

# The Freethinker

secular humanist monthly

founded 1881

Vol. 104, No. 8

AUGUST 1984

30p

## NCCL LAUNCHES NEW CAMPAIGN AGAINST OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT

"The Official Secrets Act is over-broad and indiscriminate and has resulted in recent years in prosecutions which simply are intended to prevent Government embarrassment, as in Sarah Tisdall's case", said Larry Gostin, general secretary of the National Council for Civil Liberties, at a meeting in the House of Commons to launch the Council's campaign for the reform of the Act. "This can result in unconscionable criminal penalties for men and women who do not really endanger any valid national interest", he added. Mr Gostin reminded the meeting that the Attorney-General is a member of the Government and subject to party political influences.

The NCCL's campaign has three aims. First, achieving reforms of the Official Secrets Act so that no-one will be subject to criminal penalty for the disclosure or receipt of information in cases not involving national security or serious crime.

Secondly, that the Attorney-General should not consent to any further prosecutions not involving national security or serious crime.

Thirdly, transference of consent to prosecution under the Official Secrets Act to a prosecution service that is independent of the Government.

The campaign has the backing of MPs from all the main political parties. Jonathan Aitken, MP (Conservative, Thanet South), put down an Early Day Motion in the Commons deploring criminal penalties imposed by Section 2 of the Official Secrets Act. He recalled that nearly 12 years ago the Franks Committee described that section of the Act "a mess", and proposed reforms.

In a statement supporting the new campaign for reform, Mr Aitken declared that he was "delighted to support the NCCL's new efforts to get this antiquated and highly unsatisfactory legislation removed from the statute book.

Alex Carlile, QC, MP (Liberal, Montgomery), said that successive governments have failed to take the initiative which Franks presented them.

"Paranoia has prevailed at Ministerial level in a way that has given the lie to their professions of belief in open and accountable government. This campaign does no more than meet a long-standing public and political demand for the reform of an unnecessarily restrictive law".

Labour leader Neil Kinnock, expressing his support for the campaign, described the Government's decision to prosecute Sarah Tisdall as "the meeting of malice and weakness which is characteristic of bullies.

"The sentence was excessive. It did not fit the crime. It was not intended to fit the crime. It may have been intended to be a warning to others.

"It was more than that. It was a warning to all of us — whatever our political persuasions — that there is a new convention of authoritarianism in the country and we had all better be more vigilant and more assertive about the values of liberty if we want to sustain those standards".

David Steel, leader of the Liberal Party, sent a message to the NCCL to wish the campaign well. He believed that the Official Secrets Act is in urgent need of reform and that such reform should be accompanied by a Freedom of Information Act.

Dr David Owen, for the Social Democrats, said that "good government depends on its capacity to display inner coherence and maintain wider consent. Both are easier to achieve in a structure where information is freely available both to influence the quality of the decisions and their acceptability.

"An enabling society, which should be our objective over the decades ahead, should also be an open society".

# The Freethinker

UK ISSN 0016-0687

Editor: WILLIAM McILROY

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 14 Coundon Road, Coventry, West Midlands (telephone Coventry 20070). Unsolicited reviews should not be submitted.

Vol 104 No 8 CONTENTS August 1984

NCCL LAUNCHES NEW CAMPAIGN AGAINST OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT ...	113
NEWS AND NOTES ...	114
Money for the Minster; Dr Boyson's Standards; Magisterial Pettiness; Religious Intruders; Ignore Cremation Requests, Says Chief Rabbi	
THE PALAU PALAVER ...	117
Jim Herrick	
THE WRATH OF GOD ...	119
T. F. Evans	
VISIT TO A PRIMITIVE COUNTRY ...	120
Barbara Smoker	
FREETHINKER REVIEWS ...	122
The Enigma of Daniel Home, by Trevor H. Hall Reviewer: R. J. Condon	
The Philosophy of Schopenhauer, by Bryan Magee Reviewer: David Berman	
LETTERS ...	124
Humanist Head Teacher, E. M. Karbacz, S. E. Parker	
"MENTAL MUGGING" CONDEMNED IN LORDS ...	125
OBITUARY ...	128
L. Berrand, E. Briggs, A. Corina, M. Gibson, Mrs E. M. Hogg, Mrs P. Joyce, H. B. Land, L. Pancer	
SECULARISTS COMMEMORATE "THE PHILOSOPHER" ...	128
MUSLIM WOMEN OBJECT TO SEGREGATION ...	128

Postal subscriptions, book 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

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., Dorking, Surrey.

# NEWS

The great conductor Sir Thomas Beecham once said that a man should try anything once — except incest and folk dancing. He should have added another prohibition — don't move your home to another part of the country if you are editor of "The Freethinker". This issue of the paper has been produced while I was in the throes of legal negotiations and all the arrangements necessary for moving to my new abode. I am extremely grateful to Jim Herrick, to whom "The Freethinker" owes much, and our printer, always patient and sorely tried. Without their co-operation the whole exercise would have been much more stressful. And through "The Freethinker" I would like to express warm thanks to my good friends in Brighton and Hove Humanist Group for generous gifts and expressions of goodwill. My new address is 14 Coundon Road, Coventry, West Midlands CV1 4AW

## MONEY FOR THE MINSTER

Extensive fire damage to the magnificent York Minster and its contents, whatever their purpose, is regrettable. The reaction of many Christians to the disaster is bewildering.

First, there are those who assert that the bolt of lightning which started the conflagration was a demonstration of the Almighty's displeasure over the consecration of Professor David Jenkins as Bishop of Durham. On the other side of that particular coin, Dr Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury, quoted with approval the Chief Fire Officer's words: "The Lord was on our side as we battled with those flames".

If the Lord, for whatever reason, was responsible for the fire in the first place—either by expressing his anger, or being careless with lightning—it is difficult to see how he can be regarded as the fireman's friend. He would not qualify for temporary associate membership of the Fire Brigades Union.

Secondly, there were strident calls from various quarters for State funds to pay for the repairs. Such appeals were unnecessary. The Prime Minister, who is so keen to cut costs in the education, health and welfare services, was soon on the telephone to the Minster authorities pledging Government support. Mr Patrick Cormac, MP (Conservative, Staffordshire South), immediately got a letter off to the Environment Minister urging him to meet the cost of any repairs not covered by insurance.

It is estimated that the restoration work will cost over £1 million. But within a week of the fire, an

# AND NOTES

insurance cheque for £500,000 was handed over to the Dean.

Shortly before the fire at York Minster, the Church Commissioners published their annual report which revealed, in the words of one national daily, "a wealthy portfolio stretching from St Paul's churchyard to Dallas". In Britain alone they have equity holdings worth more than £100 million in 98 companies. These include Unilever (£16.6 million), Shell Transport and Trading (£22.3 million), Marks and Spencer (£14.3 million) and GEC (£12.5 million).

During the last financial year the Church Commissioners acquired a \$16 million interest in a warehouse complex near Dallas, in Texas. They also bought the freehold of offices in the City of London for nearly £10 million. Their stock Exchange portfolio is valued at £604 million and their property folio at over £900 million.

Exploitation of public sympathy over the fire at York Minster is distasteful and dishonest. The exceedingly wealthy Church of England could meet the remaining repairs cost out of petty cash.

## DR BOYSON'S STANDARDS

Dr Rhodes Boyson has again been extolling the virtues of religious and moral education. In a prize-giving speech at the Mathilda Marks-Kennedy Jewish primary school, Golders Green, last month, the former Minister at the Department of Education declared: "One great advantage of a denominational school is that it can confidently and unashamedly teach religious and moral values".

Dr Boyson is now Minister of State for Social Security and the timing of his speech was rather unfortunate. For he had just written to Mr Gerry Bermingham, MP (Labour, St Helens), defending his Department's ruling that parents must steal their children's savings before becoming eligible for assistance under the Supplementary Benefit (Urgent Cases) Regulations 1980.

Under the regulations, families on supplementary benefit can apply for additional help to meet special urgent needs. These include payment to meet a specific need or an unexpected one caused by fire or flood.

Mr Bermingham had taken up the cases of two claimants whose appeals for assistance were turned down; the first because his son, aged nine, had £63 in savings and the other because his child had £33. In both cases the sums were Christmas and birthday gifts accumulated over several years.

Dr Boyson informed Mr Bermingham that in the case of urgent need payments it was "reasonable to expect someone who falls temporarily on bad times to look first to the money available to the family from its own savings". He added that urgent need payments should be paid only in the last resort.

Mr Bermingham commented: "The fact that kiddies' piggy-banks can be raided by a Government shows just how mean a society we have become".

It is hardly surprising that under a Government of callous, canting hypocrites our society has indeed become mean. They pose as "the party of the family" and pay lip service to thrift and sound family relationships. At the same time, they compel parents to steal their children's savings in order to qualify for State assistance.

How can a child be expected to develop thriftiness when experience tells him that he should spend his money while he still has the chance? How can parents explain to a nine-year-old that they must appropriate his savings in order to comply with Government regulations? What effect does such an act have on the parent-child relationship?

Rhodes Boyson told his Golders Green audience that religious faith will enable children "to absorb the values which will protect them later in life". Schools can best serve their pupils by fostering values far different to those of politicians who force parents to break the Eighth Commandment, thus making it very difficult for children to observe the Fifth.

---

**The Acorn School, in Romford, Essex, which is run by a Christian fellowship group, has been served a Section 71 Notice of Complaint by the Department of Education and Science. The school has 62 pupils and some of them are taught in private homes. School inspectors described the teaching as confused and piecemeal, and said that the pupils were under-stimulated and their capacities under-estimated.**

---

## MAGISTERIAL PETTINESS

The ludicrous Lord's Day Observance Act is usually invoked to prevent people from enjoying themselves and spending Sunday as they wish. But the latest example of how the Act can be used—on this occasion forcing an organisation to cancel a Saturday charity dinner and dance—takes the biscuit.

The Suffolk area committee of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which celebrates its centenary this year, arranged a £35 a head function at Kentwell Hall, Long Melford. Princess Margaret, president of the NSPCC, was to attend at 10.30 pm when the dinner would commence. It was expected that £10,000 would be raised for the Society.

Arrangements were proceeding satisfactorily until local magistrates refused to issue a late night drinks licence. The reason for their refusal was that dancing would be taking place in the early hours of Sunday. And that, they were informed by the court clerk, "must be contrary to the Lord's Day Observance Act".

Mr Derek Williams, the fund-raiser, said: "If there is no dancing there will not be a party. It will be a fiasco. You don't start making money at these events until after dinner and people start drinking".

After the preliminary court hearing, Mrs Daphne Fairbanks-Kay, chairman of the NSPCC's Suffolk area committee, said: "It is despicable. We didn't even know the court hearing was taking place. . .

"As far as we are concerned this is a private function, to be held in the grounds of a private house. Guests will be there by invitation only. We can only hope that the magistrates will be more sympathetic next week".

But the unsympathetic magistrates stuck to their decision and the function was cancelled.

It is ridiculous that magistrates or a chief constable can decide whether a function can take place or a drinking licence can be extended. Perhaps the fact that a Royal personage was involved in this latest debacle will encourage the powers that be to make a clean sweep of the Sunday observance and licensing laws.

● **The management of Woolworth has defied the Shops Acts of 1950 and 1965 by opening the company's Kensington store in London. Brisk business is reported. A spokesman for Woolworth said: "Kensington is a big tourist centre and it is our duty to provide a service where there is a need".**

## RELIGIOUS INTRUDERS

Captive audiences in hospital wards are a sitting (or lying) target for clergymen and other evangelisers in an age of declining attendance at places of worship. Undeterred by the patients' polite indifference, these servants of the One who created all things (including germs, viruses and tumors) continue to dispense tracts and triteness to the sick.

But the mainstream Christian churches no longer have a monopoly in this field of endeavour. Disciples of other gods and gurus are taking advantage of misplaced respect for religion. One example of such activity comes from Whipps Cross Hospital in Essex. Officials are investigating how a member of the Unification Church was able to enter wards to collect money and sell artificial flowers to patients at inflated prices. She told them that their contributions would help the hospital. The patients donated out of gratitude for the care they had received, until one of them challenged the collector who admitted she

was a Moonie.

The hospital administrator has warned staff to be on guard against such intruders. However, at a time when hospital staff is being seriously reduced as part of the Government's onslaught against the National Health Service, overworked doctors and nurses cannot be expected to undertake security duties. And as long as evangelising Christians are allowed to enter hospitals without a by-your-leave, competitors of other faiths will expect the same facility.

If Christian priests were not accorded special privileges — including substantial payment for chaplaincy services — far fewer gentlemen of the cloth would be seen in hospital wards. And it would be much more difficult for zealots from outlandish sects like the Moonies to invade the privacy and exploit the vulnerability of patients.

## IGNORE CREMATION REQUESTS, SAYS CHIEF RABBI

Sir Immanuel Jakobovits, the Chief Rabbi, has reaffirmed Orthodox Jewish policy on cremation by reminding a Jewish communal Trust that the practice is a serious breach of Jewish law.

The Trust, which is widely used for the administration of wills, was arranging the funeral of an elderly lady who had left instructions that her body was to be cremated. The Chief Rabbi intervened after he had been informed by "an observant Jew" of the impending cremation. He wrote to the trustees pointing out that the Jewish prohibition on cremation "is based on express biblical precept".

The Chief Rabbi added: "Any instructions to be cremated, even if incorporated in a will, are invalid in Jewish law, and relatives or executors are under an obligation to have the body buried whenever they can be prevailed upon to do so. . .

"Any argument that such a disregard of the deceased's wishes as expressed in a will would be illegal in civil law should be tested by consulting eminent legal opinion. Past experience seems to indicate that this fear has no basis in law".

Most of the major religious groups in Britain have abandoned their opposition to cremation.

---

**Bishop Carmelo Ferraro needed police protection in order to get safely out of the Sicilian town of Frazzano. He had come to examine the bones of St Calogero, a fifth-century miracle worker, which repose in the local convent. But rumour had it that he was going to remove some of them to a neighbouring diocese. So the faithful of Frazzano told the bishop to buzz off and he was forced to make an undignified exit. Now he has forbidden all religious functions in the town on pain of excommunication.**

# The Palau Palaver

JIM HERRICK

Luis Palau's expensively publicised Mission to London has drawn the fire of many critics, including Christians who object to his brash fundamentalism. Jim Herrick gives an account of his visit to Queen's Park Rangers' stadium during the mission.

I took my doubts to the party, but no-one wanted to hear them. "Bring your Doubts" had been the invitation on the hoardings for weeks, in the publicity hype for the London mission of the American-Argentinian evangelist, Luis Palau. But I very much doubt if many doubters went. On the night I squeezed through the turnstile at Queen's Park Rangers, Palau was clearly addressing a jamboree of the faithful.

*Why Revival Tarries* was the title of one of the paperbacks on sale in the stadium. Whatever the reason, there was no doubt in the two-thirds empty stadium that revival tarried. Admittedly it was one of the first days of rain in London for weeks, and at the end of the meeting, Luis was almost apologetic as he asked people to step forward through the rain to offer themselves to Jesus — "After all you will remember the wet when you look back on the night that has changed your life".

Luis Palau's name is pronounced with an "s" as sibilant as the hiss of the satanic snake which features so prominently in his imagery. He wears a smart businessman's suit and blow-waved hair, and uses *saue* charm and large gestures to excite the crowd; but the crowd around me were unexcited — respectful, yes, fervent, no. However, Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, told me that on the night she visited, which was a youth night, he was received most enthusiastically.

The media hype was expensive, but I suspect that the audience came from church notice boards rather than public hoardings. The publicity was handled by a subsidiary of Saatchi and Saatchi, the public relations firm famous for handling Mrs Thatcher's fervent message. Mr Harvey Thomas, who master-minded the Palau campaign, is a full-time adviser to the Conservative Party. Was the money well spent? Even Luis Palau admitted that the advertising campaign was "corny beyond words — not my style at all". No.

Palau is no stranger to Right-wing politicians. He was closely associated with the former President of Guatemala, Rios Montt, whose human rights record has been strongly criticised. An appeal for clemency for six guerrillas from Pope John Paul II was ignored and they were executed just before he arrived in

Guatemala City. When Rios Montt's rule was about to collapse, Palau said: "I see an orchestration of propaganda around the world. It would be the saddest day for Guatemala in many a century if the Government of Rios Montt should fall under false pretences. I have already been praying and weeping with my fellow team members at the possible repercussions for many beloved Christians, and our beloved leader in the country, if this should happen". The glossy brochure, *Luis Palau: Steps Along the Way*, contains a photograph with the description: "The Bible has power to transform anywhere!" A President of Venezuela and his cabinet pray with Dr Palau at a presidential breakfast". Mrs Thatcher, as is well known, doesn't need divine assistance to keep her Cabinet in order.

As I took my seat, I was reminded of a phrase used by Donald Soper at the Methodist Conference to criticise Palau — "ecclesiastical totalitarianism". We were shepherded into our seats with military precision. Even the most faithful lambs were bleating timorously about not being able to sit next to their friends. My request to sit at the end of a row was ignored (I feared that nausea might make me want to leave early). This was not to ensure that everyone could be fitted in, since the stadium was only one-third full. Presumably, it was to ensure that, elbow to elbow, the emotion of a crowd was created. I was told by a steward that it was for security reasons. Doubt is invited, but dissent is dealt with severely — as I saw during the meeting.

A limber-up included a choir so heavily amplified that it outvoiced the audience, a pop singer, a mountebank sales routine to off-load unsold song books, and financial appeals. Money and music came before God. We were told that it wouldn't glorify the Lord for the campaign to end in the red. The pop singer, Garth Hewitt, made the baffling statement that he had come to the peace of God while in Uganda at a time of massacres and shootings, and sung a song of mind-numbing tediousness about a mountain of peace.

Then the announcer asked how many of the audience were there for the first time. About a third raised their hands. He also asked how many had been there more than ten times. About one-third raised their hands. What better evidence that Palau was gathering the faithful rather than converting the godless citizens of London? Although the organisers admitted that attendance has been disappointing, the programme was extended by two weeks. This was presumably the original intention and the stadium had perhaps been already provisionally booked.

A letter from National Secular Society president Barbara Smoker and secretary Terry Mullins pub-

lished in the *Guardian* (16 June) commented on the attendance claims:

Martyn Halsall in his report (*Guardian*, June 25) on Billy Graham's and Luis Palau's mission to Britain, says Mr Palau has had 118,240 people pass through the computerised turnstiles.

On the night we went (June 20) the stadium was half empty and, in response to Mr Palau asking how many had been before, half of those present put their hands up. The programme listed an impressive list of churches and chapels which had sent parties to enhance the numbers present.

Before Mr Palau had finished his testament-toting tirade, enthusiastic sinners were queuing to give themselves to Jesus. Many of those who went forward were escorted by born-again enthusiasts who, no doubt, would also be fed into the computer to swell the numbers who devote their lives to Christ.

A leaflet enclosed with the programme urged those attending to commit themselves in writing to come to at least two meetings a week till the end of the crusade and throughout the extension.

Mr Palau may fear for those who leave the place without Jesus: we fear for those who leave the place without exercising their critical faculties.

On the night of my visit, Palau's hour long sermon was on family life. It gained a lukewarm hearing and was so repetitive and simplistic that there was not much upon which to exercise one's doubting faculties. He made it clear that everything he said was backed by the authority of the bible which was "the inerrant word of God". A quotation of one of St Paul's most sexist passages was prefaced with a comment not to believe the foolish theologians who said that Paul had hated women. The gist of all he said was that the husband is the head of the wife. He kept saying that he was speaking "especially to husbands" and even though he threw in a few references to wives and singles, clearly he had little concept of the variety and complexity of human relationships. He warned that people living together outside marriage and the high rate of divorce were due to a satanic attack on the family.

At this point a few women rushed onto the pitch shouting protest. So alert were Palau's henchmen prowling the edge of the pitch that the women were carried off without unfurling their banner. Ecclesiastical totalitarianism was seen at its worst in this incident. Luis Palau scuttled fast from the podium. (To be fair, violent attacks are probably a much greater risk in America.) He did not have the imagination to say: "We disagree with you, please let us carry on with our meeting and we will exchange ideas with you later". He disappeared. The choir sang and the audience clapped rhythmically to drown out any protest. It was the only moment at which I saw any fervour in the audience.

When Palau returned, before continuing his peroration, he hastily said: "Do you know why these women do this? They are trying to get free publicity out of an event that we have paid for. And they behave like that because they are possessed by

demons". Here followed the loudest applause of the evening. So his mind rushed to money and satanic menace, not to an attempt to understand why women should object to his teaching.

Whether or not there was a satanic conspiracy, there was certainly a conspiracy of silence about the protest amongst supporters. I asked many stewards what the protest was about. They all said "Nothing" or "Just some possessed lunatics", and so on, except one unguarded woman who added that earlier in the week there had been a banner put up which said "Gays Against Adolf Palau". He had been strongly criticised by the Gay Christian Movement (though not as far as I know on the pitch) for his attack on homosexuality as immoral and evil.

Palau continued with a warning against "so-called secular humanists—people dedicated to destroying the family". Among his choice insights into family life was an account of how he had threatened to blister his son's bottom after he had been rude to his mother (a ripple of applause here, too). We were reminded that Satan had approached Eve because women were more susceptible to temptation, but that Adam was responsible for the fall because it was man's duty to protect women from temptation. There was an invitation to those in the audience who knew that pain or break-up within a marriage was their fault to repent. He proffered blame and self-blame rather than an attempt to understand the difficulties of long-term relationships.

As he moved towards the invitation to step forward and be re-born in the drizzle, he warned of judgment and hell. Hell he compared to a "videotape playing back all the ugly and mean and terrible things you've done". (Would this video nasty get a certificate from the British Board of Film Censors?) He offered the chance of wiping out the video and starting it again. Whether from a realisation that we cannot so easily avoid the consequences of our actions or a shortage of umbrellas, the move forward was tardy. From my observation it was the faithful and not the doubters who went forward dutifully. Barbara Smoker had noticed two enthusiastic Christians entwining themselves like snakes around a doubting friend to drag him onto the pitch.

After a respectful interval so as not to disturb those sincerely wishing to dedicate themselves to Jesus, I took my doubts down too. I asked about the protest, about the inerrancy of the bible, about why a painful marriage should not be discontinued; but no-one was interested. They told me that Jesus was real (and their emotion was certainly real). There is no arguing with emotion. Palau's oration, like Moody's, as described by Shaw in his first published letter to the press, was "characterised by an excess of vehement assertion and a total absence of logic" (*Public Opinion*, 3 April 1875).

You cannot reason with assertion and lack of logic. So I took my doubts home, unused, but intact.

# The Wrath of God

T. F. EVANS

The consecration of Professor David Jenkins as Bishop of Durham has resulted in bitter controversy within the Anglican Church. A petition from thousands of objectors was presented to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the consecration ceremony was twice interrupted and one speaker at the General Synod denounced the "wooly, heretical bishop". Outsiders have regarded the dispute with either indifference or amusement, and the Church's image has been severely dented.

Few people who have read Thomas Hardy's great novel, *Jude the Obscure*, are able to forget the scene, late in the book, when Jude's son hangs himself and the two other small children. The distraught parents, sitting silent in their grief, hear the sound of music from the nearby College chapel and then they hear also the conversation of two men outside the house. They fear that they are being talked about, but Jude listens carefully and gathers that the voices are of two clergymen, discussing a question of church ritual, the way in which the clergyman should face when he is at the altar when celebrating the Eucharist. "Good God", says Jude, "the eastward position, and all creation groaning!"

No doubt, there are significant differences between a matter of ritual and fundamental questions of basic belief enjoined by the Christian church upon its members. These thoughts come to mind, of course, because of the controversy in church circles over what are thought by some to be the heretical views of the newly appointed Bishop of Durham. This controversy has spilled over into the wider world outside the Church, and readers of the newspapers as well as radio listeners and television viewers have been treated to the not very edifying spectacle of the apostles of love and brotherhood dissenting among themselves in a tone and temper from which Christian sweetness and forgiveness are far absent. In this, they are no better than their fellow citizens outside the Church. It is not unknown for the believers in brotherhood in the political field to show that it is not always possible to put beliefs of this kind into practical effect, but the sight of church dissension of the kind that has been seen in the last few weeks has a specially disagreeable, although sometimes, unfortunately, a slightly amusing quality about it.

Put very briefly, the difficulties arose because Professor David Jenkins of the University of Leeds, about to be consecrated as Bishop of Durham, had made a statement in which he expressed doubt about basic Christian doctrines. In particular, he said he did not believe that the Virgin Birth and the

Resurrection were historical facts. He added that he thought it possible for a person to be a Christian without believing in these two features of what is officially laid down as Church belief. It can have come as no surprise to many people that part of the outcry has been so intemperate in tone and so lacking in argument. If anyone believes something for which there is no solid evidence, he has little with which to reply to any criticism except expostulation and denunciation of those who call his beliefs into question.

Among those who have spoken out most forcefully, but who have kept their comments more or less within the bounds of reasoned submission, is the Rev Donald Allister, vicar of Christ Church, Cloughton, Birkenhead. He is reported in the *British Weekly and Christian Record* as having been interviewed on a television programme, "Credo". An article in the journal is an expanded version of his remarks and the following are important extracts:

We have been sickened by one General Synod report after another setting aside what Scripture says in favour of the latest trendy philosophy. . . . Less than half the bishops questioned believe that the New Testament accounts of Christ's miracles are literally true. Less than two-thirds believe in any sort of bodily Resurrection or of the Virgin Birth. The issue here is simple: faith means submission to scripture: those who refuse to submit their minds, hearts and lives to the Bible are setting themselves above God. . . . if other bishops say publicly what David Jenkins has said, many clergy will be deeply upset; and if this sort of theological liberalism is propagated much more, many lay Christians will leave the Church of England altogether.

It is the special position held by the Church of England that gives those outside the communion the right to take part in this particular melee, compounded as it is of blindness and confusion. We are entitled to ask how much, if at all, it matters to the life we all have to lead whether Christ was the product of a Virgin Birth (even if one can assume the possibility) or that his death was followed by a Resurrection. If there are those who wish to believe in these things as absolute fact, they should be allowed to do so. Both ideas have an attractive poetic quality and this need not be despised by unbelievers. What cannot be accepted is the readiness of the believers in these things to consign to outer darkness those who are unable to accept them as scientifically ascertained fact. Many professing Christians as well as humanists accept the essential decency of the greater part of the teachings of Christ without bothering to struggle with what some would call the

(continued on page 125)

# Visit to a Primitive Country

BARBARA SMOKER

The President of the National Secular Society visited the USA this year for an extensive speaking and broadcasting tour, from early April to late May. Here, with an account of her first nine days in that country, she gives her initial impressions of America from an atheist viewpoint.

At the kind and pressing invitation of the American Atheists — or, more specifically, of their founder, president, and chief spokesperson, Madalyn Murray O'Hair — I left Gatwick airport for the USA on 11 April.

My first destination was naturally the American Atheist Center in Austin (capital of Texas), for which I had to change planes at Fort Worth airport, Dallas, where I was unexpectedly met by two local atheists deputed by Dr O'Hair to welcome me on to American soil. As a welcoming token in a hot climate they bought me the largest icecream cornet in the world — honestly, it was almost two foot high. As I was to discover, the United States boasts most of the largest in the world of almost everything; Texas boasts most of the largest of almost everything in America; and Dallas boasts most of the largest in Texas.

American roads are generally wider than ours, and most of the cars are correspondingly large. But the notion that there are skyscrapers everywhere is quite false. Apart from New York City and Chicago, buildings are generally lower than in Britain, many being detached single-storey buildings. The reason is obvious: there is no shortage of landscape. For the same reason, as well as for religious hang-ups, cremation is less common than in Britain.

The American Atheist Center — with significant bullet holes in its walls — is a single-storey building, but by our standards is amazingly large, with 32 rooms. It is also beautifully equipped, having a well-stocked library, a stockroom of books for sale, a video processing room, a printing press, computers, word processors, and every other aid to contemporary communication. But what it was noticeably short of was manpower to keep it all going. There were six people working there and they all worked exceedingly long hours, especially Dr O'Hair herself and her second son, Jon Murray, who were hard at it from 9.30 am to 8 pm seven days a week. Admittedly, that is considerably more manpower than the National Secular Society or any other of the secular humanist organisations in Britain employs, but we operate on a far less extensive, active, and ambitious scale — and, in a sense, there is far less for us to do.

This may seem a paradoxical, not to say perverse,

statement to make in view of our Established Church and the surviving historical privileges of the other churches in Britain, contrasted with the American Constitution, which is essentially secular. But whereas only about 11 per cent of the people in Britain regularly attend church, in the States the figure is more than 40 per cent. Amazingly, it was only four per cent in 1776 — and the first six Presidents were deists. There are no redundant churches there to be pulled down or put to non-religious uses, and on Sundays one sees hundreds of cars parked around each of the many churches of many denominations, while their media evangelism is really big business — both in the money-spinning sense and the show-biz sense.

Suffering from jet-lag insomnia during my first few nights, I lay in bed watching all-night television, generally choosing an old film or an episode of a British series; but with the dawn came a choice of high-powered evangelists. They were mostly personable men with sexy voices, whose message was nauseatingly simplistic but expressed with vibrant conviction. It was all based on "The Bible says. . .", with no attempt at justifying this reliance on a sacred book, let alone this particular sacred book. But most nauseating of all was the young woman seated in the studio, gazing at the holy man with wide-eyed acceptance and never saying anything except "That is so helpful", or some such sycophantic phrase. The whole thing, however, is apparently lapped up by millions, and their donations pour in. The American Atheists once produced a television item guying this sort of programme — and even they received a few cheques for their satirical evangelical cause!

When asked about the location of America's notorious Bible Belt, Madalyn O'Hair replied that it was the whole of America — and though some areas (such as New York City) are less Bible-ridden than others (such as Kentucky), I found there was a great deal of truth in this. There is also a great deal of "closet atheism" — atheists who are reluctant to come out openly as atheists. And with reason. I heard of a teacher who had just lost his job because it had become known that he was a non-believer, and I was told categorically he would never get another job. But the atheist activists I met were correspondingly fervent in their opposition to religion.

They are, however, divided amongst themselves. Dr O'Hair not only boycotts the use of alternative labels such as "humanist", she even excommunicates local chapters of her atheist organisation that do not toe the line — sometimes on quite extraneous issues. For instance, she is that rarity, an American unilateralist, and local chapters (branches) that openly



espouse the orthodox American "defence" policy are likely to be "deregistered". Some then form break-away groups. And I found that in some places (e.g. San Francisco), members of the heterosexual American Atheists are not on speaking terms with those of the Gay Atheist League of America (GALA).

Even so, paid-up members of American Atheists number some 15,000 — each paying an annual subscription ("dues") of \$40, plus donations. Some of those giving most generously to the cause do not, however, wish it to be known outside that they are members. I asked one such woman why she needed to be secretive since she owned her own business (in real estate), and she replied that she would lose most of her customers if they knew she was an atheist. One can hardly imagine this happening in England.

A member of the organisation died, bequeathing his unique library of rare freethought books to the Center — whereupon his pious widow, in true Christian tradition, burned all the books, put the ashes in a box, and mailed it to the Atheist Center.

My visit was timed to cover the 1984 American Atheist Convention — an enterprising event held annually during the Easter weekend (not only for obvious snook-cocking reasons but because Easter is such a stay-at-home festival in America that the hotels offer considerably reduced rates for that weekend). The convention generally attracts about 400 members from all over the States, as well as casual local visitors. This year, however, the numbers were expected to be only about half the average, since the venue was, for the first time, not close to an "air-hub", but in a rather small town — Lexington, Kentucky — chosen to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the publication of an atheist journal there.

The man who had launched it, Charles C. Moore, had (like G. W. Foote over here) been imprisoned for this daring venture, but both he and his short-lived journal were forgotten until a local member of the American Atheists researched the facts in time for this centennial celebration. The arrangements included the reprinting of Moore's books and the issue of facsimile pages of his journal, for sale at the convention as well as for mail-order sales to those unable to get to Lexington. Moore's family grave, complete with impressive headstone, had also been located, and one of the convention activities was to be a visit by coach to the graveside, with speeches to be made, a specially written poem to be read, a floral tribute in the complex shape of the American Atheists' logo to be placed, and innumerable photographs to be taken.

But I am getting ahead of myself. First, I spent five days in Austin, with daily visits to the Atheist Center plus visits to various places of historical and cultural interest, including the vast University campus,

where some colossal dinosaur footprints are preserved and where the world-famous Humanities Research Center occupies a magnificent building. In the latter I was shown some of the manuscript short-hand drafts of Bernard Shaw's plays, and also saw an exhibition in honour of William Morris (though none of the students I spoke to had ever heard of him). My stay in Austin also included delectable, exotic dinners; a buffet reception given in my honour on the Saturday; and Sunday lunch beside the lovely little river in San Antonio (some 80 miles to the south), with, of course, a visit to the Alamo and its museum.

All this while, the AA Center was a hive of activity in preparation for the convention — the hotel arrangements, the pricing and packing of thousands of books for sale, and the preparation of souvenir folders containing a large assortment of reading matter (including photocopies of two of my old *Freethinker* articles) for every convention member. Madalyn took three "phoners" (phone-in radio programmes linked to the Atheist Center), in one day, sitting with the receiver tucked under her chin while she simultaneously answered questions and sorted papers or filed a broken finger-nail, and chatting to me during the commercials. And another day the Center had the free use of a "public access" television studio, where I took part in three recorded discussions, to be shown on minority-interest channels all over the country during the next few weeks.

In the midst of all this, there were hundreds of daily and weekly news cuttings to be read, dealt with, and filed — the main topic of the moment being the vote in the Senate on prayer in the public (American sense) schools. In defiance of the First Amendment to the Constitution (the total separation of Church and State) — as sacrosanct traditionally in the States as the Bible (and that's "saying a mouthful") — Ronald Reagan had attempted to introduce prayer into the schools, but, for the first time in his presidency, had been narrowly defeated (by 11 votes) after an equally rare late-night sitting in the Senate, despite the strong Bible lobby. The last task at the Center before we left for the convention was sending an appropriate letter to all the Senators who had voted against school prayer. The addressees included some unexpected names, such as Barry Goldwater and other Right-wingers.

One of the country's major news magazines carried, in ostensible pursuit of balance, two articles on the prayer-in-schools issue. One of them was written from the predictable evangelical viewpoint, arguing passionately for school prayers — of the kind envisaged by our own 1944 Education Act, though rarely found in British schools in 1984. The

(continued on page 127)

# BOOKS

THE ENIGMA OF DANIEL HOME, by Trevor H. Hall.  
Prometheus Books, £12.95

Almost a hundred years ago, on 21 June 1886, Daniel Home died of tuberculosis at the age of 53. Probably the most successful confidence trickster the world has yet seen, he enjoyed the friendship and confidence, not to mention gifts of diamond jewellery, of many of the crowned heads and nobility of Europe on the strength of his abilities as a spiritualist medium. His was the golden age of spookery when many of the biggest names were operating, yet of all that fraudulent crew he is the only medium to have an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and the only one to have had a public monument erected to his memory. He has been the subject of more books than any other medium.

Here is the latest volume in the Home Library. *The Enigma of Daniel Home* is not a biography — though much of its subject's life is touched upon — but a series of essays, in each of which Trevor Hall tries to solve some puzzle connected with the medium not previously explained to the author's satisfaction. It is more than 20 years since Hall wrote *The Spiritualists*, in which he established the true nature of the relationship between Sir William Crookes and the medium Florence Cook. The full marks earned for deduction in that book cannot be awarded here, for not all the conclusions seem to square with the evidence.

The first problem, Home's claim to descent from the Earls of Home, is solved with no great difficulty by consulting the parish register of the medium's birthplace. He was baptised Daniel Home, his middle name Dunglas (a family name of the Earls of Home) being a later assumption. Trevor Hall is mistaken in thinking that no previous writer has questioned Home's aristocratic lineage. William Lindsay Gresham, in a 1957 essay called *King of the Spook Workers*, clearly doesn't believe it. He says Home's claim that his father was an illegitimate son of the Earl of Home was first made early in his career in the United States. The glamour of noble birth — even with a bend sinister — went over big with Americans. Hall refers to the 1920 debate between Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Joseph McCabe as "somewhat uninformed". Maybe, but McCabe suspected enough to declare: ". . . for that somewhat tarnished connection with the aristocracy you have nothing but the assertion of Home himself".

A natural con artist, Home's charming manner made him liked even by those who thought his mediumship bogus. Why, then, was his name anathema to Robert Browning? In 1885 the Brownings, Robert and his wife Elizabeth, met Home at

# FREETHINKER

a séance, and from then on Robert's hatred for the medium amounted, in Hall's words, "almost to phobia". The author cites, with some reservation, the theory of Dr E. J. Dingwall that the poet may have known the truth about the "mystery of iniquity" concerning Home, which according to Elizabeth everyone raved about and nobody distinctly specified. Noting the medium's intense friendships with young men, Dingwall supposed the "mystery" to be homosexuality, but it now turns out to have been a petty financial fraud and some slanderous remarks. These things did not affect Browning personally, and cannot have been responsible for his pathological hatred of Home. The poet had no such antipathy before the séance, so what happened there is crucial. There is no mystery about it, but not every reader will know the story and it is surprising not to find it in this book.

Very simply, Home made one of the biggest mistakes of his career. In the darkened séance room he "materialised" a baby's face and said it belonged to a child of Robert's. Here the medium's reliance on gossip let him down. The Brownings had indeed lost a child, but Elizabeth had miscarried and Home produced the face of a full-term baby. In effect he was accusing the poet, before his wife, of fathering a child out of wedlock. It was a deadly insult, and the enraged Browning seized the apparition to discover it was, in his words, "the rascal's bare foot".

Age did not mellow Browning. Nine years after his encounter with Home he published *Mr Sludge "The Medium"*, a long poem in which Sludge (Home), detected in trickery, confesses and makes a whining defence of his profession. The medium was never publicly exposed, but he was often caught cheating. The poem reveals how Home managed to retain his position as top people's psychic. His séances were held in the grand houses of the gentry, where he was an honoured guest. The sitters were guests too, who would as soon have criticised their host's port as denounce his medium. The cad who does this in the poem is shown the door, while "Sludge waves his hat in triumph".

Home's powers of mesmerism are well attested, and probably account for his hold upon Viscount Adare, heir to the Earl of Dunraven. The medium had persuaded a wealthy widow to give him a fortune by pretending her husband's spirit wanted her to adopt him. The lady became suspicious and consulted another medium, whose production of the dear departed had a very different message. She was suing for the return of her money, and Home knew the publicity would damage his reputation. Friend-

# REVIEWS

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCHOPENHAUER, by Bryan Magee. Clarendon Press, £17.50

ship with the young aristocrat could be turned to advantage.

Adare allowed Home to share his bedroom, in which wonderful manifestations occurred. An account of these was written by Adare and his father and rushed into print, probably at the insistence of Home, who needed this fresh evidence of his powers. Trevor Hall thinks there could not have been a homosexual affair between the medium and Adare because public knowledge of such a thing might have led to the cancellation of the young man's approaching marriage. But readers of the account would inevitably have placed this construction on Adare's description of the kissing and caressing to which he was subjected by Home. The mystery here, still unsolved, is why the damaging passages were not cut out before publication.

Home's most celebrated feat took place while he was living with Adare. In December 1868 (the book has 1968!) the medium was levitated by spirits, carried out of one third-floor window and brought in again through another — or so it is claimed. The miracle was widely accredited, three upper-crust witnesses being sufficient guarantee against fraud even though the two who wrote accounts of the levitation contradicted themselves and each other, and none actually saw Home in flight. Rational solutions have been proposed, but hitherto every theorist has been handicapped by not knowing precisely where the marvel occurred, and has been obliged to accept Adare's estimate of a seven-foot gap between the windows. Trevor Hall's detective work has identified the building, now demolished, and he reproduces a photograph of it showing the famous windows. Each has a wide balcony with handrails, connected by a narrow ledge.

An architect has estimated that the windows in the picture are 50 inches apart. All Home had to do, says Hall, was stand on the first balcony, put one foot on the ledge and step across to the second balcony with the other, steadying himself with the handrails. What we need to know, and are not told, is the distance between the balconies, which overlap the windows considerably. Careful measurement of the photograph shows the gaps between the windows and the balconies respectively to be in the ratio of 17:11. The balconies are therefore about 32 inches apart, and Home would not have needed the ledge.

As he had calculated, Home's "levitation" restored his reputation as a miracle worker, and for the 17 years remaining to him he enjoyed the life of Riley as a respected member of the privileged class he had so cleverly infiltrated.

R. J. CONDON

"As a philosopher, Schopenhauer was the first avowed and inexorable atheist among us Germans" — this tribute from Nietzsche should sufficiently commend Schopenhauer to freethinkers. There is much, too, which recommends Magee's recent *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*: it is lucid, insightful, informative — perhaps the best study of Schopenhauer's thought and influence available in English. And yet, despite its many merits, it does not really come to grips with Schopenhauer's atheism. Why? Because Magee fails to appreciate (pp 13-14) Schopenhauer's radical pessimism, according to which — very briefly — "existence is certainly to be regarded as an error or mistake" because will or "striving is its sole nature" (*World as Will . . . II*, chapter 48). Because all things strive ceaselessly, according to Schopenhauer, they can have no real goals or, in psychological terms, satisfaction. Hence the world is *essentially* and not merely *accidentally* wrong. From this follows Schopenhauer's atheism: God, in short, is too good to exist.

The most succinct statement of Schopenhauer's atheistic argument is worth quoting, as it could be used against so-called emergent theologies and religious beliefs based on superior visitors from distant planets: "It is a deduction from what has been said [writes Schopenhauer] that we have no ground for assuming that there are even more perfect intelligences than those of human beings. For we see that this intelligence is already sufficient for imparting to the will that knowledge in consequence of which the will denies and abolishes itself". This denial, which results in nothingness, or *nirvana*, is the "highest moral goal" (*Ibid.*). Magee errs, therefore, when he states: "Schopenhauer believed passionately that the overriding aim of human life . . . is the achievement of insight. . ." (p 222). For Schopenhauer, nothingness is superior to insight: "even the most perfect intelligence possible [he writes] can be only a transition stage to that which no knowledge can ever reach. . .". This, too, is connected with a distinctive atheistic argument which identifies a conflict between two of God's supposed attributes: infinite intelligence and eternity. For if the "inner essence of all things . . . is once grasped, as it soon would be by . . . perfect intelligences, what would be left for them but mere repetition and its tedium throughout endless time?"

One can understand why Schopenhauer repels. With such gloomy friends, one might say, who needs enemies? Yet, at the least, he shows that atheism is not lacking in variety. Unlike most German atheists, he is neither an optimist, nor a rationalist, nor a materialist. Hence I disagree with Magee's materialistic account of Schopenhauer's metaphysics (pp 142-4). Magee's description of the will as a

"non-alive . . . energy" (p 161) seems wrong for two reasons: (1) Schopenhauer plainly says that will should not be "subsumed under the concept *force*", but *vice versa* (*World as Will I*, 22); he also holds that our clearest grasp of will is through inwardly experiencing ourselves as living bodies.

Magee is at his best when presenting Schopenhauer's theories of knowledge and art; he also

admirably traces the influence of these theories on men such as Wagner and Wittgenstein. He writes with evident sympathy, sometimes even with passion, and wisely restricts criticism of Schopenhauer to a final chapter. Taken as a whole, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* is a very welcome book: it brings a great philosopher to life.

DAVID BERMAN

## LETTERS

### CHURCH SCHOOL STANDARDS

I was delighted to see in the July "Freethinker" that the National Association of Head Teachers is at least debating the subject of religion in the schools. In fact the shift away from morning assembly and the teaching of RE has been considerable, and achieved because many Christians are less sure of themselves.

However, the image of church schools being the best as opposed to county schools has still to be exploded. Parents (often non-religious) see church schools as having high standards and more caring communities. This is mostly untrue, but it is a self-perpetuating myth fostered by those it benefits.

There is still a considerable body of Christians in this country who are turning away from a liberal interpretation of the law, and are beginning to preach hell fire and damnation once again. With parents having greater representation on school governing bodies, as envisaged by Sir Keith Joseph, they will be able to influence the content of the curriculum. It is only a small step to children coming home with nightmares again.

HUMANIST HEAD TEACHER

### AN UNACCEPTABLE RISK

Has John Beloff not too lightly dismissed the main objection to assisted suicide or euthanasia? (July).

He agrees that there is no law which has not at some time been abused; this is true, and it is also a painful fact that a great many laws have come to be used for a purpose other than that for which they were first intended. The Official Secrets Act is one.

It is still possible, in a democratic country, to unearth abuses, redress them and compensate where appropriate. The trouble with an Act legalising "assisted suicide" is that abuses (however "minimised" as Dr Beloff puts it) entail the death of a human being against his/her will, and this is something that cannot be redressed or compensated. After all, it was one of the main objections to capital punishment that there can be no safeguard against human error. Such mistakes, however "minimal", are too horrific to contemplate.

When we come to the use of laws for purposes other than the lawmakers intended, the possibilities become yet more frightful. In a different climate of opinion such an Act could easily be used to "put down" those who the rulers of the day considered to be "unfit" — whether by reason of age, illness, handicap, or opposition to the powers that be. And it's no good saying it couldn't happen here. It could.

This is why a great many humanists, much as they would sympathise with Dr Beloff's main argument, would be very alarmed if any such legislation got onto the Statute Book.

E. M. KARBACZ

### PERSONAL CHOICE

Suicide (Dr John Beloff, July) only becomes an act needing to be "justified" when I regard my life as belonging to something other than myself — God, the State, Society, Humanity, the Family and so on. If I decide that my life belongs to me, then I no longer have to indulge in prolonged agonizing about whether or not I am entitled to end it. When the pains of living overwhelmingly outweigh the pleasures then I will commit suicide if it so suits me. There is no longer any need for me to trouble myself about rejecting or accepting it "in principle" when maintaining my life becomes my affair.

From this viewpoint the two arguments against suicide put forward by Dr Beloff (1) "that, in taking our own life (sic), we hurt our family and friends" and (2) that suicide has "social consequences", are by no means as compelling as he appears to assume.

His first argument ignores the fact that to continue living might well cause me greater pain than my dying would to my family and friends. In this case, to refrain from suicide from fear of distressing them would, in effect, mean that my life belonged to them, not to me. I would be regarding them in the same light as the Christian views his god or the fanatic his cause — as something more to me than myself. Only I can know the pleasures or pains I experience from being alive. However distressed, therefore, my relatives and friends might be by my voluntary chosen death, they cannot possibly experience the motives which lead me to take my life.

His second argument, that of "social consequences", merely invokes the myth that there is some feeling, concrete entity called "society" that my actions can affect. This is not so. My suicide will only affect those individuals who know me and wish me well. To claim that it can affect an abstraction, which is all that "society" is, is nonsense. It is, however, the sort of nonsense that invariably accompanies the thinking of those who have succumbed to such verbal spooks as "rights" and "moral problems", instead of making their own satisfactions the criterion for their lives.

S. E. PARKER

Seventy-three per cent of sixth formers in Welsh secondary schools receive no lessons in religious education, according to a survey conducted by the National Centre for Religious Education. The report says that two RE lessons a week is the normal provision for pupils in the first three years at secondary school, while fourth and fifth formers have one lesson. No RE was provided for 13 per cent of fourth formers, 19 per cent of fifth formers and 73 per cent of sixth formers. Daily assemblies for the whole school take place in only 25 per cent of the country and voluntary aided schools.

## The Wrath of God

supernatural mumbo-jumbo.

The Archbishop of York has dealt with a large number of protests and petitions that have been submitted to him as the superior of the Bishop of Durham but he has replied that, while he welcomed the readiness of the Church to meet challenges and to defend the integrity of its belief, he accepted that Professor Jenkins was ready, conscientiously to make the declarations as to belief that were required of him by Church law. Professor Jenkins was duly consecrated and installed and there the matter might have ended but for one more startling development.

Then to the horror of all, of whatever beliefs or lack of beliefs, considerable damage was done by a fire that broke out in York Minster on 9 July. The great Gothic cathedral appears to have been struck by lightning and the roof of the 13th century south transept was destroyed. It was estimated that repairs would cost at least a million pounds. Writers of letters to *The Times* could hardly have asked for a better subject for their itching fingers. On the first day after the news was printed, letters began to appear. The following two extracts are worth reading:

The news recalled to my mind the prophet Elijah calling down the "fire from heaven" which consumed

the altar to the Lord which he had built in the presence of the prophets of Baal and I wondered wryly if the fire in the Minster was also the almighty fire threatening to burn down a cathedral in which recently there had been consecrated a bishop of our Anglican Church who publicly expressed disbelief in several tenets of the Christian faith shared by all confirmed members of the Church.

\* \* \*

Just lightning says the Bishop dismissively. To those as old-fashioned as I, lightning is the wrath of God.

Not surprisingly, other comment in other papers has been somewhat different. In the *Guardian*, one reader asked whether "if all things are equal under God should we expect Queen's Park Rangers' Stadium to be struck by lightning". (Those not in touch with these things may like to know that the QPR ground has been the scene of a revivalist crusade.)

Mockery is too easy. Perhaps it is best to leave things as they are. Yet, it must be said that if we accept that "God moves in a mysterious way", there are no limits to the disasters that can be attributed to him as an infliction of punishment for one transgression or another. Let those of us who think that they are disasters ask for what great sins we are being obliged to suffer two administrations under Mrs Thatcher or the defeats of the England cricket team.

## "Mental Mugging" Denounced in Lords

Baroness Elliot of Harwood initiated a debate in the House of Lords last month on the influence and activities of religious sects. She asked if the Government realised the wicked and pernicious influence these sects have on children and young adults.

Lord Elton, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office, replied that the Government was "aware of the very unfortunate effects which in some instances these cults have". He paid tribute to the work of Family Action, Information and Rescue (FAIR) which has been in consultation with various Government departments.

In reply to Lord Taylor of Blackburn, the Minister said he could not give a full list of religious sects registered under the Charities Act. But he told the House that it included the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the Divine Light Mission, the Bhagwan Sri Sathya Sai Trust and the Moonies.

Lord Mishcon asked the Minister if he was aware of the anxiety caused by the fact that some of these groups have registered as charities under present law and are therefore subsidised out of taxpayers' money. He wanted to know if the Government was considering bringing forward amending legislation.

Lord Elton replied that the Attorney-General "is considering proceedings in the High Court for removal of charity status from two of the charities

which are connected with the Unification Church".

Lord Denning, former Master of the Rolls, pointed out that "the pernicious activities of these cults have been exposed in courts of law from time to time and have been proved to the satisfaction of juries, especially in the Moonies case". He added that the promoters of these sects had amassed huge fortunes, and at the same time as making vast profits the sects were doing enormous damage. He thought it was time for a comprehensive inquiry into their activities.

Baroness Macleod of Borge said that leaders of religious sects nearly always claim divinity and treat people who come within their ambit to psychologically-based techniques. The treatment is known as "mental mugging". It has caused "absolute disaster" to many families in this country and throughout the world.

In reply, Lord Elton said: "As to the methods these people pursue . . . where they are applied to people who willingly accept them or invite them then it is a matter between the individuals and the organisation in which the State cannot intervene".

The Earl of Lauderdale reminded the Minister that in the case of the Church of Scientology "the Government of the day took very stringent and strong measures to protect people from being bam-

boozled by them”.

Lord Mishcon suggested that the Minister should consult with the Home Secretary and the Attorney-General “with a view to securing some clarification, or alteration, of the law which entitles these people to charitable status under the heading of the advancement of religion”.

Less than a week after the House of Lords debate, a group of Christians joined with several of the sects — including the Unification Church — to form an alliance known as the Coalition for Defence of Religious Freedom. It is opposed to the European Parliament’s code aimed at restricting “new religions”. The Moonies were mainly responsible for planning a meeting of participating groups in London.

It is undeniable that religious sects have caused widespread misery. They have been denounced in Parliament, the High Court and by a wide range of experts for their harmful and disruptive activities. Many of their victims have been driven to mental derangement and suicide. But Christian opportunists, including Anglican and United Reformed Church clergymen, appear to have no qualms about making common cause with them.

• **L. Ron Hubbard**, former head of the Church of Scientology which he founded, milked the church of £80 million, a Los Angeles court has been told. Judge Paul Breckener said that the evidence portrayed “a man who has been virtually a pathological liar when it comes to his history and achievements”. He described Hubbard as a man “gripped by egotism, lust for power, vindictiveness and aggressiveness against persons perceived by him to be disloyal”. The Church of Scientology is under investigation in a number of countries, including Britain.

---

## Freethinker Fund

Unfortunately the Fund total is rather low this month. We thank those who have sent contributions and appeal for continued financial assistance to maintain the paper.

A. Akkermans, £6.40; C. Bayliss, £6.40; K. H. Bardsley, £1; G. Beeson, £1.40; J. A. Blackmore, £1.40; P. Brown, £1.40; F. R. Buckland, £1.40; M. Clowes, £2.40; H. G. Downham, £1.40; P. Foss, £5; J. F. Glenister, £1.40; R. V. Hassid, £1.40; E. V. Hillman, £2; I. R. Jones, £1.40; B. A. Judd, £1.40; J. C. W. Lewis, £3.40; E. J. Little, £5; P. G. Lownds, £1.40; S. D. McDonald, £5; H. L. Millard, £3.40; G. Miller, £1.40; H. A. Newman, \$7; L. G. Packham, £10.40; D. Redhead, £1.40; G. J. Robichez, £5; R. J. M. Tolhurst, £5.

Total for the period 7 June until 6 July: £77.20 and \$7.

## OBITUARY

### Mr L. Barrand

Leonard Barrand, who has died at the age of 73, had a lifelong association with the freethought movement. His father was a member of the National Secular Society at the turn of the century. Mr Barrand had requested a secular funeral and the committal took place at Boston Crematorium.

### Mr E. Briggs

Edward Briggs has died in hospital shortly before his 80th birthday. There was a secular committal ceremony at Chichester Crematorium.

### Mr A. Corina

Alfred Corina died suddenly at his home in Hove, Sussex. He was 70. Mr Corina was a lifelong secularist and an active member of the Labour Party. He had been a member of Brighton and Hove Humanist Group for several years. Since retirement he had been doing voluntary work. There was a secular committal ceremony at the Downs Crematorium, Brighton.

### Mr M. Gibson

Marcus Gibson, who was manager of a pop group, has died at the age of 26. There was a secular committal ceremony at New Southgate Crematorium, London.

### Mrs E. M. Hogg

Emily May Hogg, who was 86 when she died, had been an unbeliever for most of her life. There was a secular committal ceremony at Chichester Crematorium.

### Mrs P. Joyce

Patricia Joyce, a sports teacher, has died at the age of 52. There was a secular committal ceremony at Kent County Crematorium, Charing.

### Mr H. B. Land

Harry Brian Land, a *Daily Mirror* executive, has died at the age of 57. There was a secular committal ceremony at Kensal Green Crematorium, London.

### Mr L. Pancer

Leon Pancer, who has died at the age of 94, was a Rumanian by birth. There was a secular committal ceremony at Golders Green Crematorium, London.

---

**Barbara Smoker**, president of the National Secular Society, will debate against a spiritualist on the LBC “Nightline” programme, to be broadcast on Bank Holiday Monday, 27 August.

## Visit to a Primitive Country

other article was a sophisticated plea for a prayer-time that did not assume the existence of a personal god but would comprise a few minutes of awesome silence, devoted to the abstract, universal god of the USA — the spirit of the nation. I wrote to the magazine, pointing out that their attempt at balance was nullified because the opposite of having a traditional spoken prayer is not, logically, to have silent prayer, but to have no prayer, and the negation of a personal god is not an abstract god but no god. I added that the idea of coercing children into the worship of a nationalistic god, however abstract, was nothing but fascism. (My letter was rejected.)

It was a four-day journey (in a beautifully comfortable Cadillac Fleetwood) to Lexington, Kentucky — on a zigzag route so as to take in TV and radio stations to talk about atheism in general, about the British atheist scene, about the work of the American Atheist Center, and about the forthcoming convention. Our first day on the road took us up through the whole vast State of Texas (in Dallas, passing the exact spot in the road where Kennedy was gunned down, as well as the ranch used for the interminable soap opera) and on through Arkansas (with dinner at Little Rock, of school integration memory), ending up for the night in Memphis, Tennessee, where a bungled hotel reservation resulted in my having the hotel's immense honeymoon suite (to myself)!

The next day we drove north-east, finding time *en route* to visit Abraham Lincoln's birthplace, where the actual little log-cabin is preserved inside the huge monument. Our over-night stop was Louisville (home of the Kentucky Derby), where we (Madalyn, her son and I) spent three hours on a late-night phone-in radio programme (or "talk show"), on which we received a far greater proportion of fundamentalist calls than would be the case in Britain. Such programmes, which rarely exceed one hour over here, often run to three or even four hours in the States, on a single topic, and can be quite exhausting. There are so many talk shows on so many radio stations up and down the country that it is comparatively easy to get on them, and there is actually a nationwide directory of talk shows that is about the size of a telephone directory!

On the morning of the third day (to coin a phrase), we continued northward to Cincinnati, Ohio, to take part in a popular TV talk show, with a sizeable studio audience as well as telephone calls. The main item on the programme was an interview with Madalyn — whose name has been a household name throughout the States since, 21 years ago, she fought a successful court action against Bible reading in her son's school.

Several almost incredible things happened on that Cincinnati programme. First, Madalyn Murray O'Hair was introduced (as usual) by the host of the

## EVENTS

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** The Prince Albert, Trafalgar Street (adjacent to Brighton Station). Sunday, 2 September, 7 pm. Public Meeting.

**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.** Scarborough (25 August for one or two weeks) and Poole (Christmas). Details from Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12, telephone 01-673 6234.

**National Secular Society.** Annual outing (Surrey and Berkshire), Sunday, 16 September. Details from the General Secretary, 702 Holloway Road, London N19, telephone 01-272 1266.

**The Progressive League.** Summer Holiday Conference at Beatrice Webb House, Holmbury St Mary, Dorking, Surrey, 18-25 August. Details from Joan Miller, 50 South Hill Park, London NW3, telephone 01-794 5271.

**Sutton Humanist Group.** Summer programme from George Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, telephone 01-642 8796.

**The 1984 Voltaire Memorial Lecture.** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London. Monday, 8 October, 7 pm. Ludovic Kennedy: An End to Belief?

show as "the most hated woman in America". Then there was an attempted exorcism by telephone, when a woman caller began "I command you to leave the soul of this woman. . .". But Madalyn merely smiled. Another caller took the TV host to task for inviting "this pig" on to his show — at which practically the whole studio audience burst into applause.

Then the host himself — having been only too delighted, of course, to get Madalyn O'Hair on his show — was ungracious enough to apologise to any viewers who might be offended by her presence! "Don't apologise for freedom of speech" was Madalyn's reasonable response. Later she told me he had made the apology "to cover his ass". But we heard that the next day he actually apologised for the apology.

Leaving Cincinnati, we drove back southwards to the city of Knoxville, on the outskirts of which a colossal billboard beside the freeway proclaimed "THIS CITY BELONGS TO JESUS CHRIST". Early the following morning, after a drive through the lovely Smoky Mountains, the three of us appeared on a television breakfast show.

After that, we drove for about five hours to Lexington, Kentucky, and the magnificent hotel complex where the American Atheist Convention was to be held. But that must wait till next month.

# Secularists Commemorate "the Philosopher"

A public meeting was held at Conway Hall, London, last month to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the death of Denis Diderot. It was organised by the National Secular Society and Barbara Smoker presided. Jim Herrick deputised for H. J. Blackham who was unable to be present.

Jim Herrick gave an account of Diderot's writings illustrated by quotations read by John White. He said: "Diderot wrote in almost every conceivable form and on almost every possible subject — novels, contes, dialogues, aphorisms, history, music, science, philosophy, art criticism, plays, aesthetics. An enormous number of letters display the vitality of the man and his ideas. The love letters to Sophie Volland have been described by a French critic as 'beyond all literature, and writing, with the directness of the spoken word, the luminous warmth of communication, the living presence of a man'.

"Almost all his writings aspire to the condition of a dialogue; and we can see from accounts of his life, that he was never more alive than when in conversation with friends at Grandval or in Paris. Perhaps this contributes to the fact that he saw morality — his one abiding preoccupation — as a social faculty. Citizenship was to him the essential virtue and monasticism the greatest failing. His two masterpieces are *Rameau's Nephew* and *D'Alembert's Dream* — which defy categorising and are at once entertainments, philosophical and scientific speculation and sharp observation of the controversies of his day.

"His major undertaking, the *Encyclopedia*, should be included in his writings since he wrote many of the articles for it. The article 'Encyclopedia' explains the purpose of the work: 'In fact the aim of an encyclopedia is to collect the knowledge that is scattered across the earth, to reveal its overall structure to our contemporaries, and to pass it on to those who will come after us, so that the work of past centuries may be useful to the centuries to come, so that our children, becoming more informed, may become at the same time more virtuous and happy, and so that we ourselves will not die without having earned the gratitude of the human race. . . ."

In conclusion Jim Herrick said that Diderot remained relevant for the subtlety of his arguments about deism and atheism, for his materialistic and dynamic vision of the universe, close to that of modern scientists, for his remarkable and rational views on sexual freedom, and for his firm belief that a prime virtue was citizenship. He emphasised Diderot's abiding concern with morality and quoted the last words of an unfinished work, the *Elements of Physiology*: "There is only one virtue, justice; only one duty, to be happy; only one corollary, not to overvalue life and not to fear death".

Nicolas Walter summarised Diderot's life, emphasising his human and humanist qualities. By contrast with the better-known Voltaire, who was very much a traditional intellectual and a wit, Diderot was a very original thinker and more of a humorist. His masterpiece was of course the 25 years he spent editing (and largely writing) the great *Encyclopédie*, but he produced an enormous variety of other works, one of which was banned, another of which got him imprisoned, and most of which couldn't be openly published until after his death. He became "the Philosopher", a title he deserved as perhaps the most characteristic representative of the French Enlightenment.

Nicolas Walter ended with an account of Diderot's death, on 31 July 1784 (most of the books got it wrong), soon after his family had moved him to a parish where they could guarantee a decent funeral, which was attended by 50 priests to make sure. His body was buried in a Lady Chapel, but symbolically disappeared. As Nicolas Walter concluded, "His soul goes marching on".

## Muslim Women Object to Segregation

A segregated sixth form course for Muslim women at Margaret Ashton College, Manchester, has been denounced as a racist development to keep them away from the mainstream educational system. Significantly, it is Muslim women who are leading a campaign against the course which is due to start next month.

The objectors say that the course was set up in response to demands by Muslim community leaders who put forward what they claim to be the wishes of the majority. But such representatives are usually self-appointed, often religious leaders and nearly always male.

Nadia Siddiqui, a lawyer member of the Asian Women's Movement, has written, to members of the Manchester education committee. Referring to the segregated course she says: "We cannot but liken it to apartheid and the Bantu form of education offered in South Africa. . . ."

"The premise of the whole initiative is racist and should not be allowed to continue. We want this course scrapped, and a new basis for discussion on an integrated sixth form education for all girls started".

She is supported by community worker Josna Panhania, who argues that any course for Asian girls should take account of the views of the girls and their mothers, not just those of their fathers and religious leaders.