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RELIGIOUS CHARITY LAW "AN EXAMPLE OF LIFE AFTER DEATH"

Lord Allen of Abbeydale described charity law as a morass in which no government will gladly tread, when he opened a debate in the House of Lords last month. He said there is no definition of a charity — "the whole edifice rests on the preamble to an Elizabethan statute that has long since been repealed, a rather remarkable example of life after death".

Lord Allen reminded the House that the Macnaghten judgment of 1891 classified charities in four categories, including the advancement of religion. "I must say that we have a number of religions that Lord Macnaghten would never have thought of", he commented.

Lord Denning, a former Master of the Rolls, declared that there is an urgent need today for reform in the law on charities and in its administration. He asked the House to consider religious cults which have charity status and thereby enjoy tax relief.

Recalling the Unification Church-*Daily Mail* libel case, Lord Denning said: "It was tried for six months before a judge and jury after the *Daily Mail* had exposed the Moonies and said what a pernicious cult it was and how young people were seduced from their parents, families were broken up, and the like. The Moonies, the Unification Church, brought an action for libel. The jury dismissed it and found for the *Daily Mail* and added a rider to the verdict saying that the tax-free status of the Unification Church should be investigated by the Inland Revenue department on the ground that it was a political organisation.

"The jury wanted an investigation but I am afraid that afterwards the Charity Commissioners went into the matter and considered that the law, as they saw it, was that the Unification Church still had charitable status and was entitled to the tax relief.

"I need hardly mention that all these religious cults are imported from the United States of America. There are thousands of them in that country and there are hundreds of them here. The founders make great fortunes, like Mr Ron Hubbard, who recently died, of the Church of Scientology; and like Mr Moon of the Unification Church who made a fortune. He had tax troubles in the United States and was sent to prison but that did not affect his church.

"We have had the Exclusive Brethren in our courts. It was severely criticised. But the Exclusive Brethren apparently still has charitable status. As to the Church of Scientology, Mr Justice Latey criticised it. It is corrupt, immoral, sinister and dangerous.

"Those are the cults which are coming before our courts and which are doing great damage, in many cases to family life. They get hold of well-educated youngsters of 18, 19 or 20 who are at university or the like. They get them into the organisation and brainwash them. They bend their minds and seduce them from their parents. I have had numbers of letters — I think they come to hundreds — from distressed parents whose children have been taken away into their cults".

Lord Denning said the question of charitable status had been considered by the Charity Commissioners. Their view of the law is that "any organisation professing belief in a deity or deities will be presumed by the Court to be for the advancement of religion and therefore charitable and that the presumption can be displaced only on grounds of public policy. Whether a particular religious group is contrary to public benefit and public policy involves fundamental questions of religious tolera-

(continued on back page)

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NEWS

Kenneth Hargreaves, Conservative MP for Hyndburn, has reconstituted Enoch Powell's Unborn Children (Protection) Bill which would end embryo research into congenital diseases. The Bill will have its Second Reading on 2 May so time is short. Please write at once requesting your MP to vote against the Bill. Address letters to the House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1.

CHRISTIAN STANDARDS (1)

The only good thing to be said about child abuse is that it is in the news. There is nothing new about it. Children have always been exploited, assaulted and murdered. Such outrages are often a family affair. Friends and neighbours brush aside any suspicion that children are being neglected or ill-treated. This attitude is partly due to a feeling that it is not quite nice to interfere. Basically it is rooted in the belief that the family is a cosy, loving group, ordained of God and approved by the State, in which parents have proprietorial rights over their children. Two new organisations have been formed to defend this concept of the family, and to foster the myth that upbringing in a Christian environment is the best guarantee of a happy, secure childhood.

The National Council for Christian Standards in Society was launched last month as "a national response to a national dilemma", after its founders "met for prayer and discussion . . . completely submitting their wills to the Lord Jesus Christ". Its patrons include puritanical old war-horses like Malcolm Muggeridge and Dr Graham Leonard, Bishop of London.

The first issue of the Council's journal, *Moral Choice*, consists largely of lamentations about permissiveness and declining moral standards. Kenneth Adams, chairman of the Industrial Christian Fellowship, contributes an article with the innocuous title, "Good Business". But the NCCSS is primarily concerned about what goes on in the bedroom, rather than in the board room. Many couples live together without the blessing of the Church and "the rights of homosexuals have become firmly established". There is also a quotation from *The Freethinker* that will make pious readers' flesh creep.

In a publication that professes concern about child abuse and violence in society it is not surprising to find an article entitled "Suffer Little Children". The author is none other than Charles Oxley, that tireless advocate of corporal punishment ("an indispensable part of loving care") and capital punishment ("God's

S AND NOTES

law for mankind").

The Conservative Family Campaign — a name which must rate as the sick joke of the month — was introduced at a press conference by Graham Webster-Gardiner, "committed Christian" and parliamentary candidate for Newport East. He said the organisation's policy was to foster "a positive pro-family stance". Of course the best hope of achieving this noble aim was by working for the return of Mrs Thatcher to 10 Downing Street at the next General Election (and, no doubt, Mr Webster-Gardiner as the Member of Parliament for Newport East).

According to the CFC the family is under attack. The threat does not come from mass unemployment, widespread poverty, exploitation of the young through cheap labour schemes, closure of nursery schools and deteriorating educational facilities. No, the family is being shaken by "immoral propaganda, the Equal Opportunities Act, undermining the role of the man, the father, in society today". The solution was to "put Dad back at the top of the table".

One of the CFC's specific aims is "the acceptance by the Conservative Party of . . . the upholding of Christianity as the religion of the nation and the reflection of its value in the law and in education". Peter Bruinvels, Conservative MP for Leicester East, said: "It is only right that such a group as the CFC should be established now to help spread the message of the Gospels . . . Conservatism will bring about the return of traditional Christianity and moral values". (Mr Bruinvels' distinguished record of public service includes an offer to volunteer as hangman should capital punishment ever be restored.)

The Earl of Halsbury, an exalted patron of the National Council for Christian Standards in Society, declared: "You have only to look around you to see what an appalling state society has got itself into by abandonment of Judaeo-Christian standards in favour of permissiveness". He blamed "so-called liberal humanists who triggered off the whole sorry business of social decay".

Many liberal humanists could most kindly be described as moist; some are wet to the point of saturation. But they are far more compassionate and concerned about social ills than are Christian pressure groups like the National Council for Christian Standards in Society. Like most people, liberal humanists are distressed and revolted by child abuse. But unlike some fundamentalist Christian zealots they do not cynically exploit such tragedies for propaganda purposes. Liberal humanists have higher standards.

The Keep Sunday Special campaigners against the Shops Bill have been embarrassed by their opponents' revelation that many cathedral gift shops open on Sunday selling everything from bookmarks to real ale guides. But a far more lucrative form of Sunday trading goes on in premises owned by the Roman Catholic Church whose leaders have jumped aboard the Sabbatarian band-wagon.

One amusing feature of religious life in Britain is the practice followed every Sunday by thousands of Roman Catholics who, after attending Mass, make for the nearest watering-hole. Very often they do not have to traverse more than a few paces as many drinking clubs are conveniently situated in the church grounds. Some actually adjoin the church building, a happy juxtaposition of the spirituous and the spiritual.

The buying and selling of alcoholic drink, cigarettes, etc, is obviously a form of trading. When it takes place on Sunday in Church-owned premises it is in line with the Catholic Church's comparatively relaxed attitude to Sunday observance. But it makes Catholic leaders' public support for the Keep Sunday Special campaign look decidedly opportunist and hypocritical.

The present writer's abiding interest in matters of the spirit — bottled, admittedly — moved him to refer this perplexing problem of Sunday trading in Church-owned clubs to Cardinal Hume. The good Cardinal responded with bland courtesy. He sees the problem as "yet one more anomaly" in the Sunday trading laws, and points out that "life is full of inconsistencies".

It is indeed, as is the spurious propaganda being issued by the pro-Sunday lobby and endorsed by its Catholic supporters. They regard Sunday trading in some shops, garden centres and DIY establishments as being a dire threat to England, Home and Beauty. But apparently it is a mere "inconsistency" when taking place in drinking clubs operated under the aegis of the Church.

Church leaders, increasingly uncertain about the "eternal truths" of their faith, now concentrate on proclaiming the alleged superiority of Christian-based moral standards. So Cardinal Hume should not be surprised that the Church, by exploiting an anomalous and profitable loophole in the Sunday trading laws, causes its leaders to be accused of hypocrisy and opportunism.

Is the Bishop of Warwick a cassock sceptic? Complaining that too few lay Christians are involved in Church affairs, the Rt Rev Keith Arnold recently declared: "We need to get away from the idea that the Church is run from above".

THE SURBITON VISIONARY

Some odd goings-on have been reported from Surbiton, an otherwise unremarkable swath of semis on the London-Surrey boundary. But rather than being excited about the alleged messages and visions, Roman Catholic authorities are clearly embarrassed by Mrs Patricia de Menezes's claim that she has had visions of the Virgin Mary, Our Lord and the Infant Jesus.

Mrs de Menezes, a convert and "ordinary housewife and mother", says that during one of the sightings the Virgin Mary commanded her to build a church dedicated to "innocence". That is easier said than done, and Mrs de Menezes had to set about raising the wherewithal. She wrote a booklet about her experiences, describing conversations with the

Virgin Mary on a variety of topics, including abortion. Father Kevin O'Hanlon, a local priest, obligingly supplied an introduction to the booklet and is now in hot water with the Archbishop of Southwark who is not favourably disposed to the project.

Father Michael Smith, the Archbishop's private secretary, said that nothing further should be done without the local bishop's approval.

He commented: "A lot of people say they are possessed by the devil, but often they are disturbed. Others say they want their houses to be exorcised, when in fact there could be some natural explanation".

Put another way, a great many Christian believers — particularly those who see visions and moving statues — are two bricks short of a load.

Letter from America

Geoffrey Barker

Sunday morning TV in America, the hours of the TV evangelists . . . razzmataz religion, sacred showbiz, the hard-sell road to hokey heaven. My dear late Salvationist grandmother taught me Jesus Saves. In America, Jesus Raves — every Sunday morning on network TV.

The black lady was wearing a shimmering pink silk wig and a matching pink and black jacket and she seemed to be in a trance. Her arms were flailing and she was shouting "Praise the Lord" and "Hallelujah, brothers and sisters", while onlookers encouraged her by interjecting remarks like "She's right" and "Thank you Lord". In the background a dancing chorus line was singing disco hymns.

I changed the TV channel immediately. "Oh I love it, I love it. It's goo-ood stuff". The speaker was Frederick K. Price and his remarks referred to a Bible passage he had just read to a huge crowd in his TV auditorium church. Then Frederick explained how the Lord had healed an agonising cancer the size of a silver dollar behind his left nipple.

I changed channels again. "And tell me Norma", whispered silver-haired George Vandeman, his voice oozing bathos, "what happened that night?" Norma Dodd, Christian schoolteacher of Rockford, Illinois, recounted how, lying ill in her hospital bed, she became aware of a "dark power" in the room urging her to suicide. But "a wonderful power of strength" saved her from terminal foolishness. It was Satan and God fighting for her soul in Rockford, Illinois, she explained.

Another switch. Now Jerry Falwell was there, flogging copies of *The Fundamentalist* from his TV pulpit at Liberty University, where students have absolute liberty to think exactly as Jerry does.

Switch. Pat Robinson, an outside contender for Republican presidential nomination, was railing against the iniquities of secular humanism.

Switch. Robert Schuller in his Californian crystal cathedral, inflated larger than life-size by a giant TV screen, was giving a creditable imitation of Orwell's Big Brother and flogging his latest book and cassette tapes.

There is something disturbing about the TV ravers: they are the American ayatollahs, missionary mullahs who are crusading powerfully and publicly to replace dreaded secular humanism with a narrow and often intolerant morality that seems to know little of tolerance, compassion or understanding. These people have money, votes and organisation, and are actively courted and encouraged by the Reagan administration which professes sympathy with many of their attitudes and assumptions.

The mullahs are waging war across the board against secular humanism — seeking to reverse liberal abortion laws, to compel prayer in schools, to force schoolteachers to include creationism in "science" courses, to engineer a return to what they call "traditional family values". Jerry Falwell's 6.5 million-member Moral Majority now dreams of becoming a fully-fledged political party. Mr Falwell declared recently that the fundamentalists were planning to run for office themselves to stop America from going to hell. Pat Robertson, who runs a \$230 million-a-year empire that includes a Christian broadcasting network, plans to raise \$12-\$15 million over the next year and to form a Political Action Committee to channel funds to conservative candidates in preparation for a possible 1988 bid for the Republican presidential nomination.

Their achievements may be limited in a society as diverse and pluralistic as the United States. They may even be limited by their own internal competition for the fundamentalist voice. But given the background religiosity of the country, people tend to listen when the mullahs start to rave.

The Religious Slaughter Debate

Spokesmen for the Jewish and Islamic faiths and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals addressed a public meeting in London last month on the question of religious slaughter of animals for food. The meeting was organised by the National Secular Society whose representative, G. N. Deodhekar, was the first speaker.

Mr Deodhekar said it was agreed on all sides that as far as possible suffering by the slaughtered animal must be avoided.

"The secularist contention is that old methods of slaughter must be replaced by new ones based on scientific observation, new techniques, reason and compassion. Though Jewish and Muslim spokesmen usually argue that their method is less cruel than the modern methods, the crux of the matter is that even if it was proved beyond all reasonable doubt that their method was more painful, Jews and Muslims would insist on adhering to their own method as being based on a command of a divinity in their respective religious books".

The speaker quoted verses from a chapter of the Koran entitled "The Bee". He said the essential spirit of the Koranic verses on this issue was one of flexibility and this should enable the Muslims to adjust their practice to modern conditions.

He added that resistance to pre-slaughter stunning "was based on the fear that the stopping of the heart would result in failure to drain the blood from the carcase.

"Observations now suggest that loss of blood is not affected by stunning. The only point at issue, therefore, is which method is less painful.

"Through lack of knowledge or sheer inertia, many Muslims would prefer the traditional method. But there are indications that some Muslim slaughter houses are willing to accept pre-slaughter stunning. It may well be that patient explanation and unheated discussion may produce wider acceptance by Muslims of modern methods".

It is essential, the speaker warned, that society should be on guard against the exploitation of this issue by fanatical and extremist organisations in order to foment prejudice against Jews and immigrants.

"On the other hand", he said, "minorities must realise that their claim to exemptions from general practice on religious grounds has limitations based on the welfare of other people and of animals. The lack of tolerance of religious minorities in certain Islamic countries, though not an excuse for democracies to display similar intolerance, does not strengthen the case of the Muslim minority in the minds of the general public here".

Rabbi Berkovits declared that the Jewish method of slaughter is as humane as any other. He added: "I am not ashamed of saying that the basis of our

beliefs is religious.

"The origin of our method of slaughter we believe to be from the Bible and religious law, and we believe that the Bible is of divine origin, and therefore that it is binding upon us, imperative, and eternal for all times. This is our belief. It may go back for thousands of years. I do not accept that anything which is old is *ipso facto* primitive. We are not a primitive, barbarian people. The Pyramids are old, yet no modern engineer can explain the engineering of the Pyramids. Just because something is old does not mean that it is not necessarily good. . .

"I believe that the Bible is divine, I believe in God. I am quite sure that the National Secular Society does not accept this. But my contention is that you cannot prove your point of view, and we cannot prove ours. We cannot prove the existence of God, but you cannot prove that He does not exist. . .

"You are entitled to your beliefs and we are entitled to our beliefs. Neither of us should impose our beliefs upon the other. We do not attempt to impose our practices and beliefs on slaughter upon the wider community; but then do not impose your practices and beliefs upon us. Let us show mutual respect for each other".

While agreeing that tolerance was all right as a general principle, Rabbi Berkovits took up the specific question of religious slaughter. "It is true that Jewish law is very strict about the method of slaughter", he said.

"The knife must be perfectly and absolutely sharp, and it must not contain the slightest, tiniest blemish. And there is a very great skill in testing it — the slightest blemish, which no normal person would detect, would disqualify it. There must be no pressure whatsoever during the incision, there must be no pause whatsoever, no laceration, no tear. The person who performs this is highly trained and highly qualified. And the purpose, incidentally, of religious slaughter in Jewish law is not to extract the blood, and the reason why we oppose pre-stunning is not because it impedes the extraction of the blood, but because it causes certain injuries to the animal which are forbidden to Jews under Biblical law. Not all injuries, by the way, will render the slaughter invalid".

Rabbi Berkovits said critics may claim science tends to show that Jewish methods of slaughter are not quite as humane as others. He was sure that the NSS is not opposed to the Jewish method simply because it is religious, but bases its arguments on science.

"But let us not be blinded by science. To have faith in science as the answer to everything is just as credulous as faith in God. . .

"We shouldn't have absolute faith in science. We

must be careful how we evaluate. And here I would also say that because science requires evaluation, it is constantly changing. What value can we place on science if yesterday's scientific facts, yesterday's empirical evidence, is tomorrow's fallacy, or today's fallacy? I will give you one example. The RSPCA has been telling us for 30 years to stun animals electrically. In their very latest report, however, they now concede what we have said all along — that electric stunning does not work. They call for a ban on electric stunning”.

Rabbi Berkovits said it was the primary duty of opponents of religious slaughter to produce incontrovertible evidence to support their case. They had failed to do so.

He concluded: “I think that it is not merely because we believe in God, and that our practice of slaughter is of divine origin, that we believe that it is not inhumane. I maintain that secular humanism cannot possibly talk about the ethics and morality of causing pain to animals. Because if we are merely creatures who evolved out of the protozoic slime, who are not created by God, who are merely animals of a superior kind — our genes are better than those of other animals, perhaps — what use is it to talk of ethics and morality? There is no such thing. Ethics and morality cannot exist without a religious under-pinning. Secular humanism talking about ethics is simply playing with words. . .

“If you don't believe in religious under-pinnings of society, then any system which you choose to follow happens to be moral. There is no point in talking about ethics and morality if one does not believe in religion. And therefore I contend that our method of slaughter is not inhumane; that we are not the ones who are superstitious, obscurantist or illiberal, but rather, perhaps, our opponents”.

Dr H. El Essawy, a representative of the Islamic Society for the Promotion of Religious Tolerance in the UK, declared that Muslims and Jews had recently come under “an orchestrated attack” for alleged cruelty to animals in slaughter houses. He accused the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Animal Rights Group, and said they were encouraged by the National Front.

He invited “careful scientific and physiological assessment of the questions raised by the campaigners, as we consider this issue to be a serious potential threat to religious tolerance in this country, especially when we take into account the rather reckless accusations of ‘barbarism’ and ‘cruelty’ thrown at Muslims and Jews.

“The way taught by God to the children of Abraham and followed for thousands of years by the Jews, Christians and Muslims, is to carefully and quickly cut the arteries and veins of the animal's neck using a very sharp knife.

“The general Islamic guidelines for the production

of Halal meat are first, to reduce the animal's suffering to a minimum; secondly, to let the blood flow out, as it is harmful to humans; thirdly, to mention God's name in recognition of him having given us this meat and a stomach to digest it”.

On the question of pre-slaughter stunning, the speaker said that in the absence of a common language between man and animal, we have to look for a comparable and available “human model” that can show us which method is painful and which is not.

“The human model is demonstrated every day by the man shaving, or the accidental cut by a sharp kitchen knife which shows us that a cut is not in itself painful. Many people cut themselves without even realising that they have done so until the wound comes into contact with a pain-producing substance. . .

“What happens to an animal that is being slaughtered according to the age-old religious method is that the big carotid arteries and the big jugular veins are cut, leading to an interruption of the cerebral circulation with an immediate loss of consciousness. The effect is comparable, though on a smaller scale, to the effect of a stroke; the victim never really knows what happened to him.

“There can be no quicker or more painless way of slaughtering the animal than that taught by God and his messengers. The only reason why some people think it is cruel is their ignorance of the physiological processes involved”.

Dr Essawy said it is a different question whether man should eat the meat of another animal. This is the wider basis of vegetarianism, which is also promoted by animal rights campaigners.

He asserted that “it is necessary for humans to eat meat, though arguably not at the present excessive levels.

“The biological distinction between an animal, say, a rabbit, and a vegetable, say a carrot, is a thin one. Animals and vegetables share much of the same physiology. Both feed, feel, breathe, communicate and reproduce. Both are very much alive.

“It follows that a campaign to ban eating meat on the basis of cruelty is obviously a shallow one, prompted by sentimental and good-hearted attachments to some animals though not to others”.

Dr Essawy claimed that although examples of cruelty to animals are numerous, Muslim and Jewish methods of slaughter were not among them. To describe these methods as barbaric is nothing less than cruelty to Muslims and Jews, as it stirs up racial hatred and religious intolerance.

John Douglas, manager of the RSPCA's Farm Animals Department, strongly denied that their criticism of religious slaughter without pre-stunning is racially motivated. Nor is everything perfect regarding conventional methods of killing animals for food, he declared.

Mr Douglas said that his and the RSPCA's criticism of religious slaughter is based on three main criteria.

First, there is the question of pre-slaughter stress. While not dwelling on the method used for casting animals prior to religious slaughter, Mr Douglas added: "Suffice to say that turning any animal on its back is distressing for the animal, and in the case of ruminants, particularly sheep, it causes death within a relatively short space of time due to pressure on the diaphragm and thorax.

"The Weinberg crate or pen, whilst an improvement on the methods used for casting or hoisting by a back leg prior to slaughter 50 years or so ago, is now totally outdated and the cause of considerable stress.

"A far better pen used for some years in the United States is the Cincinatti or ASPCA pen, in which the animal is held upright and the cut made from below. It has not been sanctioned by the Jewish authorities for use in this country. Its introduction for Shechita and Halal slaughter would be a major step in reducing the terror prior to slaughter".

Secondly, there is the pain associated with cutting the throat of an animal. Mr Douglas referred to the claim made by some defenders of religious slaughter that the pain involved could be likened to nicking oneself with a razor.

"To suggest that severing skin, muscle, nerves, oesophagus and trachea, in addition to the major blood vessels, causes no pain seems to me to be stretching credulity too far", he said. "In addition to the likely pain involved, the animal cannot vocalise its terror as both the windpipe and the nerves supplying the vocal chords have also been cut".

The speaker's third point concerned the time taken for an animal to lose consciousness.

He said that "it is not possible to measure consciousness directly in the laboratory, let alone under commercial conditions in the abattoir. . .

"The problems involved in delayed loss of consciousness are compounded by the not infrequent failure, particularly in Shechita, to cut one or both of the carotid arteries, which lie close to the spinal column. This is because the Shochetim is not supposed to put any pressure on the knife, and because he must make sure that the knife is not nicked. Not only would such an event render the animal unfit for Jewish consumption but he would have to spend a long time resharpening the knife. Studies at the Food Research Institute show that in such cases time to loss of evoked response is delayed by up to five minutes".

Mr Douglas concluded by suggesting that fear of change is perhaps the biggest fear that reformers have to overcome.

"All of us have a tendency to resist new ideas. Change is often considered a threat to a way of life,

or to undermine rich traditions of culture. . .

"No one would deny that both Jews and Muslims have the interest of the animal at heart. Both the Talmud and the Koran carry many instructions on the care and welfare of the animal kingdom. But the point is that many of these instructions which were wise and valid a thousand years or more ago, simply do not apply now.

"Times have changed, knowledge has increased. Science has made new inroads and cannot be ignored. There are those in both the Jewish and Muslim faiths who are deeply concerned about their traditional methods of slaughter and see no objection to pre-slaughter stunning.

"The fact that a new Halal slaughter house has just been opened in North Wales is testimony to this. Animals from there are exported to Muslim countries all over the world. All are stunned before being Halal slaughtered".

Freethinker Fund

The Freethinker is a campaigning journal. It endeavours to provide readers with facts and information which they in turn can use in debate and in letters to the media and their public representatives. It is a means by which the secular humanist viewpoint on contemporary issues can be expressed and circulated to the press, broadcasters, Members of Parliament and organisations.

Although public relations work of this kind is regarded as an extra-editorial duty, it is not free — stationery and postage charges are considerable. So the purpose of the Fund is not only to bridge the gap between income and expenditure. It helps to finance public relations work which is vital, particularly when paid advertising is prohibitively expensive.

Our thanks are expressed to the latest list of contributors which is given below.

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Total for February: £211.10 and \$5.

A programme of meetings has been arranged throughout the country as part of the British Humanist Association's "Focus on Violence" week. This article is based on the author's contribution to a symposium organised by Warwickshire Humanist Group.

1793 was the year of the Reign of Terror. The tumbrils rolled through Paris carrying the condemned to the guillotine. *Les Tricoteuses* knitted while the heads rolled. Yet, according to Arthur Koestler, more people were hanged in Britain in 1793 than executed in France. There was no revolution, just a normal year in which stealers of sheep and horses were despatched, burglars and burners of haystacks duly punished. We had a Reign of Terror every year, without undue excitement. On 18 February, 1796, a man found guilty of "hissing the King on his going to Parliament" was sentenced to the pillory and five years in prison. Only 50 years ago black Americans in the southern states were charged with "statutory rape" for, allegedly, smiling at white women on the other side of the street.

In 1951 I was chairman of the Jamaica Council for Human Rights. We set up a Legal Commission which compiled a dossier of sentences imposed in Jamaican courts in that year, especially those of the Resident Magistrates' Courts. A boy convicted of stealing a paper bag was sentenced to "twelve strokes of the tamarind switch". A country girl of 18, charged with "standing up in a truck, contrary to the Road Traffic Laws" while on her way to market to sell her produce, was sent to the Kingston Penitentiary for six months. Yet there was no evidence then, and no evidence now, that harsh penal systems anywhere in the world reduce the crime rate.

The "hang-em", "flog-em", "birch-em" "castrate-em" brigade have centuries of history on their side, but no evidence that their visceral reactions have ever, or will ever, prove an answer to violence and other crime. They are not really interested in crime, only punishment. They despise "Do-gooders". The only firmness they recognise is savagery. They represent the mirror-image of the very thing they claim to condemn.

Humanists must ask "Why Crime?" They reject the religious notion of "Original Sin". In any case, this doctrine is irrelevant to crime since salvation through faith and redemption through Jesus has never emptied the prisons nor reduced the work of the courts. Humanists also reject the view of Thomas Hobbes, still widely held, that human nature in a state of nature is vicious, and that men are only

driven to civilised conduct through a fear of death which leads them to surrender their liberty to "Leviathan" ("Law and Order"). Humanists see human nature, not as an entity like a soul, but as a description of human behaviour. Man is a social animal and his behaviour can only be observed in society. Thus his behaviour is determined largely by the society in which he finds himself, its current social organisation and the traditions and culture which it has inherited. Consequently, since society is always changing, human nature changes, is malleable and flexible, and, in any case, involves a mixture of influences and motives, some good, some bad and often contradictory.

Humanists naturally do not see morality as God's will or the sole source of our knowledge of right and wrong. It would indeed be convenient to have an eternal standard by which our conduct could be measured. But God no longer lectures to us as he appeared to in the Old Testament. All we have now is different human claims to know what God's will is. If we have to choose between the Pope's God, Ian Paisley's God, Jerry Falwell's God and the Ayatollah's God, it is clearly better to reject all of them, and decide for ourselves on the basis of human morality derived from human experience. Morality is material, physically-based, biological and evolutionary. The human species is social and cannot survive without society. Consequently, that which endangers the survival of society is "wrong" and that which promotes it is "right".

The "Original Sin" and "Vicious Human Nature" adherents are plainly wrong. The majority of people are decent, kindly, considerate and co-operative. Many are self-sacrificing. No town or village could survive unless the propensity for good behaviour outweighed the propensity for crime. So what do we do about crime? Penalties as retribution? Penalties as a deterrent to others? Rehabilitation?

On 17 March Princess Anne, in a speech to the Butler Trust, deplored prison conditions as making rehabilitation impossible. Peter Bruinvels, Conservative MP for Leicester East, one of the founders of the Campaign for Law and Order and self-declared applicant for the post of public hangman, if the post should be advertised again in the future, disagreed with the princess. He said that "people go to prison to be punished". He continued with the utter inanity: "Once a criminal always a criminal". Such breath-taking stupidity will, I hope, lead the voters of Leicester East to demonstrate the falsity, likewise, of "Once an MP, always an MP".

Yet, if, under existing penal conditions, neither deterrence nor rehabilitation seem very successful, we are left with punishment. Many Humanists

myself included, favour punishment, especially for violence against the weak, abuse of children, wife-battering, rape and violence against the elderly. I find especially repulsive the current wave of cases involving the torture of babies. But what kind of punishment? It could be argued that prison for the violent (a) protects them from social condemnation by its very seclusion and (b) ensures their association with other like-minded violent persons. Perhaps, if a system could be devised, they should undergo their punishment while continuing to live in the community, suffering social stigma, but with the opportunity to rehabilitate, to regain self-respect and to regain the community's respect.

We should be more concerned with causes and prevention. Much violence involves family, relatives and acquaintances. The press emphasis on the violent stranger is misleading. Panda cars, riot shields and plastic bullets are no answer to most of the violence around us. A *Guardian* report on 8 January said that in the Catford Police Division, out of 255 constables, only nine were available for what used to be regarded as normal police duty, namely, patrolling the streets. There is a case for "Community-policing" and bringing back "the Bobby on the beat".

Much is made of the influence of the media. The press, or sections of it, can be charged with sensationalising crime, and the *Sun* is rightly condemned for nauseating hypocrisy when it "titillates on page three and pontificates on page five". I would like to make two points about TV violence. Films like the Channel Four *Jubilee* and *Sebastiane* showed violence as horrific and were condemned by such as Mary Whitehouse and Winston Churchill. Series like *Starsky and Hutch* and *The Professionals* involve more violence, more killings, but light-hearted and often performed by the "goodies". They are not condemned by such as Whitehouse and Churchill. But are they not infinitely more pernicious, showing violence as acceptable rather than horrible, and catering for a much larger child audience?

My second point is "Sex and Violence". What perverted mind associated these two together? When they come together in reality, as in rape, we deplore it, so why set out to associate the two in the public mind. They are poles apart and should be kept poles apart. Sex is natural, is enjoyed by the participants and involves love and affection. It is life-giving. Violence is unnatural, involves pain, misery, sometimes death to some of the participants, callous indifference, cruelty and hatred. The message to Mrs Whitehouse should be "More Sex and Less Violence".

Another factor is the example set by governments. Can we really believe that the peace-time piling up of fantastic devices for nuclear genocide has no effect on the thoughts and behaviour of individuals? Does not the individual violence seem less when

compared with the almost unimaginable violence which governments seem capable of contemplating? The use of torture by governments far exceeds the use of torture by individuals, as Amnesty International will testify. The terrorism practised by governments against their own citizens far exceeds the worst that individual terrorists have achieved. What terrorist gang has been able to match the 30,000 citizens who "disappeared" under the Argentine military governments, or fell to the Death Squads in El Salvador or Guatemala? Similarly, when we condemn a paint-daubing vandal, do we remember the nuclear waste which BNFI pours into the Irish Sea, totally indifferent to the Irish, and the acid rain which the CEGB sends across the North Sea, totally indifferent to the Norwegians, with their depleted forests and poisoned lakes?

Another problem is class justice. It is useless prating about law and order if there is one law for the rich and another for the poor. In the 16th century when the profits of the wool trade tempted rich landowners to seize the common lands to convert into sheep-runs, the peasants declared:

The Law locks up the Man or Woman
Who steals a Goose from off the Common,
But leaves the greater Villain loose
Who steals the Common from the Goose.

In *The Red Lily* Anatole France writes of "the majestic equality of the laws which forbid rich and poor alike to sleep under the bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal their bread". Dennis Skinner, MP for Bolsover, recently commented upon the Government's failure to deal with massive frauds in the City and in Lloyds' underwriting while "a pensioner could be done for taking a tin of salmon".

Finally, what of crime in our society. We have a Prime Minister devoted to Victorian values, a fragmented society, an ethos of selfishness in which the rich are rewarded (Mrs Thatcher has said, specifically, that the successful should be rewarded), decaying inner cities, depressed ethnic minorities, racially-minded police, reduced education and social services and massive unemployment. In such a society there is little chance for the expression of personality, the employment of talents, the achievement of aspirations, seeking for fulfilment. All members of society, unless their misconduct indicates otherwise, need and deserve to be respected by the society in which they live, to be honoured, to be treated as *significant*, to feel that they matter to others. Mentally, they need a role, not so much as *takers*, recipients from society, but as *givers*, contributors to society, employing their talents to the full.

When Marx wrote in *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*, "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs", he was misunderstood. His target was waste of talent and energy. Should not Humanists seek a society which could inscribe these words on its banner?

IS CHRISTIANITY TRUE?, by Michael Arnheim. Duckworth, £7.95

This is a devastating book. It not only demolishes the monotheistic claims of the gospels but leaves a distinct (and on reflection a quite alarming) impression that they were written by a gang of incompetent charlatans. Indeed the gospel writers commit so many factual and doctrinal errors, and perpetrate so many obvious inconsistencies, that one begins to feel that the overall effect would have been more plausible if only one gospel had been written, or better still if God himself had written them. As it is the New Testament, when subject to the harsh light of penetrating scholarship, reeks of literary fraud.

Whatever Christianity is about, one now suspects, it is not about truth, which becomes the first casualty in this self-seeking fraud. It is about one man's deluded idea that he himself is the prophesied Jewish Messiah, an absurd and (as it turned out) dangerous belief, unscrupulously furthered by a small band of followers, embittered by rejection and determined to start up their own break-away religion. Here we have, writes Michael Arnheim, a Professor of Classical Civilization at a South African university, "the strange spectacle of a religion centred on a Jewish founding figure (Christ), laying claims to Jewish titles of honour . . . but becoming increasingly hostile to Jews and Judaism alike".

There have been other books that have tried to iron out the confusing inconsistencies of the gospels in order to uncover the real Jesus and determine what he stood for. But Arnheim's book is quite different, as his title makes plain. He says that communal religions like Judaism — celebrating the shared attributes of one social group — needed less doctrine to hold them together, and were hence more tolerant and liberal. Christianity, on the other hand, is a creed religion based upon specific beliefs. Alone of the world's religions it depends utterly upon the truth of its historical assertions. One factual slip-up, one false claim, and the entire edifice crumbles away.

The rot sets in with the crucifixion itself. This was a monumental blunder, since the execution of an incarnate God led to all kinds of doctrinal difficulties and was very difficult to justify on theological grounds. Hence the Jewish Bible was ransacked in the hope of yielding prophesies pointing to a despised and suffering Messiah. At first glance the Book of Psalms looked promising. But, as so often with ancient Hebrew, verses became corrupt in translation to the Greek, with abstract metaphor and collective nouns being concretised and personalised. Hence Psalm 22 probably referred to the dismemberment of the Jewish state at the hands of its enemies.

Other fatal misconstructions abound. Arnheim mentions the technique of parallelism, common to Hebrew poetry, where emphasis is obtained through a slightly varied repetition. In Matthew's account we find Jesus riding into Jerusalem not on one ass, but two. This is because Jesus's life was purposely made to fit Zechariah: "Behold your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass".

None of the four gospels agree with each other even on essential details concerning Christ's nativity, his alleged virgin birth, the events surrounding the resurrection, and so on. Christians explain this away by saying that the gospels were written many tens of years after the event, as if somehow God thought it was in his interests to proclaim his existence to the world through a mist of linguistic ambiguities.

Unfortunately the devout Christian cannot even jettison the image of the Messianic Christ and simply use his religion as a system of compassionate ethics. Christ's ethical commandments, on the contrary, were so uncompromising as to be literally unattainable. Loving your enemy was the Christian pass mark in ethics; merely loving your neighbour as second best was not good enough. Even if you failed in what was humanly impossible, you were still a sinner.

In any event a close reading of the scriptures reveals Christ himself to be a hypocrite. While demanding that his followers love their enemies, he roundly condemned the Pharisees, and calls down curses upon the heads of his opponents. On one occasion he rudely rebuffed his own family when they came to see him preach to a large crowd. He reproached his own mother without fail every time they met. Amazingly he has no insight, or prevision, as one would expect of an incarnate God. When, for instance, the adulteress is taken to Jesus, "to test him" as St John puts it, he is clearly in the dark as regards both the legal position and the actual charge levelled against her.

The world might have been spared Christianity if the Jews had accepted Christ as the Messiah. The religion survives, says the author, not because of its "truths", but because it depended on a campaign (largely half-hearted) to recruit non-Jews who were not so concerned with historical truth. But it was a campaign which took literally centuries to gather momentum, and which very nearly failed.

In the process a number of pagan attributes were allowed to flourish by default: female mother figures, for example, and a plethora of images and icons, together with an army of saints who could intercede (a prominent feature of polytheism, this).

R REVIEWS

Is Christianity True? is a marvellously ironic, lucidly written book — a triumph of logic and reason over cant, transparent propaganda and unsupported claims. It is an indispensable primer for humanists needing to know why the gospels were really written.

ANTONY MILNE

Is Christianity True? is obtainable from G. W. Foote & Co Ltd, 702 Holloway Road, London N19, price £7.95 plus 85p postage.

MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD, by Mary Whitehouse. Kingsway Publications, £1.95

The Lowatollah rides again. Dedicated Whitehouse-watchers will relish the old familiar brew and broomstick. Her fifth book is the mixture as before from an arch-casulist who knows all the answers before she's even begged the questions. More smoothly concocted and beguilingly argued this time, though.

The trouble with believing that you are an instrument of God's will, as Mary Whitehouse certainly does, is that your opponents *ipso facto* become devilish. And here's the same old demonology. First and foremost — and what a compliment to us! — the humanist/permissive lobby; a highly-organised worldwide conspiracy of dedicated political revolutionaries, persistently promoting "the moral anarchy which has characterised the last two or three decades and is now spilling over into industrial and political anarchy" (a pet boo-word of Whitehouse's; she has no notion of anarchy in its precise meaning of self-government — people taking voluntary responsibility for the good order of society instead of displacing authority outside themselves onto an oppressive state force). Then the usual motley collection of those she loves to hate — John Osborne, Roy Jenkins, the late Bishop John ("Honest to God") Robinson, Alex Comfort ("an anarchist" — ugh!), Professor ("charity is more important than chastity") Carstairs, Sir Hugh Greene and *That Was the Week That Was* (all, our authoress graciously informs us, "hardly remembered" with the exception of Greene: the others *will* be pleased)!

A particularly blatant example of her smeary style of reckless assertion is her claim that because the spread of AIDS is linked with promiscuous homosexuality, "permissiveness" resulting from the 1967 decriminalisation of private consenting adults is responsible for the deaths of babies who have lost their lives through transfusion of blood donated by gay AIDS sufferers — though, she adds "in all fair-

ness" after making this monstrous and totally unprovable allegation, they didn't realise that they'd got it! (How does she know of this?)

Whitehouse disclaims any wish for *political* censorship — yet the whole burden of her message is highly political, anathematising anyone who is vaguely to the left of Genghis Khan. She doesn't seem to see that a "freedom" which only applies to people who agree with her is a nonsense. Claiming to be a democrat, she clamours for more censorship, tougher laws and uncritical support for the police.

The titbit of this otherwise predictable book is the revelation that Charles Oxley, who is (appropriately) Vice-President of her National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, infiltrated himself as a spy into the executive committee of the Paedophile Information Exchange and that his "extraordinary and committed dedication" in doing so played a crucial role in the police prosecution of PIE and the subsequent capers of the egregiously Geoffrey Dickens, MP.

The organisers of PIE were a naive bunch. It's not really surprising that adults whose emotions and sexual interests are centred on prepubertal children are themselves prone to be childishly trusting and lacking in worldly wisdom; they genuinely believed that they had only to explain to the world what basically nice people they were for everyone to pat them on the head and say "there, there". They reckoned, however, without the *News of the World*, the *Sun* and Mrs Whitehouse — a curious bunch of allies but, when you come to think of it, natural ones in many respects (not least in their shared prurient prudishness).

Mary Whitehouse relates this bizarre episode with obvious relish, depicting the "tall, humorous, bespectacled, successful academic, principal of several Christian schools" as going repeatedly under a false name to PIE meetings in shabby London terrace houses where, it seems, "a vicar's son(!) was lolling on a broken settee reading a pornographic magazine".

"As caring and compassionate people", Mary Whitehouse demurely observes, "we have to think of the paedophiles themselves — not as moral lepers beyond our concern, but as real people with real needs". Recalling the raucous and destructive hulla-baloo she orchestrated a few years ago against the Albany Trust for doing precisely that, my jaw dropped several inches as I read this pearl of wisdom and I ruminated afresh on the true nature of the *vice Anglais*. . .

ANTONY GREY

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.

OBITUARY

Mrs B. Beer

Beatrice (Betty) Beer, who has died at the age of 76, was born in the village of Turton, near Bolton, the second daughter of the Rev James Platt and his wife Beatrice. She grew up with her brother and sisters in the beautiful surroundings of a large vicarage which they called "the Old Vic".

Her chief interests as a schoolgirl were biology and medicine. For financial reasons, a medical training was hardly a practical option at that time for a girl. And the possibility of getting free medical training by signing up as a missionary was out of the question. She had already abandoned the Christian creed.

Betty was in her twentieth year when, returning from a Halle concert, she was knocked down by a charabanc, sustaining a broken thigh-bone. She was in hospital for 18 months and accepted with characteristic stoicism the decision to amputate the leg.

She went up to Reading University from 1931 to 1935, obtaining a BSc in botany and zoology, and an education diploma. Her political activities began at this period and after leaving university she became actively involved in the National Unemployed Workers movement. Later she was forced to resign from her first teaching post, ostensibly for allowing the pupils too much freedom, but more likely because of her political views. She remained a socialist all her life and in recent years was active in the Campaign for Nuclear disarmament and Greenpeace.

For nearly two decades Betty Beer was an active and valued member of several humanist organisations, including South Place Ethical Society of which she was a Trustee. She will be gratefully remembered for her work as secretary of Humanist Holidays, not only carrying out the planning work with her usual initiative, energy and efficiency, but also acting as courier on ambitious trips and coping with all the problems that arose as though she were able-bodied and half her age.

Five years ago she developed breast cancer and last summer, following a fall, began to suffer severe back pain. Nevertheless she insisted on fulfilling a Humanist Holidays commitment to take a party to Exmouth. She returned to London and to bed, and bore the last months of illness with great fortitude.

Betty Beer is survived by her second husband, Sam, four children of her first marriage, four grandchildren, her brother and two sisters.

There was a large gathering at South London Crematorium where a secular committal ceremony took place on 6 February.

Mrs F. Cockerell

Fanny Cockerell, who died last month in London after a short illness, was a tremendously energetic person who gave unsparingly of her time and talent to many causes and organisations.

Educated at North London Collegiate School and University College, London, from which she graduated with an honours degree, her first job was a reporter with the short-lived *Jewish Daily Post*. Her novel, *And the Stars Laughed*, was published in 1937. The following year *Come Out to Play*, which she wrote with Jack Sarch, was staged at the Kingsway Theatre, London, after being blue-pencilled by the Lord Chamberlain.

Fanny Cockerell was a tireless worker for peace, social justice and libertarianism, giving her services liberally to the causes she believed in. Over the years she had been active in the Independent Labour Party, the Labour Party, National Peace Council, Fabian Society, National Council for Civil Liberties, Campaign Against Censorship and South Place Ethical Society. She was a member of the National Secular Society and a *Freethinker* reader.

In 1931, together with C. E. M. Joad, Olaf Stapledon and others, Fanny Cockerell was a founder member of the Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals. It later became the Progressive League, and she was its most tireless organiser until the end of her life. Without the advantages of office accommodation, paid staff or regular income, the League arranges an ambitious programme of conferences, meetings, cultural and social events. In addition to undertaking much of the organisational work, Fanny Cockerell also edited the League's monthly magazine, *Plan*, since 1955. Her energy seemed to increase with age; amazingly, she was in her 80th year.

The main chapel at Golders Green Crematorium was packed for the secular committal ceremony on 14 March. Rose Hacker, president of the Progressive League, described it as a celebration of a life of achievement and the privilege of knowing Fanny Cockerell, whose place in the League would never be filled.

"Month after month her clear-sighted *Plan* editorials enlightened us and prodded our conscience. Her awareness of the horrors and dangers of our time never made her cynical, but fuelled her unwavering enthusiasm for the causes to which she gave her energy unsparingly.

"Her heart was as open as her home, and she enriched all our lives through her love for and encouragement of the arts".

Lord Jenkins of Putney, a former Minister for the Arts, said that the death of Fanny Cockerell meant the loss of someone who was a significant part of our own existence. "And so we are able to understand and to share something of the grief of Fanny's family, Hugh Cockerell, their sons and daughter and

grandchildren.

"Spreading out from their house at 22 Mapesbury Road, which was often full of people, the vibrant personality of Fanny Cockerell affected all who knew her. She was quite uninterested in being widely known, although she had qualities and skills which would have carried her far".

He referred to the many and varied tasks which Fanny Cockerell undertook, "all of which she performed with equal enthusiasm, and I never heard her reproach anyone for not matching her own unflinching willingness and energy".

Lord Jenkins concluded by saying that Fanny Cockerell's life was a long and full one, "which ended without declining into disability. And Fanny would not have wished it otherwise".

Appropriately, the ceremony included music and poetry, including two of Fanny's own poems which were read by her nephew. After the flower-covered coffin was slowly withdrawn from view, Fanny's family and friends left the chapel to the strains of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. It was a perfect farewell.

Mr N. Maguire

Norman Maguire has died in hospital after a long illness. He was 74. A native of Belfast, Mr Maguire was an unbeliever all his adult life. There was a secular committal ceremony at Canley Crematorium, Coventry.

Mr P. Stamford

Peter Stamford has died after a long illness at the age of 81. A lifelong secular humanist, he was a German Jewish refugee from the Nazi regime. In 1946, as a British army captain, he was responsible for the re-education and repatriation of thousands of German POWs.

There was a secular committal ceremony at Golders Green Crematorium, London.

Mr W. Southgate

Walter Southgate, life president of Havering and District Humanist Society, has died at the age of 95. His membership of the National Secular Society followed the example set by his father, who had been a steward at meetings addressed by Charles Bradlaugh.

Mr Southgate joined the Social Democratic Foundation, the first modern socialist body, in 1905, determined to do all he could to end the squalid conditions of life in London's East End, where he had been born. His death leaves the 101-year-old Lord Shinwell the only surviving founder member of the Labour Representation Committee, forerunner of the Labour Party. Until quite late in life he was an active member of the Harold Hill Labour Party and the Romford Historical Society.

For many years Walter Southgate worked towards the establishment of a labour and trade union museum. The National Museum of Labour History opened at Limehouse Town Hall in 1975, with his own collection of historical material as its nucleus. His autobiography *That's the Way it Was* appeared in 1982. As a first-hand source of information about the bad old days he was often consulted by universities, researchers and writers. He numbered calligraphy and pen-and-ink drawing among his talents, and was in demand on ceremonial occasions as a maker of quill pens, an art whose secrets he claimed would die with him.

Mr Southgate's wife, Grace, to whom he was devoted, predeceased him by 27 years.

There was a secular committal ceremony at the South Essex Crematorium, Corbets Tey, on 20 February.

Miss A. Williamson

Audrey Williamson, the author and drama critic, died in London last month at the age of 72.

There was a secular committal ceremony at Islington Crematorium.

Peter Cotes writes: Despite her diminutive physique, Audrey Williamson was a redoubtable fighter who never stopped battling for the good life and "the best of causes". She won respect for her ideas, if not always for her way of expressing them.

I had known her for over 40 years, principally through her writings for the Theatre (she was at one time the number two drama critic on *The Times*, in the days when the great Cookman was senior critic on that newspaper). I also knew her to be a writer of a number of well-researched histories of the Theatre, as well as political biographies that dealt with her great heroes: Paine, Wilkes, Shaw, Ruskin, Rosetti and William Morris, amongst others. Upon publication of her Thomas Paine biography in 1973 she became vice-president of the Thomas Paine Society, and matters concerning the great man were constantly being ventilated in the media through her busy pen and occasional broadcast appearances. Her study of *The Mystery of the Princes in the Tower* (in which she was anxious to acknowledge her indebtedness to Dora Russell) won for her the Annual Crime Writers Award in 1970.

During the 1960s, Audrey was based for a period of several years in the United States and became the New York drama, opera and ballet correspondent for the *Guardian*, *The Times* and *The Scotsman*, as well as drama critic for the *Sunday Times*.

Her modern heroes were Michael Foot and Tony Benn — now she will never, alas, write their "lives" — and she counted having a bet on the horses an occasional pursuit ("that I can ill afford", as she used to say). Audrey Williamson wrote at one time fairly regularly for *The Freethinker*, was always at the centre of some controversy, and whether the

enemy be publishers, the Tory Party or various forms of bigotry, she was always on the side of the "little ones" of life. Which was as it should be, with a woman so tiny in build and so big in heart.

Christopher Bruncl writes: The Thomas Paine Society was formed to restore to Paine his rightful place in history and to promote knowledge of his life and ideas. Much has already been achieved, and an improved atmosphere has greatly helped over the years. Over the years, too, there have been some outstanding landmarks — one was Audrey Williamson with her writings on Paine.

LETTERS

HUBBARD AND THE PSYCHIATRISTS

"A vote for (L. Ron) Hubbard" may well be "a vote against the shrinks", as David Tribe puts it (Free-thinker, March). But freethinking should not mean carelessness of facts, and a more critical appraisal of allegations about Mr Hubbard is warranted than your article otherwise offers. There was no arrest for petty theft, or anything else, as court records can demonstrate. There was no failed nuclear physics course. The line about making a million dollars from religion was George Orwell's, not L. Ron Hubbard's.

But David Tribe is not the first to roll out these old chestnuts, so where did they come from? When Mr Hubbard published his "Dianetics, the Modern Science of Mental Health" in 1950 he was one of the first and most outspoken critics of the psychiatric brutalities which commonly passed as treatment. He had in fact worked with psychiatrists at Washington DC's famous Saint Elizabeth Hospital researching his books, and became aware of the CIA-funded "mind control" experimentation (involving drugs, electric shock and worse) being conducted there (see, for example, "Operation Mind Control" by Walter Bowitz). L. Ron Hubbard exposed this in his "Science of Survival" (1951) and thus attracted the ire of not only the institutional psychiatric fraternity but also the shadier spooks who wanted to create "programmed assassins" and unconsciously controlled intelligence agents.

Early in the 1950's, a Rockefeller-sponsored bill to create mental health "gulags" in Alaska — dubbed the "Siberia Bill" by opponents — was rejected only after vigorous campaigning by Mr Hubbard and others.

Colonel Fletcher Prouty, a retired United States Intelligence official whose post gave him access over many years to top-secret CIA and FBI material, suggests that this early campaigning was the cause of a continuing campaign of black propaganda which used the full services of the US intelligence agencies. The same kind of campaign, it will be remembered, was directed against Wilhelm Reich, Martin Luther King and Charlie Chaplin.

In 1976, the South African Church of Scientology published an expose of black mental health camps run by private companies — including Rockefeller interests — for profit. This expose resulted in an immediate raid of the Church's offices, confiscation and subsequent banning of the Church's journal, and extreme official harassment. Only in 1981 did it emerge that Information Minister Connie Mulder, personally responsible for the raids and harassment, was a major shareholder of the private companies.

She was a campaigner, and she sparked the criticism of some academics, not, I believe, because she was a poor historian but because her subject's campaigning in the 18th and early 19th centuries still aroused passions. As with her detective fiction, she researched deeply and well with her historical writings. She contributed greatly to the changed attitude towards Paine — he is still not loved by the establishment, but he is no longer buried by a cloak of ignorance.

The Thomas Paine Society salutes Audrey Williamson and her work.

The late Will Hamling, MP, as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Health Minister in 1971, identified lobbying from institutional psychiatric "front" groups as the major pressure behind British Government attacks on the Church. The Scientologists had been the most vociferous critics of abuses in British psychiatry.

The story could go on — indeed it doubtless will. As to Scientology itself, a guiding principle has always been "what is true for you is what you can observe yourself". A great many people have found workable truth in Mr Hubbard's work.

MICHAEL GARSIDE
Public Affairs Director,
Church of Scientology

MAN AND THE UNIVERSE

It was most kind of you to devote two pages of your valuable journal to a review by H. J. Blackham of my new book, "Instead of God". As I wrote the book to contribute to "thinking together", perhaps I may be allowed a come-back on one or two points which affect the future of Humanist and Secular thinking.

First — Greek thought. Of course we must be deeply grateful to Greek thinkers and writers, in the ethical, as in every other, field. But it is a mistake to suppose that, as regards the issues of my book, the Greek input was all positive. The work of Aristotle, with his concept of God as "the unmoved mover", did more to sustain the traditional Christian concept of God, during the impact of the Renaissance, than any other influence.

Next, to a more fundamental issue. The evidence is accumulating that it is no longer necessary, or logical, to regard humankind and consciousness as purely chance outcomes following a long series of incredibly unlikely accidents. The transition from inorganic to organic matter was, at one time, held by theologians to be miraculous and, by scientists, to be statistically highly improbable. But the evidence now strongly indicates that organic matter is commonplace throughout the universe. It may well be that a lot of other "miraculous accidents" — like the development of photo-synthesis or the oxygen level in our atmosphere — will turn out to be expectable commonplaces in the sort of universe in which we happen to be living.

Acceptance of the movement of the creative process towards more elaborated forms has nothing to do with entelechy (a supposed urge to perfection within things) or with élan vital (the "ghost in the machine" by another name). Nor is any supernatural finger stirring the brew. It looks more as if energy systems, as they develop, have a tendency towards balanced complexification. The charge on an electron nicely balances the charge on a proton; quarks arrange themselves into neat patterns of mutual charge; simple atoms change, when conditions are right, into more complex ones;

electrons weave atoms together into molecules; catalysts and enzymes carry out their multifarious tasks with punctilious precision. And so on. All this order and elaboration seems to derive from a self-organizing propensity within matter itself. How that is to be explained we do not know. But it is clear that neither "God" nor "Chance" will cover the phenomena.

Of course, as H. J. Blackham rightly points out, the whole extraordinary complex of interacting energy systems, leading at last to life and mind, would not occur the same way twice. It would not, therefore, have been surprising if we humans had evolved as marsupials rather than placental mammals, or as birds with hands, or whatever. But to suppose that consciousness and personality would never have evolved, if that had happened, is almost certainly erroneous. The movement of the entire evolutionary process is demonstrably towards greater consciousness, in spite of all the false starts, dead-ends and zig-zags.

Holism? H. J. Blackham correctly notes that the philosophical holism of Jan Smuts has died long since. But what I have been writing about is contemporary scientific holism. Today it is "separatism" not "holism" that is inconceivable. The universe started as an undifferentiated eruption of energy, and it is still one system, in spite of its many aspects, of which we are one. We now know that, if we are properly to understand parts, we must study them in the context of wholes.

It seems to me vital that Humanists do not seem to be downgrading life, mind, and personality as mere chance spinoffs from a totally alien universe. We shall not win the hearts of humankind with such arid beliefs. If that is how things actually are, then we must settle for it; but it is beginning to look as if we are involved in a more universal scenario than keeping a tiny planet peopled for a few million years. Finding out what is going on, with ourselves as intimately involved in the drama, is much more interesting and exciting than near-nihilism based on a conviction about the non-significance of homo sapiens.

JAMES HEMMING

THE ULSTER UNIONISTS' CHAMPION

I am pleased that my letter on Ulster (February) sufficiently jolted your readers out of their inertia, that it generated not just one but three "rebuttals".

It is unfair of correspondent Kevin Ritchie to attempt to deny the progressive spirit of the 18th-century Presbyterian United Irishmen by citing Victorian Bible-thumpers who came into existence a century and more later; the entire Victorian age, everywhere, was dominated by clerics. It is true that throughout the past 100 years the Ulster Loyalist movement has been led by religious crackpots, but has Mr Ritchie stopped to consider that perhaps this might be due to "liberal" bigots like himself refusing to have anything to do with the cause of Ulster's survival?

Likewise, I can assure Madeleine Simms that if it had not been for the late 1960s intervention of IRA death-squads, complete with their clerico-fascist mystique of Gaelic-Catholic chauvinism, then Northern Ireland would have quite naturally emerged as the modern, progressive province it had [and has] the potential to be. Before the advent of the IRA, Rev Ian Paisley was generally regarded in the Loyalist community as a buffoon. Nowadays, he is widely regarded as a saviour; the only leader with the courage to oppose IRA imperialism and Westminster betrayal. This is a sad commentary on the inept failure of freethinkers to accurately address the basic issues in Ulster; even the British Labour Party refuses to organize in the British Province of Northern Ireland.

As J. E. Cohen points out, progressives and freethinkers have ignored Ulster for so long that the only "leaders" the Ulster people have had to turn to have been reactionary Right-wingers, who have continually opposed social reforms such as the legalization of abortion, homosexuality, Sunday opening, and so on. However, I would suggest that even bearing the burden of such "leadership", Ulster is still light years ahead of its backward neighbour, the Republic of Ireland, where abortion is illegal twice over — once by law, and again by constitution! It is indeed amazing that English "liberals" would insist on (relatively) progressive Ulster being annexed by such a Third World regime.

To address Mr Cohen's final ad hominem point, it is quite true that I was indeed a National Front activist before emigrating to the United States in 1978. What on earth has that got to do with my arguments?

DAVID McCALDEN

TAKING THE MICKEY

Unlike Mr A. Joiner (Letters, February) I quite enjoy your occasional lapses into levity. I think there is no harm in poking gentle fun at the follies of the faithful.

Of course Mr Joiner is right that reasoned argument is preferable to cheap jibes, but I see no evidence of the latter and plenty of the former in The Freethinker. In fact I think that you show considerable restraint, considering the incredible goings-on in the world of religious make-believe.

How could one, for example, refrain from satirical comment in the recent case of the devil-worshipper who coned a Sussex vicar and other Christians out of vast sums?

There is a danger that the freethought movement will degenerate into a small circle of earnest self-styled intellectuals forever debating the finer points of philosophy leaving 99 per cent of the population untouched. A sense of humour and a more mundane approach will stand us in good stead.

TONY AKKERMANS

LINDSAY BURNET

I was saddened to read of the death of Lindsay Burnet, comparatively soon after that of his wife Mora, though this may have been the way he would have wished it.

As you perceptively point out, Lindsay Burnet was very much someone who improved on acquaintance. In an age which too readily judges on appearance and "charisma", his face was emphatically not his fortune. Moreover, in the movement at large — especially in the eyes of the "young turks" who came into the Ethical Union-British Humanist Association in the 1960s — he was taken to represent "old-fashioned" ethical culture rather than "modern" humanism. Few people have been unkind to Stanton Coit and his legacy than myself, but let me now observe that this strand of freethought has perhaps been dismissed too lightly. One of the reasons is that secularism and rationalism have always had better journalists than ethicism. Another is that it particularly fell victim to extreme theories of moral relativism and logical positivism in the postwar years. It was symbolic that the EU became the BHA under the presidency of Sir Alfred Ayer, Britain's leading exponent of logical positivism.

To use a biblical metaphor, Lindsay and Mora Burnet were in the tradition of Martha rather than Mary — practical rather than contemplative. As such, they filled a vital organisation role. And in the Humanist Housing Association, which they nurtured with great skill, tact and dedication, they left a tangible memorial of which any humanist might be proud.

DAVID TRIBE

Celibacy Rejected by German Priests

A former Roman Catholic priest and founder of an association for married priests and their families says that between 5,000 and 6,000 West German priests are either secretly married or living "in sin". Heinrich Lueg's claim is in a new book, *Unholy Marriage*, by Ursula Goldman-Posch, which has caused uproar among German Catholics.

Bishop Stimpfle of Augsburg requested to see proofs of the book. But the author works for a Catholic publisher and knows how censorship can be imposed. She turned down the bishop's request but invited him to a publication party attended by 16 women either living with or secretly married to Catholic priests. He declined the invitation.

Lueg, who was married in a registry office, asserts that there are around 16,000 married or suspended priests all over the world. They were hoping for dispensation from Rome, but he said "the Vatican hardly ever grants dispensation now".

Religious Charity Law

tion which we believe can be determined only by the Courts, the Government or Parliament". Applying that principle, the Charity Commissioners think it right to grant charitable status in these cases.

"I suggest that view is erroneous", Lord Denning declared.

"At all events, it should be reconsidered by Parliament or by a committee so as to get the law in a position where these religious cults are not given charitable status with all the immense tax benefits that this implies.

"Indeed, I could go further. The Charity Commissioner gave an interview, which was reported in the press, in which he said that he would like this question of the advancement of religion to be reconsidered. He said that they had to go by the application which the trust, organisation or whatever it was had put down on paper and consider whether those purposes were charitable or not; and of course they could be framed by lawyers in such a way as to appear charitable. He said that he would have liked to go into the intention of the promoters to see whether or not it was in good faith.

"I should like the charitable purposes of such an organisation to be judged not by their paper applications for registration but by the way that they carry out their work. By their deeds shall ye know them! So that is another ground on which I suggest that charitable status should be reconsidered and reformed".

The Charity Commissioners employ 330 people at offices in London and Liverpool. The annual cost of their work is around £5 million.

German priests who marry in a registry office are usually suspended. At one time Cardinal Dopfner of Munich allowed them to work in church administration or schools. This tolerant attitude attracted married priests to Munich from all over the Federal Republic.

Suspended priests now work mainly as teachers, social workers or consultants in labour exchanges. The head of one labour exchange commented: "I have more priests working for me than the Archbishop of Cologne".

EVENTS

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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. New Venture Theatre Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton 4th May, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. Barbar Smoker: Euthanasia and Religion.

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. 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, 15 Queen Square, Glasgow G41 2BG, telephone 041-424 0545.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 24 April, 7.45 pm. Barbara Smoker: Bernard Shaw and Religion.

Norwich Humanist Group. Programme of meetings obtainable from Philip Howell, 41 Spixworth Road, Old Catton, Norwich, NR6 7NE, telephone Norwich 47843.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 14 May, 7.30 pm for 8 pm Sir Hermann Bondi: A Fresh Look at Defence Policy.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House, Hill Street (off Corporation Street), Coventry. Monday, 21 April, 7.45 pm for 8 pm. Public Meeting.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Georgina Coupland, 117 Pennard Drive, Southgate, telephone 01-828 3631.

Betty Beer (1909-1986) and Fanny Cockerell (1906-1986). Memorial Meeting, Saturday 17 May, 2.30 pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.