
The Freethinker

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RITUAL SLAUGHTER: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM HAS ITS LIMITS

A spokesman for the Compassion in World Farming organisation has accused meat companies involved in ritual slaughter of selling their products to non-religious markets. Peter Roberts, director of CIWF, has written to the Director of Public Prosecutions drawing his attention to the Halal Meat Company which operates a large abattoir in Anglesey. Mr Roberts told the DPP: "It appears that the Halal Meat Company are using the 'religious exemptions' even when they are selling into markets other than Muslim. It is evident that even at the time of slaughter the intention is to supply non-Muslim markets, the meat being sold in institutions and also to fill a contract with the French Inter-marche supermarkets and hypermarkets".

Compassion in World Farming has just concluded a month of intense campaigning to expose what it describes as the "bloody shambles" of British slaughterhouses. It asserts that the slaughter industry "remains rooted in the Dark Ages".

The organisation is pressing the Government to implement the recommendations of the Farm Animal Welfare Council reports of 1982 and 1985. In its latest report the Council recommended that the exemption of Jews and Muslims which allows them to kill animals without pre-stunning be removed from the Slaughterhouse Act 1974. During the last year religious leaders have been exerting pressure on the Government to allow the continuance of ritual slaughter despite the Council's recommendation. It is now widely believed that the Government has capitulated to the religious lobby on this question.

CIWF declares that although religious freedom is one of the hallmarks of a civilised society, "as with other freedoms, it cannot and never has been absolute. . .

"Freedom grants no one a license to destroy other people's property, nor cause them a nuisance, nor inflict pain or injury on them.

"Nor should freedom of religion be allowed beyond

those limits where the rest of natural creation is caused pain and suffering".

Exemptions from stunning before slaughter were made in respect of religious freedom for minority groups. In 1908 a local Government Board advised that the Jewish method should be allowed on condition that it was carried out by a Jew who had been licensed by the Chief Rabbi. In 1928 Scottish legislation allowed an exemption for Muslims, largely for the benefit of Indian seamen who were calling at Scottish ports. This exemption was added to English law in 1933. The EEC adopted it in a Directive of 1974, although it allows member countries to forbid ritual slaughter.

Ritual slaughter in Britain is no longer just a concession to religious minorities. It is big business with a lucrative export market. In order to take advantage of the demand from Middle East countries for Halal-killed meat, some slaughterhouse operators do not pre-stun any of the animals.

CIWF points out that the Jewish (Shechita) and Muslim (Halal) methods are totally different in origin and in practice. A past chairman of the Shechita Committee described Shechita as "a religious rite deriving authority from the Torah". The Shochet (slaughterman) is licensed only after a long period of training. The knife is supposed to be razor-sharp and examined for flaws before each animal is killed.

Only one third of the carcase (the forequarters) is acceptable to Jews. The hindquarters could be acceptable if porged, but since this is an expensive operation the non-kosher meat is usually sold on the open market.

CIWF describes Jews as a very humane race. They are not allowed to kill for sport. "But", it adds, "they have a conviction that no new knowledge can ever improve on the methods laid down by Moses".

(continued on back page)

The Freethinker

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NEWS

A CANDID EXPOSURE

Do you know what is the devil's greatest weapon against missionary work? It is a camera. Why? Because you can take a photo of a starving body, but not of a soul going to hell. . . We must not be so moved by appeals for starvation relief that we neglect sin and redemption.

It was a gentleman of the cloth named the Rev Philip Jensen who made this stirring call when he addressed the Evangelical Ministry Assembly at St Helen's Church, Bishopsgate, London. An annual event, the Assembly was attended by 250 pastors, and there is no evidence that even one of them became hot under the dog collar while listening to rantings of their callous brother in Christ.

Christian fanatics have always regarded any development likely to increase human knowledge with suspicion and hostility. The printing press revolutionised the production of books, thus increasing the desire for literacy and the dissemination of new ideas. The telescope enabled astronomers to probe the night sky, adding to man's understanding of the universe and the earth's place in it. The microscope replaced the religious relic as a weapon to conquer disease.

It is therefore not surprising that the Rev Jensen and others of his ilk regard the camera with disfavour. They see it not only as "a weapon against missionary work" but as a means of exposing divine cock-ups the world over. The camera brings into the living room disasters like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, typhoons and droughts which an all-powerful, all-loving deity in his infinite love and wisdom inflicts on humanity and the animal kingdom.

It is not the camera but the missionaries' appalling historical record that militates against them. True, some missionaries have been motivated by genuine compassion (it is highly improbable that every one of the thousands who went into all the world to preach the gospel was a bad egg). But for the most part the role of the missionary has been that of a blatant superstitionmonger, exploiter and willing tool of gunboat diplomats.

Christian propagandists tirelessly proclaim the good deeds performed by missionaries, particularly those involved in medical and educational work. Little is said about the diseases which, albeit unwittingly, they introduced; or that their attempts to impose the Judaeo-Christian ethic on other cultures often resulted in social upheaval and misery.

Today's missionaries and their organisations

AND NOTES

exploit public concern over the plight of famine-stricken millions. Vast sums of money contributed by the religiously indifferent finance the activities of evangelical dinosaurs like the Rev Philip Jensen. In addition to purveying religious superstition, a large number of missionaries, particularly Roman Catholic priests and nuns, promote the harmful social policies of their churches, as governments trying to introduce population control programmes have discovered.

Of course fire-and-brimstone fundamentalists like the Rev Philip Jensen are a considerable embarrassment to those followers of "gentle Jesus" who contend that Christianity is a religion of love. But the fundamentalist is, biblically speaking, on much firmer ground than are those squeamish practitioners of the double-think who prefer to ignore the bliss-or-blisters message of their holy horror comic.

Like it or lump it, ignore it or reject it, self-deceiving believers cannot escape the fact that eternal punishment is not just a fundamentalist but a fundamental Christian doctrine. The Rev Philip Jensen's ghoulish message is rooted in scripture and tradition. It is yet another example of how religion warps the human mind.

ILLIBERAL ALLIANCE

The Earth Mother of Britain's embryonic Moral Majority may be getting long in the tooth, but Mary Whitehouse is still resolutely defending us from excesses on the television screen. Never mind that she has not seen the items she wants banned, or that viewers have not asked her to vet programmes on their behalf. Mother knows best.

Mrs Whitehouse was at it again last month, trying to prevent a Channel 4 transmission of the French film, *Themroc*. All she succeeded in achieving was a warning red signal at the bottom of the screen — and a larger audience for *Themroc*.

The Monocled Mutineer, Alan Bleasdale's dramatised account of a First World War mutiny (one of many which the military authorities tried to hush up), did not show the officer class in a particularly favourable light. It provoked the predictable clamour about Left-wing bias from jingoists, retired brasshats and other authoritarian types.

Norman Tebbit and his prodnoses at Conservative Central Office have been looking up Auntie's skirts in their search for evidence of Marxism at Broadcasting House. Not content with having Fleet Street and most of the national press in his pocket, Chairman Norman wants the broadcasters to present

wall-to-wall Jimmy Young.

The twin-set-and-pearls busybodies at the beck and call of the Conservative Party and religious pressure groups have their opposite numbers on the Left. They are the Alternative Moral Majority. Their noisy presence is felt in many Labour Party branches where even the mildest questioning of their views is greeted by howls of "sexist" and "racist". *Labour Weekly* recently carried a constituency Labour Party advertisement for a parliamentary candidate to which "Women and ethnic minorities are invited to apply".

The AMM is also active in civic offices where they have had some success in censoring calendars and posters. One local authority capitulated to these po-faced viragoes and issued a ruling that the greeting, "Hello darling", is an act of sexual harassment.

The Alternative Moral Majority is certainly handing it on a plate to the Peter Simples and John Junors of this world.

ALL IN A BAD CAUSE

It was not the Westland affair that brought about Leon Brittan's resignation from the Cabinet earlier this year, according to Nelson McCausland, Northern Ireland organiser of the Lord's Day Observance Society. "I honestly believe that what happened to him over Westland was God's judgment on him for seeking to destroy the Lord's Day", he recently told a *Belfast Telegraph* interviewer. (Leon Brittan organised the early stages of the Shops Bill.)

The Northern Ireland region of the LDOS is the Society's strongest in the British Isles. At the moment Mr McCausland is mightily agitated by a Federation of the Retail Licensed Trade campaign to allow Sunday opening of public houses in the province. He is constantly on guard against moves to hold sporting events on the precious day. The only Sunday recreation he allows himself is taking a walk between church services. No Sunday newspaper is delivered to the McCausland abode, although he reads them in the public library on Monday!

Northern Ireland's leading Sabbatarian is also active in political circles and has unsuccessfully contested three elections. He is chairman of the North Belfast Ulster Club. The Ulster Clubs movement has links with the National Front and other groups on the far Right. It has been described by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland as "fascistic".

Despite much lofty moralising the Sabbatarian organisation, through its full-time representative, Nelson McCausland, has some very unsavoury connections in Northern Ireland. And for all its grandiose claims, the once-powerful Lord's Day Observance Society is now nothing more than a very small blister on the bum of British society.

Church Schools Discriminate and Divide

A new study of schools in London, Birmingham and Manchester has revealed that only one pupil in ten at council secondary schools attends morning assembly. The study, Faith, Culture and the Dual System, also shows that fewer than half the church schools surveyed holds a daily act of worship. And although the 1944 Education Act decrees that religious instruction shall take place in every school, only fourteen per cent of council secondary schools provide it for all their pupils. Research data from various sources shows that the Act's requirements regarding religious instruction and the daily act of worship are now widely ignored.

According to this latest survey, undertaken by Dr Bernadette O'Keefe of King's College, London, church schools are now regarded by many parents as "grammar schools" compared to comprehensives. Many church schools are becoming "denominational" as pressure for places increases. Admission procedures are less flexible, with almost nine out of ten church secondary schools giving first priority to children from Anglican families. Yet only two years ago the general secretary of the Church of England Board of Education condemned school governing bodies which discriminated in favour of practising Anglicans.

One aim of the survey was to establish church and county schools' approach to multicultural education. It concludes: "In 60 per cent of church secondary schools and 53 per cent of county schools the school ethos, curriculum, policies and practices remain unchanged by the cultural diversity found outside the school environment". Church school pupils are less likely than those at county schools to gain knowledge of world religions.

Evidence showed that there was less effort by church than by county schools to implement multicultural activities. There is greater cultural and religious diversity among county school pupils. Dr O'Keefe's findings support the Runnymede Trust's suggestion that church schools are "wittingly or unwittingly propping up racism and racial disadvantage".

In addition to being racially and religiously divisive, church schools in some areas are reinforcing social and economic class divisions. They have a higher proportion of pupils whose parents are in non-manual jobs, while unemployment and other forms of deprivation are more prevalent among parents of those attending county schools.

Coinciding with the publication of the survey, *The Times Educational Supplement* carried an interview with the Bishop of Durham, the Rt Rev David Jenkins, who earlier this year said he was in favour of phasing out voluntary-aided church schools. In the interview he said: "Our society is no longer united

either by Christian culture or by Christian worship. . .

"And in the light of what I have said before about the whole issue of education in a divided, uncertain society, I am bound to point out that, in my view, the relationship of church schools to education and state aid also needs to be re-thought and re-negotiated.

"There are questions about so-called Christian worship as a necessity forced on pluralistic schools and there are questions about state support for a particular religion".

Referring to "very sharp questions" about publicly endorsing and supporting any form of particular religious education, the Bishop of Durham said: "I think Christians have to make their contribution to education and values in openness with everyone else.

"I think there's also a very good question about how far, for instance, Protestant schools and Roman Catholic schools in separation contribute to the situation in Northern Ireland".

Kit Mouat, 1920-1986

Kit Mouat, a former editor of *The Freethinker*, has died after a long illness. She was 66.

Of Nonconformist and agnostic parentage, Kit Mouat became a prominent figure in the freethought movement over twenty years ago. Her first book, *What Humanism is About* appeared in 1963. It was later translated into German. She also published *An Introduction to Secular Humanism* and contributed articles and poems to a number of journals. Her volumes of poems were *Poems of an Angry Dove*, *Time Smoulders* and *I'm Staying*.

Kit Mouat was the first honorary secretary of the Agnostics Adoption Bureau, which prepared the way for the Agnostics, now the Independent Adoption Society. She was also founder of the Humanist Letter Network (International). Latterly she helped to form the group, Cancer Contact, and published *Fighting for Our Lives*, which included ten case histories of cancer patients.

The Rev Eric Hayden, rector of Cuckfield, conducted a secular service which included readings from Voltaire and D'Holbach, at the Surrey and Sussex Crematorium, Worth. Kit Mouat's husband said: "Although she was an atheist, she dearly wished to have the funeral conducted by the village rector". Mr Hayden, a personal friend, said he did not need permission of the Anglican authorities to conduct the secular service.

Sensation in Willesden

JOHN YEOWELL

First, the message of Lourdes, then the message of Fatima, now the message of Willesden Green.

I was, unhappily, not present at what must undoubtedly have been the most momentous occurrence in North West London since the arrest of the mass murderer, Denis Neilson: no less than a personal appearance of Our Lady. I had, however, been able almost to witness an earlier but unrealised promised apparition.

The national press has been remarkably silent about recent events in Willesden. Tempted by a half-page advertisement in the *Willesden Chronicle*, I was present at a replica of the Lourdes grotto (as seen in the film, *The Song of Bernadette*) which stands in the grounds of the local Catholic church. The promise from On High had been that the Blessed Virgin would appear if but five hundred people could be found who would attend at the shrine at 12.45 pm on the following Sunday. This time coincided with the end of the high mass — confirmation, if that were needed, that the times of church services are posted in Paradise.

By half-past twelve no more than a couple of dozen of the faithful were gathered about the holy images. It was apparently a profitable day for the local florists, who had opened their shops this Lord's Day for the expected business that always accompanies a sacred apparition. Here and there kneeling women were telling their beads (all but four of those present were women), although groups of unconcerned men were lounging around the church doorway in the distance in the tradition of rural Ireland.

A sudden hush fell over the small gathering. The three holy women who were to be the human vehicles for the promised miracle had arrived. With the assistance of a microphone one of them led the faithful in prayers. Being something of a stickler for punctuality, when Our Lady failed to keep her appointment on time I gave up and left.

My disappointment can be imagined when I heard that Our Lady had actually appeared on the following Sunday, while I was wasting my time watching Brian Walden's last TV programme. The news of this apparition was communicated to the world through an advert in the local press. By this account the Mother of Christ had appeared to a convert Jewish woman, to a young Irish girl and to a Polish "secular nun". The heathen English were excluded. The rest of the world, including the national news media, which should have been waiting for Mary's message, has since displayed total indifference. So what did she have to say?

First, that the Pope "must quickly come to London, now at once top speed, for his own safety . . ." His holiness must have been otherwise engaged at

12.30 pm on that Sunday or, surely, she would have gone direct to him. That was his loss.

The British and all other countries had better "clean up their evil, drug-infested, pornographic, criminal societies, with . . . draconia (*sic*) measures", she said. We must "abolish all crime etc from films, videos and television". "God commands nations to reduce crime by 85 (not 70, or even 84) per cent . . . with the most severe punishments (as in Moslem (*sic*) Arab countries)". Oh, dear, so many right hands to be lopped off, for Willesden is such a wicked place!

"All alcohol must be banned. . ." etc, etc. She should have told that to my near neighbour, Paddy Ryan, who is well-known in the Spotted Dog as well as a past master of the Knights of St Columbanus.

As in the good old days of music hall, when the star of the show was invariably last on the bill, so in Willesden the great attraction was produced at the end, almost as an afterthought. For it was J. C. Superstar, no less — and not a newspaper man present to report to a startled world the great man's "final ultimatum" and threats of the "horrendous penalties that will come". But, as is the way with decent terrorists, a warning will be given: in the form of a "cosmic sign in the skies (exploding comet)". Then all corrupt nations will be wiped out, "as in Noah's day". Meanwhile, "prophetic messages" will continue on Sundays at 12.30 pm sharp.

It seems that Our Lady has vastly extended her vocabulary since she appeared in Fatima and at Lourdes. Then she spoke in simple, monosyllabic sentences. Practice, as they say, makes perfect.

Meanwhile, I really must get along to the grotto on Peter Avenue, Willesden, N.W.10, next Sunday. Although any turns produced now — the Archangel Gabriel, perhaps, or St Jude, who reads the *Daily Telegraph* — are almost sure to be an anti-climax after the recent unexpected bonus attraction.

The Prince of Wales took time off from talking to his flowers last month to attend mass at a Roman Catholic Church in Cumbria. Roman Catholic officials are said to be "delighted" that the future monarch accompanied a friend to the Church of the Holy Family, Kirkby Stephen, where he was greeted by Fr Geoffrey Severs and a congregation of about forty. A Roman Catholic spokesman said the visit may upset old-fashioned Anglicans, "but for us it was a nice Christian thing to do". The Rev David Samuel, director of the Church Society, commented that the Prince's attendance at a Roman Catholic service was "very unwise".

The Piece of God

ERIC WESTMAN

Although most religions have treasured relics of dead leaders and martyrs it was the Roman Catholic Church that transformed the practice into a ludicrous and lucrative spectacle. For centuries Christian shrines housed the bones and belongings of saints — some of whom the Church now admits were fictional characters. One relic was so treasured that it was in the proud possession of several churches and monasteries at the same time! Eric Westman takes a light-hearted look at this intimate "piece of God".

Two thousand or so years ago, the Christian god was the hapless participant in a traditional Jewish ceremony. It happened during his incarnation as a human being, and he was at the time a baby boy eight days old. The purpose of the ceremony was to name him Jesus, because his foster-father dreamt that an angel told him that God had said, through a prophet, that his (God's) name should be Emmanuel. Work it out for yourself — it's typical bible logic. During the ceremony, young God was subjected to a painful and obscene mutilation in which part of his genitalia was amputated. For those who are not *au fait* with these matters, I should explain that this was not the operation the tom cat has when it goes to the vet. Jesus was not castrated — although later in his incarnation he advised others to get themselves castrated — but ritually circumcised.

Now, much thought has been exercised on the knotty problem of whether, when he ascended bodily into the spiritual state of heaven 33 years later, he took the piece of skin that had been hacked off his male organ with him. At least eleven Christian churches, convents (!) and shrines claim that he didn't, because they happen to have it in their possession, as good as new. Well, we all know that Christian authorities do not tell lies, because they tell us they don't, so patently the god Jesus must have been circumcised at least eleven times — twelve, if he took one foreskin up with him. Either the baby god had a prepuce that operated on the principle of the many-headed hydra — every time one is cut off, three grow in its place — or, more likely, he was equipped with eleven or twelve penises. Nothing improbable in that: it was obligatory on gods that they had more of certain features than did their human counterparts. The Roman god Janus had two faces and one of the Hindu gods boasts six arms. Thus it is quite in order for the Christian divinity to dangle a dozen whatnots, and considering the number of virgins and old ladies he impregnated he had need of all of them.

Don't be surprised that pieces of Jesus Christ are still in existence; actually, there are enough chunks of this Christian god around to clone him a dozen

times and still have a few fonts full left over. The wonder is that the Roman Catholics haven't eaten this residue during Mass, or magically turned it into wafers.

One of the earliest "genuine" foreskins of the deity was that reputedly given by Charlemagne to the abbey of Charroux, in France. The monks were so proud of this relic that in the early twelfth century they carted it in procession to Rome to show the Pope. This put the magnificently misnamed Innocent III on the spot, since seven similar morsels were being proffered as the genuine article and he had to adjudicate which one really had nestled between the infant thighs of his Saviour. Apart from Charroux the contenders were Calcata, north of Rome; Coulombs, near Chartres; Puy, Metz, Antwerp, Hildesheim and Vaux. Innocent fought shy of opining which of these eight prepuces was the Saviour's personal property, declaring that only God himself knew such an intimate detail as that.

Since the field patently lay wide open, other Christian establishments began producing similar offcuts of Jesus's person. Santiago de Compostola was first, closely followed by the abbey of St Cornille at Compiègne. And in the sixteenth century a dying soldier confessed that, when pillaging Rome in 1527, he had seen the genuine item in the Lateran and nicked it. The soldier had later buried the relic, no doubt expecting it to resurrect three days later and fly up to join on to the rest of its owner. Pope Clement VII ordered a search, and eventually a lady who was named Magdelene de Strozzi found it. As she tried to prise the container open, her hands miraculously stiffened — a sympathetic erection? — and it took a sweet and innocent girl to eventually open the box and extract the sacred prepuce. Interestingly, the article emitted a beautiful odour which convinced everybody of its genuineness.

Similarly, the relic at Charroux was lost (it appeared to be a hazard with God's foreskin) and rediscovered, after which Clement VII granted indulgences to all present at the exhibition of this intimate portion of Jesus's anatomy.

This relic disappeared again when Huguenots captured Charroux during the French Wars of Religion. But in 1856 an artisan found it hidden in a wall, and after a minute examination the local bishop, Monsignor Pie, declared it was indeed their old treasure recovered. Having persuaded the Ministry of the Interior to build a fine new church to house such an important item of veneration, Monsignor Pie handed over this endpiece of Jesus's penis to the nuns of the local Ursuline convent for safe keeping until the church was built. In 1862 the nuns sadly yielded up their bit of the divinity, and

it was solemnly transferred to its new home, watched by a huge crowd. Monsignor Pie preached a panegyric on it, and declared that he had spotted the same dried blood on the relic that Pope Clement VII had mentioned in his Bull ages ago. Bull indeed.

This curious relic found great favour with women, who believed it protected them during childbirth or made them fertile when barren. Henry V of England borrowed the holy foreskin from Coulombs in 1422 while his wife Catherine was carrying her first child. This Coulombs foreskin was reputed to be particularly potent, and in 1464 Louis XI knelt humbly before it, but there is no record that he ever became pregnant. Since 1872 the parish priest has — no doubt for a consideration — let women kiss the reliquary (but not, one assumes, its contents).

In Calcata, the parish priest, Dom Mario Magnoni, ritually exposed his church's relic once annually on 1st January, the Feast of the Circumcision. When, in 1983, his old church was closed and he was given

a nice new concrete one near by, the priest transferred the sacred prepuce to a wardrobe in his bungalow. Soon after, someone broke in and stole it, but Dom Magnoni did not mention this fact until the next 1st January, when he had to tell his disappointed congregation that the foreskin had been filched. Popular opinion reckoned that the local bishop, who was not happy about the relic, had organised a Mafia-style snatch — such operations are by no means unknown in Catholic Church circles. Others pondered whether Dom Magnoni had made preparations for a comfortable retirement by secretly selling it to a wealthy collector of lumps of Jesus who wanted to build up his own Saviour. It hardly matters — no doubt the prepuce will be “rediscovered” in due course. Significantly, the local police were not concerned because, they said slightly, the relic was “old, in bad condition and small”.

Well, what did they expect after nearly two thousand years?

Freethinker Fund

The words of a Manpower Services Commission official (see back page) are another example of how otherwise level-headed people can be duped by religious opportunists. Furthermore, the reckless handouts of public money to evangelistic groups in Scotland is only one facet of a national scandal. The anomalous and unjust charity laws make it easy for churches, imported religious sects and propaganda organisations to plunder the public purse.

When *The Freethinker* was founded 105 years ago its declared aim was to “wage relentless war against superstition in general and Christian superstition in particular”. That is still its aim, and it is one that does not commend the paper to the Charity Commissioners, charitable trusts or wealthy patrons. *The Freethinker* relies on readers' generosity for its continued existence. They have never failed it. The latest list of contributors to the Fund is given below. We thank them and all who have sent donations in the past.

J. Madoc Jones, £1; A. Campbell, £1.15; W. Beninson, A. Douglas, H. N. Feather, N. Haemmerle, C. Jones, B. A. Judd, L. Lewis, R. S. Payne, P. Proctor, J. Sampson, P. Stiehl, P. D. Ward, D. Whelan, G. Williams and R. G. Wood, £1.40 each; S. F. Cox, £2.40; C. Brunel, £3; C. Kensit, £3.40; L. J. Dawson, £5; D. A. Rickards, £5.80; J. Barr, K. M. Barralet, H. Edmunds, F. C. Hoy, W. Irvine and G. H. Williams, £6.40 each; P. Somers, £10; I. M. Davis, £12; R. J. Condon, £20.

Total for August: £123.15.

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, West Midlands CV1 4AW

Our Lady on Tour

A party of *Freethinker* readers attended the first night performance of *Our Lady* at the Drill Hall Arts Centre, London, on 23 September.

Described as a “blasphemous thriller”, Deborah Levy's play was banned by Coventry Festival officials following a campaign initiated by a local Roman Catholic priest who had neither seen nor read it. Fr Benedict Tarbuck boasted how he prevented the play's two scheduled performances in Coventry. “I suppose you could say I spearheaded the campaign against the play”, he declared.

After receiving a leaflet advertising the play, Fr Tarbuck urged his flock at St John Fisher's Church to lobby councillors. A large number of letters and telephone calls protesting against the play were received. Officials got cold feet and cancelled a booking of the Women's Theatre Group production. It had a successful run at the Edinburgh Festival.

Our Lady is now on tour and will be seen in Taunton, Portsmouth, Havant, Bury, Durham, Barton, Basingstoke and New Milton.

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Botha's Holy War

BARRY DUKE

Afrikaner Nationalists regard South Africa as a bastion of Christianity against the forces of Western Liberalism on the one hand, and Communism on the other. So strong, in fact, is their belief that their God has singled out South Africa as the Eden in which white, Christian supremacy should flourish that there are now ominous signs that the regime could be preparing for a full scale "Holy War" against its own black population as well as those in neighbouring Southern African states.

At the conclusion of a long and defiant address at the recent National Party Congress in South Africa, President P. W. Botha made a chilling statement which appears to have gone virtually unreported in most of the international media.

This is almost certainly due to the fact that reporters have had a gutful of insane Afrikaner outpourings about God and his Great Plan for South Africa. After all, such rhetoric has been the mainstay of every Nationalist politician's speech for decades, and newspaper, radio and television commentators quite rightly feel that no one with a grain of intelligence would want to read or hear any more of the welter of religious rot that parades in South Africa in the guise of serious political debate.

However, I do believe that the media has also chosen to underplay or ignore the heavy religious overtones of the utterances of Afrikaner Nationalists, and latterly the neo-fascists in groups even further to the Right, because they are likely to embarrass Christians in other parts of the world who would rather not like to be reminded, thank you very much, that South Africa's institutionalised racism is a direct product of fundamentalist Christianity.

So what were Botha's words, and why do I think they are significant?

This is what he said: "I look at the constellations in the sky at night and what are the words I see written there? Southern Africa for Christendom".

Most people's reaction would be: "What drivel". Perhaps, but I believe that this particular piece of drivel, analysed in the wider context of what is currently happening in and around South Africa, could well be a coded message declaring an intention to embark on an official full-scale "crusade" against black (and white) dissidents within the country.

I say this because unofficially apartheid has progressed from merely being a cruel, crude ideology aimed at separating the races to a weapon which the police and the military have systematically used to intimidate, provoke and brutalise the black population in the fervent hope of sparking a rebellion which would, in turn, provide them with the justification for a sustained programme of genocide.

As someone who had grown up in a predominantly Afrikaans area, I had always been aware that the deep hatred the Afrikaner bore towards "non whites" went beyond the desire to simply subjugate the black population; extermination was their ultimate ambition. But it was not until I found myself the guest at a private party, in the late 1960s, for Botha's predecessor, John Vorster, that I heard this sentiment openly expressed at an official level.

I had somehow entered into a discussion with a high-ranking security police officer over the regime's "independent" Homelands policy.

"Independent Homelands my arse", declared the officer. "Let me tell you what they really are — targets. One day we'll have all the kaffir bastards neatly rounded up in their own areas, and if they try and give us any trouble we'll just shoot and bomb the whole damned lot".

The bombastic boast of a solitary, power-crazed white racist with equal measures of hatred and brandy in his bloodstream? I think not. Within the next few years I was to meet a lot like him — men of power who displayed all the attributes of sadists, psychopaths and criminals; men, who, in any civilised society, would be kept under close lock and key. But this was no civilised society. This was South Africa, and by the early seventies it had become apparent that the inmates had taken complete control of the asylum.

The horror of the situation was most effectively brought home to me during an inquest I was covering for the *Johannesburg Star* on an Asian school-teacher, Achmed Timol, who had been taken into custody by the security police then later "fell" from the tenth floor of John Vorster Square police station. He was the twenty-second detainee to die at the hands of the police. All the evidence laid before the magistrate pointed to the fact that a crude cover-up had taken place to shield those who had first beaten Timol then had either thrown him, or forced him to jump from the window of the interrogation room.

"Do you know what this inquest will find?" a grinning security policeman, who had been sharing the Press bench with me, asked. Then, roaring with laughter, provided his own answer: "It will prove that coolies can't fly". His prediction was not far from the truth. The police were exonerated — as they had been on all previous occasions when detainees had died in custody, and as they would be in the future following the killings of other prisoners who had never been brought to trial, such as Steve Biko, who was murdered in 1977. (To date, more than 76 political prisoners died at the hands of the police.)

There could be no doubt that the country was fast sliding into a state of barbarism with the tacit

consent of the majority of whites, who had long lost the ability to distinguish between the reality of the South African situation, and the misinformation that was shovelled up to them by the regime via State-controlled radio and TV.

In the finest traditions of Orwell's *1984*, a Lies Industry had been established to transform victims into villains, critics into Communists. Such is the situation now that Botha can say, as he did with breathtaking impudence in a key speech in 1985, "Violent and brutal means can only lead to totalitarian and tyrannical ends", without most whites recognising the bitter irony of this statement.

Yet, with forty years of unrelenting tyranny behind them, the regime, whose entire existence is based on the ultimate lie of white supremacy, is still able to use the club of Christianity to bludgeon many millions of black South Africans — "moderates" in Botha-speak — into accepting a role of perpetual servility. What is particularly depressing about this is that there are black toadies — their brains clearly addled by religion — who are actively collaborating with Botha in a bid to reconcile fellow blacks to the notion that they are inferior beings who should accept their lot, and spend the rest of their lives in lickspittle subservience to their deity and their whip-wielding white rulers.

One such collaborator is the Right Reverend Bishop Lekganyane, head of South Africa's largest black Christian grouping, the Zion Christian Church. Last year, the Bishop made a nauseating public spectacle of himself by metaphorically applying his episcopal tongue to the Presidential posterior at a ceremony at which he awarded Botha "the freedom of Moria" — Moria being the Black city in which members of the Zion Christian Church gathered in their thousands to rededicate themselves to the White Man's voodoo.

Botha responded to this honour by telling the Bishop's congregation: "You have a sincere and healthy lifestyle. You respect law, order and authority" — Botha-speak for: "So far you haven't given us the excuse for shooting you dead". He declared:

Today I give you an undertaking. The Government is aware of its responsibility towards God and man. We are convinced of the necessity to uphold Christian values and civilized ways of life. We are convinced of the necessity to recognize and protect freedom of faith and worship. There are countries in the world where the church of God is not welcome. There are countries where Christ is ignored. But we in South Africa believe that we must first seek the presence of Christ and many of our problems will vanish.

Botha also added this nugget:

The Bible also has a message for the governments and the governed of the world. Thus we read in Romans 13 that every person be subject to the governing

authorities. There is no authority except from God. Rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad conduct. Do what is good, and you will receive the approval of the ruler. He is God's servant for your good.

And, what must be the ultimate in sick jokes:

Our people are being cared for; and our people are being protected. We shall continue to do so. The forces of darkness must be kept out of our country.

While the huge congregation was sucking up this sickening hogwash, in other parts of South Africa the police and the army were engaged in their daily "peaceful" exercise of "caring for, and protecting the people" by, for example, administering electric shocks to the genitals of black teenage boys; by whipping pregnant mothers and elderly women; and by tear-gassing and shooting schoolchildren.

A year or so later they were "protecting freedom of faith and worship" by arresting two entire Church congregations under the State of Emergency — a device aimed primarily at allowing the forces of "law, order and authority" to use murderous tactics against innocent, unarmed citizens under cover of a complete news black-out.

It is against this ugly tapestry of torture and death, and a cynical disregard for human life and dignity, that Botha and the rest of the thugs who govern South Africa expect the world to believe that apartheid is being phased out, and that black South Africans will shortly be able to take part in the country's "democratic" processes. The reality, of course, is that apartheid is being further entrenched and that the only "democratic" process blacks will ever be able to engage in will be to vote for carefully vetted stooges bearing the National Party Seal of Approval.

This was once again made clear recently when a fast-talking Leo Evans, a representative from the South African Embassy, was invited to provide an update of the South African situation to LBC radio listeners in the London area. In the belief, no doubt, that English listeners were as gullible as most White South Africans, Evans smugly parroted some of the phrases his Führer used at the National Party congress.

South Africa was committed, said Evans, to the creation of a fair and equal society for all its race groups. South Africa, whilst not wholly-democratic at present, was working towards a much more democratic system — but not on the Westminster model. And significant changes for the better had taken place in the Republic in recent years — apartheid had virtually disappeared.

Outraged by his slick attempts to hoodwink listeners, I dived for the phone, and, in the dying

(continued on page 157)

LESLIE STEPHEN: THE GODLESS VICTORIAN, by Noel Annan. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, £16.50.

Leslie Stephen is now most often remembered as the father of the novelist Virginia Woolf and the model of her caricature of a dominating Victorian pater-familias, Mr Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*. His real achievements as a Victorian man of letters were *The History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* and the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Among freethinkers he is remembered for his influential essay *An Agnostic's Apology*; although it has none of the challenge of a fighting atheist like Bradlaugh, there is little doubt, as Noel Annan points out, "that Stephen regarded his assault upon God and the theologians to be his most important contribution to the intellectual life of his times".

Noel Annan's weighty book is more a study of "the intellectual life of his times" than a biography. It might well have been subtitled "From the Clapham Sect to Bloomsbury", for it is the development from evangelical Christianity through Victorian agnosticism to the Bloomsbury group that particularly interests him. This version is an updated and expanded edition of a work first published in 1951, and Annan's tendency to digress upon mountaineering, Oxbridge colleges, Leavisite controversies, and so on, suggests that the temptation to expand has not necessarily led to an improvement.

The biographical aspect is, however, succinct. He follows Stephen's advice on the writing of biography: "It does not follow that because I want fact, not fiction, I therefore want all the facts, big and small; the poet's washing bills, as well as the early drafts of great works". Although the all-embracing 600-page biography has produced some masterpieces like Haight on George Eliot or Wilson on Diderot, the academic industry of biography can produce much that is tedious and immaterial.

Leslie Stephen's father, James Stephen, was a fervent evangelical, who followed a legal career with an appointment at the Colonial Office and Board of Trade. He was puritanical and according to Leslie "He once smoked a cigar and found it so delicious that he never smoked again"; but his religious views mellowed later in life sufficiently for him to publish a volume of essays in which he hoped that sinners might eventually be relieved from their suffering in hell. This unorthodoxy led him to be attacked when, on retirement from the Colonial Office, he was appointed Regius Professor of History at Cambridge, as liable to pervert the youth of the country: "These are dangerous times", wrote the Master of Jesus College, "when an atheist walks about the streets of Cambridge in cap and gown, cap and gown".

Leslie Stephen was thus brought up in an atmosphere of earnest rectitude which, though he lost the tenets of the Christian faith, he never abandoned. He was a delicate child and hated the appalling Eton of his day. At Cambridge he was much happier and discovered a talent for wrangling and rowing: he was fairly successful as a mathematical wrangler and outstanding as a rowing coach. (Throughout his life he was a muscular non-Christian, being a vigorous long-distance walker and alpine climber.) He was ordained in 1855 and took orders in 1859, a gap which illustrates a lack of enthusiasm for this conventional step in the career of the nineteenth-century academic, in which the purpose of an Oxbridge education was to create a governing class in Church and State. He might have been set for a moderately distinguished career as an eccentric don, remembered principally by succeeding dons who retail anecdotes about each other at High Table. But he realised in 1862, in an undramatic and straightforward way, that he could not conduct chapel services because he did not believe them. He differed perhaps from others in his honesty rather than his doubts, which must have been far from rare even if not always so thorough-going. He joined that small band, from A. H. Clough to Henry Sidgwick, who put their principles before their academic career. Sixteen years later he symbolically renounced his Holy Orders and invited Thomas Hardy to witness his signature.

In his subsequent career as "a notorious penny-a-liner" (his own phrase), he earned himself a secure income as the editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, but lost money for the owner by offering fare that was too serious. He was, nevertheless, very conscious of those parsons' daughters who might read the journal and advised Hardy to remove the over-suggestive word "amorous" and rejected Matthew Arnold's essay on miracles. Editorship gave Stephen time to write *The History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. George Smith, the wealthy owner of the *Cornhill*, desiring to put a more popular-minded editor in Stephen's place, suggested that he might produce a universal dictionary. Stephen sensibly narrowed the project to the *Dictionary of National Biography* and it became for many years his life task. As happened to Diderot when he embarked on his *Encyclopédie*, it became a burden: "That damned Dictionary is about my bed and spies out all my ways, as the psalmist says". Annan regards its 63 volumes as his "most enduring bequest to posterity" and it is still a standard reference work.

Stephen in his personal life met great happiness

REVIEW

and considerable grief in his two marriages. His first wife, the second daughter of Thackeray, died after eight years in which she had surrounded him with domestic joy. He worshipped Julia Duckworth, the second woman he married, and never really recovered his balance after her death in 1895 after 18 years of marriage. Virginia Woolf's memory of his dark, bad-tempered old-age is only a partial view of a man who could be generous and sociable. He died in 1904 a distinguished but far from serene old man.

His substantial body of published work included essays, biographies, literary criticism and above all history of ideas, as in *The History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, which remains invaluable for any student of the eighteenth century. Stephen came to the conclusion, without any aid from Marx, that changes in society changed men's ideas, rather than the other way round. He looked at the question of why the "cold blast of scepticism" in the early eighteenth century died out in England, as Annan puts it, why "the rationalists went down before the passion of the Methodists or the visions (and vapours) of the Romantics". He concluded that it was because modes of thought differed according to social class: aristocratic scepticism was not transferred to the middle and working classes.

Stephen himself exemplifies his own theory, for why were so many educated nineteenth-century rationalists like himself so timid? The answer lay in the middle class fear of disorder and transfer of power to the working classes. Agnosticism is a serious philosophical viewpoint, but freethinking atheists often saw it as a tempering position. Moncure Conway, as an American, was astonished by the way English rationalists thought it their duty to conceal their views. To his credit Stephen did not, and in contrast to some of his friends he supported Bradlaugh during his struggle to enter Parliament. He also became an Honorary Associate of the Rationalist Press Association towards the end of his life. But he was essentially one of the middle-class intelligentsia, and the division between such men and the working-class radicals weakened both. To this day working-class suspicion of intellectuals (and vice versa) survives, when an alliance between the two could strengthen radical politics.

Annan is very concerned to describe "an hereditary strain", which he sees exemplified in the evolution from the Clapham Sect evangelicals to the Bloomsbury set. He presents some fascinating parallels, and demonstrates convincing hereditary links: but any history of ideas is the result of

selection and shaping which reflects the perspective of the historian — and it is no accident that Noel Annan is himself an intellectual in this tradition. Among the similarities between the successive groups which he points out are their belief in salvation by the exercise of personal judgment (whether that personal judgment leads them to Jesus, agnosticism, or personal relationships), individual pursuit of the truth, a challenge to the aristocratic establishment (a seriousness of life which looked unkindly on, say, gambling or hunting), a loyalty to ideals rather than institutions, to ethics rather than political power. There were also differences, and Annan does point out how the bigotry of some evangelicals would be abhorrent to humanists.

E. M. Forster made a similar link in his essay (1939) on his great-grandfather, Henry Thornton — a leading member of the Clapham Sect. Forster, the Bloomsbury man, is gently critical of his evangelical forbear: "The world has not progressed as Henry Thornton hoped. The evils in human nature, which he realized, and the evils in commercialism, which he could not realize, have combined to pull it down, and the religious remedies that he proposed seem today formal and trifling".

The spirit that imbues evangelism, agnosticism, and Bloomsbury is found in a letter which Francis Newman wrote to Moncure Conway: "I was an Evangelical, but like plenty of Evangelicals beside, both now and then, was resolved to follow the Truth *whithersoever it led me*. . . ." This resolve could lead to humanism, both as a conclusion and as an approach. It is perhaps why humanism is in a way the ultimate non-theistic Protestant sect, which is why it has flourished in protestant countries, while anti-clericalism is stronger in Catholic countries. "Protestantism in an aspect", Stephen wrote, "is simply rationalism still ruaning about with the shell in its head". Is humanism Protestantism running around without a shell on its head?

Annan, though apparently admiring Stephen's plain speaking and his ethical concern, is critical of rationalism. He suggests that Stephen failed to realise that ritual "suffuses communal emotion and helps a man to adjust himself psychologically to his fellow men". (What about women?) He feels that Stephen did not "ask himself why ideas he thought preposterous had lasted so long and what dilemma in human existence they claimed to explain". These are questions freethinkers should not ignore.

Annan's first-class history of ideas is at times ponderous, at times over-inclined to see Oxbridge as the centre of the universe; but it is crammed with ideas and contains 50 pages of notes and references which would provide a comprehensive study course for anyone interested in the history of Victorian scepticism. He concludes with a description of Stephen by Lowes Dickinson as a certain type of "Cambridge man": "It is a type unworldly

without being saintly, unambitious without being inactive, warm-hearted without being sentimental. Through good report and ill such men work on following the light of truth as they see it; able to be sceptical without being paralysed; content to know what is knowable and to reserve judgement on what is not. The world could never be driven by such men,

for the springs of action lie deep in ignorance and madness. But it is they who are the beacon in the tempest, and they are more, not less, needed now than ever before. May their succession never fail!" The type is, of course, much more universal — and Leslie Stephen was an admirable example.

JIM HERRICK

AIDS—We MUST be Rational

ANTONY GREY

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a disastrous health hazard that has spread to many parts of the world, including Britain, over the last decade. Antony Grey, Convenor of the British Association for Counselling's AIDS Panel, and a former Secretary of the Homosexual Law Reform Society, asserts that the Government is not facing the seriousness of the situation.

I remember, as a child, a hot summer's holiday in Munich year at Bournemouth (so genteel in those days!) while Hitler rampaged around Europe and Chamberlain scuttled to and fro across the Channel. We knew, even then, that war was coming. But amidst the peace of an English holiday resort, it all seemed utterly unreal. So did the Government's sandbags-and-paper-strips-on-your-windows "preparations" for air raids. Yet the war soon became all too horribly real, and dominated all our lives for the foreseeable future.

This is what springs to mind in July 1986, sitting in a sunny, peaceful English garden writing about AIDS. It still all seems so unreal. But the new world health crisis is a fact; the logic of the statistics is inescapable; friends tell me with increasing frequency of the dying and dead whom they know of. To most people, however, it is still merely a spine-tingling media scare story with juicy overtones of homosexuality and drug-taking.

There is little comfort in the facts as we know them so far. Since AIDS first surfaced in North America in 1981, and in Europe a couple of years later, the graphs of those known to be infected with the virus have continued to rise steeply, and their projections by the various world health authorities are uniformly pessimistic. The lengthy incubation period — now believed to average as much as six years and even longer — adds to the uncertainty over the actual state of affairs. The increasing likelihood that some of those infected will remain symptomless for ten or a dozen years, and will then develop brain damage and die of senile dementia whilst still in their prime, adds a horrendous new twist. If the figures of 300,000 *new* cases a year by the early 1990s given at the recent Paris international

conference are accurate, the whole world faces a situation of catastrophic proportions. When figures like 30 million AIDS-infected people in Africa are seriously advanced, the social impact on that continent is mind-boggling. And such a calamity cannot be isolated to a single area of the world: no such epidemic ever has been.

Those who contract full-blown AIDS are merely the tip of an iceberg. Many more will suffer from AIDS-Related Complex (ARC), and will be very seriously ill even if they survive; whilst a vastly greater number who are carriers of the HIV aids virus (seropositives) may remain well indefinitely but are potentially infectious to their sexual partners and those with whom they even inadvertently exchange blood and other body fluids.

So far, there is no known medical intervention strategy which can cure an AIDS sufferer. All that can be done is to treat the opportunistic infections which they develop, endeavour to prolong their remission periods (during which some AIDS sufferers can live at home, work and lead a fairly normal life), and care for them as well as possible when they are dying. Nor is any preventive vaccine yet on the horizon. So the only effective way of checking the rapid spread of AIDS is by publicising the facts about its transmission (the virus is in fact quite hard to catch), and persuading those most at risk because of their lifestyles to change their behaviour in ways which will make it less likely that they will become infected.

This brings us to the Government's role. In the United States some public authorities, notably San Francisco and Los Angeles, both cities with a numerous gay population, have been commendably courageous. However, the same cannot be said of the British Government — at least so far. Out of a central funding provision for 1985/86 of £8.3 million, £3.65 million has been allocated for treatment and counselling, £2.6 million for public health education, £1.9 million for screening and laboratory services, and a mere £150,000 for the voluntary sector. The "counselling" referred to is minimal, and mainly concerns the pros and cons of taking the antibody test and its immediate aftermath. The two Government public health advertisements which

have appeared so far in the national press have been unanimously derided as incomprehensible and mealy-mouthed by all the medical and other AIDS specialists I have spoken to. Yet the Secretary of State for Health and Social Services complacently assures MPs that "the Government recognises the full extent of the public health implications of this disease".

In fact, they remain determinedly ignorant of it and their unwillingness to grasp the issues reminds me poignantly of the "phoney war" when almost everyone chose to believe that we were going to "hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line" and polish off Hitler by Christmas, 1939.

One of the basic reasons, of course, is that this Government, whose totem cries are of "the Individual" and "Free Choice", is instinctively hostile to unconventional minorities and alternative lifestyles as its dismal record on civil liberties and its determined opposition to liberalisation of the anti-homosexual laws in Ulster and the Armed Forces or of the absurd drugs legislation shows. Whilst not wishing to be party-political or Christian-bashing about AIDS, I fear that the crassly ignorant statements about it, and the attacks upon the main categories of sufferers, coming from some Tory MPs and the usual bunch of evangelical Jesus-botherers have demonstrated yet again that the typically English vice is not buggery but humbuggery.

I have actually been solemnly assured by a Christian gynaecologist that it is a "fact" that if there weren't any homosexuals, there wouldn't have been any AIDS! The "wrath of God" brigade are in full cry (or should I say full Gale?) and the most burning topic in the religious press for weeks was whether or not you could catch AIDS from sharing the communion chalice (bizarrely known amongst the trendily progressive as the "loving cup"). The answer, from all the doctors, is an unequivocal and resounding "No!"; but whether this will calm the ignoble panic of believers in an after-life who, ironically, seem to find the prospect of dying much more frightening than those of us who assume it leads to nowhere in particular, is dubious.

With so little good news, no signs as yet of any magical medical breakthrough, and an urgent need for much less public panic and media provocation, the essential requirement for everyone who wants to be responsible and caring in this sombre situation is to be as balanced, calm and factual in their approach to the individual tragedies and social priorities of AIDS as they can be. Here, perhaps more than anywhere else in the closing years of the twentieth century, is a prime testing ground for those qualities of rationality, compassion and love of our fellow men and women which — rather than any fear or worship of a speculative God — distinguishes human-kind from other species.

seconds of the phone-in which followed the Evans interview, managed to point out that he had made a travesty of words like equality and democracy. The true test of democratic society committed to equality for all rested on three fundamental freedoms — freedom of choice, freedom of speech and freedom of movement.

If one analysed Botha's most recent speech at the National Party Congress, it soon became clear that none of these freedoms would feature in the Brave New South Africa. Blacks would not, for example, be allowed to choose a white school for their children, or a home in a white area; freedom of speech would continue to be viciously crushed; and blacks would still be despatched in vast numbers to the vast concentration camps euphemistically called "Homelands". In other words no change at all.

Evans said he did not think the freedoms I spelled out were important. Much more significant, he thought, were freedom of religion, and a free and independent judiciary, both of which South Africa proudly possessed.

Demonstrating again the spuriousness for which all Nationalist politicians and embassy representatives are renowned, Evans conveniently omitted to point out that only those who practiced a brand of Christianity approved of by his regime enjoyed freedom — such as the sycophantic Bishop Lekganyane (who, if he ever dared to set foot in a whites-only Dutch Reformed Church, would be thrown out on his obsequious neck); and that, while it is true that the judiciary still has some measure of independence, it has signally failed to protect the interests of the vast number of blacks who are denied judicial consideration through the simple expediency of detention without trial. There are now an estimated 14,000 such people detained under the latest Emergency regulations, of which a third are under 18. There can be no doubt that each and every one of these people are having to endure the sort of torture which, it was recently revealed, was inflicted on detainee Father Smangaliso Mkhatswa, a leading Roman Catholic priest.

The torture he endured from interrogators who stressed that "the Bible tells you to obey authority" included the insertion of "a creepy creature or instrument" into his anus while he stood handcuffed and blindfolded, and being made to remain standing for 29 hours. It was only by virtue of his status that the Bishop's plight was revealed in the Pretoria Supreme Court, which ordered an immediate halt to his torture. Others, who haven't money, influence or knowledge of the law, are destined to continue being incarcerated without trial and tortured and killed by police who, in terms of the Emergency regulations, are empowered to act as judges, jailers

and executioners.

And where cases have come to trial, there has been a total absence of justice. For example, last month a magistrate in the Cape sentenced 14 black children, aged between 13 and 17 to jail terms of seven or eight years for arson and damage to a car.

Given that Botha and his power-crazed cronies sincerely believe that they have the God-given right to keep on governing South Africa, and to control the destinies of their neighbours; that they have absolutely no regard for the lives of black people; and that, thanks to the support of the West, they possess a terrifying arsenal including nuclear weapons, the scene, I fear, is set for a massacre of hideous proportions unless urgent steps are taken to ensure that the victims of apartheid no longer have to face their oppressors armed only with sticks, rocks and petrol bombs.

LETTERS

HUMANISTS AND THE UNIVERSE

The correspondence in these columns that followed my review of James Hemming's *Instead of God* (March) cannot be left to straggle on. Having started it with the review, I have been given the last word, not to stamp in my own points, but to try to tidy up.

In such a discussion, it should be acknowledged that to say comprehensively, "Physics says. . .", is not the language of physics, but of metaphysics. The same would be true in biology or in history. The ground of agreement that obtains among specialists working in the laboratory or the library or the field does not obtain at the macroscopic or general level of discourse, even if it is a physicist or biologist or historian speaking. And it has to be recognized that the "whole" necessary for an understanding of an internal combustion engine or the human body, or of a market economy or of the biological evolution of species, is not the kind of whole of a possible universe of universes, except by analogy. (Hemming's aids to imagination in his September letter are irrelevant to such a concept.) There is of course nothing wrong with philosophical discourse and argument by analogy, if their logic is respected; with the caution that more than two thousand years of inconclusive verbal argument has to stand comparison with some two hundred years of spectacular advance by collaborative division of labour in building reliable universal knowledge. The "thinking together" to which James Hemming contributes in his book can be useful, if in the nature of the case never conclusive. There is no last word.

What James Hemming was concerned to do in his book was to provide on humanist assumptions positive ground for humanist ideals and aspirations in which a new generation may root and thrive. To counter negative conclusions to the effect that the human race is one of the multitude of cosmic accidents, and doomed to eventual extinction, he insists that emerging from the crowd of accidents is a discernable direction of developmental change, that the birth and growth of consciousness are potentially there in the nature of things, and in that sense necessary, not casual; in short, that the open and caring society as a humanist ideal is an adoption and adaptation of natural trends. His critic, Harry Stopes-Roe, is equally at work to

show that the roots of morality are in the ground of human nature.

For myself, I am at work to show that the human race can get its universals from the development of homo sapiens in the historical cultures of the world, the relation of the present to the past and the future. These are all forms of human self-awareness, sought and used to justify and reinforce humanist values. Are they merely rationalizations posing as the rationale of humanism? What we agree about as humanists, in terms of tolerant and caring human relations, is solid, and some would say self-justifying. The resort to philosophical argument to find or provide rational grounds is necessary to rational beings. Let us beware of the odious odium theologicum in so doing. It is the more absurd if what is sought is a pragmatic sanction. If our hearts are in unison on practical fundamentals, let our heads go on talking about why they should be, in order to persuade others. So long as we do that in a way that is likely to do just that.

H. J. BLACKHAM

This correspondence is closed.—Editor.

COMMON GROUND

From time to time the question is asked why is there so little growth in the numbers of people accepting the secularist / rationalist / humanist / agnostic / atheist / free-thinking approach to life.

I recently saw the film, *Superman II*, and believe that it shows a major part of the answer. My whole impression of the film was that it expounded the ideas and emotions of a simplistic religion rather than mere showbiz razzmatazz.

Secularists often fail to see that all major religions offer a scheme for living within their supernatural wrapping. Moderates, in such religions, may well ask in what way their lifestyles differ from secularist proposals.

Most humans find that life gets a little out of control and is subject to forces both unexpected and unclearly defined. The multi-million success of *Superman II* suggests that supernatural help is seen by many to be far more promising than human limitations.

The above comments do not, in any way, imply that supernatural forces exist, but rather that a high percentage of humanity see a need for them. The almost universal belief in astrology and the paranormal, even among the highly intelligent, is evidence of this need.

It seems that those wishing to remove superstitious belief should look deeper into human nature before they begin to use logical arguments. The subject merits further research.

R. G. SILSON

FREE SPEECH FOR FREEMASONS

You report (September) with apparent approval that Manchester City Council has forbidden the hire of the Town Hall to freemasons. Why is your paper not condemning this disgusting violation of free speech?

Freemasonry, which I abhor, is a legal organisation, and whatever consenting adults do in private is not the criterion. Unless we support the right of free speech, even when we disagree with what is being said, then we join Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, the Vicar of Rome and all past and present dictators.

Don't forget that if this year we condone Big Brother's banning of free speech to the freemasons, next year Big Sister may do the same to freethinkers.

P. J. GAMGEE

MISUNDERSTANDING

I think that John L. Broom has misunderstood Charles Guignebert (September). The latter can hardly have argued that Jesus' tomb was not empty; that would be to argue that the body was still in the tomb! What Guignebert argued was that Jesus' body was thrown into a common pit and that that the story of the empty tomb was a later invention (Jesus, page 500). I suggest that my statement is not wrong, as Broom claims.

Incidentally, it is simplistic to regard the Gospels as "historically unreliable", a conclusion that could only be accepted if there was some more reliable evidence from the period.

I cannot imagine what David Shaw saw in the ramblings of ex-nun Phyllis Graham (The Jesus Hoax, 1974). It is a worthless book. STEUART CAMPBELL

Christian Right in Censorship Crusade

People for the American Way, a new Washington-based organisation, has warned that the religious Right in the United States is no longer content with censoring "dirty" books. A survey it conducted reveals that Christian fundamentalists are attacking ideas through a nationwide censoring of school textbooks and library books.

PWA president, Anthony Podesta, says that acts of censorship show that "almost sixty per cent of the incidents were attempts to censor ideas, information and teaching methods. Censors today don't just ban books. They want to ban ideas different from their own".

The censorship drive is being spearheaded by fundamentalist organisations like the National Legal Foundation, Concerned Women for America and Christians for Excellence in Education. The latter aims to "bring public education back under control of Christians by taking complete control of all school boards".

Nearly forty foreign language and school textbooks have been withdrawn from Alabama schools. Science textbooks which cited dinosaurs as supporting the theory of evolution have been banned in Louisiana. A sixth of the biology textbooks now being used in schools do not refer to evolution.

The PWA report highlights the extent to which religious intolerance is affecting American schools.

It warns that book banning and censorship can inflict serious damage on the nation's educational system.

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EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. New Venture Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton. Sunday, 2 November, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. Frank Gray: Why War?

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Annual Dinner at Langford's Hotel, Third Avenue, Hove, Saturday, 8 November, 7 pm for 7.30 pm. Vegetarians catered for by arrangement. Guest speaker: Nicolas Walter. Tickets £6.50 from Joan Wimble, Flat 5, 67 St Aubyns, Hove, BN3 2TL, telephone Brighton 733215.

Edinburgh Freethinkers Group. Information regarding fortnightly meetings for younger humanists is obtainable from Box 120, First of May Bookshop, 43 Candlemaker Row, Edinburgh.

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.

Glasgow Humanist Society. Exhibition: Humanism in Scotland, The Mitchell Library, Glasgow, until the end of October.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 30 October, 7.45 pm. John White: Humanism and the Arts.

Humanist Holidays. Christmas at Bournemouth. Information obtainable from Gillian Bailey, 18 Priors Road, Cheltenham, GL52 5AA, telephone 0242 39175.

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

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 19 October, 11 am. Ellis Hillman: A Clutch of Trinities — Holy, Female and Profane. 3 pm, Sam Beer: A Journey Through Caucasia. Sunday, 26 October, 11 am. Christopher Hampton: The Influence of Baroque Rome on the Counter-Reformation. 3 pm, Leslie Jones and F. A. Ridley: Winstanley and the Diggers.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 12 November, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. Dr Derek Richter: Rehabilitation of Mental Health Patients.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House, Hill Street (off Corporation Street), Coventry. Monday, 17 November, 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 044 128 3631.

Huge Handouts to Religious Entrepreneurs

Norman Godman, Labour MP for Port Glasgow and Greenock, has called for a top-level inquiry into the allocation of Manpower Services Commission funds of over £1 million to two religious groups. Mr Godman says he wants the Employment Minister "to initiate an immediate, thorough and rigorous examination of a number of serious allegations about the conduct of certain MSC officials".

There has been serious disquiet for some time about the way that the Commission's community programme is being run in Paisley. The area manager is a lay preacher, Matt Bleakley. He is pastor of the Adelphi Mission, which received £59,000 for a project.

The Renfrewshire Evangelistic Association has also been the recipient of considerable sums from the Manpower Services Commission. Its president is James Elliot, owner of two companies, James Elliot Associates and Lindfield Sitework Ltd. The latter's registered address is given as Renfrewshire Evangelistic Association's Halls.

Bleakley and Elliot have been acquainted since childhood days. They have preached in each other's churches. Mr Bleakley denies showing favouritism towards the Evangelistic Association.

The Lanarkshire area board has also handed over £250,000 to an American religious sect, apparently unaware of its intended use. The Latter Rain Ministries received the money for improvements to a 40-room mansion at High Blantyre. Pastors LaVere Soper and Bill Tilney, from Tulsa, Oklahoma, have converted the building into a conference centre. They

run courses on "divine healing, righteousness, the principles of prayer and financial management". The fee is £100, plus £84 a week for full board.

The Clyde Valley Christian Centre has received £117,000 for work on a 100-room mansion outside Lanark. This is the first stage in a £6 million development of houses and flats for private sale. The company is headed by a charismatic preacher named the Rev David Black. He stressed that the organisation is a charity.

George Wycherley, chairman of the Lanarkshire MSC board, commented: "We didn't know that one of these organisations was using the upgrading of the estate at High Blantyre as a selling feature for commercial reasons. None of us on the board knew of this.

"I feel we have been lulled into a false sense of security because the applications were made by Christian charities.

"We do take things on trust when we see applications from Christian-based groups".

Mother Advised to Avoid Born-Again Christians

"I would suggest that born-again Christians are not good for you, and you might think it desirable to keep out of their way", Judge Gabriel Hutton told a young mother of two boys at Gloucester Crown Court last month. Mrs Lyn Loughrey was put on probation for three years for unlawfully wounding her son in a frenzied attack. He recovered in hospital.

The court heard how Mrs Loughrey stabbed four-year-old Ben with a pair of scissors, after becoming convinced that he was Satan. Her husband heard Ben screaming and found him lying on the bed with a pair of dress-making scissors stuck in his back.

Prosecuting counsel said that Mrs Loughrey had a history of instability. In the weeks before the attack she was fit and well.

"But she came into contact with a local fellowship of born-again Christians", he added.

"Such groups tend to practise their faith with a particular evangelical fervour. She attended meetings and went to Bible study sessions. She developed a preoccupation with the devil and the supernatural.

"That developed into a delusion that her eldest son Ben was Satan, and that her youngest son, Ryan, was Christ reborn. Her duty was to kill Ben and then herself in order to save the reborn Christ in the form of Ryan".

Ritual Slaughter

However, many enlightened Jews (and Muslims) have adopted pre-stunning or have become vegetarians. But others still insist on following the barbaric tradition.

In contrast to the Jewish tradition, Halal does not require a thorough training of the slaughterer. There is no method of training or control. Before a killing, the name of Allah must be invoked to remind the slaughterman that the life of an animal is sacred. But in the conditions of a modern conveyor-line poultry slaughterhouse, it is sufficient to pronounce the name of Allah only when the line is started.

The British Veterinary Association is also opposed to ritual slaughter. Its members ask how they can reprimand a slaughterman for inefficiently stunning an animal while ritual slaughter without stunning is taking place all the time in the same abattoir.

• **The address of Compassion in World Farming is 20 Lavant Street, Petersfield, Hampshire, GU32 3EW, telephone (0730) 64208.**