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# The Freethinker

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## AMERICAN-STYLE "MORAL MAJORITY" DEVELOPING IN BRITAIN

"The prospect of numerous religious-inspired pressure groups lobbying MPs and opinion makers into submission on a range of specific moral issues is quite real," declared Martin Horwood when he addressed the British Humanist Association Autumn School. The Association's Director of Development said the term "Moral Majority" began as the title of a specific organisation, but has grown to represent something much wider and, in the eyes of its critics, much more threatening.

Moral Majority roots lie in the "Fundamentalist" movement which started in America in the early twentieth century. Writers of pamphlets on "the fundamentals" represented a backlash from traditional American Protestants against the increasingly liberal church establishments.

Martin Horwood said that by 1925, when they initiated the "Monkey Trial" of a Tennessee teacher for teaching evolution, the fundamentalists were regarded as cranks.

"The movement lay essentially dormant for many years, concerned primarily with prayer and evil influences such as jazz music and alcohol. The 'fifties brought the even more depraved influence of rock 'n' roll and then the 'sixties ushered in what appeared to be a wholesale breakdown in the moral fabric of American society. Women's liberation, civil rights and liberal attitudes to sex gained wide acceptance. In 1962 and '63 the Supreme Court ruled against school prayer and Bible reading in school. By 1973 another ruling had legalised abortion.

"In 1976, however, Presidential candidate Jimmy Carter was describing himself as a 'born-again Christian' and fundamentalists were reconsidering their long abstinence from the worldly political arena. Television preachers were already flourishing and the political potential of this huge constituency

was becoming obvious.

"In 1979, the Reverend Jerry Falwell founded Moral Majority and brought fundamentalist religion crashing headlong into the world of politics, lobbying on everything from school prayer to the world-wide crusade against Communism and targeting Congressmen and State representatives with supposedly 'liberal' views. In 1980, Ronald Reagan, an undisguised fan of this new movement, was unexpectedly elected to the White House. The Moral Majority, fundamentalist preachers and televangelists across America celebrated. Psephologists have cast serious doubt on the actual effect of their targeting, but in the public mind they were now a force to be reckoned with."

Many techniques have been used to advance the fundamentalist cause. Private colleges such as Falwell's Liberty University attract thousands of entrants and provide an army of preachers. By transmitter, cable and satellite, regular religious broadcasts, overwhelmingly fundamentalist, reach tens of millions of people.

Although the parallels in Britain are few, certain common denominators exist. There is what fundamentalists regard as the threatening advance of liberal theology.

"The Church of England is a genteel battleground between evangelical as well as old-fashioned High Churchmen like the Bishop of London and the overwhelmingly liberal Establishment, exemplified by the Bishop of Durham. Young Christians seem to mix an attachment to evangelical folk-rock culture and trendy evangelical magazines like *Buzz*, with support for women priests and the ecumenical movement.

"In the universities, however, there are often spectacularly intolerant Christian Unions,

*(continued on back page)*

# The Freethinker

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# NEWS

## WILL THEY EVER LEARN?

November brings the annual programme of Remembrance Day services and ceremonies commemorating those who died in "the war to end wars". Ever since 1918 prayers have been offered for peace as they had been for victory by opposing Christian nations. Nevertheless for the last seventy years there have been thousands of wars, ranging in scale from local disputes to international conflicts wiping out millions of people and impoverishing nations. Religion has been a key factor in many — and usually the most vicious — of these conflicts.

With less than a decade and a half of the twentieth century to run, war is still an almost conventional method of settling differences between nations. Human attitudes to war in the nuclear age are diverse; it is rejected outright by pacifists and joyfully accepted by Christian fundamentalists as fulfilment of biblical prophecy, a belief encouraged by President Reagan's "Armageddon" speech.

The Middle East and Central America are the world's most dangerous flashpoints at the present time. Western countries are being drawn into the Iran-Iraq war, with American-flagged ships increasingly coming under attack.

Ayatollah Khomeini, the fanatical Islamic leader who hates capitalism and communism with equal fervour, believes it is his duty to establish a society approved by Allah. He teaches that "this life is but a passage. . . What is called life in this world is not life, but death. True life is that only offered in the hereafter. . . We are here in this low, earthly life, only to perform the duties God has set us to perform." Khomeini's reaction to the slaughter of thousands of his followers, including children, on the battlefield is: "Even our total defeat in this war shall be a blessing from the Almighty and the sign of his wisdom which we cannot fully understand."

The reign of Khomeini and his successors could be a far longer one than his opponents expect. In the meantime, Western powers, particularly the United States, should consider the role they played in bringing this embittered religious zealot to power.

If, during the Mossedegh period, the Iranians had been allowed to run their own affairs, including nationalisation of oilfields, the Middle East might not be the powder-keg it is today. Instead, Western intelligence services engineered the downfall of Mossedegh and the pro-American Shah was installed. The reign of terror conducted by the United States puppet regime; particularly Savak, the Shah's secret police, sowed the seeds of an uprising and Khomeini's

# S AND NOTES

triumphant return from exile.

On the other side of the world international opinion is probably the main reason why Washington does not openly invade Nicaragua as it first did in 1909 in order to foist a Right-wing dictatorship on the country. The US Marines returned in 1912 and were in almost continuous occupation until 1933. Before leaving, they established the notorious National Guard which three years later brought the dictator Somoza to power.

"Somoza may be a son of a bitch, but he is our son of a bitch," declared President Roosevelt of the man who was dictator of Nicaragua for 43 years. During that time the Somoza family amassed a fortune, with stakes in industry, agriculture, airline companies, radio and television stations. The majority suffered extreme poverty, illiteracy and repression by the military. According to one Oxfam publication, only ten per cent of the entire population had access to medical care.

In 1979 the Sandinista Front for National Liberation overthrew the Somoza regime. The Sandinistas embarked on a programme of education and health care. When the first free elections were held they won an overwhelming majority.

This was not at all to the liking of the United States. It regarded Nicaragua as a source of economic exploitation and military bases. (It was from bases in Nicaragua that America attacked Guatamala and Cuba.)

The United States has paid vast sums to arm and train pro-Somoza Contras who have been attacking Nicaragua from bases in Costa Rica and Honduras. An American economic blockade has badly affected the Nicaraguan economy and delayed the introduction of further welfare schemes.

Reagan's policy in Nicaragua is backed to the hilt by the Christian Right which campaigned with such vigour for his election. Many Nicaraguan Christians, including Roman Catholic priests, support the Sandinistas' reform programme. But their fellow-Christians in the United States are cast in a different, anti-liberal mould. Their support for bullying and aggression is particularly evident among Protestant fundamentalists who regard central American countries as a fertile area for missionary activities.

Flag-waving, military parades and bands blaring out *Onward Christian Soldiers* perpetuate the myth that war is glorious. The majority of people who participate in services at war memorials and churches are totally sincere. Many are honouring relatives and close friends. But the spectacle of national leaders paying homage while Britain is a major exporter

of armaments and supporter of Reaganite aggression in Central America is nauseating. They insult the dead of past wars as well as victims of future conflict.

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**Over a hundred Roman Catholics demonstrated outside Westminster Cathedral, London, during an inter-faith service which opened a week of prayer for world peace. They were objecting to the involvement of Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs. The demonstrators recited the rosary and waved banners protesting against Catholics worshipping with non-Christians.**

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## THANKS FOR NOTHING

Soppy announcements in the Thanksgiving columns of Catholic newspapers provide ungodly readers with much needed light relief ("St Clara thanks a million for impossible requests granted"; "Our Lady . . . for excellent results in examination"; and optimistically, "St Martha for prayers going to be answered"). The suspicion that such outpourings by those of the Bleeding Heart Tendency are an embarrassment to intelligent Catholics was confirmed by Dr Edward Daly, Bishop of Derry, when he recently addressed a diocesan rally.

Dr Daly disconcerted pious advertisers — not to mention business-minded advertising managers — by scathingly describing such announcements as "a dreadful misrepresentation of true prayer" and "a complete waste of time and money." He admitted that the practice was traditional; it had, however, got out of hand in recent times.

"There has been a veritable explosion of these adverts and they have occupied many, many inches of classified columns in some newspapers, in some cases more than a hundred such notices in a single edition of a newspaper.

"These ads or notices ask for favours or give thanks for favours — they sometimes talk of three favours, one business and two impossible — and publication on the ninth day and such like. . .

"These practices have more to do with superstition than with true prayer. Nobody should feel bound to communicate with the Lord, the Holy Spirit or Saint Anyone through an ad in a newspaper, however widely read the newspaper might be. . .

"I cannot imagine the impression of Catholicism which these adverts must give to people of other faiths."

Dr Daly's irritation with the gullible faithful is justified and his outspokenness commendable. But when a Christian leader — particularly a Catholic bishop — denounces superstition and speaks of "true prayer" in the same breath, it is rather like a brewery owner joining the Band of Hope. At least

advertising is an effective method of communicating with thousands; "true prayer" is simply a euphemism for talking to oneself.

For many centuries Dr Daly's church exhorted the faithful to pray for health, wealth and success. Bishops and priests proclaimed cures and wonders allegedly effected by pilgrimages to shrines and veneration of holy, if spurious, relics. Those who sought or believed that they were the recipients of divine favours could not then place notices in the *Catholic Herald* or *The Universe*. Instead they advertised by way of gifts, legacies and the building of churches.

It is understandable that an educated Catholic leader like Dr Daly should endeavour to persuade his flock that displays of excessive piety and superstition in the twentieth century actually harm the Church. But that will not be easy in the land of moving statues. Perhaps the Bishop of Derry should invoke the aid of Saint Jude, patron of lost causes.

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**Teignbridge District Council in Devon has warned monks at Buckfast Abbey that they are breaking the law by selling bibles, crucifixes and rosaries on Sundays. But the Council has shown good sense in one respect. The monks may sell their famous wine on Sunday during licensing hours.**

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## **DON'T DO AS I DO . . .**

Two subjects guarantee ecstatic applause for a speaker at the Conservative Party conference: (1) a demand for the return of capital punishment and (2) a crackdown on "scroungers and fiddlers", whether they be unemployed teenagers or unmarried mothers.

This year's gathering at Blackpool was no exception. Delegates cheered a statement by Norman Fowler, Secretary of State for Employment, that another three hundred investigators were being appointed to deal with social security abuse. An even greater cheer went to the philosopher from Bournemouth who profoundly inquired: "If there are three million unemployed, why are there not enough window cleaners to go round."

The Tories' abiding interest in fiddling and deception seldom extends to really large-scale financial criminality. Hardly surprising, since this form of law-breaking is confined almost entirely to City offices and board rooms, an unfailing source of election funds.

The rapturous reception that welcomed Cecil Parkinson back to high office in the Party of the Family and Traditional Moral Values was a merciful diversion from the sad plight of Keith Best. The

ex-Member of Parliament and True Blue-eyed boy of Conservative Club bars came a cropper by making multiple applications for British Telecom shares. He narrowly escaped a term of imprisonment and told one newspaper: "Everything I cared about has been taken from me — my parliamentary seat, my career as a barrister, my commission in the Territorial Army."

Still, Mr Best has the comfort of religion. "What got me through all this is my Christian faith," he said. "I believe there has to be a reason for it all."

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**The Church of Scientology has failed in the High Court to stop publication of material in a biography of its founder, L. Ron Hubbard.**

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## **CHRISTIAN CONTROL IN FIJI**

When a politician, brasshat or religious enthusiast believes that he is doing "God's will" the consequences are often disastrous. So it is a matter of some concern that a dictator who is all three has assumed power in Fiji.

Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, the island's new ruler, called on God to bless the decree making Fiji a republic. This appeal to the Almighty was no C- of E-style formality. Fiji's military dictator is a Christian fundamentalist who, but for his colour, would grace the pulpit of any Bible Belt church.

When Rabuka and the Governor General met for final negotiations before the republic was declared, one of his "minimum requirements" was that Christianity should become the official religion of Fiji. Rabuka is a fervent Methodist, and the Methodist Church has been a powerful influence in Fiji for nearly two centuries. Its brand of fundamentalism demands strict observance of the Sabbath, and many still remember the days when most Fijians would not cook or do household chores on Sunday.

Although Christians are now a minority in Fiji, one of Rabuka's first actions was to prohibit Sunday sport, trading and public transport. The ban extended to gardening and family picnics, and has been imposed with much firmness by the army, many of whom are Methodist lay preachers.

Leaders of the colonel's Taukei Movement, several of them Methodist ministers, have claimed divine support for the new regime. Rabuka also admits to belief that God is on his side.

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**A service of thanksgiving was held at Westminster Abbey last month to celebrate the centenary of the Ecclesiastical Insurance Office which arranges insurance cover for church buildings. The centenary was also marked by over five hundred claims following the hurricane which swept across southern England.**

# NI Sabbatarians Lose Sunday Pubs Battle

For the first time in 64 years public houses in Northern Ireland can open on Sunday — legally.

Thirsty customers took advantage of a new law which came into effect last month and thronged public houses for a pre-lunch Sunday drink. Gordon Hervey, president of the Northern Ireland Federation of Retail Licensed Trade, celebrated the occasion at his Hillsborough, County Down, public house by selling drinks at 1923 prices. One customer said law reform was long overdue. "There has been Sunday opening on the mainland for years, and there is no good reason why the situation should be different here," he added.

Last year publicans in a number of Northern Irish towns protested against the Government's delay in introducing reform of the licensing laws. They opened for one Sunday and attracted considerable support. Police took the names of pub owners and customers. But reform was inevitable and police action largely symbolic.

Gus Allen, owner of Belfast's Great Eastern bar, said: "Nobody is outside my premises dragging customers in. They are exercising their right to make a choice and that's what we've been after all along."

Referring to picketing by religious opponents of the new law, Mr Allen said: "I could tolerate it when we opened illegally as a gesture of concern at the law. I hope they will remember that from now on publicans are operating within the law."

In marked contrast to the happy Sunday drinkers, members of the Rev Ian Paisley's Free Presbyterian Church staged demonstrations outside many public houses. Sour-faced Paisleyites, clutching Bibles and "Keep Sunday Special" posters, protested against "the desecration of the Lord's Day."

Commenting on the publicans' claim that they are now being allowed to compete with licensed clubs, the Rev Stanley Barnes declared: "We want the clubs closed down on Sunday as well."

The Rev Ian Paisley denounced alcohol as "the devil's buttermilk" and said that a campaign would be launched to have the Sunday opening law revoked.

Writing in the current issue of the Lord's Day Observance Society's magazine, *Joy of Light* (don't laugh!), Nelson McCausland, the Society's Northern Ireland area secretary laments that "the opening of public houses on the Lord's Day would be a major erosion of the Sabbath." Advising the faithful to "pray much about this matter", the doleful Mr McCausland sorrowfully notes "a lowering of Christian standards regarding God's Day."

Northern Ireland is one of the few remaining outposts of Sabbatarianism in the British Isles. Liberalisation of the Sunday licensing laws is a major setback for the LDOS and other Christian enemies of personal freedom.

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## "Smiling Pope" Poisoned, Author Maintains

David Yallop, author of *In God's Name*, has described as "pure fantasy" a statement by Fr Diego Lorenzi that Pope John Paul I had complained of severe chest pains on the night he died. Fr Lorenzi, who was one of the Pope's private secretaries, made the claim in an Italian television programme. He recalled that another priest, Fr John Magee, now the Bishop of Cloyne, had also heard the Pope's complaint of pain. The Bishop has made no comment.

David Yallop asserts that Pope John Paul I was in good health. He had been poisoned by a drug overdose because of disagreements with the Curia. In his book, he claims that the man who had been nicknamed "The Smiling Pope" intended to remove the smiles from a number of faces. He had acquired evidence concerning the activities of a masonic lodge whose members ranged from cardinals to priests. He also intended to investigate the affairs of the Vatican Bank which later became the centre of an international scandal.

Italian newspapers have claimed that Fr Lorenzi's

television statement has dealt "the final blow" to David Yallop's accusation of murder. The author has responded by asking why, in view of the publicity and intense interest in the case, Fr Lorenzi waited nine years before mentioning the Pope's chest pains.

*In God's Name*, by David Yallop, is obtainable from G. W. Foote & Co Ltd, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL, price £2.95 plus 45p postage.

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The American gun lobby wants its own patron saint. John Snyder has written to the Pope on behalf of the Citizens' Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms suggesting a priest named Fr Gabriel Possenti for the honour. Fr Possenti, who lived in the last century, allegedly routed a band of renegade soldiers with two pistols. Snyder told the Pope that making the priest a saint would show that "an instrument in the hands of a person committed in heart, mind and soul to Almighty God may be used to bring good here on earth."

# Why I Am Not A Humanist

NIGEL SINNOTT

A former Editor of The Freethinker asserts that humanism is not just an unsuitable generic name for the freethought movement. The vogue term of two decades ago is now a liability.

No, I have not forsaken three-quarters of a lifetime's atheism and found myself a god or a guru. But I would like to set out my reasons for being profoundly unhappy — as I have been for 25 years — about belonging to a movement with the general label “humanist”.

Until the 1940s what is now called the humanist movement was known as the freethought movement. In its broadest sense it did and does encompass a spectrum from militant irreligion through rationalism to groups of agnostics, some of whom regard themselves as religious. The older word, “freethought”, aptly described the common denominator of these disparate organisations, namely, that they attracted people who insisted on the right to follow their own line of musing and reasoning, specifically on religious matters, instead of accepting some dogmatic, supernatural creed.

The word “humanist” began to catch on in freethought circles in the 1950s, perhaps because it had connotations of the Renaissance and the university. (The Renaissance humanists changed stylised, rather rigid mediaeval forms of art and literature to naturalistic representation and more free expression; they also encouraged a reawakened interest in scientific inquiry. At universities the word “humanist” had long signified a student of the liberal arts, classics and philosophy, as distinct from engineering or “hard” sciences.) The 1950s and '60s also witnessed a boom in secondary and tertiary education, so “humanism” had — or seemed to have — an educated, refined image which old working-class secularism allegedly lacked. The generic term “rationalism” had sometimes been used for the broad freethought movement, but some of the new humanists found rationalism an arid word, connoting an exclusive devotion to reason, despite the fact that sensible rationalists avoided any claim that reason was the only good in human life.

By the 1960s, however, “humanist” in a new sense had come into its own. During the period from 1959 to 1966 a large number of new humanist societies were formed, and some rationalist organisations cashed in on the vogue word and changed their names to “humanist”. For a while, “humanist” was flavour of the month. But fashions are fickle things and the popularity of humanism has waned since the 1960s just as that of secularism did after the 1880s.

I do not wish to decry the 1960s. The period had its faults, such as the narcissism of the “me-generation” and venal gurus who pandered to mass naïveté. But it was also a period of relative prosperity and full employment, of new-found freedom for the young; a time for optimism, unselfish idealism, experiment, protest and worthwhile change. I am glad I was young then, rather than now.

If humanism is no longer a band-wagon word, there is little pragmatic argument for its retention as a generic name for the freethought movement in general. My main contention, however, is that humanism is now more of a liability than an asset.

The people who promoted the word “humanism” in the 1960s had their merits. They knew what was politically relevant at the time and how to campaign on particular issues. However, they often seemed to have a horror of anything they perceived as “negative”. Hustlers and some politicians show the same tendency today. Humanist had a “positive” ring to it, despite the fact that what unified the movement was its disbelief in supernaturalism and its rejection of authority in philosophy, two thoroughly negative — but valuable — features.

I strongly assert that the search for and maintenance of truth, which is often negative, is more important than contrived efforts always to seem “positive”.

My principal objection to humanism is the implication by its promoters that freethinkers do — or should — “believe in Man”. I dissent from this on two grounds. It is reminiscent of “I believe in God” and I contend that the freethought or rationalist movement should not be promoting an ersatz religious mode of thinking but offering a radical departure from it by saying that the whole concept of “believing in” (in the dogmatic, religious sense) is erroneous. Belief, for a freethinker, should be tentative, and open to amendment and reasoned argument. Atheists rightly regard “Jesus saves” as a flatulent slogan; “Man is the measure of all things” is immodest, unscientific bunkum, and it is high time someone said so.

The cult of Man with a capital M is only a slight improvement on the cult of God. It still leaves a lot to be desired, women for instance. If the Christians' idea that they belong to the same exclusive club as the creator of the universe sounds to us infidels as monstrous conceit, I can only add that I find almost as pompous and egotistical the notion that man is some marvellous pinnacle of evolution; that because *Homo sapiens* has produced Einstein and Michaelangelo we can forget about the Nazis, the Crusaders and the Khmer Rouge; or that a Gothic cathedral,

an air-conditioned office block or the mausoleum of some ancient megalomaniac justify mankind's destruction of the world's forests, some of the most biologically valuable and breathtakingly beautiful places on earth.

Worst still, the adulation by some humanists of the human intellect (unique as it appears to be) encourages the old-fashioned nonsense that men and women are specially set apart from other living organisms and, worst of all, that the human race has an evolutionary destiny (formerly God's permission) to conquer and subdue nature.

"Glory to Man in the highest! for Man is the master of things" wrote Swinburne, my favourite poet. The words are marvellous rhetoric, intended to shock mid-nineteenth-century piety, but today, if taken seriously, they would be a recipe for an ecological nightmare. The fact is that if any other species of animal had caused a quarter as much destruction of life (including annihilation of whole species), degradation of the landscape, fouling of the seas and pollution of the air as humanity has, we would have declared such an animal — however smart and intelligent — to be dangerous vermin and would be spending vast resources on destroying it.

It seems to me to be callous and smug to adulate Humanity with a capital H. Yes, we can devise elaborate instruments and drop them on the planet Mars. Meanwhile, half the members of our own species are starving or are near to doing so. Another half, women, are often treated as drudges and serfs. Intelligence does not necessarily produce wisdom or goodness. It took brains and education to design the gas chambers at Auschwitz; skill to timetable the cattle trucks.

In addition to man's inhumanity to man there is humanity's massive, cruel exploitation of non-human animals for food, clothing, experiments and what passes for amusement. Protests against exploitation of animals have come from many quarters, but are in the freethought tradition from Shelley and Henry S. Salt. More than half a century ago the National Secular Society added a better deal for animals to its aims and objects. Yet not so long ago a humanist said to me, "I don't think animals have anything to do with humanism". We were talking about the concept of animal rights. I certainly want nothing to do with that sort of retrograde human chauvinism.

Unlike humanists I am not very proud of my membership of the human race. Yet I hope I am a good freethinker; I would like to think I am a reasonable rationalist; and I am very sure that secularism offers a happier prospect for humanity than the hells on earth created wherever religious zealots obtain power.

More than a hundred years ago the militant freethought movement started a campaign to make the

public aware that it was possible to limit family size. It was probably the most valuable thing the movement has ever done. Freethinkers promoted birth control because they realised that resources for human consumption were finite. They hoped that small families would reduce poverty and give ordinary people more control over their lives. It is not surprising that religious conservatives have always opposed birth control: they know — consciously or instinctively — that overbreeding in a human population makes for political and economic instability, insecurity, poverty and anxiety, just the conditions in which supernatural religion flourishes. Orthodox religion is a more cynical business than some humanists imagine.

I want the world to be a place fit for my grandchildren, where they will have space to move, freedom and time to think, wilderness to admire; a world where people can live in harmony with plants and animals. I do not want them to be forced to elbow their way through an overcrowded, stressed, war-ridden civilisation that has degraded the face of the earth into either ugly cities or vast, intensively farmed monocultures. It would only be a matter of time before such a society destroyed itself.

If we want the first sort of civilisation in the future, rather than the second, we may have to forgo a few fancy gadgets or devise more sensible alternatives; we will need to control our human numbers, put world poverty and land misuse before national privilege, nuclear war-toys and space research (without blunting our scientific curiosity), and change the emphasis of our throw-away, consumer society. Above all, we will need a more sensitive, perceptive view of the rôle of the human race on this planet, one which will understand the right of other animals to breathe free in the air we at present pollute, one which will appreciate the value — practical and aesthetic — of plants, trees and wilderness.

In creating a better world the freethought movement, if it gets its priorities right, has a useful part to play. The movement can promote a reasoned, scientific approach to problems; can ensure that human beings have more personal control over their minds, bodies and lives; can support freedom of speech and expression against efforts by the far right and far left to muzzle society; it can oppose new superstitions and pseudoscience and continue its historic rôle of exposing the restrictive, irrational and essentially totalitarian pack mentality encouraged by orthodox religion.

What has become pressingly important today is humanity's need to realise — and take action on the fact — that we do not stand apart from other living organisms. We are a part of nature: we can only "conquer" nature by destroying the natural world and ourselves with it. *Homo sapiens* badly needs a

sense of ecological humility, not the conceit of humanism.

We have seen the religious ethic of faith and universal love produce — in reality — hatred, intolerance and barbarism. For these reasons I think we should be wary of any general answer to the world's complex problems which is restricted to human considerations or, to be more precise, to considerations limited by the virtues and vices, diligence and greed, foresight and folly of just a section of humanity, the privileged middle class of the richer industrialised countries.

What has become increasingly important today is humanity's need to realise — and take action on the fact — that we need not stand apart from other living organisms. We are a part of nature: we can only "conquer" nature by destroying the natural world and ourselves with it. *Homo sapiens* badly needs a sense of ecological humility, combined with curiosity and intellectual integrity. We do not need blinkered conceit dignified as humanism, or evasion of the facts of life and death sanctified as religion.

## Holy Hallucinations

ERIC WESTMAN

It's strange how humans have a strong urge to see things that are not really there. I am not thinking of the paranoid, or even of candidates doing "ink-blot" tests, but of the general run of men and women. Staring into the fire (those of us old-fashioned enough to still have an open fire) we see faces or creatures; looking into the dregs of our teacup (those of us that still don't use tea bags), we see "pictures" to tell our fortunes by; and Madame Francesca, in her fairground tent and primed with a piece of silver (actually a £5 note) peers into her crystal ball and "sees" the various adventures that are going to befall us in the near future.

Does one particular picture, more than any other, appear to the casual viewer? Yes, indeed: the face of Jesus Christ is the most popular subject of such imaginings. Strange, since nobody can possibly know what he looked like, assuming the unlikely event that he really did exist some 2,000 years ago. Daguerre hadn't then invented his primitive photography; there is no record of God — or his son, whichever way you care to regard it — sitting for a portrait or a sculpture; and even God's own infallible book does not contain a self-description. All we know about him physically is that he had been circumcised — and that, of course, is not apparent in any of the "faces" that are so frequently seen. Yet Jesus is "recognised" by large numbers of people.

Some years ago, a favourite Sunday newspaper — if one may accord it that title — published a photo-

graph, taken from an aeroplane, of a snowcapped mountain. And in this photo, the tabloid trumpeted, could be seen the face of Jesus. Anxious to view a likeness of this popular, if mythical, personage, I scrutinised the picture from various distances and angles, with and without my NHS correctives, for about half an hour. Eventually, a shadowgraph of what, taken in isolation, might with difficulty be imagined to be a bearded human visage, appeared to form. But I didn't know what Jesus looked like, any more than anyone else did, and thought it resembled Clement Freud. Well, they are both Jews, so no doubt I was on the right track.

A woman wrote to another paper, saying that Jack Frost had etched a face on her window, and it was the face of — guess who? No, not Clement Freud: Jesus Christ. How she recognised her Saviour's physog was not evident, but at least she got two quid for her letter. People see Jesus Christs everywhere: go into a field and stare at a newly deposited cowpat, and you'll soon find Jesus gazing glumly up at you from his halo of bovine excreta.

Yes — Jesus is the Number One favourite in these sightings. It's never Sherlock Holmes, Groucho Marx, Mickey Mouse or even Aunt Ruby. But although J.C. is the top scorer, he does have occasional rivals: even his Mum has muscled in on the act, as the following account shows. A Mafioso driving a car was shot at by the police, and although the windscreen of his vehicle was badly crazed by a bullet, the crook escaped unscathed. Someone opined that the cracks in the windscreen formed an excellent picture of the Virgin Mary (of whom no contemporary representation exists) and the local bishop solemnly declared that the Mafioso was under the special protection of the Mother of God. No doubt the Mafioso had been consistent in handing to the Church a percentage of his ill-gotten gains.

Another of his rare rivals turned out to be no relation at all, as Arlene Gardner found out. Arlene lives in a mobile home in Estill Springs, Tennessee. On the porch of her trailer she keeps an upright model General Electric freezer. Nothing special about that, you'd say? But when Arlene's neighbour Katharine Partin flips on her front porch light, it casts a peculiar shadow on Arlene's freezer, about two feet long by one foot wide: or 60 cm by 30 cm for those of you who have gone metric. *And it resembled the profile of a bearded man!*

Immediately, word got around that Jesus was on show on Arlene's freezer every night as soon as it got dusk. For two weeks the narrow road leading to the trailer park was jammed with cars heading for Arlene's home, as 2,000 religious rubbernecks clamoured to take a look at their Saviour.

"There is definitely a face there," enthused one satisfied pilgrim, "it's very possible that this could be a vision." But sceptic Bob Mankin objected:



"When the good Lord comes, he won't come on a major appliance. If the Lord is coming, he would have a better way than coming on the side of a freezer." Spoilsport.

The town's chief citizen, Mayor John Gaul, was not impressed and considered the whole affair a nuisance. "All this has given us is a traffic problem, really," he grumbled. So even the hot dog stands didn't get much extra trade.

For once, even the clergy seemed disinclined to cash in on the phenomenon. In fact, the reaction of the local agent for Jesus, the Rev John Parton Jr, was remarkable. He did not ecstatically endorse the features of the shadow as that of his Principal, and joyfully instal a donations box on Arlene's porch (the donations going to Rev John and not to Jesus) which is the standard procedure. It was not, he snorted angrily, Jesus at all. The features were, declared Rev John, indubitably those of Willie Nelson, the celebrated country singer. And still he didn't set up a donations box alongside the freezer. He must have been newly ordained and hadn't yet developed the business acumen so vital to a successful man of God.

So there the matter stands. People still flock in their thousands to see the shadow, heedless of whether it represents Jesus the Christ or Willie the country singer. Interestingly, Willie has put in a second appearance, this time in Guatemala City. There, ecstatic folk rushed to tell Father Hector Bogran that the face of Jesus had appeared on the west wall of his newly whitewashed church. It is not reported whether Father B set up a donations box or if in view of what happened later, he handed the quetzales back to the donors. For when the next cloudburst thinned the whitewash somewhat, it was found that the features were those of Willie Nelson on a poster that had been painted over.

"But the remarkable thing," mused Father Bogran, "is that some of the pilgrims to the 'vision' were remarkably cured of their diseases." Mind over matter? Perhaps our National Health doctors should issue pictures of Willie Nelson along with their prescriptions, as supplements to Largactil and Nitrazepam tablets. At £2.40 a time it should produce a nice sum to spend on anti-AIDS condoms.

Does all this signal a new trend: the decline of religious figures and their replacement by popular entertainers in shadows and visions? What if this trend spreads to Britain: whose face will people start seeing in cowpats and frosted windows? Bruce Forsyth or Ken Dodd? Princess Di? You know, I'd lay odds that the most likely candidate for appearances in popular visions would be Britain's self-appointed Saviour, herself: Margaret Thatcher.

And there would be a donations box handy.

## LETTERS

### EVOLUTION AND THE EMBRYO

The National Secular Society statement on embryo research, sent to the DHSS and reported in *The Free-thinker* (September), is full of inconsistencies and errors. For example, we are told that the limit of 14 days on embryo experimentation suggested by Warnock is arbitrary. Agreed! But the statement then suggests that 35 to 38 days would be more sensible because of the start of the development of the nervous system at that time. Surely this is equally arbitrary as the development of the nervous system is gradual and not a sudden change (unlike brain death with which it is paralleled in the statement). In fact there is no qualitative change in the developing embryo throughout the whole gestation period, only gradual evolution from the point of conception.

This also applies to consciousness which, in an embryo, gradually develops and may well begin early on. It is well documented that unborn babies respond to outside stimuli several months before birth.

In any case, who can say that consciousness is a valid measure of human worth? A child of three is more conscious than a newly born baby; none of us can remember our first month of life. Is he or she then of more worth? A person may be in a coma for several months and not respond to any external stimuli. Does he then become expendable "non-human" material?

The most facile comment in the whole statement must surely be the comparison between a fragment of flesh from a glazed knee and an embryo. It is true that both contain cells and that each cell contains the DNA "blueprint". But there the similarity ends. You might as well compare a twig with a seed or an acorn with an oak leaf simply because they contain the same basic cells.

One final point. If the NSS suggestion that 35 days should be the maximum for experimentation, surely this should be applied to abortion as well. If embryos may become conscious beyond this period it is equally wrong to murder as to experiment on. I am not aware that the National Secular Society is campaigning to reduce the abortion limit to seven weeks.

As ever, humanistic values when examined are totally arbitrary.

S. J. NICHOLLS

### NORTHERN IRELAND

The Campaign for Equal Citizenship in Northern Ireland believes that sectarian politics would decline if the major British parties were to organise there. Whether they are correct or not can only be tested by experiment. Their aspiration, however, is a reasonable one and does not deserve the hostile treatment it received in *The Ulster Quickstand* (September), which I presume was written by the editor.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement put Northern Ireland under the effective rule of the Dublin Government, against the democratically expressed wishes of the vast majority of its inhabitants. The rights of the Catholic minority in the north are "safeguarded" by the Dublin Government. There is no reciprocal safeguarding of the rights of the non-Catholic minority in the Republic where, for example, all the schools are run by the churches and it costs a minimum of £100 a year to send a non-Catholic child to a non-Catholic secondary

(continued on page 174)

# BOOK

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE FREUDIAN EMPIRE,  
by H. J. Eysenck. Penguin, £3.95

This is the kind of book which is likely to leave the intelligent lay reader in despair about the state of psychology. Eysenck is a prominent psychologist who writes prolifically, well, and persuasively — primarily about personality and intelligence. He writes with the conviction that he can prescribe the definition of “scientific” psychology and that he has a personal duty to scourge the discipline of its anti-scientific demons. The most compelling demon is Freud.

Eysenck has been conducting a campaign against Freudian theory and particularly against Freudian methodology for a number of years. Although much of this book is a measured and careful demolition of the scientific claims of the theory, there also comes through a passionate polemic against the man. Eysenck blames Freudian ideas for various manifestations of the breakdown of society (especially that hoary myth “permissiveness”). He also claims that acceptance of Freudian theory and methods in research in abnormal psychology, and most particularly in therapeutic techniques, has “held back scientific progress” in psychology and psychiatry for fifty years. The intense animus appears to date back to Eysenck’s student days when he was obviously very interested in Freud’s writings, and attempted to test many of the hypotheses. It is not clear whether Eysenck conducted these early experiments as a skeptical believer or an iconoclast, but the intensity and time investment suggests a powerful involvement in Freudian theory.

This book brings together a large number of criticisms of Freudian theory, methodology and therapeutic techniques which argue that Freudian theory does not meet the criteria of natural science — a criterion that Freud frequently asserted that he wished to be judged by, though it is not at all clear that Eysenck’s definitions of the criteria of natural science — which arise directly from a particular interpretation of logical positivism — are the same as those of Freud. On the basis of the interpretation of those criteria that Eysenck chooses to apply, he makes his case.

The philosopher of science, Karl Popper, claimed that psychoanalysis, along with Marxism, was a “pseudo-science” because it could not generate testable hypotheses and replicable studies, and was therefore not falsifiable. Subsequently, many critics of Popper have pointed out that quite a few “natural” sciences that rely on observational methods of singular or long-past events would also fail Popper’s test, and that therefore he must be regarded

# FREETHINKER

as proposing an extremely narrow definition of the scientific method. However, Eysenck subscribes to the narrow version of Popper’s definition of science as controlled experimentation, but chooses to argue that Freud’s theory does lend itself to falsifiability.

Eysenck’s main enthusiasm is for the controlled experiment. For example, he argues that the “proof” of the effectiveness of psychotherapeutic techniques must be in their comparative success in relation both to a control group of untreated patients, and a comparison group of other methods. This is a wholly unrealistic requirement; there are many difficulties in making such assessments in view of the wide variation in length of time of treatment, and the difficulty of defining “cure” in any case — and of course the ethical and practical problems of creating a “control group”. However, comparisons of studies seem to show that psychotherapeutic methods (of various sorts) do not have a greater success rate than can be accounted for by spontaneous remission. The only method which does show a better success rate is behaviour modification — the application of counter-conditioning methods to deal with phobias or bad “habits” such as bed-wetting — in other words, behavioural problems which have a very specific aetiology and may not necessarily be part of a widespread personality dysfunction.

Eysenck adopts the strict criterion of noting how a particular consequence should follow from a very precise statement of the theory, rather than from a general principle — for example a defensive response or a neurotic reaction arises not from repression but from the specific repression of an infantile wish-fulfilment. Where possible, as in the case of the effects of weaning or toilet-training, Eysenck presents studies which fail to show any effects; however, where there is some evidence to support something akin to a Freudian conclusion, he carefully points out how other interpretations could be used to explain the phenomenon. This is perfectly sound reasoning — except that often the alternative explanation is no more plausible, or supported by evidence, than that which would accrue from the Freudian. Nor does he take into account the fact that Freud’s ideas developed and changed over the years; Eysenck pays a great deal of attention to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which was one of Freud’s earliest works.

He repeatedly criticises the Freudian school — and especially Freud himself — for resisting criticisms and failing to consider alternative explanations for their data. Unfortunately that trait is one to be found in most innovative scientists, including Eysenck himself; *pace* the Popperian “ideal” (if that it is) most

# REVIEW

scientists await the refutations by others of their theories, being more concerned to develop the ideas and accumulate supportive evidence. The gratuitous comment that psychoanalysts insist on "initiation rites involving years of analysis by members of the circle" applies equally well to the PhD training in any discipline — the difference is that a PhD can be obtained with the support of government grants, and within university institutions; it is only possible to gain psychoanalytic training through expensive private tuition. This hardly constitutes evidence of a powerful orthodoxy which holds back the impact of the "respectable" scientific work.

Despite the persuasiveness of the arguments and the evidence, eventually one ends up with the feeling, "why all the effort?" As Eysenck does concede, supporters of the Freudian school have made their own modifications of the theory and fully acknowledge the criticisms of many of the main tenets of the original — for example the Oedipus complex. The effect of Freudian ideas on present-day psychology is highly diffuse, and many ideas are entrenched in some very respectable brands of experimental work — one can cite the idea of identification, which plays an important role in developmental learning theory.

What stirs Eysenck so much is the underlying issue of what should constitute "scientific method". He pits a particular model of "scientific psychology" against psychoanalysis, and as we have seen, I concede that according to those criteria, psychoanalysis fails. But let us explore what Eysenck means by "scientific". At one point he contrasts hermeneutics — the study of symbol and meaning — with what he terms the natural science approach which stresses the study of behaviour. What does this mean in fact? The only psychologists who have truly studied behaviour in isolation from meaning have been behaviourists who worked only with animals, and carefully constructed experiments in which they believed they had controlled all the variables. Some useful information was gleaned from these studies, mostly about simple conditioning, which indeed is relevant to some areas even of human learning. But this method can hardly be considered "scientific" if we include in that definition the necessity of studying a reasonably broad range of human behaviour.

The predominant areas of psychology concerned with humans — and ones which are considered impeccably "scientific" by the psychological establishment — now pay a great deal of attention to language and to the importance of how events are interpreted; in other words, the psychologist is considering meaning as a central and relevant

phenomenon in the situation. Increasingly, psychologists are learning to do textual and linguistic analysis. Eysenck does not consider that this way of dealing with data constitutes "science", but his own work has relied extensively on linguistically-mediated data, in the form of questionnaire measures.

Like most people trained in academic psychology, I hold no strong brief for Freudian theory. I think few people do — not even the *literati* whom Eysenck particularly accuses of spreading the dangerous menace. It seems to me a curious exercise to treat the writings of someone who died fifty years ago, and whose work has been transmuted by even his most devoted followers, as if it were a new and powerful model to be demolished before it can take root. The claims that Freud made were often excessive and usually speculative; they were also often culture-bound — but the impact of psychoanalysis as a body of ideas about human functioning has been enormous, particularly outside psychology.

Eysenck argues that all the "right ideas in psychoanalysis" (by which he seems to mean ideas that accord with twentieth-century commonsense) have been around for centuries; while this may in part be true, it does not alter the significance of Freud's work in systematising them into a theory — however incomplete and flawed. Most of our present-day ideas in fact can be "traced" to an earlier tradition (even some Greeks were heliocentric); the contribution to theory lies in formulating something that has coherence.

Freud's techniques were based on intensive observations over a long period of time — very much the methods of a biological scientist, in fact. Eysenck gives little weight to careful observation, and much to controlled experimentation. But surely an even more important issue in science is to ask the right questions? Eysenck does not consider whether the questions that Freud addressed are important questions, only whether his methods for answering them met particular criteria. In other sciences (for example biology, and also physics) if interesting questions cannot be answered by the current methodology, it is the methodology that changes, not the question that gets lost; only in certain branches of psychology do people say in effect or even sometimes in fact, "this question cannot exist because I do not have the techniques to measure the phenomenon".

Much may be wrong with Freudian theory, but it is probably the only theory within psychology which has made the systematic effort to take on board the fact that human beings are conflicted, that their motivations and emotional states have a substantial effect on behaviour, thinking, memory, learning and perception. Freud's careful and painstaking observations over four decades attempted to document these conflicts and their manifestations; no-one else

has dared. The fact that his theory generated the sort of hypotheses that Eysenck considers it easy to demolish does not alter the importance of those questions.

Any competent final year undergraduate can do a decent experiment; it takes genius to ask the right questions. And science progresses by taking notice of significant anomalies, not simply by doing neat experiments — though these will consolidate that progress. I do not doubt that psychoanalysis has failed to consolidate the progress, but I have grave doubts that Eysenck's approach to "science" will leave its practitioners free enough of methodological chains to be able to ask the right questions.

Finally, throughout the book Eysenck makes much of a particular choice; he asks whether a parent would prefer the psychologist to use behaviour therapy methods to cure head-banging or enuresis in children, or to use what he claims would be a prolonged and by no means guaranteed successful form of psychotherapy. At the end of the book he poses the question slightly differently; he argues that the "humane" response, in line with psychoanalytic theory, is to recognise that the child is trying to attract attention, and therefore the "correct"

reaction is to comfort it — this, Eysenck argues, would simply "reinforce" the undesirable behaviour. He contrasts this with the apparently more inhumane but effective method of negatively reinforcing the behaviour (by isolating the child) or by retraining the habit (eg of awakening when the urge to urinate occurs) by appropriate Pavlovian conditioning. The latter, he argues, is more "effective".

If it were my child, that is not how I would perceive the choice; I would want to know why she behaves like this. I might give credence to the skills of the therapist who can "cure" the symptom most effectively, but I wouldn't give a fig for his or her wisdom or basic understanding of human behaviour, if they didn't even bother to try to find out why the child was behaving like that. Nor would I give much for a science that considered itself complete when it had found out approximately as much about human behaviour as it takes to get a dog into a good behaviour competition. Fortunately, I am a psychologist and I know that most of us are not as blinkered as Hans Eysenck about what constitutes "science".

HELEN HASTE

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## Freethought in Fiction (5)

### *The Anarchists*

ANDREW WHITEHEAD

A curious amalgam of documentary style fiction and political polemic, J. H. Mackay's "The Anarchists" has long languished in unwarranted obscurity. Even the recent revival of interest in Mackay has tended to overlook this his first substantial prose work, focussing rather on his later championing of gay love.

*Die Anarchisten*, published in Zurich in 1891, quickly gained an international renown. It was translated into French, Dutch, Yiddish and several other languages. An English edition, under the title *The Anarchists: a picture of civilization at the close of the nineteenth century*, was published in Boston by the individualist anarchist Benjamin Tucker. But the translation did not do full justice to the book, and no British edition was ever published. So although *The Anarchists* is set in London — indeed is one of the most interesting books about the city at that time — it won little attention in Britain.

John Henry Mackay was born in Greenock in 1864 and his father was a Scottish insurance broker, but in every other respect he was German and that was the language in which he wrote. He was very young when his father died and his mother returned to her native Hamburg. In his twenties, Mackay travelled widely in Europe and the United States. He came to

London in the spring of 1887 and spent about a year there, at a crucial time in his political development.

In the introduction to *The Anarchists*, Mackay acknowledges the influence on him of the writings of Proudhon, Tucker and Stirner (Mackay was later to write a biography of Stirner), and it seems to have been during his time in London — no doubt moulded by his reading — that Mackay came to espouse individualist anarchism. He gained some attention in 1888 with the publication of a volume of anarchist verse. And much of *The Anarchists* takes the form of a fervent political treatise. The central figure in the book champions individualist anarchism, with all the faith and vigour of a recent convert, against a more collectivist political approach which is described as communist anarchism.

Some of the passages of political dialogue are heavy going, but what enlivens the book is the outraged description of the poverty Mackay saw around him in his explorations of the less salubrious parts of London. It is the Jubilee year, Mackay reminds his readers in the first paragraph of the book, which he set in the autumn of 1887. As if to contrast the veneer of prosperity and civilisation with the realities of London life, Mackay plunges straight into an account of child prostitution in the Charing Cross

area, revealing how mothers pleaded with well-dressed passers-by to buy the favours of their daughters:

"Two shillings only; she is still so young, but she will do anything you want," and with that she drew the girl near, who turned away, trembling and crying.

A shudder ran through him. But the beseeching and piteous voice of the woman kept on.

"Pray, do take her along. If you won't do it, we shall have to sleep outdoors, — only two shillings, gentleman, only two shillings; just see how pretty she is!"

His description of Whitechapel — "The East End in the East End! The hell of hells!" — is similarly bleak:

Whoever would like to see how much human nature can endure; whoever still believes in the childish dream that the world may be saved by love, poverty relieved by charity, misery abolished by the State; whoever would trace the last effects of the terrible deeds of the murderer State — let him visit the battlefield of Brick Lane, where men do not fall with skulls cracked and hearts shot through, but where hunger cuts them down easily, after want has deprived them of their last force of resistance.

Mackay also incorporated into the book descriptions of the political meetings and protests in which he participated while in London. There's a detailed account of a meeting at the South Place Institute called to protest against the death sentences passed on a group of anarchists in Chicago. He describes the Institute as a "dark, church-like building":

The hall was of about equal width and depth; a broad gallery, which was already filled, extended along the walls. At an elevation of several feet, a platform rose in front, on which were placed a number of chairs for the speakers. It was still unoccupied. The hall gave the impression of being used for religious purposes. The shape of the seats also indicated this.

This evening, however, nothing was to be noticed of the indifferent, mechanically quiet routine of a religious meeting. The seats were occupied by an excited, strongly moved multitude loudly exchanging their opinions.

Kropotkin and William Morris were among the speakers. There are pen portraits of others present, and recitation of such *minutiae* as the titles of the papers on sale in the hall. *The Anarchists* also contains very precise descriptions of socialist-inspired demonstrations of the unemployed, of German and Jewish socialist clubs in London, and of the violent police dispersal on 13 November 1887 of demonstrators entering Trafalgar Square (an incident which became known in radical and socialist annals as "Bloody Sunday").

The central argument of the polemical chapters of the book is that all forms of collectivism, with their disregard of the individual, are every bit as shackling as organised religion. Mackay puts in the mouth of his central character a fierce riposte to the argu-

ments for communist anarchism:

"I battle exclusively for my liberty. You battle for what you call the liberty of others.

"Every other word you speak is abolition. That means forcible destruction.

"You talk about the abolition of religion. You want to banish its priests, extirpate its teachings, persecute its followers.

"I trust to the steadily increasing perception which puts knowledge in the place of faith. It is economic dependence that forces most people nowadays into recognizing one of the many still existing churches, and prevents them from leaving them.

"After the chains of labor have fallen, the churches will of themselves become deserted, the teachers of a delusive faith and folly will no longer find listeners, and their priests will be forsaken.

"But I would be the last to approve of the crime against the liberty of individuals which would by force seek to prevent a man from adoring God as the creator, Christ as the saviour, the pope as infallible, and Vitzliputzli as the devil, so long as he did not trouble me with his nonsense and demand tribute from me in the name of his infallible faith."

But Mackay himself had an almost infallible faith in the future, and towards the end of the book looks ahead to the full realisation of his rationalist and individualist precepts:

The nineteenth century has deposed "our Father in Heaven". It no longer believes in a divine power to which it is subject.

But only the children of the twentieth century would be the real atheists; doubters of divine omnipotence, they had to begin to test the justification of all human authority by the relentless criticism of their reason.

They would be imbued with the consciousness of their own dignity. Instead of seeking their pride as hitherto in subjection, humility, devotion, they would regard command as presumption, obedience as sacrifice, and each as a dishonor which the free man despises.

The new century did not, of course, bear out Mackay's hopes. In 1909 his own writings advocating tolerance of relationships between men and mature boys were declared obscene by a German court and ordered to be destroyed. And in May 1933, just a few weeks after Hitler took power, Mackay died, apparently by his own hand.

## Freethinker Fund

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Total for September: £152.90.

## Letters

school. It costs Catholic parents nothing to send their children to Catholic schools.

The Republic has shown, in its recent referenda on divorce and abortion, that it is still the most Catholic country after the Vatican, with little interest in conciliating or tolerating the godless propensities of its non-Catholic minority.

The claim that "mainland Britishers" would choose to expel Northern Ireland from the UK against the wishes of the vast majority of its people is highly debatable. Would the Scots vote to expel Northern Ireland? Would the English vote to expel the Scots? Or Liverpool?

The whole Ulster Quicksand article, with its sanctimonious complaints about Government expenditure in the Province, was an example of English nationalism at its most insular and unpleasant. It was also an example of the modern "socially acceptable" form of anti-Irish bigotry — hatred of the Northern Irish Protestants.

PAUL ROWLANDSON

### NO LAUGHING MATTER

I'm happy that Ursula MacKenzie found **Cults: Guidelines for Gurus** (August) "a pleasure to read." In her exertions for Family Action Information and Rescue she can't find too much to smile at. I had hoped that she might get the odd chuckle from **Blue-Chip God Companies** (September), but this was not to be.

A tone of barbed banter isn't easy to sustain, and I'm ready to admit there may have been some falling away. Nor is the application of guidelines quite as exuberant as the devising of them. Moreover, the Punch and Judy show of the Bakkers is intrinsically more risible than the mystery play of the bishops. But I fear there is a deeper reason why Mrs MacKenzie, an orthodox Christian, wasn't amused by the second piece. And that is the nature of religious belief.

Almost by definition the numinous is not humorous. In this respect she shares the reaction of the "cult folk". All that separates them is the content of their beliefs. The nearest secular equivalent to this phenomenon is the suspension of disbelief at the opera, where we persuade ourselves that a portly, ageing and egocentric diva is actually a maiden dying of love and consumption.

Would that all religious tyranny and atrocities were as ancient as the Spanish Inquisition. Alas, the twentieth century offers examples no less gruesome. She herself alludes to Northern Ireland. One might also mention Catholic Fascism before and during World War II, the Middle East, Vietnam, South Africa, Central and South America. In fact, almost everywhere where religion is taken seriously.

DAVID TRIBE

### MERE CHRISTIANITY? MERE SUPERSTITION!

How can we accord any value to Ursula MacKenzie's arguments? All she does is seek to soften the face of her Christian superstition.

In her letter (October) Mrs MacKenzie begins in a tolerant manner about David Tribe's article, **Cults: Guidelines for Gurus**. Then she changes slightly towards his **Blue-Chip God Companies** with words like "laboured", "not funny", etc. Who does she think she can fool? She had her brand of superstition and the cults have theirs — she is merely in competition with them. She may as well compare washing powders; each manufacturer has always got the best product. Some simply spend more on advertising.

Ursula MacKenzie suggests that David Tribe should

forget the Spanish Inquisition. Well I say don't forget it. If opposition to Christianity led to the Spanish Inquisition, we should remember it.

Finally comes the attempt at conversion with the example of C. S. Lewis. We are invited to take up the challenge and read the first two chapters of his **Mere Christianity**. Those who accept the challenge should also read his gentle and pleasant **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**. But treat both as fairy tales.

Ursula MacKenzie and C. S. Lewis both suffer the weight of superstition. We must reject superstition and belief in the supernatural. There are enough human problems.

Christianity and cults — Mere Superstition.

R. J. SINCLAIR

## Marjorie Mepham, 1907-1987

The death of Marjorie Mepham on 14 October at the age of 80 will be mourned by many who remember her kindness with gratitude and affection. She made an immense contribution to the humanist movement, and gave generously of her time and energy to many voluntary organisations.

Marjorie Mepham was born in London, and following a short spell in India — her father was a soldier — the family returned to England. After attending a local dame school for some years, Marjorie went to Wallington Grammar School for Girls, excelling in maths and physics. Further education in these subjects was not readily available for girls at that time. Undeterred, she enrolled in evening classes at Chelsea Polytechnic and later got a degree.

During the war Marjorie first became involved with the Labour Party. It was at this time that she met George Mepham and they both worked for the Party in Hampstead and Willesden. They were married in 1948.

Two years later the Mephams moved to Manchester where Marjorie worked at the BBC Education Department. Once again she was helping the Labour Party and also joined the secular humanist movement. She remained a lifelong member of the British Humanist Association, the National Secular Society, South Place Ethical Society, and was for many years a keen reader and supporter of *The Freethinker*.

Marjorie and George Mepham, with twin boys Roger and Trevor, returned to the south in 1954, and settled in Sutton, Surrey. They participated in the inauguration of the Agnostics (later Independent) Adoption Society and helped to form Sutton Humanist Group. As Group secretary, Marjorie wrote many letters to the local press and gave talks to schools.

In 1964 Marjorie played a key role in a new project. Humanist Holidays was in effect her creation. As its first secretary and treasurer she was until

1979 responsible for the considerable amount of administrative and organisational work involved in arranging holiday centres. Humanist Holidays has enabled hundreds of participants to enjoy their holidays in congenial surroundings with like-minded people. It continues to function with much success.

Marjorie was a member of a local group of the World Development Movement, initially concerned with the plight of Bangladesh and later with Third World debt problems. Her concern for prisoners of conscience led to active involvement with Amnesty International. She did much in the Sutton area for New Way Trust which works for the rehabilitation of offenders.

Animal rights was another of her major concerns — she was a vegetarian for over forty years — and she supported the work of the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare. (Memorial donations may be sent to the Federation at 8 Hamilton Close, South Mimms, Potters Bar, Hertfordshire, ENJ 3QD.)

Marjorie had wide cultural tastes. She loved good theatre and opera, especially the works of Mozart, Verdi and Puccini. Other favourite composers included Chopin and Monteverdi. She greatly enjoyed visits to Glyndebourne and Covent Garden, and initiated Sutton Humanist Group's annual visit to the open-air theatre at Polesden Lacey.

It is difficult to summarise Marjorie Mepham's long life of social activity and service to others. Her appearance of physical frailty was deceptive. She was exceedingly modest and self-effacing, never seeking the limelight but always caring about causes and people. Conscientious to a degree, she blamed herself if anything went wrong. Integrity, compassion and public spirit were her guidelines for living.

There was a large gathering of family, friends and representatives of organisations at the secular committal ceremony which was held at North East Surrey Crematorium, Morden.

## Announcement

The cover price of *The Freethinker* will be increased to 40p on 1 January 1988. This is the first price increase since 1983.

Postal subscriptions will be: United Kingdom, 12 months £5; overseas surface mail (including Republic of Ireland), £5.60; United States, \$12.

Overseas subscribers are requested to obtain sterling drafts from their banks, but if remittance is in foreign currency (including Republic of Ireland), send the equivalent of £5 sterling or USA \$8 to cover bank charges. Alternatively, send at your own risk currency notes convertible in the United Kingdom, plus bank charges equivalent to USA \$3.

Cheques, money orders, etc, should be made payable to G. W. Foote & Co Ltd.

## EVENTS

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** New Venture Theatre Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton. Sunday, 6 December, 5.30 for 6 pm. Public Meeting.

**Edinburgh Humanist Group.** Programme for 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.** The Unitarian Centre, 72 Berkeley Street (near Mitchell Library), Glasgow. Tuesday, 24 November, 7.30 pm. Jim McCurdie and Alex Stewart: Non-Religious Funerals. Sunday, 13 December, 2.30 pm. Yuletide Social.

**Havering and District Humanist Society.** Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road, Harold Wood. Tuesday, 1 December, 8 pm. Public Meeting.

**Humanist Holidays.** Christmas at a central Brighton hotel. Information obtainable from Gillian Bailey, 18 Priors Road, Cheltenham, GL25 5AA, telephone 0242-39175.

**International Humanist and Ethical Union.** International Conference at the State University of New York, Buffalo, USA and the Sheraton-Brock Hotel, Niagara Falls, Canada, 2-6 August 1988. Information obtainable from Free Inquiry magazine, PO Box 5, Buffalo, New York 14215, USA.

**Leeds and District Humanist Group.** Swarthmore Institute, Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Monday, 16 November, 7.30 pm. Barbara Smoker: Medical Ethics — Current Issues.

**Lewisham Humanist Group.** Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 26 November, 7.45 pm. Denis Cobell: AIDS.

**National Secular Society.** Annual Dinner at the Coburg Hotel, London, Saturday, 19 March, 1988.

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

**Sutton Humanist Group.** Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 9 December, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. Michael Cooper: Review of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless.

**Warwickshire Humanist Group.** Friends Meeting House, Hill Street (off Corporation Street), Coventry. Thursday, 19 November, 8 pm. Dilys Went: Learning About Sex — Sex Education in Schools.

**West Glamorgan Humanist Group.** Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Georgina Coupland, 117 Pennard Drive, Southgate, telephone 044 128 3631.

## "Moral Majority" in Britain

enthusiastic for American-style 'missions'."

Martin Horwood said that in the political arena there are some signs of fundamentalists aligning themselves with Right-wing politics.

"A columnist in the *Guardian* earlier this year warned of the influence of American-based missions bringing 'American consumerist ideology' into British churches, and noted that even the respectable Scripture Union was deviating into 'crude anti-Russian propaganda'.

"But a Left-Right divide is rather misleading. Politically, the most controversial moral issues are the subjects of parliamentary free votes, the issues of conscience. In the United States the loose party system allows politicians to be targetted and labelled as liberal or unsound on a range of issues from foreign policy to abortion — all equally political, equally relevant to election campaigning.

"In the UK strict party whips and rigid manifestos allow no such flexibility. Religious pressure seems unlikely ever to exert an influence on such key party issues as defence and foreign policy, and political pressure in all three major parties to put capital punishment within the party whip has so far fallen on stony ground. Only the Reverend Ian Paisley stands out as a shining example of how to combine party politics with religion."

On free votes of conscience, party lines blur and dissolve. Thus David Alton, Liberal and Roman Catholic MP, is a champion of AIDS sufferers, hostile to Mrs Thatcher's Victorian values, and yet the focus for a major religious campaign on abortion identical in many ways to those of the US Moral Majority, characterised by religious-inspired moral outrage and a minimum of factual justification.

"Alton's campaign is backed by the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child and Life. Organisations with similar moral convictions have been fairly unusual in the past. Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers' and Listeners' Association was formed in 1963 and SPUC after the Abortion Act in 1967. But the 'eighties have brought a rash of new and more overtly religious organisations: Christian Action Research and Education in 1981, the Jubilee Centre in 1983 and the National Campaign for the Family, the National Campaign for Christian Standards in Society and the Conservative Family Campaign within months of each other in 1986.

"But these organisations, while well-resourced and with dedicated support, will not be able to exploit all the paths followed in the US. There will be no Liberty University — the public provision of higher education is too deeply ingrained here — far more so than in State secondary education, currently being unravelled by Kenneth Baker. And British religious education, unlike American, is integrated into the curriculum and enjoys broad and multi-denomina-

tional support.

"The expansion and deregulation of the airwaves in Europe may offer some opportunities for televangelism but hard sell American-style TV religion is anathema to almost everyone in the church here. . .

"The picture looks increasingly dissimilar, but the issues on which the fundamentalists campaign are not. Alton's supporters on abortion part company with him on sexual immorality, particularly when AIDS or feminism are mentioned. On such subjects as these, along with other matters of life or death such as embryo research, a familiar pattern emerges. Strands come together as Christian Union students join *Buzz* readers, old-fashioned hardliners, and the more dogmatic Roman Catholics in opposition to secular views on moral issues. Allies appear in unlikely places as the Chief Rabbi joins their condemnation of the Warnock report and Islamic leaders join them in defence of religious assemblies in schools."

Martin Horwood said that although Moral Majority fundamentalists were not a majority they are unquestionably influential.

"Like their US counterparts, they are learning to lobby brilliantly and they do have resources and highly dedicated support. Journalists know their names, MPs dread their bulk mail and media producers can always get a quote on a newsy subject from them. Religious influence in Britain today should not be measured by bums on pews, but rather by radio interviews and direct mail shots through the letterboxes."

## More Football Violence

Physical violence marred a football match at Dawsholm Park, Glasgow, when centre half Tommy Orr was felled by the opposing team's striker. Douglas McConnell was fined £100 for assault at Glasgow Sheriff Court. The court heard that after the incident Orr was taken to hospital with a broken jaw. His face was wired up for five weeks.

McConnell admitted the assault. He told the police: "I'm sorry about what I did. I feel quite bad about it and it has never happened before in twelve years of playing football."

Mr Kevin Duffy, defending, said McConnell, who was the league's Player of the Year, scored a lot of goals. During the match he was constantly elbowed and eventually struck out with his left hand which connected with Mr Orr's chin.

The court also heard that "because of their violent conduct and dangerous play over a number of games," McConnell's team had been expelled from the Church Football League. He played for Allander Evangelicals and the broken-jawed Mr Orr for Linwood Baptists.