

The Freethinker

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RELIGIOUS FAITH INSPIRES FANATICISM, VIOLENCE AND MENTAL SLAVERY

In its annual report the National Secular Society refers to "a welcome increase in the struggle to defeat terrorism". It also comments on a reluctance in the West to acknowledge the fact "that most large-scale acts of terrorism, like most of the local wars that are going on all the time around the globe, are caused, and then perpetuated, largely by hostility between different religions or religious sects — between Sikh and Hindu, Muslim and Jew, one sect of Muslim and another, and one sect of Christian and another. Indiscriminate violence demands utter confidence in the rightness of one's cause — and there is nothing like religion for this sort of certitude".

In Northern Ireland it has always been denied on both sides that the conflict had more than a nominal religious component.

"But at last it is being more widely admitted that religion is indeed a major if not the major — factor in the unending hostilities there".

Religion was responsible for the most recent setback to any hope of a united Ireland in the foreseeable future. A Bill to legalise divorce in the Republic was defeated, largely because of Church opposition.

"Public opinion there had been running strongly in favour of the Bill until a last-minute campaign by the RC Church succeeded in bringing the people to heel just in time for the referendum — thus preventing thousands of people from breaking the shackles of an unhappy marriage so as to regularise a happy one".

The report declares that the NSS is virtually the only organisation in Britain that actively campaigns for the separation of Church and State. It has taken every opportunity to express the secularist viewpoint on social issues, both on behalf of its members and of the considerable proportion of unbelievers.

There is a comment on the *UK Christian Hand-*

book, published last October, admitting a decline in all the mainstream Christian churches. The combined numbers of practising Baptists and Methodists have been overtaken by practising Muslims. Jibes about racism must not prevent secularists from making justified criticism of Muslims.

But although the traditional churches are rapidly losing adherents, "they are enabled through their anomalous historical privileges and inherited wealth to exercise far more influence than their public support warrants.

"In particular, they continue to demand censorship whenever anything is broadcast or published that pokes fun at religious subjects or otherwise offends their prissy sensibilities.

"A few years ago, Mrs Whitehouse and her cronies in the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association carried the torch of repression almost alone, but recently other groups dedicated to 'Victorian Values' have been springing up to man the barricades".

The NSS still has an important role to play, in spite of universal education and modern technology.

"The law of this country still requires our schools to introduce children to religious myths and doctrine, and, even worse, to religious practice in the daily collective act of worship. And though an increasing number of schools, to their credit, now secularise these compulsory items of the timetable, there are no signs of Parliament bringing the law into line with modern views, whatever the practical difficulties that the requirements of the law would, if obeyed to the letter, create in multi-faith schools".

Although many people have left the churches, they have not discarded the old religious mentality. They often turn to upstart cults that are even more pernicious than the worn-out sects they have abandoned.

(continued on back page)



The Freethinker

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Editor: WILLIAM McILROY

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NEWS A

CLOWN COLONY

Christians no longer have the power to burn their opponents (and each other) at the stake, so Ulster Protestants greeted 1987 by symbolically consigning the Anglo Irish agreement to the flames.

And the Rev Ian Paisley hit the headlines last month when he made his umpteenth appearance in the long-running farce, *Ulster Says "No"*. The performance was staged in the European Parliament as a curtain raiser to Mrs Thatcher's act. Paisley complained that the audience was unenthusiastic, being "full of Communists and Roman Catholics". But, nothing daunted, he managed to hog the world television cameras.

Next day newspaper readers were treated to full reports of the spectacle. The same week, some of the dailies devoted much less space to the announcement that the Government is to spend £680 million on security alone in Northern Ireland during the next financial year. And this figure represents only ten per cent of public spending in the six counties. Almost £50 million will be allocated to the potentially dangerous Ulster Defence Regiment. The locally recruited force includes former members of the disbanded "B" Specials terrorist organisation. UDR members have made frequent court appearances on serious criminal charges, including murder.

Secretary of State Tom King stated the obvious: "The only thing that Paisley succeeded in doing was to disgrace the image of Northern Ireland in the influential European arena". Britain is paying a heavy price for the Unionists' intransigence. The Northern Ireland office entertains a hope that the Anglo Irish agreement will eventually be accepted by "moderate" Unionists. It is a forlorn hope; moderate Unionists are as scarce as snowflakes in hell.

Although Conservative leaders make soothing noises about "the wishes of the majority", they are becoming increasingly dubious about subsidising the intractable "loyalists". Ironically, it is the Conservatives who have stripped their most loyal and sycophantic supporters of their powers, except the control of cemeteries and disposal of rubbish.

For years the Moderator of the Free Presbyterian Church has been bawling threats and abuse in the direction of Dublin and London. Any reference to the concept of a united Ireland provokes an explosion of wrathful bigotry. But his political and religious rantings are self-defeating. Every time the Rev Ian Paisley opens his mouth, a piece of the Border falls away.

S AND NOTES

DAWSON AGAINST THE BISHOPS

Kenneth Rose, King George V's biographer, described the revelation that Lord Dawson, physician to four monarchs, prematurely ended the King's life in January 1936 as "the most astonishing thing that I have ever heard about the King". Royalty worshippers are just as astonished by the news that Queen Mary and the then Prince of Wales told Dawson that they did not want the King's life to be prolonged if there was no hope of recovery. The final injection to end the King's suffering was timed to ensure that the announcement of his death appeared in the morning, rather than the "less appropriate" evening newspapers.

So even in death, Lord Dawson of Penn (1864-1945) has managed to put the humanitarian cat among the conformist pigeons. He was a formidable character who, despite his elevated position, was not afraid of controversy. He was not afraid of the bishops either.

From his days as a young doctor, Dawson was a firm but discreet supporter of birth control. In 1886, he and a group of colleagues published a four-page leaflet entitled *Few in the Family, Happiness at Home*. Dawson wrote the first draft of the leaflet which advised parents: "After the birth of the first child, delay the conception of another until you feel well able to bear the additional responsibility and expense. . . Always make sure you can give your child a fair chance in the world, before you bring it into existence". Wise words, but highly provocative at a time when the Church of England and other Protestant churches were fully in accord with Rome on the question of birth control.

It should be remembered that until well within living memory the Anglican clergy were (publicly at least) redoubtable opponents of family planning. Liberal prevarication on the subject aroused the reactionaries to a state of frenzy. The cautiously worded memorandum in 1914 by a committee of bishops made a few minor concessions. But it was furiously denounced by the diehards whose representative, the Bishop of Southwark, declared: "The only thing that justifies ultimately the intercourse between the man and the woman is the purpose and desire to have children. . . I disapprove entirely of intercourse if there is any other motive". (Oddly enough the Census Report of three years previously showed that the Anglican clergy had among the lowest birth rate on record.)

Bishops at the 1920 Lambeth Conference passed a resolution condemning what they described as "unnatural means" of preventing conception. They opposed teachings which "encourages married people in the deliberate cultivation of sexual union as an end in itself".

The following year Lord Dawson hit back when he addressed the lay Church Conference in Birmingham. By that time he was a leader of the medical profession and his words carried considerable weight. He described as "an invertebrate, joyless thing" the type of sexual relationship idealised by the Lambeth Conference. "Fortunately", he added significantly, "it is in contrast to the real thing as practised by clergy and laity".

Undeterred by attacks from religious quarters and the gutter press, Lord Dawson continued to shock the orthodox at meetings and debates. But it was another ten years before family planning was officially — if tardily — approved by the Lambeth Conference.

CHRISTIAN CENSORS

We can but hope that radio and television producers are not being hoodwinked by the artificially spontaneous protests they receive every time the words "damn" or "Christ" are heard in a programme. Not surprisingly, BBC Radio 4 programmes like *Radio Active* and *Week Ending* are prime targets for protesters. Programmes which gleefully send up the Pope and the Rev Ian Paisley are obviously a conspiracy to procure the downfall of western Christian civilisation as we know it.

Over the last two decades a network of letter-writing religious pressure groups has been developed by Mary Whitehouse and lesser luminaries. These censorious prudes are little concerned about facts, truth, or peoples right to choose what they shall read, see, or hear. After enjoying being shocked, they soothe their guilty conscience by writing epistles against "purveyors of filth", as one correspondent expressed it in the Salvation Army newspaper, the *War Cry*.

The same writer appealed for Christians "to protest loud enough and long enough in large numbers" against programmes that do not conform to their prim, vacuous standards. Of course this is not censorship — "it is trying to protect children and the weak-minded".

Christian zealots who believe that new-born babies are tainted by "original sin" should be the last to accuse others of corrupting the young. Children who spend much of their time in the school playground or sports field are unlikely to be tainted even by Auntie's excesses. And it is not a programme like *Radio Active*, but *Prayer for the Day*, that is aimed at the weak-minded.

OBITUARY

Mr E. Gomm

Edwin (Ted) Gomm died in St Stephen's Hospital, Chelsea, last month at the age of 83.

Ted Gomm was a much travelled and mildly eccentric man. His decision a few years ago to accept a prison sentence rather than pay a parking fine was widely publicised. When asked his religion he said "freethinker" to the warder — who promptly wrote down "Church of England". While in prison he attended Sunday services to pass the time. But he promptly departed on one occasion when the preacher was from the Salvation Army.

He later entertained a Rotary Club and other bodies with talks about his prison experiences. An

appreciative listener at one function was the chairman of the bench of magistrates that sentenced him.

Ted Gomm was for many years a member of the Independent Labour Party and later the Labour Party. He was chairman of the ward Labour Party in Colne, Lancashire, where he lived before moving to London last summer. One of his close friends in Colne was Sidney Silverman, when he was Member of Parliament for the constituency. He was active in the Clarion movement, and for many years theatre critic for the *Socialist Leader*, the former political weekly founded by Keir Hardie.

A lifelong freethinker, Ted Gomm was a member of the National Secular Society and a *Freethinker* reader for many years. There was a secular committal ceremony at Putney Vale Crematorium, London.

Freethinker Fund

Financial stability of many voluntary organisations is often dependent on grants from charitable trusts, big business or, if they are dedicated to the promotion of religious superstition, sympathetic consideration of their case by the Charity Commissioners. The freethought movement, on the other hand, has always had to rely on the generosity of its members and supporters. And when asked to finance a specific campaign, project or publishing venture, they have never failed to rally around.

Publication of *The Freethinker* since 1881 is a very positive achievement. Although the fur often flies in its columns, and successive editors have suffered severe inflammation of the ears, there has always been an immense reservoir of goodwill for the paper. This is demonstrated in many ways by its writers and readers, recognising that although there may be differences of opinion and emphasis, it is essential that we maintain this regular forum of the secular humanist viewpoint.

Every month a list of contributors to the Fund is published. Throughout the year, donations large and small, from individual readers and local groups, have helped *The Freethinker* to bridge the gap between income and expenditure. We announce, with deep gratitude to all concerned, that during 1986 over £3,000 was donated to the Fund.

The list of donations received during November and December is given below.

D. Mitchell, £1; E. S. Barker, R. J. Beal, J. M. Cardy, C. M. Bondi, B. Clarke, J. W. Darling, T. J. Davies, R. Delaurey, N. Ferguson, B. Forder, J. G. Gerrard, H. R. Haydon, G. M. Hilton, P. Irving, M. Konrad-Kosicki, N. Levenson, H. G. McIver, T. A. Millar, R. W. Philpott, D. Pickett, R. Power, G. Swain, O. Watson and B. C. Whiting, £1.40 each; A. Dawn and R. Huxtable, £2 each; M. Bendall, G.

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Total for November and December: £505.65.
Grand total for 1986: £3,076.10 and \$13.

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Deaths of a King and a Commoner

BARBARA SMOKER

Two family doctors, fifty years apart, helped dying patients to die more quickly, with dignity. The first practitioner was famous for his bedside manner and the patronage of three generations of the royal family; the second, described by his own counsel as "a man with a very blunt manner", has a National Health practice. Barbara Smoker, former Chairman of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, explains how the two cases came together in a remarkable way at the end of November 1986.

From 11 to 29 November, 1986, Dr John Carr, a Yorkshire general practitioner, was in the dock at Leeds Crown Court, on a charge of attempted murder. He had, on 1 August, 1985, given a patient, Ronald Mawson, a lethal injection of phenobarbitone. Though the patient had died, the charge was attempted murder, since natural causes could not be ruled out. The accused pleaded Not Guilty, on grounds that he had miscalculated the dose in error. But as the evidence piled up, the outlook began to look black for him. Another similar case against him was (in the absence of the jury) mentioned. And the judge was clearly hostile to the prisoner.

Suddenly, on 26 November, as the trial drew to its close, the news broke in the mass media that Francis Watson (author of the book *Dawson of Penn*) had written an article for the December issue of *History Today*, "The Death of George V", in which he revealed sensational details from the royal physician's extant (but hitherto unpublished) private notebook. At Sandringham, on the evening of Monday, 20 January, 1936, Dawson wrote:

At about 11 o'clock it was evident that the last stage might endure for many hours, unknown to the Patient but little comporting with that dignity and serenity which he so richly merited and which demanded a brief final scene. Hours of waiting just for the mechanical end when all that is really life has departed only exhausts the onlookers & keeps them so strained that they cannot avail themselves of the solace of thought, communion or prayer. I therefore decided to determine the end and injected (myself) morphia gr. 3/4 & shortly afterwards cocaine gr. 1 into the distended jugular vein: "myself" because it was obvious that Sister B. was disturbed by this procedure.

A bulletin was broadcast on the wireless at ten minutes after midnight that the King had died peacefully at 11.55 pm, and the news of his death made the morning papers. That, it transpires, was one of Dawson's motives in hastening the end — "the first announcement in the morning papers rather than the less appropriate evening journals" — and he had earlier telephoned his wife in London to advise *The Times* (the paper that really mattered) to hold up its first edition for an announcement expected (confidently) at about midnight.

The details, withheld for more than fifty years, received considerable press coverage, but most of the papers treated it with a certain flippancy. *The Times*, to whose interest Dawson had given so much weight, now commented: "Even in those days it was a bit above the odds to be tipped off that the king was about to die by the man who was killing him".

The Independent, surely tongue in cheek, asked in its front-page headline "Was George V's death treason?", and quoted a Law Society spokesman as saying "If Queen Mary and the then Prince of Wales did knowingly consent to the King's life being prematurely shortened, they would both have been guilty as accessories to treason and murder". The *Daily Telegraph* carried a cartoon (by Marc) in which an upper-class lady asks "But surely, doctor, if it was alright for royalty it's good enough for Mother?" And, in the same issue, a leading article took the strangely British line that any blame should fall not on Dawson or the Queen or the Prince, but on Francis Watson, for having let the cat out of the bag, even though fifty years after the event.

The Sunday Times was most openly pro-euthanasia, contrasting George V's expeditious death with the lingering deaths of Churchill and Franco, and commenting "Let the king, as the last public service of a public life, die with dignity and dispatch" — though, "to a modern eye", Dawson's consideration of the morning, as opposed to the evening, papers, "looks bad, carrying a double charge of snobbery and news management".

Meanwhile, the judge summed up in the Carr case in Leeds, and the jury retired to consider their verdict. They cannot fail to have read the press comments on that other death, and to have been influenced in their opinions on euthanasia.

Friday evening, the jury were still unable to reach a decision, and the court was, unusually, re-convened for the Saturday.

The judge, obviously thinking that their tardiness was due, in all probability, to a single ultra-liberal juror holding up a proper unanimous conviction, told the jury that he would now accept a majority verdict of ten to one (the twelfth juror having dropped out). When it finally came, the verdict was, to everyone's amazement (and most people's delight), Not Guilty.

The judge seemed to regard it as a perverse verdict, since he refused costs to the defence. The media, though more sympathetic, also treated it as a perverse verdict, ignoring the doctor's accidental plea and commenting on the case as one of active euthanasia.

Even if it were, there was no evidence that it was explicitly voluntary. Nor was there in the case of

George V. But in those pre-war days, patients were rarely told the truth about a poor prognosis, whereas there has been a welcome move in the past few decades towards patient autonomy and informed consent in the matter of treatment. In the final decision, however, the patient, who is the person most concerned, is still, because of the law, generally denied any say as to the manner and timing of his or her own death.

Only when voluntary euthanasia is legalised will doctors be able to act openly in their patients' best interests and thus respond to their last wishes.

Coincidentally, just two weeks after the King's death, the Voluntary Euthanasia (Legalisation) Society (founded in 1935) set up a consultative legal council to draft a parliamentary Bill to legalise voluntary euthanasia. The resulting Bill was introduced, unsuccessfully, into the House of Lords in November 1936 — and one of the peers who spoke and voted against it was, ironically enough, Lord Dawson of Penn. In his view, it was for doctors, not patients, to decide on the most advantageous time of death — all things being considered.

And to this day the law remains unchanged.

Rambo on the Rampage

An American correspondent reports on a crude and highly successful campaign to brainwash a new generation about the United States' role in the Vietnam war. Sylvester Stallone's films have done much to foster pro-war hysteria in "God's own country".

American entertainment taste has hit a new low by making Sylvester Stallone's *Rambo: First Blood, Part Two* a box office smash hit throughout the country. There is nothing *crypto*-Nazi about this film; it openly glorifies war, reinforces racist stereotypes and strives to induce the American psyche to believe that the Vietnam war was noble.

Rambo and similar movies are no coincidence. They come at a time when the vast resources of State propaganda are blaring a new tune about the war: the military was held back from winning it by loathsome politicians; dissent at home caused "us" to lose our way; and, maybe the most pernicious, that the Vietnam veteran was just following orders and should be honoured instead of blamed.

Rambo capitalises on these lies, and for good measure throws in some old-fashioned Red-baiting and race-hating (the Yellow Peril) that would make Goebbels envious. By furthering such deceit, *Rambo* becomes part of the United States' propaganda parade. Of course the film's big lie — American prisoners of war are still being held in Vietnam — should be greeted with the same cynicism as the Nazis' announcement that a Communist had burned down the Reichstag. But the masses swallow the Big Lie with greater enthusiasm than they do the small one.

The pitifulness of Sylvester Stallone as a vertebrate is not only obvious in his films, but also in his babbling to the media. He loves to ramble on about his love of God and country, and of his solidarity with the American common man. At times he becomes so patriotic you would like to hoist him right up a flagpole. But then he will try to put the

big lie. "I'm not political", he recently told a *New York Times* reporter. "Listen", he said, "I'm not Left-wing. I love my country".

Stallone lacks the backbone to stand up for his political convictions and state plainly that he subscribes to a far-Right ideology. His next propaganda piece, *Rocky IV*, will be about fighting a big bear (Russian). Of course the film will be apolitical, with the moral, freedom-loving, religious man winning. Guess who that will be!

The saddest part of this whole *Rambo* phenomenon is that Americans — mostly teenagers too young to know about Vietnam and very susceptible to gung-ho propaganda — are flocking to see it in record numbers. Instead of criticising the film's neanderthal attempts to whitewash history and advance the canard of Right-wing ideology, audiences seem only capable of responding by chanting "USA! USA!" with such patriotic fervour that I was showered with half-chewed popcorn by a young fanatic sitting next to me.

The fact that millions of people see and enjoy *Rambo* is reason enough to take it seriously. The United States' mad dash to the Right is promoted in such films.

● The Roman Catholic Church appears to have lost faith in the power of relics and holy objects to protect the faithful from disease. A handbook distributed to priests in the Brentwood diocese suggests that rosaries and crucifixes at the bedside of an AIDS victim who has died should be burned.

● Eunice White has appeared before Hendon, north London, Magistrates' Court charged with disturbing the peace. She was arrested after shouting religious slogans and waving a crucifix at a group of people in a bus shelter. A policeman told the court: "The people in the bus shelter were very distressed and frightened. One old lady was covering her head, apparently afraid of getting hit with the crucifix". The defendant said: "I was preaching the gospel. I was doing this to please God". She gave the magistrates a demonstration of her preaching. They sent her to prison for two weeks.

Thomas Paine: an Anniversary Tribute

EDWARD ROYLE

Thomas Paine was born on 29 January 1737. During a turbulent career he was involved in two revolutions, the American and the French. Dr Royle, Senior Lecturer in History, University of York, pays a 250th anniversary tribute to the great English radical whose writings influenced generations of free thinkers.

Thomas Paine — only those who wished to belittle him called him “Tom” — was born at Thetford, in Norfolk. He came from a comfortable but hardly wealthy family. His mother was an Anglican and the daughter of an attorney who had her son brought up in the Established Church and sent to the local grammar school. His father, a master staymaker, came of a Quaker background and it was on his insistence that the boy left grammar school at the age of 13, having acquired a plain English education devoid of the Latin style imparted to the older classical scholars. This was to be one of Paine's greatest assets in later life; he wrote the language of the people, not the language of gentlemen.

As he entered manhood, he was a typical, self-improving artisan, independent in outlook, anti-pathetic towards the Established Church and disposed towards plain speaking. There was nothing, though, to suggest the extraordinary career which lay before him.

After working as a staymaker in London, Dover and Sandwich, he married Mary Lambert, the daughter of a customs officer, in 1759. She soon died and he decided to apply to enter his father-in-law's profession. He obtained his first appointment in Grantham in 1764, but was discharged the following year for the common practice of stamping a consignment of merchandise without first inspecting it. He spent some time thereafter in London, teaching English before being re-appointed to the Excise service at Lewes in 1768. Here he lodged with the Ollive family, who kept a tobacconist shop. When Samuel Ollive died the following year, Paine became Mrs Ollive's tenant, ran the shop and in 1771 married her daughter Elizabeth. But then his life fell apart. The business failed and was sold up in 1772, and two years later he was discharged a second time from the Excise and his marriage broke up.

During this period of his life Paine learned about oppressive taxation and the heavy hand of government (as an Excise officer); the problems of the poor (as a member of the Lewes Vestry which was responsible — among other things — for the administration of the poor law); the dangers of credit and the difficulties of the small businessman (from his own failures); and the power of his pen (he led the

agitation of the Excise Officers for higher pay, and wrote his first pamphlet putting their case).

It was while he was in London promoting this cause that he met the American journalist and inventor, Benjamin Franklin, who influenced Paine to make a new start in life after the disastrous events of 1774. With letters of introduction from Franklin, Paine sailed for Pennsylvania in October 1774. Here, in Philadelphia, he encountered a society more alive with political ferment, republican ideas and criticism of George III and his ministers than anything he had encountered in London or Lewes. As editor of the *Pennsylvania Magazine* he showed strong resentment against Britain and against such institutions of the New World as slavery.

Slowly, as the political situation worsened, Paine was drawn into the propaganda of conflict, and in January 1776 published his first great work, *Common Sense*, in which he caught the changing tide of public opinion and expressed it. Demanding independence from Britain, he based his argument on a combination of appeals to first principles and to common sense, uttered in the language not of the classical schools but of modern journalism:

In England a king hath little more to do than to make war and to give away places; which in plain terms is to impoverish the nation and to set it together by the ears. A pretty business indeed for a man to be allowed eight hundred thousand sterling a year for, and worshipped into the bargain! Of more worth is one honest man to society, and in the sight of God, than all the crowned ruffians who ever lived.

Common Sense was an immediate success. As one contemporary wrote, it “struck a string which required but a touch to make it vibrate”. But not everyone welcomed its downright appeal for simple democracy. Already, Paine had his conservative critics in men like John Adams who feared what effect “so popular a pamphlet might have among the people”.

Paine's second literary contribution to the American cause was the *American Crisis*, a series of papers the first of which was written on a drum head by a camp fire and read out to Washington's demoralised troops before the battle of Trenton began to turn the war. The grandeur of style of the opening paragraph can only be compared to Shakespeare's *Henry V* before Agincourt:

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.

What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated.

Paine also served the rebellious colonies as secretary to the Committee for Foreign Affairs — a position he used to advocate closer links with France, but he was forced to resign in January 1779 after making well-founded allegations of financial misconduct against the American agents sent to Versailles to negotiate French military aid. Paine already had many enemies in the administration, and Gouverneur Morris referred to him as “a mere adventurer from England, without fortune, without family or connections”.

In 1787 Paine returned to Europe to promote a scheme for building an iron bridge, a prototype of which was built by Walkers of Rotherham in 1790. But by then events in Paris had recalled him to his first love of polemical politics. In May 1789 the crisis broke in France, and Paine went to Paris to visit his friend, Thomas Jefferson, who was United States ambassador to Versailles. He returned to Britain in March 1790 to take a leading champion of the American cause, Edmund Burke, denouncing the Revolution in France. Few people agreed with Burke at this time, but in November 1790 the publication of his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* marked a turning point in loyalist opinion. Paine was only one of many to rush into print in defence of the French against Burke, but with *Rights of Man*, published in February 1791, it was Paine again who caught the right mood. As Burke himself acknowledged, all the replies to the *Reflections* were “Paine, with some difference in the way of stating”. But it was that difference which was all-important. Public opinion began to polarise around Burke and Paine. The latter became the champion of the radicals and Dissenters; he was feared and hated by supporters of Church and King.

The argument was taken a step further in February 1792 when *Rights of Man, Part 2* was issued, despite a Government attempt to interfere with its publication. Now Paine called for an English Republic: “An hereditary governor is as inconsistent as an hereditary author”. Moreover, he argued that once a cheap republic had been installed in place of an expensive monarchy and aristocracy, there would be sufficient surplus resources to permit the abolition of the poor laws, and the provision of work for the unemployed, education for the children, pensions for the aged, and gifts of money to individuals on the occasions of births, marriages and deaths. The whole system of welfare was to be paid for by a system of progressive taxation of real estate. This theme was taken up again by Paine in 1797 in *Agrarian Justice*, which included a proposal for a ten per

cent inheritance tax.

Such a challenge to the political establishment could not go unbridled. In May 1792, proceedings were begun against Paine’s publisher, and a Royal Proclamation denounced “wicked seditious writings” in general and Paine in particular. A loyal address greeted this proclamation, to which Paine responded with *A Letter Addressed to the Addressers on the Late Proclamation*, his most radical work in which he called for a Convention to be elected in Britain by manhood suffrage to supersede Parliament. This was published while Paine was on his way to France to take up the seat to which he had been elected in the French Convention. He was tried in his absence for sedition, found guilty, and never again returned to his native land.

In Paris, events were moving fast and Paine associated himself with the moderate Girondins in the Convention, already alarmed at the growing violence of the revolution. When King Louis XVI was arrested and tried, Paine pleaded for his life as a private citizen. Like Robespierre, he was opposed to capital punishment; but unlike him Paine was not prepared to make an exception even for “Louis Capet”. The King was executed on 21 January 1793. Within a month, Britain and France were at war, and within a year Paine was under arrest as an enemy alien. During this year of growing extremism, Paine wrote his great theological work, *The Age of Reason*, written to uphold the classical deism of the 18th century Enlightenment and to prevent the French people from “running headlong into atheism”. In *Part 1* he applied to the churches, the Bible and the obscurantism of Christian theology the same scathing reason which he had earlier turned on the British constitution. In *Part 2*, written while Paine was in the Luxembourg prison between November 1793 and November 1794, he savagely attacked the Bible, especially on moral grounds:

The most detestable wickedness, the most horrid cruelties, and the greatest miseries that have afflicted the human race, have had their origin in this thing called revelation, or revealed religion. It has been the most dishonourable belief against the character of the divinity, the most destructive to morality and the peace and happiness of man, that ever was propagated since man began to exist.

So Paine’s message was complete, as priestcraft joined kingcraft as the twin evils which afflicted the world.

On release from gaol, Paine remained in France and wrote several further works, of which the most important were *The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance* (1796) and *Agrarian Justice* (1797). But he was increasingly out of sympathy with the France of Napoleon Bonaparte. He returned to the United States in 1802, but found public opinion markedly more religious and conservative than it had been in the 1780s. The hero

of 1776 was forgotten and died neglected by his countrymen, amid slanders about excessive brandy drinking, on 8 June, 1809 aged 72 years.

Paine's importance lies not so much in his political and social theory as in his popularisation of that theory and its application to current affairs. In itself his thought was not remarkable. His politics were in the tradition of the English Commonwealthsman; his religious thought was classical deism; and his economic thought was that of *laissez-faire* political economy. Like Thomas Jefferson in America, he spoke the language of the small independent producer who resented the burdens of taxation, the interference of the State, the credit system of the rich and the oppressiveness of the idle. His significance lay in his ability to provoke a reaction, as he was taken up by Government and people alike as a symbol of what they most detested or loved. In Britain after 1791, *Rights of Man* became a formative text for groups of artisans meeting to discuss their own position in society and to demand change. In the eyes of the Government he stood for the evil of revolution and successive investigative committees felt it sufficient to establish a connection between Paine's works and political reformers for those reformers to be deemed seditious. Paine's works therefore both stimulated popular radicalism and became the instrument whereby that radicalism was suppressed. His

religious views were also divisive, since many radicals preferred to identify their cause with "true" Christianity rather than dismiss it entirely

A later generation of radicals, though, looked back to Paine for inspiration. William Cobbett, once an inveterate opponent of his ideas, brought his bones back from America as an act of penance — and lost them! Richard Carlile took up Paine's cause after the French Wars were over in 1815 — though he inverted his religious message and for a time advocated that very atheistic materialism which Paine had written against. Above all, Carlile began the practice of celebrating Paine's birthday — a celebration which survived among radical and secularist groups throughout much of the 19th century. In the later 20th century, few now celebrate Paine's birthday in this way. His economic and some even of his political ideas, taken out of context, appear close to those of the radical populism of Mrs Thatcher — although her religion would make him turn in his grave.

Ideas gain their meaning principally from their historical context. It is hard for us now to grasp the shock which greeted the plain, outspoken application of common sense and reason to the most venerable of political and religious institutions. That Paine did offer such criticism is an important part of our heritage — too important a part to be complacently neglected.

Creationism—Back to the Dark Ages ANTONY MILNE

The American education system is being undermined by fanatical Christians determined to impose their "Moral Majority" standards and values on the next generation. Creationists are among the most determined of those elements intent on gaining control of the nation's schools. But there are now signs that educationists and scientists are making a stand against the Christian fundamentalists.

A wave of irrationality threatens to engulf American high schools. Even the American Association for the Advancement of Science feels angry and alarmed about the way the Creationists are daring to, and succeeding in, getting public education institutions to teach their doctrines as science. In some states they have actually succeeded in promoting legislation permitting, and in some cases compelling, schools to teach Creation (as a "science") on equal terms with evolution. There was a brief reversal of the trend in 1982, as an Act of this kind was thrown out by the State of Arkansas, following a sensational court case. Nevertheless the Act did momentarily get onto Arkansas's statute book.

Some of the definitions of the Arkansas Act, typical of what Creationists want to impose nation-

ally, might not unduly worry many biologists and geophysicists; for example where clause (1) defines "Creation-science" to mean "the sudden creation of the universe, energy and life from nothing" (although it depends on what is meant by "nothing"); nor even where it teaches (2) "the insufficiency of mutation and natural selection in bringing about development of all living things from a single organism". Section (4), however, dealing with "separate ancestry for man and apes" is questionable, depending ambiguously on what is meant by "ancestry". But it would be highly specious, and probably damaging to the educational system, to teach children that the Earth and all life on it is a "relatively recent inception".

Creationists argue, quite baldly, that evolution never happened because the Bible says it didn't. At a recent press conference Stephen Jay Gould, the eminent American paleontologist, called Creationism: "A whitewash for a minority religious view in America — Biblical literalism".

Of course not all American Christians, not even the evangelical radicals, are anti-evolutionists. And most Creationists are split into various factions

(continued on page 13)

BOOKS

THE HIDDEN POWER, by Brian Inglis. Cape, £10.95

This book is the story of a battle between two implacable opponents: one is ruthless, dishonest, cramped-minded, and is refuted by the experience of thousands; the other is searching, generous, and is in tune with the deepest experiences of humanity. The former is "scientism", sometimes known as "materialism"; the latter has no simple name, perhaps because it is beyond simple "isms" — it may be characterised by belief in "psi".

"Psi" is the "hidden power" of the title. But what, you may wonder, is psi? And what are the doctrines of materialism/scientism? Inglis is remarkably reticent on the latter, in fact the chief claim of materialism/scientism is its denial of the existence of psi. So what is psi? We are told that "psi cannot be pinned down to a simple definition. It reflects a hypothesis that a force exists capable of biological action and communication at a distance. . .". Inglis gestures towards a definition of psi through examples: insect metamorphosis, bird migration, "faith healers", metal bending, astrology, water-divining and termite nest building.

One of the astonishing features of this book is that anyone can think that such a ragbag of phenomena can refute anything. The only sense in which — on Inglis' account — metal-bending can refute materialism is that materialism is *defined* as the negation of the existence of metal-bending. Astonishing, but not unusual in books of this kind.

For a theory to be refuted by a selection of facts then something like the following must hold: (1) Theory T holds that propositions $t_1, t_2, t_3 \dots$ are true. (2) $t_1, t_2, t_3 \dots$ are inconsistent with the occurrence of phenomena, events, facts of a particular sort. (3) Some of these phenomena do in fact occur.

Now the most that Inglis shows is that (3) is the case. What he completely fails to demonstrate is the characteristic of (1). "Scientism" seems to mean no more than that scientists are frequently dogmatic, sometimes intolerant and dishonest. This is interesting in terms of the sociology of the practice of science; it is irrelevant to the status or content of theories in science. "Materialism" is defined even more vaguely. Inglis has nothing to say about it except that it seems to be continually refuted — by quantum physics, table-turning, termites. A typical remark of his is on a stage in insect metamorphosis called histolysis:

The insect's body is dematerialised, melting into a kind of uniform pap, a simple amorphous substance in which the majority of organic and specific distinctions appear. (p97)

FREETHINKER

How anyone can call a process of becoming amorphous "dematerialisation" is beyond me. We may as well say that making an omelette refutes materialism.

The only sense of materialism in which it can be said to have been refuted is the belief that matter consists of tiny billiard ball-like atoms. This is no longer the theory of matter of modern physics. But this is not the "dematerialisation" of matter; it is a *different* theory of matter, reached *within science*.

A materialism which asserts that only dead matter is real and denies the existence of ideas, aspirations, etc, is quite uninteresting. Materialism, in the sense of the appropriate philosophy to neo-Darwinian evolution asserts the genetic priority of matter to life and to consciousness; more generally, it asserts the explanatory priority of process to essence. Nothing in the string of facts cited by Inglis refutes this.

This book is valuable mainly as an illustration of a particular strategy of anti-science. Secondly, it contains a number of interesting arguments to the effect that critics of parapsychology of the Hansel kind have been misleading and dishonest. This has made me, for one, think again about the veracity of the claims of parapsychology. What Inglis has not made me do is think that it all matters very much.

DAVID MURRAY

BHAGWAN: THE GOD THAT FAILED, by Hugh Milno. Caliban Books, £12

The drop-outs of the '60s and '70s sought a purer way of life, an alternative to our directionless, spiritually impoverished Western "civilisation". Many of them went to India, not to help relieve the dire material poverty of the native population, but to satisfy their own spiritual needs. They found satisfaction in an ascetic's life of meditation in ashrams, at the feet of gurus. Most of these disciples eventually returned to the Western rat-race, refreshed by their period of repose and learning. Their gurus visited the West on recruitment drives. In a callous, self-destructive world, sects and cults proliferated.

Many of these sects are probably harmless, benign even. But the activities of the Orange Movement, founded in Poona 20 years ago by Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, were to culminate in the Movement's leaders standing trial in the United States on an array of charges ranging from drug-running to attempted murder. Motivated by a kind of inverted imperialism (and by his growing unpopularity in his native country), the Bhagwan moved in 1981 to a

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small town in Oregon, which he and his followers took over, intimidating the local inhabitants with lawsuits. The Bhagwan amassed an enormous personal fortune and 93 Rolls Royces (complete with bullet-proof windows). Meanwhile his disciples worked in Gulag conditions to build yet more accommodation for their master and his possessions.

The early days of the Movement had been idyllic — if being forced into bed with a partner of the Bhagwan's choice is your idea of an idyll — for in the post-Pill, pre-Herpes era Bhagwan was verily the Guru of the Vagina. Later, however, he was to discover Mammon for himself and the Protestant Work Ethic for his adherents.

There have been five biographies of the Bhagwan, and investigative journalists have exposed him. Hugh Milne's account is of particular interest, though, because the author was part of the Bhagwan's inner circle. Milne, a Scottish-born osteopath, joined the Orange Movement in Bombay in 1973, having sampled encounter groups, meditation and Reichian therapy in London. Milne found in the Bhagwan the charismatic, dominating father-figure he hankered after, and he rose through the ranks of the Movement, to become head of the Rajneesh's much-needed personal bodyguard. He remained in the Movement for ten years, and when he left, totally (if very belatedly) disenchanted, its leaders hounded him unmercifully. He needed psychotherapy to help him re-adjust to the society he had been so happy to reject.

The book is written in a clear, unfussy style, but is unburdened by any self-criticism on the author's part. He makes no attempt to veil his contempt for the Indians, and seems unaware how similar this makes him to his colonising forbears. Milne tells us a great deal about the *minutiae* of life in the ashrams, but is reticent about the spiritual revelation and the ecstasy which presumably held him there for so long.

The book is an amazing, almost incredible chronicle of the Movement's degeneration, and an account of the leader's greed, his hypocrisy, his cruelty and his sheer *chutzpah*. What is altogether more sinister, in my opinion, is the disciples' (and of course Milne's) slavish, masochistic surrender to their master's every whim. By their docility, the disciples allowed the Movement to become increasingly hierarchical, corrupt and arbitrary — the very evils they claimed to be fleeing in their own societies. Yet even when the Movement had turned into a police state, new disciples kept on coming, if in diminishing numbers.

The Bhagwan was clearly adept at public relations.

The journalist Bernard Levin, who visited Poona in 1980, was highly impressed by the Bhagwan's eloquence, and Prince Charles declared oneself an enthusiast. Of course, none of these apologists for the Movement submitted (presumably) to the Bhagwan's caprices.

Milne assures us that, like himself, a large number of the Bhagwan's followers were successful professional people, not natural "bohemians", hippies or no-hopers. He seems to expect us to greet this intelligence with surprise. I feel none. After all, that combination of self-seeking and self-abnegation, of thrusting energy and passivity, that is the prerequisite for material success, also equips people to immerse themselves unquestioningly in a cause and actively to promote it. This book is as much an act of self-vindication on Milne's part as a portrait of the Bhagwan. Nowhere does the author fully admit to his own culpability or address the uncomfortable fact that without the connivance of people like himself the Bhagwan would have been unable to commit his many outrages.

Milne ends the book with a hindsightful warning: "As Krishnamurti said, it is vitally important never to give another person the power to make your decisions for you". It is interesting that to the very last, Hugh Milne lets a guru think and speak for him.

VERA LUSTIG

Religious Laxative—Auntie Increases the Dose

The BBC is to increase its output of religious propaganda during the coming year. Religious programmes will also be allocated more favourable times.

Sunday, on Radio 4, will be double its former length. The Saturday evening service, also on Radio 4, is being brought forward from 10.15 pm to 9.50 pm. It will be given a new title, *Ten to Ten*.

The Religious Broadcasting Department now promotes a wide range of religious faiths. Religious affairs correspondent Rosemary Harthill has an assistant who is a Sikh. Rabbi Lionel Blue is a frequent contributor to religious programmes.

In addition to the hundreds of hours of "official" religious programmes broadcast every week on national, regional and local radio and television, a considerable amount of pro-religious propaganda is included in other programmes.

• A satirical play, *The Last Secular Jew*, has been censored by Israel's Film and Theatre Censorship Board a week before it was due to open in Tel Aviv. Government spokesman and Education Minister, Yitzhak Navon, a liberal by Israeli standards, said the play legitimises something that is unacceptable: "Mixed marriages cannot be considered as far as the Jewish people are concerned".

LETTERS

FREETHINKERS' IDEA OF FREEDOM

What kind of freedom is it that *The Freethinker* and its readership value so highly? Jonathan Sanders' letter (November 1986) clearly pointed out *The Freethinker's* insidious editorial misogyny and racism. Your readers' response in last month's letters page demonstrated that the freedom they hold so precious is the freedom to hate, and promote hatred of women and black people.

Oppressed peoples the world over are struggling daily for their most basic human rights. The right to be a bigoted liberal strikes me as a shabby and spiteful freedom, and only one the most small-minded person would claim.

JEF JONES

REFORMS ARE NOT ENOUGH

I very much doubt, judging from their letters (December 1986), that John Campbell, H. S. Ryley and Pamela Wardle can be brought to any understanding of the issues raised in my previous letter (November). It would be like explaining calculus to people who have not yet learned about simple addition. Still, mainly for the benefit of other readers, I would like to answer some of their points and expand on my earlier correspondence.

Mr Campbell, clearly eager to be misled by a crass heading given to my letter, seems incapable of attacking my views without elaborate references to biblical language and imagery. Perhaps he is a closet Christian? It is quite inaccurate and useless to compare awareness of one's sexism and racism to the religious "confession", "original sin" or to think that the purpose is to denigrate and punish oneself. As I see it, the purpose is to relinquish some of the power and advantages one has as a white male, and to allow women and ethnic minorities their own spaces. Of course, there will always be disagreements about how this should be done.

To reach something like the "equality" Pamela Wardle claims to favour, it is necessary to give women and people from minorities the "privileges and considerations" that will balance the socially innate advantages that those not in these groups already have. Most people are not conscious of the privileges that white, heterosexual, able-bodied men have in our society, because they have always been taken for granted.

A few miscellaneous points. If Pamela Wardle is content to be "tolerated" as a woman, that's up to her. As a gay man, I scorn such patronising, ineffectual liberalism. Regarding Mr Campbell's comments on the London Lesbian and Gay Centre, I am not prepared to debate the internal issues of the Centre, funded and used by lesbians and gay men, with a heterosexual in the pages of a non-gay magazine. Nor would I, being male, presume to comment on feminist newsletters. Still, I must admit that Mr Campbell's sensational round-up of Left-wing activism is probably good enough for the *Sun*. His inference that I operate from the premise of believing there is something "innately good in being female or coloured" suggests he is on that newspaper's intellectual wavelength. Oddly enough, I don't believe there is anything innately good about being an atheist (or a Christian) either. And is Mr Campbell really so naive as not to realise that all pictures, photographs and films are (overtly or not) the products of social attitudes?

H. S. Ryley raises the old question of whether one

should modify one's views in order to gain greater public support and thereby perhaps achieve a limited version of one's goal. Personally, I do not believe that true equality and freedom can be acquired in bits and pieces. For instance, the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, passed after many years of hard campaigning, legalised gay sex but with so many restrictions (not put on heterosexuals) as to make sex between men still, basically, illegal. Twenty years later there seems no sign of these restrictions being lifted. Indeed, the 1967 Act has even been counter-productive by encouraging complacency. (And I have only mentioned one, purely legal context in which gay men are denied equality and freedom.)

Finally, I would like to add that my views are purely my own and should not be attributed to any other individuals or groups.

JONATHAN SANDERS

DIVISIVE

I was interested to read the replies to Jonathan Sanders, which seemed very much to the point.

White males are presumed to exhibit all the failings Jonnathan Sanders attacks, and disadvantaged groups must not be thought to have such failings. What simplistic and ignorant rubbish! It cannot serve the interests of the disadvantaged to appoint incompetents because they are disadvantaged.

The Alternative Moral Majority inspires fear, guilt and hatred — sometimes deliberately, sometimes not. Those who seek to bring about human betterment are frequently exasperated by them, but our protests at their divisive and regressive actions are misconstrued.

Our pain and anger is supposed to show that reaction (!) has been confronted and exposed — or so the AMM would have us believe. Our objections to the ugly and stultifying "anti-racist" and "anti-genderist" Newspeak are similarly treated.

Orwell, thou shouldst be living at this hour! You would expose the wrong and reactionary dualism which both moral majorities adopt.

COLIN MILLS

AN IMPLAUSIBLE STORY

How does Steuart Campbell (December 1986) know that the tomb in which the body of Jesus was placed after the crucifixion, was empty on the Sunday morning? Obviously from the evidence of the Gospels, since no other source, Christian or pagan, mentions it. But as he himself acknowledged in his article, *The Empty Tomb, the Origin of Christianity (The Freethinker, May 1985)*: "Since the Gospels are propaganda, they cannot be relied upon to tell us what happened, but it is likely that they contain historical fragments".

One of these "historical fragments", I suggest, is the tradition that the corpse of Jesus was deposited in a tomb (only Matthew claims it belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, Paul, the earliest witness, writing simply that Jesus "was buried"), the whole implausible story of the tomb being empty on the third day having been manufactured about 40 years later, to fulfil Jesus's prediction that he would rise within that period. Moreover, this is not, as Mr Campbell alleges, some crazy theory peculiar to me. In his *Jesus* (page 500), Guignebert argues, ". . . the discovery of the empty tomb (ie on the Sunday morning) . . . falls into the category of an apologetic or polemical invention, and is eliminated from the realm of history", and goes on to give references to other scholars who hold the same opinion.

JOHN L. BROOM

depending, bluntly, on how educated they are. There are three types. First, recent Creationists, the most radical, who say the universe cannot be older than 10,000 years, in line with Genesis. Second are the ancient Creationists who agree that the cosmos (and the Earth) is much older, and the “days” of creation in the Bible are metaphorical or are subject to other interpretations. But they still believe that plant and animal species were created separately by God. Third are the theistic Darwinists who cannot bring themselves to oppose widely accepted scientific ideas, but cannot believe either that the universe came into being without a creator.

This latter position is fair enough. Saying that one believes in a supernatural beginning to the universe makes as much sense as arguing that the universe created itself. Either way, the existence of the cosmos seems miraculous and unfathomable. Fred Hoyle, one of our greatest astrophysicists, is an unbeliever but says he is sympathetic to the idea of a supernatural creative force.

And there is nothing wrong with attacking Darwinism as a theory. Evolution implies that every living thing descended from earlier forms of life all the way back to the first primitive organisms. Darwinism itself decrees that it is the struggle for survival that acts as a driving force, by killing off mediocrities in every generation. However, one major criticism is philosophical: the time-scale of evolution makes it unobservable and unrepeatable. According to Karl Popper this makes it unscientific. It might even be in danger of becoming institutionalised and creed-like.

Furthermore, the principle of natural selection, the elimination of the least efficient species, does not always apply. Goats and deer, for example, have developed scent glands which enable the rest of the herd to keep track of them but gives them away to predators. And carnivorous plants, which are extremely rare and usually found in desert regions, acquire their moisture and nourishment by trapping and consuming flying insects. They can live for weeks on one fly, and don't need rain. Why are not all plants like this?

But finding faults with the mechanics of evolution is not what the Creationists are about. There would not have been time for species to evolve within the 6,000 to 10,000 years that the Earth has been in existence. Herein lies the absurdity of the Creationists' case. They are in conflict with astrophysics, geophysics and geochemistry.

Astronomers, after all, have the key to the age of the universe. For if the days of creation are literal days then the stars must be only several thousand years old. So it would be impossible for them to be millions or billions of light years distant.

The Creationists get around this by suggesting God first made the velocity of light infinite, and then slowed it down to its present value, so involving him in pointlessly changing the laws of physics shortly after he created them!

Perhaps, runs the argument, the light beams were purposely created with the appearance of great age, like the fossils, or perhaps there is no physical reality behind the light waves at all. This means that all astronomers are wasting their time studying non-existent stars. Perhaps the entire universe is a great deception, an elaborate piece of trickery, casting doubt even on the truth of Genesis which says specifically that “God created the stars also”. In fact Creationists actually go as far as suggesting that two kinds of space exist, one Einsteinian and the other capable of being curved in any way you like so that you could quite easily end up with light beams emanating no further than five years distant. This reasoning is akin to that of the pre-Copernican astronomers who feverishly devised ever more complex trajectories to prove that the heavenly bodies revolved around the Earth.

What surprises me are the great debating points at the Creationists' disposal which they throw away in favour of pseudo-science. How many Creationists point out that the universe would not have come into existence if the weak nuclear force and gravity had not been tuned to each other to the accuracy of one part in 10,000 billion billion billion? If gravity had been too weak the galaxies would never have survived the explosive force of the Big Bang. Too strong, and the universe would have collapsed back on itself within the first few minutes. This is a devastating argument, but seldom used.

Instead they concentrate on the feeblest of arguments, which can be summed up as “flood geology”. They believe if they can prove the Earth was flooded shortly after Creation, as depicted in Genesis, then they have proved their case because the Flood would explain all the anomalies of curious rock strata, fossils, everything. This shaky line of reasoning is the inheritance of some particularly ignorant founding fathers. For example, early twentieth-century Recent Creationism was kept alive by a man called McCready Price. His books, like the *Modern Flood Theory of Geology*, far from being new or up-to-date, were in effect an atavistic return to seventeenth-century catastrophism. Catastrophe theory is the idea that the Earth's birth has been painful and traumatic, and was the product of violent crustal upheavals and celestial bombardment. This perspective dominated the thinking of early geologists like John Woodward and William Buckland, but has long been discarded by scientists.

Flood geology received a fresh boost in 1961 when *The Genesis Flood* was published by J. C. Whitcomb and H. M. Morris. This book was highly influential in the evangelical movement, and spurred

into being several new creationist societies in the States, such as the Creation Research Society, and a couple in Britain a decade later.

I remember obtaining this book while researching my own recent book, *Floodshock*, assuming it to be a genuine geophysical study. Instead I found page after page devoted to discussing a huge "vapour canopy" which was supposed to have collapsed to cause the widespread flooding at the time of Noah, apparently increasing the volume of the oceans by some 30 per cent. This would have been a highly unlikely occurrence, since such a vast quantity of vapour would raise atmospheric pressure from 15 pounds per square inch to a suffocating 970 pounds with freak temperatures of over 500°F being reached (any cooler and the canopy would collapse into rain).

A Series of Fallacies

In this extract from an article published in the *Financial Times* of 19 November 1986, broadcaster and critic Christopher Dunkley examines some of the claims that are made regarding the relationship between television and violence in society.

Attitudes towards television are dogged by a series of fallacies; widely and strongly held, but still fallacies.

The first involves the attribution of human characteristics to television as though the very wires and transistors were somehow capable of maintaining — or debasing — a moral code. With acknowledgements to Ruskin I call this the pathetic fallacy, that being the phrase he used to ridicule those poets who habitually attributed human characteristics to insensate objects ("every flower enjoys the air it breathes" etc).

The second is the assumption that while you and I can of course see through television's wicked ways, the rest of the audience — thickies all — are being led by the nose. This we might call the Whitehouse fallacy, after the woman who believes that, whereas the effect of television's sex-and-violence upon her is to turn her more and more firmly against it, the effect upon everyone else is precisely the opposite.

The third fallacy is the belief that "if television sells detergent it must sell violence too", and in a way this virtually encompasses the other two. It is a misconception arising from the failure to consider both the intention of the message sender (the broadcaster) and the receptiveness of those at the receiving end (the viewers). In a recent *Newsnight* discussion Conservative MP Tim Brinton encapsulated these ideas when he mouthed the cliché that people believe anything they see. Clearly he excluded him-

Even so there is a wide groundswell of support in America for this kind of pseudo-science amongst the growing ranks of the "Moral Majority", promoted by fanatical pressurized lobbying of Government officials and backed up by considerable wealth.

Now scientists representing 72 Nobel Laureates and 24 scientific organizations have been goaded into making a determined stand against the creeping spread of Creationism in schools. They have filed a counter-suit at the US Supreme Court reversing the decision of the state of Louisiana to ask the Court's permission to teach Creationism alongside evolution in all State-funded schools. If the scientists lose their case, a new educational tyranny will descend upon America, ironically one of the few countries that up to now allow no compulsory religious instruction to be part of the curricula.

CHRISTOPHER DUNKLEY

self from this judgement. His assertion will carry more weight on the day that he comes before us declaring "I believe anything I see. I have just seen Labour's latest party political broadcast and tonight I shall be abandoning the Conservative Party and crossing the floor of the House to join the Opposition".

There are two main reasons why television commercials sell detergent: first, that is what they are intended to do and immense efforts are put into ensuring that they will; and secondly, viewers are highly receptive to the message because they like and need detergent. If programmes were intended to "sell" violence, and if immense efforts were put into ensuring that they did, and if viewers were highly receptive to the message because they liked and needed violence, then matters might be very different.

The usual response to this, and of course it recurred last week, is that "You are not taking account of juvenile delinquents, they just copy what they see". If that were so, then generations of delinquent teenagers would have been running around crucifying one another, since the most familiar image in every city, town and hamlet in western Europe for the last 2000 years or so has been that of a man nailed to a cross, with blood running down his body: a vivid and violent image if ever there was one (and incidentally often three-dimensional). Where are the imitators?

Anyone who seriously believes that it is television which has spread the riots of our time across the country needs to explain how the tollgate riots and the agricultural machinery riots and a dozen other sets of riots spread so fast in the centuries before television. Then they need to explain why it is always the unemployed and poor youths of places such as Brixton and Toxteth who riot today and not

their well-heeled contemporaries in Cheltenham and Stoke Poges. Don't rich teenagers watch television?

If television is "responsible" for the unprecedented popularity of the British royal family, why has the same not happened in Holland? If it was television which won the election for Harold Wilson against Edward Heath, why did it lose him the next one against the same opponent?

It is time we stopped heaping the blame for all sorts of social phenomena on to television and accepted that it is just our most recently discovered means of communicating with one another. If that which is communicated does, indeed, have some causal connection with subsequent acts we would do well to remember that it is men and women who make the programmes, not wires and transistors. The 21-inch screen in the corner is wholly amoral.

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Jesus Mania Hits American Tennis Stars

Tournament officials sent three American tennis players home from Nigeria after they "found Jesus" at Bible-reading sessions. Morris Strode, Bud Cox and Jimmy Garfein destroyed their possessions, including passports and money.

Garfein, who is 24, jumped from his first-floor hotel room screaming "Jesus". He was badly cut and bruised.

The tour director said the trouble started when Strode stayed at a Christian mission near Lagos. Officials confirmed that some of the American tennis professionals found their careers in conflict with their "born-again" Christian beliefs.

Another player on the tour, Bobby Banck, said he and the three expelled players had been studying the Bible together. Twice in one week they burst into his room in the early hours telling him to "find the Lord" and give up tennis. "I didn't know what to do", he added. "I felt if the Lord wanted me to give up tennis he would tell me".

The three players who did "find the Lord" were put on a plane for home and advised to seek medical help.

• The Keep Sunday Special Campaign has admitted that the churches are still breaking the Sunday trading laws. In a leaflet issued last month it stated: "If Christians are to campaign against total deregulation, and to 'keep Sunday special', they must be seen to obey, and not flout, the present law. Otherwise they will face charges of hypocrisy". It was revealed during the Shops Bill debate that churches involved in the campaign against reform were selling a wide range of goods at their book-stalls, gift shops and clubs.

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group: New Venture Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton. Sunday, 1 February, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. James Sang: Is Evolution Central to Atheism?

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.

Harrow Humanist Society. Programme of meetings obtainable from Rosemary Bennett, telephone 01-863 2977.

Havering and District Humanist Society. Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road, Harold Wood. Tuesday, 3 February, 8 pm. R. J. Condon: Charles Bradlaugh—Champion of Liberty.

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Swarthmore Centre, 4 Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Monday, 9 February, 7.30 pm. Frank Watkinson: The Third World (illustrated).

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 29 January, 7.45 pm. Public meeting to commemorate the 250th anniversary of Thomas Paine's birthday.

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. Sunday, 18 January, 11 am. Harry Stopes-Roe: Humanism and Science. Sunday, 25 January, 11 am. Christopher Brunel: Thomas Paine; 3 pm, John White: Helping our Children to be Good? —42 Years on from the 1944 Education Act. Tuesday, 27 January, 7.30 pm. Debate, Steven Rose and Harry Stopes-Roe: Is There a Human Nature?

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 11 February, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. Annual general meeting followed by George Mephram: What Humanism Offers to People and to Society.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House, Hill Street (off Corporation Street), Coventry. Monday, 19 January, 7.45 p.m. 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.

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

New Doubts Over Saint's "Invented Holiness"

The canonisation in 1950 of Maria Goretti ("the most popular saint of the century") resulted from judgements that were a fabrication. This claim, made by Giordano Bruno Guerri in his book, *Poor Saint, Poor Assassin*, has caused fury in Roman Catholic circles. Guerri asserts that Maria Goretti was used by the Church "as an invented holiness for a made-to-measure sainthood for farm labourers".

Maria Goretti was born into an Italian peasant family in 1890. On 5 July 1902, she was stabbed by a villager after rejecting his sexual advances and died in hospital the following day. Before dying, she was received into the Children of Mary and, according to legend, fully forgave her assailant. But author Guerri says she was "a scruffy urchin of low intelligence who could not have understood the belief

of Christian forgiveness".

Her beatification took place in 1947, a time when Roman Catholic leaders were seriously disturbed by the effects of wartime social upheaval on Italians, particularly women. In the beatification decree Pope Pius XII declared: "Italian girls especially, in the fair flower of their youth should raise their eyes to Heaven and gaze upon this shining example of maidenly virtue which rose from the midst of wickedness . . . God is wonderful in His saints . . . Now he has given to the young girls of our cruel and degraded world a model and protector".

St Maria Goretti's shrine is visited by hundreds of thousands of pilgrims every year, and churches are dedicated to her. But there has always been controversy over the circumstances of her canonisation.

Fanaticism, Violence and Mental Slavery

The desire of immigrants from non-Christian backgrounds to preserve their own cultures in an alien land had led to many of them being more fanatically religious than they would have been in their countries of origin.

"Even those of West Indian origin, with a Christian background, are generally far more ardent than the average Briton. In addition to starting new and flourishing Christian sects, they constitute a disproportionate section of both Roman Catholic and evangelical congregations in many localities, and are the keenest proselytisers, even trying (with little success) to convert the indigenous population to Jesus.

"Ironically, they are apparently unaware that the doctrines they proclaim with such fervour were cynically foisted on their ancestors by slave-masters, the more easily to keep them in subjection, and are thus the hallmark of slavery.

"But then, all religion is itself a kind of slavery".

The NSS stands for the abolition of slavery in the realm of the mind. This will happen when the slaves of every skin colour and every brand of religion open their eyes. Only then will they be ready to let go their chains.

Whilst adapting to the needs and methods of our changing times, the National Secular Society remains essentially true to the insight, vision and life's work of its founder, Charles Bradlaugh. In addition to its own campaigns, it works with other pressure groups on specific issues, defending the right of free speech, publication and personal choices of life-style.

Annual Report (free) obtainable from the National Secular Society, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL, telephone 01-272 1266.

Top People's Beliefs

The Spectator's recent survey of religious belief revealed that 74 per cent of Britain's successful people believe in God, 15 per cent are agnostics and 11 per cent are atheists. The 151 respondents were drawn from the City, business and industry, trade unions, press and television, universities, medicine, law, the arts, Civil Service and the Houses of Parliament.

There is little comfort in the answers for the Church of England. Of the Anglicans interviewed, six said they were agnostics. More remarkably, two claimed to be atheists!

Anglicans were the most likely to have lapsed, and also the least consistent in church attendance.

Only 11 of the 151 interviewees knew all the Ten Commandments, while 22 could not or would not mention one.

The Spectator concludes: "Even if our own age does not have a monopoly of religious ignorance, ignorance is surely greater than would have been found a generation ago, and greater not because learning by heart is less fashionable, but because the subject itself is considered less important".

● Every Christmas Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre is the scene of an unholy squabble. Priests of various churches have indulged in fist fights — one of them belaboured another brother in Christ with a broom on one occasion — over control of the holy building. This year visitors were advised to carry umbrellas. A group of priests whose quarters are above the church had taken to urinating on worshippers of rival faiths.