* or *Lullaby*—a moving lyric about the intensity and transience of one-night stands. James Kirkup's infamous *The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name*, the publication of which brought about the blasphemy trial of *Gay News*, is half there. Beneath the title the Editor writes: "*Gay News* was successfully prosecuted for blasphemous libel on publishing this poem. It therefore remains unavailable to the British public". This is only half true. The poem was republished after the trial by the Free Speech Movement.

It is a pity that Penguin did not challenge the ridiculous blasphemy law by republishing the poem—some of the limericks are quite as indelicate—but it is understandable that the Editor would not wish to jeopardise the whole venture for one poem. However, there is printed a similar, but much more delicate, poem which implies that Jesus had homosexual experiences with his disciple John.

The Editor has written a cogent introduction tracing attitudes to homosexuality from the Ancient Greeks to Gay Liberation. By establishing the criteria of "a collection of poems by and about gay people", he is able to cast a very wide net and an unexpected, but attractive, inclusion is Wordsworth's *To Lady Eleanor Battle and the Honourable Miss Ponsonby, Composed in the grounds of Plas-Newydd, Llangollen*. (Womens' love is not neglected.) The

omission of any biographical details is a pity, especially since some of the poets are little known, but with well over 150 poets the space taken might have meant loss of poems.

The anthology is justified on the grounds that to preserve and rediscover a record of gay love is to ensure homosexual rights: there is no better way of oppression than the obliteration of knowledge. Above all it is as an anthology of love poetry, which reminds us that love is a universal experience regardless of sexual orientation, that this excellent anthology will be treasured.

JIM HERRICK

The Humanist Case

kind.

The humanist respects cultural myths of whatever date or origin (Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Islamic, etc) but rejects them as valid or ultimate explanations. He recognises that various religious groups have cherished these myths as truth in spite of destructive evidence (the frail and chancy process of "faith") because they feel they need them in the face of the admittedly challenging human condition.

The humanist believes that ethics or moral philosophy is part of the study of man. Beyond man, we have no reason to believe that there are any moral values, though we do see a primitive morality practised by other species on our own planet. Nature and the universe, however entrancing to the intellect and imagination, are morally neutral: if we reach out for our values to the stars or to any "god", we only bring back our own.

The humanist rejects absolute values as part of the stuff of the universe, on grounds of observable evidence; their existence, like so much else that is improbable, is impossible to disprove, but once assumed leads to frightful moral quagmires that are only deepened by the further assumption of gods or deities to explain them. Kindness, tolerance, love and self-sacrifice are inherent in human beings at least as deeply as their behavioural opposites, and can be seen in some of the "lesser" species.

The humanist rejects the notion of sin and the needless guilt it brings, together with the tortuous and tortured mechanisms of propitiation and salvation. For him, morality is the rational reconciliation of conflicting desires and needs.

The humanist accepts the limitations of the human condition and has learned to live with them. In this he has something in common with some Eastern religions, but not with Christianity's hectic, apocalyptic, guilt-ridden and above all equivocal message. He does not need the pathetic illusion that his personal fate is linked with the universe, or personally cherished by its omnipotent creator. He is resigned to personal extinction, prizing this life all the more. He it is who truly respects the mystery of the world.

LETTERS

RELIGION AND EDUCATION

The two articles, "Religion and Powers of Discrimination" by Brenda G. Watson, and "Good/God" by Michael Duane, appearing side by side in a recent issue of "The Freethinker" convinced me that religious education is perhaps more necessary to society today than at any time before.

Michael Duane's comment that "all cultures succeed in creating emotional bonds so strong that in times of crisis reason is swept aside by patriotism", together with his inference that inbuilt prejudice masquerading as personal preference lies at the root of such emotions, point to the need for education. For the cure for prejudice must lie in education. Michael Duane in drawing attention to the universality and power of prejudice whether culturally conditional or personally acquired, lends weight to the plea made by Brenda G. Watson, "that children be enabled to think clearly in both science and religion. . . I see education as concerned with giving children the skills with which to evaluate evidence . . . the problems attendant upon the interpretation of evidence, the element of subjectivity, etc, etc, may be disclosed to the great benefit of all of us who are concerned about the building up of a harmonious society in which religious believer and unbeliever can live in a manner appropriate to 'homo sapiens'".

The United Kingdom is now declared a multi-cultural and multi-faith society. The need for religious education is therefore more pressing than formerly when a single common tradition was the norm. Michael Duane in his opening remarks on patriotism stresses the importance of fear of the enemy. In many of the violent racist eruptions within the UK it is this fear of the alien and therefore enemy which is contributory to the conflict. The only hope for a society consisting of peoples from diverse cultures and religions is that mutual understanding might bring about tolerance and mutual respect. Since religion plays so important a part in the lives of the differing cultural groups it is essential that all should have an informal knowledge and understanding about the beliefs and reasons for the significance of these beliefs to the different groups. It is the role of education to provide children with the opportunity to gain such understanding.

Michael Duane, in replying to Brenda G. Watson, points out problems about the Christian concept of the God of love and refers in his argument to the Indian concept of the goddess Kali who embodies both good and evil. In making these references as well as his other comments about the Christian religion Michael Duane draws heavily upon his own religious education. From my reading of Brenda G. Watson's article I conclude that what she is asking of schools is to educate pupils so that they, like Michael Duane, will also be enabled to enter into the same kind of debate as well as to rationally determine their own position with regard to religion.

I think that she is right and I feel that to dismiss religious studies from the curriculum would be to encourage religious prejudice, inter-cultural suspicion and social unrest within society as well as to deprive children of the means of understanding themselves in the historical and philosophical context of their native culture and tradition. It is for these reasons that I mention that religious education is vital.

DORA AINSWORTH
Former Principal Lecturer—Education,
Manchester Polytechnic

Michael Duane replies: Dora Ainsworth presumes that I "draw heavily upon (my) religious education" when I discuss the Christian concept of the God of love or refer to the goddess Kali. In our "Divinity" lessons there was no discussion of "the concept of God", no questioning of "His" existence, no examination of the way in which concepts are formed. One thing did stick, although it was never discussed, viz Thomas Aquinas' statement, "Nihil intellectum est nisi per sensu", a statement that seemed to me then to be at odds with his distinction between "material" and "spiritual", and now to make a nonsense of the material/spiritual question. My later exploration of ideas, specially those of the linguistic philosophers, and my readings in anthropology and psychology, confirmed my earlier intuitions and led me to study the circumstances in which children get ideas about "God".

Like so many other writers about religion and religious education, Dora Ainsworth does not discriminate between (a) instruction in the ideas and practices of particular religions and sects, e.g. teaching hymns and prayers and practising postures and rituals such as closing the eyes and bowing the head, clasping the hands together while praying, making the sign of the cross on the body, kneeling and so on; (b) discussion of different beliefs and practices and their relation to the history and culture of the believers—sometimes called Comparative Religion; and (c) the teaching of morality and ethics—the study of actions and their consequences on individuals and society: the consideration of what may be called "good" or "bad" and how such categories are reached.

I know of no serious objection to the inclusion of (b) and (c) in school curricula, and especially of (b) in any society, whether multi-cultural and multi-faith or not. Incidentally I am not aware of any official declaration of the United Kingdom as "a multi-cultural and multi-faith society". Such a declaration would presumably require the disestablishment of the Church of England. I certainly do know many and serious objections to the inclusion of (a) in State schools: many of the objectors with whom I have discussed these issues are themselves devout adherents of particular faiths.

Faith, like freedom of thought, is a matter for the individual. If he is to be presented with the arguments for God, then he must have the right to be presented with the arguments against God. Only then can he be in the position to make up his own mind. Some years ago a few pupils in Summerhill told A. S. Neill that they wanted to attend a local church. He did not seek to dissuade them. Several weeks later they stopped and when Neill casually asked them why, replied that they could make no sense in anything they had heard and seen. Should Neill have tried to persuade them to continue to attend until . . . what? Until they made it clear that they wished to become members of that Church? Until they had "rationally determined" that it was not for them? Upon what criteria would Neill, or others, have assessed the rationality of their decision?

Brenda G. Watson has asked "that children be enabled to think clearly in both science and religion", but to state the requirement thus is to place religion in the same category as science, i.e. knowledge resting on evidence that is verifiable because experiments can be repeated and conclusions checked by others. Religion, in the sense of belief in a supposed entity called "God", is a matter of faith and cannot be tested by experiment. Like poetry, its truth lies in the ear of the listener. To make this kind of religion compulsory in schools denies the very meaning of faith, since faith cannot be compelled. Witches were burned because their beliefs defied religious argument.

FLATTERED AND GRATIFIED

I am flattered that Antony Milne and S. E. Parker, in their article, "The Freethinker"—Quoting From the Left? (February), should have singled out my modest contributions as being "Left-wing propaganda". Clearly I have succeeded more than I hoped.

First, some specific points. My article in the March 1982 issue was not "an entirely political article . . . in defence of Ken Livingstone". It was, as I should have thought evident from the summarised bold introduction, an article attacking the popular Press, and contrasting press treatment of Ken Livingstone and Tony Benn with the reality of these politicians (I am deeply saddened that Mr Milne and Mr Parker did not appreciate the penetrating wit of my title—"Surely not Mr Livingstone, I Presume . . . ?").

Secondly, your writers suggest that Tony Crosland would have demurred at my description of Tony Benn as "an intellectually gifted man". I am sure he would, and I applaud Mr Milne's and Mr Parker's acute perception of the difference between politicians on the extreme Right and the extreme Left of the Labour Party.

Thirdly, Mr Milne and Mr Parker state that I wrote "another article . . . attacking the new Police Bill." That is so. I take the view that this Bill, now revived in a second but substantially unchanged version, is a direct assault on basic civil liberties, specifically in terms of increasing police powers of detention, of arrest, and stop and search. Any legislative measure which seriously proposes, as this Bill does, to detain people for up to 96 hours if they are suspected of a "serious arrestable offence" (not even defined in the Bill) by a police officer (whose rank is not designated in the Bill) is, I would suggest, a matter of acute concern for readers of this magazine.

Finally, my understanding of humanism is that its rejection of organised religion is simply a starting point. For me it is a belief in the capacity of ordinary people to rise above the myths—religious, political, social and economic which have been foisted on us for generations, and assert our right to form our own judgements. I find that "Left-wing" politics—if such labels must be used and in spite of its imperfections—provide me with more satisfactory answers to basic human problems than other political systems, and if my writing along these lines characterises me as a "Left-wing propagandist", then I am honoured and gratified to be so described.

TED McFADYEN

IN DEFENCE OF DEMOCRACY

I would like to make two comments on the article by Antony Milne and S. E. Parker.

First, my contesting the presidency of the National Secular Society had nothing to do with the content, political or otherwise of "The Freethinker". I stood in order to offer an alternative to moves which in my opinion would be injurious to the democratic process within the Society. Rightly or wrongly the Society's annual general meeting, which neither Mr Milne nor Mr Parker attended, rejected my offer.

Secondly, it is absurd to describe the allegation that the CIA has murdered or conspired to murder politicians it doesn't like as being unsubstantiated. President Johnson himself admitted: "We have been operating a damned Murder Inc in the Caribbean" ("Atlantic" July 1973). The involvement of the CIA in all manner of unpleasantness, from the Bay of Pigs invasion to the recruitment of savage tribal mercenaries in Laos, has been well documented, particularly by John D. Marks and Victor Marchetti in "The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence", a book which the CIA tried to prevent being published.

Opposition to the machinations of the CIA is not "anti-Americanism", but a necessary activity in defence of democracy.

I find "The Freethinker" an excellent publication and an antidote to the mind-rotting drivel of the Establishment media from the "Church Times" to the "Sun". In a time of growing reaction, both religious and secular, its fearless radicalism is vital.

TERRY LIDDLE

FUNDAMENTALISTS IN POWER

It would be good if both the United States and Israel were the paradise for freethought that Antony Milne and S. E. Parker claim. But they must know full well that one of the USA's principal exports has always been evangelists—from Aimee MacPherson and her angels to Billy Graham. The present Israeli government is kept in power by fundamentalists whose beliefs are as dangerous as the Ayatollah's.

Fortunately, in both countries, and in the Arab world, there is a growing minority trying to get rid of this nonsense. Antony Milne's and S. E. Parker's statement that all the world except Europe and America is receding into the dark ages ignores such countries as China, India, Japan, Australia and New Zealand where there is more optimism.

SAM BEER

THE USA UNDER REAGAN

Antony Milne and S. E. Parker support the charge of "The Freethinker's" growing politicisation with specific allegations. As to their criticism of "The Freethinker's" anti-Conservative stance, one might refer them to two articles, Jim Herrick's (May 1982) and Terry Liddle's (September 1983) for a sound rationale of the humanist response to Tory religious propaganda. I wish to confine my remarks to President Reagan's open flouting of the American division between Church and State.

Throughout his presidency, Mr Reagan has been an unashamed defender of the faith in public office, alienating churchmen and atheists alike. As long ago as the summer of 1980, he was to be found on the campaign stump with avowed fundamentalist leaders. Three years later he went even further in addressing himself to the "evils of Communism" before a gathering of the same fundamentalist leaders. As was pointed out at the time by no less of an establishment figure than Alastair Cooke, this assertion of spiritual pride was an attack on the large Roman Catholic element in America as well as on the Soviet Union. In one fell swoop, Mr Reagan managed to turn back the clock 30 years in his own country as well as internationally by suggesting that White Anglo-Saxon Protestants were more legitimately American than were other United States citizens and, by faintly concealed implication, more moral.

President Reagan's anti-Catholic tendency may be seen in the American-backed defeat of Roman Catholic socialist regimes in El Salvador, Grenada and Nicaragua. At the time of American intervention in El Salvador, President Reagan appeared on a broadcast to the nation to distinguish between "positive and negative totalitarianism". Henry Kissinger's recent report on Nicaragua vividly recalls CIA intervention in Chile to decisively defeat the Allende government—which Dr Kissinger makes no attempt to conceal from his Memoirs. Only the most politically naive could fail to identify the form of American intervention in the open and inveterate persecution of political dissidents in Latin American countries. "The Freethinker" has

never endorsed the widely-publicised persecution of dissidents in the Soviet Union; there has been no need for it. But when America has been so stridently moral and Christian in their foreign policy, their intervention invites rebuke.

Freedom of speech and of belief always has been a basic tenet of humanist activity. The United States' highly selective interpretation of this and their heavy-handed policy arising from this interpretation, reinforces the humanist response to it.

AN AMERICAN READER

MATTERS OF HISTORY

The article by Antony Milne and S. E. Parker (February 1984), following the letter from eight readers (November 1983) complaining about "Left-wing propaganda" in "The Freethinker", includes as one of the examples of such improper propaganda an article by myself "on unilateralism" (February 1983). I must point out that my article contained no Left-wing propaganda, that it concerned not unilateralism but the unilateralist movement, and that it concentrated on the highly relevant point that many freethinkers (including leading members of several freethought organisations) have always been involved in the movement, as they have in the wider peace movement for more than a century—a point which has often been a subject of legitimate interest in the freethought press.

Anyway, from the time "The Freethinker" began, back in 1881, it published much "Left-wing propaganda"—supporting Republicans and Radicals, and attacking Tories and moderate Liberals (and Socialists and Anarchists)—like most freethought periodicals and organisations during the past two centuries. Ethical and humanist freethinkers have always tended to be socialists, and secularist and rationalist freethinkers have always tended to be Liberals, with plenty of room for disagreement in all sections. The good thing about "The Freethinker", as of most of its contemporaries, is that it remains independent of all political parties, despite the accusations of the gang of eight (or two). And the good thing about the humanist movement in general is that it combines individualism with broadly "Left-wing" ideas, following long historical tradition.

The article by H. J. Blackham on Ernst Haeckel (February 1984) mentions his book "The Riddle of the Universe", and adds that it was translated by Joseph McCabe "as the third volume of the Thinker's Library in 1929". I must point out that McCabe's translation was first published by the Rationalist Press Association in 1900, within a year of the book's original appearance. It was indeed the first great success of the RPA's publishing programme, being reprinted several times, most notably as the fifth volume of the Cheap Reprints in 1902, and selling more than 100,000 copies by 1905. Haeckel temporarily lost his influence in this country when he supported the German war-effort in 1914; hence the significance of his reappearance in the Thinker's Library. We have never quite managed to keep politics out of freethought.

NICOLAS WALTER

CHRISTMAS IN COMMUNIST COUNTRIES

Further to my letter published in the February issue, I have now had an opportunity to clarify exactly which Communist countries of Europe retain Christmas as a public holiday. They are East Germany, Hungary and Poland. The ones that have abolished it and other religious holidays are Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania, USSR and Yugoslavia.

Albania, which was predominantly Muslim, had the

Christmas festival inflicted upon it while under Italian rule. Thereafter the Communist Government abolished all religious public holidays. Ataturk (a great non-marxist Secularist) had already done likewise in Turkey.

TED GOODMAN

GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE

Reading Jim Herrick's review of John Norman's "Holyoake" (January) reassures me that I am not the only person in the freethought world less than reverential to one of secularism's pantheon of saints and martyrs.

I agree with your reviewer that George Jacob Holyoake is not to be condemned for working within the Liberal Party of his day or for preferring education to violence in achieving political ends. Many of the "utopian" socialist ideas prevalent during his youth and "scientific" socialist ideas flourishing during his old age were not just set aside by him—or by Charles Bradlaugh—as "fine principles" unattainable in his lifetime but were actively rejected, and rightly so. They have never been tried in the Soviet Union, and the Chinese flirtation with them in the 1960s and 1970s turned out to be a disaster which they are now busily trying to reverse.

I also agree with Jim Herrick that Holyoake was never a very energetic radical (apart from one episode) and that his views and personality were open to criticism; but here again I think the case has not been put strongly enough. One clue to his conduct lies in the changing currents of 19th century radicalism. Its first three decades were dominated by realists like Richard Carlile, who were also genuine martyrs. They did what they had to do in an age of severe reaction to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, and suffered as they knew they would. Conversely, the 1830s and 1840s, in which Holyoake matured, were dominated by utopianists like the French socialists, Robert Owen and Henry Hetherington. They wrote books like "The Catechism of the New Moral World" and formed organisations like the National Union of the Working Classes and Others and the Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists. At the same time Owen, like Friedrich Engels, was a socialist who had done very nicely out of capitalism, thank you; and as a millowner saw that his young operatives were educated in their time, not his. Much of this attitude was reflected in Holyoake. Bradlaugh matured in the realistic 1850s following the collapse of Owenism, Chartism, the socialist communities and the 1848-49 revolutions. In other words, as a "social missionary" in his youth Holyoake foolishly believed he and friends were about to come into their own; and he took some time to discover on which side his bread was buttered.

Holyoake's "cautious" views were almost disastrous. He was at the heart of every move to split the secularist movement and, more seriously to the world at large, persistently tried to sabotage secularist support of family planning. As shown by his management of the Fleet Street House, his period coediting the "National Reformer" with Bradlaugh and his pseudonymous cartoons and squibs about Bradlaugh and Besant when they were most vulnerable politically, his personality was worse than "querulous and indecisive". Indeed, he was treacherous and malicious throughout his life. He was, in my view, a better writer than Bradlaugh; and most of his reputation derives from the fact that his favourite subject was himself.

DAVID TRIBE

DIVERSITY

Concerning Jim Herrick's review of "A Radical in Search of Respectability", I have not yet had the opportunity of seeing John Norman's play based on the life of G. J. Holyoake. But my own view, for what it is worth, of Holyoake's major failing (which view, I infer, Jim Herrick shares) is that it is by no means necessarily dishonourable nor unusual for a deprived and sensitive man to seek social acceptance. And if Holyoake showed an undue concern for this goal, then I wonder why, towards the end of his very long life, he chose to become chairman of the Rationalist Press Association. Might he not, like Wilberforce, have exchanged an unbeliever's crown of thorns for a Christian hero's halo?

Freethought needed—and I think still needs—the likes of both Bradlaugh and Holyoake. We can never be other than diverse.

R. J. M. TOLHURST

REFUSAL TO FACE FACTS

The factions involved in the Middle Eastern wars see themselves primarily waging religious war. Why is it that European politicians, and English politicians in particular, refuse to see these conflicts in this context and refuse to recognise religion as a primary cause?

This is particularly true of comments on the conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland. Any factor other than religion is put forward as the prime mover in this war of attrition. The current taboo on recognising fundamental social forces makes the commentaries of such debaters as Bertrand Russell and Dean Inge refreshingly pertinent and candid in comparison.

D. REDHEAD

SUNDAY TRADING

The objection of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers to Sunday and Statutory Holiday Trading is based on two main grounds.

First, the economic consequences of Sunday Trading would place a burden by way of increased prices on the public; this is a point which is always ignored by Sunday Trading advocates and I am sure is not generally known. USDAW and leading representatives of the Distributive Trades—people who have spent a lifetime in the trade—agree that the additional costs for labour, lighting, heating, transport and security would raise prices by 14 to 20 per cent. Continental hours would inevitably lead to continental prices.

Secondly, the social consequences of Sunday Trading to shop workers who already have to work unsocial hours for very low wages would become intolerable. The Year of the Child was 1979, but this seems to be ignored by Sunday Trading advocates who display a callous indifference towards children who would be deprived of the company of their mothers on a Sunday if Whitney's proposals had been accepted.

The question of compensating payments to shop workers is also one which is ignored and one which USDAW would be most anxious to watch most carefully.

A national ballot of USDAW members revealed a total objection to Sunday Trading and I would suggest that amateurs in the field of distribution should have the humility to respect the opinions of people who have spent a lifetime studying the problems of retailing.

USDAW is in the process of submitting sensible evidence to the Committee of Enquiry set up for the purpose of removing anomalies in the 1950 Shops Act. Any amendments to this Act should be properly

EVENTS

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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Queen's Head, Queen's Road (entrance in Junction Road, opposite Brighton Station). Sunday, 1 April, 6.30 pm. for 7 pm. Professor Colin Lacey: What is Happening to Education Today?

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

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

Harrow Humanist Society. The Library, Gayton Road, Harrow. Wednesday, 11 April, 8 pm. Gordon Tether: The State of the East-West Ideological War.

Humanist Holidays. Easter at Llandudno, North Wales. Yugoslavia, 27 May for two weeks (jointly with the Progressive League). Scarborough (August) and Poole (Christmas). Details from Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12, telephone 01-673 6234.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 29 March 7.45 pm. Antony Milne: Economic Growth: is it Good for us?

Scottish Humanist Council. North Bristol Hotel, Edinburgh. Saturday, 7 April, 10 am until 5 pm. Annual Conference. Guest speaker: James Hemming. Details from Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, telephone 26710.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 11 April, 8 pm. Dr James Hemming: Why Some People Need a God.

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

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House Annexe, Page Street, Swansea. Friday, 30 March 7.30 pm. Professor Hansel: Parapsychology: Science or Pseudoscience?

Worthing Humanist Group. Trades Club, 15 Broadwater Road, Worthing. Sunday, 25 March, 5.30 pm. Stephen Love: Education as it is and Could be.

considered by people who really understand distribution.

It surprises me that "The Freethinker" should align itself with people like Mr Whitney, Baroness Trumpington and Lord Ponsonby, none of whom has ever worked in distribution and most of whom have simply never worked!

A. HAMILTON
Deputy Divisional Officer,
USDAW, North Eastern Division

Religious Schools Stunt Pupils' Development

Notices of complaint have been issued against two religious schools. Sir Keith Joseph, Education Secretary, filed the notices under section 71 of the 1944 Education Act in respect of the Talmud Torah Machzikei School, Hackney, and the Christian Academy, Coventry.

The Hackney school has 248 boys on the roll and is run by the Jewish Belz community, whose first language for the majority is Yiddish. Hebrew studies predominate and cannot be considered to contribute to secular education. HM Inspectors reported that "the time allocated to secular education . . . is far too short to enable proper courses to be developed and implemented. Further, the timing of the periods, which start between 2 pm and 4.45 pm is quite unacceptable, coming as they do when the boys have been on the premises for up to nine hours".

The report states that all Hebrew lessons are conducted in Yiddish and it is critical of the teaching of both "Hebrew language" and "Hebrew history". It states that "the standards are not very good. Most of the boys appear to have difficulty in rendering simple words and phrases into English; some are clearly incapable of this altogether".

Children at the Christian Academy in Coventry are experts on the bible but their academic development is in danger of being stunted. That is the view of education inspectors who visited the school which is run by the Bible Baptist Church.

The Christian Academy uses an American teaching system known as "Accelerated Christian Education".

It was devised by an organisation in Louisville, Kentucky, for fundamentalist churches setting up their own schools.

No member of the staff has teaching qualifications or teaching experience in other schools. The principal and head teacher have degrees from the Bible Baptist College, Springfield, Missouri, and the Tennessee Temple College. Neither institution is recognised by the DES as award-giving.

The inspectors report: "The lack of qualifications and experience at all educational levels of the staff is a serious drawback to the school's development and is currently placing children at risk".

They also criticised the school for reliance on corporal punishment to maintain discipline, a methodical and highly didactic method of teaching by rote, and a serious lack of books. Choice of books at the school is limited to encyclopaedias or works of fiction written to illustrate biblical teachings.

The school was set up by church members who pay for their children to attend. It was provisionally registered with the education department in 1980. Although the children have an extraordinary knowledge of the bible, little is done to prepare them for examinations. They often spend hours studying alone in cubicles.

There is a large proportion of American children at the Christian Academy. British children have to wave a Union Jack when requiring assistance from a teacher.

Inspectors will again visit the school in September.

"Evil Practices" Denounced

With a wife, four children and a growing band of disciples in tow, the Manor's 11 bedrooms, eight bathrooms, ballroom, swimming pool and other accommodation were considered a very desirable and necessary residence. The Maharajah of Jaipur was a former occupant, and at the reported price of £16,000 it was a snip.

In the early days at East Grinstead, Hubbard expanded his interests. He experimented with plant mutation and became the town's road safety organiser.

The honeymoon with East Grinstead was short-lived and the Scientologists' popularity waned. There were reports that they had attempted to infiltrate local schools. When they planned to expand the Manor, vigorous opposition was expressed by the authorities at a school and training centre for mal-adjusted young people. The presence of so many Scientologists in the area was not helpful to their work.

In 1967 Geoffrey Johnson Smith, Conservative MP for East Grinstead, and other MPs, had received so many complaints about the goings-on at Saint Hill Manor that questions were asked in the House of Commons. The then Minister of Health, Kenneth Robinson, replied with a blistering attack on Scientology, describing it as "a hollow cult that thrives on ignorance". He accused Scientologists of directing their influence towards "the weak, the unbalanced, the immature, the rootless and the emotionally unstable".

Mr Robinson was even more forthright the following year when he announced restrictions on the entry of Scientologists into Britain. He declared that Scientology "alienates members of families from each other and attributes squalid and disgraceful motives to all who oppose it; its authoritarian principles and practice are a potential menace to the personality and well-being of those so deluded as to become its followers; above all, its methods can be a serious danger to the health of those who submit to them".