

The Freethinker

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PIOUS INDOCTRINATORS TIGHTEN GRIP ON CLASSROOM CAPTIVES

Christianity will be even more firmly entrenched in the education system under changes in the Education Reform Bill agreed in the House of Lords. Amendments were passed that will end what Baroness Cox, speaking for the Government, described as "a mish-mash, multi-faith approach". In future, local education authorities and head teachers must ensure that RE recognises "the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian".

It is already widely recognised that this intensification of religious indoctrination in the classroom will cause considerable resentment and social divisiveness. Such considerations did not concern the religious dinosaurs led by the Bishop of London, Dr Graham Leonard, who was nobly supported by the Duke of Norfolk (Roman Catholic), Lord Soper (Methodist) and Lord Jakobovits (the Chief Rabbi). One vigorous opponent was Lord Houghton of Sowerby. "As far as I am aware", he declared, "it was never thought that a Bill had been promoted to deal with religion."

"I am also unaware that any examination results or any votes of censure upon the system by employers related to religion."

"The standards of education that have been strongly criticised have been secular; namely, maths, English, understanding of the language, and the mental abilities for young people to take their place in life and industry today. Yet when we set about the reform of the education system to meet the demand for higher standards, we find ourselves in the middle of a debate on more education in religion".

He said that past teaching was not that there was a loving God. Human beings were expected to fear God.

"A different approach must be taught to children which is not one of discipline and fear, but one of love. Surely parents should be giving their children that teaching. It seems to me that churches and parents are shifting their duties and responsibilities to the State education system. It appears that everyone must pay for it whether or not they are in sympathy with what is being done".

On the question of morality, Lord Houghton said that although human conduct and behaviour have been entrenched in the teachings of religion from the early centuries, a great deal of that has become so embodied in the statute law, either criminal or civil.

Lord Sefton of Garston said that in the history of man religion has been one of the most divisive forces that could have been created. Religion should have been left "completely and utterly" out of the Education Reform Bill.

"This present debate is beginning to prove the kinds of division that can be created in society", he said.

"If one wants a further example of the divisions in society that have their bases in religion, do I have to draw the parallel and ask members to look at the problems in Ireland? Is it necessary for me to talk about the problems of the Middle East? Is it necessary for me to talk about the social problems that have been caused by belief in religion?"

There are fears in some religious quarters that this latest attempt to bolster school religion will be counterproductive.

Lord Goodman told the House of his experience at the Oxford college from which he recently retired as head. "It was disappointing to me to see the small number of undergraduates who attended Sunday chapel. Most of them had been educated at schools where there was compulsory religion".

The Freethinker

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NEWS

PRE-DATING THE NAZIS

Pope John Paul II's visit to Austria last month was an unrewarding, even bruising, experience for the much-travelled Pontiff. The pomp and ceremony usual on such occasions failed to conceal the divisions and indifference among the country's Catholics, less than a quarter of whom attend church regularly. The Pope's consistent practice of appointing conservatives and traditionalists to high office has estranged many. Last year there were extraordinary scenes at St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna when the auxiliary bishop had to be consecrated under police protection. The ceremony was not interrupted by anarchists or communists, but by disgruntled Catholics.

If the Catholics' welcome to John Paul II was less than enthusiastic, that of the Jewish population was decidedly cool. Addressing former inmates of the notorious concentration camp at Mauthausen, the Pope spoke of "the mad ideology of a system of hate and destruction". Presumably he was referring to Nazism, although in historical terms there are marked similarities between the anti-semitism of the Nazi regime and those of the Church. Not surprisingly, the better-late-than-never papal condemnation of Nazism cut little ice with the president of the Jewish community, whose questions about the role of the Church during the Hitler era and its traditional anti-semitism went unanswered. Even the Pope cannot explain away nearly two thousand years of Christian teachings which condemned the "perfidious Jew" and the "Christ-killer". Such teachings, combined with political expediency, prepared the ground in which Nazi racism took root.

The origins of Christian persecution of the Jews can be traced back to the fourth century. From that time, through their sermons and writings, a succession of popes, bishops and theologians added to the prejudice and hatred. Fanatical priests and monks were usually in the forefront of any mob attacking Jews or their property.

No Jew was safe where the Church ruled. One of Pope Paul IV's first acts when he became pope in 1555 was to publish a Bull, *Cum nimis absurdum*, a guideline for discrimination over the next three centuries. It reinforced edicts under which Jews were denied civil and legal rights, restricted to the ghetto, and forbidden to employ Christians in any capacity. They were compelled to wear a mark or distinctive clothing (as ordered by the Fourth Lateran Council which also set up the Inquisition), and the kidnapping of Jewish children for conversion to Christianity was actively encouraged by the Church. Nowhere in Europe were the Jews more abominably treated than

AND NOTES

in Rome itself.

In 1205, Pope Innocent III said that all Jews were slaves, and his declaration was given a theological foundation by Thomas Aquinas in his *De regimine Iudaeorum ad Ducissam Brabantae*. Such edicts enabled popes and rulers to confiscate the property of Jews and force them to live within a specific area.

The crusades of the Middle Ages aroused Europe to a frenzy of religious fanaticism which engendered even more intense hatred of the Jews. They were never not only accused of "killing Christ", but held responsible for the plagues and epidemics which wiped out millions, Jews included. This was in an age of faith and Christian dominance when veneration of holy relics and offerings to the Church were held to be more efficacious in the prevention and treatment of disease than clean wells and medicine. It was not in the Church's interest to encourage the idea that running water was more beneficial to health than holy water.

Those Austrian Jews who met the Pope would be aware how Christians — not only, but particularly, John Paul II's Church — persecuted their race. Some of them had suffered at the hands of the Nazis whose rise to power was witnessed by one of the present Pope's successors as papal nuncio in Berlin. Later, as Pope Pius XII, he maintained a cold silence even when the mass extermination of Jews had become general knowledge.

Rolf Hochhuth, the playwright, asked how "the murder of an entire people could occur without the highest moral authority on earth having a word to say about it". And of the Holocaust, a Dean of the Sacred College declared: "I fear that history will reproach the Holy See with having practised a policy of selfish convenience and not much else".

Those words will haunt occupants of the Chair of Peter for many decades to come.

BUSINESS AS USUAL

"There is a quite natural desire among the bereaved to seek for consolation through almost any channel . . . the money the 'medium' rakes in is the flow of tears from the sorrowful and distressed, and is one of the shadiest of shady businesses". Those words, written in 1919 by *Freethinker* editor Chapman Cohen, were prompted by an upsurge of interest in spiritualism at the end of the first world war. They came to mind after reading Polly Toynbee's recent *Guardian* article on Doris Collins, spiritualism's newest superstar. She has taken on the mantle and

the manager of another Doris (Stokes) who passed into the great beyond last year.

Doris the Second is the *Sun* newspaper's resident medium, a combination of the ghostly and the ghastly. The *Sun* is also sponsoring her national tour, with a supporting act, singer Julie Rogers, whose warblings include the nauseatingly mawkish *I Believe*. At £700 a night it pays her to believe.

Polly Toynbee described as impressive the way in which Doris Collins "contacted" the dead son of a couple in the audience: "She had gone to them so quickly, so surely, and with no fishing around first". But when the journalist met them during the interval she discovered they were prominent figures in the spiritualist fraternity. Doris Collins could well have known they were present, and about their dead son. Polly Toynbee wrote: "Two such determined and distressed believers were not looking for any more earthly explanation of the message they received".

Doris Collins asserted that "you couldn't possibly use plants in this business. Newspapers would pay them a fortune to tell their story". But who needs to pay accomplices when, as Polly Toynbee commented, "there are so many thousands of desperately vulnerable, susceptible believers without a sceptical thought in their heads".

Her verdict on contemporary spiritualism echoed sentiments expressed by Chapman Cohen nearly seventy years ago.

"Preying on the bereaved is a nasty business. . . Who knows what damage these 'messages' may do to the vulnerable. It certainly makes coming to terms with death almost impossible for them".

SPIRITED CAMPAIGN

Liberals lost control of Eastbourne at the recent council elections. Nothing surprising about that, even though some of them sought guidance from two of the century's greatest politicians, Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George.

Interviews with the great men were arranged by Mrs Theresa Williams, local liberal leader and keen spiritualist for many years. She arranged seances which were attended by Liberal candidates, including the town's former mayor.

Ex-councillor Colin Swansborough said Mrs Williams telephoned and invited him to her house on a very important matter. "We spent about thirty minutes listening to a tape which seemed to be the voice of Winston Churchill", he added. The wartime leader made critical comments about the local bus services.

Lloyd George, the last Liberal Prime Minister, said he was worried about the outcome of the council elections. And who could blame him?

Nearly ninety per cent of the 1,169 Jews who left the Soviet Union in May did not go to Israel. This is according to the Israeli authorities who regard an influx of skilled immigrants as essential to economic growth. And the rejection of Israel by so many Jews is a cause of ideological concern to Zionists.

MISGUIDED LOYALTY

Announcing plans to expand its contents and increase circulation, the Roman Catholic weekly *Universe* describes itself as "the best-selling and widest-read religious newspaper in Britain and Ireland", which has built up "a loyal and perceptive readership". But just how perceptive does the Church hierarchy regard the faithful who read popular Catholic newspapers? That uncharitable question is prompted by a second reading of *A Path From Rome*, by Anthony Kenny, the former theologian who is now Master of Balliol College, Oxford.

In this autobiography, Dr Kenny recounts his debate with the late Cardinal Heenan, Archbishop of Westminster, on the question of nuclear weapons. Shortly after publishing an article in the Liverpool diocesan newspaper, *The Catholic Pictorial*, Kenny received a friendly warning from the editor that the Archbishop was "really annoyed" by what he had written. The following day Cardinal Heenan's letter arrived. He said that the young priest had the right to his views but . . .

"I think you probably do not realise how different it is writing for the kind of semi-literate public which read the *Pictorial* and, for example, the *Tablet* or *Clergy Review*. Educated readers will dismiss the view of a priest if they do not agree with him. The simple Catholic is likely to accept whatever a priest writes in a Catholic paper as part of the teaching of the Church".

In another letter, the Archbishop assured Kenny that he was concerned "only because many of the readers of the *Pictorial* are uneducated. . . To these simple people I have in mind we of the clergy are all infallible.

"I don't at all mind what you write in the *Tablet*. Its readers are well able to look after themselves".

Any amusement we may derive from the Archbishop's cynicism is clouded by the knowledge that millions of "simple Catholics" the world over still have blind faith in the priesthood. And while readers of the *Tablet* are "well able to look after themselves" on questions like mixed marriages, family planning, and even divorce and abortion, the Church's unyielding attitude is the cause of a vast amount of human misery, not least, if we take its "agony column" as a guide, among "loyal and perceptive readership" of the *Universe*.

TRAINED TO BELIEVE

Religious indoctrination does not end at school for those who decide on a career in the Royal Navy.

Before reporting to the training establishment, recruits receive a booklet which carries a section headed "Religious Instruction". Religion has always had an important place in naval life, it declares. The authorities intend to keep it that way.

"Morning Divisions are accompanied by prayer, not merely at HMS . . . but throughout the Royal Navy. During your Part I training you will have periods of religious instruction and Sunday worship. After that it is up to you — but the Navy believes that, as part of your general training, you should be familiar with the main services of the Church.

"The staff at HMS . . . includes three full-time chaplains — Anglican, Roman Catholic and Free Church. They do not have any formal rank so you can turn to them at any time. You can talk to them about any problem that is on your mind, even if it has nothing to do with religion".

In addition to three chaplains, there are churches at the training establishment. No reference is made in the booklet to similar facilities for recruits of non-Christian faiths or those who have no religious beliefs. Neither is there a conscience clause that would enable non-Christians to opt out of religious instruction and Sunday worship.

It is obvious that young people embarking on a career which involves a total change in their life style may need to seek advice on personal problems. Professional counsellors without an axe to grind should be available for that purpose. The present set-up simply provides professional Christians with another captive audience at public expense.

A recent investigation into the disappearance of a hundred bibles at Armley Jail, Leeds, revealed that most of them have gone up in (holy) smoke. Prisoners discovered that the Good Book was printed on paper particularly suited for rolling cigarettes. The Bible is the only book provided free to inmates, and they are supplied by the Gideons. There appeared to be more hope than certainty in the organisation's claim that "people have been known to be converted to Christ by reading the page in which they were actually rolling a cigarette".

A plan to introduce Sunday sailing services by Caledonian MacBrayne, the State-owned ferry company, is being vigorously opposed by the Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland and the Free Presbyterians. Sunday sailings already take place to the island of Barra, the population of which is predominantly Roman Catholic.

A Threat to Freedom of Debate

TOM O'MALLEY

The Administrator of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom argues that Government plans for broadcasting will, if successful, benefit wealthy companies and deprive the public of a diverse and informative service.

The noise coming from the Government about changes in broadcasting is only equalled by the bellowing of the tabloids everytime the BBC or ITV transmit a programme which criticises Government policy. The Broadcasting Standards Council, the attack on the BBC's licence fee and the launch of Rupert Murdoch's plans for satellite broadcasting are just some of the headline-making developments in recent months.

Beneath the surface of the daily announcements, and the brash superficiality of tabloid reporting on broadcasting is a deeply serious issue.

We face a real threat to democracy. That threat is embedded in the Government's plans to deregulate broadcasting. The limited public controls over the BBC and ITV which ensure that they produce programmes which are balanced, inform, educate and entertain are about to be removed. The traditional role which broadcasting has played as a balance to the Right-wing national press will be removed. If the Government has its way, mass broadcasting in the next ten years or so will be in the hands of the same kind of people who run Wapping and Fleet Street. The range of information on offer to the public will be the first to go. People will simply be less well informed and therefore more vulnerable to the ideas of the people who run major multinational corporations.

The Government plans a White Paper on broadcasting in the autumn. This will mean that the IBA will be undermined as a regulator of public service broadcasting. More TV and radio channels with few obligations to provide a wide-ranging service will compete for advertising revenue and, as a result, drive programming standards down. The Government will allow TV and radio companies to become more vulnerable to takeover by multinationals. The IBA may lose its powers to force contractors to balance output and spend money on programmes. In place of the IBA will be a much more repressive body, the Broadcasting Standards Council. The BSC will act as a censor with no obligation to make sure that overall programme standards are maintained.

If Government plans become law then quality and choice will diminish, as more channels offering the same diet of advertising, game shows and Right-of-centre politics proliferate. The future is bleak. Why? Because an informed population can involve itself

fully in democratic decision making. A population at the mercy of a media dominated by the State or private enterprise will not get the information necessary to help it make adequate choices.

The Government wants broadcasting run by the same people who control the national press. Where commercial considerations have been allowed to dominate the media, the effect has been dramatic. In the United States only fifty Corporations owned the nation's 25,000 media analysts outlets in 1986. It is predicted that only six corporations will control the US media by the end of the 1990s.

In 1920, seven hundred American cities had more than one daily paper. In 1986, although the population had doubled, there were only twelve cities with competing dailies. The stranglehold of commercial censorship in the United States has led Ben Bakdikian in his study, *The Media Monopoly*, to comment that the media "has starved the voters of relevant information, leaving them at the mercy of paid political propaganda that is close to meaningless and often worse. It has eroded the central requirement of a democracy that those who are governed give not only their consent, but their informed consent".

The absence of public controls over the media in the United States has led to an uninformed society, thereby reinforcing the power of those people rich and powerful enough to control the flow of information. A similar situation might develop in Britain if we allow the Government to break up the BBC and IBA system. It will not only be quality that suffers; it will also be the nature of our democracy which will be undermined.

The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom has spelt out the implications of Government policy in a recently published booklet, *Switching Channels*, in which it examines the origins and likely impact of Government plans for the BBC, ITV, radio, satellite and cable. It takes a critical look at the people and companies who want public regulation of broadcasting abolished and it handed over to the multinational companies which dominate newspapers and publishing. *Switching Channels* argues that diversity, choice and quality in broadcasting will be undermined if Government plans succeed.

Freethinker readers should seriously consider the implications of Government policy, and express their concern to Members of Parliament about the future of broadcasting. The changes that are now envisaged threaten freedom of choice, quality and, ultimately, the democratic environment of Britain.

* *
Switching Channels: the Future of Broadcasting. See display advertisement on page 103.

Born-Again Maggie

MICHAEL DUANE

The Prime Minister's sermon at the Church of Scotland General Assembly was a failure on at least three counts. First, as a blatant exercise to retrieve her party's political fortunes in Scotland it was bitterly resented by a large number of Christians. Secondly, the British people are inherently distrustful of politicians who indulge in religious musings. Thirdly, the Iron Lady's hard-nosed policies are in marked contrast to her soft words from the pulpit.

Brought up as a Methodist to attend chapel almost daily and three times on Sunday, Margaret Thatcher is now a High Church Anglican, a move that has very obvious social as well as religious connotations. Her latest fulminations on morality, to the Church of Scotland General Assembly and to the Conservative Women's Conference in London, are nothing new. In a joint letter from the chairman and the secretary of the Church of England General Synod's Board for Social Responsibility, the writers stressed, among other things, "a particular commitment to the poor, the vulnerable and the victims in society". They agreed with the Prime Minister's stress on personal responsibility, and went on: "But can we understand personal responsibility without stressing also the essentially social character of human life?" (Mrs Thatcher has often and vigorously declared her intention to destroy — not just to modify, but to *destroy* — socialism in all its forms.) They continued: "Individuals are born from relationships and born into families and communities. The social dimension is fundamental and inescapable . . . Governments, therefore, have clear social and moral obligations. These are to pursue policies which create and encourage that sense of community and morality which are the hallmarks of a complete human life".

The *Oxford Companion to the Mind* defines paranoia: "A functional psychosis in which the patient holds a coherent internally consistent, delusional system of beliefs, centering round the conviction that he/she is a person of great importance. . . A person so affected believes that she is right, that she is justified in her beliefs, and that anyone who opposes her point of view is behaving maliciously or at least non-understandingly towards her. . . Paranoiacs on occasion commit murders and not infrequently engage in futile litigation".

Listen to "Today in Parliament" on Radio 4 and what you think is a screaming harridan about to be ejected from the Commons public gallery turns out to be our dear Prime Minister belabouring the Leader of the Opposition. (The same Prime Minister has declared: "I hate those strident tones you hear from some Women's Libbers".) Turn on the television when she is being interviewed and you may get the

impression from the over-elaborate hair-do and the exaggerated enunciation that you are seeing an impersonation by Janet Brown.

The core of paranoia is an unalterable conviction of being right. Conviction politics ("the lady is not for turning" — her own phrase) became evident at a time of rising unemployment and falling productivity when criticism of her policies was not confined to her political opponents. With unemployment at 1,846,000 she said "there will be no change in our economic policies because they are absolutely right" (August 1980), and "what we cannot do is to change our essential strategy" (January 1981) when unemployment figures were rising to over 2,271,000.

Another symptom of paranoia is the denial of reality. "The recession is coming to an end", the Prime Minister declared in April 1981 when the unemployment rate stood at 2,372,700. And in September 1981 when it was 2,748,600 and still rising: "We are through the worst of the recession". Four months later, when the figure had exceeded 2,896,300: "I think we are through the worst".

Just before the Falklands war, Mrs Thatcher's popularity rating was "lower in the opinion polls than any Prime Minister had been since opinion polls started" (*The Unnecessary War*, published by Spokesman). In 1978 she told the Conservative Central Council: "If you can't succeed with people at home, then try to impress them with overseas adventures".

A further feature of paranoia, close to the denial of reality, is the readiness to lie. In 1982, while recounting her feelings about the Falklands war to the Scottish Conservative Party Conference, Mrs Thatcher said: "When you've spent half your political life dealing with humdrum issues like the environment, it's exciting to have a real crisis on your hands". The bereaved from that war could have done without her need for excitement in an "over-seas adventure". On 20 May that year she said that peace proposals could have led to an immediate ceasefire, "but again it was Argentina who rejected them". This was a blatant and outrageous lie to cover her responsibility for the carnage that followed the sinking of the *Belgrano*.

In January 1982 the Conservatives had the support of 27.5 per cent of the population electorate. In June it was 45 per cent. Mrs Thatcher shouted "Rejoice, rejoice!" — while parents and lovers in two nations mourned the loss of young lives and the wounded were debarred from the "thanksgiving" service in St Paul's Cathedral.

In her *Thatcher's Reign* (Chatto and Windus), Melanie McFayden recalls the Prime Minister's 1981 statement that "the family is the basic unit of

society". She promised: "Child benefit will be increased. This increase to its highest ever real value is evidence of our commitment to the family".

From 1979 to 1983 child benefit went up from £4 to £6.50, a rise of 10p after the effects of inflation were taken into account. By the end of 1984 families on unemployment benefit had lost £4.65 weekly in real terms. If housing benefit cuts are included, the loss was £7.28 a week. Meanwhile, families earning three times the average had gained by eleven per cent, and those on five times the average by 22 per cent.

The result of Mrs Thatcher's housing policy over the last nine years has increased the price of houses by such a rate that young families who are not already wealthy cannot buy even modest starter homes. For instance, a house in Streatham bought for £10,000 in 1978, sold in 1983 for £50,000 and in 1988 was on sale for over £200,000. The story is repeated anywhere within commuter distance of London, even as far as Lincolnshire and Devon. In areas like Devon the problem is exacerbated by the flocking of the aged to retire, so that the county is known as "the elephants' graveyard" on that account.

Mrs Thatcher said in 1978: "Let us remember that we are a nation and that a nation is an extended family". Despite her professed concern for the welfare of the family, her policies have meant a massive onslaught on the conditions necessary to establish good family life for those who earn at or below the average salary — more than fifty per cent of the working population. "We shall protect the poor and those most in need of help", she said in March 1984. But under her leadership massive shifts in wealth have been made from the poorer half of the population to the very rich. By 1982 the average salaries of the top thirty company directors rose from £98,000 to £191,000. In 1979 there were four million claimants on supplementary benefit — a governmental index of poverty. By 1982 the figure had risen to over seven million. In 1988 the transfer of wealth to the rich from the poorer part of society increased from two billion a year to nearly three billion. A further transfer is now being worked out in the form of the Poll Tax — a proposal that is under fire even from many Tories.

At the Conservative Women's Conference, Mrs Thatcher obviously felt that she was more at home and could "loosen her corsets a bit". Where she had been careful to avoid imposing the more crass elements in her own political thinking on a Scottish audience containing a fair number of intelligent scholars, she gave her Tory ladies the works. It was all rousing stuff that her followers wanted to hear, with a faint stink of the rabble-rousing, mindless dross associated with the Black Papers and the "philosophical" junk churned out by Roger Scruton

What, then, do we have as our leader towards the end of the twentieth century? A woman whose capacity for self-deception is phenomenal: "We are all working people" (March 1978); "I do not have to worry about money" (March 1982); "The charm of Britain has always been the ease with which one can move into the middle class" (October 1974); "I am really very normal . . . just a perfectly ordinary person" (January 1977); "I'm not grand at all" (February 1977); "People living in need are fully and properly provided for" (December 1983).

In 10 Downing Street we have a woman whose period as Prime Minister has seen a division between rich and poor deeper than any previously experienced in this country; a woman who, by the contradictions between her words and her deeds, has ensured that no other woman will become Prime Minister in Britain for a very long time; a woman whose lack of principle has given rein to the most greedy and most ruthless elements in our society; a woman whose speed of repartee and whose ability to wound by words reveals a profound lack of imaginative intelligence and human understanding; a woman so cynical that she is ready to sacrifice human lives to gain political advantage; a woman so lacking in good taste and judgement that she can boast of having forgone part of her public salary as Prime Minister as an instance of her Christian practice and fail to mention that she is married to a millionaire; a woman who every time she utters the words "nuclear defence" makes people tremble.

And *that* is to be described as Christian, normal, or sanc.

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A Feminist Case Against Censorship

MARY HAYWARD

Some feminists endeavour to censor allegedly sexist writing, advertising and speech. The secretary of the Campaign Against Censorship argues that censorship has no rightful place in women's fight against discrimination and inequality.

The history of feminism is in part a history of women's fight against powerlessness, ignorance, and being treated like children. Recently a movement has arisen within feminism which favours censorship. This is not only a distortion of what feminism should be: it is at best misguided and at worst pernicious. Women who really believe in equal rights should set their faces against all censorship, and especially that which claims to be for their benefit. Censorship never benefits anybody except the censors, and nearly all censors are men.

There are two kinds of subject-matter on which censorship operates: fact and opinion. Opinion is further divided into two: opinion presented as fact, and opinion presented as fiction.

In Britain, censorship of fact no longer needs to be attacked from a specifically feminist viewpoint. Once it has been accepted that being female does not disqualify an individual from being a citizen, it affects both sexes equally. It should be remembered that there are still countries where women are *not* equal citizens; compared to them, feminists in the English-speaking world have no problems worthy of the name. It should also be remembered that equal rights carry with them equal risks, and in some countries there are women writers and dissidents, journalists and political activists, locked up and ill-treated not for the shape of their bodies but for the contents of their heads.

The question why there are proportionately so few women in positions of political power is outside the scope of this article, but it should be noted that the system as it stands was devised by men, for men, and in order to succeed in it women have to compete on men's terms. Only when women in power actually outnumber men will it be possible to alter the system in our favour. That day will never arrive so long as women acquiesce in the idea that knowledge of any kind should be withheld from them on the grounds of their sex.

At present, to take an example of current interest, certain school subjects tend to be defined socially as "boy's" and others as "girl's". This may come very hard on the child whose gift lies in the "wrong" group, especially in secondary school. It takes a very dedicated adolescent to pursue a vocation in defiance of social disapproval, and the talents of girls with a flair for mathematics or boys with a gift for craft

may be wasted. It is to be hoped that the national curriculum, by forcing all pupils to learn key subjects up to a certain level, will provide a framework within which this entirely false distinction can be ignored if not completely overcome.

When one moves from censorship of fact to censorship of opinion, the field enlarges and things become more contentious. A fact is a fact, but someone's opinion of it is a wider question. Everyone with a view to express has two ways of doing it; to make a documentary, a polemic, a tract or a manifesto, or to make fiction. Opinion presented as fact has broadly three classes of subject-matter, which may be described in old-fashioned terms as spirit, mind and body; or in more current language as religion, politics and sex.

Taking religion first, while the majority of people in this country practise no faith at all and the number of adherents of other faiths is increasing, Christianity is still very closely woven into the fabric of our culture. Often we find garbled bits of the teachings of Jesus as the sub-text of statements which are not explicitly Christian. It is fair to point out that if the world's religions, past and present, are judged on their treatment of women, Christianity does not come out too badly. Women under Christianity are not mutilated, locked up, forced to commit suicide or denied the possession of a soul and participation in an afterlife. The Christian male may occasionally thank his god on a personal basis that he was not born a woman, but he is not enjoined by his faith to do so.

That said, the attitude of the churches towards women has, for most of their history, been deeply ambiguous. On the one hand, an all-male and sometimes celibate priesthood treated them with the hostility which comes from fear, which in its turn stems from ignorance; and on the other, a more or less central element in this religion is the worship of a mother-goddess. It insists that a woman must be either a whore or a saint, and if she will not define herself as either there is a problem. It is noticeable that a disproportionate number of today's leading feminists were brought up as Roman Catholics, and politicised by, among other things, the conflict between the roles their church offered them and what they felt themselves to be.

Of course, a great deal of what passes for Christianity in the popular mind is nothing of the sort. It is the tribal belief of the English middle class, whose god is The Family, consisting of husband, wife and children in that order. This narrowly defined family unit is passionately defended, and anything which appears to threaten it is denounced in the name of Christian moral values. We know of "Chris-

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tian moral values". These values do not include generosity, honesty or compassion. We know how easily they are reconciled with greedy and self-centredness, and how easily they can accommodate intolerance. It is far more important to preserve The Family than to show sympathy for those whose attempts at a family life fail, or understanding of those who decide to live outside a family life altogether. Most important for a discussion of censorship, "Christian moral values" by no means include any requirement to tell the truth. And there is something very wrong with a cult which treats the love of somewhere between a fifth and a tenth of the population as unspeakable, and conducts prolonged campaigns to keep children in ignorance for as long as possible of the more unsightly aspects of the world in which they will have to live as adults.

All censorship is lying — the pretence that what is done has not been done, that what is written has not been written, and what is said has not been said, that things are not as they are. Furthermore, it is unwise to force people into deception about their feelings and motives with people they see every day. The blatant male chauvinist is at least honest in his offensiveness. Feminists make fools of themselves over sexual harrassment, not because it doesn't exist or is not unpleasant, but because it should be despised rather than feared.

The woman who reacts aggressively to sexist behaviour does two things. First, she reinforces the man's belief that women are dangerous creatures and if you don't put them down they will put you down. Secondly, she implicitly accepts the position the man has adopted — that the most important thing about her is not her skill, experience or official status, but her sex. When a man sticks pin-ups on the office wall, the woman who pulls them down has done exactly what he wants her to do. As for his language, she can do herself a service by considering before she complains, whether he offended out of malice or carelessness. She might also ask herself who really benefits from working with people who have to pick their words carefully every time they open their mouths, and whether the habit of dishonesty, once established, may not spread into areas other than verbal. She might also remind herself that the nineteenth-century lady, in whose presence certain topics might not be discussed or even mentioned, was kept out of many occupations and professions on the grounds that her sensitivity unfitted her for them. Equality and protection may be incompatible.

I believe that in a hundred years' time the verbal antics which some of us go through in order not to give offence to feminists on the look-out for sexist vocabulary will appear as silly as the Victorians' painful avoidance of any word which might remotely suggest sex itself. Bowdlerism is in fact subtly insult-

ing; it implies that the person on whose behalf it is practised is too fragile to cope with the uncensored version of what people really think or say. When applied, as it sometimes is, to literature of the past, it amounts to vandalism. It also reveals a superstitious belief in the power of words — not so much that by naming something you can call it into being, but that by not naming it you can make it go away.

That is not to say that women faced with sexism should adopt a low profile. A little self-confidence, not to say arrogance, works wonders. As American politician, Geraldine Ferraro, put it: "Men don't harass uppity women."

The feminists' most powerful objection — to the use of pictures of half-clothed women to sell something irrelevant like machines — needs to be turned on its head. The woman, after all, is being paid, but the man who is drawn to look at her is being got at. One of his basic instincts is being exploited to try to sell him something. To have the same effect on women, one would use pictures of babies. It is immoral, but the roots of the situation lie not in sex but in economics. It cannot be said too often that while girls are denied equal opportunities for education and training, and are compelled to take low-paid, dead-end jobs, there will be those willing to earn more by displaying their naked bodies than by using their minds. Before condemning the advertiser, or his model, it would be more constructive to ask how she came to be there.

The page three girl is the stuff of fantasy. Nearly all the men who look at her do not expect ever to meet her, let alone take her to bed. For all practical purposes, she is imaginary.

The proposal to censor page three epitomises what has gone wrong with the feminist movement since Germaine Greer wrote in *The Female Eunuch*: "Censorship is the weapon of oppression, not ours." Poor Clare Short got exactly the response that the woman who takes down the office pin-up gets — her male opponents knew that she was making a fool of herself. Women should know better. For centuries men did their best to dictate what women should know and think, even about their own sexuality, and we have no business doing the same to them. Most male human beings are sexually stimulated by the sight of a female body, and that stimulus is pleasurable. To ask them to change is to ask for a reversal of history or even of evolution. Worse, if feminists shout "porn, porn" every time they see a half-dressed woman in a newspaper, they risk reinforcing the idea — a legacy of Christianity in one of its nastier aspects — that a female body is of itself offensive and sexual desire is of itself wrong.

It is almost impossible to campaign against pornography without moving into the same camp as people who also campaign for a return to sexual ignorance. That is the last place feminist leaders should wish to

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be, because some of them are lesbian, and lesbianism is a threat to the tin god Family in whose name so much censorship is imposed. Ask for a ban on page three and you have not much ground to stand on when they bring in Clause 29. Censorship is not right in one context and wrong in another; there must be no double standard.

In any case, the suggestion that men take their idea of what women are like from a picture on a page or a TV screen, and not from the real women around them, is nonsense. So is the suggestion that looking at pornography can turn an ordinary man into a rapist. Pornography is not propaganda. It is not advertising. It is fiction. A person's character is not determined by their choice of fantasy, it is the character which determines the choice. Quite small children can reject one story-book and demand another. The attempt to impose censorship reinforces the belief which many men still have that women are both weak and dangerous. Dangerous because they want to control what men think, weak because they cannot face an uncensored version of those thoughts. In fact pornography is not very important. It is a symptom of what is wrong between the sexes, not its cause.

Last but not least, feminists must stop trying to cast all women all the time as helpless victims. Not only does it destroy the case for equality — you cannot be both an equal adult and a protected child — it is untrue. There is one set of conditions in which the woman is wholly powerful and the man inescapably powerless; when she is an adult and he is a small child. There are very few men who have not spent the first few years of their lives under the care, control and guidance of women: mothers, sisters, carers, teachers, grandmothers, neighbours, nannies. If a man grows up into a tyrant or a monster, somewhere there is a woman who must bear a share of the blame.

Catholic Church authorities have evicted the charity OXFAM from its Rome shop. Sally Norton, who ran the shop, was told that staff and goods would be physically removed from the premises if the keys were not handed over. Mrs Norton described a donation by the diocesan headquarters as "appeasement of a guilty conscience at having thrown out an agency which has consistently done good works".

Ten days after the Bishop of Gloucester, head of its Board for Social Responsibility, informed the Prime Minister that wealth could be "deeply destructive of spiritual experience", the Church of England announced profits of nearly £117 million last year. This represented an increase of seventeen per cent on the 1986 figure. In addition to investment income, the Church Commissioners received £56 million from trusts and contributions.

THE MISSIONARIES, by Norman Lewis. Secker & Warburg, £10.95

Scenario One: THE SUNDAY SCHOOL MISSION BOX.

"Hear the pennies dropping, Listen as they fall, Every one for Jesus, He shall have them all".

Scenario Two: DEVOTION.

Danger, hardship and facing death to save souls of the benighted.

Scenario Three: THE CANNIBAL'S COOKING POT.

Problems of resurrection and bodily assumption — separating the enjoined flesh of the eater and the eaten, part to heaven and part to hell.

Scenario Four: SEXUAL INHIBITION.

The Reverend Davidson, succumbing to Sadie Thompson in Somerset Maugham's *Rain*.

Scenario Five: THE AFRICAN.

"You had the Bible and we had the land. Now we have the Bible and you have the land".

These stereotypes embody truth and error, but it is number five in its most sinister and devastating form which is the subject of this book, nothing less than the systematic destruction of traditional ways of life, hounding out of their time immemorial forests, exploitation, forced labour and sometimes genocide of whole tribes of innocent people, all this taking place now in the Year of Our Lord 1988.

The first chapter relates the activities of the London Missionary Society in the Pacific islands during the first half of the nineteenth century. Captain Cook had described Tahiti and its neighbours as "these happy islands and the good people on them". Some years later he wrote: "It would have been better for these poor people never to have known us". Bligh of the *Bounty* was sent out to the Pacific to collect shoots of breadfruit trees to augment slave diet in the West Indies. It had been noted that the physique of Tahitians was superior to the average European, due, it seemed, to their superior diet. But then came the London Missionary Society, appalled to find a well-fed happy people who did not need to work themselves to the bone to pile up an employer's fortune. The vicious activities of these missionaries which almost, for a time, wiped out the Tahitians, included the cutting down of the breadfruit trees "to incite the people to industry by reducing the spontaneous production of

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the earth”.

In chapter three the author relates his experiences among the Montagnard people of Vietnam under French rule. A missionary condemns the Long Houses as sinful and complains about the recalcitrance of those driven to forced labour on the plantations. He says they are all Communists, not because they have ever heard of Marx or Russia but because “they are crazy about sharing everything”.

The worst horror of this book, however, is the account of two evangelical Protestant missions which have carved up South America between them in a holy war against the forest Indians, driving them from their homelands by armed force, forcing their women into prostitution, condemning whole tribes to forced labour on capitalist farms and plantations, and, in some cases, exterminating whole tribes.

These two powerful and wealthy missionary societies are the Summer Institute of Linguistics and the New Tribes Mission. The former, whose title the author describes as “a pseudo-scientific disguise”, does indeed translate the Bible into Amerindian languages, with some remarkable results. For instance the Authorised Version of Romans Ch. 13 Verse One is: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. . . The powers that be are ordained by God”. The SIL translation is: “Obey your legal superiors because God has given them command. . . There is no government on earth that God has not permitted to come to power”. Sweet music in the ears of South American dictators.

It is noteworthy that dictatorial governments have given the two missions vast land grants and *carte blanche* for their operations against the Ayoreo people of the Gran Chaco and the Aché people of Paraguay. But the New Tribes Mission has encountered resistance from the more liberal government of Venezuela in its activities among the Panaré Indians of the savannah. The CIA, which prefers dictatorships to democracies in Latin America, also prefers the Protestant missionaries to the Roman Catholic priests with their suspect “liberation theology”. The author writes: “I never met a Bolivian who did not regard the Summer Institute of Linguistics as the base for CIA operations in Bolivia, possibly in South America itself”.

He quotes a Victor Halterman, an SIL operative, and, significantly, at the same time an official of the Bolivian Ministry of Culture and Education: “A number of Indians remain in forest areas designated for white occupation. They are a dangerous nuisance and they must go. Our task (i.e. the SIL’s task) is to ease their passage”.

This book’s account of how exactly the SIL and

the New Tribes Mission set about this task is nauseating reading.

Freethinker readers may be interested to know that the European Headquarters of the New Tribes Mission is in England at Derby Road, Matlock Bath, Derbyshire.

KARL HEATH

RADICAL UNDERWORLD: PROPHETS, REVOLUTIONARIES AND PORNOGRAPHERS IN LONDON, 1795-1840, by Iain McCalman. Cambridge University Press, £27.50

In 1819 the congregation of the Hopkins Street chapel in Soho voted to deny the existence of the devil. They argued that he “could be of no use except to the clergy of whom he was the principle (*sic*) support”.

The chapel consisted of two shabby back rooms which could be reached only by step-ladder. Its debates and discussions ridiculed authority and at the same time entertained its dissolute habitués. The leading figure was Robert Wedderburn, a West Indian mulatto (the child of a slave and a slaver), who mixed Methodism with infidelity to produce a heady insurrectionary brew. One of his associates, Thomas Preston, attended a Sunday service at St George’s church in the Borough and drank all the wine in the Communion cup. Another — a dwarf, Samuel Waddington — was a regular in court, where his custom of sitting on the edge of the bar in a white top hat with Bible in hand to conduct his cross-examinations amused jury and onlookers alike.

The Hopkins Street chapel, a short-lived venture, was just one facet of metropolitan ultra-radicalism in the early nineteenth century. It is this dubious, declamatory world that Iain McCalman uncovers with meticulous scholarship. His compelling account of “blackguard” radicalism is a necessary complement to the studies of better documented and better disciplined radical movements.

These ultra-radicals were admirers of Thomas Paine, but looked more particularly for inspiration to his namesake, the land reformer Thomas Spence. Although numerically few and sometimes silly, as the author is quick to point out, the Spenceans survived the repression of London Jacobinism in the late 1790s and became the focal point of a revolutionary underground which endured for another forty years into the early stages of the Chartist movement.

It was an imprecise tradition, celebrated in tavern free-and-easies, millenarian-style chapels, lewd pamphlets and prints, and clandestine conspiracies. The organisers of the abortive uprisings in London after the Napoleonic wars had once been Spenceans. Arthur Thistlewood and his co-conspirators whose designs on the lives of His Majesty’s Ministers con-

demned them to the scaffold had moved in the same milieu.

This was an underworld populated by "disreputable" artisans at the lower ends of their trades, by failures from the professions, by the more articulate of the lumpen poor. Blackmailers, brothel-keepers, pornographers all played their part. It's sometimes difficult to distinguish a coherent social and political programme from the polemic and the exaggerated informers' accounts of intoxicated oratory. But what may appear from a distance to have been a jumble of confusions and contradictions seemed, of course, perfectly coherent to those involved at the time.

Iain McCalman's study, though at times lost in detail, succeeds in giving a rounded account of the rougher side of radicalism. He brings together a dauntingly wide range of sources (the editorial notes run to fifty pages and the select bibliography to another thirty) to reconstruct the life histories of prominent Spenceans, those men (and a few women) who became convinced that "God was a very notorious leveller". He suggests that the most significant legacy of this underworld was to keep alive a popular political tradition of plebeian unrespectability and irreverence — a ribald, saturnalian and anti-establishment culture. It may not have been as influential as mainstream radicalism, but it's much more fun to read about.

ANDREW WHITEHEAD

Less than a third of Scotland's Catholic pupils practise their religion. Making this claim, the head of religious education in the archdiocese of Glasgow said that a survey of 28 schools revealed that only 13 had departmental heads in religious education. Head teachers were reluctant to appoint an RE teacher as it meant losing a teacher in another subject.

An estimated five thousand monks and nuns will escape the poll tax. The Government has confirmed that members of closed religious orders without income or capital of their own will be exempted.

Britain's Witchcraft of Elders has decided not to have a new king. Alex Sanders, who died recently, had reigned for 25 years. His widow said that although the old custom of sacrificing the king after seven years had stopped, "nobody in their right mind wanted the job".

"If I had the power I would open a jail and I would put every single doctor who performs abortions in jail for killing a child", declared Mother Teresa when she visited the United States last month. Speaking on behalf of "pro-life" groups, she described abortion as "double murder", the killing of an unborn child and a woman's conscience.

LETTERS

A FOOLISH WOMAN

Anyone who considers rational criticism of Mother Teresa (News and Notes, June) as an attack on a "caring" woman, should first consider seriously what she says: "If anyone doesn't want a child, give it to me. I will always find a family, a beautiful family, to adopt a child". Fantasy, pure fantasy!

She later showed the foolishness of her own words. "Mother Teresa appealed for aid for an estimated 150 million orphaned or abandoned children around the world, after talks with the UN Secretary General".

Jesus may be the Pope's and Mother Teresa's saviour. But if the world is looking for saviours, might not the condom be one?

LUCINDA BROOMFIELD

MORE ON THE CFC

I wish to add further information to the recent articles you have published on the Conservative Family Campaign (CFC) and its chairman Graham Webster-Gardiner who recently unsuccessfully sued me for libel.

At the 1986 press launch of the CFC Mr Webster-Gardiner confirmed his, and the CFC's, support for Christian supremacy by stating "it's far better that Christians govern this country than non-Christians govern it".

During his disastrous election campaign in Newport East, he was correctly described by the local press as "... the most conspicuous extremist in Gwent. ..."

The sitting Labour MP, Roy Hughes, tripled his 1983 majority and the percentage Tory vote overall fell significantly, in marked contrast to the moderate Tory candidate in neighbouring Newport West who increased the Tory vote by over two per cent.

In a letter to me dated 20 May 1987 he wrote: "If the Conservative Party were to be won for Christ it could transform our nation". In the same letter he confirmed that some CFC members are not Conservative Party supporters.

His support for the curiously named "pro-life" movement is contradictory. While he spoke of abortion as "murder" he also described the use of nuclear weapons as "righteous" and God's judgement on nations. Clearly, he does not regard the killing of millions of Russian babies in a nuclear war as "murder".

The CFC itself has been the driving force behind the recent hate campaign against gays which manifested itself in the now infamous Clause 28 of the Local Government Act which is supposed to prohibit Local Authorities from allegedly "promoting homosexuality", whatever that means. The CFC have stated that they want this ban extended to publishing and the media. They also want "coming out" made a crime.

The CFC anti-gay campaign betrays the real ideological inspiration of the CFC. A leading neo-fascist, A. K. Chesterton, said in 1967, "If scapegoats have to be found, do not look for them among the Jews or the coloured people, look for them among the champions of Sodom". The CFC, recognising the changed circumstances of 1930s Germany and 1980s Britain have clearly taken his advice to heart. Swap the gays for the Jews and the pronouncements and tactics of the CFC could have come straight from *Mein Kampf* and the German Nazi Party.

The CFC appears to be a party within a party. Conservative Central Office disowned it in April 1987. It has its own aims, legislative programme and member-

ship which are different from the party it claims to support. In the last general election it even had its own list of candidates. Its ideology owes more to Hitler than to Margaret Thatcher.

Bigots are never satisfied. The CFC are just as hostile to secular humanism. No doubt, they will soon be crawling back to Parliament with amendments to Clause 28 banning the promotion of secular humanism. We have been warned!

R. W. ALDRIDGE

HITLER IN POWER

I do not disagree with most of the propositions in John H. Charles's further and longer letter (June) concerning Hitler's coming to power, and repeat that it was not my purpose to detail what H. A. L. Fisher in his *A History of Europe* called "the great Nazi storm of 1933".

Mr Charles acknowledges that the abortive putsch of 1923 "was open insurrection", and necessarily implies that the process by which Hitler in fact assumed power was not that. Certain legal forms were observed on the latter occasion, whatever horrific events — as is well known — accompanied that observance.

Mr Charles now explicitly agrees with the main point of my original letter which was the use which Hitler made of fear of "the menace of Bolshevism" to justify his actions and declared policies to credulous multitudes both in Germany and abroad. I well recall that Hitler used his hundred per cent Nazi Reichstag as a sounding board for some of his most important pronouncements, especially during the war.

If Mr Charles imagines that in some degree I approve of these Hitlerian proceedings, let me assure him now that is not so.

R. J. M. TOLHURST

This correspondence is closed. — Editor.

EVIDENCE, NOT ANECDOTES

John L. Broom (Letters, June) has failed to counter any of my arguments about the mind-brain relationship and has still to come up with anything other than the odd anecdote in support of his case. Those people who supposedly could see and hear what went on around them whilst "clinically dead" were clearly not dead, the doctors had made a mistake (after all they're only human). I see this merely as confirmation that occasionally, while physical body functions can be slowed down until undetectable, sensory and mental processes can continue at a sufficient level to permit some degree of awareness (a condition which may be inducible by drugs). It certainly does not prove the existence of some mind independent of the brain.

It strikes me that all the evidence Mr Broom has is anecdotal. Now I could come up with anecdotes from educated, sensible, intelligent people in support of anything from monsters in Loch Ness to flying saucers. Anecdotal evidence is utterly useless. It is far too prone to mistakes, misidentifications and misinterpretation not to mention the very strong tendency to embellish and exaggerate a good story. If Mr Broom doubts this then he should consider the tragic miscarriages of justice that all too often occur due to over-reliance upon eyewitnesses who were certain of what they saw. The very most anecdotes can do is to suggest that perhaps something is going on which is worthy of further investigation. I readily accept this in the case of out-of-body experiences, but think it more likely that what is going on is entirely within the brain.

I am sure that your more rational readers will agree that the kind of evidence I gave in my last letter — repeatable and verifiable evidence that can be done again and again and again in a laboratory is far superior to mere anecdotes. What experimental evidence can you come up with Mr Broom? Let's have some instrumental measurements. This ought to be possible since, as he points out, the mind can influence the material world, our bodies being a part of that world

Incidentally, I do not think Mr Broom should rely too heavily upon whatever Ian Wilson says. A man gullible enough to be duped by the Turin shroud and to convert to Roman Catholicism on the strength of it is not one I would trust.

Finally, I am not impressed by the semantic trickery in his final paragraph. If it takes an independently existing mind to arrive at truth then I shall have to treat my electronic calculator with greater respect since it arrives at the truth every time I use it!

STEPHEN MORETON

TRUTH AND LOGIC

John L. Broom (Letters, June) writes: "Mr Moreton's opinion that the mind is always dependent on the brain cannot be true". Logically then, if a proposition cannot be true then there can be no evidence for it. Yet Mr Broom writes that "truth is reached by an impartial consideration of the evidence for and against". Since, by his own logic, there is no evidence for the proposition that the mind is always dependent on the brain, then he must regard his contrary view to be a self-evident truth. I am afraid it is not self-evident to me, but doubtless that is a reflection of the condition of my brain at the moment.

R. McDOWELL

FALLACY

What John L. Broom (Letters, June) calls "a powerful logical argument against the view that the mind is completely dependent upon the body", turns out to be just a rehash of an old fallacy. He asserts, in effect, that if our thoughts about the evidence for and against any proposition were constrained by brain behaviour, that very fact would invalidate any conclusion we might reach. The mistake here lies in the assumption that the laws of rational thought and correct reasoning are incompatible with the physical processes which occur in the brain.

This is not so. Natural selection has ensured that our brains are capable of rational thought: animals failing to "arrive at truths" about the world and/or then failing to deduce (albeit unconsciously) the most appropriate course of action don't last long. Successful animals (I suppose that includes humans) have brains that necessarily obey both the laws of rational data processing and of science.

Examples of non-living matter obeying two sets of laws are quite commonplace now. Calculators obey the laws of arithmetic as well as those of electronics; a chess-playing computer conforms to the laws of chess while always subject to the laws of physics; the distilled wisdom of the medical profession can be codified into the rules of an "expert system" computer program which might well be superior to any human physician at the "impartial consideration of the evidence for or against" a diagnosis.

On freedom as a condition for arrival at the truth, isn't Mr Broom conflating two ideas? We Freethinker readers value the political freedom to pursue truth as

we see it without external restraint — but this does not mean that the instrument we use for that pursuit, the brain, has to be free in the sense of being arbitrary. Indeed, the extent to which the brain (or, if you prefer it, Mr Broom, the mind) is not deterministic in its working, but depends on chance factors, is also the extent to which its deliverances have no meaning.

NORMAN BACRAC

EDUCATION, NOT SUPERSTITION

It is most important for those who wish to spread religious superstition to start indoctrination at an early and impressionable age. It follows, then, that atheists should be equally vigorous in protesting the teaching of religious beliefs as "facts".

Professor Le Fevre (Letters) makes two excellent points in the fight to disentangle superstition and education.

First, freedom for those who "wish to run special (religious) schools without a penny of State finance". The problem would be one of educational isolation. The more fundamentalist the parents and religious leaders, the keener they would be to separate and "protect" their children from other competing religions. If you haven't got a special religious school, sell your clothes and buy one!

Secondly, freedom for parents to "deliver their children to the tender mercies of religious teachers from noon on Friday until Sunday evening for religious instruction". Here the problems would be multiple — isolation, contradiction and confusion. An educator cannot show and describe the bones of a dinosaur, perhaps sixty million years old, and in the next lesson teach biblical "creation" as factual without seeming simple, mad, or a blatant liar.

We should do our best to develop minds free from the shackles of religion altogether — a real reform of all education.

ROBERT SINCLAIR

BLASPHEMY CASE RECALLED

Some reviewers of James Kirkup's new autobiographical book, *I, Of All People*, have suggested that his poem, "The Love That Dares To Speak Its Name", which was first published in *Gay News* in 1976, is unobtainable as a result of Mary Whitehouse's successful private prosecution for blasphemous libel.

In fact that case, like all such cases in the past, resulted in a much wider circulation of the offending item. The poem was reprinted in a dozen Left-wing papers, and thousands of single copies were distributed by various individuals and organisations, one edition in 1978 being signed by more than a hundred prominent people.

The commercial publishers may not yet be prepared to take the risk, but anyone who still wants to read the poem may obtain a copy by sending a stamped addressed envelope to the Free Speech Movement, 84B Whitechapel High Street, London E1 9QX.

ARTHUR FREEMAN

Derek Jameson, the TV host with two marriages behind him, is to marry the divorced Ellen Petrie at the Roman Catholic Cathedral, Arundel, on 3 September. Miss Petrie, who is a Catholic, petitioned for the service on the grounds that none of the couples' previous marriages took place in church and were therefore not valid.

OBITUARY

Mr G. Fleet

George Fleet, who has died in his 90th year, had a long and varied career in the film industry and as an organiser of events for the British Legion.

He was born at St Leonards, Sussex, in 1899, and was called up for military service in the first world war at the age of eighteen. He was wounded and sent home, and in later years did much to help those who were disabled in the war.

George Fleet moved to London, and after working for the Marconi Wireless Company he joined Fox Films. His next move was to British International Pictures at Boreham Wood where he was an assistant producer. He also studied at the Royal College of Music, winning bronze, silver and gold medals in elocution.

After leaving the film industry he took a post with the British Legion. For many years George Fleet organised the Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall and assisted in arranging the Legion's annual Whitsun conference. In 1958 he was made an MBE for his work on behalf of the British Legion.

Mr Fleet was a widower since 1981. He was an avid reader and retained a keen interest in the theatre until the end of his life. He was a member of Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Friends conducted a secular committal ceremony at Worthing Crematorium.

Freethinker Fund

Producing and distributing a 16-page monthly without the benefit of advertising revenue is an expensive business. Small increases in expenditure cannot be added to the cover price every month, but of course they mount up.

There appears to be no shortage of money for funding bad causes like censorship and religious superstition. We appeal for continuing financial support to promote "the best causes" through the columns of *The Freethinker*.

We thank Glasgow Humanist Society and those individual readers whose names appear below.

R. D. Birrell, J. T. S. Henderson, K. MacLeod and C. S. Wilkins, £1 each; P. Brown, C. R. Fletcher, F. M. Holmes, D. A. MacIntosh and D. Redhead, £2 each; K. H. Bardsley, £2.50; P. Rowlandson, £4.40; A. Glass, £4.40; J. A. Blackmore, M. B. Clarke, D. Ford, J. Glenister, A. Grindrod, B. Humphries, J. W. Krugel, E. J. Little, P. N. Luckhurst, S. D. MacDonald, H. Millard, A. Milne, F. Munnisksma, P. Paris and D. A. Thompson, £5 each; A. Liddle, £8; T. Akkermans and S. Beer, £10 each; R. J. Condon, £20; R. J. Tutton, £30; Glasgow Humanist Society, £45.

Total for May: £225.40.

Russell's Works in USSR

A selection of Bertrand Russell's works on atheism was recently published in the Soviet Union. The book consists of essays, articles, treatises and interviews. It is believed that until this volume appeared only his *Why I am Not a Christian* had been published in Russian. The new collection is included in the Atheistic Literature Library series, and has an initial print run of 200,000. Soviet readers will be able to buy it in hard cover at the equivalent of £1.50.

Anatoli Yakovlev, who compiled the collection and wrote a commentary, says the reader cannot comprehend the essence of Russell's atheistic views without seeing that the basis is humaness. That is a very important aspect of the English philosopher's world outlook.

Yakovlev declares that Bertrand Russell's "was the life of a philosopher who untiringly sought the ultimate truthfulness, the foundation of existence which was no longer possible to doubt, something that could not be called an illusion or vanity.

"Denying religion, he searched for the truth, and the fact that he eventually found it served as the final denial of the existence of a 'supreme creator'. Man is the highest value on Earth. The fight for his happiness, against the bloody senselessness of war and nuclear insanity, is the highest and a definite blessing — such is the outcome of Bertrand Russell's search".

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EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Summer programme obtainable from Joan Wimble, honorary secretary, Flat 5, 67 St Aubyns, Hove.

British Association for the Advancement of Science. The Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford, Friday, 9 September, 2 pm. Debate: The Religious Implications of the Theory of Evolution. Speakers: the Rt Rev Richard Harries, Bishop of Oxford, and Dr Beverly Halstead. Information obtainable from the BAAS, Fortress House, 23 Savile Row, London W1X 1AB.

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.

Havering and District Humanist Society. Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road, Romford. Tuesday, 2 August, 8 pm. Eugene Levine and Julia Pelling: Report on the British Humanist Association Annual Conference.

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.

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

The Progressive League. Summer Holiday Conference at Wye College, near Ashford, Kent, 6-13 August. Details and bookings: Kenneth Dobbie, 162 Gunnersbury Lane, London W4 8LB.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 17 July, 11 am. Paul Derrick: The Seventieth Birthday of Clause Four — Common Ownership, Public Enterprise and Nationalisation. 3 pm. Norman Fulford: The Spies for Peace After a Quarter of a Century.

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

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

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.

Curtains for the Cross at Lewisham?

A recommendation by the Public Protection Sub-Committee of the Lewisham Borough Council that curtains should be provided to screen the large brass cross on the inside wall of the Borough's crematorium chapel at non-Christian funerals was accepted by the Environmental Services Committee at its meeting last month. But this does not guarantee its implementation, as Council decisions that involve expenditure, however small, are now subject to the money being saved elsewhere in the budget of the department concerned. So the recommendation may not come into effect until next year.

It is now over six years since a deputation comprising the secretary of Lewisham Humanist Group, a local Unitarian minister, and National Secular Society president, Barbara Smoker, who lives in the borough, was promised that the authorities would look into the situation whereby non-Christian bereaved families have to pay a considerable surcharge to have the Lewisham Crematorium cross removed, while those who want it displayed pay nothing to have it replaced.

In 1982 the funeral surcharge for removal of the cross was £25, but by 1987 it had risen to £136, a further £10 being added during the past year — making an incredible £146 surcharge at present for non-Christian funerals. The size of this surcharge has been justified on the grounds that having to remove and replace the cross requires the provision of two cremation slots and the employment of five men, who have to be paid "danger money" to do the job.

Crematoria chapels do not, of course, belong exclusively to Christians. Most are provided by the local authority, for the use of people of all religions and of none, and their upkeep is paid for out of the cremation fees paid by all the people who use the facility. Indeed, it was non-believers who, for half a century, pioneered cremation when most of the churches opposed it, as the Roman Catholic Church continued to do until comparatively recently. But when Christians began to use the crematoria chapels, they introduced into many of them such fixtures as Christian sculptures, stained glass, crosses, crucifixes, carved angels and other symbols, as though they owned these public places. They then held ceremonies to consecrate the chapels according to their own rites, thus strengthening their proprietary claims.

The chapel of Lewisham Crematorium was thus consecrated by the Bishop of Southwark in 1956 according to Church of England rites, and for that reason, Lewisham Council, wary of contravening Canon Law (Section F13, Sub-section 3), refused, in August last year, to make any decision about screening the cross unless and until approval was received from the Church authorities.

Barbara Smoker commented: "It is as though you walked into your neighbour's house, said a few words of mumbo-jumbo, and claimed thereafter that this made the house yours".

Lewisham Council sent out consultative letters to twelve local churches, from seven of which they received replies. Though all of these were opposed to permanent removal of the cross, six were agreeable to screening.

No consultative letter went to the local body that had initiated the original deputation on the matter in 1982 — the Lewisham Humanist Group — nor was there any mention of it in the relevant Council papers, though the NSS was named as the applicant.

At the Sub-Committee meeting in April, the newly elected Conservative leader of the Council, Mrs Maggie Punyer, stated that the proposal did not represent a "groundswell" of opinion. She neatly ignored the fact that those consulted — the Christian churches — had been overwhelmingly in favour of it. Councillor Humphrey Ball voted against it, on the ground that it would destroy Britain as a Christian country. Councillor Pegg, on the other hand, said that if there were only one Muslim or one Jew who was offended by the cross, the Borough would be justified in accepting the proposal. It is not surprising that even those in favour of the proposal were concerned only about the members of non-Christian religions, not about atheists.

The curtain-rail and two sets of curtains now recommended to be provided by the Borough are estimated to cost £2,300, plus £100 per annum for dry-cleaning. Even these amazingly large sums, however, are negligible in terms of the Borough's total budget, and are equivalent to the surcharge on only seventeen funerals in the first year and less than one funeral a year thereafter.

Many other municipalities, especially south of the Thames, similarly own crematoria chapels containing Christian symbols that are either irremovable or difficult to remove. (For instance, the Honor Oak Crematorium chapel, owned by the Borough of Southwark, has a large horizontal cross on the catafalque.) Now that the secular humanist campaign in Lewisham has reached what promises to be a successful conclusion, it is to be hoped that other boroughs will soon follow Lewisham's example in recognition of this injustice, especially in view of today's multi-credal society and decline in Christian adherence.

Freethinker readers are advised to consult plans (usually available at municipal offices) of any new crematoria or additional chapels to existing ones. They will thus be able to protest at an early stage against the inclusion of religious symbols that are not easily removed or concealed.