

The Freethinker

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THE BATTLE CONTINUES, DECLARES AUTHOR OF *IN GOD'S NAME*

Writer David Yallop was guest of honour at the National Secular Society's annual dinner in London on 19 March. Barbara Smoker, who presided, proposed a toast to the author of "*In God's Name*", in which, after three years of intensive research, he concluded that Pope John Paul I was murdered.

"It's still in the best seller lists in quite a number of countries, which not only gratifies me, but irritates the Vatican, so my gratification is twice blessed, if I dare use such a word in present company.

"In early 1987, Pope Paul II continued his highly expensive habit of continuous world tours. Apparently my book followed the Pope around. In Chile and in the Argentine, copies were being held up in the crowds, and the people could be heard shouting at the Pope, 'Answer! Answer!' And it will come as no surprise when I say that answer came there none".

David Yallop said there was no doubt whatsoever that in his mind John Paul I was murdered. In his book he identified six men who, together or independently, had very powerful motives for killing the Pope.

"One of the six I identified was a man called Michele Sindona, who was a member of the Mafia and also a member of P2, the illegal masonic lodge. I accused him of a number of crimes as well as possibly being involved in the murder of the Pope. I accused him, for example, of the murder of an Italian government official called Giorgio Ambrosoli. At the time the book came out Sindona was in prison in America serving 25 years for the biggest bank crash in the history of America, the Franklin Bank Crash.

"Prior to that he had been the Vatican's banker. They kept extremely good company inside the Vatican. It was said to explain and apologise for Paul

Marcinkus, Archbishop Paul Marcinkus, who is the head of the Vatican Bank, 'Well, at the time of Michele Sindona, he was a virgin banker'. After Michele Sindona came a gentleman called Roberto Calvi, who ended up hanging under Blackfriars Bridge. And one can only say of Marcinkus, 'Well, you can only be a virgin once.'"

Sindona was extradited from the United States to Italy where he was tried and found guilty of Ambrosoli's murder. Before his trial he was visited in prison by P2 members. He had previously threatened to tell all, and there was a strong possibility that, like many members of the Mafia, he would talk in order to get a reduced sentence. But one morning his usual cup of coffee contained a lethal dose of poison.

"This man was being held in a maximum security prison", David Yallop declared.

"He was subjected to constant 24-hour surveillance, there were never less than three guards with him, his food and drink came into the prison in sealed containers.

"Now this is very important in terms of looking at the murder of Albino Luciani. If they could get into a maximum security prison to poison Michele Sindona, imagine how easy it would have been to get in to Pope John Paul I.

"Up to June 1984, when my book was first published, I used to walk in and out of the Vatican freely. Always I carried a large black case. The research assistants with me also were always carrying bags. We were never stopped, we were never searched. We could have taken enough gelignite in to blow up the Sistine Chapel. The security has been tightened up since my book came out, but at the time of the Pope's murder in 1978, there was no

(continued inside back page)

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Vol 108 No 4 CONTENTS April 1988

THE BATTLE CONTINUES, DECLARES AUTHOR OF <i>IN GOD'S NAME</i>	49
NEWS AND NOTES	50
Defending "False" Faiths; Witches' Liberation; A Belated Admission	
THE CARPENTER	54
June Callwood	
JOHN M. ALLEGRO, 1923-1988	55
R. J. Condon	
THE LAST SAYINGS OR DYING LEGACY OF MR THOMAS HOBBS OF MALMESBURY	56
BOOKS	56
Citizen of the World: Essays on Thomas Paine Reviewer: Christopher Brunel	
Out of Control Reviewer: Karl Heath	
HAPPY FAMILIES	60
Terry Liddle	
WHITHER OR WITHER: A CHURCH IN DECLINE	61
Daniel O'Hara	
MISCELLANEOUS Obituary (Jesse Collins) 52; "Jesus is Alive" Slogan a Dead Loss, 53; Tories Call for Action Against Sects, 53; Letters, 62	

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NEWS

DEFENDING "FALSE" FAITHS

Back in 1976 Dr Donald Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury and theological Thatcherite, reminded the faithful that they could still resort to the use of blasphemy law. The following year Mary Whitehouse launched a private prosecution for blasphemous libel against *Gay News*. Editor Denis Lemon was tried at the Old Bailey, fined £500 and sentenced to nine months' imprisonment (suspended for eighteen months). The publishers were fined £1,000. Mrs Whitehouse's expenses were paid out of public funds. The trial was conducted by Judge Alan King-Hamilton, then president of the West London Synagogue, who later revealed that during the preparation and delivery of his summing-up he "was half-conscious of being guided by some supernatural inspiration".

The *Gay News* case provoked considerable public interest, for it was generally believed (not least among Christians) that blasphemy law was a dead duck. During the previous 55 years there had been only one case, Lady Birdwood's unsuccessful (and almost unnoticed) prosecution of Jack Gold and Eleanor Fazan, directors of Oscar Panizza's play, *Counsel of Love*, at the Criterion Theatre, London.

Debate continued long after the *Gay News* trial ended, and the Law Commission decided to consider the question of blasphemy law. In 1985 it issued a report, *Offences Against Religion and Public Worship*, recommending abolition of the common law offence of blasphemy. The report was not unanimous, and in an article, "Two Cheers for the Law Commission" (*The Freethinker*, August 1985), J. R. Spencer wrote: "By splitting 3:2 on what should be done about it, the Law Commission may unfortunately have given this and future governments the excuse they need for doing nothing at all". The Government did nothing, but the Church of England set up a Working Group under the chairmanship of Dr Graham Leonard, Bishop of London. The Group has published its report, proposing an extension of blasphemy law.

In his preface, Dr Leonard points out that the existing offences against religion and public worship "are aspects of the criminal law which protect the Church of England, its members and its public worship". He calls for "a modern statutory offence" and says it "should seek to protect the adherents of all religions represented in this country. The Church of England continues to be the Church established by the general law as the religion of the nation, but Christians should recognise that there are many thousands of people who are adherents of other

AND NOTES

faiths”.

Dr Leonard and his colleagues say that they “speak as Christians, and as such we believe that the God in whom we put our faith is the one and only true God”. Not so long ago this cosy arrangement would have been defended to the last ditch by Anglicans, particularly conservatives and traditionalists like the Bishop of London. But in this ecumenical age of “better hang together than hang separately” Christianity, those who previously worshipped “false gods” have become, according to the *Church Times*, “worshippers in other traditions”.

For centuries the Anglican and other churches sent out their missionaries and indoctrinators in response to a supposed call “from Greenland’s icy mountains, from India’s coral strand”. A vast amount of human energy was expended preaching “the one and only true God” and preparing the way of the Lord (not to mention imperialist conquerors and land-grabbing colonists). Now it appears that those Christians “whose souls are lighted, with wisdom from on high” are having second thoughts: they say that legal protection for the religion of “the one and only true God” alone cannot be justified. The privilege should be extended to “all religious believers in this country”. Obviously this would include Jews, Muslims and Sikhs of varying degrees of fanaticism. Furthermore, dubious outfits like the Moonies, Children of God and the Jesus Army would also be able to claim protection from critics, particularly investigative journalists.

By calling for an extension of blasphemy law to protect hitherto “false” religions, the Anglicans have again displayed their unprincipled two-facedness. As with charity law, by which evil religious sects enjoy enormous fiscal benefits, mainstream Christians will resist any reform that may endanger their own privileged position.

Freedom is under attack from all sides by religious and political authoritarians. Creeping censorship was proceeding apace when the last trial for blasphemy took place nearly eleven years ago. Since we moved back to the age of “Victorian values” it has broken into a trot.

The Vatican has a problem on its hands — a priest who is a woman. When Father Paolo was ordained he met the Church’s requirement that a candidate for the priesthood should be a baptised male adult. He has since undergone an operation and has been authorised by two Italian courts to change name and gender on official documents. There is no canon law that deals with such cases.

WITCHES’ LIBERATION

The very word “witchcraft” sends shudders down genteel Christian spines, a reaction that is provoked by ignorance and fear of competition in the superstition market-place. There is also an element of guilt; the Christian churches, Roman Catholic and Protestant, have a damnable record of witch-hunting, burnings, hangings and other atrocities. For centuries, in obedience to the biblical injunction “thou shalt not suffer a witch to live”, Christian bishops, priests and monks conducted a reign of terror against “witches” that claimed an incalculable number of victims of both sexes, adults and children. There was much debate whether witches should be burnt alive or first strangled. Children were given special consideration, and Henri Boguet, the French prosecutor, argued that “not only a child witch who has reached the age of puberty, but even one who has not, should be sentenced to death. Yet I would not in such a case employ the usual penalty for witches but some gentler means, such as hanging”.

Many readers will have seen the stage or film version of Arthur Miller’s play, *The Crucible*. It was written at the time of the infamous McCarthyite political witch hunt that gripped the United States in the early 1950s. *The Crucible* is based on events in the Puritan community of Salem, Massachusetts, scene of a religious witch hunt in 1692. During that year a total of 150 suspects were arrested. Of those brought to trial, nineteen were hanged, two died in jail, and an eighty-year-old man was pressed to death under heavy stones. These victims of religious hysteria and irrationality were God-fearing Christians who died at the hands of their own kind.

It is not surprising that “real witches” have traditionally kept themselves to themselves. Even today your local coven will not be listed in the Yellow Pages. But witches are at last “coming out”, and in the United States they are making a public stand in defence of their “constitutionally-guaranteed civil right to practice religious freedom”. With a neat touch of irony they have persuaded the Governor of Massachusetts to appoint an “official witch” for the town of Salem.

Here in Britain, the British Witches League for Public Awareness was launched last month. (You hadn’t noticed!) It is presided over by Nigel Bourne and Seldiy Bate from their flat in Streatham, south London. Their aim is to fill the gap caused by the falling away of support for the mainstream churches.

Witches reject such notions as original sin and salvation by faith. They accept responsibility for their actions, holding that wrongdoing cannot be expunged by confession or washed away in the Blood of the Lamb. There does not appear to be a central organisation, but regular meetings are held by covens and groups. Many of those who participate

are newcomers to witchcraft who find it a means of escape from the stress of modern life. Others are "cradle witches" from families who have practised witchcraft for generations.

Witch-persecution in the British Isles never reached the same scale as in Continental countries, but there were many trials and executions. In Lancashire, during 1612, the most famous group of English witches were tried and hanged at a site near Lancaster Castle. Local churches are now protesting against a proposal to feature the trial and execution of the Pendle Witches, as they became known, in a Theme Park that is being developed in the area. Contemporary Christians obviously prefer not to be reminded of their historical record.

Most freethinkers will regard modern witchcraft with amusement and scepticism. Witches are certainly no more potty and a lot less nasty and intolerant than the fundamentalist Christians who denounce them as evil.

A BELATED ADMISSION

The Roman Catholic Church's part in the German take-over of Austria was admitted at ceremonies to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the *Anschluss*, when the largely pro-Nazi Austrians welcomed Hitler's forces into their country.

Archbishop Berg told a congregation in St Stephen's Cathedral, Vienna, that they should "look the truth in the eye", and face the fact that Austrians had allowed themselves to be influenced by Nazi ideology. The Church had "erred under pressure in the hope of retaining freedom of action".

Cardinal Konig spoke at a ceremony to commemorate members of the Vienna State Opera who were persecuted by German and Austrian Nazis. He said that the Church had done too little to immunise people against Nazism.

The Bishop of Innsbruck said in an interview that the Church had helped to prepare the ground for the Holocaust by its "thousand years of anti-semitism". The long tradition of anti-Jewish feelings among Christians had prepared people emotionally for Nazism.

While memorial ceremonies for victims of the Nazis were taking place, Rudolf Hess, Hitler's deputy, was being reburied in the family grave. The body had been kept at a secret location since his death last August. There was a Lutheran service at the graveside, and as the coffin was lowered, a mourner held aloft a large crucifix.

Newspaper reports are always required by The Freethinker. The source and date should be clearly marked and the clippings sent without delay to The Editor, The Freethinker, 14 Coundon Road, Coventry, West Midlands, CV1 4AW.

OBITUARY

Jesse Collins, a vice-president of the Thomas Paine Society and member of Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, died in February. He was 89. There was a secular committal ceremony at the Downs Crematorium, Brighton.

R. W. Morrell writes: Jesse Collins had been an active supporter of the freethought movement for most of his adult life, and while his intellectual ability might well have made him a leading figure in the movement he was not the type of person who hankered after publicity, preferring to stay in the background, although this does not mean he had any hesitation in openly voicing his radical and atheistic views. Along with his wife he supported various Humanist bodies and was active in the National Secular Society, particularly during the 1960s.

Involved professionally in the arts, Jesse Collins met his future wife Elizabeth when he was studying art at Goldsmiths College, London. Elizabeth shared his atheist views and he found her enthusiasm for historical research contagious. It was this, coupled with the acquisition of a home in Lewes, Sussex, situated in Paine's Twitten, that led Jesse Collins to "discover" Thomas Paine, whose writings became a major influence on his thinking — not that his approach to Paine was uncritical.

Jesse Collins became a founder member of the Thomas Paine Society and later a vice-president. With his wife he gave a sum of money to endow a Thomas Paine Lecture at the University of East Anglia, the latest of which was given by Professor Bernard Vincent of the University of Orleans last year. The Collins requested no publicity be given them for this most generous gesture. When the reputed birthplace of Thomas Paine in Thetford was threatened with demolition they offered a considerable donation towards a fund set up to preserve it, though in the event another member of the Thomas Paine Society purchased the property, after permission to demolish it was refused, in order to incorporate it into a hotel to be called after Paine. It was Jesse Collins who stepped in and purchased a number of Paine relics when they were auctioned and might have been exported, and gave them to the TPS, which in turn passed them on to Norwich County Council for preservation in Thetford.

In recent years deafness and poor vision made life increasingly difficult for Jesse Collins, and though he bore these defects with courage it was clear from his correspondence he found them very taxing.

He went into retirement in Brighton. His wife had died in 1976 at the age of 85, and while Mr Collins may outwardly appeared to have got over this blow one suspects that inwardly he did not. Jesse Collins will be greatly missed by his many friends.

"Jesus is Alive" Slogan a Dead Loss

It will have surprised many that a Southend-on-Sea bookseller could afford to blow £50,000 on advertising a biblical will-o'-the-wisp. Mr Paul Slennet paid such a sum to the Post Office for franking the words "Jesus is Alive", together with a cross, the hideous Christian symbol of violent death, on millions of letters.

Mr Slennet's public relations exercise can hardly be described as an unqualified success for either party. The dull and often indecipherable slogan was never likely to make much impact. Even the Archbishop of Canterbury was dismissive: "The imposition of a postmark by a public monopoly is hardly an affirmation of faith, since the sender can exercise no choice in the matter".

In recent times the Post Office has been far more concerned with making profit than providing a public service. But it has gained little if anything from its dealings with Mr Slennet. Many letters of apology have been sent to captive customers, indignant that their mail was being used to circulate an untrue and controversial statement. The resulting unfavourable publicity has not helped the Post Office's image.

Freethinkers can take heart from the fact that the "Jesus is Alive" propaganda exercise has brought an enormous amount of anti-Christian sentiment to the surface. This has been reflected in news reports, newspaper correspondence columns and editorial comment. It is gratifying that Mr Slennet did not

spend his money on well-produced leaflets and pamphlets which would have had a far greater effect than a franked slogan. But it would have been even more gratifying if he had donated his £50,000 to a good cause rather than promoting a figment of his imagination. Jesus is not alive, but unfortunately there is no shortage of religious zealots, Christian and otherwise, making mischief in the world.

The National Secular Society and Rational Press Association issued a joint statement declaring that the postal delivery service, operated by a monopoly, is not the right place for religious controversy. Many freethinkers wrote to Sir Bryan Nicholson, chairman of the Post Office, protesting against the "Jesus is Alive" slogan. Leading secularists have been informed by Sir Bryan's representative that "we are reviewing the way in which we interpret the guidelines for the approval of postmark slogans. In future we shall be applying a more stringent control before accepting slogans".

Fanatical Muslim postal workers in the Gulf are refusing to handle mail from Britain franked with the "Jesus is Alive" slogan. Thousands of Britons working there have not received letters. Frank Thompson, who works for an oil company in Saudi, said: "It's annoying that one bloke can pay the Post Office to foist his beliefs on others".

Tories Call for Action Against Sects

Lord Rodney led a three-man delegation of Conservatives who went to the Home Office last month to express strong views on the activities of religious sects. He was accompanied by John Hunt, MP (Ravensbourne) and Tom Sackville, MP (Bolton West).

The Home Secretary is coming under growing pressure from within the Conservative Party to take a firm line on groups like the Moonies and Scientologists. The delegation accused sects of separating young people from their families, brainwashing and fleecing them.

Lord Rodney commented: "These sects are recruiting among young people and I think the least the Government can do is to warn young people of the dangers.

"I would like the Home Secretary to take a strong stand against cults.

"If the Government thinks they are a bad thing, then they should speak out and say so. At the moment the Government is taking a neutral view".

Lord Rodney was critical of the Government's decision to fund an organisation called INFORM.

Its work is endorsed by churches and approved by the Moonies. Critics would prefer to see Government finance going to organisations with a proven record of anti-sect work. Such groups exist on a shoestring and are run on a largely voluntary basis.

The British Council of Churches has accused main denominations of unfair tactics when renting or selling property to other religious groups. In a report it refers to complaints about big rent increases, failure to disclose serious structural defects and threats to "gazump" a potential tenant or purchaser.

Sex and the Bible are Wilfred Glew's main interests in life. When another member of the Watford Seventh Day Adventist Church, 23-year-old Debbie Richards, went to Glew for "spiritual guidance", he told her it was God's will that they should have sex together. When she ended the affair in order to marry Richard Clements, another church member, Glew lured Clements to a garage and battered him to death. He has been sentenced to life imprisonment.

There's nothing new in anti-abortionists using illegal methods to interfere with the work of the Morgentaler Clinic, Toronto. Over the past three years the clinic's carpenter and general handyman, David Butt, has suffered beatings, threats to his life, vandalising of his work vehicles, and a host of assault charges privately laid by demonstrators that judges have never found valid. This article is published by kind permission of the author and the Toronto Globe and Mail newspaper.

David Butt, 42, is a stocky man with thinning orange hair, grey in his beard and remnants of London, England, in his speech. He's been in Canada for seventeen years, living for almost all of it in the pleasant neighbourhood around Harbord Street where he is a favourite contractor for the surrounding homes and businesses.

In December 1984, he was working on a minor renovation on a Harbord Street house. Nothing new in that, but a group of people kept standing in his way, demanding to know what he was doing and taking his picture. He discovered they were protesting against the opening of the Morgentaler Clinic next door. He had no opinion about abortion one way or another, and ignored them.

Early in 1985 he was asked to build a protective fence around the front of a Harbord Street restaurant where business was falling off because demonstrators blocked the entrance. While he worked, he was amazed to be villified by demonstrators as a "murderer".

The clinic, obliged to increase its security precautions, asked him to make alterations to the front door. Requests for other repairs followed and with that the tirades from demonstrators increased. He was followed home by people shouting insults and his landlady was harassed. In August 1985, he was standing outside the clinic when a demonstrator hit him over the head with a stick bearing an anti-abortion placard. His left eye was temporarily blinded and blood poured down his face as another demonstrator struck him with a sharp object, cutting his right hand to the bone.

As he flailed around trying to protect himself, other demonstrators piled on. Police intervened and laid numerous charges against his assailants, some of whom were convicted. But one of his attackers went to City Hall and laid a private charge of assault against the carpenter.

His trial lasted two days and he was acquitted. His legal bill, which he only recently succeeded in paying, was \$3,800, and there is lasting impairment to the sight in his left eye.

He considered moving away but he's a tough man,

almost fearless, and he could not abide being driven from his own neighbourhood by hooligans. Besides, he was finding himself a protector for the women who work in the clinic and he wouldn't abandon them to the mob.

According to Andrea Knight, clinic director, David Butt is known to the staff as "our hero". When police surveillance for the clinic has left and nurses must wade through the demonstrators alone, they call the carpenter, who comes promptly from his home around the corner and escorts them to the bus stop.

"David has become the target of the dozen hardcore regulars, mostly men, who picket the clinic every day", she says.

In January 1986, he heard that the Campaign Life hotline was describing him as a "Nazi thug" and "goon". His vehicles, a jeep and a van, were vandalised on a daily basis. Every morning he found tires slashed or studded with nails, massive dents and scratches, stickers obscuring the windshield. On two occasions, someone shot at his van.

Strangers accosted him on the streets, screaming, "God will punish you".

Another charge of assault was laid against him by a demonstrator, but this too was dismissed in court, and after that matters escalated. He was advised that he would be killed. Police, taking the threat seriously, sent a bomb squad to instruct him on precautions. The next weekend was uneventful, however, but on Monday morning when he was driving at top speed on the Don Valley Parkway his jeep went out of control. He got it to the shoulder safely and discovered that all the bolts had been loosened on one wheel.

He admits he was scared. Weeks later, it happened again. Now he checks before starting to drive.

Toronto Police Inspector Gordon Brown comments: "It's very frustrating for us. We think we know who did it, but we have no proof to lay charges".

The regulars on the picket line — an insurance company employee, a civil servant, a retired nurse, and others — have been augmented of late by such beef as construction workers in hard hats, dockyard employees and college football players, all shouting "baby killer" at women entering the clinic. They take down licence plate numbers and appear to have access to Government computers. At night, anonymous calls are made to families and neighbours to say that someone in the household has used the clinic.

Last autumn David Butt was served with a flurry of summonses, all of them concerning assault charges laid by demonstrators. With police standing

by to attest to his innocence, he went into court on 10 December, but the judge tossed out the complaints early in the first trial. His legal bills total more than \$7,000. Unable to pay, he has appealed for help to the Pro-Choice Defence Fund which receives donations for legal costs incurred by the clinic.

The graffiti-splattered clinic, a building under

siege, now is outfitted with more security devices than most banks as the mood of the demonstrators is worsening. David Butt, working calmly inside to repair an air conditioner, says: "The people who work here are my friends. I can't walk away from them".

It's Toronto. It's not Beirut or Belfast, where such violent fanatics would be labelled terrorists.

John M. Allegro, 1923-1988

R. J. CONDON

John Marco Allegro died on his 65th birthday, a minor oddity rounding off an academic career which, though brilliant, was unorthodox to the point of eccentricity.

After war-time service in the Royal Navy he began to study for the Methodist ministry, but gave up that idea and became a student at Manchester University. In 1951 he obtained a first-class Honours degree in Oriental Studies, followed by an MA in 1952.

Allegro spent a year at Oxford studying Hebrew dialects, returning to Manchester to take up a lectureship in Comparative Semitic Philology. From 1962 to 1970 he was Lecturer in Old Testament and Inter-Testamental Studies.

In 1953 he became the British representative on an international team collating and translating the Dead Sea Scrolls. Ten years later he complained of "regrettable delay" in the publication of what had by now become a large mass of material. The documents entrusted to him he had published, but after 1956 a cloak of secrecy had descended. Scrolls, he said, had been secretly unearthed, fleetingly glimpsed by specialists and then allowed to disappear off the face of the earth.

By this time Allegro had abandoned Methodism and publicly acknowledged his atheism. He persisted in his claim that the Dead Sea Scrolls were being suppressed, adding that they contained material which would be damaging to Christianity if it were made public. He even wrote a play on the subject, which does not appear to have been produced.

Certainly the importance of the Scrolls to our understanding of the background to the New Testament cannot be overestimated. Formerly there were no Jewish documents from the time of Jesus. Now there are a great many, compiled in the very area associated with him. Forty years after the first were discovered they are virtually forgotten, though they were exciting enough at the time. It is now well established that the Scrolls are from the library of an ascetic Jewish community, the Essenes. Those that were published showed many correspondences between Essene doctrine and Christianity. As was to be expected, the result was a premature spat of

books claiming that Jesus was an Essene monk.

Allegro wanted to see established in Jordan an institute where the Scrolls could be kept and made available to scholars for study and research. Free from religious or political control, such a foundation would enable students from varied cultures to meet on common ground, and thus "further the cause of mutual tolerance and understanding that is the Scrolls' greatest promise to mankind". With these declared aims, Allegro and a few friends organised the Dead Sea Scrolls Fund for the finding, preservation and publication of the Scrolls. It was hoped that the full potentialities of the Scrolls would be realised, "and that such a bridge may be built between the antagonistic faiths of this world that no amount of religious bigotry and intolerance shall again divide the peoples of mankind".

In 1970 Allegro dropped what was intended to be a bombshell on the Christian world, but it proved a damp squib. With a great show of recondite learning, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* asserted that Christianity was founded in an ancient and decidedly phallic cult centred on the worship of the fly agaric *amanita muscaria*. To avoid persecution the devotees of the psychedelic mushroom transmitted their secret formulae in adaptations of old mythologies. These cryptic devices were later mistaken for the histories of real persons and collected together in the New Testament.

The notion that Jesus was nothing more than a penis-shaped mushroom was received with scorn and derision by the academic world, and its author suffered an eclipse from which he never more than partially emerged.

It would be a pity if such fantastic speculation were to bring discredit upon the mythicist view of Christian origins, because people are prepared to consider it if reasonably presented. The present writer attended a popular lecture on the Dead Sea Scrolls given by John Allegro, in the course of which he stated that neither Jesus Christ nor John the Baptist had ever existed. The audience, four hundred respectable middle-class citizens, didn't turn a hair.

The Last Sayings or Dying Legacy of Mr. Thomas Hobbs of Malmesbury

Thomas Hobbes, "the Philosopher of Malmesbury", was born four hundred years ago this month on 5 April 1588. The son of a parson, his birth took place on Good Friday, and no man of his time was more hated by the clergy. He was a bold and courageous freethinker who owed his liberty and possibly life to his wealthy protectors, the Devonshire family. When a Bill against "atheism and profaneness" was introduced in Parliament, Hobbes' *Leviathan* was noted "in particular". After his death in December 1679, at the great age of 91, "Last Sayings or Dying Legacy" was printed in broadsheet form. The Sayings are reprinted here (numbered and somewhat modernised) with a commentary by Dr David Berman, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, Trinity College, Dublin.

1 Fear of Power invisible feigned by the mind, or imagined from Tales publicly allowed, is Religion; not allowed, is Superstition.

2 It is with the Mysteries of Religion, as with wholesome Pills for the Sick, which swallowed whole have virtue to Cure; but chewed, are for the most part cast up without effect.

3 To say that God has spoken to a man in a Dream, is no more than to say he dreamt that God spoke to him.

4 To say he has seen a Vision, or heard a Voice, is to say that he has Dreamt between sleeping and waking.

5 To say he speaks by Supernatural Inspiration, is to say he finds an ardent desire to speak, or some strong opinion of himself, for which he can allege no natural reason.

6 In matters of Right or Interest, where Reason is against a man, a man will be against Reason.

7 Evil men under the pretext that God can do anything, are so bold as to say he does everything that may serve their turns.

8 As for Witches, I do not think that their Witchcraft is any real power; but yet that they are justly punished for the false belief they have that they can do so much mischief, joined with a purpose to do it if they could.

9 For Fairies and walking Ghosts, I think that opinion is taught only to keep in credit the use of Exorcisms, Crosses and Holy-Water, to lay those spirits which never were raised.

10 The best Prophet naturally is the best Guesser; and the best Guesser he that is most versed and studied in the matter he guesses at.

11 Whatsoever we imagine, is Finite: therefore there is no Idea or conception of any thing we call Infinite.

12 When we believe another man's Revelation, not from Reason of the thing revealed, but from the Authority and good opinion of him to whom it was revealed, then is the Speaker or enthusiast the only object of our Faith, and the Honour done in believing, is done to him only, and not to him who revealed it: So on the contrary, if Livy says the Gods once made a Cow speak, and we believe it not; herein we distrust not God, but Livy.

13 There is no greater Argument of Madness than the arrogating to one's self Inspirations: for if some man in *Bedlam*, after he had made a long sober discourse, should at last tell you that he is God the Father, I think you need no further Argument for his Madness.

14 He that believes a thing only because it may be so, may as well doubt it because it may be otherwise.

15 A certainty of Error in any part of a thing, implies a possibility of Error in the whole.

16 *Nil fuit in intellectu, quod non fuit prius in sensu* (i.e. there is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses).

17 When a Pope excommunicates a Kingdom, he may be said to excommunicate himself, the Pope being the only loser thereby.

18 That Daemonics were no other than madmen, from *John* 10.20: "He has a Devil and is mad."

19 As a Man that is born blind, hearing men talk of warming themselves by the Fire, and being brought to warm himself by the same, may easily conceive there is somewhat there which men call fire and is the cause of the heat he feels, but can have no Idea of it in his Mind as they that see it. So also by the visible things of this world, and their admirable order, a man may conceive there is a cause of them which men call God, and yet not have an Idea or Image of him in his Mind.

20 No Persons ought so justly to die for Religion as those who get their living by it.

21 To measure Good or Evil by the Reward or Punishment assigned by the laws of our own Country, is like little Children, who have no measure of good or ill but from the correction of their Parents.

22 The Church is a Mother-in-law to the Laity, but an own Mother to the Clergy.

23 That the Popish Consecration is no other than Conjunction or Incarnation; for when their priests in the Sacrament pretend to turn Bread into Christ's Body, wherein differ they from the *Egyptian* Conjurors, who are said to have turned the Rods into Serpents and the Water into Blood? However, if (as in the Sacrament the Bread remained Bread still) the

Rods also remained Rods still, and they had nevertheless faced down the King contrary to his own eyesight, that they were Serpents, what impudent Rogues had these been that they had been both Enchantment and Lying, and so it is in Transubstantiation.

24 That we might not give too much credit to all pretended Miracles, let us examine the many Impostures wrought by Confederacy, wherein we shall find that there is nothing impossible soever to be done, that is impossible to be believed. For two men conspiring, one to seem Lame, and the other to cure him with a Charm, will deceive many; but many conspiring, one to seem Lame, another to cure, and all the rest to bear witness, will deceive more.

25 In these four things, *viz*, Opinion of Ghosts, Ignorance of second Causes, Devotion towards what men fear, and taking of things Casual for Prognostics, consisteth of the natural Seed of Religion; which by reason of the different Fancies, Passions and Judgements of several men, hath grown up into Ceremonies so different, that those which are used by one man are for the most part ridiculous to another.

26 That Law which is absolutely necessary to Mankind's future Happiness ought (if the Law-giver be just) to be generally made known unto all men. No one revealed Law was ever made known unto all men; *Ergo*, no one revealed Law is absolutely necessary to Mankind's future Happiness.

27 That God is Almighty Matter.

28 That the prime Law of Nature in the Soul of Man is that of self-preservation.

29 That the Law of the Civil Magistrate is the only obliging Rule of the Just and Unjust.

30 Dreams are the reverse of our waking Imaginations; the motion when we are awake, beginning at one end, and when we dream, at the other.

* * *

It is appropriate on the 400th anniversary of Hobbes's birth that *The Last Sayings, or Dying Legacy of Mr Thomas Hobbs* should be reprinted here; for it assembled many of Hobbes's most irreligious utterances in a format aimed at popular diffusion. Although the broadsheet bears the imprint: "London, Printed for the Author's Executors, 1680", it was actually issued by Charles Blount, probably the most daring freethinker of the seventeenth century.

Blount took most of the "Sayings" from Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651). Thus number 1 is from chapter 6; 2-5 are from chapter 32; 6 and 19 from chapter 11; 7-9, 24 and 30 from chapter 2; 11 from chapter 45; 13 and 18 from chapter 8; 23 from chapter 44; and 25 from chapter 12. This selection of quotations

taken out of context scarcely gives a balanced view of either Hobbes's legacy or his *Leviathan*; yet Hobbes may have wished some of his statements to be read in isolation — uncamouflaged, as it were.

Blount almost certainly drew numbers 27-29 from *The Creed of Thomas Hobbes* (2nd ed. 1671, pp. 7-8), by Thomas Tenison, who suggests that Hobbes was generally thought to hold these propositions. Numbers 14 and 16 are to be found in Blount's own work, *Anima Mundi* (1679, pp. 111-112 and 95). Number 26 is the most enigmatic in the collection. It is one of the earliest and boldest statements of critical deism. I have been unable to trace its source, but it was used nearly verbatim — although more succinctly and elegantly expressed — thirteen years later in an essay in Blount's *Oracles of Reason* (1693, p. 198). This much-praised essay — entitled "Of Natural Religion, as opposed to Divine Revelation" — was addressed to Blount and signed A. W. There has been considerable debate on it. In 1745 it was reprinted and attributed to "the celebrated Poet, John Dryden". However, in his *John Dryden: A Bibliography* (1939), Hugh McDonald rejected the attribution, ascribing the piece to Blount (p. 184). This ascription was then contested in 1950 by E. R. Purpus, who argued for A. W.'s authorship. The Dryden attribution was then defended at length by William Empson in 1975.¹ None of these writers, however, was aware that the essay's key argument originally appeared as number 26 of our broadsheet. This fact enforces one old and raises one new possibility.

The old possibility is that Blount, as McDonald claimed, was the author of the essay to himself. As Saying 26 is not to be found in any of Hobbes's published writings, as far as I am aware, it may be Blount's own. If so, he would feel no compunction about using it (as he did number 14) in another work. In any case, it is surely very odd that Blount should be sent an essay by A. W. or Dryden: whose crucial passage was blandly plagiarized from the broadsheet he himself issued and whose sayings he attributed to Hobbes.

The new possibility is that Hobbes himself wrote the essay. Although not very likely, there is some circumstantial evidence to support this. For Blount corresponded with Hobbes and saw at least one of Hobbes's works — the essay on heresy — in manuscript.² Whichever case, *The Last Sayings* is an important (although neglected) Hobbesian document.

Notes

¹ See Empson's "A Deist Tract by Dryden", in *Essays in Criticism*, vol xxv, and my "A Disputed Deistic Classic", in *The Library*, March 1985, pp 58-9.

² See Blount's letter to Hobbes, dated 1678, in *The Oracles of Reason*, pp 97-105; Blount sent Hobbes a copy of his *Anima Mundi* with the letter. References to Blount's books are to his *Miscellaneous Works* (1695).

CITIZEN OF THE WORLD: ESSAYS ON THOMAS PAINE. Edited by Ian Dyck. Christopher Helm, £14.95

The major part of this volume consists of chapters by the late George Spater, who began research for a book on Paine after publishing his two-volume biography of William Cobbett in 1982. Sadly, Spater died suddenly two years later, the project incomplete. The editor, Professor Ian Dyck, has attempted to salvage much of the work, and has assembled it into five chapters.

The three further chapters are by friends and academic associates of Spater. J. F. C. Harrison views Paine within the context of eighteenth and nineteenth century millenarian radicalism; Joel H. Weiner examines the association of Paine and his brave British publisher and disciple, Richard Carlile; and Dyck's own essay explores the intellectual and cultural liaison between Paine and William Cobbett (*alias* Peter Porcupine, or Peter Skunk, as Paine labelled him before Cobbett recanted his virulent opposition to Paine).

It delighted me to read in Dyck's Preface that out of loyalty to Paine's own style and meaning the book was addressed equally to the reading public and to academics — and the promise is kept throughout. Even where Spater is going over familiar ground he arranges his composition with exemplary clarity. His chapter, "American Revolutionary, 1774-89", includes a very clear summary of the complicated Silas Deane affair, in which the sea-green incorruptible Paine had dealing with, to put it mildly, some financially disreputable men, who supported the revolutionary cause.

One important question Spater poses concerns how Paine, with little formal education and who had never published anything before, could blossom out into a brilliant journalist in Philadelphia at the age of 37. Spater finds no satisfactory answer. He demolishes the theory that more than forty articles in a local paper in Lewes, Sussex, where Paine had lived, were Paine's; they were signed "A Forester", similar to the pseudonym "The Forester" used in America by Paine. But Spater discovered that "A Forester" was the Rev Richard Nichell of East Dean.

But Paine's residence in Lewes needs more examination, as he was a prominent member of the local debating club, as well as of the local authority — media that doubtless would have developed Paine's easy conversational style; he also wrote *A Case of the Officers of Excise*, before going to America. There is also the unlikely suggestion that Paine was Junius; that should be examined, even if only to be knocked down.

Spater's work is stimulating, (as, indeed, are the essays by the other contributors), and each would make excellent study material, leading to workshop-style discussions. At just such an event I would, however, tackle Weiner's statement in his essay on Paine and Carlile that Paine fled to France in 1792, rather than contest the British Government's prosecution of his *The Age of Reason*. Among the arguments to vindicate Paine's action would be that he needed to take his place in the French Convention, to which he had just been elected, and William Blake's warning that the British government was looking for a hanging verdict. (I would also point out that in 1792 *The Age of Reason* had not yet been written! Weiner meant *Rights of Man*.)

Harrison's essay is particularly interesting to free-thinkers, as it deals with a somewhat unusual link between Paine, a hero of atheists although he was a deist, with a narrow religious belief, millenarianism, especially focusing on the works and followers of Richard Brothers (1757-1824). Harrison maintains that an important minority of Brother's followers were politically radical. Among the better known were William Sharp, the engraver, and friend of Blake — Sharp's engraving of Paine is famous. Harrison claims that millenarianism was basically an ideology of change, concentrating attention on the great changes taking place in the latter part of the eighteenth century: the world was to be transformed by the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth, a state that would last for a thousand years and be followed by the last judgement.

The American Revolution, followed closely by the French Revolution, gave radicals a feeling of living in a time of enormous change — Paine reminisced that having a part in two revolutions was living to some purpose — and these changes turned men's minds towards a need for some explanation. Paine was conscious of this era of unprecedented change. "We have it in our power", he wrote in *Common Sense*, "to begin the world all over again. A situation, similar to the present, hath not happened since the days of Noah until now. The birthday of a new world is at hand".

The parallels are there. I was taught that parallel lines never meet. But, after reading Harrison's essay, I fancy I have recognised one or two near misses!

The final essay, "The Legacy of Thomas Paine", by Spater, includes much else of interest to free-thinkers. George Jacob Holyoake and Charles Bradlaugh, says Spater, like Paine "their inspirational leader, combined the propaganda of freethought in religion with republican radicalism in politics, and

REVIEWS

left their mark in the numerous secular societies that flourished throughout Great Britain from the 1850s".

The societies were influential in seeing that Paine's birthday on 29 January was celebrated each year. I particularly like the account of how one secular society branch held a children's Thomas Paine birthday tea party in 1890 with food, music and a magic-lantern show.

CHRISTOPHER BRUNEL

OUT OF CONTROL, by Leslie Cockburn. Bloomsbury, £13.95

The sub-title of this book is "The Story of the Reagan Administration's Secret War in Nicaragua, the Illegal Arms Pipeline and the Contra Drug Connection". In the recent House of Representatives debate which denied aid to the Contras fighting in Nicaragua, one Democratic Congressman said that he found President Reagan's habitual description of the Contras as "freedom fighters" sickening. This book's detailed account of an evil conspiracy flouting American law, deceiving Congress, involving the CIA, the National Security Council, Presidential staff and advisers, cocaine runners, Miami gangsters, mercenaries and international racketeers; and the murder, assassination, rape and torture of civilians, including women and children, makes the term "freedom fighters" even more nauseating.

The United States of America, born of the Declaration of Independence and a victorious struggle against Empire, has long maintained its anti-imperialism, usually, alas, a hollow pretence. In 1823 President Monroe issued his famous doctrine of non-interference when Spain's American colonies achieved their independence. But the Doctrine was, it seems, not to apply to the USA. Before the century was out politicians were declaring America's "manifest destiny" to control Cuba. In the 1898 Spanish-American War American troops invaded Cuba and defeated the Spanish army. The Americans withdrew in 1902, declaring Cuba independent, but Congress passed the Platt Amendment requiring the Cuban politicians to embody in their new constitution a pledge never to interfere with American property and investment, and granting "in perpetuity" an American Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, still there today, even after 29 years of Castro.

The shadow of "Los Yanquis" still hangs over Latin America. In this century many Central

American states and Caribbean islands have been occupied by American troops, often for periods of many years. In Mexico they used to say: "Pobre Mexico. Tan lejos de Dios, tan cerca de Los Estados Unidos". ("Poor Mexico. So far from God, so close to the United States".)

This book refers briefly to Major-General Smedley D. Butler who led a force of Marines into Nicaragua in 1912. They remained there until 1933 when the Americans installed as protector of their interests the vile dictator, Anastasio Somoza, whose family amassed vast wealth at the expense of Nicaraguan people and ruling Nicaragua until his son, another Anastasio, was overthrown by the Sandanistas in 1979. The book quotes one sentence from an extraordinary speech which Major-General Smedley D. Butler gave to an American Legion convention in Connecticut on 21 August, 1931. A longer version appeared in *Common Sense* in 1935.

I spent thirty-three years and four months in active service as a member of our country's most agile military force — the Marine Corps. I served in all commissioned ranks from a second-lieutenant to major-general. And during that period I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street, and for the bankers. In short I was a racketeer for capitalism.

Thus I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras "right" for American fruit companies in 1903.

During those years I had, as the boys in the back room would say, a swell racket. I was rewarded with honors, medals, promotion. Looking back on it, I feel I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three city districts. We Marines operated on three continents.

"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose".

Since World War II the United States has overthrown the democratic Government of Gustav Arbenz in Guatemala (1954) condemning that country to more than thirty years of bloodthirsty dictatorship, attempted the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba (1961), again invaded the Dominican Republic, and achieved, under Reagan, the "glorious victory" of conquering Grenada, an island of 133 square miles and 100,000 population. Old-style imperialism of Marines and gun-boats now has the added flavour of an alleged Communist conspiracy, a crusade against an Evil Empire, with the aid of drug-runners, gangsters and mercenaries. But the principle remains the same. This book details the roles of Colonel North, National Security Council head, Robert MacFarlane, CIA chief William Casey, and the retired army officers, Secord and Singlaub. Vice-President George Bush, now a candidate for the

Presidency desperately trying to deny his involvement, is shown here at the heart of the conspiracy. It does not matter how much Reagan himself knew. He doesn't know much, but he would have approved of every detail of these plots.

This book is crammed with information and it is a matter of regret that one must criticise it. *Out of Control* falls between two stools. It fails as light journalism because there is too much to absorb in

casual reading. But if it is intended as a serious source of information, why is there no index? Instead there are thirty-four pages of chapter Notes at the end of the book, but the references have no footnote numbers, and there are not even page references. Checking back is like threading through a maze.

KARL HEATH

Happy Families

A leaflet published by the Conservative Family Campaign recently came my way. In the normal way I would have ignored it, but noticing a bold sub-heading proclaiming "Christianity", I read on. It soon became clear that a particularly reactionary and fundamentalist brand of Christianity is what the CFC is all about. Indeed it is announced on the front page that one of the Campaign's aims is: "The upholding of Christianity as the religion of this nation; and the reflection of its values in the law and in education".

The leaflet goes into more detail. It declares: "Our nation is still a Christian nation. The Head of State is a spiritual as well as a temporal ruler. Our laws have traditionally been based on the observance of the Christian ethic. Our greatest period of national influence and prosperity have occurred at times of deep religious commitment, such as the Victorian era. . .

"In so far as they have ceased to support the family, our laws have departed from the Christian ideal. Those laws which have made abortion and divorce easy options, and which have condoned and even encouraged sexual relationships outside the framework of marriage, stand in contradiction of Christian ethics".

The CFC makes plain what it aims for: "To achieve the . . . revival we as Conservatives desire to see, it will be absolutely essential to re-establish Christian values at the heart of public policy". The diatribe is rounded off with an extract from *The Christian in Society*, by Sir Fred Catherwood, MEP, one of the Campaign's sponsors. He waxes indignant about the "potential for perversion in human nature", and throws in a quotation from the Book of Proverbs.

Typical of the views holding currency in the CFC are those of its chairman, Graham Webster-Gardiner. Replying to a question at a meeting of the Right-wing Monday Club, he said that pornography was read by only a few people in Victorian times and never by children. Perhaps he hasn't heard of the child prostitution scandals during that period of great national influence, prosperity and deep religious commitment.

Again revealing his ignorance of history, he continued with a lyrical description of two thousand

years of Judeo-Christian heritage in Britain. This presumably includes that torture and burning of alleged witches and heretics, and the current bloody conflict in Northern Ireland.

The CFC chairman then turned his attention to education, asserting that schools should be compelled to start the day with an act of Christian worship. Pupils should be given biblical instruction, including the creationist story of the origins of the universe and of life. (Considering the recent mauling inflicted on Duane Gish, the Californian creationist bigwig, by the Association for the Protection of Evolution, he should have down-played that one.)

Mr Webster-Gardiner demanded that homosexuality should again become a criminal offence, abortion banned and divorce made far harder to obtain. One-parent families, he said, were a danger to society. Divorce meant more trauma and stress, with one-parent families rearing a crop of juvenile delinquents. Secularists were out to radically change the social structure, a sign of their activity being more open and tolerant attitude towards gays. When asked to name some of the television programmes which he felt were also part of this malaise, all he could come up with was "late night films on Channel Four". Small wonder that a member of the audience, having had no response to his claim that the same was said of Hollywood films of the 'thirties, felt moved to describe Mr Webster-Gardiner as "a Bible-bashing berk".

The Conservative Family Campaign's symbol is a cartoon depiction of a typical nuclear family, Mum, Dad and three kids, over which hovers a nondescript bird — possibly a symbol of religion — which looks as if it is about to do a nose dive into the family group. As CFC members should know, the dramatic social changes of the post-war years have made this idealised family as hard to find as their odd bird which I'd like to think of as a close relative of Coleridge's albatross.

It is tempting to dismiss the ideas of the Conservative Family Campaign as those of an eccentric Right-wing fringe group. But the record of the present Government shows that such ideas have a disturbing habit of becoming those of mainstream Conservatism.

TERRY LIDDLE

Whither or Wither: a Church in Decline

DANIEL O'HARA

There is no shortage of proposals to halt the Church of England's declining influence. The Dean of Litchfield's recent contribution to the debate is examined by a former Anglican priest who obtained degrees in theology in England and the United States.

It ill behoves an ecclesiastical dignitary who, on the one hand, can admit that "the Church is declining in almost every way it is possible to measure" to then conclude that "in the opinion of many, secular humanism is a failure and is making society worse, not better". But this is the burden of the Dean of Litchfield, the Very Rev John Lang, in another of *The Independent's* Saturday "Faith and Reason" features (5 March). The Dean provides a mass of evidence to show that the Church of England really is in a "deep malaise", but, quite characteristically, none whatsoever to support his contentions about secular humanism.

The Dean lays most of the blame for the Church's failure to pull out its nose-diving tail-spin at the door of the General Synod. The naughty Synod has, apparently, seduced the Church away from its "primary task of conversion and sanctification of individuals . . . the making of christian disciples . . ." and foisted upon its attention such irrelevancies as "oppression in one country and poverty in another . . . racism, sexism . . . (and) ecumenism". It has even (fatal mistake!) encouraged its members to dissipate their energies "in a dozen time-consuming ways and to be more generous in their giving as 'faithful stewards' ". No wonder it is in decline!

When it comes to suggesting remedies to revive the ailing church, the Dean's reasoning is, to say the least, convoluted. He wants the Synod to meet less often, and to transfer its interests in social responsibility, mission and ecumenism to the successor of the British Council of Churches. This will leave the C of E free to concentrate on three main tasks.

First, making sure every church has "one good act of worship every Sunday". This might be difficult in some rural areas where one clergyman has charge of five, six or more churches spread over an area of twenty square miles. But the dean also seems to confuse cause and effect. If the fact that "clergy are dispirited" shows itself "more quickly in worship than anywhere", how does he propose to improve standards of worship without tackling the root cause of the clergy's dispiritedness?

Secondly, "find(ing) an effective way of commending Christian belief". He admits that the task is daunting, as "Secularism has gained so great a hold that even to some Christians such a search seems vain". (This is where he takes a gratuitous swipe at

secular humanism, and quite fails to distinguish between common-or-garden indifference to religion and the ethical commitment of secular humanists.) "The time has come", he says, "not to invent new Christian doctrine, but to think through the old in the light of what we know today". He seems to set great store by what the Doctrine Commission might produce in this sphere now that it "has at last started the task". But he seems to forget that there has hardly been a time during the last fifty years when some such body within the C of E has not been agonizing over such issues, and the numerous reports they have produced are all gathering dust on clerical bookshelves, which will no doubt become the fate (after an initial flurry of interest) of whatever new opus the Doctrine Commission produces.

Thirdly, "reshap(ing) the Church with the clear intention of making new Christians". He doesn't suggest how this might be brought about, but the most successful (at least in the short term) efforts in this direction in recent years have been made by the American "televangelists". No doubt when most British homes have a satellite dish on the roof, and "God Incorporated" starts to exploit this as yet untapped and lucrative market, many more gullible individuals will fall prey to that brand of hysterical Christianity than the C of E will ever tempt within its fold.

What Dean Lang, and many another who shares his privileged position within the established Church, fails to realise is that people will increasingly reject Christianity if they are allowed to examine its credentials. This is because the Christian religion is based on a nonsense, and history fully bears out the accuracy of Voltaire's dictum: "Men who believe absurdities will commit atrocities". It is only the fundamentalists (fully in line with Tertullian's *Credo quia absurdum* and Luther's execration of reason) who are making any headway at present. Were they to succeed, we should be in for a new dark age. But my faith, as a humanist and a rationalist, is that most people will see through the nonsense, so that Christianity will take its place soon with Zoroastrianism and Mithraism among the museum pieces of religion.

I also hope that true humanism will replace the indifference into which many sink as a result of the Church's teaching that either the gospel is true or life is absurd. There is a great need for work to be done on developing a humanist ethic and a legal system which are evolutionary and consequentialist, and not tied down by the baleful effects of Christian absolutism and irrationalism.

LETTERS

THE NAZIS AND ELECTIONS

Hitler's rise to power, as related by R. J. M. Tolhurst (Letters, March), is hardly in accordance with the facts.

The Nazis never received more than 37 per cent of the votes at a free election for the Reichstag. Hitler's new path to power was to be by way of intrigue, mindful of his abortive attempt at seizure of power in 1923. The burning of the Reichstag building on 27 February 1933 enabled Hitler to declare illegal the Communist Party, which then had 81 members in the Assembly. He had also arrested several Social Democratic members of the Reichstag. Nevertheless, in spite of every weapon of terror, the Nazis secured only 43.9 per cent of the poll in the Election held on 5 March 1933.

The Enabling Act 1933, officially called "the Law for Removing the Distress of People and Reich" was technically in breach of the Constitution. The Act could only be activated if two-thirds of the Reichstag voted for it, though of course in favour of democratically-minded governments not for use by an obvious dictator. Hitler was astute enough to insert in the Act that he, the Chancellor, "might deviate from the Constitution" but no laws were to "affect the position of the Reichstag" — surely the cruelest joke of all.

The Catholic Centre Party (on the instructions of the Vatican) was concerned to secure the position of Catholic Schools which Hitler had promised to safeguard, and on 23 March 1933 the Party voted in favour of the Enabling Act to give Hitler the necessary two-thirds majority. Thus this megalomaniac under a spurious legality, within an arena of terror, had become supreme dictator.

JOHN H. CHARLES

NO OFFENCE

Diana Rookledge's letter (February) was a farrago of feminist nonsense. Taking exception to being addressed as "luv" or "darling" illustrates just how divorced from common sense the feminist movement has become. Local councils like Brent deserve all the criticism they get for pandering to this extremism.

Personally, and perhaps because I a colonial, I bridle when called "Sir". It embarrasses me and makes me feel that I am in some sort of superior position to the person addressing me. It implies an attitude of deference which I find odious. Not only do I hate being called "Sir", but I would never address anyone by that term.

The words "luv" and "darling" betoken friendliness and in no way imply a pejorative attitude to the addressee. Whenever I do my shopping at market stalls I'm always addressed as "guv'nor" or "mate", perfectly friendly terms and surely the male equivalents of "luv" and "darling". And I notice that barrow-boys always call their female customers by those names.

If Diana Rookledge is offended by such terms then I suggest she has got tunnel vision. There are far more serious problems afflicting the world today than to worry about such harmless sobriquets.

PETER BACOS

OUCH!

In the March issue (News and Notes) you write that the Jehovah's Witnesses are a pain in the neck.

I have always put it rather lower.

A. N. BLEWITT

CONTRADICTION

I am grateful to Barbara Smoker for her full and courteous reply to my letter on the near-death experience.

However, I still cannot understand why, if the patients concerned are half conscious, they can see and hear the doctors making such strenuous efforts to restore them to consciousness. There seems to be a fundamental contradiction here. Moreover, one lady on the radio programme claimed she heard one of the medical team exclaim "She's gone!", which, of course, would be a nonsensical remark for him to make if the patient were semi-conscious.

I have no idea by what means those who experience the phenomenon are perceiving and thinking, but I certainly would not dogmatically rule out the possibility that the mind is incapable of existing independently of the body. After all, as secretary of the Shaw Society, Barbara will know that GBS as a vitalist, believed that the Life Force uses the material world to fulfil its purposes. And GBS was no credulous fool, except, perhaps, when he was praising Josef Stalin!

JOHN L. BROOM

DIVINE DISCLAIMER

I am authorised by my Principal, The First Person, to advise you that there is no foundation for the claim, put forward by a Mr Pat Robertson, that political candidates' prayers may be instrumental in countermanding hurricane projects.

Further, I am to state that His Displeasure at this arrogant presumption may well have contributed to Mr Robertson's recent discomfiture.

Further, I am to state that The Third Person is instructed to submit proposals for the spiritual re-education of the said Mr Robertson.

A. GABRIEL

Press Officer to F, S & HG(S)

Freethinker Fund

Never mind about Jesus, *The Freethinker* is alive! And for over a century it has been kicking superstition, intolerance and privilege. It was never easy to maintain a journal that is dedicated to rationalism and secularism, but supporters' goodwill and generosity have kept *The Freethinker* in existence.

Every reader can play a part in securing the paper's future by donating to the Fund and persuading others to take out a postal subscription. We thank all those who are already doing so. The latest list of contributors is given below.

F. R. Evans, £1; J. L. Broom, £1.15; B. Chatfield and R. Huxtable, £1.50 each; N. Barnes, R. C. Baxter, W. J. Glennie, S. D. Kuebart, T. E. Mapp, F. Stevenson and R. J. M. Tolhurst, £2 each; D. Dick, N. Gibbard and D. J. Holdstock, £2.50 each; C. Lovett, K. M. Tolfree and S. Trent, £3 each; C. Honeywell, £4; D. Baker, C. Blakely, E. Cecil, G. F. Clarke, S. Eadie, R. J. Fennell, M. Fox, M. D. Gough, A. Harrison, F. Hiorth, F. Howard, G. Mepham, M. Russell, K. P. G. Spencer, V. Thapar, R. K. E. Torode and I. A. Williams, £5 each; G. B. Stowell, £5.80; J. G. Hillhouse, £6.40; H. J. Jakeman, G. S. Mellor, M. Morley, J. Morrison, F. Pidgeon and P. Ponting-Barber, £7 each; D. Harper, G. L. J. Lucas and Sutton Humanist Group, £10 each; B. Aubrey, £15.

Total for February: £223.85.

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. New Venture Theatre Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton. Sunday, 1 May, 6.30 pm for 6 pm. Frank Gray: How Man Made God.

Edinburgh Humanist Group. Programme for Forum meetings from the secretary, 59 Fox Covert Avenue, Edinburgh, EH12 6UH, telephone 031-334 8372.

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association. 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 Mrs Marguerite Morrow, 32 Pollock Road, Glasgow, G61 2NJ, telephone 041-942 0129.

Humanist Holidays. Summer holidays at Shanklin, Isle of Wight, 3-17 September. Details obtainable from Gillian Bailey, 18 Priors Road, Cheltenham, GL52 5AA, telephone 0242 39175.

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Swarthmore Institute, Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Tuesday, 10 May, 7.30 pm. Sheila Allen: Society's Problems Twenty Years On.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 28 April, 7.45 p.m. John Evitt: Problems and Opinions.

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

Scottish Humanist Council. The Cowane Centre, Stirling. Saturday, 23 April, 10 am until 5 pm. Annual Conference. Speakers include television producer Stuart Miller. Details obtainable from Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, KA3 2JD, telephone (0563) 26710.

Sutton Humanist Group. The Public Library, St Nicholas Way, Sutton (near Sutton BR Station). Tuesday, 12 April until Saturday, 16 April, 9.30 am until 8 pm (Saturday, 5 pm). Exhibition: Humanism for a Better and Happier World. Information obtainable from George Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey, SM1 4PD, telephone 01-642 8796.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 11 May, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. Martin Horwood: The British Humanist Association, 25 Years On.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House, Hill Street (off Corporation Street), Coventry. Monday, 18 April, 7.45 pm for 8 pm. Public meeting.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Georgina Coupland, 117 Pennard Drive, Southgate, telephone C44 128 3631.

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

NSS Dinner

security at all".

David Yallop then referred to another of the six named suspects, Paul Marcinkus. He was Bishop at the time, but promoted to Archbishop by Luciani's successor. This promotion was for reasons and services which are explained in *In God's Name*.

"Not least is the fact that at the behest of the current Pope, Paul Marcinkus and Roberto Calvi conspired illegally to move into Poland two hundred million dollars, which was supposed to be for Solidarity. I have been personally and directly advised by Solidarity that they haven't seen a dollar of this money. So it went into Poland and vanished at the behest of the current Pope, and it is for such services that Marcinkus remains protected inside the Vatican.

"There are at least five senior officials hiding inside the Vatican. All have been sentenced in their absence to prison terms. And these people are being protected by the Holy Father, this man who claims to be the most spiritual human being on earth".

David Yallop said that the Vatican was circulating a new account of Pope John Paul I's death. The story was first told in a television programme last November by Father Diego Lorenzi, who dined with the Pope on the evening of his death. He recounted in some detail how the pontiff suffered a heart attack during the meal, withdrew to his room and there died.

The story astonished David Yallop who had interviewed Father Lorenzi over many hours both in England and Italy. He had spoken many times of how well the Pope had been on that last evening. And if this new account were true, why had the Vatican waited nine years before informing the world?

"I obtained access to Albino Luciani's medical records going back to birth. He was in excellent health. And if you consider for a moment the logistics of it, it will become obvious that there was no real need to undertake the kind of deep research in this area that I did indeed undertake.

"A Conclave to elect a Pope costs approximately ten million dollars. To elect as replacement for Pope Paul VI a sick or ill man would be not only illogical, it would not make sound financial sense. And the Princes of the Church can usually be relied upon to make decisions that do indeed make sound financial sense. . .

"It has been said of my book that it is like returning to the world of the Borgias. Indeed it is. When you go from England to Italy you put your watch back about an hour. When you cross the Tiber from Rome to the Vatican you need to put it back about 350 years".

David Yallop ended by saying that events have

vindicated his original conclusions.

"The battle continues with this issue. I cannot help but reflect what I and many other people are doing, which is to discredit the current regime in the Vatican, or discredit the current way that Christianity is organised, imposes on us a great and deep responsibility".

Ted Goodman, chairman of the Campaign Against Censorship, proposed a toast to the National Secular Society. He said that organisations like the NSS may not have a mass membership, but many important reforms have been achieved by activists.

"Most people are too busy dealing with their own lives to worry about what the law is on any subject, until or unless it affects them", he added.

"Reforms relating to the death penalty, theatre censorship, abortion, divorce, male homosexuality have been achieved by small groups".

Mr Goodman said that State support for religious control in many spheres of national life continues.

"The Archbishop of Canterbury has written to the Lord Chancellor asking him to follow the minority recommendation of the Law Commission and extend the crime of blasphemy to non-Christian religions, instead of abolishing it.

"In addition, the Government is making compulsory indoctrination part of the core curriculum in the Education Bill".

The speaker quoted from the latest NSS annual report a reference to the reforms achieved twenty years ago, whereas it is now a matter for self-congratulation when we manage to hold onto reforms already won. He gave some examples.

"Television will come under more Government control by virtue of the Broadcasting Bill. It will also frighten producers into more self-censorship by extending the law of obscenity.

"Clause 29 of the Local Government Bill will frighten or give an excuse to local authorities to censor material in libraries and assisted theatres.

"The Special Branch collects information on anyone it considers a threat to the *status quo*. The National Police Computer has files on one-and-a-half million people.

"The Master of the Rolls, Lord Donaldson, stated that the security services should be allowed to break the law.

"In Northern Ireland no prosecutions are brought against police responsible for shoot-to-kill. A soldier convicted of murder has been released after less than two years and reinstated".

Reminding his audience it was said of Augustus that his stature was caused by the flatness of the surrounding landscape, Ted Goodman said the same was true of the present Government.

He added: "The Opposition is weak and divided. For instance, the recent attack on the right of abortion was aided by 36 Labour MPs voting for it

and eighteen abstaining, thus counterbalancing the Tories who voted against the Alton Bill".

Ted Goodman concluded: "It is vital that the National Secular Society continues the struggle for reform".

Responding on behalf of the Society, Jim Herrick said that on the previous evening he had seen "the most anti-religious play in the English language", Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*. It opens with a prologue spoken by Machiavelli in which he says, "I count religion but a childish toy, And hold there is no sin but ignorance".

Jim Herrick said that if religion is a childish toy, then we, the non-religious, "must beware of the childlike feeling of impotence about what we see around us.

"It is hard not to feel helpless in the face of the current climate of opinion, where an anti-democratic Government gives ear mainly to the rich and to the so-called moral majority.

"Who would have thought a hundred years ago, when Bradlaugh succeeded in passing the Oaths Act, that in 1988 we would have a judge saying that two children could not give evidence, because they were too young to understand the Bible and therefore their oath would not be binding?"

Jim Herrick said that campaigns to amend the 1967 Abortion Act and to promote Clause 29 were based on misinformation.

"The Clause 29 campaign was based on the mistaken idea that some schools were being flooded with literature trying to persuade people to be gay. One example is *Jenny Lives With Eric and Martin*. I have yet to find hard evidence that it has been used in any school, and my own reading of it indicates that it is a remarkably innocent book, intended to help people understand and be tolerant towards homosexual relationships".

Speaking of his recent visit to India, Jim Herrick said he was particularly struck by the fact that despite the enormous problems of population growth, communal violence between religious groups and widespread superstition, there are secularists and humanists who are vigorously active.

"We must be vigorously active too. The NSS is the society of all of us, not just the society of its officers.

"If everyone here could find a new member of the NSS or a new reader of *The Freethinker*, if we were to get more active volunteers, if only everyone were to write one letter to a newspaper or public figure once a month, then far from being impotent, we would be a small but powerful voice in public affairs".

Jim Herrick concluded by urging "that we put away childish things, remember religion is but a childish toy, and make no delay in acquiring and disseminating knowledge rather than ignorance".