

# The Freethinker

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## OATH TAKING: GOVERNMENT URGED TO GRASP "THIS WITHERED NETTLE"

Justice, the British Section of the International Commission of Jurists, has once again recommended the abolition of oath taking in courts of law. In a report entitled *Witness in the Criminal Court*, a committee of lawyers, magistrates, a judge and a representative of the police say "it is a matter for regret" that fundamental reforms were not included in the Administration of Justice Act 1977, later incorporated in the Oaths Act 1978.

Justice committees have produced many authoritative and influential reports since it was founded in 1957. The current report recalls that as long ago as 1973 a Justice committee drew attention to "the unsatisfactory position with regard to the religious oath in a largely non-religious age".

Like its predecessors, the present committee believes that the oath in its present form should go. It proposes that instead all witnesses "should be required to make the same solemn affirmation so that there should be no distinction in the respect that is accorded to them".

Barbara Smoker, president of the National Secular Society, welcomed this call for the abolition of the traditional religious oath from the country's legal trappings.

"We trust that the Government will not go on dithering for decade after decade before finally grasping this withered nettle", she added.

Miss Smoker said that as long as legal testimony enshrines this relic of ancient superstition, "the law forfeits the respect of thinking people while even the most superstitious members of society have thought nothing of it within living memory.

"There have been court cases in recent years in which the key evidence of primary-school children has not been heard because they were deemed not to understand the theological implications of the oath — whereas there would have been no such difficulty

with a simple promise to tell the truth. And although adult witnesses have the right nowadays to use a form of secular affirmation instead, they are usually advised by their own solicitors not to do so since juries — and even magistrates and judges — may suspect the reliability of their evidence as a result.

"Policemen invariably gabble the oath, whether the evidence they are about to give is truthful or not. When, a few years ago, I was on a jury panel at the Old Bailey, and said I preferred to affirm, the prosecuting counsel immediately objected to my being on the jury — probably thinking that non-believers are less likely to find anyone guilty!

"When Bradlaugh, having been elected to Parliament, agreed to take the usual Oath of Allegiance in the absence of a legal alternative secular affirmation, he said he would be 'bound not by the letter of its words but by the spirit which the affirmation would have conveyed', and for that honesty he was prevented for six years from taking his seat".

Other organisations which favour abolition of the oath include the Justices' Clerks' Society, the Law Society and the Magistrates' Association. The latter has described taking the oath in court as "an out-of-date ritual with little or no meaning which makes an insignificant contribution to the obtaining of truthful evidence".

The Magistrates' Association also agrees that those who affirm may be discriminated against because they are differing from what the court appears to accept as the norm.

Dora Russell (born 1894) died at her home in Cornwall on 31 May. A staunch freethinker, she was one of the century's most eminent radicals and her intellectual vigour was undiminished until the end. Tributes will be published next month.

# The Freethinker

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# NEWS A

## NO ANSWER TO TERRORISM

After a resounding defeat in the House of Commons three years ago, supporters of capital punishment will be cautious about forcing a vote on that issue in the immediate future. Nevertheless a clamour for the noose continues, the latest addition to it coming from journalist Mary Kenny. Like the capital punishment freaks at Westminster she is a zealous Christian (Roman Catholic variety); like many of them she is an ardent supporter of the pro-"life" (anti-abortion) lobby.

Miss Kenny informed readers of her *Sunday Telegraph* column: "Recent events have now convinced me that it is necessary to restore capital punishment for certain crimes . . . because terrorism is such a dreadful threat to our persons and those we are responsible for, it is morally permissible for us to defend ourselves against the terrorist by executing him". While not suggesting for a moment that she is a plagiarist, this sounds like an excerpt from a press release issued by the South African police.

Like so many who regard violence, whether personal or institutionalised, as a solution to life's problems, Mary Kenny ignores the underlying cause of the terrorism she rightly condemns. This "eye for an eye" reaction may drive perpetrators of terrorist acts underground. It would almost certainly provoke them into taking and killing hostages. Festering political grievances which give rise to terrorism invariably surface later in a more dangerous form.

As the Cold War becomes a memory to older people and an almost meaningless term to a new generation, the opinion manipulators are adopting new techniques to foster a war atmosphere. During the three post-war decades we were regaled with warnings about a Russian take-over. At the same time the Americans were establishing hundreds of bases in Britain and Europe.

Terrorism in one form or another — assassinating a monarch or building an empire — has long been a method of securing political ends. Today "terrorism" is the bogey-word that is being used as a pretext for undermining leaders who will not dance to Uncle Sam's tune or allow their territory to be used as an American springboard. The recent raids on Libya were carried out in retaliation for terrorist acts which Washington claimed were sponsored by the Gadafi regime. But the indiscriminate bombing of civilians by planes operating from American bases in Britain is unlikely to hurt those who plant explosives in shopping centres or airport lounges.

Mary Kenny's indignation about terrorism is

# AND NOTES

understandable. But there is a very hollow ring to the hypocritical protests by born-again Rambo Reagan and his Christian "Moral" Majority backers. Washington has sponsored the forces of terrorism in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Chile and elsewhere. Within the last six months two dictators, Duvalier in Haiti and Marcos in the Philippines, have been toppled. Both operated a reign of terror over many years; both were supported right to the end by the United States.

Israel, ever ready to denounce terrorism, was quick to endorse the American bombing of Libya. Yet Israel came into existence after an unprecedented campaign of terrorism, and is today a national eventide home for superannuated career terrorists.

Mary Kenny and others of like mind should think carefully before advocating the death penalty for terrorists. If her suggestion were treated seriously, most of the world's "security" agencies would soon be under-staffed.

## OPENING TIME

Although the Victorian English Sunday is now regarded as the last word in gloom and dreariness, it was a quite jolly affair compared to Sunday in present day Northern Ireland. It is worst of all in the small towns of this bastion of Sabbatarianism.

All that changed for two hours last month in Dungannon where the public houses opened in defiance of a ban on Sunday drinking. Normally the County Tyrone town is deserted on Sunday when, as one resident put it, "the best thing about Dungannon is the road out to Belfast". But when the publicans opened their premises to lunch-time drinkers they did a roaring trade. The police took drinkers' names, but most were able to keep a step ahead of the forces of law and order.

The anti-Sabbatarian protest started at a public house in Scotch Street (how appropriate!) and before long the town centre's 14 licensed premises were thronged with happy drinkers. One of them said he had lived in England for 25 years and enjoyed his lunch-time drink most of all. Raising his glass he declared: "I'm here as a matter of principle. This is a question of freedom".

Members of the Rev Ian Paisley's Free Presbyterian Church and the Lord's Day Observance Society paraded outside the public houses. They carried posters exhorting the tipplers to "Remember the Sabbath Day". The Rev Trevor Baxter, a local Paisleyite minister, said they would continue to

picket premises "defying God's Law".

Northern Ireland is the only place in the British Isles where public houses are forbidden by law to open on Sunday. In 1923, the Government of the new mini-statelet imposed a ban on Sunday opening which had previously been permitted throughout Ireland. It did so in response to pressure from three sources: the temperance movement, which opposed drinking at any time; the Sabbatarians, who, true to Christian form, wanted to impose their standards on all and sundry; and the Orange institutions, because the majority of public houses were Catholic-owned.

Of course there were clubs where the middle and upper classes — many of whom railed against the opening of public houses — could enjoy a Sunday drink. Now there are around six hundred clubs, some of which are controlled by shady elements.

Public house ownership is vastly different in Northern Ireland to that in Britain. Most of the province's two thousand pubs are family businesses; there are less than two dozen "brewery" or "tied" houses.

The publicans were forced to take illegal action in order to defend their livings. Many of them are faced with financial disaster because of unfair competition from clubs, hotels and restaurants which are allowed to sell drink on Sunday provided a meal is available. According to the Federation of the Retail Licensed Trade, this results in "the hypocritical nonsense of licensed hotels and restaurants packed to capacity on Sunday evenings with the 'available meal' in many cases consisting of a tray of cocktail sausages".

This is not the only example of hypocrisy over Sunday drinking in Northern Ireland. Many Protestants who would not darken the door of a pub in their community on Sunday, or legally permit others to do so, have no such scruples when visiting other parts of the British Isles.

The publicans' patience with the Government is exhausted. After prolonged discussion and negotiation, there is no promise of legislation that will bring Northern Ireland's drinking laws into line with those in mainland Britain. Further militant action is planned. If Government ministers continue to drag their feet they should not be surprised if publicans conclude that the only way to get rid of a bad law is to break it.

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Although the religious body-snatchers performed their rites at the funeral of Lord Shinwell, there is ample evidence that he was a freethinker. The memorial meeting in the Grand Committee Room of the House of Commons will be more fitting for the veteran parliamentarian who died in his 102nd year. Shinwell always shunned Jewish religious activities. During an interview (1984) he declared that when young "I began to have doubts about the whole thing, and I still do".

# The Final Accounting for One of God's Bankers

DAVID YALLOP

David Yallop's book, *In God's Name*, published two years ago, was derided by Vatican spokesmen who described the author's allegations as fantasy. His most sensational assertion was that Pope John Paul I, whose reign lasted only 33 days, was murdered to prevent him from investigating the affairs of several financial institutions. Since the book appeared, two of the leading figures have met with violent deaths. Roberto Calvi was found hanging under a London bridge and Michele Sindona was poisoned in a Milan prison on 20 March. Archbishop Paul Marcinkus, protected by John Paul I's successor, remains at the Vatican and is, in fiscal terms, the most important figure in the Roman Catholic Church.

*There is no man so Blessed that some who stand by his deathbed won't hail the occasion with delight.*  
—*Marcus Aurelius*

When the news broke that Michele Sindona was dead, the delight may have been muted but the relief was manifest. The relief was discernible in the higher reaches of Italian politics. It could be seen within the Vatican. It could be observed among certain international bankers. No tears were shed by the Sicilian Mafia or the Gambino Mafia in New York. The fact that the world had one less murdering thief in it today will comfort many who are praying that Sindona took his secrets with him to the grave.

Childhood poverty affects men in different ways. Some, like Pope John Paul I, grew up determined to relieve the poverty of others. Some, like Michele Sindona, grew to manhood determined to relieve others of their wealth. His appetite became so voracious that he was given the nickname of "The Shark". Born on 8 May, 1920, and educated by Jesuits, Sindona demonstrated early in life a marked proclivity for mathematics and economics. Having graduated from Messina University with an excellent Law degree, in 1942, he avoided conscription in Mussolini's armed forces with the aid of a distant relation of his fiancée who worked in the Vatican Secretariat of State, one Monsignor Amleto Tondini.

During the last three years of the Second World War, Sindona put his law degree to one side and earned a very lucrative living doing what he would ultimately become world famous for: buying and selling. He bought food on the Black Market in Palermo and smuggled it with the aid of the Mafia to Messina, where it was sold to the starving population.

After June 1943 and the Allied landings, Sindona turned to the American Forces for his supplies. As business expanded so did his Mafia connections. In

1946, he left Sicily for Milan, taking with him his young wife, Rina, invaluable lessons in the law of supply and demand, and a number of even more valuable letters of introduction from the Archbishop of Messina, whose friendship Sindona had carefully cultivated.

In Milan he lived in the suburbs at Affori, and worked for a business consultancy and accounting firm. Sindona's speciality, as American capital began to flow into Italy, was to show would-be investors how to dance their way through Italy's complex tax laws. His Mafia associates were suitably impressed with his progress. The Mafia family Gambino were particularly taken with the young Sindona and his dexterity at placing dollar investments without reference to tiresome tax regulations.

On 2 November 1957 there was a "Family" reunion at the Grand Hotel des Palmes, Palermo, at which Michele Sindona was present. The Gambino family made Sindona an offer he accepted with enthusiasm. They wanted him to manage the family's re-investment of the huge profits just beginning to accrue from the sales of heroin. They needed a laundryman. Sindona, with his proven abilities at moving amounts of money in and out of Italy without disturbing the tranquillity of the Government's taxation departments, was an ideal choice.

Within 17 months of the Mafia summit conference Sindona had bought his first bank, aided by Mafia funding. He was about to discover one of the cardinal rules of theft: the best way to steal from a bank is to buy one.

Sindona created a Lichtenstein holding company, Fasco AG. Shortly afterwards Fasco acquired the Milanese Banca Privata Finanziaria, usually called BPF. Founded in 1930 by a Fascist ideologist, the BPF was a small, very private, exclusive institution which served as a conduit for the illegal transfer of funds from Italy on behalf of a favoured few. It was doubtless this proud heritage that won Sindona's heart.

In 1959, the same year in which he acquired BPF, Sindona made another very shrewd investment. The Archbishop of Milan was trying to raise money for an old people's home. Sindona stepped in and raised the entire amount: 2.4 million dollars. When Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini opened the Casa della Madonnina, Sindona was by his side. The two men became firm friends, with Montini relying more and more on Sindona's advice on problems other than diocesan investments.

What Cardinal Montini may not have known is that the 2.4 million dollars were supplied to Sindona very largely from two sources: the Mafia and the

CIA. Former CIA agent Victor Marchetti was later to reveal:

In the 1950s and the 1960s the CIA gave economic support to many activities promoted by the Catholic Church, from orphanages to missions. Millions of dollars each year were given to a great number of Bishops and Monsignors. One of them was Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini. It is possible that Cardinal Montini did not know where the money was coming from. He may have thought it was coming from friends.

The Shark began to swim faster. The Milanese, who as a breed are inclined to be dismissive about the Romans, let alone the Sicilians, had initially disregarded this quietly spoken, polite man from the south. After a while the financial circles of the city which is the financial capital of Italy conceded that Sindona was a fairly bright tax consultant. When he began to acquire a company here and there they put it down to beginner's luck. By the time he had become a bank owner and confidant of the man many were tipping as the next Pope, it was too late to stop him. His progress was irresistible.

Sindona forged close links with Massimo Spada, one of the Vatican's trusted men, Administrative Secretary of the Vatican Bank and on the board of 24 companies, including Banca Cattolica del Veneto on behalf of the Vatican. Luigi Mennini, another top Vatican bank official, also became a close friend and Father Macchi, Montini's secretary, yet another. Banca Privata began to flower and in March 1965, Sindona sold 22 per cent to Hambros's Bank of London. Hambros, with their long-standing close links with Vatican finances, considered Sindona's direction of the funds flowing into BPF "brilliant". So did Continental Illinois of Chicago, who also bought 22 per cent of the bank from Sindona. Continental were now the major conduit for all USA investment by the Vatican. The bonds Sindona was placing around himself and the various Vatican elements were becoming multi-layered. He had become a close friend of Monsignor Sergio Guerri, who controlled one of the Vatican's key financial institutions, The Special Administration.

In 1964 Sindona had acquired yet another bank, this time in Switzerland, the Banque de Financement in Geneva (Finabank). Largely owned by the Vatican, it was, like his first bank, little more than an illegal conduit for the transfer of money from Italy. After Sindona's purchase of the controlling block of shares, the Vatican still retained a 29 per cent share of the bank. Hambros of London and Continental Illinois also had a stake in Finabank.

For three such august institutions as the Vatican, Hambros and Continental Illinois to be involved so closely with Sindona must surely indicate that Sindona ran his banks in an exemplary manner. Or does it? Carlo Bordoni discovered a different reality. Bordoni first met Sindona in the latter half of

November 1964. Previously, Bordoni had worked as manager of the Milan branch of First National Citibank of New York. Shortly before his meeting with Sindona, Bordoni had been fired by Citibank for exceeding his limits on foreign exchange deals. Sindona could be counted on to look kindly at such a man. He offered Bordoni the opportunity of handling the foreign exchange of BPF. In view of the fact that the bank's entire deposits were less than 15 billion lire (approximately 15 million dollars), Bordoni declined. Compared with the billion dollar turnover at Citibank this was small change.

Bordoni had a better idea. Why not create an international brokerage company? With hard work and Bordoni's excellent contacts, such a company could earn excellent commissions.

As Bordoni recalled later in a sworn deposition to Milan magistrates, when he turned State evidence against his former boss, Sindona became visibly excited and gave his approval for the project without hesitation. It is easy to understand Sindona's delight. The aptly named Moneyrex went into operation on 5 February 1965. Initially run in an ethical manner, it made significant profits. By 1967 it was dealing in a volume of 40 billion dollars per year with net profits in excess of two million dollars — profits which in Sindona's hands promptly disappeared before the tax authorities had time to blink. But Sindona wanted more than honest profit. He urged Bordoni to channel the maximum possible amount of foreign currency towards his two banks. Bordoni pointed out that there were several very serious difficulties which made the idea impractical. The Shark began to get angry and shouted that Bordoni should remember his "Force of conviction" and his "Power". Bordoni retorted that these were precisely the difficulties he had been talking about. In case Sindona was in any doubt, Bordoni elaborated: "Your 'force' is the Mafia and your 'power' is freemasonry. I don't intend to risk my good name and the success of Moneyrex just because a mafioso asks me to".

Eventually Bordoni agreed to examine the affairs of BPF and Finabank. What he discovered tells us as much about the Vatican, Hambros and Continental Illinois as it does about Sindona.

He found numerous overdrawn accounts without any real guarantees and for amounts far in excess of the legal limit of a fifth of capital reserves. He also found massive theft. The staff were transferring large amounts of money from the accounts of depositors without their knowledge. These sums were then moved to the account held by the Vatican Bank. The Vatican Bank then transferred the amounts, less their 15 per cent commission, to Sindona's account at Finabank in Geneva. The account name in Finabank was MANI. MA stood for Marco, NI stood for Nino, the names of Sindona's sons. The amount of 15 per cent commission paid to the Vatican was a

variable figure depending on the current exchange rate operating on the Black Money Market.

Bordoni's discoveries at Finabank, Geneva, were just as bad. The managing director, one Mario Olivero, knew nothing about banking. The general manager spent all day playing the share commodity and currency markets. If he lost, the loss was transferred to a client's account. If he won the profit was his. The heads of the various divisions followed the example of the general manager, as did the Vatican Bank.

Bordoni, too, had transgressed in his foreign speculations. When he tried to extricate himself, Sindona used one of his classic techniques: blackmail. Bordoni would be reported to the president of the Bank of Italy. Bordoni stayed.

Sindona was a master when it came to blackmail. Apart from an innate ability in this direction, he had his Mafia training. He also had available to him the talents of the most skilled blackmailer then practising the art in Italy, Licio Gelli. Through an illegal and outlawed Masonic Lodge named P2, "The Puppet Master" Gelli by the late 1960s virtually controlled Italy. It was inevitable that the paths of Gelli and Sindona would cross.

When Pope Paul VI, previously the grateful archbishop Montini of Milan, proclaimed the magnificent aspirations of *Populorum Progressio* in 1967, Vatican Incorporated had already for a number of years been a close working partner of Michele Sindona. Through the illegal flight of currency from Sindona's Italian banks via the Vatican Bank to the Swiss Bank which they jointly owned, Sindona and the Vatican, if not making the goods of creation flow to the poor, were certainly making them flow out of Italy. By early 1968 another Vatican-controlled bank, the Banca Unione, was in trouble. The Vatican owned approximately 20 per cent. It was represented on the Board of Directors by Massimo Spada and Luigi Mennini. By 1970, two years after Sindona bought control and with the Vatican still substantial part-owners, the bank seemingly had become an astonishing success. Aiming at the small saver and offering superior rates of interest, the bank's deposits rose from 35 million dollars to over 150 million dollars — in theory. In practice, during the same period, the bank was robbed of over 250 million dollars by Sindona and his associates.

In 1969 the Vatican decided upon a fundamental change in its business strategy. The plan was to divest itself of what had become high profile holdings within Italy and increase its foreign investment. Among the items that the Church of the poor wished to sell was its 25 per cent stake in the giant Societe Generale Immobiliare which had assets of over half a billion dollars scattered around the world. Sindona bought the lot using money stolen from his own bank, Banca Privata Finanziaria. For good measure, Sindona, again using stolen money, bought the

Vatican's shares in Condotte d'Acqua, Rome's Water Company and its shares in Ceramica Pozzi, a chemical and porcelain producing company. All the negotiations were personally approved by Pope Paul VI.

In the early 1970s the pace grew faster as The Shark's appetite increased. Sindona and his close friend and fellow P2 member Roberto Calvi, chairman of Banco Ambrosiano, openly boasted that they controlled the Milan Stock Exchange. Their criminal activities were smiled upon by a P2-dominated authority.

Illegal and criminal kickbacks became the order of the day. Thus, in 1972, Calvi kickbacked 6.5 million dollars to Sindona and Bishop (later Archbishop) Paul Marcinkus, now running the Vatican Bank, after purchasing a Sindona-owned company at an astronomically inflated price. In the same year Calvi received a five million dollar kickback from Sindona. The documentary evidence that I have amassed on these criminal activities involving the Mafia, P2 and the Vatican stands several feet high. Equally well documented is the Vatican Bank's involvement in acting as a laundry for the Mafia profits from heroin sales.

Sindona speculated against the lira, the dollar, the German mark and the Swiss franc. Having reaped enormous profits by attacking his country's currency, he was hailed by Prime Minister Andreotti as "The Saviour of the Lira". In 1973 he was presented with a citation by the American Ambassador to Italy. The citation proclaimed that Sindona was "Man of the Year for 1973".

When the crash came it was spectacular — "The Crack Sindona" the Italians called it. Between October 1974 and January 1975, the United States and Europe resounded to the noise of crashing banks. The Franklin Bank crash in New York, with losses in excess of two billion dollars, is the biggest in American history. Banks in Rome, Milan, Hamburg, Cologne, Zurich and Geneva collapsed like a pack of cards because of the fun and games by Sindona, Calvi and Marcinkus.

Undeterred, Sindona popped up in New York, fighting extradition proceedings brought by the Italian Government. The Shark was prepared to use every means at his disposal to avoid being extradited to Italy. These included bribing witnesses, putting out Mafia contracts to frighten other witnesses and a 100,000-dollar contract on District Attorney, John Kenney. This last contract clearly illustrates the mentality of Sindona. Kenney was the man leading the extradition proceedings on behalf of the United States Government. Sindona's thought processes were 100 per cent Sicilian Mafia. Kill the prosecutor and the proceedings will vanish. Fortunately, the New York Mafia takes a marginally more rational view of life. There were no takers for the contract.

It was precisely at this time that Pope John Paul I

was murdered. My three-year investigation placed Sindona at the very heart of the murderous conspiracy that succeeded in removing an incorruptible man from Saint Peter's Chair. It is my belief that the Pope was poisoned to ensure that the fiscal reforms he was planning — reforms that would have led directly to long terms of imprisonment for Calvi, Sindona and others — would never be implemented.

When *In God's Name* was published in June 1984, Vatican reaction was swift. Within days of publication, and before any of the spokesmen had read the book, the reaction that I had predicted was there for all to hear. "Taking speculation to new levels of absurdity. . . Infamous rubbish. . . Absurd fantasies". Perhaps with the death of Michele Sindona the moment is opportune to reconsider some of my "fantastic speculations".

My assertion that Sindona had the Italian Government official, Giorgio Ambrosoli murdered via a Mafia contract was vindicated three months ago by a Milan Court. Sindona was found guilty of this murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. Sindona had been extradited to Italy three months after the publication of *In God's Name*. Upon hearing that he was finally going to Italy to stand trial Sindona observed:

If I finally get there, if no one does me in first, and I've already heard talk of giving me a poisoned cup of coffee, I'll make my trial into a real circus. I'll tell everything.

Sindona was visited in a maximum security prison by members of P2 and advised that it was not in his interest to talk. During the trial Sindona kept his secrets to himself. On 18 March he received a life sentence. Two days later, after drinking his breakfast coffee, he screamed: "They have poisoned me". By the weekend he was dead, the poison on this occasion being cyanide.

The murder of Sindona, for murder it was, is a classic example of the power of P2. Sindona was subjected to constant TV surveillance, there were never less than three guards with him. His food and drink came into the maximum security prison in sealed containers. Murdering an unguarded Pope, whose Swiss Guard actually slept during the night, would be child's play for P2.

Other accusations within *In God's Name* include the fact Luigi Mennini, the managing director of the Vatican Bank, was guilty of criminal fraud. One month after publication he was found guilty and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment.

My book accuses the Vatican of direct criminal involvement with regard to the crash of Banco Ambrosiano, something that the Vatican has always hysterically denied. Since initial publication the Vatican has repaid 250 million dollars to the creditors of the bank.

My book accuses Licio Gelli of a long list of

crimes, not least, plundering Banco Ambrosiano. Since publication Gelli, still on the run, has offered to repay the bank some nine million dollars.

The book accuses P2 of carrying out the Bologna railway station bombing in which 85 people were murdered. P2 members have since been arrested and charged with complicity regarding this outrage.

My book accuses freemasonry of having criminal links with the Sicilian Mafia. Two months ago Italian authorities confirmed that among a list of two thousand members covering a freemasons' lodge in Palermo were some of the most senior members of the Sicilian Mafia.

Since initial publication of *In God's Name*, not one single statement, not one single fact, not one single contention concerning the murder of Pope John Paul I has been proved false. In mid-1985 I challenged the Vatican to prove me wrong on just two simple questions of fact, concerning my account of who found the dead body of the Pope and the nature of the papers he was still clasping in his hands. There has been no response from the Vatican.

During my research I established a short list of suspects, six men with powerful motives and in some instances a clearly established capacity to murder. Two have died suddenly. Calvi and Sindona have been murdered. Just two men on that list remain alive, Archbishop Paul Marcinkus and the man who I have no doubt whatsoever ordered the murder of Sindona as he had ordered the murder of Calvi and Pope John Paul I. His name is Licio Gelli, the P2 puppet master, still pulling the strings from his South American hideout.

If Sindona had lived and finally kept his promise to tell all, the consequences would have been disastrous for many. He had in the past threatened to reveal secrets which would have seriously compromised relations between the United States and Italy. He could have shed invaluable light on the murder of Pope John Paul I. He could have given exact details of how 500 million dollars a year, the profits of heroin sales by the Mafia, was laundered through the Vatican Bank. His evidence on leading figures within the current Italian Government would have certainly brought down the ruling coalition.

The occasion of Sindona's death will indeed be hailed by many with delight.

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# The Plain Truth About Herbert W. Armstrong

PHILLIP ADAMS

It must come as a great shock to L. Ron Hubbard and Herbert W. Armstrong that they are dead. These god-like gurus dominated the lives of countless dupes, and when they kicked the bucket earlier this year there was a widespread feeling that the world will be a better place without them. David Tribe's assessment of L. Ron appeared in our March issue. We now welcome to *The Freethinker* one of Australia's leading journalists and an outspoken unbeliever. Phillip Adams examines the career of Herbert W. Armstrong, founder and for half a century leader of the Worldwide Church of God.

Herbert W. Armstrong was born 93 years ago and became a pioneer of radio evangelism in the '30s. His ministry spread like a tumour, eventually claiming 80,000 ardent members plus the innumerable supporters conned by television programmes beamed from no less than 374 stations worldwide.

Armstrong founded his opulent ministry in 1934, beginning with a radio show from a tiny 500-watt station in Eugene, Oregon. A former salesman from Des Moines, he would travel the globe in a mission he called the Great Commission. Somehow he managed to get audiences with such world leaders as Emperor Hirohito, King Juan Carlos, Menachem Begin, Ferdinand Marcos and Margaret Thatcher.

Photographs of his summit meetings would appear in *The Plain Truth*, adding authority to his activities. This noxious rag, with a claimed circulation of 7.9 million, was Armstrong's main recruiting device. It was targeted at the fearful, the vulnerable, those who cannot cope. Once they accepted a "free" subscription, they were on their way to self-destruction. My filing cabinets bulge with horror stories from Armstrong's victims, of families destroyed and pauperised by his demands.

Armstrong claimed that the only true church had faded out in Jerusalem in AD70, somehow managing to resurrect itself in America in 1927 in order that God could give his last messages before ending the world. Salvation from the coming holocaust could only be found within its ranks . . . And Herbert W. Armstrong had been appointed God's spokesman.

Members were required to keep to the Old Testament laws and calendar feasts, eschewing their New Testament counterparts as pagan festivals. They were required to tithe their income as well as making at least twice-yearly offerings to the work. This generally meant up to 30 per cent "tithe", plus offerings.

The theology of Armstrong was an unlikely mixture of Seventh Day Adventism, Mormonism, British Israelism, Jewish Legalism and the ideas of

the Jehovah's Witnesses. Armstrong denied the Trinity, the divinity of Christ and the divine personality of the Holy Spirit. He was also unimpressed by the bodily resurrection, the immortality of the soul and the need to be "born again".

Like all his ilk, Armstrong constantly claimed a financial crisis. Time was running out and the faithful had to cough up as a matter of urgency. His members and followers were persuaded to donate up to 40 per cent of their annual income, giving Armstrong \$100 million per annum gross.

This provided Herb and Co. with a magnificent standard of living which, in the 1970s, became a major issue. Dissident church members sued Armstrong for fraud, claiming he had squandered money on lavish homes and furnishings and on his global journeys by private jet with his then top aide, Stanley Rader. During the controversy, Armstrong commissioned full-page newspaper advertisements lambasting State officials while accusing the Government of being manipulated by Satan.

Over a period of years Herbert W. began handing over the reins to his son, Garner Ted, whose apocalyptic utterances became familiar to radio audiences. But Garner was involved in the odd sexual scandal and, in a scene echoing the expulsion of Adam from Paradise, was evicted from Pasadena.

However, all was forgiven and he was both reinstated and confirmed as his father's successor. But there were more rumours about sexual misdemeanours and in February 1974, in an unprecedented protest, six ministers resigned from the church over his alleged misconduct. Subsequently some 29 ministers and 2,000 members joined a rival church.

Garner Ted began publicly criticising his father, expressing moral outrage at the way the octogenarian had married a bimbo 40 years his junior. Armstrong's first wife, Loma, died in 1967 and in 1983 he was divorced in a highly publicised battle over property from his second wife, Ramona, 45. Supported by former church members, Garner charged that his father had spent millions of the church's annual income on personal expenses.

Little wonder that Garner hasn't been invited back into the fold. Hours before his death, Herbert W. appointed one Joseph Tkach as his successor.

Having created his own personal religion by combining aspects of fundamental Christianity with Judaism, Armstrong announced a strict policy against remarriage for divorced people. He required new church members to dissolve second marriages, remarrying their original spouses. Yet this didn't stop the energetic octogenarian changing the church's law to suit himself. Shades of Henry VIII.



Armstrong's basic strategy, demonstrated in *The Plain Truth* and in the radio and television broadcasts, was to warn the world that things were going down the gurgler, while offering a Utopia for believers. For week after week, year after year, *The Plain Truth* would focus on warfare, famines, lawlessness, wickedness and pestilence as signs that the end was nigh. However, Armstrong's followers would, miraculously, be protected and preserved. Not even World War III would hurt them. Exploding nuclear weapons wouldn't even ruffle their hair. In these anxious times, an attractive offer.

Over the years I've watched *The Plain Truth* become even slicker. In the bad old days it was quite hilariously funny, being full of the most lurid, quasi-pornographic drawings of the wicked being afflicted by boils.

Well before Armstrong's death, the church was in trouble. A dissident group publishes the *Ambassador Report*, full of inside information about goings-on. They claim to have persuaded between 10,000 and 25,000 of Armstrong's followers to leave the fold as a result of their revelations. Armstrong and Rader were charged by the State of California with diverting no less than \$70 million in church funds for their own use.

For years Herbert W. Armstrong claimed that his was the "number one religious telecast in the US". While his programme may be number one in terms of the number of channels in his network, he's by no means the most popular or influential TV evangelist.

In 1984 the Gallup organisation asked viewers "which religious television programme do you watch most often?" And only one per cent of viewers named H.W.A. Surprisingly, Billy Graham still heads the list with 16 per cent of viewers indicating approval, followed by the appalling Jimmy Swaggert with 13 per cent, the awful Oral Roberts with 12 per cent, Pat Robertson with 11 per cent, Jim Backer with 10 per cent and the smooth Robert Schuller with eight.

Surprisingly, Jerry Falwell and Rex Humbard can only manage 11 per cent between them. And way down at the bottom of the list, with only one per cent, is Herbert Armstrong. Even his dissident son, Garner Ted, is out-pointing him.

On many occasions, Armstrong predicted that the end of the world was not only nigh but now. When this important event failed to occur, the faithful, with a little help from Herbert, would manage to rationalize and he would return to muttering dire prophecies. Well, the end of the world has arrived for Herbert and it may be imminent for his organisation as *The Plain Truth* loses ground and the television programme loses ratings.

Worse still, more ex-members are taking legal action to recover their tithes. Not even Herbert W. could take his (rather, their) money with him.

The Church of Scotland general assembly has rescinded a resolution last year that "abortion was allowable only when the mother's life was at risk". Archbishop O'Brien of Edinburgh, the official Roman Catholic observer at the assembly, said he "deeply regretted" the decision to include rape and the possibility of a handicapped child as grounds for abortion.

## Putting in a Good Word

ROY SAICH

There is an old Chinese saying: "Calling things by their right names is the beginning of wisdom". Like other old sayings this one seems to contain a great deal of truth — even if at first sight it is not immediately clear what it means.

Obviously if people didn't call things by their proper names confusion would result, even if "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet". People don't usually use the wrong names for things deliberately to cause confusion, but they often do it for other reasons. Jargon words are used to exclude outsiders, and such industries as advertising are so influential, and misuse words so much, that real communication is made more difficult for the rest of us.

Words may be misused because we are not thinking clearly enough, or it may be that we don't have the right words. English is such a large and growing language that it may seem perverse to worry about a shortage of words, but there certainly seems to be a shortage in some areas, even if there is a surplus in others.

There is a surplus of words in some areas because there are many words for things whose existence is doubtful to say the least: fairies, demons, ghosts, hobgoblins, devils, faith healing, God, witches and psychics are just a few examples.

In contrast there is a shortage of words, in such areas as science, technology and ethics where new words are having to be invented all the time.

Often words are misused because descriptions of objects are used as if they were objects themselves. For example you can't have two. You have to have two of something. You can't have a personality without a person, or love without lovers, or mind without a brain. However some people so misuse words that they even go so far as to use words like Love with a capital letter and speak about it as if it existed before any creatures capable of love had evolved. Philosophies and religions which misuse words in this way divide people from the real world

(continued inside back page)

**CONNECTING THE FRAGMENTS: A HUMANIST VIEW**, by Harry Holmes. George Mann Books, PO Box 22, Maidstone, Kent, £3.95

The slowness with which I have reviewed this anthology may have infuriated your editor, but it has enabled me to test it as a bedside book for several months. It passes the test with flying colours. There are familiar quotations which I'm happy continually to return to and snippets quite unknown to me, which have sent me in quest of the full original (for which the lack of references, it must be said, gives me no help).

Mr Holmes is a retired diplomat who believes "that the high promise of mankind is wasting tragically away". His response "as a humanist" is to rest "his trust in affection and understanding, in gentleness and tolerance". He favours "a kind of ecological humanism" to save "our planet and our essential human values". But he is not entirely optimistic that "these values, always precarious, will survive the bitterness of the coming environmental and spiritual storm".

The quotations are prose and poetry, long and short (occasionally, as with "I'm talking about Jerusalem" by Arnold Wesker, so short as to be meaningless; Wesker merits a substantial quote, not merely a catchphrase). Two well-represented writers, both favourites of mine, sum up the mood Mr Holmes aims to create: Forster and Montaigne. Forster gives the gentleness and tolerance, also the striving for completeness; one of his most famous phrases, "only connect", is the keystone of the collection. Forster also gives some of the section titles: "These Outspread Wings", which connect the prose with the passion, without which "we are meaningless fragments, half monks, half beasts, unconnected arches that have never joined into a man"; "The Beloved Republic" which follows "Two Cheers for Democracy": "one because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism. Two cheers are quite enough: there is no occasion to give three. Only Love the Beloved Republic deserves that. . .". While some of the sections, such as "Alms for Oblivion" on the relentless passage of a human life, or "This Goodly Frame the Earth" on nature and the future of our planet, are quite clear, the arrangement of other sections is somewhat elusive.

Montaigne, also of course a favourite of Forster, is to me the greatest of all humanist essayists: nuggets from them, although quotable, do not give the full force and pleasure of a knotty, learned, observant, self-critical mind in process. Montaigne here muses on old age, death, authority and also included is the famous sentence from "*On Experience*": "So it is no good our mounting on stilts,

for even on stilts we have to walk with our own legs; and upon the most exalted throne in the world it is still our own rump that we sit on". Holmes uses an inferior translation to the one I have quoted by Florio, the Elizabethan who, despite the inaccuracies to which creative translation occasionally led him, produced a masterpiece of prose. Anyone who thinks the glorious language of the Authorised Version of the Bible has something to do with religion should read some translations of more sceptical works from the period.

An era to which Mr Holmes frequently returns is the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: to poets like Meredith, Rupert Brooke, Houseman, Dowson, Masefield — surely a period of poetry ripe for revival — and to prose writers such as Edward Carpenter, Samuel Butler, G. Lowes Dickinson and Maeterlinck. More modern poets like Auden, Macneice, D. H. Lawrence are also found. Even T. S. Eliot scrapes in with "We shall not cease from exploration" from *The Four Quartets*, although humanists would surely not embrace Eliot's mystical view that "the end of all our exploring/Will be to arrive where we started. . .".

This raises the legitimacy of using quotations from non-humanist authors, sometimes religious writers. It is startling to find a saying of Jesus next to one of Epictetus; I remember being similarly shocked when I first saw a bust of Jesus on the front of the Leicester Secular Society premises. But it may be useful to see religious figures as ethical teachers; it brings them down to human size, and reminds us that not all their remarks were ridiculous.

Two misattributions need correction: Hadrian's comments on death are attributed to Margaret Yourcenar, who merely translated them for the conclusion of her fine novel, *Memoirs of Hadrian*; and the humanist creed beginning "I will learn to be autonomous: to take responsibility for myself in all my relationships and decisions" is not by Margaret Chinnan, but by Margaret Chisman, well-known to many humanists as a former British Humanist Association executive committee member. I must repeat that the lack of references, even titles for some pieces, is a grave deficiency in a book which makes you want to rush to the library to find the original. Two American writers whose quotations make me determined to read more are the architect-philosopher, Lewis Mumford, and the naturalist, Loren Eiseley.

This is an anthology which should find its place on all humanist bookshelves. From Epictetus to Fromm, from Pericles to Huxley, from Socrates to Bertrand Russell, Mr Holmes provides a wide and

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original choice; but none are more essential than Montaigne and Forster, who both speak highly of friendship. Forster writes: "What is the good of your stars and trees, your sunrise and the wind, if they do not enter into our daily lives? . . . Haven't we all to struggle against life's daily greyness, against pettiness, against mechanical cheerfulness, against suspicion? I struggle by remembering my friends. . .". Another way to struggle would be to keep this anthology to hand.

JIM HERRICK

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**TOM PAINE: THE GREATEST EXILE**, by David Powell. Croom Helm, £18.95

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If the 250th anniversary next year of the birth of Tom Paine is to receive the attention it deserves, it will have to be marked by better books than this. The author promises a historical documentary approach "to recreate something of the background in which Paine grew up and attempt to interpret his imagined response to all that he saw and heard". There is a great deal of the background and not all that much of Paine. And when conversation is reported and motive imputed, there is no way of telling whether this is a creation of the author's historical imagination or more securely based.

The publishers believe this book throws particular light on Paine's early and middle life. Unfortunately, it does not. Why did Paine, who devoted so much energy to promoting the happiness of mankind, apparently care so little for the well-being of his second wife — prompting his own mother to describe Tom as "the worst of husbands"? And why at the age of 37, within months of landing in Philadelphia, did this son of a Quaker staymaker blossom into one of the finest polemicists in the English language? There is little more than a suggestion of the answers in Mr Powell's over-written text.

There is no doubting David Powell's affection for his subject, nor his extensive knowledge of Paine's life and writings. There must be a suspicion that a sterner editorial hand from the publishers could have led to a very valuable book.

ANDREW WHITEHEAD

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The second edition of a catalogue of second-hand books and pamphlets specialising in freethought and humanism is now obtainable from Mrs B. Forder, 15 Sunninghill Avenue, Hove, East Sussex, BN3 8JB. The catalogue is free, but applicants should send a stamped, addressed 9in x 4in envelope.

**WITCHCRAFT AND RELIGION: THE POLITICS OF POPULAR BELIEF**, by Christina Lerner. Basil Blackwell, £17.50

Dr Christina Lerner had just been appointed to a personal professorship at the University of Glasgow (where she had been a lecturer in history, politics and sociology for many years) when she died in April 1983, at the tragically early age of 49. She left behind her much material on witchcraft and related subjects, and these have now been collected and edited by Alan Macfarlane, who also provides a foreword. The first part consists of essays and articles which have appeared in various books and periodicals (*James VI and Witchcraft*, *The Crime of Witchcraft in Scotland*, *The Crime of Witchcraft in Europe*, *Witch Beliefs and Accusations in England and Scotland*, and *Witchcraft Past and Present*), while the second comprises the Gifford lectures which Dr Lerner delivered at Glasgow University in 1982.

The learned author is at pains to draw a distinction between different types of alleged witchcraft. There is white witchcraft which is concerned with healing; black witchcraft or *maleficium* which involves the casting of spells said to result in sudden illness, death, the failure of crops, the drying up of milk in humans and animals, etc; compact witchcraft, the making of a pact with the Devil; and Sabbath witchcraft, the holding of meetings or covens at which Satan is worshipped in a Black Mass, complete with fearful orgies. The first two were common in primitive societies and were known to the Romans, whereas the last two originated only in the 15th century, and were the creation of Christian lawyers and theologians. All four kinds, of course, existed simultaneously in the great persecutions from the 15th to the early 18th centuries, but to a different extent in different countries. In England, for example, compact and Sabbath witchcraft were practically unknown, whereas on the Continent and in Scotland they were proceeded against with the utmost ferocity.

Dr Lerner, who was an expert on witchcraft in Scotland, gives several reasons why the persecutions were so much more severe north than south of the Border. First, Scottish law was (and is) based on Roman law, which is inquisitorial and theoretical, whereas English law was (and is) based on statute law, which is essentially pragmatic. The alleged Scottish witches were tortured to extract "confessions", and theories about diabolism led to tales of covens and Devil worship. Secondly, unlike the situation in England, proceedings against witchcraft in Scotland were centrally controlled by the Privy Council and Parliament, which meant that they could be used for political purposes to foster national unity. Thirdly, the progress of witch-hunts in the various parishes was closely monitored by the local kirk sessions. However, the mania was mostly confined to

the northern isles, the eastern seaboard and the Lowlands around Edinburgh, cases in the Gaelic-speaking Highlands and the western isles being extremely rare.

Prosecutions began in the early 16th century with peaks in the 1590s and during the years 1629-30 and 1660-61. Thereafter, they began to decline, and ceased altogether following the passing of the Witchcraft Act in 1735. The total number of those executed in Scotland is hard to determine, but Dr Larner arrives at a figure of between 1,000 and 1,500, which, though horrific enough, is far lower than previous estimates, which have ranged from 3,000-30,000.

The campaign of the 1590s occurred during the reign of King James VI and I, and one of Dr Larner's best essays is devoted to a penetrating study of that superstitious monarch's involvement in witchcraft. A visit to Denmark in 1589 to collect his bride aroused his interest in the subject, and on returning to Scotland, he became obsessed with the notion that witches were plotting his overthrow and death. Since he believed himself to have been Divinely-appointed to the throne, the crime of treason was compounded with that of blasphemy. From November 1590 until May 1591, more than 700 subjects were examined at James's direct instigation, and a large number executed. In 1597 he published his *Demonologie*, part of which consisted of a ferocious attack on the sceptical opinions of Reginald Scot, who, in 1584, had brought out a book ridiculing the belief in witchcraft. However, James himself considerably modified his views following the removal of the Court to London in 1603, but by then the damage had been done.

Belief in witchcraft is, of course, inseparable from belief in religion in general and Christianity in particular. Dr Larner gives various causes for the outbreak of the persecutions throughout Europe in the 15th century, but the most important was undoubtedly the Christianisation of the peasantry with its attendant acceptance of the existence of a personal Devil, and the rise of the Christian nation-state. As she puts it: "Witch-hunting covered more or less precisely the period during which Christianity had political importance, when the kingdom of God on earth was a realistic political objective. As soon as secular ideologies, such as liberty, fraternity and the defence of property took over, witch-hunting ended". Politics and religion in the 17th century, she shows, were fused in exactly the same way as they are today in Northern Ireland, Poland and the Lebanon. Somewhat curiously, Dr Larner does not refer to biblical texts which gave the persecutors scriptural justification for their atrocities, eg Exodus 22, 18 ("Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live") and Deuteronomy 18, 10.

Many other interesting aspects of the subject are explored by Dr Larner, including the problem of

why the vast majority of the accused were women. She dismisses the once widely-held theory, originated by Dr Margaret Murray, that the suspects were members of a pre-Christian female fertility cult which met in secret during the period of Christian dominance. According to Dr Larner, there is no evidence at all for the existence of such a cult, but the idea has been adopted enthusiastically by modern self-styled "witches", who claim they are its descendants. As Dr Larner puts it with her customary dry wit: "Their magazines all look as though a copy of *Penthouse* had been crossed with a PhD thesis".

The 1982 Gifford lectures, which form the second part of *Witchcraft and Religion*, are only incidentally concerned with witchcraft itself. Dr Larner begins by giving a short but fascinating account of the history of the Gifford foundation, including an affectionate but sardonic look at the pious Lord Gifford himself and at William Robertson Smith, who was dismissed from his post as Professor of Old Testament Studies at the Free Church College, Aberdeen, following the publication of his highly critical article on the Bible in the celebrated ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The main subject of Dr Larner's lectures is the debate among students of sociology between ethnocentrism and relativism, ie whether it is proper or improper to apply our own standards of rationality and ethics to the beliefs, values and practices of other societies. The extreme ethnocentric viewpoint is expressed in Robert Louis Stevenson's satirical verses:

Little Indian, Sioux or Crow  
Little frosty Eskimo  
Little Turk or Japanese .....  
O! Don't you wish that you were me?

or in hymns such as *From Greenland's icy mountains* . . . , while the extreme relativist maintains that all beliefs and customs are equally true, rational and valuable. After a closely-reasoned analysis, Dr Larner reaches the sensible conclusion that while it is wrong for missionaries and administrators to force their religion and morality on peoples who are better off without them, it is equally wrong to accept with equanimity such revolting practices as the immolation of widows and female circumcision.

The author makes no attempt to conceal her own scepticism in matters of religious belief (she remarks with some astonishment at one point that "we still encounter educated persons who believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting"), but also rather inconsistently expresses the hope that she herself will have "a College chapel burial, complete with hobgoblins, foul fiends, and the 23rd psalm sung to Crimond", apparently on the grounds that though religion is untrue, it fulfils a useful social function by linking us to the past. We still need, as she puts it, "a trace of its pattern on our lives". I doubt if many freethinkers would disagree with this,

so long as it is only a trace!

Because the book consists of separate essays and lectures, there is inevitably some overlapping and duplication of the material in the different sections. However, a good index is provided, and Dr Larner's careful scholarship, as well as her clarity and humour, make the work an indispensable guide for specialists and lay people alike.

JOHN L. BROOM

Peadar O'Donnell, the Irish revolutionary socialist and writer who, with Sean O'Faolain, founded *The Bell* literary magazine, has died at the age of 93. A former teacher and trade union organiser, he conducted many campaigns on behalf of workers and small farmers. His son and a handful of friends accompanied the coffin to Dublin crematorium where committal took place without a ceremony of any kind.

## LETTERS

### VIOLENCE AGAINST. . .

I should like to take issue with Anthony Grey on some points raised in his review of Mary Whitehouse's *Mightier Than the Sword* (April). Perhaps some paedophiles are indeed naive, some others are not so naive since they write books which get published openly and so defend paedophilia. Others get into Court on a pseudonym to protect them as they are well-placed in the British class-system. So it would appear that some paedophiles are quite intelligent and well-organised males; indeed about 95 per cent of the PIE are male.

However those women who have campaigned against violence against women — a movement which includes violence against children, are known in the columns of *The Freethinker* as "fascists" and "men-haters". So personally I am very glad indeed that Geoffrey Dickens has taken up the cause of abused children using the grudgingly given, in this instance, security of Parliament, and so apparently forcing the DPP to take some action.

If you think for how long wife-beating and child-bashing have been frequent, well-concealed and little punished or moderated by the law, then you might wish to come clean and say whose freedom does *The Freethinker* and Mr Grey stand for and what is it freedom to do? Can any freethinker possibly argue for freedom to rape or kill children? Or women?

As to the vice Anglais, well adults can consent to their own death or to sadistic practices, can children do so? To my mind the answer is no, never. Anthony Grey does the cause of gay men's liberty no good at all by conflating it with paedophilia. And people who argue for freedom should take care that freedom for some, usually powerful persons, does not imply coercion, degradation or death for less powerful persons.

Could some person, preferably not a Platonist, give some practical advice on how to feel less scared of male violence? The Adult Education Centre where I work has issued a hand-out saying that it offers a "safe night" out. That shows how frightened people are becoming, both for themselves and for their children.

If the killers and torturers are caught, which does not happen enough, then they get light sentences or none at all and can do the same again. All the social workers can do is move the threatened women and kids to secret addresses.

It is high time that the male freethinkers started thinking about power and coercion instead of civil rights and civil liberties for paedophiles, sadists and killers.

B. L. ABLE

Anthony Grey writes: I hope most freethinkers don't take such a fast-and-loose attitude as B. L. Able to rational thought-processes! If she believes that "paedophile" is a synonym for a child-molester, I suppose it's not surprising that she seems to think that all men feel violent towards women. As for logical argument, I don't appreciate having things I never said and views I don't hold thrust into my mouth and then being ordered to justify them!

B. L. Able exhorts male freethinkers to "start" thinking about power and coercion. As a gay man, I have been only too aware of these throughout my adolescent and adult life. I invite her and her fellow "women against violence against women" (ONLY against women? Me, I'm against violence by anyone against anyone) to look honestly at how their own anger and hatred intimidates and alienates men who would be much more supportive of feminism if they didn't feel so threatened by slogans such as "Dead men don't rape". It's unfashionable these days, I know, to agree with Voltaire that "I loathe what you say, but will defend to the death your right to say it": but I haven't as yet discovered a better recipe for safeguarding a most vital democratic freedom. So I'll go on sticking up for the right of paedophiles, pornographers, B. L. Able, Mary Whitehouse and the Bible Society to go on publishing whatever rubbish they wish. I certainly don't approve of private spies. And the vice Anglais (in case B. L. Able doesn't know) is humbuggery.

### NATURE'S DYNAMICS

Harold Blackham seems to be challenging me on three points, all of which are vital to the future of Humanist thinking (Letters, May).

Harold Blackham says that the universe is not a single system. I say that it is. He says that we do not need wholistic thinking. Again I disagree. He seems to reject the idea that there is a self-ordering propensity within the universe whereas my book suggests that there is.

Let me, briefly, give my reasons for holding the position that I do. The universe started as a single entity — pure energy. It then passed through a series of differentiations — to plasma, to hydrogen and helium, to more complex molecules, as well as to gas clouds, stars, supernova, solar systems and the rest. Further differentiations brought organic molecules, life and, ultimately, mind. The differentiation continues. Since all that exists has derived from a single source, the universe is ultimately a single system, however complex — a system of systems in fact. There is no denying that obvious truth.

Reductionism? It is very handy for studying details; it cannot study complex wholes. But, in science, we are, more and more, dealing with complex wholes. The human body is one such whole, in which every aspect interacts with every other aspect. Medical reductionism, in its day, produced appalling errors. Thousands of people lost their tonsils, teeth and appendices on the reductionist error that all rheumatism arises from foci

of infection. Doctors now know that the whole person has to be taken into account if rheumatism is to be adequately treated. Rheumatism may be due to stress, malnutrition, water abnormalities, allergy, or a score of other causes, or a combination of any of them. Only a wholistic approach can lead to a proper diagnosis. That is an analogy for many modern problems. It was reductionist thinking — failure to take the whole situation into account — that caused the recent NASA disaster.

Is the universe self-organising in some way as yet not properly understood? If it is not, then how comes it that a creatively ordering mechanism — the human brain — has arisen from a physical/biological background that totally lacks any inherent ordering propensity? The nature of the universe can, to some extent, be hypothesized from the nature of the brain since the brain is as much a part and product of the universe as an electron, a pulsar or a black hole. Incidentally, what Harold Blackham has to say, in his letter, about human responsibility, almost as though I had not made the point, is what my book, *Instead of God*, is primarily about.

JAMES HEMMING

### HOW RANDOM IS CHAOS?

The discussion of James Hemming's book suggests that many scientific ideas are only half understood.

Chance is not definable as chaos. In the simple case of random numbers all individual numbers, sequences of numbers and sequences of sequences are equally likely. Sequences such as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 . . . and 5, 5, 5, may be just as random as any other sequence. These sequences only look non-random because of cultural bias. The point is that apparent regularity does not imply a systematic cause.

It is easy to demonstrate that atoms travelling in space, at random speeds and in random directions, will, from time to time, clump into proto galaxies. These clumps will remain because the concentration of mass produces new centripetal velocities due to gravitation.

Similarly with biological evolution. The formation of chemical compounds is essentially a chance process depending on local temperatures, pressures and proportions of elements interacting with atomic forces. Some compounds will be stable others less so. At some point the mixture of compounds formed a simple self replicating unit. Although it had some complexity it was far simpler than modern life since replication was its only requirement. The ability to self replicate biases the random process, producing at that point more than chance expectations, for the combination.

From that point on natural selection produces a ratchet effect. Improvements in replication increase whilst faults fall back to the chance system. The balanced complexity of living species is a result of evolution not its cause. Feedback processes increase efficiency but result from chance accumulations rather than inherent tendencies. Evidence for this is seen in the many solutions seen in nature from the same problems. Evolution has used what is available rather than what is ideal.

The increasing complexity of life seems rather to be an artefact of chance faults in reproduction than a force in itself. Duplications and deletions are routine chance occurrences in the gene line. They are one form of mutation. Large changes, either way, cause imbalance and are likely to be eliminated. Small additions survive as passengers providing material for later chance changes that may be useful. The bias favours increases in the genes and so complexity.

It seems unlikely that there is a force towards greater consciousness only one towards more efficient survival.

Self consciousness seems to be largely accidental, the result of greater complexity for more direct needs. One should ask the question why are there so many species of moderate intelligence and marginal self consciousness. Why has selection not made all higher species self conscious. Human large brain size is a very recent phenomenon. It occurred relatively suddenly. What was the new need?

Holism assumes that, in many cases, the whole is greater than its parts. This is a valid comment but ignores far too often that the quality of the parts is also relevant. A large piece of architecture has many special qualities remote from the single brick design that may form its whole. However the limits of the architecture are closely controlled by the specification of the brick. In buildings only certain combinations of bricks are stable. This is also true of living systems.

R. G. SILSON

### CHRISTIAN STANDARDS

May I comment on your report on the National Council for Christian Standards in Society (News and Notes, April)?

The National Council undertook a MORI national opinion poll prior to its launch which revealed that child abuse is the second highest area of concern among the 19 issues surveyed, 66 per cent compared with 67 per cent for drug abuse. The national age group most concerned about this problem is the 25-34 age group, the CI social group (non-manual clerical staff), and Alliance voters rather than Conservative or Labour voters. Liberal humanists must be included in this pattern of concern, and if they are "more compassionate and concerned about social ills" than are members of the National Council then they should be backing the Council.

One other point: The Freethinker would be wrong to imagine that the Council will not be very concerned with declining moral standards in industry and the City. This has become a number one issue and will be included in our working programme.

That Christian standards are regarded by 67 per cent of the population as being very or fairly important in setting and maintaining moral standards in Britain today can be no surprise to your readers since Britain is, and remains, a Christian nation at heart.

PHILIP VICKERS  
General Secretary,  
National Council for Christian  
Standards in Society

### IS CHRISTIANITY TRUE?

Antony Milne's praise of Michael Arnheim's book *Is Christianity True?* (April) is in sharp contrast to critical comments by Nicolas Walter in *New Humanist*.

However, the book is not as good as Milne thinks nor as bad as Walter believes. Walter stated that hardly any modern Christians hold the gospel accounts to be "true" (and chided Arnheim for not realising this), but it can be argued that anyone who does not accept them as true accounts is not a Christian. The gospels are certainly accepted as true by fundamentalists, whose numbers are not insignificant.

Of course Arnheim's title asks the wrong question, and instead asks a meaningless one. Christianity exists, so of course it is true (ie real). The question with which the book deals (in part) is whether or not the beliefs of Christianity are based on real (true) events. As hundreds before him have shown, some are true and some are not. Arnheim's choices can be questioned; for instance, his conclusion that Jesus' use of the phrase "Son of Man" was not Messianic! Arnheim's conclusion, that Jesus was a failed extremist, is

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perhaps unjustified and probably wrong. His treatment is so patchy and shallow that it is difficult to know on what basis the conclusion was reached.

The book does not deserve the glowing review given it by Milne; it adds very little to the huge body of secular criticism of the gospels and it is certainly not a definitive or seminal work. However, I for one was glad to see a historian defending the historicity of Jesus.

STEUART CAMPBELL

## Freethinker Fund

Once again we gratefully acknowledge an encouraging total of donations. The latest list of contributors is given below.

E. C. Hughes and H. Madoc-Jones, £1.20 each; A. P. Allen, N. Bruce, E. F. Cresswell, W. D. Eaton, R. C. Edmunds, N. G. Gibbard, W. J. Glennie, M. A. Hawkins, D. M. Holdstock, C. Honeywell, I. R. Jones, D. R. Love, R. J. Orr, D. Rookledge and R. W. Walker, £1.40 each; E. Palmer and I. Shelat, £2 each; L. Stapleton, £2.40; S. M. Rowe, £2.80; J. R. Crellin, £3.60; G. L. J. Lucas, £4.20; G. Clarke, T. Cornish, R. Forder and A. E. Woodford, £5 each; N. G. Baguley, J. Bond, H. K. Campbell, B. N. Kirby and C. Morey, £6.40 each; S. Eadie, £7.60; B. A. Burfoot, £11.40; I. Campbell, S. Little, L. T. Ong and G. Strang, £16.40 each; R. J. Condon, £20; J. E. Rupp, £21.40; Anonymous, £30.

Total for April: £248.40.

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### *Putting in a Good Word*

and from each other. This leads to arguments, misunderstandings and even religious wars.

However when we rely on human reason and reject ideas which go beyond reason we are making a stand for honesty in language. There is no subject that is outside the realms of reason and scientific investigation.

Everything can be explored and, humanists believe, be explained within terms of matter and energy and the relationships between matter and energy. Expressions such as a "life force" are meaningless unless they are used to describe the nature of such a force.

Humanists believe that everything can be explained in this way because no one has been able to demonstrate the existence of beings or events which are incapable of explanation within our experiences of nature and human nature.

As a follower of Epicurus, the greatest philosopher in the ancient world, wrote in about 55 BC: "We are all wrong when we delude ourselves with dreams, or torment ourselves with nightmares, of invisible powers interfering to upset the regular and determinate working of the perceptible universe".

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** New Venture Theatre Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton. Sunday, 6 July, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. Annual General Meeting and secretary's visit to Australia (illustrated).

**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.

**Humanist Holidays.** Information regarding future holidays is obtainable from Gillian Bailey, 18 Priors Road, Cheltenham, GL52 5AA, telephone 0242-39175.

**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, 26 June, 7.45 pm. Public Meeting.

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

**South Place Ethical Society.** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Meetings on Sunday, 11 am. 22 June, V. Stern: Britain's Prisons — the Long Running Crisis. 29 June, A Mendelsohn: The Work of CND. 6 July, F. Grubb: Martin Bell 1918-1978, Poet and Rebel. 13 July, Debate between the Rev Keith Ward and Harry Stopes-Roe: Science, Religion and God.

**Sutton Humanist Group.** Details of summer programme obtainable from George Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, telephone 01-642 8796.

**Warwickshire Humanist Group.** Friends Meeting House, Hill Street (off Corporation Street), Coventry. Monday, 16 June, 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.

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

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**The Chief Minister of Punjab, Surjit Singh Barnala, acting on the orders of five Sikh priests, cleaned the shoes of religious zealots to "atone" for the recent police action in the Golden Temple at Amritsar. Mr Barnala repeated the penance for six days to placate militant Sikhs.**

# Religious Cults Exploit Young Workers

In a House of Lords debate last month, Lord Rodney asked the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Lord Glenarthur, if he was aware some religious cults use the Government's Youth Training Scheme to recruit members. There have also been instances of child abuse.

Lord Glenarthur agreed that distress and unhappiness are often caused to individuals and families as a result of involvement with certain cults.

"But when cults act within the law there is limited scope for direct Government action", he added.

Lord Denning said that in view of the evil influences of cults, is it not extremely urgent for the Government to do something, especially in view of the intimation that the final decision of the courts regarding the charitable status of the Moonies will not be decided for some years. He asked if there was any possibility that all cults would be required to be registered like any professional or trade association.

Lord Glenarthur said that so far as charitable status of the Moonies was concerned he had nothing to add to his statement of 28 April.

"As I understand it", he said, "certain of the 'new religions' are registered as charities, but I note the point about general registration and shall certainly look into it".

Lord Peyton of Yeovil reminded the Under-Secretary "that for many years Government departments have been watching things without having a notable effect on the evil and wicked people who cause a great deal of distress. I hope he will urge his colleagues to resort to action now".

Lord Glenarthur replied: "The difficulty is that the law must retain a balance between the freedom of belief and practice, and the need to safeguard from abuse the other basic freedoms of members of society. The difficulty is that one man's cult may be close to another man's religion".

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**Foreign residents in Saudi Arabia were warned last month that they faced dismissal from their jobs, heavy penalties and deportation if they ate, drank or smoked in public during the Muslim fasting period of Ramadan.**

## Conway's "Continuous Search for Truth"

"To Moncure Conway we owe a debt for having rescued the reputation of Thomas Paine from neglect and infamy", said Michael Foot, MP, when he chaired the 62nd Conway Memorial Lecture, given by Lord Fenner Brockway at Conway Hall, London, of 21 May.

"Conway's life of Paine was, and remains, one of the great biographies of the nineteenth century. If it had not been for his researches in three countries where Paine helped to set the world on revolutionary courses, in his own England here, in America and in France, so much of the tradition which Fenner Brockway himself treasured would have been lost".

Fenner Brockway referred to Conway's inner conflict, particularly during his early years when he came under the influence of Methodists, Quakers and Unitarians. It persisted throughout his life.

"On one conviction Conway certainly remained firm. This was his strong opposition to slavery. When he preached a sermon on the subject, it won him a national reputation. But in his church were many slave-owners, and, greatly shocked, they dismissed him.

"He then became Minister of the more liberal Unitarian Church of Cincinnati, the cultural centre of the American West. Unfortunately, he caused a split in the church by developing radical views".

Referring to Conway's views on religion and

ethics, Fenner Brockway said it was very interesting that as far back as the middle of the nineteenth century he referred to an intellectual elite who rejected much of the Christian theology such as the virgin birth, the supernatural Jesus and the physical resurrection.

"He complained that while they did so, these same dissidents appeared to support the churches wherein creeds embodying these superstitions were regularly recited. These intellectuals took no part in liberating the people from the domination of the rigid conceptions taught in the churches. How relevant is this protest today".

Fenner Brockway said that the churches' traditional image of indifference to social problems was changing, particularly in South Africa and Latin America. But we still have to expose the superstitions of Christian and other religions. We should remember Moncure Conway's "open, questioning mind, his continuous search for truth, his exposure of naive superstitions, his practice of racial equality, his hope for sexual equality, his deep and sincere concern for the well-being of all human life, and his determined resistance to war".

• **Moncure Conway: His Life and Message for Today (the 62nd Conway Memorial Lecture), obtainable from South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL, price 50p.**