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MOTHER THERESA: VETERAN CAMPAIGNER DENOUNCES "THIS STUPID WOMAN"

"On the one hand I think we can say that our ideas are becoming accepted", said Diane Munday, when she spoke at the annual dinner of the British Humanist Association in London last month. "Opinion polls, people's behaviour, patterns of thought, certainly in the last two decades, have moved closer and closer to those of what we call humanism", she added. "But on the other hand, irrationality, religion, superstition and mumbo-jumbo, still surround us and affect every aspect of our lives. And we are becoming complacent about this. There is so much of it that we are accepting, and not arguing. It washes over us and we don't notice".

Mrs Munday, who is public relations officer of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, said that in all directions nonsense seemed to be gaining a credibility that sense has great difficulty in achieving. "And nowhere is this more noticeable than in the areas of human procreation", she added.

"Recently, two million signatures supported the proposition that a fertilised egg has the same human rights and indeed is exactly the same as an existing human being. There are people who signed this petition who believe that a spot of blood on an egg yoke is a chicken. And we are going to see a resurrection of this kind of thing in Parliament.

"We had a number of MPs describing the Powell Bill to outlaw all research on embryos as 'the most burning moral issue of the day'.

"The trouble is that there seems to be an enormous number of 'the most burning moral issue of the day', depending where you stand.

"Mother Theresa, for instance, believes that abortion is 'the most important issue of the day'. This stupid woman — and I use the word advisedly because there is no sense, logicity and indeed no humanity or compassion in what she says and writes — has described abortion as a greater threat to

human peace than nuclear arms.

"Even in Britain, a civilised and rich country, thousands of children are languishing in institutions wanting families.

"Yet this woman who has travelled in the poorest parts of the world, who comes from India, who works on the streets with the poor, has the cheek to stand up and say, 'I will look after your child', condemning millions to misery and suffering.

"Is it because we fear her popularity that we don't point out the nonsense, the arrogance, and the sheer inhumanity of her message?"

Diane Munday added that the Pope's pronouncements, like those of Mother Theresa, appeared in the press day in and day out.

"But do we write to the newspapers saying what a load of pernicious nonsense it is?" she asked. "We have come so much to accept it that we just let it pass".

The speaker referred to the Pope's statement that "contraception is a falsification of the interior truth of conjugal love". She commented: "Now what he knows what conjugal love means I don't know, which is maybe why he writes such nonsense. What exactly do his words mean to the average person? And yet he gets away with it time and time again".

Mrs Munday said that she had just read a report on the population crisis in Kenya. A woman has an average of eight children and a large number of babies die within hours of birth. The population is increasing by four per cent annually, and will be doubled in eighteen years time.

She added: "I was forcibly reminded of the fact that earlier this year the Pope was in Kenya where he made one of his strongest speeches against birth control. We heard nothing from him about the fact that we practise death control. That's all right, but

(continued on back page)

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Vol 105 No 12 CONTENTS December 1985

MOTHER THERESA: VETERAN CAMPAIGNER DENOUNCES "THIS STUPID WOMAN"	177
NEWS AND NOTES	178
God and AIDS; Christmas Heave; Fair-Weather Devotees; A Sense of Priorities; The Swindlers; Clairvoyants Challenged	
FORTIETH CONGRESS OF THE WORLD UNION OF FREETHINKERS	181
Jim Herrick A CHRISTMAS CAROL— REVISED VERSION	182
Eric Westman THE CHRISTMAS GIFT	182
Michael Duane FEMINISM AND CENSORSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES	183
John Lauritsen FORGOTTEN FREETHINKERS (4)	185
DIVERSE STRANDS Andrew Whitehead FREETHINKER REVIEWS	186
BOOK Cult Controversies, by James A. Beckford Reviewer: James Hemming CINEMA Je Vous Salue, Marie (Hail Mary) Reviewer: Vera Lustig	
ADVERTISING ON THE BEEB	187
THE POWER AND PERIL OF WORDS	189
Karl Heath NEW HUMANIST HAS A BIRTHDAY	191
EXPERT SAYS EMBRYO RESEARCH MUST CONTINUE	192

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NEWS

GOD AND AIDS

"God moves in a mysterious way" — this platitude is the constant stand-by for those Christians who are baffled by the thoughts and actions of their Almighty Figment. To them it sufficiently explains away every evil, injustice and stupidity. So it was no great surprise that the Conservative leader of Solihull Borough Council, who is an Anglican, trotted it out in order to justify his claim that God has sent the killer disease, AIDS, in order to rid the world of homosexuals.

Councillor Robert Meacham made this interesting revelation at a meeting of the Council's policy committee last month. He told his colleagues that the AIDS visitation is evidence of divine intervention on a par with the fire that seriously damaged York Minster after Dr David Jenkins was elevated to the bishopric of Durham.

Of course it would be easy to dismiss Councillor Meacham as a heartless, pig-ignorant Christian bigot. Quite apart from the fact that pigs take grave exception to the comparison, such a reaction would be mistaken. There is no reason to question the sincerity of his sympathy for AIDS sufferers (which is no doubt extended to those afflicted by a wide range of diseases and handicaps that Councillor Meacham's God cannot or will not relieve). The sad fact is that Councillor Meacham is himself seriously affected by a deadly virus. It is called Christianity, and is destructive of rationality, logic, truth and common sense.

Biblical condemnation of homosexuality is explicit, and the death penalty for homosexual acts, prescribed in Leviticus 20-13, was carried out in Christian countries, including Britain, until the nineteenth century. For nearly two thousand years hatred and fear of sex have warped Christian thinking. Christian zealots — from the Early Fathers to the Moral Majority — have regarded pleasurable sex as an even greater vice than the pursuit of knowledge. Christian theology has firmly rooted sex within the family framework, a necessary evil for the purpose of procreation. Indeed sexual relations even within marriage are still regarded by a large section of Christian society as being only second best to celibacy.

Twenty-five years ago the churches were in the forefront of a campaign against homosexual law reform in Britain, as they are in New Zealand at the present time. A former Archbishop of Canterbury (Dr Fisher) declared that homosexual indulgence was "a shameful vice and a grievous sin from which deliverance is to be sought by every means".

S AND NOTES

At the same time, the Bishop of Rochester described it as "a grievous sin and perversion", "gross indecency" and "the perversion of a wholesome instinct to an unnatural and loathsome end".

Councillor David Threlkeld, the borough's Labour opposition leader, said of his Conservative counterpart's outburst: "It is almost too funny for words. But for the leader of the Council to make these comments is also very serious".

Of course the blatherings of Christian puritans are often funny; two centuries ago they were blaming tea-drinking and Italian opera for the spread of homosexuality in London. But the influence and activities of Christian moral terrorists are both serious and sinister.

The Gay Humanist Group issued a statement which aptly summed up Councillor Meacham's views "as further evidence, if such were needed, of the hatred for gays felt by many mainstream religionists". It describes such attitudes as "a social evil akin to anti-semitism and racism, and has the same evil consequences. Such hostile pronouncements made by a public figure give encouragement to others to flaunt their bigotry".

CHRISTMAS HEAVE

Every Christmas we are regaled with statistics purporting to show that the crib and the cross still have the power to attract. Church attendance soars, particularly at the Christmas Eve midnight service. The cynics and sceptics find it all quite amusing, and doubt the religious commitment of many who attend these midnight matinees on 24 December. More likely it is a warm and colourful end to an evening of revelry.

The Rev Edward Pilkington, Vicar of St Michael and All Angels, Gidea Park, Essex, apparently shares this view. He will not be conducting the traditional Christmas Eve communion service because of worshippers' boorish behaviour in previous years.

In the last two years it has been difficult to persuade volunteers to act as ushers at the Christmas Eve service. "We can't have bouncers at the church door because that would destroy the service and the atmosphere of worship", Mr Pilkington lamented.

Mr Pilkington told a local newspaper why he had reached this decision. It appears that many who turned up last year were half-drunk. Topsy and giggling worshippers used the communion rail for support. One enthusiast partook of the cup three times. Another was sick on the floor.

It is all so different from *Songs of Praise*.

FAIR-WEATHER DEVOTEES

The epidemic of jerks and twitches that affected holy statues in Ireland last summer has been brought under control. With the onset of wintry weather and long dark evenings the "sightings" of visions and movements have dropped dramatically.

Crowds of up to twenty thousand attended vigils at Carna, County Sligo, after four local schoolgirls reported seeing a vision of "our lady" in September. Now the pilgrims have all but disappeared. "It is a very wet, miserable, exposed place" the parish priest explained.

Attendances have fallen away at other shrines too. In County Limerick seven statues were showing signs of wanderlust during the summer. "There hasn't been a murmur from any of them in the last few months", according to one statue watcher.

The Dublin travel company that laid out coaches to the most famous shrine of all at Ballinspittle, County Cork, has also reported a sharp decline in business. But the Ballinspittle grotto committee is not giving up that easily and has produced a tape of a new hymn-ballad entitled *Ballinspittle in the Night*. They expect to sell over two thousand copies at £2 a throw. The local postmaster says that many people are sending it to relatives in Britain and the United States.

The composer of *Ballinspittle in the Night* is not a local man. He comes — most appropriately — from Blarney.

A SENSE OF PRIORITIES

Conservative and Labour members of Warwickshire County Council finance sub-committee joined forces to vote a £5,000 donation to Coventry Cathedral repairs appeal. Councillors Mollie Gerold and John Wilson (Conservative) said the donation was justified as the Cathedral was a great tourist attraction.

Councillor Derek Forwood (Labour) described the building as "a symbol of all the pain and suffering that was endured during the war, and of the reconciliation since then".

Only Councillor George Cowcher (Liberal), who is also a parliamentary candidate for Stratford-upon-Avon, opposed the donation. He said that it would set a dangerous precedent.

At the same meeting, the committee rejected, without comment, a proposal for a public appeal in the county for famine relief in Ethiopia.

An American firm, Heavenly Dolls Inc., has launched a new product in time for Christmas. The Baby Jesus Doll, complete with a glow-in-the-dark detachable halo and a manger packed with fireproof hay, is selling for around £24.

THE SWINDLERS

Andrew Dobie, a 22-year-old student and son of a wealthy landowner, has paid a high price for his involvement with the Church of Scientology. Within a month of joining — after a chance encounter with two members in a public house — he had spent £90,000 on books by the “philosopher” and founder of the church, L. Ron Hubbard. Christies, the fine art dealers, described the leatherbound volumes of pulp fiction and “philosophy” as being “virtually worthless”.

A spokesman for the firm said: “This is the worst example of profiteering from cheap and fairly commonplace material I have seen.

“I cannot but reel back in astonishment that anybody has the gall to offer them for such extortionate sums”.

Andrew's parents, who have an estate in Berwickshire, decided to kidnap him after he telephoned demanding access to a further £53,000 from an inheritance. In addition to the money for books, he had paid over £10,000 for courses of “self-improvement” run by the Scientologists.

Mr Dobie said of the telephone call: “It was frighteningly out of character. He was shouting so much that I had to hold the receiver away from my ear. They were obviously putting him under enormous strain to get more money out of him”.

The Dobies enlisted the help of former cult members, including ex-Moonies and Scientologists. After many hours of argument and discussion, Andrew Dobie realised that he had been swindled by the Scientologists. He has now left the church.

His father said: “It wasn't the money that made us resort to this; they had taken his mind and his future as well”.

CLAIRVOYANTS CHALLENGED

Paul Daniels, the millionaire magician, has challenged clairvoyants to convince him their skills are nothing more than an elaborate act.

The famous TV magician says he has offered £10,000 if a clairvoyant will meet a person of his choice in his living room.

“I guarantee they couldn't produce anything worthwhile for that person. I get so angry at people who claim they can ‘tune in and out of the psychic world’”, said Mr Daniels.

“They are exploiting people who believe in another life by a mixture of artful questioning and gullible people hearing what they want to hear”, he added.

Newspaper reports are always required by “The Freethinker”. The source and date should be clearly marked and the clippings sent to the Editor at 14 Coundon Road, Coventry CV1 4AW, West Midlands

Fortieth Congress of

Niort, a small and charming town in the French region of Deux Sèvres, is according to the local newspaper “hardly on the map even for the French”. The fortieth Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers took place there recently and now, as the President said without a trace of irony, “Niort will take its place on the roll of honour of the cities where WUF conferences have been held”.

On the same weekend a conference, attended by the French President, Francois Mitterand, was held to commemorate the three hundredth anniversary of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. As a local freethinker pointed out to me, the region of Deux Sèvres was one from which many Protestants had fled the Catholic persecution instituted by Louis XIV. And, on the principle of a plague on both your houses, this had created a strong freethought tradition in the region.

One of the principle reasons for the choice of Niort as venue was the translation facilities of the MAIF (Mutuelle-Assurances des Instituteurs de France), the headquarters of the teachers' mutual insurance organisation. The splendid modern building gleamed in the brilliant sun of an exceptionally hot weekend. The theme of the conference was “Universalité, actualité, jeunesse de la Libre Pensée”, which is hardly less mouth-stopping when translated into “Universality, topical events, youth and freethought”. Not much left out there!

The President of the French Libre Pensée, Joseph Berny, in an interview in the regional paper *le Courier de l'Ouest*, discussed the theme of the Congress. Freethought must be renewed, he declared, by paying attention to the Third World, the place of women, the problem of nuclear arms. The chairman of the regional branch of the Libre Pensée, Andre Gaillard, reinforced this view: “Religion, for me, is no longer the principle target. . . If the influence of religion is less important, the influence of the media is increasing. It creates its own heroes and icons and presses upon us mercilessly every second of our lives”. The politics of the Church in his view are reflected in the media and freethought can be demolished by being not talked about at all.

The world may not have been talking about the World Union of Freethinkers Congress, but those freethinkers gathered in France were never at a loss for words in talking about the world. The conference opened with a welcome from M. Gremlin, the President (from Luxembourg), which included, I should add, an expression of pleasure that the National Secular Society was represented, although not a member of WUF. He referred to the thirty-sixth Congress of WUF held in London in 1966 and paid tribute to the late Charles Bradlaugh Bonner

the World Union of Freethinkers

JIM HERRICK

who had been a President of the WUF. The deputy mayor of Niort also welcomed the Congress to the town. All this set the tone for a conference that was not short on rhetoric of a kind which (like sermons) can be excellent for the morale of the converted, but does not necessarily move people to action.

One of the most important events during the weekend was a call to action from three young campaigners from Freiburg in Bavaria, West Germany. They gave an account of how members of the Bunte Liste, a radical rationalist, ecological party were being prosecuted under blasphemy law for displaying an anti-clerical poster. A full account of the case appeared in *The Freethinker* last month, so I will only say here that the WUF passed a resolution protesting against the prosecution. There was a debate about whether to include the name of the Bunte Liste in the motion and there was clearly friction between the young radicals and the established leaders of the freethought movement. I was not fully aware of what arguments took place behind the scene, but there was the appearance of a conflict between youthful enthusiasts and more established campaigners who, perhaps understandably, did not want the pre-arranged programme to be disturbed. Although the group was given a polite hearing, I felt they were not unanimously supported. When I expressed the hope that all delegates would organise a protest at the German embassy of their capital city, I was not confident that the suggestion would be followed up.

From other countries came reports of activities over the last four years. The German Freethought organisation was co-operating in peace demonstrations and anticipated a growth to its 10,000th member within the next four years. In France despite the cry of "The cleric in his church, the teacher in his school", denominational schools were flourishing. In Italy the presence of the Vatican created an unfavourable climate of opinion for freethought, while in Holland there had been energetic freethought campaigns at the time of the Pope's visit to the Netherlands. A pamphlet entitled *The Pope, an Unwanted Guest*, and a sticker, *The Vatican is a Dictatorship*, had created controversy. The Federation of Austrian Freethinkers, who had also protested against a papal visit, enraged the Church hierarchy by sending a leaflet setting out parents' rights of withdrawal from religious education to half the families in Vienna. The rate of withdrawal had substantially increased.

In Switzerland a questionnaire on belief had shown that Bible reading was so rare that the post-Christian era could be said to have arrived.

In my own account of freethought in England, I

referred to the beginning of Muslim denominational schools, to the campaign against genetic research on the embryo, to the customs officials' action against Gays the Word bookshop, and to the changing relationship between Church and State.

I said: "Freethinkers have often been divided on political questions, and will work as individuals in different political groups. But in some areas we cannot evade the need to bring political change. We must walk a tight-rope: we cannot inhabit an ivory tower of philosophical debate, but we deceive ourselves if we think that we alone can solve all the world's problems. We must try to keep alight a flame of reason in a mad world".

The Finnish delegate, Erkki Haartikainen, described how the conservative wave sweeping the Western world had affected Finland. A complaint to the United Nations Human Rights Committee had led to a change in Finnish law giving the right to teach an atheist "life-view" in schools, but few resources and qualified teachers were available for such teaching and there was opposition from the Lutheran Church and the orthodox Communists alike. A Finnish Parliamentary Committee on Day Nurseries had proposed the introduction of religious instruction, so that now there are Bible stories, prayers and grace in kindergartens.

Erkki Haartikainen presented one of the main lectures to the Congress and surprised everyone by saying that he thought freethinkers and atheists were less moral than religious people. He thought this was because there was no effective atheist moral education. He also thought the quarrelsomeness and the poor intellectual calibre of the freethought leadership illustrated his point.

In any conference the conversation and new acquaintanceships are as stimulating and provocative as the platform rhetoric. A student I spoke to at the end of the conference was reluctant to label himself as a freethinker. He told me that the problems which other students were concerned with were peace, famine, racism, human rights: "There are many things more important than being a religious believer or not".

Congresses should do more than reinforce the complacently held views of the participants. The freethought approach is to be constantly searching, questioning, seeking truth and understanding. The Freiburg radicals with their account of persecution in Germany, Erkki Hartikainen with his challenging comments on morality, and the student I spoke to at the end therefore all provided me with invaluable questions to grapple with as I travelled home across France from the Fortieth Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers.

A Christmas Carol—Revised Version

Nowadays, thoughtful Christians — including many who make their living by purveying Christian myths and superstitions — admit that the two God-inspired biblical accounts of the Nativity are not true. Naturally, they don't do this straightforwardly; in true Christian fashion they emit a smokescreen of euphemisms and evasions in a face-saving attempt to disguise their embarrassing admission. But there still remain a few hard-core fanatics who cling desperately to the Crib and the Star, and frantically proffer theories to prove that, after all, the Nativity could really have happened.

Most of these fantasists use the Star as their linchpin, and periodically trot out *novae*, or conjunctions, or other astronomical events that, according to the ancient Chinese, Arab or Hottentot records, occurred within ten years or so of the date the Church allotted to the Nativity. This, they claim, could have been the Star — never mind the time discrepancy.

One of these Starry-eyed visionaries is Dr Percy Seymour who is, appropriately, a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society. Dr Seymour (appropriate name, too) decided to track down the Star, and in a Radio Four broadcast claimed to have done so. Using the calculations of Dr David Ewes of the University of Sheffield — who had also exercised the grey matter in an attempt to solve the “Star of Bethlehem Mystery” — he had sat at the controls of his planetarium in Plymouth Poly, twirled some dials, and re-created the sky as it was over Bethlehem on what he believed was the significant night.

“I changed the latitude from that of Plymouth to that of Bethlehem”, explained Percy proudly. “And I repositioned the axis of the Earth, because two thousand years ago it did not point to the North Pole Star”.

But, it seems, this wasn't the sky of 25 December AD or BC. What he had set up, was the sky of Tuesday, 17 September 7 BC. That, insisted Percy, was the real night of the Nativity. He explained how, in that year, there were three conjunctions of the planets Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces, when the two planets occupied almost the same position in the sky. And it was the September conjunction that he plumped for.

“The two planets would never actually have been seen as one object — they were the distance of a full moon apart”, confessed Percy. “But”, he went on eagerly, “They had astrological significance, and once you start delving into ancient texts on Babylonian, Greek or Egyptian astronomy, you find that the two subjects aren't really separate; and in the New Age Bible the Wise Men are referred to as ‘astrologers’ and this is why they set out on their journey to visit the child in Bethlehem”.

So now we know. It wasn't one star: it was two.

And they weren't stars: they were planets. And it didn't happen on 25 December. Christmas Day is, according to Dr Seymour, 17 September, and our present year is really AD 1992. Thus, about now, we should be celebrating Easter.

Thank you, Percy. It must have been a pleasant diversion from plotting black holes or quasars. Although, come to think of it, there is no definite evidence that they exist, either.

ERIC WESTMAN

The Christmas Gift

The woman stands admiring herself in a new fur coat. As she caresses her body through the gleaming pelts the television reporter asks, “Do you like it?”

“Oh, it's *beautiful!*” she breathes.

“Don't you feel at all uncomfortable that more than a hundred of these animals have had to be killed to make this one coat?”

“No. I don't think so”. The embarrassment is momentary. “After all they do breed these animals by the thousand on farms now”.

The camera pans across the cages in which the wild animals are being bred. A fox swings frantically from side to side and screams as it tears at the wire with its paws. Dozens of small creatures rush round and round and up and down the walls of their tiny pens screaming, biting, clawing and tearing lumps of fur from one another's bodies.

In the sorting room a man rubs his fingers along a dried pelt to test the quality of the fur and tosses aside those which are, however slightly, defective. Thousands of small pelts are piled in rows with the tiny masks staring through unseeing eyes.

On the farm the breeders talk about the animals.

“Dangerous brutes. They'll take a lump out of your hand if you don't watch them. Ungrateful bastards! They're well fed; we give them only the best”.

“But don't they need much more space and freedom of movement to be healthy? Doesn't this close confinement affect their health and therefore the quality of their skins?”

“No. They're well fed. If they look like being not up to standard we simply kill them off. If they start biting one another and damage the fur we give them tranquillisers. It wouldn't be economical to keep them under the conditions they are used to in the wild. Besides, by now they're used to these conditions. None of their ancestors for several generations have ever known that kind of freedom. And, of course, they don't have any natural enemies to contend with here”.

MICHAEL DUANE

Feminism and Censorship in the United States

JOHN LAURITSEN

Jerry Falwell's obnoxious Moral Majority is only one of many repressive movements operating in the United States. As in Britain, a strident minority of men-hating feminists have joined forces with ultra-conservative elements in a crusade to promote censorship and conformity. John Lauritsen, a journalist and freethought activist who lives in New York, examines their aims and tactics.

The Old Wolf, Censorship, is prowling around the United States, decked out in the garb of Little Red Riding Hood's suffragette grandmother. The purpose of this masquerade is to bypass the free speech guarantees of the First Amendment. The strategy is to get an opening wedge by attacking pornography, not through the traditional channels of the criminal code, but rather as "discrimination against women", a violation of human rights.

Strange alliances have been formed. In crusading against the evils of pornography, feminists have embraced some of the staunchest opponents of women's rights: fundamentalist Christian and Jewish groups and elements of the New Right.

The feminist anti-pornography movement was launched a decade ago by Susan Brownmiller's treatise on rape, *Against Our Will*. Notwithstanding this book's status as a best seller and a Book of the Month Club selection, it was a shoddy piece of work: ludicrously inaccurate, flagrantly dishonest, patently reactionary and vulgarly written. By special pleading, falsification of evidence and atrocity-mongering, Brownmiller created an atmosphere of hysteria and misinformation conducive to assaults upon civil liberties, as well as to diverting the women's movement from its rational priorities.

Brownmiller and a few "feminist leaders" founded the New York Women Against Pornography (WAP), which gave birth to similar groups across the United States. Rape, WAP claims, is an omnipresent danger to all women. Pornography is an expression of violence against women. If men are allowed to look at pictures of naked women, they will be inspired to commit rape upon such bodies.

Slogans were coined: "Pornography is the Theory; Rape is the Practice". Hysteria fed upon hysteria. Anti-porn agitators created the "Snuff Hoax" in 1976. According to this rumour, there existed a genre of movies known as "snuff" movies. "Snuff" movies, so the horror story went, were produced for the sexual titillation of depraved men; they featured the actual torture, dismemberment, and murder of unsuspecting actresses.

The Snuff Hoax was investigated thoroughly by the

authorities and found to be a rumour without the slightest factual basis. Nevertheless, new censorship boards were created to deal with this horrible, if imaginary, threat to women's lives.

Big Lie techniques came into play. A frequent occurrence at conferences and forums would be a feminist speaker declaiming: "It is a Fact That One Out of Every Three American Women Will be Raped in Her Lifetime!" People began to believe this sort of thing.

In 1983 the anti-porn movement entered a new phase when the Minneapolis City Council hired Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin to draft a feminist anti-pornography bill. In return for their \$14,000 "consultants' fee", MacKinnon and Dworkin delivered seven double-spaced pages of strident feminist rhetoric, lame-brained generalisations, half-truths and Big Lies. The central contentions of the bill appear to be: (1) Pornography is central to the oppression of women (2) Pornography is itself discrimination against women (3) Pornography prevents equal rights for women in the areas of employment, housing, education, property rights, public accommodation, etc, and (4) Pornography promotes "injury and degradation such as rape, battery and prostitution".

Pornography is defined as "the sexually explicit subordination of women", which is broadly defined in terms of multitudinous possibilities, including when "women are presented in postures of sexual submission" or when "women's body parts . . . are exhibited, such that women are reduced to these parts". So broad is the range that almost any conceivable form of erotica could qualify as "pornography".

What about gay male porn? Could a film or magazine with an all-male cast still qualify as "sexually explicit subordination of women"? Yes it could. The clever "consultants" stipulated that "the use of men, children, or transsexuals(!) in place of women . . . is pornography". Still not clear? Well, according to Dworkin and MacKinnon, some of the men in all-male porn are *really* playing the parts of women. Therefore, even all-male erotica serves to prevent women from achieving equal rights in employment, education, property rights and public accommodation.

The Minneapolis bill would enable any "woman, man, child, or transsexual" to bring an unlimited series of civil actions in court against producers, distributors, or exhibitors of pornography. The courts could forbid the future display or sale of such commodities and award monetary damages to the alleged victims.

Supporters of the bill claim that it is not censorship, since the law is civil rather than criminal. The difference, however, is illusory. Few bookstore owners, for example, could afford to pay legal expenses to defend works which censorious feminists might interpret as depicting the "subordination of women".

The MacKinnon-Dworkin bill was twice passed by the Minneapolis City Council, and twice vetoed by the Mayor.

A similar bill (for which MacKinnon and Dworkin were also paid a generous "consultants' fee") was passed in Indianapolis. It was then ruled unconstitutional by a woman judge in Federal District Court, and is now being appealed in Federal Circuit Court.

In Suffolk County of New York, feminists joined with extreme Right-wing elements to introduce a much more blatantly censorious version, which was defeated. In Los Angeles County in California, two similar bills are pending.

Censorious feminism is not a new phenomenon — indeed, a current of irrationalism and intolerance has run through the women's movement since its inception. One recalls such slogans as "Chastity for Men" (Christabel Pankhurst, England, 1910-1914), "Castrate Rapists" (USA 1970s) and "Dead Men Don't Rape" (England, 1984).

A generation ago, the French sexologist, René Guyon, pointed out a few "feminist errors":

In her fits of spleen, woman will not grant others the freedom she desires for herself. That is why she becomes a fanatical prohibitionist. Unaccustomed to liberty, she, in the article of claiming it, denies it to others, thinking it dangerous. Hence women leaders of the feminist movement advocate all sorts of restrictions, and their programme is a long list of interferences with private life. Women lack the respect for freedom which men have been hard put to it to acquire. Feminist leagues make our gorge rise by their prohibitionist spirit and their puritan trend. In sexual matters, above all, woman seems determined to impose restrictions. One who has adopted a scheme of sexual behaviour, wishes intolerantly to force it upon the whole world, and is ready to persecute those who will not comply. When feminists speak of "immorality", they seem to mean simply and solely an unwillingness to accept without discussion a particular group of sexual conventions. Thus the most deadly enemies of sexual freedom are women of average mental calibre who are incapable of appreciating any other canons than those which were taught them in childhood, and who cling to their conventional past as a shipwrecked seaman clings to a floating plank. (*Sexual Freedom*, New York, 1958)

What is new and encouraging is the emergence of feminist opposition to censorious anti-porn politics. Such prominent feminists as Betty Friedan and Kate Millett have spoken out against the Minneapolis legislation. Last year the Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce (FACT) was formed. They have sponsored forums, appeared on talk shows and written articles to inform the public that not all women support

censorship and that the anti-porn movement is basically a handful of media stars based in New York City. FACT opposes the Dworkin-MacKinnon law as a "misguided, dangerous, and ineffective strategy in the battle against sexism and violence".

The women in WAP have responded with vindictive fury, branding their opponents in FACT as "sexual degenerates", "racists", "anti-semites" and "male-identified women". WAP adamantly refuses to enter into public debate with FACT. WAP forums do not allow for discussion; if critical discussion should occur, the WAP speakers simply pick up their papers and make a sanctimonious exit. On several occasions, WAP supporters have succeeded in persuading colleges to "disinvite" speakers from FACT.

In contrast, during the discussion period of a FACT forum, one of the panelists asked two WAP supporters in the audience if they wished to say anything. No response. She again gave them the opportunity to speak. The two WAP women squirmed in their seats; then one replied that they were only there "as observers".

FACT makes it a practice to distribute copies of the Minneapolis bill so that one can read exactly what its provisions are. Between FACT and WAP, it is clear which side feels its cause is best served by Free Enquiry.

Although Dworkin and MacKinnon have been praised for their "sincerity", one is more impressed by their boundless cynicism. Earlier this year on "listener-sponsored" Radio WBAI, Catherine MacKinnon several times cited "snuff" movies as among the horrors her bill is intended to counteract. Surely the woman knows better.

No one who values the free expression of ideas ought to hesitate in opposing the anti-pornography movement. The historical precedents are all too clear. On 23 February 1933, as one of the very first acts of the Nazi government, a decree banned pornographic literature of every description. After that, as we all know, one thing led to another.

The feminist anti-pornography legislation should be recognised for what it is: a ploy designed to bring us one step closer to a police state.

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Diverse Strands

ANDREW WHITEHEAD

The freethought movement has never been the creature of any one political ideology. If the subjects of this series have been on the Left, that is simply a reflection of the research interests of the author. Yet from the days of Thomas Paine, Richard Carlile and Charles Bradlaugh, into recent times, there has been an enduring link between secularism and political radicalism. This concluding article examines some disparate aspects of that relationship.

Ireland has made a distinctly modest contribution to freethought. A noteworthy exception is Myles McSweeney, an unsung stalwart of both secularism and radicalism in Victorian London. McSweeney was born near Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, in 1814, and — according to his obituary in Bradlaugh's *National Reformer* — came to London as a young man, working as a saddler and later as a book hawker.

Active in the Chartist movement and later in the Reform League, McSweeney was an abiding force in metropolitan radicalism. He was one of a large deputation of working men who, in November 1867, visited the Home Office to plead for clemency for the "Manchester Martyrs", the three Fenians hanged for allegedly murdering a policeman while rescuing one of their leaders. The Home Secretary refused to see the excited deputation, but nothing daunted they held a protest meeting on the first floor of the Home Office, despite attempts by alarmed civil servants to usher them from the building. McSweeney was among those to speak, and a manuscript account of his remarks is in the Home Office files at the Public Record Office.

"The Crown, it is thought, must always be right whatever the circumstances may be, and no respect is shown to the people", McSweeney declared, standing just a few feet from the Home Secretary's private office. "The Government think they have a right to deal with these poor men just as they like, but I consider that if they are executed the blood of these unhappy men will be upon the head of the Home Secretary". He was later active in the amnesty movement on behalf of imprisoned Fenians.

Myles McSweeney was a long-standing abstainer and a regular lecturer at secularist meetings. C. Maurice Davies, collecting material in the 1870s for his impressionistic accounts of religious and irreligious life in London, heard him "resolve Christ into a Solar Myth" at a hall in Hackney. McSweeney exhibited that immense erudition and keen scriptural knowledge so common among artisan freethinkers

of his day. His main theme was the common ground between paganism and Christianity. He published a lengthy and learned tract "in which it is shown that the history of the Jew Moses as recorded in the Bible, and that of the fabulous God, Bacchus, of the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, as given by the heathen poets, are identical". He also worked on an account of the parallels between the Biblical legend of Jesus and the story of Thor and a pantheon of his pagan colleagues.

His most charming pamphlet was a long poem, *Two Visions*, published in 1867 by Edward Truelove. It consists of two reveries, during the first of which the author hears of a secret meeting in the Vatican between "Old Nick" and his Viceroy, the Pope. In the second he is a fly on the wall at a secret session of the Pan-Anglican Synod. He puts in the mouth of the youngest participant at the Synod sentiments which were no doubt his own, advocating the claims of science:

"Hark! hear that voice in thunders loud,
It comes and rends the mental shroud
That bound mankind in fetters strong,
By right divine whose rule is wrong.
The electric shock is felt around,
Dashing our systems to the ground;
Scattering them like ocean's spray,
That in the sunbeams sportive play,
Exposing fraud and force, which we
Enslav'd a world that should be free".

A speech like this was unexpected,
I need not say it was rejected;
A vote of censure was pass'd *nem con*,
Wound up the Synod Pan-Anglican.
A row ensued, — some heads were broke,
And with the hubbub I awoke.

Myles McSweeney died in 1881, and the subscriptions sent in for his funeral testify to the esteem in which he was held.

The emigré communities in Britain were in general too concerned about political developments in their native countries to spare much effort for domestic political and secular organisations. But again there were exceptions. Frederick Lessner, a German, first came to London in 1847 to escape compulsory military service. He returned home the following year, the "Year of Revolutions", but was back in London in 1856 having spent five years in a German jail. Lessner was an active member of the German Communist Club in London and also involved in the freethought movement. For a time he thought highly of Bradlaugh, but as he recorded in his autobio-

(continued on page 188)

BOOK

CULT CONTROVERSIES, by James A. Beckford.
Tavistock Publications, £8.95

This book is a penetrating study of NRMs (New Religious Movements) and the controversies and problems they have generated in Britain and overseas. A good deal has been written on these themes, lately, from solemn denunciations in the heavies to excited exposures in the tabloids. The current survey is, in contrast, cool and sociological. It invites us to take stock of what the situation actually is, the range of NRMs that exist — with particular attention to the Unification Church (Moonies) — and the various ways in which the cults penetrate social and personal life.

One is struck by the pattern of need which drives people, young people especially, to make a sudden transition from their everyday life into a new set of ideas and relationships. This is the more remarkable as the claims made by some — not all — NRMs are quite fantastic, and may be accompanied by blatant opulence on the part of the leaders.

The author does not deal in detail with the motivations of the recruits, but the pattern of their needs emerges clearly in the course of the book. Cults are for the lost, lonely and unfulfilled, for people with a painful gap in their lives. The chosen cult offers release from a sense of futility or of being hemmed in by everyday circumstances. The prospect of a new self and a new life seems to lie ahead, together with the snugness of a community that revels in its own conviction of superiority.

Because the NRMs dispense such appealing psychological rewards, they tend to develop in their recruits a suffocating dependency, therefore a fixation, a devotion to the routines of behaviour, the ideologies and the leaders that give the cults their charismatic appeal. It is this dependency that gives rise to the charge of brain-washing and that has caused most of the alarm and the court cases. The loved one cuts himself, or herself, off from the family and disappears into a zombie-like withdrawal. The anger and anxiety at this happening are the greater because the dedication makes the recruits vulnerable to being fleeced, and many undoubtedly are — of time and money.

But Beckford is too good a sociologist to fall for the temptation to dismiss all NRMs as unmitigatedly evil influences. Some recruits seem to live happily in the aura of the cult, becoming, as it were, the priesthood, while others learn something from their plunge into, and escape from, the cult's embrace. A cult's avowed aim is the revitalisation of personal and social life; there is no doubt that encounter with some of the less extreme NRMs can revitalise some lives. The mental clothes you are asked to wear by

FREETHINKER

the organisations may fit quite comfortably, at any rate for a time.

Beckford looks beneath all the surface condemnation and considers whether the bubbling up of these cults over the past few decades is not part of a general impulse towards social rejuvenation. If society offers people no profoundly satisfying experience, will not many people inevitably seek an alternative source of fulfilment? Instead of condemning cultism in all its forms, out of hand, should we not regard it as a revolt against a society that is failing to provide for the deeper needs of humankind? But it would, of course, be going too far to suggest that cults are, in themselves, good; but they are a symptom of something lacking. From that, those who run our society have something to learn.

The cults fail, in their turn, because, while seeming to offer an escape from meaningless existence, they may turn out to be a prison. Dedication is rewarding only so long as it does not become experienced as exploitation, or manipulation, or the boredom of carrying out dreary and repetitive tasks. This inner contradiction of the cults comes out in the rapid turn-over of membership, apart from the enduring band of faithful followers. One research worker quoted by Beckford found that the average length of membership of the Unification Church was "just over a year".

The book deals interestingly with how cult members achieve disengagement if it all proves too much for them. Disengagement is not only an escape; it may generate a sense of deprivation. Rewarding community bonds are lost; the initial hope is quenched; the ordinary world may seem flat after the elevated sense of special significance that the cults engender. Ex-Moonies may also feel profoundly foolish. Here, too, there is a lesson to be learnt by those who seek to shape mainstream education and society.

Overall, Beckford presents the cults as a challenge to the complacency of the *status quo* rather than as unquestionably evil anomalies. It follows that, if we do not like them, we had better make an equivalent appeal to people's aspirations. Cults, the author implies, are there to be learnt from. The book is a valuable antidote to the knee-jerk reaction to cultism often found today.

JAMES HEMMING

A psychic group in Shoreham-by-Sea, Sussex, is seeking new members to raise additional funds. It needs the money because of an "unforeseen" increase in rent for its hall.

REVIEWS

CINEMA

JE VOUS SALUE, MARIE (HAIL MARY). Directed by Jean-Luc Godard

Je Vous Salue, Marie has reached British cinema screens trailing clouds of fury. It has been roundly condemned by the Pope (although it is not clear whether he has seen the film) and caused riots and demonstrations when it was screened in France and Italy. London Regional Transport refused to carry posters for the film, showing a rounded belly and a man's hand.

Je Vous Salue, Marie is the work of Jean-Luc Godard, director of *A Bout de Souffle*, *Alphaville*, *Vivre Sa Vie*, *Tout Va Bien*, *Sauve Qui Peut* and many other radical and innovative films. He is an important and controversial film-maker (some call him seminal, others masturbatory). Not a conventionally religious man, Godard has taken the story of the Virgin Birth and re-located it in present-day French Switzerland. Marie is a young basket-ball playing student, who rejects the physical overtures of her taxi-driver boyfriend, Joseph. The Annunciation is made by a menacing stranger, Gabriel.

The austere Godard and Steven Spielberg, director of Hollywood blockbusters like *Close Encounters* and *ET*, would seem to be curious bedfellows. But Godard pays *hommage* to the American with his head-on shots of aircraft, their lights blazing eerily, and with his suggestion that Gabriel, and by extension Marie's baby, are extra-terrestrial beings. Godard also bows towards Martin (Taxi Driver) Scorsese, with his images of Joseph driving his cab at night past blurred street lights. Like Scorsese's cab-driver, Godard is weary of contemporary society, with its tackiness and its pursuit of cheap gratification. Indeed, he has called this latest film "an invitation to chastity", and he chose Myriem Roussel to play Marie because of her "dreamy, absent look".

To Godard, Marie embodies all women: "She's a mother and a daughter and her son is both her father and her son" — a somewhat limited, and limiting, view of womanhood. Marie's rejection of Joseph is cold and fearful, her celibacy unappealing and her ponderings thereon, anguished and introspective (voice-overs, while the camera dwells on full moons, rippling water, meadows, flowers, with tawdry lyricism). In those raw, earlier Godard films, prostitutes often featured. Now he has given us the other side of the coin — the Madonna.

A director more interested in ideas than in characters, Godard "objectifies" Marie's body in a

way that must give offence to many feminists. The last scene shows her applying lipstick for the first time; the final shot is a full-screen close-up of her mouth, open but enclosing, with red, glistening lips.

I was left with a troubling question. If Godard could make a film at once so mawkish and so pseudo-profound, so tricky and pretentious as *Je Vous Salue, Marie* — have we not misjudged his films all these years, investing them with an unwarranted significance simply because their form broke new ground and their subject-matter was so unerring in its street-credibility?

VERA LUSTIG

A catalogue of second-hand books and pamphlets specialising in freethought and humanism has been issued by Mrs B. Forder, 15 Sunninghill Avenue, Hove, East Sussex, BN3 8JB (telephone 0273-770796). Many of the items listed are out of print. The catalogue will be sent to Freethinker readers on receipt of a stamped, addressed envelope (foolscap size).

Advertising on the Beeb

Barbara Smoker, president of the National Secular Society, has written on the Society's behalf to the Peacock Committee on Broadcasting.

She noted that the Bishops' Committee for Communications Policy and Development had expressed "their adamant opposition to the proposal that the funding of BBC television and radio should be supplemented by advertising revenue".

Miss Smoker commented: "Since the Church they represent — and, indeed, all the mainstream religious bodies in this country — make constant use of all television and radio channels for advertising their doctrines, we presume it is only *paid* advertisements to which they object.

"We, on the contrary, would have far less objection to broadcasting of religious propaganda and ritual if the churches promulgating them paid the going advertising rates for their broadcasting time, as in the USA. We would also ask that the programmes be preceded, as a warning of possible bias, by the announcement: *The following item is a Religious Broadcast*".

A Birmingham church has disbanded following a brawl involving members of the congregation and church leaders. They threw chairs and punches at each other during a service in the Good News Asian Church. Indian Christians raised £30,000 to purchase the building two years ago. The Bishop of Birmingham has withdrawn the church's licence from the priest-in-charge.

graphy, his views changed. "Men like Bradlaugh are not rare in England", Lessner wrote. "They use the shoulders of working men only as steps to rise higher, and then turn against the working class".

Lessner was active in the First International in the 1860s, and twenty years later, when Marxism first began to make some impact in Britain, he became a member of the Social Democratic Federation. In both organisations he was a colleague of the Swiss watchmaker, Hermann Jung, who had his workshop in Clerkenwell. He too was a secularist, though never particularly active in the movement. It was Lessner who wrote an appreciation for the SDF's journal when Jung died in 1901. He was murdered by a Frenchman who, claiming to be a refugee, had been given assistance and sanctuary in Jung's home. Kropotkin was among the several hundred mourners who attended a secular service at Finchley cemetery. Guy Aldred, who was at school with one of Jung's children, recalled that the murder "made a great sensation at the time and caused a lot of talk about Socialism".

It is incontestable that secularism both nourished the early socialist organisations in Britain and was superseded by them as a mass movement. The debate between Bradlaugh and H. M. Hyndman, leader of the newly established SDF, in April 1884, was a symbolic encounter. Bradlaugh was widely acknowledged to have been the more effective performer, but — as the historian Edward Royle puts it — if Bradlaugh had won the battle, then Hyndman was to win the war. Bradlaugh's long and inspiring campaign to take his seat in the Commons was heading towards its successful conclusion, so removing one of the main rallying calls of the secularists, while the SDF was beginning to make a name for itself as the standard bearer for the unemployed.

What is sometimes overlooked is that secularism continued to act as a nursery for socialists of militant hue for some years. Harry Pollitt, Tom Bell and T. A. Jackson were among the most active members of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the year after its foundation in 1920. All three obligingly wrote autobiographies which illustrate the crucial role of freethought in their formative political years.

Harry Pollitt, born in 1890, attended meetings as a young man in the Secular Hall, Rushholme Road, Manchester, where G. W. Foote and Chapman Cohen were among the speakers. "During those early years", Pollitt recalled, "I was reading everything I could lay my hands on. I rushed for *The Clarion* and *The Freethinker* every Friday night when they came to the house . . . I got hold of all the publications of the Rationalist Press Association, and from the local library all the classics of English

literature, but in this field my greatest craving was for poetry".

Foote and Cohen were also occasional visitors to the Glasgow Secular Society, where Tom Bell attended meetings. He was prompted to take a keen interest in atheism to combat the propaganda of three Salvation Army women who worked alongside him in a bottling store. "To meet their challenge I read the Bible, Ingersoll's *Mistakes of Moses*, and quoted the *Brimstone Ballads* of G. W. Foote, the freethinker. I did not seem to make any impression on them other than, I believe, to intensify their prayers for a lost soul". He married Lizzie Aitken, whose father, a stonemason in a small village in Fifeshire, was an ardent follower of Bradlaugh for which he was ostracised from village life. As a girl, Lizzie undertook the errand of going to Cupar "to get *The Freethinker*, the *National Reformer* and *The Clarion* from a newsagent who was scared for his customers and always kept them hidden away in a drawer until called for".

Tom Bell also read RPA publications and, like Harry Pollitt, he made particular mention of the influence of Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe*. This must have been a book of portentous influence, for Tommy Jackson also made specific reference to it in chronicling his own intellectual development. When, in 1911, Jackson went to Leeds as a lecturer for the Freethought Socialist League — during which time he incurred convictions for profanity and for using intemperate language — he found some resistance to his revolutionary zeal. "In the ILP in South Wales", Jackson lamented, "there had been acrimonious complaints that I habitually paraded my atheism on the Socialist platform. Now I found some of the old Bradlaughites complaining that I habitually waved the Red Flag over the Freethought platform".

Tommy Jackson faced the same problem Charles Bradlaugh had encountered forty years earlier when, as leader of the republican movement, he was widely criticised for his irreligion, while some of his free-thinking colleagues denounced his disloyalty to the Crown. The correspondence columns of *The Freethinker* show that the relation between partisan politics and freethought continues to excite lively debate.

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The Power and Peril of Words

KARL HEATH

Karl Heath's article, *Bad Language*, which appeared in our November issue, was a mere skirmish. There is a real battle of words to be fought.

In language, one of humanity's supreme achievements, there has always been an undercurrent of menace. Millions have died for the words they uttered, or refused to utter, for supporting or opposing groups of words in the form of slogans, manifestos, doctrines, creeds, sacred texts, battle-cries, demagoguery, bigotry and hypocrisy. In the past, words circulated more slowly and among smaller groups of people. Today the whole world can hear the same lies, the same distortions, the same ignorance in the same short time. If we do suffer a nuclear termination there will be words which have caused it, and other words which could have avoided it. It is imperative that we strive to use words closer to reality.

We not only use words; words are part of us. Rationalists may applaud the French philosopher, Descartes, for employing, three and a half centuries ago, a rigorous system of doubt to establish for himself a firm foundation for his philosophy, avoiding all unproved assumptions. This sceptical reductionism has to stop somewhere unless we believe in nothing. Descartes thought that he had reached firm rock-bottom with his famous *Cogito, ergo sum* — "I think, therefore I am". The whole universe may be an illusion but I am thinking about it, and even if I only think I am thinking I am still thinking. But rationalists should perceive Descartes' enormous blunder at this point. He retains a vast unproved assumption in one small word. In English there are only three "one-letter" words — "O", "A" and "I". The first two, the vocative and the indefinite article, are weak. The third is vastly powerful. But what is "I", or should I say "What am I"?

The whole Cartesian edifice rests upon this false assumption, and consequently crumbles. Many commentators have overlooked it, or failed to realise its significance. Even Bertrand Russell who, in his *History of Western Philosophy*, notes that the "I" is "illegitimate" and says that, instead of "I think" Descartes should have said "There are thoughts", fails to pursue the false consequences.

From this "I", irrespective of thoughts, Descartes proceeded to the immortal soul, since the thinking "I" did not appear to be bodily or material. From there he proceeds to the existence of God, and then, since God would not deceive us (another assumption) to the material universe which appears to exist and therefore does exist as God's creation, but for ever separate from the realm of spirit and ideas. And so

to Dualism, Mind and Matter, Body and Mind and Body and Soul, the Dualism unsustainable in philosophy or science, but congenial to popular religion and confusing masses of people to this day.

The present readers are "I" to themselves, but "You" to me, and so I will call you "You". What do you think you are? Reading the *Freethinker* few will reply 'An Immortal Soul'. But are you a body? And, if so, which body? The one you have now, or ten years ago, or at birth, or the one you will have in old age? Try introspection on what you call your "Self". What is it, where is it? Do you believe, like Descartes, that your true self resides in your pineal gland? He was at least right on one point. The ego has something to do with thinking. But what are your thoughts? Do they not, however immediate they may seem, always deal with the past, even if the past is only a second away? Can you think about anything except the past? Are not all your expectations about the future, and plans for it, based upon past experience? Is your self, or personality, a collection of memories, a compendium of your life's experiences? Does not an amnesiac suffer personality loss?

And what about your thinking? Is it all sensual, in pictures, in colour, recollections of touch, sound, taste and smell? Is it emotional, reflecting love, hate, anger, pride, shame, etc? Surely it is all these things — but how much more?

HOW MUCH OF YOUR THINKING IS IN WORDS?

You did not invent those words. You inherited them. If English is your native language you have inherited a vast vocabulary, coloured by imagery and allusion from countless sources, notably Shakespeare, the King James I Bible and the sea. (It is almost impossible to get through one day without uttering or encountering some phrase from these sources, even if we do not always know their origin.) Do you not think that language influences thought?

I have a German daughter-in-law who is trilingual, a Sorbonne student in France and living many years in England. She is so fluent in all three languages that I once asked her which language she did her thinking in. She replied "It depends upon what I am thinking about".

A more extreme but perfectly possible example would be a member of some remote and primitive tribe whose language has no written form and contains only three hundred words. Let us assume that this person is intelligent and talented but has had no contact with the outside world. Is his thinking, or her thinking, at all like ours?

By this stage, are you prepared to acknowledge the "word" element in your "self" or personality?

The next stage is the relation of language to

reality. We have a subject-predicate structure in which a subject noun or pronoun is followed by a verb, and, if transitive, by an object. Something does something, or does something to something else. This structure has conditioned us to assume that every noun corresponds to something real in objective reality. The philosophers of linguistic analysis have shown us how fallacious this can be. They asserted the principle of verification. The statement, "The moon is made of green cheese", though false, is not meaningless, because one could imagine how to find out, even before Neil Armstrong stepped on it. His memorable words would surely have been different if his "step for mankind" had been into Stilton. The statement, "God created the Universe", is neither true nor false, but meaningless. Not only is it unverifiable, but its terms cannot be defined. The theologians themselves describe God as "indescribable".

The linguistic analysts also condemned metaphysical philosophy for endowing abstract nouns with substance, a common trap for most of us, and one that breeds irrationality. Let us consider some examples:

"The cat sat on the mat"
"Cycling is a healthy exercise"
"Love conquers all"
"Power corrupts"
"Virtue is its own reward"
"Justice will prevail"

Many people are ready to assume that each of the six subject nouns corresponds to something in reality; but do they? The cat may be a particular warm, flesh, blood and furry feline. But is there such a thing as "cycling"? There are bicycles and riders, but cycling is only a relationship of activity involving the two. Why are you telling us something so obvious? some will ask. But wait! What about love? Does not the same apply? Is there such a thing as love? As an entity? Independent of things? There are warm human beings in a flesh-and-blood relationship. There are human beings who love their pet animals. There are animals themselves which demonstrate their mutual affection. But does love exist as an entity separate from these relationships? The religious want us to believe in a cold, lifeless external force, which they call love, and sometimes they call it God. What on earth has this dead abstraction got to do with human love? The remaining three, Power, Virtue and Justice, are equally non-existent as entities, although their significance as relationships is undeniable.

I am proposing that misuse of language, deliberate or otherwise, distortion and corruption of language, and failure to attempt a mutual definition of terms, with agreement or recognition of disagreement, can be a deadly danger in a world of mass media, possibly on the brink of nuclear catastrophe. We should strive to clarify our own language, and, hence, our own thoughts. We should challenge the lies, distortion and obfuscation of those who may

determine our fate.

This article was started before the Geneva "Summit". The historic meeting has taken place and it is instructive to examine the part played by words in the negotiations. If we judge reality by the number of weapons, their deployment and the threat of new ones, then nothing has changed. Yet something has changed. The Americans may have approached the "Summit" concerned about how to respond to some unexpected Soviet proposal or how "their man" would perform. They were bedevilled by internal dissension (Defence Secretary Weinburger tried to sabotage the "Summit" while Reagan was flying across the Atlantic.)

The Russians must have realised that they would gain nothing of substance at this stage, neither in arms reduction nor in abandonment of "Star Wars". Maybe it is too tempting to use the "Chess" analogy with the Russians. Perhaps it is their Marxist "historical" sense which leads them to think in longer terms. It seems to me that their more substantial moves are still to come, and that Geneva was a preliminary preparation. Who suggested four hours of private talks? It can hardly have been the Americans who must have been alarmed at the thought of Reagan left unguarded with Gorbachev.

It might have been easy for the Russians to humiliate Reagan. Yet they clearly decided to do the opposite, to build him up and provide him with a triumph. For the last three years of his presidency he can continue to enjoy the support of middle America, not as a crusader against Communism, but as the President who can talk to the Russian leader on equal terms. It will be difficult for him to make another "Evil Empire" speech or to declare, as he did before, that the Russians break every agreement and can never be trusted. The "hawks" like Weinburger and Perle must, for the time being, restrain their language.

My judgment may be wrong, but it appears that the Russians have made skilful use of language, and that the words they have used are closer to reality than the "banalities" of which Gorbachev complained in his press conference speech, and which, he admitted, both sides had used in the past. As he said: "You need truth, like you need air to breathe. There have been too many fables invented to scare people, too many prejudices. We need to blow away these mists".

A four-year-old girl was burned alive during an exorcism at Bangor, Maine, in the United States. Angela Palmer's mother and her boyfriend, John Lane, have been charged with the child's murder. The court was told that Lane tried to expel the devil from his flat by painting crosses and playing religious music. Following complaints from neighbours about a curious smell, the police arrived and found the girl's charred body in an oven.

New Humanist Has a Birthday

The Freethinker extends warm congratulations and good wishes to *New Humanist* magazine which is celebrating its centenary. It first appeared in November 1885 as a monthly paper called *Watts's Literary Guide: Being a Record of Liberal and Advanced Publications*. This was produced by Charles A. Watts (1858-1946) who was born into a leading freethought family. In 1882 he took over his father's printing and publishing company which traced its origins back to 1817.

In 1884 Watts began the *Agnostic Annual*, which continued publication under various titles until 1980. In 1885 he began a monthly *Agnostic*, but closed it in favour of the *Literary Guide*. In 1890 he founded the Propaganda Press Committee, which eventually became the Rationalist Press Association in 1899.

The *Literary Guide* became the organ of the RPA, which was the main publishing organisation in the British freethought movement, being best known for its series of Cheap Reprints and the Thinker's Library, and still circulating humanist publications around the world. It also organised lectures and conferences, and publicised rationalism and humanism in the press and later on radio and television. Its Honorary Associates have included many of the most distinguished people of the twentieth century—Freud and Einstein, H. G. Wells and E. M. Forster, Julian Huxley and J. B. S. Haldane, Bertrand Russell and Karl Popper, Conor Cruise O'Brien and Hermann Bondi.

C. A. Watts edited the *Literary Guide* until his death and was succeeded by his son Frederick Watts,

who died in 1953. The magazine became *The Humanist* in 1956 and the *New Humanist* in 1972, and is now a quarterly. Subsequent editors have been Hector Hawton, Christopher Macy and Nicolas Walter.

For the present editor, Jim Herrick, the occasion is a "double century". He was editor of *The Freethinker* when it celebrated its centenary in May 1981.

NEW HUMANIST CENTENARY ISSUE

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EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. New Venture Theatre Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road) Brighton. Sunday, 5 January, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. Joe Darling: How Superstitious are Humanists?

British Humanist Association. Holborn Library Hall, 32-38 Theobalds Road, London WC1. Wednesday, 18 December, 7 pm. Public meeting on Freedom and Information.

Edinburgh Humanist Group. Programme of Forum meetings from the secretary, 59 Fox Covert Avenue, Edinburgh, EH12 6UH, telephone 031-334 8372.

Gay Humanist Group. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Friday, 10 January, 7.30 pm. Kees Waaldyk: A Humanist Approach to Eliminate Discrimination Against Gays and Lesbians.

Glasgow Humanist Society. Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Norman Macdonald, 15 Queen Square, Glasgow G41 2BG, telephone 041-424 0545.

Humanist Holidays. Christmas at Folkestone, Kent. Details obtainable from Betty Beer, 58 Weir Road, London SW12 0NA, telephone 01-673 6234.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 19 December, 7.45 pm. Saturnalian Party.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Meetings on Sunday, 11 am. 15 December, R. Bellamy: William Godwin's "New Man of Feeling". 22 December, James Hemming: A New Look at Jesus.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 8 January, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. Libby Morgan: Triadcraft.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House, Hill Street (off Corporation Street), Coventry. Monday, 16 December, 7.45 pm for 8 pm. Public Meeting.

Worthing Humanist Group. Programme of meetings obtainable from Bob Thorpe, 19 Shirley Drive, Worthing, telephone 62846.

Expert Says Embryo Research Must Continue

"The case for *in vitro* fertilisation research is compelling and its results could provide doctors with more efficient methods of treating patients", according to Dr Peter Misch, who is a psychotherapist, infertility specialist, family planning doctor and abortion counsellor. He expressed this opinion at a public meeting in London, organised by the National Secular Society.

Dr Misch said that the central objection to the use of human embryos as research subjects is based on moral principles.

"Put simply, the main argument is that the use of human embryos for research is morally wrong because of the very fact that they are human.

"The human embryo is seen as having the same status as a child or an adult, by virtue of its potential for human life. The right to life is held to be the fundamental human right, and the taking of human life on this view is always abhorrent. To take the life of the innocent is an especial moral outrage. The first consequence of this line of argument is that, since an embryo used as a research subject would have no prospect of fulfilling its potential for life, such research should not be permitted.

"Everyone agrees that it is completely unacceptable to make use of a child or an adult as the subject of a research procedure which may cause harm or death. For people who hold that embryos are human, research on them would fall under the same principle. They proceed to argue that since it is unethical to carry out any research, harmful or otherwise, on humans without first obtaining their informed consent, it must be equally unacceptable to carry out research on a human embryo, which by its very nature, cannot give consent".

Dr Misch added that the more generally held view is that although the human embryo is entitled to some added measure of respect beyond that accorded to other animal subjects, that respect cannot be absolute and may be weighed against the benefits arising from research.

"Although many research studies in embryology

and developmental biology can be carried out on animal subjects, and it is possible in many cases to extrapolate these results and findings to man, in certain situations there is no substitute for the use of human embryos.

"The latter coincides with my own view on this subject. The early development of the fertilised egg occurs up to 15-16 days during the stage that even the most primitive nervous system has not developed. The vast majority of cells which make up the pre-embryos would form the placenta. The embryo can up to the end of this stage split into two to form identical twins. In nature, more than 50 per cent of these very early pre-embryos are lost spontaneously".

Dr Misch recalled that the Powell Bill was defeated after almost every Parliamentary device and filibuster had been used to keep it on course. He warned that it is almost certain a similar Bill will be introduced during this session of Parliament.

Freethinker Fund

Once again the Fund total is encouraging and there are indications that this year's amount will be in excess of that received in 1984. But as costs increase, so do the problems of publications like *The Freethinker*. Donations to the Fund, prompt payment of annual subscriptions and a higher circulation are more necessary than ever.

Warm thanks are expressed to all contributors. The latest list is given below.

A. Ahearn, J. Anderson, K. Byrom, M. Carter, H. Goodall, W. J. R. Grant, G. Horner, C. F. Jacot, A. Joiner, K. Mack, A. M. Marshall, B. Moore, A. Stuart, A. Turner, O. Watson, W. S. Watson, B. C. Whiting and K. Williams, £1.40 each; J. McNamee, £2.10; C. F. Ablethorpe, H. A. Newman, W. N. Ramage and A. Whitehead, £2.40 each; J. W. Leenders, £2.80; T. Haas, £3.40; C. Marcus, £4; E. F. Channon, S. H. Walker and A. E. Woodford, £5 each; P. L. Lancaster, A. W. F. Negus, J. B. Reader and V. Wilson, £6.40 each; W. Shannon, £6.90; B. Aubrey, £8.40; R. E. Davies, £16.40; Anonymous, £30; Iconoclast, £100.

Total for the period 2 October until 1 November: £249.40.

When the Rev Sun Myung Moon recently made his first speech since being released from prison he blamed "atheistic materialism and secular humanism" for the problems facing America. The problems include "moral corruption, unjust distribution of wealth and totalitarian communism". The top Moonie had spent thirteen months in prison for tax evasion.

Mother Theresa: "This Stupid Woman"

birth control isn't. Again the illogicality, the irrationality. And we let it pass. We do not attack".

Diane Munday concluded by saying that the humanist movement had won many campaigns and achieved much. But she warned against complacency.

"Attacking is adventurous, it is great fun, the adrenalin runs. Defending is not nearly such fun. It is dreary, it is hard work, and it doesn't appear to give immediate results. But it has to be done. We cannot allow these inhumanities to go unanswered. We have to answer back".