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ISLAMIC BOOK BURNERS IN NEW ATTACK ON LITERARY FREEDOM

The ritual burning of Salman Rushdie's prize-winning novel, *The Satanic Verses*, outside Bradford Town Hall by Muslims campaigning to have it banned, was described by Fay Weldon, a Whitbread Book Prize judge, as "intellectual terrorism"; and by Barbara Smoker, president of the National Secular Society, as "all too reminiscent of the Nazi regime".

In a letter to the director of London's Islamic Cultural Centre, the NSS president declared: "When British people go to live in Muslim countries, they are expected to observe the cultural customs of those countries, but we in this country are finding that our generally tolerant, pluralist approach towards immigrant groups is being abused — especially by Muslims.

"The present attempt to deny the people of this country access to an important work of fiction because it includes material that happens to offend some of the more fanatical members of an alien minority religion is only the latest instance of this abuse".

The Bradford Muslims' action was directed against W. H. Smith's bookshops. Acting on police advice, company chairman Sir Simon Hornby ordered that the book be withdrawn from display at the Bradford shops and recalled from all its 430 branches.

Sir Simon said that W. H. Smith had been selling *The Satanic Verses* since it was published last year. This was despite "several large and ugly demonstrations aimed against our shops, and other bookshops, in various parts of the country.

"The most notable of these occurred in Blackburn where 3,000 Muslims marched on our shop.

"Equally ugly demonstrations, with accompanying threats to staff and premises, have taken place against other booksellers, some of whom, with the

safety of their staff paramount, have taken decisions to withdraw temporarily the book from display.

"We learned that Muslims in Bradford were planning a major demonstration and that threats of a serious nature had been made against staff and customers in our two Bradford shops. The police advised us that they were not able to guarantee for the indefinite future the safety of our staff and customers and the maintenance of public order.

"To have subjected our staff and customers to possible harm would have been utterly irresponsible".

Last October *The Satanic Verses* author had to cancel a reading in Cambridge after Heffers, the booksellers who were sponsoring the event, received a bomb threat.

It is widely believed that the author's life is in danger. He employed a bodyguard after receiving death threats. Such caution is justified. An official of the Bradford Council of Mosques declared: "If he comes here, I tell you he will be dead".

The Muslim community, which constitutes 70 per cent of Bradford's ethnic minority population, is strictly controlled by a network of mosques and organisations. Religious leaders dictate the people's lives, and imams are brought over from Pakistan to stem any "pollution" of the faith. Young people are forbidden to visit pubs or discos, and most marriages are arranged.

Anti-Rushdie leaflets are, to say the least, a bit over the top. They are liberally peppered with words like "blasphemy" and "blasphemous". According to one Young Muslims (UK) handout, *The Satanic Verses* "crosses all limits of decency" and is "the most filthy, abusive and obscene book ever to be launched against Islam. We are objecting to the blasphemous, abusive, filthy and obscene language

(continued on back page)



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NEWS

RELIGION: THE PROBLEM NOT THE ANSWER

Perusal of "agony columns" in the religious press — particularly Roman Catholic newspapers — uncovers abundant evidence that far from being the solution, a strong religious commitment, whether acquired by inheritance or conversion, is frequently the root cause of emotional stress, depression and misery. Christian teachings foster an unrealisable desire for easy answers to complex questions, instant gratification and reliance on a celestial superhuman entity to conduct earthly, human affairs. Individual responsibility, diversity and determination to make the most of the only life about which we know anything, are not part of the Christian *schema*.

Guilt and fear are among the most destructive emotions inflicted on human beings by Christianity. Such feelings are exploited by the orthodox priesthood and fundamentalist Bible-thumpers who offer their victims palliatives like baptism, confession and the "born again" swindle. Because of that little business in the Garden of Eden, true believers are lumbered with the overwhelming guilt of "original sin". Graft that on to the biblical assurance that "Christ died for us", and practitioners of emotional blackmail have a field-day.

Christian teachings are a barrier to emotional development in many people. In some respects they remain childish, a state which commends them to Jesus but does not fit them to cope with the problems of life. Moreover, they are not trusted to observe decent moral standards unless under threat of divine retribution. In her *Morals Without Religion*, Margaret Knight writes: "Christian morality is largely authoritarian . . . quite literally, childish". Examples of this infantile, authoritarian moral code range from Jesus saying "unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven", to Mary Whitehouse's heroic protection of adults from imagined depravity on the television screen.

It is not difficult to manipulate those who are bamboozled by Christian claims and prefer answers which come prepacked in evangelical tracts. Thus, thousands of near-destitute Americans living on State handouts, regularly and voluntarily send donations to wealthy religious charlatans, while in over-populated countries much weight is given to denunciations of birth control by career celibates like the Pope and Mother Teresa.

Christian teachings have warped the human sexual drive, resulting in incalculable unhappiness and social harm. It was well into the present century

S AND NOTES

before the Church of England gave up its opposition to contraception. The Roman Catholic Church still forbids it, a prohibition that has undoubtedly led to vast numbers of unplanned pregnancies and unwanted abortions. Worse still, the Christian churches and their front organisations try to foist their views about sexual matters on to schools, medical colleges and hospitals.

It is likely that most religious counsellors, whether working privately or through the media, endeavour to offer the best possible advice and guidance. But in many cases their religion has caused or aggravated the problems they are trying to resolve. If people are indoctrinated from childhood with belief in original sin, the possibility of eternal punishment, and that nearly two thousand years ago a man committed suicide by violent means to atone for their sins, it is hardly surprising that many become unstable and are unable to face reality.

SILLY RESTRICTIONS

Although a recent reform of public house licensing laws was a step in the right direction, this Government — like others of all shades — dithers on the question of making a clean sweep of irksome restrictions on drinking and entertainment. Next month, for instance, Sunday opening hours will apply to public houses on "Good Friday", which most people now regard as a holiday rather than a holy day. The same restrictions will apply to the sale of alcoholic drink in shops and supermarkets.

The daftness of our Sunday Observance laws was demonstrated once again at the New Year. Sabbatarians, resorting to the 1780 Sunday Observance Act, threatened action against clubs and discotheques which charged for admission on New Year's Eve (Saturday), but allowed dancing to continue after midnight. The 208-year-old Act prohibits such depravity in England and Wales, even when New Year's Day falls on a Sunday. Strictly speaking, revellers should have taken off their dancing shoes when Big Ben struck the first minute of 1989.

The manager of one London night-club said that drinking and dancing normally goes on until 3.30 am on Sunday. He could not see "why anyone should want to enforce an old Act which has been ignored for so long. It is not as if a night-club interferes with what people wish to do".

He is something of an innocent in such matters. Religious zealots and cranks often use antiquated laws to impose their standards on the general public. The Lord's Day Observance Society ("For Our Lord and His Day") continues a long Christian tradition

of interfering with what other people wish to do. John Roberts, its secretary and spokesman, announced that the LDOS would support anyone who complained to the authorities about the 1780 prohibition being ignored on New Year's Day. He declared: "We have got eyes all over the country on what is happening. . . We are not only concerned about the spiritual value of keeping Sunday, but there is the social and moral value".

Antiquated laws which were imposed when Christians had the upper hand are an anachronism in this day and age. And society can well do without the "social and moral values" of Sabbatarian spies and narks.

A woman who held strong religious views refused to let her adopted daughter, aged eleven, have an abortion. The child, who was a rape victim, gave birth to a baby boy. An Old Bailey jury heard that the mother also refused to allow the girl to give blood samples on religious grounds. This meant that the police were unable to carry out full genetic "fingerprint" tests which would have established the rapist's identity. A 31-year-old north London man was accused of four offences against the girl.

DOCTORS OR WITCH-DOCTORS?

The Rt Rev James Thompson, Anglican Bishop of Stepney, is annoyed with the health authorities. He says that they have assumed that God is dead. How come? They have closed the chapels in three London hospitals and have not included such centres of superstition in plans for new hospitals.

A Department of Health spokesman says it is the responsibility of district health authorities to determine the "spiritual needs" of each hospital. As churches are merging and closing down all over the country, rather than assuming that God is dead, or even in need of intensive care, very likely DHAs have decided that instead of building chapels that are certain to be under-used, it would be more sensible to re-open wards for which there is an urgent need.

It is not only hospital chapels that are a drain on the limited funds being doled out by the Government. The scandal of junior doctors regularly working an eighty-hour week is a cause of much public concern. So should the fact that full-time and part-time hospital chaplains cost the country a vast amount every year. It will be argued that they bring comfort and consolation to patients. In some cases this is true, and there would be no objection to special facilities being provided for clergy visiting patients who specifically ask for them. Such requests would be embarrassingly few, and will become fewer. And it could be argued that the beneficial effects

from clergy visits are far outweighed by annoyance caused to patients receiving the unwanted attention of officious chaplains, prosletysing evangelists and insensitive tract distributors.

Another London cleric, the Roman Catholic Bishop Guazelli, sent out a rallying call: "Unless the Christian community takes a stand, we shall find ourselves without any chapels at all". We deeply sympathise, but maintain there is no reason why chapels should be paid for out of the public purse, particularly in institutions which serve the whole community. If Bishops Thompson's and Guazelli's demands for hospital chapels are met, how long will it be until other groups are clamouring for hospital mosques and temples?

Thousands of Americans have been travelling to a firewood yard near Houston, Texas, to stare at a light they believe is the image of Jesus or the Virgin Mary. It reflects from a white table-top. With four thousand pilgrims turning up each evening, the sheriff's office had to arrange crowd control. When a local sceptic switched off the floodlight at a nearby car-wash, the miraculous light and sacred image disappeared. Pious visionaries hurled insults and stones at the iconoclast.

ANSWER TO A FREETHINKER'S PRAYER

Martin Scorsese's film *The Last Temptation of Christ* has caused its distributors many problems. These have usually resulted from Christian attempts to have it banned. At Sheffield's civic cinema, *The Anvil*, the show almost didn't go on — but for a different reason. Within hours of the allegedly blasphemous film being delivered, the projector burst into flames. A new machine was installed in time for the first showing.

No doubt this unfortunate occurrence was regarded by many of the faithful as divine retribution. But David Godin, the city's Senior Film Officer, said of the fire: "As I've been praying for some time for a new projector, maybe it will vindicate the old dictum about mysterious ways".

The waggish Mr Godin was speaking with his tongue firmly embedded in his cheek. He is a veteran supporter of *The Freethinker* and an occasional contributor to its columns. His last article (September 1988) was entitled "Jesus and the Censor".

The management of a Tiberias hotel allowed a naked couple to have sex in a helicopter hovering over the swimming pool during a party. The chief rabbi has revoked the hotel's kosher food licence.

WHAT PRICE FREEDOM?

The National Council for Civil Liberties launched its "Strategy for the '90s" campaign at a press conference in London on 24 January. The new campaign, described as unparalleled in the Council's history, starts at a time when, declared general secretary Sarah Spencer, "a decade of sustained attacks on civil liberties have effectively created a state of emergency in peacetime".

She added: "Our liberties have been eroded by stealth. The greater economic freedom some enjoy does not compensate for the erosion of the personal freedoms of us all. It is our duty to reach out to a wider audience, to alert people to what is being done in their name so that they can make their opposition felt".

The NCCL plans to make greater use of international human rights machinery. In addition to strategic parliamentary lobbying, focussing particularly on Government MPs, it will also extend legal test case strategy in the British and European courts.

Following an extensive overhaul of the organisation, which has involved streamlining its internal staff structure, the NCCL aims to reverse a decline in membership and reach a wider public audience.

As part of its campaign, the Council has published barrister Peter Thornton's new book, *Decade of Decline: Civil Liberties in the Thatcher Years*. (It will be reviewed in a future issue of *The Freethinker*.) Copies are available from the NCCL, 21 Tabard Street, London SE1 4LA, price £3.95 (30p postage).

Desmond Doak has been jailed for 14 years at Belfast Crown Court. He stabbed his 14-year-old rape victim through the heart because "he did not want it known he had had sex with a Catholic".

CLASSROOM SCEPTICS

British children's scepticism about religion is increasing, according to the Rev Leslie J. Francis of Trinity College, Carmarthen. His claim is based on the result of a survey, the fourth he has conducted since 1974. It appears that youthful doubts about the deity have dramatically increased over the last 15 years.

In 1974, 36 per cent of 5000 secondary school pupils found it difficult to believe in God. By 1986 the figure had risen to 50 per cent. Only 29 per cent believed that God answered their prayers, a decrease of 18 per cent during the same period.

Dr Francis says that statistics confirm "there has been a consistent, widespread and larger drift away from the church" by young people.

Peace Party

BARBARA SMOKER

A ninetieth birthday party is no longer the rarity it used to be, but the one held for Kathleen Tacchi Morris at the Regent Palace Hotel, London, on 24 January, to celebrate her nine decades of dynamic life and work for peace, was rare indeed.

The guest list was large, varied, and studded with celebrities, including members of both Houses of Parliament and representatives of innumerable organisations and many countries, as well as a number of small, delightful great-grandchildren; the floral tributes were magnificent; the huge birthday cake spectacular; and the buffet generous; but the birthday girl herself, manicured and wearing a resplendent Indian shawl of red, black and gold, outshone everything and everyone.

On the shawl were pinned two brooches: on one side, a plastic badge from a nine-year-old's birthday card, proclaiming "I AM 9" (with a nought added), and on the other side, the gold medal for peace awarded to Tacchi by the German Democratic Republic.

Among those who made little speeches were Judith Hart, Bruce Kent, and the GDR embassy representative who had brought the medal; while Harold Wilson, Tony Benn, and the Bishop of Durham were among those who sent messages.

From the speeches, different facets of Tacchi's long, full life emerged. At twelve years of age she had organised a school strike against a sadistic headmaster — and, though the protest was vindicated, she herself was expelled for being a rebel. In the

next decade, she moved in the world of film, theatre, ballet, and art, and numbered among her friends Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin and Picasso, as well as the then Prince of Wales (later Duke of Windsor), who, because he enjoyed talking to her, used to bring her fruit and flowers. (Perhaps she should have thought of England and pre-empted Mrs Simpson!)

Her visit to Warsaw at the instigation of Picasso was the start of the World Disarmament Campaign. Tacchi always had a global outlook, and set up a school in London for overseas students. She also developed a technique of health-through-dancing, and taught it in mental hospitals.

Becoming mistress of a large west-country mansion on her marriage, she put it to good community use: during the war she took in and brought up a number of war orphans (one of whom said a few words to the gathering), and in more recent years the house has been used for the peace campaigns (especially women's peace campaigns) in which Tacchi has been such a tireless catalyst. Now she has moved out (of the house, not her activities) and handed over the building and grounds to a trust for use as a peace centre.

When I thanked her for inviting me to the party as a representative of the freethought movement, she said she really needed me there to counterbalance all the reverend gentlemen present! Though Tacchi has always co-operated with religious peace movements, she has never tried to hide her atheist views, but has always been forthright in defending them.

The Second Coming: Another Disappointment

A book that was published by the World Bible Society early last year has had serious repercussions for many American believers. Sales of Edgar C. Wisenant's book, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will be in 1988*, have soared. It is on sale in Christian bookshops and on doorsteps. Individuals have spent huge sums publicising it and giving away free copies. The author, a former NASA rocket engineer, has based his predictions on mathematical calculations and biblical prophecy. His message is "the end is nigh".

Some people gave up their jobs in preparation for the great lift-off. The owner and workers at one engineering establishment rushed to complete customers' orders.

In the small North Carolina town of Gibsonville a man barricaded himself in his house for thirty hours and fired shots at motorists as he waited for the end of the world. Mrs Joy Cassell said her 27-year-old nephew, Ricky Chavis, "was messed up real

bad on religion". She said that two Jehovah's Witnesses had convinced him that he had to "get right with God".

There have been many instances of gullible believers preparing for "the Second Coming". On one occasion a group of Jehovah's Witnesses dressed in white stood on the Mount of Olives to greet Christ on his return.

Details of a Marplan poll show there is considerable support among religious people for a woman's right to choose abortion. The question put to 1,552 people was: "Do you think that women should have the right to choose an abortion in the first months of pregnancy?" Sixty-seven per cent of Roman Catholics, 86 per cent of Anglicans, 77 per cent of Methodists and 65 per cent of Baptists replied in the affirmative.

Muslim Tolerance

MERVYN JONES

A leading writer and critic examines the absurdity of Islamic reaction to Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*. He warns against complacency in the face of increasing attacks on literary freedom.

The Society for the Promotion of Religious Tolerance is the name of the organisation, housed on the premises of the plush and dignified Regent's Park Mosque in London's West End, which first launched the attack on Salman Rushdie's now celebrated novel, *The Satanic Verses*. The name is not meant ironically (Muslim theologians aren't known for a sense of humour). Tolerance, on this definition, means immunity from the kind of open discussion and argument that other religious or political bodies have come to expect in a modern society.

Muslim intolerance — to use the word now in an accurate sense — has been on display several times in recent years. There was the row about the TV documentary *Death of a Princess*, a piece of investigative journalism which raised questions about the punitive (and, many would say, barbarous) Sharia law code. There was another row about Mike Leigh's play *Goose Pimples*, which was entirely misinterpreted by the protestors (naturally, since they didn't go to see it) and whose real target was British racism. The *Satanic Verses* row is another link in a sequence that, sadly, may stretch indefinitely.

Like all demands for suppression, this one has provided a publicity boost for the object of the attack, and most readers of this article are probably well-informed about the book. Suffice it to say that it is a novel in which realism mingles with fantasy and the past with the present, stimulating thought about the moral ambiguities which have surrounded the Muslim religion (like other religions) from its birth. The verses in the Koran which, according to a folk tradition, were inspired by Satan and not by Allah, are used by Rushdie as a symbol of these ambiguities.

If the question is whether such a book is shocking to devout Muslims, the answer must be Yes. Devout Christians have been recurrently shocked by a long line of books from Renan's *Life of Jesus* through Zola, Graham Greene and Edna O'Brien. As I write, the Pope is urging the faithful to keep away from Umberto Eco. The only way to make the world free from disturbing literature is to make it free from literature.

Since the decline of the Index, however, and the concurrent decline of the Catholic Church as a political force (even in Italy and Spain), Catholics don't normally demand censorship as a protection from shock. Muslims do, and we should be thankful that they do so frankly. "Censorship should ensure

that minorities' values and beliefs are not offended" is a sentence from a letter to the *Independent*. "The Government has a duty to ban books which vilify and trivialise Prophet Mohammed" is another.

We should be wrong to dismiss such pressures as an anachronistic absurdity. Rather, we should be alerted to the political influence that bigoted Muslims can exert, especially in industrial towns with large numbers of voters of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin. Max Madden, Labour MP for Bradford West, is among several who need to worry. (His SDP opponent in the 1987 election was a Mr Moghal, and the traditionally Labour seat might not be safe if a big block of votes swung Mr Moghal's way.)

So, switching on the television to see Mr Madden interviewed on the Rushdie affair, we hear him say: "I don't think we can all stand back and say — complete freedom of speech". Something, in Mr Madden's view, should be done about *The Satanic Verses* in response to the outraged feelings of Muslims. As to what should be done, he appeared uncertain, and he was clearly anxious not to get into the position of an advocate of censorship.

His one positive proposal — and apparently he has written to Salman Rushdie to suggest this — is that future editions should include a statement of why the book is offensive to Muslim believers. The idea is certainly ingenious, not to say unprecedented; one wonders how publishers would react to giving space to a sort of health warning. ("Reading this book can seriously damage your faith"?) Several of Kingsley Amis' novels are highly offensive to women, and there are more women than Muslims in the population, but I've yet to hear of a feminist demand for an appended statement in future editions.

The real danger is this. Muslims say, no doubt sincerely, that they want their community to be accepted as an element in what is now a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. All of us, barring the intolerant, want this too. But, if they set themselves so clearly against the standards of literary freedom established at heavy cost in this century, the outcome will be exactly the opposite of what they are seeking.

Barrister Ali Mohammed has declared that Muslims intend to prove in the courts that Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* infringed the law on blasphemy. They were prepared to go all the way to the European Court is necessary. He said: "This book and its publication has offended the faith of the Muslim community throughout the world".

The Glorious Revolution

PETER BACOS

The accession of William and Mary on 13 February 1689 was a landmark in English constitutional history. In an article to mark its tercentenary, Peter Bacos examines the background to this historic event.

James II was entirely responsible for the loss of his throne. His actions during his short reign of three years precipitated his deposition. The people were prepared to tolerate a Catholic king, but not one who tried to replace the Church of England with the Church of Rome. The populace objected to popery not just on religious but also on patriotic grounds. It was seen as un-English to support the papacy with its emphasis on superstition and authoritarianism. What did more damage to James than anything else was the action of Louis XIV in withdrawing toleration from the Protestants of his own kingdom which they had been allowed for 87 years. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685) set alarm bells ringing throughout Protestant Europe. Would James do the same in England?

James tried to force the Church of England to support his absolutist policies, but they were not so compliant. He angered the Fellows of Magdalen College, Oxford, by insisting they appoint a Catholic as their next president. He revived the Ecclesiastical Commission to bludgeon his way through clerical opposition. Still making no headway there, and determined to repeal the penal laws against the Catholics, he turned to the Dissenters for support. He promised them, in his two Declarations of Indulgence, religious toleration if they would support him. However it is difficult to believe he sincerely wanted diversity of religious practice within his kingdom, and he was only using Nonconformists to entrench the position of his co-religionists. In the second Declaration he enjoined the clergy to promulgate it from every pulpit within the realm. They refused, to the King's fury, and in retaliation there followed the trial of the Seven Bishops, a celebrated episode in English history. They were acquitted, to the delight of the cheering crowds.

James also tried to pack Parliament, the first sustained attempt on the part of the executive to do so. A compliant House of Commons would repeal the Test Acts, and he used every tactic he could to get Members returned who were favourable to his policies. He also took back many of the charters which had been given to the boroughs over the centuries thus ensuring their independence, and ejected 1,200 municipal office holders.

William of Orange was the nephew of the King, and his son-in-law through marriage to his elder daughter Mary. Many Whigs had already tried to drag him into English politics, but he had refused

to be used as their catspaw. However, after James II's young queen had given birth to a male heir in the summer of 1688, the situation was entirely different. There was now the prospect of a Catholic dynasty on the throne of England, a state of affairs abhorrent to Protestant Englishmen. Mary's claim to the throne would be superseded by the boy prince, and England would be drawn ever closer to France and away from Protestant Europe. William wanted England's support in the coming struggle with France, and felt an invasion was necessary to secure this.

William was invited by a number of leading nobles to invade England. They saw that everywhere the King had interfered with the liberties of his subjects and there was widespread disaffection. One vital piece of intelligence was that the army was only half-hearted in its loyalty to the King. William relied on the accuracy of this report because he could not possibly defeat James in the field. He landed at Torbay on 5 November 1688. It took a while for the gentry to rally to his cause, but by the end of the month the outlook was bleak for James. There had been uprisings in the Midlands and the North. His daughter Anne and her husband had deserted him. He decided to flee the kingdom but unfortunately he was apprehended in Kent. William gave him the opportunity to escape once more. Just before Christmas he crossed over to France and exile.

William decided not to assume the Crown immediately as he did not want to appear as a usurper. He called a Convention Parliament to resolve the constitutional crisis, which met at Westminster on 22 January 1689. The Prince of Wales was deemed suppositious, and Mary was next in line to the throne. But as many Tories were unhappy about the way James had been deposed, they thought a Regency would be a suitable compromise. However, this would be unworkable, and as Mary would not be Queen on her own (William had said he would not be his wife's gentleman usher), William must be King and Mary would be Queen Regnant.

They were proclaimed joint monarchs on 13 February 1689, but not before they had consented to the Declaration of Right. England was a limited monarchy and the King was not above the laws of the land. In future he must rule in concert with Parliament, which must be summoned frequently. No money could be raised without its authority. Limited toleration was granted to Dissenters, but the throne was secured for Protestants only.

James lost his kingdom because of the way he abused his powers throughout his reign. England was a land governed by independent country gentlemen, and they were prepared to disrupt the hereditary succession to the throne to preserve their liberties.

Frederick Delius, Music's Godless Genius

TERRY SANDERSON

The music of Frederick Delius leaves few listeners indifferent; its unique qualities provoke fierce reactions from detractors and defenders alike. Delius's contribution to the musical world was unusual on many levels — not least of which was the extraordinary method by which his later works came into being. He was also one of music's most famous Unbelievers.

Born in Bradford of German parentage in 1862, Delius was a cosmopolitan in the true sense of the word, spending much of his early life in Florida where he grew oranges. The natural music of the negro plantation workers was to have a profound effect upon his development as a musician, and the themes and harmonies he brought back with him from Florida crop up time and again in his music.

He studied for a time in Leipzig and moved later to Paris where he found his musical style in a milieu of artistic freedom. His love of nature, of mountains and rivers, periodically drew him to Norway where he spent much time in the company of Grieg. Delius felt that only nature, "eternally renewing", had any significance in the world and he had no time for supernatural explanations of events or people. The final thirty or so years of his life were spent in the tiny village of Grez-sur-Loing near Fontainebleau, where he lived reclusively until his death in 1934.

Delius's contempt for religion, and the "weaklings" who cling to it, is well chronicled. (It has been recorded that in his youth Delius had heard Charles Bradlaugh in Bradford.) He was influenced by the philosophy of Nietzsche and upon his first encounter with *Also sprach Zarathustra* "it acted upon him as a moral, mental and physical earthquake" (as Christopher Palmer wrote).

Perhaps the greatest of Delius's compositions is *A Mass of Life*, a huge choral work using *Also sprach Zarathustra* as its springboard. Finished in 1904, it has been given only infrequent performances — one of which was at last year's Proms to great critical acclaim. Part of the reason for its neglect must be put down to the huge forces required to perform it; another is that it doesn't mention God or Jesus, probably the only Mass that doesn't. However, the Mass provokes violent opposing reactions in music-lovers. Philip Heseltine, the musicologist, said that it was "without doubt the greatest musical achievement since Wagner, a Mass worthy to rank beside the great Mass of Sebastian Bach. . .", whilst the music critic Sir Neville Cardus referred to it as "the most beautiful choral work ever written". Such enthusiasm is not echoed by the religionists in the musical fraternity. Another writer on music, Charles

Reid, dismisses the Mass: "For all its proud gesture and brazen colour, its philosophical poetry makes little purchase on the human mind and heart as compared with the immemorial text set by Bach. The one text is a waning intellectual fashion. The other spans the ages".

It was whilst reading the score of *A Mass of Life* in 1928 in Scarborough that a young man called Eric Fenby first became acquainted with Delius's music. He had been so moved by what he had read, and so horrified to hear that its composer was at that point blind and crippled, that he wrote and offered his services to Delius in any way which might help him continue composing. Fenby at the age of 22 was an accomplished musician himself, but was still surprised when Delius accepted his offer.

What ensued is a story unique in the annals of music. By sheer determination, Eric Fenby was to take down by dictation many works by Delius which would otherwise never have come into existence. The process by which this was achieved was tortuous in the extreme, and is movingly recounted in Eric Fenby's memoir, *Delius as I Knew Him* (Faber and Faber). It has also been dramatised by Ken Russell in the BBC film, *A Song of Summer*.

The Delius household was a very difficult one for a young man to deal with. The great man himself — blind and paralysed from syphilis and in constant pain — was (to paraphrase Fenby) inhumanly aloof, penetratingly truthful, colossally egotistical, dreadfully selfish, splendidly generous, exceptionally refined and triumphant over his almost total incapacitation. The house itself was isolated and cheerless. And yet over a period of five years he worked diligently with Delius to produce music of exquisite beauty. In 1981 Eric Fenby was invited to conduct a recording of most of the pieces that were completed in this way and this is now available (*The Fenby Legacy*, Unicorn-Kanchana DKP 9008/9).

One of the most interesting aspects of this most unlikely of relationships was that whilst Delius was relentlessly atheistic, Fenby was profoundly religious. Eric was constantly bewildered that a man as totally Godless as Delius could produce such sublime music. It was beyond his comprehension — and the comprehension of many other religious people who have been drawn to the ravishing sensuality of sound in Delius's work — that not only did the music pay no homage to God, it actually affirmed that the world was a better place without Him.

"Given a young composer of genius", Delius said to his young amanuensis one day, "the surest way to ruin him is to make a Christian of him. Look at Elgar. He might have been a great composer if he

had thrown all that religious paraphernalia overboard".

Whilst Fenby often thought he would like Delius to be a Christian, he never tried to proselytise. This might have been more to do with his youth and awe of the great man than lack of desire to evangelise, but Delius never hesitated to urge Fenby to abandon his faith. "To the end he continued to taunt me for my persistence in being a Christian", Eric writes, "Every time I went down to lunch or supper I was always in danger of heavy bombardment".

"Eric, I've been thinking", Fenby quotes the composer as saying, "the sooner you get rid of all this Christian humbug the better. The whole traditional conception of life is false. Throw those great Christian blinkers away, and look round you and stand on your own feet and be a man. . . Sex plays an tremendous part in life. It's terrible to think we come into this world by some despicable act. Don't believe all that tommy-rot priests tell you; learn and prove everything by your own experience".

This had no effect on Eric, however, who continued to ignore the good advice given to him by his mentor.

In 1914 Delius had shocked a music-going public with a Requiem that had nothing to do with God. It was written "To the memory of all young artists fallen in the war" and must be the most neglected of all the composer's major compositions. Even Eric Fenby has to admit that the reason is not hard to see. It is not a Requiem as understood in Latin Christianity; it is a cry from the composer's heart against those Christians and Mohammedans "who, filled with woe and fear, drugged themselves with dreams and golden visions and built themselves a house of lies to live in". This was a composition too shocking for the conservative musical tastes of the time, and has remained little-heard in the seventy years since its first performance. However, the Requiem has some wonderful passages and is worthy of investigation. As far as I know there is only one recording, dating from 1968 (HMV Green-sleeve ED 29 0027 1).

Frederick Delius was a prolific composer and has left a large body of work. From the famous and oft-heard miniatures (*On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring*, *Summer Night on the River*, etc) to the operas and choral works (*Sea Drift*, *Idyll*, *Songs of Farewell*, etc) his music owes allegiance to no "school" and was influenced by no other composer; it stands alone in the musical canon.

Although his works are often included in programmes of "English music", Delius was not really an English composer. In his own words: "One thing is certain — that English music will never be any good until they get rid of Jesus".

Well, Delius certainly got rid of Jesus and his music suffered not one iota.

Subsidising Superstition

The Treasury is to pay £5 million towards the capital costs of a technology college where collective worship will play "an important role in developing community life and moral values". The City Technology College Trust will also receive £1.5 million from business sponsors. Due to open in Gateshead next year, the college will cater for eleven to eighteen-year-olds.

It is claimed that children of all faiths will be welcome at the college. But its strongly Christian ethos will deter most non-Christian parents from enrolling their children.

Industrial sponsors include John Laing, the construction group, Argyll supermarkets and Dickens Ltd, the home improvement chain. Another sponsor is the Reg Vardy Motor Group, whose chairman, Reg Vardy, said that teaching respect for law and order and traditional family values would also play a significant part in the curriculum.

"This sounds like a cover for evangelical Christianity", declared Jack Straw, Labour's education spokesman in the House of Commons.

Mr Vardy is a member of the Free Evangelical Church.

Austria's Roman Catholics are furious with Pope John Paul II for foisting another ultra-conservative prelate on them. The archbishopric of Salzburg has been vacant for over a year, Pope John Paul II rejecting all candidates put forward by the diocese. His personal choice, Mgr Georg Eder, is said to use language "reminiscent of the times of Pope Pius XII". He believes that democracy is responsible for "cancelling every moral value".

An Anglican priest who cut Mrs Judith Beatt's car brakes as part of a vendetta against her after she ended their five-year affair, has been put in charge of several Berkshire parishes. The Rev Peter Renouf, a father of four, appeared at Lewes Crown Court in 1984 and was put on probation for two years. He had been on "sick leave" until the Bishop of Reading appointed him priest-in-charge of Beedon, Peasmoor, West Ilsley and Farnborough.

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BOOKS

TIME BOMB: IRISH BOMBERS, ENGLISH JUSTICE AND THE GUILDFORD FOUR, by Grant McKee and Ros Franey, with a foreword by Ludovic Kennedy. Bloomsbury, £4.99

On 5 October 1974, two bombs exploded in two Guildford pubs, the Horse and Groom and the Seven Stars. Five people were killed. On 22 October 1975, Paddy Armstrong, Gerard Conlon, Paul Hill and Carole Richardson were convicted of murder at Guildford and Woolwich on the evidence of their uncorroborated confessions.

According to the convicted, confessions were extracted from them by the police after lengthy questioning and maltreatment amounting to torture: "Conlon, after relating how the police spent several sessions calling him a fucking, murdering Irish bastard, squeezing his testicles, hitting him in the kidneys and slapping his face said . . . 'I started to write the statement, but as I hadn't done the bombing I didn't know what to write. . . I wrote a statement from what I read on Hill's. I just wanted to get it over'".

Of the twelve witnesses who claimed to have seen Richardson, none identified her on an identity parade; the police would not put Armstrong up for identity to the witnesses who claimed to have seen him with Richardson and had described him in detail. No identity parades were held for Conlon and Hill.

The "confessions" of the four differ radically from one another. The authors examine the differences in minute detail. Evidence of alibis, and, in particular, a diary belonging to Richardson, was never sought or presented by the prosecution.

From 6 to 12 December 1975, the "Balcombe Street Siege" took place. Four members of the London Active Service Unit of the IRA held Mr and Mrs Matthews hostage in their flat while trying to escape after shooting up Scott's Oyster Bar.

In October and November of 1976 Alistair Logan, defence solicitor of the Guildford Four, along with James Still, retired Superintendent of the Metropolitan Police, interviewed the Balcombe Street Siege members of the IRA and Brendan Dowd of the Northern Active Service Unit of the IRA, as part of Logan's attempt to secure an appeal hearing for the Guildford Four.

In the course of these interviews Dowd claimed to have planned and placed the Guildford bombs, and gave details about the mechanism of the bombs, the layout of the pubs, the exact position of the Horse and Groom bomb and the disposition of people in the pub that could have been given only by someone who had spent some time in there

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just before the bomb exploded, and who had taken part in manufacturing the bombs.

In particular, he described, quite spontaneously, "two old guys with shopping-bags" in a way that perfectly fitted with a Mr Hutton and Mr Jones who had been in the pub and who had given statements to the police about a youngish couple who had sat near them before they left the Horse and Groom. No mention of these "two old guys" had been made during the trial and nothing about them had appeared in the press.

During the interviews of Dowd by Logan and Still it had to be evident that no claim could later be made that the interviews had been manipulated, so prison officials supervised the meetings with Dowd and an official court reporter with a stenograph machine recorded every exchange. Still had been chosen to lead the interviews because he was an investigator employed by the Senate of the Inns of Court. Later both he and Logan were commended by the Court of Appeal for the scrupulously fair manner in which the interviews had been conducted.

At the end of the Balcombe Street trial, O'Connell, who had claimed, with Dowd, to have bombed Guildford, made a statement on behalf of himself and his co-defendants. In it he said:

"We have recognised this court to the extent that we have instructed our lawyers to draw the attention of the court to the fact that four totally innocent people — Carole Richardson, Gerard Conlon, Paul Hill and Patrick Armstrong — are serving massive sentences for three bombings, two in Guildford and one in Woolwich. We and a nother man (Dowd) now sentenced have admitted our part in the Woolwich bombing. The Director of Public Prosecutions was made aware of these submissions and has chosen to do nothing".

The title of this book includes the words "Time Bomb". That bomb lies in the section of the book from chapters 24 to 30, and 30 to the end. It is, in effect, an indictment of the fifteen members of the Surrey Police Force who dealt with the Guildford Four; of Chief Superintendent Nevill (later Commander) and Detective Superintendent Imbert (later Commissioner) of the Metropolitan Police; of Sir John Donaldson (later Lord Donaldson, Master of the Rolls); of Lord Eustace Roskill and of Sir Michael Havers (later Attorney General and Lord Chancellor) and of David Mellor, MP, and Douglas Hurd, Home Secretary.

Against the police the charge amounts to physical maltreatment of prisoners, suppression of evidence and perjury. Against members of the judiciary it is of failure to maintain the strict standards demanded in weighing evidence and in directing the jury.

REVIEWS

Against David Mellor and Douglas Hurd the charge is of the utmost gravity in virtue of their positions as Member of Parliament and Minister of the Crown, viz: that having had their attention drawn, by such eminent public figures as Lord Scarman, Lord Devlin, Lord Fitt, Cardinal Hume, Roy Jenkins, Merlyn Rees, Sir John Biggs-Davison and Christopher Price, to a probable miscarriage of justice, they did not immediately set up a judicial review. The Home Secretary's failure to do so exposes him, and ultimately the whole Government, to the charge of conniving at a cover-up of scandalous proportions.

It is now more than thirteen years since the Guildford Four were convicted and gaoled. As the final words of the book read: "They are rotting, and with every day that passes English justice is rotting with them".

MICHAEL DUANE

COME DUNGEONS DARK: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF GUY ALDRED, GLASGOW ANARCHIST, by John Taylor Caldwell. Luath Press Ltd, Forest Bank, Barr, Ayrshire, KA26 9TN, Scotland. £6.95

Although the centenary of Guy Aldred's birth in 1986 did not pass unnoticed, as a newly established anarchist quarterly, *The Raven*, published a long article by Nicolas Walter on him, it constituted a tardy response to an event which deserved wider recognition and illustrated the neglect for their own history evident amongst socialists and, sadly, secularists. One hopes this book will help to drag Aldred's name back from the obscurity into which it has fallen. It may also enable readers to understand why some people prefer to forget him.

Born on 5 November 1886, in Clerkenwell, London, Guy Alfred Aldred was only 15 years old in 1902 when he took the first steps in a career which was to put him for a time amongst the most controversial figures on the Left of British politics. It was not as a budding politician that Aldred had taken to the streets of Clerkenwell, but as a Christian evangelist and boy preacher. However, he soon found himself at odds with his fellow Christians, and having been influenced by the ideas of the Rev C. A. Voysey, founder of the Theistic Church, a fact he plays down in his autobiography, *No Traitor's Gait!* (1956), giving credit instead to a study of a book entitled *The Oxford Helps to the Study of the Bible*, that had been recommended to him by an evangelical colleague. In April 1904, Aldred opened a Theist Mission in Clerkenwell; but

sadly for Voysey, who may well have seen in his new convert a person with the potential to carry on the running of the Theistic Church, Aldred's enthusiasm for theism seems to have evaporated overnight. After an existence of a mere four months, the Clerkenwell Theist Mission became the Clerkenwell Freethought Mission, its "missioner" having become a secularist.

It was characteristic of Aldred that having espoused a new cause he did so with an explosive outburst of energy and was soon to be found lecturing for National Secular Society branches and other freethought organisations active in the metropolis. He also contributed to *The Freethinker* and *The Agnostic Journal*, but, never happier than when involved in a heated controversy, Aldred took to describing himself as the Rev Guy A. Aldred, Minister of the Gospel of Revolt, presumably knowing clergy would object strongly to this. He had been befriended by W. S. Ross (Saladin), editor of *The Agnostic Journal*, and had Ross lived longer it is possible Aldred would have remained in the freethought movement. Like Voysey, Ross may have discerned in Aldred leadership potential, for there is no doubt that he possessed the enthusiasm, energy, courage, oratorical skills and literary ability to have risen high in the movement. Ross gives a hint of the impact the youthful convert had made when he wrote in *The Agnostic Journal* (in October 1905): "This Guy, born on Guy Fawkes' Day, and intent on an argumentative blowing up of the House of Priestcraft, has done so much at eighteen that I am sure the readers of *A.J.* would all like to see what he will have done by the time he is eighty".

But Aldred seems to have been both an impatient individual and an egoist who throughout his life disliked being anything but leader, though it was not until 1956 that he managed to get around to acknowledging what he said was the egoism of youth. Further evidence of Aldred's egoism is provided by his attempt to establish his own freethought group in 1906, calling it the London Secular Society. On the other hand, it might have been the influence of Ross which led Aldred to accuse G. W. Foote of wanting to be "a would-be priest" and gain recognition as the "pope of Freethought", a charge also made against Chapman Cohen.

After Ross's death in 1906, Aldred started to drift away from secularism towards socialism. He never broke totally with the former, and from time to time the old interest was to surface in articles and booklets, even when these were primarily concerned with politics. For unlike so many socialists, then as now, Aldred viewed religion as hostile to socialism, and later anarchism.

Aldred was no sooner involved in politics than he found himself at loggerheads with leading socialists and anarchists as he rapidly progressed through

various political organisations. He bluntly told the bearded leader of the Social Democratic Federation, H. M. Hyndman who, according to Caldwell, had rebuked Aldred, that he (Aldred) preferred "wisdom before whiskers". Hyndman, Caldwell adds, "was not amused". With such an attitude it was inevitable that Aldred found no organisation or set of ideas in socialism or anarchism to his liking. It makes interesting reading to discover how he attempted to resolve this difficulty.

When the First World War broke out, Aldred energetically opposed it, and his vigorous campaign against conscription for which, like many others, he suffered harshly, brought him a national reputation amongst socialists. Following the war Aldred took part in the tumultuous debate and organisational changes the Russian Revolution generated. It was at this time that he chose to move from London to Glasgow, which remained his base for the rest of his life. In 1922 he fought the first of many electoral contests, despite being an outspoken anti-parliamentarian who argued that Parliament promoted political careerism. Nicolas Walter holds that the decision to enter electoral activity marks the point at which Aldred's influence commenced to wane.

As a professional political agitator, Guy Aldred always suffered from a shortage of money to finance his work. But in 1938 a new chapter opened when he was left £100,000 in the will of a Yorkshire land-owner and fellow pacifist, Sir Walter Strickland, a long time supporter and benefactor. Unfortunately, Aldred was only able to obtain £3,000 of this as most of Strickland's money had been invested abroad and his Yorkshire land was entailed. Nevertheless it was a substantial sum by the economic standards of the day.

The legacy allowed Aldred to acquire second-hand printing equipment and establish a new press named after Strickland. He revived an earlier journal called *The Word*, which he was to edit until his death on 17 October 1963, when the author of this biography took over, continuing publication until May 1965. After that it appeared irregularly as *The Word Quarterly* ceasing publication with the closure of the press in 1967. During the Second World War *The Word* became a leading anti-war paper, attracting contributions from many of its leading opponents including the pacifist but anti-socialist Duke of Bedford, the only duke to have affirmed when taking his seat in the House of Lords. It was the Duke of Bedford who is reputed to have solved Aldred's paper supply problem during the war, though Caldwell does not mention this.

John Taylor Caldwell has written a fascinating book about a courageous eccentric who, while preaching socialist unity, even calling his miniscule political organisation the United Socialist Move-

ment, probably fell out with more leading socialists and anarchists than anyone else in British Left-wing circles. The bitterness with which he denounced some political figures, usually for what he saw as careerism, or not accepting his line of reasoning, makes it surprising that Aldred retained any friends amongst them. But he did, even if most surfaced only after he had died.

Unfortunately, *Come Dungeons Dark* is peppered with errors which proof reading should have detected, one being on page 89 where Karl Marx becomes Karl Karx. Another concerns Aldred's friend, the mystic Aleister Crowley, who reputedly practised obscene rites in honour of various primitive and classical gods, who is said to have been known as Beast 606, whereas it was actually Beast 666.

Come Dungeons Dark can be read with pleasure and profit, and may even stimulate a desire to read what Aldred himself wrote. If so, it constitutes a fitting memorial to a remarkable man.

R. W. MORRELL

Freethinker Fund

It is hardly necessary to remind readers that *The Freethinker* is published at a financial loss. This is almost inevitable when a journal has a limited circulation. Without the unpaid services of its writers, the paper would not survive.

The Freethinker soldiers on at a time when religious organisations are being increasingly aggressive. Through their pressure groups, the churches are seeking to undermine the social reforms of the 1960s and to prevent further progress. There is not a single weekly outlet for the secularist, freethinking viewpoint. Readers' generosity has so far enabled *The Freethinker* to appear every month. We must at least match last year's total of just over £2,400. In addition to financial backing by present readers, there is an urgent need to increase circulation.

The first 1989 list of donations to the Fund will be published next month.

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Let me be ME—and Free

JOHN BRAY

The writer is a professional journalist who believes there is no more valuable service to humanity than forcing people to think.

Pity the poor freethinker. In his desperation to avoid the snares that beset the followers of religion, more often than not he plunges head first into the deepest trap of all: certainty . . . finality . . . conviction.

In the pursuit of truth he pounces upon what he believes to be his quarry, unaware that it has become his captor.

The avowed atheist, the humanist, the secularist is as surely shackled as the Christian, the Muslim or the Jew. Any creed — even if it begins “I believe not . . .” — sets immediate bonds on thought, turning judgment into prejudice. Every -ism, -ity and -ology is a ball and chain on a mind that should be running free.

For, after all, absolute truth is a chimera. All we know (or think we know) is what our senses tell us and, ultimately, that amounts to a sequence of electro-chemical impulses triggering sensations in our brains. Training and conditioning have taught us to call this sensation “light”, that one “smoothness” and so on, but the hard fact is that we can know no more outside ourselves than a desk-top computer can know about the person who operates it.

For all I know, I could have been brought into existence a split second ago complete with all the illusions of knowledge, experience and memory that I think are mine.

And if there is no absolute truth to be found, we are little better off in the search for relative truth. For truth may be said to be whatever you believe. Test the idea. If you believe it, it is true as far as you are concerned. If you do not believe it, you deny its truth.

And belief, in the end, becomes a matter of choice rather than of logical certainty. I choose to believe that there is a place called the United States of America because it makes daily intercourse more convenient. It would be embarrassing to be continually saying: “I don’t believe in America. Ronald Reagan is a myth. Columbus is a history book con. And there’s no way you can prove otherwise”.

But nobody feels embarrassed about saying: “I don’t believe in religion. God is a myth. The Bible is a con”. Yet, in terms of hard evidence, the case is identical.

And don’t tell me you know about America because you’ve been there. You mean that you got into an aeroplane and some time later you stepped out in a place that somebody told you was America. It’s all a matter of faith.

But if you are a true freethinker, sceptical of everything you read, everything you are told, everything that you cannot know from within yourself, where do you look for a lodestone? For a compass you must have, otherwise you are lost in a desert of meaningless experiences.

The answer is: within yourself. What you know of yourself must be the foundation for what you believe about everything else.

We are offered two concepts from which to choose. One side of the argument postulates that man is a body directed by a brain, a computer-controlled machine, no more. The idea of “mind” is an illusion, a by-product of brain activity.

The alternative view is that both body and brain are at the disposal of a third element — mind, soul, spirit, ego, psyche . . . call it what you like. The ghost in the machine.

Neither case is capable of proof. No-one can produce a mind or an ego and say: “Here it is; I told you so”. Nor can the believer in mechanistic man insist that because mind has not been proven it does not exist. It can never be possible to prove that something does not exist; only that it has not yet been found.

So it becomes, as with all belief, a matter of choice.

You choose as you like. For me, I find it more comfortable to believe that while my brain may control my body, it does so under the direction of my mind. I like to think that I could, at this moment, choose to stop writing and go and make myself a cup of coffee. I feel easier believing that I am a driver-controlled vehicle, not an out-of-hand automaton.

Besides which, it makes life easier. It is so much simpler in conversation to be able to say: “I think . . .” rather than try to explain to a bemused friend that my brain is thinking of its own accord because in reality there is no “I”.

In short, while those philosophers who deny the existence of personal mind may be right, we all behave as though they were wrong. Mankind, almost without exception, acts as though each individual had a mind of his own. We have even created a whole field of professions to guide and train and treat and cure the human mind.

And to behave *as though* something were true, even though we cannot know it for certain, is a definition of faith.

The next question to be assailed is, of course, the question of where mind, if it exists, came from. Did brainless vegetation evolve into brain-directed animal life and then into mind-directed humanity? Or has mind an independent life of its own? Did matter

create mind, or does mind choose to inhabit matter?

The question swirls outward to involve not only me — whatever I may be! — but the unlimited vastness of the eternal universe. And forced to choose, it would seem more reasonable to me to believe that mind created matter, rather than that matter created mind.

It is, of course, a chicken and egg conundrum. It may be no more than the arrogance of my own ego that obliges me to come down in favour of creative mind. You may be able to take a more detached view and accept that what you call “you” was a mere accident of evolution or even that there is no “you” at all.

For me, I'll stay with the ghost in the universe and the ghost in myself that is my self. And if my neighbour likes to call that ghost God, or Allah, or Jehovah, or Brahmah, why should I quarrel with him?

LETTERS

A PURPOSE IN LIFE

Having decided that weatherwise and healthwise, January is never a good month to invite speakers, particularly aged ones, even to a seaside resort, Brighton and Hove Humanist Group settled for an open discussion session for their first meeting of 1989.

The chairman started us off with Harry Stopes-Roe's statement (*The Freethinker*, December 1987 in response to an article by Nigel Sinnott the previous month) “that some freethinkers forget that freedom without a purpose is Hell. To recognise that one is free to do anything and yet have no wish to do any one thing rather than another, is a form of madness”. Initially this was shot down as a “load of rubbish, unworthy of someone high up in the Humanist movement”. That deadly bullet started off an hour's non-stop, wide-ranging discussion on a variety of important and relevant issues.

One of the points raised was that to be a freethinker, one automatically has a purpose of some sort — not necessarily a humanist or atheist purpose at that. To have no purpose at all, or so little as not to matter, does not necessarily imply madness, since any degree of purpose at all depends on circumstances and situations. For example, a Third World hunger victim need have no more purpose than seeking a miserable morsel of food to survive.

Contributions to the discussion abounded. It was difficult to work out how we got from here to the national and international disasters of recent months; one suspects that religion must have been the common chord. The comparison was made between memorial services being held for, say, a hundred victims of a mechanical disaster (attended by all sorts of dignitaries and political VIPs) when on the other hand, no kind of similar memorial service is suggested for three million people who have died of hunger quite unnecessarily. And what about the innocent people who are often slaughtered in the name of religious or political causes?

Why cannot humanist organisations put out some definite and constructive statement showing that religion is not the only way, or even the best way, to give help and comfort to people in distress? Why is it left to religious bodies to rush to the scene of

some disaster and make claims for the need of their services?

The discussion led on to the point that Humanism, as a movement, like any other organisation, has got to find a way of involving people publicly. In the long run, however, to get a workable membership will depend very much on what we do rather than on what we say. Should the British Humanist Association have issued a humanist statement in connection with these disasters?

JOAN WIMBLE,
Honorary Secretary,
Brighton and Hove Humanist Group

THE PAPACY

In his review (January *Freethinker*) of Peter de Rosa's book, *Vicars of Christ*, H. J. Blackham is somewhat unclear on two points.

First, his omission of some such phrase as “the Church claims” makes it look as though he accepts without question the Roman Catholic claim that there have been 262 popes, going back “more than 1,900 years” to St Peter himself. Even if Peter was an historical character, the tradition that he went to Rome dates only from the second half of the second century, and it was not until after the fall of the Roman Empire that the Bishop of Rome was acknowledged to be “the Bishop of Bishops”.

The second apparent mistake in the review is to credit Paul VI with setting up the Birth Control Commission. This had already been set up by John XXIII, though he did not live to receive its report — which would have enabled him to allow the Pill. Paul, however, was reluctant to do anything so revolutionary, and delayed responding to the report for four years, saying he had to think about it and pray about it. Many Catholic women assumed that all this thinking and praying meant that biochemical methods of contraception were about to be sanctioned, so they jumped the gun and went on the Pill. Then, when Paul finally brought out his reactionary *Humanae Vitae*, most of them refused to go back to the old Vatican Roulette — and this has been one of the main causes of the subsequent weakening of papal authority.

BARBARA SMOKER

Three-year-old Liam Smith of Appleby, Cumbria, has died in an American hospital after a heart operation. It was carried out without blood transfusions as these were prohibited by his parents who are Jehovah's Witnesses. British doctors refused to take the risk of a major operation without blood. Before the operation, Liam's mother said: “Without it he will die. But our conscience will not let us go against our religious beliefs”.

The Home Office is to seriously consider the question of Sunday trading following a High Court refusal to grant injunctions against Sunday traders. Applications by local authorities (King's Lynn, Chester and Worcester) were rejected by Mr Justice Warner. He said their applications concerning DIY stores operated by Texas Homecare, W. H. Smith Do-It-All and RMC Great Mills must wait until the European Court of Justice ruled on claims by British retailers that restrictions imposed by the UK Shops Act breaches the Treaty of Rome.

OBITUARY

Mr F. Hoy

The Freethinker has lost a keen supporter with the death of Fred Hoy.

Mr Hoy was a Londoner by birth. He lived in the Merseyside area for a time and moved to the Republic of Ireland in 1958 after his second marriage.

Fred Hoy came from a Methodist background but regarded religion as the cause of much of the world's trouble. He found that this was the case particularly in Ireland. He supported the movement for multi-denominational schools, the Divorce Action Group and the Campaign for the Separation of Church and State.

His son-in-law delivered an address at the secular committal ceremony.

Mr P. Hunot

Peter Hunot died on 20 January, aged 74.

Norman Bacrac writes: For the past eight years, Peter had been editor of *The Ethical Record*, the monthly journal of South Place Ethical Society. He devoted much thought and concern to the work of the Society, its Committees, and its building, Conway Hall, London. His acute observations will be missed.

Peter was a keen photographer and handyman, and author of a book *Man About the House*. He became the first secretary of the H. G. Wells Society in the early 'thirties. He worked for and gave active support to numerous organisations throughout his life, including the Federation of Progressive Societies (later the Progressive League), the National Council for Civil Liberties, Mass Observation, Central Board for Conscientious Objectors, the Sankey Committee (on human rights), the Crusade for World Government, and latterly, Republic. He edited the first edition of the United Nations' *Yearbook of International Associations*.

Peter saw his role in all this to be that of facilitating progress to a different state of society, in the manner of Wells' "Open Conspiracy" and the DeWindt character in *The Shape of Things to Come*. He was a generous humanist, and the embodiment of the humanitarian ideals he extolled in his *Ethical Record* editorials.

There was a secular committal ceremony at Golders Green Crematorium, London, and a memorial meeting is being arranged at Conway Hall.

Holiday accommodation to let: a self-catering chalet to sleep a maximum of six, situated eleven minutes from the sea at Mablethorpe. March to May and October to November, £40 per week; June to September, £70 per week. Further details from Secular Properties Company, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB, telephone (0533) 813671.

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. New Venture Theatre Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton. Sunday, 12 March, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. Public meeting.

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

Gay 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.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 23 February, 7.45 pm. Bill Hughes: Is Materialism Still Alive?

London Student Sceptics. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Monday, 20 February, Barbara Smoker: Near Death Experiences. Monday, 6 March, Glen McLead: The Evolution Conspiracy. Monday, 20 March, David Wood: Physics and Irrationalism. Public meetings at 7.15 pm.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sundays: Lecture, 11 a.m.; Forum, 3 pm; Concert, 6.30 pm. Tuesdays and Thursdays, Extramural Studies, 6.30 pm. Please write or telephone 01-831 7723 for details.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 8 March, 7.30 for 8 pm. Jim Herrick: Humanism in India.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House, Hill Street (off Corporation Street), Coventry. Monday, 20 March, 7.45 pm for 8 pm. Public meeting.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Bernard Phillips, 16 Highpool Close, Newton, Swansea, SA3 4TU, telephone 68024.

National Secular Society

ANNUAL DINNER

Speakers:

BENNY GREEN

JONATHAN MILLER

DANIEL O'HARA

BARBARA SMOKER

The Coburg Hotel,
Bayswater Road, London

Saturday, 15 April,

6.30 pm for 7 pm

*Vegetarians catered for
Advance notice essential*

Tickets £15 each from the
NSS, 702 Holloway Road,
London N19 3NL,
telephone 01- 272 1266

used with reference to our faith . . . the product of Rushdie's warped mind".

A Bradford Council of Mosques leaflet refers to "the blasphemous novel", "the blasphemous contents" and "such blasphemous literature". It concludes: "What is needed is a change in the law on blasphemy. For as it stands, the law is not even-handed, applying only to the blasphemy against the Christian faith".

Freethinkers have consistently argued that rather than being strengthened, blasphemy law should be totally abolished. The Islamic book burners are encouraged by church leaders who, rather than give up a Christian privilege, advocate the extension of blasphemy law to protect "false faiths" such as Islam. Political opportunists of all parties — particularly Labour, to its shame, in Bradford — support blasphemy law with an eye to the religious vote.

In the Commons, three Labour MPs, Bernie Grant, Max Madden and Brian Sedgmore, have endorsed a move to extend blasphemy law.

Fortunately there are writers and publishers who are prepared to defy the agents of censorship and suppression. In particular, sponsors of the Whitbread Book of the Year Award are to be commended for rejecting an impertinent demand by the Bradford Council of Mosques that Rushdie's novel be removed from the short list.

The Bradford book-burning incident received immense press coverage, much of it in the correspondence columns. One *Independent* correspondent was Simon George, representing something called Christian Solidarity International. After pointing out that Islamic intolerance of non-Muslims had been growing in recent years, he added: "Religious intolerance in the twentieth century is a lamentable matter". Simon George choose his words with care; perhaps he was being mindful of the warning to people who live in glasshouses. Christian activities in the mission field have provoked zealotry and intransigence in followers of other faiths. And religious intolerance is a lamentable fact of life where Christianity is still a dominant force.

Although past generations of missionaries introduced Christian superstition, disease and alien customs into other lands — and often acted as agents of invading armies and colonisers — freethinkers are not morally obliged to remain silent when mullahs burn books and try to silence writers in twentieth-century Britain. Freedom of expression, whatever its shortcomings, was not handed to us on a plate.

We must not forget Salman Rushdie's words: "If it's my book today, it could be someone else's tomorrow. If it's the Muslim zealots today, it could be another zealot group tomorrow".

New Sect Menace

Another imported religious sect has infiltrated two universities — Birmingham and Aston — after being banned by two London University colleges. The Central Church of Christ is described by Ian Haworth, director of the Cult Information Centre, as "sinister and dangerous".

The church was founded in the United States ten years ago and has established a mission centre in London. Like similar groups, it endeavours to influence vulnerable young people, particularly students and others who have left home for the first time. Converts are supervised and controlled by spiritual "minders", and as far as possible prevented from contacting non-believing parents and friends. It demands so much commitment to Bible study that academic work can suffer. The church also asks its followers for a hefty financial contribution.

Mr Haworth accuses the Central Church of Christ of using brainwashing and mind-control techniques.

"If I was in a position of influence with any university infiltrated by these people, I would do everything in my power to safeguard the welfare of students. They are at considerable risk".

A representative of the Central Church of Christ described it as "a straightforward Christian Church taking a simple approach to the Bible". It holds Sunday services in the Josiah Mason Lecture Theatre, which is owned by Birmingham City Council.

Italians Reject Church

While Pope John Paul II has been winging his way around the world denouncing sins of the flesh like contraception, which he describes as "denying the sovereignty of God", a fundamental change of outlook by the faithful has developed in his own backyard. Italy's National Research Council has issued statistics which justify one leading newspaper's statement that the Church has "forfeited all claims on the sexual and family customs of the nation".

The Italian birth-rate was once the highest in Europe. It is now the lowest in the industrialised world. The average couple produced three children twenty years ago. That figure is down to 1.3 and still falling.

Italy's rising generation is paying scant attention to the Pope's exhortations and admonitions. An indication of a profound change in outlook among young people was revealed by the result of an opinion poll which rated the gravity of mortal sins from nought to ten. They voted as follows. Homosexuality: four; regular adultery: three; abortion: two; missing Mass: one. Sex before marriage and birth control rated nought.

