

The Freethinker

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RELIGIOUS CHARITIES: GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO ACT "NOT GOOD ENOUGH"

Alan Meale, Labour MP for Mansfield, has called for an investigation by Inland Revenue into a firm which is a front business for the Unification Church, better known as the Moonies. He told the House of Commons that Crescent Printing Services is not registered at Companies House. It is registered as Unified Family Enterprises, another Moonie outfit.

Mr Meale invited the Minister of State at the Home Office, John Patten, to note a list of Moonie-controlled businesses and organisations.

"There are at least 33 Moonie recruiting fronts, ranging from the World Family Movement to the Hope Academy based in California in the United States. Moonie religious fronts number about 24 of which, the Unification Church and the Sun Myung Moon Institution in Korea, are but two.

"There are at least 21 Moonie political fronts — the 'Captive Nations' group and 'Project of Unity' among them. Moonie media fronts include organisations, newspapers and magazines that knowingly promote the Moonie message. There are at least three such fronts, including the *World Student Times*, *New Hope News* and *Unified World*.

"There are at least 37 Moonie cultural and social fronts, ranging from the international foundation to the Korean cultural and freedom foundation".

Mr Meale said there were over a hundred Moonie businesses outside Britain. These included fish-packing plants, jewellery shops, cosmetic production and the manufacture of M16 rifles. They also ran hotels, casinos and newspapers.

Turning to the situation in Britain, Alan Meale referred to Crescent Printing Services of Mansfield, which he believed was the Moonies' main printing house in this country.

"At present its manager is Anthony Nicholas Dixon, who also holds a directorship of Unified

Family Enterprises and was a director of New Tomorrow Limited, before that company was dissolved.

"Both those companies are undoubtedly front businesses, as their other company directorships are all registered at the same address in Lancaster Gate, London, the Moonie organisation's national nerve centre".

Stephen Carr, chief reporter of the Mansfield *Free Press Recorder*, had established, via Companies House, other connections between the companies.

"His examination of company records revealed that some of the directors involved are directly linked to the Moonies' main controlling boards in London", declared Mr Meale. Those involved include Denis Orme, former head of the Moonie organisation in Britain. Other companies were listed as being under the direction of leading Moonies.

"All shares in them are or were held jointly in the keeping of the trustees of the Sun Myung Foundation, the main financial clearing house of the Moonies' world-wide operations", declared Mr Meale.

The Mansfield MP recalled that major challenges have already been made to the Moonies' registration as a charitable body.

"I am sad to say that, so far, the Attorney-General has failed to act because of what he described as no exact proof that the charitable body was not functioning as a charity", he added.

"That view is not good enough. It has not taken me long to get evidence that, rather than being charitable, that body is operating purely as a business venture, with the added advantage of its status, coupled with worse employment practices than any business should ever be allowed.

"For instance, there is definite evidence that many

(continued on back page)



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Vol 109 No 4 CONTENTS April 1989

RELIGIOUS CHARITIES; GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO ACT "NOT GOOD ENOUGH"	49
NEWS AND NOTES	50
A Lady of Letters; Fight Back!;	
Dwindling Popularity;	
Abortion: Catholics Ignore Prohibition;	
Death in Paris	
A WAR AGAINST ARGUMENT	53
John A. Florance	
DAY OF EUROPEAN RECKONING?	54
James Sang	
CROSSING SWORDS WITH CREATIONISTS	55
Daniel O'Hara	
APRIL CENTENARIES	57
T. F. Evans	
REVIEWS	58
Books. Neo-Fundamentalism: the Humanist Response	
Reviewer: Norman Bacrac	
Bernard Shaw. Volume 1, 1856-1898: The Search for Love	
Reviewer: Petr Bacos	
THINKING ABOUT FREE-THINKING	60
David Blackmore	
MISCELLANEOUS	
Letters (61); Freethought at Brighton International Festival (62)	

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NEWS

A LADY OF LETTERS

The Prime Minister, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Roman Catholic Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster sent messages of congratulation to Mary Whitehouse on the 25th anniversary of her Clean-Up Television Campaign which became the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association. How many hours the good lady has sat glued to the television screen, watching and waiting (and maybe praying) for something "offensive" to protest about, will probably remain one of life's mysteries.

Mrs Whitehouse and her Association are but the latest in a long list of religious individuals and organisations with a mania for poking their noses into other people's business. National VALA's forerunners include Proclamation Society, the National Vigilance Association, the Religious Tract Society, the Gospel Purity Association and the Public Morality Council. These and many other groups were devoted to the cause of suppression, censorship and expurgation.

Like all purity crusaders, Mrs Whitehouse believes that she is an instrument of "God's will". Her support is drawn mainly from the churches, "and in particular the Established Church", as she has recorded.

When she launched the Clean-Up Television Campaign in 1964, Mrs Whitehouse was sounding alarm bells about "disbelief, doubt and dirt". Her list of obsessions soon extended to include matters ranging from disrespect for authority to the Postmaster-General's salary. She has always made much of her desire to protect children from the excesses of the small screen. No doubt Mrs Whitehouse, like the vast majority of people, is deeply concerned for the welfare of children. But her censorious crusades have always affected a much wider spectrum of the population. Targets of her letter-writing campaigns included late-night films on Channel 4; and Howard Brenton's play, *The Romans in Britain*, at the National Theatre. None of these was likely to be seen by unsuspecting children.

Mrs Thatcher is a long-time chum. In 1978, while still a humble MP, she and Mary Whitehouse were on a Family Group deputation to the Home Secretary. They warned him of "pressures which destroy parental rights . . . and undermine law and order". They also presented "evidence of the corruption of the foundations of society".

Not surprisingly for someone who has been associated with Moral Re-Armament over many years, Mary Whitehouse is also a very political lady. Her

AND NOTES

initiative in 1964 not only gave birth to National VALA, but also spawned a network of authoritarian, far-Right "purity" groups. The mini-Moral Majority may be fragmented and some of its sex-obsessed leaders a bit loopy. Nevertheless, in this era of Victorian values, their influence can be detected in parliamentary debates.

Mary Whitehouse is now pushing 80 and will not keep going at a hectic pace for too much longer. But there is the TV soap, *EastEnders*, to fret about, and with friends in high places — like Lambeth Palace and 10 Downing Street — much can still be done to impose her standards on society.

A Conservative MP, William (now Lord) Deedes, was the main speaker at National VALA's first convention, held in Birmingham on 30 April 1966. During his speech he declared: "Censorship is not the safeguard of a civilised nation; it is the most ominous sign of its ill health. It is not a sign of strength or virtue; but of weakness and fear". Such sentiments are now being smothered, partly through the influence of the "purity" lobby, but chiefly at the command of "We" who must be obeyed.

FIGHT BACK!

With the current upsurge of religious fundamentalism and threats to hard-won social reforms, the existence of a freethinking secularist movement is very necessary. The National Secular Society is generally regarded as the most militant organisation of its kind in Britain today. It was founded in 1866 by Charles Bradlaugh, before he embarked on his great parliamentary career, providing a national forum for the many local groups which had been formed. Many of them became branches of the NSS, and its branch structure survived until the 1960s.

Since its inception, the NSS has worked consistently for literary and artistic freedom, safe and legal abortion, equal rights for all, affirmation in place of the oath, and animal welfare. It seeks to end religious instruction and observance in State schools, the churches' fiscal and other privileges, provision of chaplains at public expense, and the excessive amount of broadcasting time allotted to religious propaganda.

The minimum annual membership subscription is a modest £2. Local humanist groups may affiliate for the same amount.

There is a statement of principles and membership application form on page 63.

DWINDLING POPULARITY

The ultra-conservative Pope John Paul II is increasingly being defied by theologians and clergy. The latest attack on his policies takes the form of a statement that has become known as the Cologne Declaration. Signed by 163 eminent theologians, it accuses the Pope of abusing his authority and retracting the liberal reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

Leading the critics in what has been described as an anti-papal onslaught is Professor Hans Küng. He was deprived of his chair of theology after a confrontation with the Pope ten years ago.

In addition to his intransigence on birth control, the Pope has annoyed many European Catholics by consistently promoting conservatives and traditionalists. His latest appointees include the Archbishops of Cologne and Salzburg, both of them notorious reactionaries. Another papal favourite, Dr Klaus Küng, Vicar of the secretive Opus Dei organisation, has been made Bishop of Vorarlberg. Most papal appointments are made against the wishes of local churches.

The latest outburst of acrimony has been provoked by what progressive Catholics call "creeping infallibilism". There is also considerable resentment over the Pope's attitude to theologians — often men of a far higher intellectual calibre than himself — who do not toe the Vatican line. The treatment of the American, Fr Charles Curran, and the Brazilian, Fr Leonardo Boff, and others who were summoned to Rome to explain themselves, is regarded as an attempt to suppress academic freedom.

Shortly before the Cologne Declaration was flung at the Vatican, a prominent German theologian, Fr Bernard Haring, published a scathing attack on opponents of birth control. In an article published in a Church magazine, *Kingdom*, he roundly condemned the Pope's moral theology advisers. In particular, he blames Mgr Caffarra, Dean of the Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family, for the Church's rigid attitude. The article suggests that a world commission is set up to consider the question of birth control. It should not be confined to those of the Roman Catholic faith.

Fr Haring claims that a blacklist of clergy and theologians who are considered "untrustworthy" is circulating within the Roman Curia. He describes the question of birth control as "an earthquake" for the Church.

The *Humanae Vitae* pigeons are coming home to roost. That papal pronouncement convinced many people that the Church was no place for them. Now the witterings of Pope John Paul and his fellow celibates go unheeded by millions of Catholics and former Catholics.

ABORTION: CATHOLICS IGNORE PROHIBITION

A recent national survey shows that 67 per cent of Roman Catholics support a woman's right to choose abortion. A large proportion of Anglicans (86 per cent), Methodists (77 per cent) and Baptists (55 per cent) also believe that a woman should have the right to have a pregnancy terminated.

These figures have provoked strong protests, particularly from the "pro-life" lobby. Yet they come as no surprise. It is well known that, as on other matters, Roman Catholics decide for themselves on the question of abortion.

It is nearly 20 years since Madeleine Simms and Charlotte Ingham conducted one of the early research studies on legal abortion in Britain. As far back as 1970 they discovered that 30 per cent of abortion applicants at a North London hospital were Roman Catholics. Just over one-third of them were Irish nurses.

The Lane Committee (1970-74) concluded that Roman Catholic women ignored their church's ban on abortion.

Every year an increasing number of women come from the Republic of Ireland to Britain for an abortion. Undoubtedly a large proportion of them are Roman Catholics. The Church's teaching on contraception, and the fact that sex education is left to priests and nuns, is the cause of ignorance and many unwanted pregnancies in Ireland.

It is gratifying that so many people — not just Roman Catholics — are prepared to defy their churches' teaching on abortion, divorce and contraception. Unfortunately many of them act like social blacklegs. They oppose reforms, but willingly take advantage of them when achieved.

DEATH IN PARIS

The plight of Muslim girls living in western countries has been highlighted by a triple-death tragedy in Paris.

Nineteen-year-old Ilham Jbali's love for a Frenchman outraged her family, particularly her two brothers. One of them murdered her, and in a suicide pact killed his brother before turning the gun on himself.

Young Muslim males are generally more rigid than girls in their religious beliefs and social attitudes. The brothers belonged to a fundamentalist organisation. Papers found on their bodies showed that they planned the deaths as an act of "purification" in the name of Allah.

Last month the Roman Catholic Church in Italy held a conference to study the influence of angels on human lives.

Freethinker Fund

The Freethinker celebrates its 108th birthday next month. That the paper has survived since 1881 is a tribute to its dedicated readers and writers.

Many examples of the financial support which enables the paper to meet the annual deficit have been recorded. The latest list of contributors to the Fund appears as usual in this issue. However, it does not include the name of one generous benefactor. An envelope with a Glasgow postmark recently arrived at the *Freethinker* office. It contained a short, hand-written note ending "Yours anonymously" — and a National Savings Account cheque for £700.94. We can only express sincere appreciation through these columns to a very generous reader.

A second anonymous donation appears on the latest list which is given below. Our thanks to all who have contributed.

R. H. Barr, A. J. Hoyle and H. Prince, £1 each; A. M. Ashton, D. S. Austin, F. B. Edwards, W. J. Ford, J. D. Groom, A. M. Nicholls and F. T. Pamphilon, £2 each; A. E. B. George and D. J. Holdstock, £2.50 each; Anonymous, £3.50; R. Baxter, C. Blakeley, P. H. C. Maguire, J. R. Schwiening, D. C. Taylor and K. M. Tolfree, £3; J. N. Ainsworth, M. A. Aitchison, E. Cecil, F. Clare, T. Cornish, J. B. Coward, B. Everest, N. Gibbard, A. Harrison, R. G. Hayne, C. L. S. Howard, J. Lloyd Lewis, H. Madoc-Jones, C. H. Matthews, G. J. Reece, G. Mepham, A. Oldham, D. E. Shoosmith, A. Taylor, R. K. E. Torode, S. Trent, M. F. Villiers-Stuart, J. M. Walsh, G. Wells, C. Williams and P. D. Wrightson, £5 each; G. S. Mellor and M. O. Morley, £7 each; J. H. Bridle, B. A. Burfott, L. Dubow, M. Fox, R. Gilliland, W. J. Glennie, D. Godin, Leicester Secular Society, C. Lovett, F. Pidgeon, A. J. Pinkett, M. D. Powell and Sutton Humanist Group, £10 each; R. Fennell, D. Harper and L. Kendall, £15 each; R. J. Condon and J. E. Rupp, £20 each; Anonymous, £30; V. D. Brierley, £50; Anonymous, £700.94; F. Dahl, \$2.

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A War Against Argument

JOHN A. FLORANCE

When a copy of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was publicly burned in Bradford in January, one was chillingly reminded of the Nazi-inspired book pyres in pre-war Germany. When, on 14 February, Ayatollah Khomeini issued an order for the execution of the author, it was as if we had been suddenly whisked back into the Middle Ages.

Shortly after the pyrotechnic protest Aziz Al-Azme, Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter, argued that the brouhaha was fanned by Muslim organisations which did not reflect the bulk of Muslim opinion in Britain:

Few Muslims — even practising ones — are Islamist in cultural and political terms, although in Britain, as elsewhere, few are willing to contest the issue with cantankerous activists backed by deep (well-endowed) coffers. In fact this kind of political and cultural zealotry is very new in Muslim history, which only emerged from an insignificant subculture when its patrons, from some of the most archaic groups in the Muslim world, became spectacularly rich after the oil boom.¹

What has become depressingly clear since then is that fundamentalist attitudes have had a profound influence amongst large areas of the Muslim community. At the college where I teach many Muslim students, whose tacit acceptance of multi-culturalism and sanity of outlook I had previously taken for granted, they gleefully praised Khomeini's edict and found my arguments against so monstrous an action absurd and irrelevant. A reporter for *The Independent* who sampled opinion in Bradford discovered much the same attitude: "Most of the 30-plus Asians interviewed at random on the streets of this West Yorkshire mill town think Rushdie must die. While none have actually read the book, most have read extracts in posters and leaflets published by the local Council for Mosques".² It has become gruesomely apparent from reports such as this that otherwise intelligent beneficiaries of Britain's education system are, in the matter of Rushdie, as susceptible to the hateful blood-lust peddled by Khomeini as the fanatical hard-liners.

On 17 February *The Independent* printed a letter, the like of which I have never seen in a British newspaper. The Ayatollah, the writer tells us, "did his duty as a religious leader when he pronounced the death sentence against Salman Rushdie for his crime against the Muslim Ummah". (The Muslim Ummah is the universal brotherhood of Muslims.) Further, the publishers of *The Satanic Verses* are accessories in Rushdie's "crime" and Khomeini's verdict against them is "just and fair". Worse follows: "Even while he is being protected by the police, the life of Salman Rushdie is bound to be

a life of fear, suspicion and mistrust. There is only one way out of this rat-like existence for him. By recanting his blasphemies publicly, he can win a reprieve to make amends for the wrong he has done. God is oft-forgiving, most merciful". These are the authentic tones of the Inquisition.

Thankfully, in the next column there was a characteristically trenchant contribution from Arnold Wesker: "Believers must not be allowed to imagine their beliefs are the only credentials for moral authority. . . It is Khomeini's declaration which is an offence, a kind of blasphemy to those who cherish the democratic, rational freedoms the best minds of the ages have argued and fought for".

Such a response is heartening. Indeed, it is Britain's authors, notably Harold Pinter, Fay Weldon and Hanif Kureishi, who have articulated the sense of angry indignation which so far has been disgracefully unforthcoming from the Government. Anthony Burgess, in a typically well-turned intervention, concluded: "I would much prefer that Khomeini argued rationally with the infidel West in the manner of the great medieval Arabs. But instead of arguing, he declared a holy war against argument. His insolence is an insult to Islam".³

The response of some politicians, many, I suspect, with their eyes cravenly fixed on the ballot box, has been as depressing as it has been predictable. There have been calls for the extensions of the blasphemy laws to cover all religions (notably from Labour's education spokesman, Jack Straw), a recipe for legal chaos and curtailment of civil liberties. The sanest comment on this that I have heard has come (very surprisingly) from Lord Hailsham when he called for the abolition of blasphemy law.

Of course, it is vital to keep a sense of proportion in the midst of all this madness. One can only be thankful for the Muslims who have publicly and courageously distanced themselves from Khomeini's edict and sought to defuse the situation. But one fears that the most damaging ramifications of the affair will only become apparent in the months to come. Even if Rushdie escapes with his life (by no means a certainty), community relations will undoubtedly suffer a severe set-back. Demands for separate Muslim schooling will become more clamorous, and the community itself could well become a wholly separate enclave in British society, inspiring fanatical hatreds which are a mirror of those they themselves have misguidedly espoused.

1. "The Satanic Flame", *New Statesman and Society* (20 January, 1989).

2. *The Independent* (19 February, 1989).

3. *The Independent* (16 February, 1989).

Day of European Reckoning?

JAMES SANG

With the "brain drain" to the United States and elsewhere proceeding at a marked rate, and a decreasing number of school leavers opting for higher education, the outlook for academic achievement in Britain is decidedly unpromising. The next generation will pay a high price for Thatcherite false economies in the sphere of education.

There has been an interesting and amusing correspondence in *The Times Literary Supplement* where a Professor Cantor (History, New York University) has complained about British dons taking American academic posts. "American universities are not", he says, "the new Victorian Punjab of academia designed to provide outdoor relief to the British academic classes". The historian shows through all right, but he misses the point that market economics have long permitted the United States to buy academics (and other skilled people) wherever they are to be found. The recent change is *here in Britain*, where the same economic philosophy has sapped academic morale. The Punjab did not recruit the cream of our upper classes; on the other hand we are losing some of our best talents not only to the United States but also to Europe. That is a very serious matter indeed, especially at this moment in history.

Thatcherism, as everyone knows, is attempting to apply "market forces" to education, particularly to higher education, but now also to schools. Market forces are nothing more than an arbitrary reduction of State funding, which has meant a real reduction of income from Government sources, including money for research. It has just been announced that next year will see an overall cut of about three and a half per cent, this on top of a decade of reductions. And it will apply to Polytechnics as well as to Universities. No wonder academics of all complexions are depressed; for their incomes, if they still have a job at all, have also declined by 20 per cent compared with average national earnings. And the students they teach have been treated just as badly, or worse.

This is not the situation in other countries, at least not yet. If we look at the top salary levels here, the professorial scale starts at £23,380 and rises, exceptionally, to about £30,000. In the United States (and most of Europe, except Ireland and Greece) the equivalent figures are £34,000 to £60,000 — with even higher maxima in California. So it is not surprising that America once again looks like the promised land. But academics stay in teaching and research because that is what they want to do. Now that their facilities are greatly reduced, that the students they teach cannot afford to buy textbooks,

and that they are hedged around with pettifogging administrative rules and have to act as accountants (as head teachers and doctors will soon have to do) America seems more attractive than ever. And many go because "market forces" there allow them to pursue their subject freely.

Let me give an example. Professor Bernard Williams, Provost of King's College, Cambridge, left to become Monroe Deutsch Professor of Philosophy at Berkeley, University of California, at double his English salary. But his reason for escaping was that "Britain is actually a rather philistine country, but this Government is organised philistinism" (*Sunday Telegraph*, 7 February 1989). America on the other hand, even Reagan's home State, appreciates academic learning and is not closing down its philosophy departments as our Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker, is doing here. We shall suffer for this beggarly treatment of learning.

In two or three years' time the number of school leavers will have declined by a fifth. The National Health Service alone will need more than half of them to replace its retiring staff, and the temptation to go straight into a job implies, as is already being seen, that fewer students will opt for higher education. Already some businesses have seen the danger signals; one, I believe, is offering to take on any graduate of its local University whatever the level of their final degree!

Graduates will be in short supply just when we come into full competition with the open Common Market. At the moment, 17 per cent of our school leavers go on to higher education; by 1992 the proportion is likely to be less. Contrast our situation with France: there about 40 per cent go to University, or equivalent training, and the target for the year 2000 is 80 per cent. Education is the "priority of priorities" in the Socialists' national plan. Even if we started to improve things today, the losses we have already had among trained staff, through emigration and early retirement, mean that we cannot catch up. The legacy of Thatcherism is not just the philistinism that Professor Williams complains about, but an erosion of the technical and scientific base which we shall need for economic survival.

Of course we shall survive at some level and, of course, we must recognise that academia is, essentially, an international State. New developments in philosophy, in literature, in science and so on will be available to British academics, and the survivors will contribute to these developments in knowledge. So why complain, you may ask. For three reasons, I suggest. First, we are already very bad at letting our national talent express itself; we have too many

"mute, inglorious Miltons". Secondly, the philistine world has its own attractions which are generally intellectually undemanding. Choose them, and the slide to Third World status will proceed apace. Thirdly, along that track our national humanist heritage will become fossilised, a topic for historians rather than an inspiration to further freedoms. Who would dare say that we cannot see such a decay already?

The Government's many fronted attacks on education have not only affected morale; they have also

created an educational problem which we shall be unable to resolve. Where are the 100,000 additional teachers to come from to meet the needs of the new school curricula? What will happen when we find that A-level programmes cannot fit into European requirements? What will happen when we find that three-year degree courses have to be extended to four years to be acceptable as European requirements? Who will train our managers? Can this Government do an about turn to save us from disaster?

Crossing Swords With Creationists DANIEL O'HARA

I was so taken by Beverly Halstead's enthusiastic review, in a recent issue of *New Humanist*, of Arthur Strahler's massive *Science and Earth History — The Evolution/Creation Controversy* (Prometheus, 1987), that I ordered a copy from the RPA.

The book, as large and heavy as a hard-bound telephone directory, arrived as I was about to leave on a two-week holiday in Madeira and Porto Santo, so I took it with me. That I actually managed to finish it by the time we returned home is a tribute to Professor Strahler's lucidity and skill as an expositor. Apart from the fact that it makes the arms ache, I have nothing but praise for this most thorough and exhaustive survey and defence of mainstream science — astrophysics, geology (in particular), biology and biochemistry — in the face of creationists' pseudo-arguments for a young earth, separate creation and a universal deluge. My impression was that Professor Strahler had completely demolished the creationists' claims to be taken seriously.

I was interested to know how the creationists had reacted to Professor Strahler's work, so I wrote to the Institute of Creation Research in California to enquire. It may be of some interest to readers to see the response I received from the ICR's Director, Dr Henry M. Morris. It is reproduced below, together with my reply.

Dear Mr O'Hara,

Thank you for your letter of February 11th. We do have a copy of Professor Strahler's book, *Science and Earth History*, and I would agree that it's probably the most impressive of the thirty to forty books that have been published in recent years opposing creationism.

Dr Gish has been working for some time on a book answering most of the criticisms that have been published against us. He is almost through with the book and I hope it will be published sometime within the year. However, he will not be dealing

primarily with the geological arguments related to the Flood, which occupy a large part of Professor Strahler's book.

In answer to your question, we certainly would not presume to have answers to every problem that could be posed against creationism, neither do the evolutionists have answers to all the difficulties with evolution, most serious of which is the fact that there is no evidence for it except the opinion of the majority. When one takes into account the weight of the evidence on both sides of the issue we, of course, are firmly convinced that the creationist position is much the stronger of the two. This is entirely apart from what the Bible has to say about this issue. As Bible-believing Christians, of course, we consider the latter to be authoritative and definitive.

Professor Strahler's book covers many topics and it is impossible to answer a generalized question such as that contained in your letter. If you have specific questions about some specific problem, however, we would be glad to try to answer it if we can. Thank you for your interest.

Henry M. Morris

* * *

Dear Dr Morris,

Thank you for the courtesy of your reply to my enquiry concerning the ICR's view of Arthur N. Strahler's *Science and Earth History*.

I confess to being extremely perplexed by several statements in your third paragraph. You say, for example, "... there is no evidence for it (i.e. evolution) except the opinion of the majority". But surely, no opinion, however widely held, amounts by itself to the slightest degree of evidence. So what you presumably mean is that there is no evidence for evolution, period. In the Middle Ages practically everyone believed that the sun goes around the earth. But, as I'm sure you agree, that all-but-universal belief did not rest upon a correct interpretation of the apparent evidence. It was indeed the evidence adduced by Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler which

eventually overturned a universal opinion — much to the chagrin of the Catholic Church.

I wonder, however, if I have interpreted your meaning correctly. Perhaps you meant that in the opinion of the majority there is evidence for evolution, but in your opinion there isn't. If that is the purport of your statement, the fact remains, surely, that it is the weighing of the evidence and not the strength of anyone's opinion which must be allowed to determine the issue.

You then go on to say: "When one takes into account the weight of the evidence on both sides of the issue we, of course, are firmly convinced that the creationist position is the stronger of the two."

That seems to me a very curious statement, for two reasons. Firstly, if, as you maintain, the evidence for the evolutionists' position is zero, then it wouldn't need the evidence for the creationists' position to be very much larger than zero to tip the scales in its favour. So you have apparently suggested that the case for creation need not be more than infinitesimal to make it stronger than the case for evolution. Secondly, I am puzzled by the use of the term "of course" in the above-quoted sentence. Why, "of course"? It doesn't seem to follow, unless, of course, you are indicating that your belief in creation is in every sense anterior to the consideration of any evidence, for or against either evolution or creation.

This interpretation seems to be borne out by your next two sentences: "This (i.e., your conviction that the creationist position is the stronger of the two) is entirely apart from what the Bible has to say about the issue. As Bible-believing Christians, of course, we consider the latter to be authoritative and definitive." Now if that is your position (and you are honest enough to admit that it is), why bother about evidence at all? You don't need it, do you, as your views are constrained, *a priori*, by what the Bible says, irrespective of any evidence whatsoever.

I simply can't understand why the ICR wastes so much time and energy looking for and considering evidence when you have an unshakeable prior commitment to the Bible, whatever evidence may actually be adduced.

A final comment. You say that there is *no evidence* for evolution. And yet Professor Strahler, in the aforementioned book, reviews masses of such evidence. If, because of your prior commitment to the Bible, you are constrained to reject all such evidence, so be it. But you are surely not entitled to say that because the evidence for evolution is unpalatable to you, then it simply doesn't exist!

It seems to me that, apart from religious fundamentalists (Jewish, Christian and Muslim) who have *a priori* objections to evolution on dogmatic grounds, practically everyone with the time and intelligence to examine the multiform interlocking and growing evidence for evolution finds it overwhelming.

I appreciate your reasons for rejecting evolution.

You do so because it is incompatible with your religious beliefs. Rather than wasting time arguing against evolution, therefore, should you not simply be taking your stand with David Hume, who declared, "our most holy religion rests on faith, not on reason." The difference between you would be that while Hume made the statement tongue-in-cheek, you can make it quite straightforwardly. Such a stance would surely merit greater respect than that unedifying spectacle of creationists juggling with evidence that they have already judged inadmissible or irrelevant.

Daniel O'Hara

* * *

This correspondence has not touched on what is probably the most important aspect of the creationists' crusade, namely their as yet unsuccessful attempts to have creationism taught in the public schools of the United States. American fundamentalist Christians are as incensed today as at the time of the famous Scopes trial in 1925 about the teaching of Darwinism, with its atheistic implications, in the State schools. In order to counteract what they see (rightly, in my view) as the secularist and non-theistic consequences of the scientific world-view, they have attempted to make out that evolution is an unscientific and ultimately religious doctrine, and that creationism, on the other hand, is scientific. By this means they hope at least to obtain "equal time" for the teaching of evolution and creationism in the schools. But Professor Strahler rightly exposes the flagrant dishonesty of this approach.

The creationists tend to be schizoid about whether evolution is scientific (i.e. evidential) at all. On the one hand they condemn it as an atheistic dogma, lacking in supporting evidence; on the other hand, they are forced to recognise that practically everyone who is scientifically literate and not already committed to a fundamentalistic creed accepts evolution as a thoroughly well-founded theory, with immensely rich predictive and explanatory powers. So their reaction tends to be to invoke conspiracy theory, a variation on the "Reds under the beds" paranoia which so appeals to a certain type of American backwoodsman.

Canadian creationists are currently touring the United Kingdom promoting a film they have made entitled *The Evolution Conspiracy*. This gives the true flavour of the typical creationist response to evolution, and indeed any scientific theory with non-theistic implications. But both Dr Morris of the ICR, and the Canadian creationist Glen McLead, who recently crossed swords with Mike Howgate and London Sceptical Students at Conway Hall, have succeeded only in exposing the utter poverty of their own knowledge and understanding of the modern scientific world view, and the palpable fraud of their attempts to promote creationism as a scientific hypothesis.

April Centenaries

T. F. EVANS

"April", in the words that begin the most famous poem of the century, "is the cruellist month". T. S. Eliot, in beginning *The Waste Land* with this line, was suggesting that life is cruel in the way in which the present is always forced to look back upon the past, "mixing memory and desire". The accident of arithmetic helps in this direction. As we enter on a new year, we can hardly avoid looking back to the corresponding date a century or more ago. We reflect on some of the events that then happened; this year, for instance, the French are celebrating (if that is the right word) the bicentenary of the 1789 Revolution. We also tend to think of the births that took place a hundred years ago and to review the lives of those whose names came to have some significance for their contemporaries and those who followed.

By coincidence — and coincidence is everywhere in this operation — the month of April 1889 bestowed upon the world a few figures of more than usual interest and importance. The weight that anyone gives to these two words will vary according to individual temperament and inclination. It would be hard to deny, however, that an obscure birth in Austria was going to have consequences that were appalling for Europe and the world. It was in April 1889 that Adolf Hitler was born. The name may not convey much to a large number of people today; he died (also in April) in 1945. Nobody under the age of 50 can realise what the name meant to those over that age. The 1939-45 War was not directly caused by one man — no war could be. But the policies and the fanaticism based on them that Hitler brought to the international situation in the 1920s and 1930s made their immense contribution.

Volumes have been written about Hitler and the Germany over which he presided; many more are still to be written. Only a few brief notes are here possible. A good beginning is the earlier view of one who was to become Hitler's most prominent adversary in the war. Winston Churchill, in a 1935 essay reprinted in *Great Contemporaries*, looked at Hitler with a more sympathetic eye than he was later to show. In common with many others, Churchill had some feeling that Germany had been unfairly treated by the victorious allies at the end of the 1914-18 War, and the patriot in him looked not disapprovingly on Hitler's success in restoring Germany to greatness. He disapproved of Hitler's persecution not only of Jews, but also of Christians, Socialists, Communists and trade unionists — in short, of anyone who opposed him. At the other end of the political spectrum, the devoutly Christian and pacifist Labour leader, George Lansbury, was taken in by Hitler and thought it possible to reach an accommodation with him. In addition, the orthodox historian, H. A. L. Fisher, could write of the Hitler

revolution as "a sufficient guarantee that Russian Communism will not spread westward". For Fisher and others, "the solid German bourgeois" was an insurance against excess. Indeed, the German capitalists in the main supported Hitler.

When there was a choice between fanaticism of Left or of Right, it was never forgotten that the Left presented a greater challenge than did Hitler and the Right. On the surface, at least, the treasure was safer with Hitler, and the heart was there as well. Unfortunately, the Hitler party was nominally socialist, if called National Socialist, and he was able to command overwhelming support. His return to a kind of atavistic primitive Nordic legend, accompanied by the music of Wagner, appealed to religious or semi-religious fanaticism. The West, split between the injunction to resist not evil and the need to oppose German rearmament, and confused by the reservations of those in high places who thought that the discipline of Hitlerism might be a good thing after all, presented no coherent opposition until war came.

By a further coincidence — and the word cannot be avoided — the birth of Hitler was followed a fortnight later by the appearance of one who was going to become almost his twin, so close in some ways was the physical resemblance. Before the toothbrush moustache of the German dictator had become known throughout the world, a remarkably similar face had looked down from millions of cinema screens in all countries. Charles Chaplin became for a number of years probably the best-known man in the world. There, of course, the resemblance ended. There was nothing militaristic or dictatorial about the humble, downtrodden tramp with the shabby clothes, baggy trousers, cracked boots and jaunty cane. Chaplin became a symbol of the poor and deprived; in his screen comedies, despite countless disasters and indignities, he came out on top.

In the years of difficulty and depression after the 1914-18 War, he became a focus of sympathy and encouragement to audiences everywhere. Chaplin declared in *My Autobiography* (1964) that he was not an orthodox religious man. He claimed to believe that "in the realm of the unknown, there is an infinite power for good". In addition, his private life may best be described as "eccentric".

At first, Chaplin saw the German dictator with a face that was "obscenely comic — a bad imitation of me". Gradually he saw the sinister side, when such great Germans as Einstein and Thomas Mann were forced to leave their native country. In 1940, despite remaining in his films for some years after "talkies" had arrived, Chaplin accepted the inevitability of speech. He made *The Great Dictator*, a

(continued on page 60)

BOOKS

NEO - FUNDAMENTALISM : THE HUMANIST RESPONSE. Prometheus Books. £16.95

This is a collection of some of the papers given at the International Humanist and Ethical Union's 1986 Congress in Oslo.

It begins with Paul Kurtz's important article, "The Growth of Fundamentalism Worldwide". The late 19th-century belief that religious orthodoxies would be replaced by a humanist civilization based on reason and science has not been realised. Some progress in this direction has occurred, but we have the puzzling phenomenon of the worldwide growth of fundamentalism.

Over 30 per cent of the United States population call themselves "born-again Christians". The evangelical effort has not only been directed at Americans but also at many developing countries, with dramatic results. China, South Korea, the Philippines, sub-Saharan Africa, South America (especially Brazil and Argentina) have all seen large increases in the more dogmatic, uncritical and primitive forms of religious belief. There has been no matching export of humanist philosophy into those areas which have very poorly developed traditions of scepticism and freethought.

Paul Kurtz details the sharp contrast between the humanist and fundamentalist attitudes to truth, knowledge, diverse behaviour, and the upbringing of children. He discusses three types of explanation for the persistence of religion: sociological, sociobiological and what he calls the "transcendental temptation". In his view, the existence of unbelievers makes it unlikely that there is a "transcendental" gene at work. The cultivation of our critical intelligence is the surest way to liberate us from illusions about reality.

Paul Kurtz recommends a major educational outreach, especially to the Third World, aimed at overcoming the parochial racial, ethnic, nationalistic and religious prejudice. This will require sustained radical criticism of the Bible, the Koran and all forms of theological nonsense. Some humanists think this is unnecessary. They are wrong — the victory has not been won. Humanism should not ape religion, but should, without being dogmatic, identify with atheism, agnosticism and scepticism. Humanism must be "the cutting edge of the new tomorrow".

Gerald Larue gives an account of the origin of modern fundamentalism in the United States, including its attempts to restrict education and its impact on politics and the media. Vern Bullough traces the story of Islam from its inception, its intellectual golden age in a cosmopolitan Mediterranean world, its sudden decline at the end of the 11th century

FREETHINKER

in the face of militant Christianity. It became inward looking and fearful of speculation. Today's upsurge of fundamentalism is likewise a reaction to the abrasive effect of alien cultures on the Islamic world. The prospects for secularism there look gloomy.

J. C. Pecker's "The Return of Mystical Dualism" describes the attempt to smuggle God into cosmology and modern physics. He makes some valid points on the "anthropic principle" (a new form of the old argument from design). However, his talk of the electron's "free will" 50 years after Susan Stebbing showed (in *Philosophy and the Physicists*) that this was silly, doesn't inspire confidence. His essay suffers from an inferior translation when clarity is essential.

A. H. Tunon states the dilemma of the "higher" religions. When confronted by the implications of science, accepting them means reducing the supernatural content so much as to risk sliding into atheism; rejecting them involves clinging in a reactionary way to such ideas as the myth of biblical inerrancy. An unsympathetic translation frequently mars this piece as well, so it's then a relief to come across the easy-to-read paper by G. A. Wells on "Why Fundamentalism Flourishes". Some very thought-provoking points are made, including the continuing need for critical study of the Bible.

Two eminently sensible articles by Sir Hermann Bondi express his intense dislike of the divisiveness and unfair restrictions on people imposed by religion.

Some of the familiar differences between communist and liberal ideologies are analysed in the paper by S. Stojanovic. However, the growing frankness of Eastern bloc self-examination is startling. Are we seeing a real evolution from a closed to an at least partially open society? (Is ours totally open?) Western humanists must be alert to such attempts at reconstructing and consolidating humanist values and be ready to participate in the process. There are some thoughts on this subject in the interesting piece by Johan Galtung entitled "Ethics in a Global Perspective", which puts humanism in an ecological setting.

This book is worth studying, although the only humour is provided by misprints such as "paleolithic café paintings"!

NORMAN BACRAC

Saatchi and Saatchi, the public relations firm that packaged and sold Margaret Thatcher to the British public, is to market a new Bible. The word "Holy" has been dropped from the title. Hodders, the publishers, deny that they are sensationalising "the good book".

REVIEWS

BERNARD SHAW. VOLUME 1, 1856-1898: THE SEARCH FOR LOVE, by Michael Holroyd. Chatto & Windus, £16

The central thesis of Michael Holroyd's biography is that Shaw's maverick life can be accounted for by his exceptionally unhappy childhood. His parents were entirely neglectful of him, but some of his father's idiosyncrasies, and some of the personalities who frequented the Shaw household, left an indelible mark on him. His father had a habit of laughing at the most incredibly inappropriate moments such as, when it seemed his milling business was threatened with bankruptcy, he retreated to a corner of the warehouse and bursted out laughing. And on one occasion when he threatened to fling the young Shaw (at that time he was known as Sonny) into the canal, a suspicion dawned upon the young lad as to the real reason for his father's extravagant gesture. "Mama, I think Papa's drunk", he said on returning home. And from that day forward, the adult Shaw claimed he never took anything at face value.

The presence of George Vandaleur Lee in the Shaw household further enhanced the boy Shaw's facility for scoffing at received opinion. Shaw claimed he never knew when his mother met Vandaleur Lee, because he was sensitive to the charge that he might have been his illegitimate son. He did everything he could to protect his mother's reputation. However, Holroyd has done his homework and proved that Lee had established himself as a singing teacher and set up his amateur musical society in the early 1850s, the premises of which were only a few hundred yards from the Shaws' married quarters in Upper Synge Street, Dublin. At that time he was scouring the streets for talent, and it is not improbable he could have spotted Bessie Shaw with her pure mezzo-soprano voice looking for tuition. It is the strongest hint we have from any of Shaw's biographers that he might have been Lee's son. The evidence is clearly there that he could have been, something the adult Shaw tried to dismiss by dating Lee's and his mother's meeting from the 1860s.

It was music that rescued the Shaw household from the debilitating effects of a dyspomanic father and an utterly negligent mother. It also became Mrs Shaw's *raison d'être*, and an escape from a failed marriage and a husband she despised. In 1867 Lee joined the Shaw household and the *ménage à trois* was established. Nothing has ever been stated that there was anything sexual between Lee and Bessie Shaw, but it is impossible to believe that at some stage there had not been. Lee was a mesmeric figure, a fastidious dresser, with whiskers, long black

hair and, despite a club foot, attractive to women. His impact on Sonny was just as profound. He ate brown bread and slept with the window open (against the doctor's advice) but with no ill effects. He passed on his mistrust of received medical wisdom to Sonny who, in turn, developed a scepticism towards the pretensions of all the professions.

What was more significant for the young Shaw was that at that time in Dublin many of the best singers were Catholics. Both Lee and Bessie Shaw realised that if they were to have the best musical society in the city, Catholics would have to be included in it. Thus, from an early age, Shaw realised that there was no intrinsic difference between Catholics and Protestants.

Holroyd describes a number of Shaws, Sonny, George, G.B.S., G. Bernard Shaw. I am confused about the transmogrification of one into the other. I am sure his biographer is likewise, which is understandable, as Shaw was adept at adopting a *persona* to hide his real self. What did his friends, in particular his mistresses, call him? I would love to know.

The book is a little bit too long-winded in the second half. The chapters on Shaw's dramatic and musical criticism could have been edited, but perhaps this reflects my own bias as I prefer these in small doses.

My main criticism of the work is its subtitle, "The Search for Love", which is entirely misconceived. Shaw was denied parental love as a child, and as a compensation turned to literary and intellectual pursuits. He never sought emotional entanglements; when his affairs became too serious he withdrew from them. His first sexual experience, with Jenny Paterson, gave him some misgivings, not only because he felt he was using her, but because it was distracting him from his work. Holroyd's biography should have been subtitled "In Spite of", or, "Instead of Love", for Shaw achieved everything in his life without the aid of that powerful emotion. He married Charlotte Payne-Townshend because he felt they could reproduce the relationship that existed between Sidney and Beatrice Webb, which had been a marriage of minds, although there was to be far more intimacy between them than ever took place between the Shaws.

At the end of volume one we leave Shaw on the threshold of a supremely happy marriage. For the first time we see him becoming a successful playwright making nearly £2,000 from the American success of *The Devil's Disciple*. His conscience was clear now about marrying the heiress Charlotte, for he could not be accused of being a fortune hunter. No doubt volume two will give us Shaw on the world stage, with the years of ignominy and failure safely behind him.

PETER BACOS

Thinking About Free-Thinking

DAVID BLACKMORE

In his article, *Let me be ME — and Free* (The Freethinker, February), John Bray asserts that the freethinker, in desperation to avoid the snares that beset the followers of religion, falls into the trap he is trying to avoid — certainty, finality and conviction. He also says that belief, in the end, becomes a matter of choice rather than logical certainty. David Blackmore disagrees.

I do not agree with John Bray, because he seems to misunderstand secularism.

Secularism, as I see it, is part of the family of free thought, which in turn is synonymous with rational thought, which can be defined as conclusions based on careful argument and detailed logical analysis. Rational thought is often at odds with religious thought, and if religious believers say that rational thought must therefore be flawed, they cannot then use rational thought to argue their own case. That would be like a chess player changing the rules of chess half way through a game to turn it to his own advantage.

This is an outline of rational thought. If, by using a careful and detailed study, a hypothesis or theory can be shown to be logically self-contradictory, then it would be reasonable to reject that theory or hypothesis, as it stands. If it can be shown to be logically consistent, or analysis is inconclusive, this does not mean it is necessarily true. Its truth then becomes a matter of belief to be held with conviction, the depth of which depends on how much evidence is in its favour. Thus, to use Bray's example of the existence of the United States of America, it does not go against logic to say that the USA might not exist, but to believe that it in fact exists is not an arbitrary choice, but one based on the fact that much evidence, from many independent sources, points to its existence; no evidence, as yet, points to its non-existence. It is therefore a belief on rational grounds.

In his article, John Bray is misusing the word "faith". This word means different things in different contexts. *Religious* faith is the beliefs that a person holds despite any amount of evidence or argument to the contrary. This is demonstrated most clearly by the person who says "any evidence or argument contrary to my faith was planted by the Devil to try and turn me away from God". Faith that the USA exists is a different sort of faith — it is a belief based on rational grounds as outlined above. Beliefs of this kind are not held with fanaticism; nobody jumps up and down, shouting that the sun is going to rise tomorrow.

The supposed existence of a god is beyond proof or disproof by any evidence or argument. This is no accident, because such a concept has no substance. It is like saying that although the workings of a

watch can be explained by mechanics and physics, it is in fact an undetectable gremlin sitting inside the watch that turns the hands. The concept of a god as described in, say, the Bible perhaps has substance, but is logically flawed, and much evidence conflicts with it.

Secularism takes the rational stance in holding that the traditional concept of a god (a being that is all powerful, benevolent, etc) is untenable as it stands. *But more importantly*, secularism recognises the fact that it is faith of the religious type that shackles the mind, and that anything that shackles the mind is undesirable. As a friend of mine said, "Having [religious] faith is like throwing your brain into the dustbin".

If someone accuses secularism as being biased, as Mr Bray seems to do, I would point out that secularists do not base their beliefs on what feels most comfortable, unlike followers of religion. It is this comfort which induces the latter to hold their beliefs so strongly, sometimes with fanaticism. Secularists also desire a comfortable state of mind, like most people do, but not by blind acceptance of mind-stunting doctrines.

April Anniversaries

ludicrous parody of Hitler which culminated in an eloquent, if not wholly successful, appeal for tolerance and world peace. Amazingly, there were objections. Some critics declared that the final speech was Communist in implication.

While Chaplin was making *The Great Dictator*, he was visited in Hollywood by a comparatively unknown British politician who had been to Russia and was much impressed by the potential power of the Soviet State. His name was Stafford Cripps. He, too, was born in April 1889, and was a member of the Potter family, the best known of which was his aunt, Beatrice Webb. He had been Solicitor General in Ramsay MacDonald's second Labour Government (1931) and his Aunt Beatrice thought that he was "the one of the 155 nephews and nieces who might become a big figure". Prophetically, she also thought that only ill-health could stand in his way.

Cripps was something of an exception among politicians in that he was an openly convinced Christian, perhaps an example of Attlee's contention that the Labour Party owed more to Methodism than to Marx. In the years following the Labour rout of 1931, he worked hard for a union of the Left against Conservatism at home and Fascism abroad. In the prologue to his *The Struggle for Peace* (1936), Cripps wrote of the brotherhood of

man being laid down by the Christian faith as the foundation for human and social relationships. Further, he took the problems of peace and war to be "the supreme challenge to the intelligence of mankind", and to the "higher nature" that he derived from the Almighity.

After the last war Cripps was a leading figure in the Attlee Government. He was a man of high principles, uncompromising but stopping short of ultimate rigidity. He was savagely attacked by political opponents. By temperament ascetic, he was made the scapegoat for the so-called "austerity" policies of the Attlee Government. Such was the fairness and balance of some sections of the press that he was held personally responsible for the hardships of rationing because, as a vegetarian himself, clearly he did not want anyone else to eat meat. As his aunt had foreseen, his health could not stand the strain and he retired in 1951, to die the following year.

In this brief survey, the comedian stands between the two politicians, each of whom might be called, in his own way, a fanatic. Opinions may differ as to the ultimate effects of the two brands of religious or semi-religious enthusiasm. It could well be that the efforts of the comedian to amuse brought enough to the total sum of human enjoyment to offset, to a great extent, the effects of political fanaticism. But even the laughter evoked by Chaplin could not wipe out the memories of a ghastly toll of death and persecution.

To conclude on a lighter note: another notable birth took place in April 1889 and this again was one who entertained his fellow men rather than sent them to the gas chamber and the battlefield. Neville Cardus, the illegitimate son of a Manchester prostitute, made his name and reputation by being paid for spending his whole day doing the two things he liked best in the world: watching cricket in the daytime and attending concerts and operas in the evening, and writing about both for the newspapers. Again the question, unanswerable of course, arises. Where does human achievement lie? Is it in the leader wading, as did Macbeth, through blood to a throne, dragging behind him the cheering millions eager to follow him to "glory" and inevitable death; or the comedian amusing the world with the mirror image of everyone's follies and foibles; or the politician seeking to reconcile his ideas of the human and the divine; or the journalist trying to convey to his readers something of the glory that he found in some of the greatest artistic products of the human spirit? Neville Cardus claimed to have neither political aspirations nor political views, but while he had been a dogmatic atheist, the arts made him begin to doubt his rationalism. It was not the testimony of the Church that moved him, but the music of Handel.

LETTERS

A MATTER OF FAITH

John Bray, whose article about faith appeared in the February edition, also writes a bit of folk religion for my local newspaper, and his *Freethinker* piece was typically vague and unconvincing.

He suggested that belief in God was a "reasonable" thing to have. Surely a reasonable conclusion is one based on reason, or logical argument? His fellow theologians have always taught that divine belief was unreasonable — the more contrary to reason something was, the better, because the more faith it took to believe, and the truer the believer became.

Mr Bray also said that human experience and religious belief were identical. How can they be, when one is based on what actually is, and the other only on what might be? Religious faith is just a synonym for wishful thinking.

With God being a matter of faith, rather than empirical evidence or logic, any fanatic can claim to be divinely inspired, and no-one can show that he isn't. Perhaps Mr Bray, like other believers, thinks that real faith is defined in a religious book, but how can we know today that the ancient author wasn't genuinely mistaken about his experience, or that he didn't just make the whole thing up? If I wrote a book, and claimed divine inspiration, would John Bray believe me?

Mr Bray believes in a supernatural spirit, somewhere out there in the universe. This spirit is human-like and benevolent, and can act in defiance of all the known laws of nature. It is always watching over us, and rewards us when we behave ourselves. Finally, it has even appeared on earth, in a human embodiment of its spiritual self. That general description fits the traditional view of a religious god: it also describes Santa Claus. Does John Bray believe in him, too?

N. BLACKFORD

A WARNING FROM THE RIGHT

Collins' English Dictionary defines the word political as "of the State or its affairs". Therefore Karl Heath (*Letters, March*) is wrong to suggest that "many humanists were afraid of politics" — what many humanists were dubious about was ideological party politics of the sort he takes such pains to conceal in his letter.

Many readers will not be old enough to remember the developing leftward political movements, including the Left Book Club, of the 1930s. However, there was one outstanding political commentator of the time who was well aware of their political pretensions and wise enough to deliver a devastating blow against them. His name was George Orwell, and his painfully coherent book, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, should serve as ample warning to freethinkers should Left-wing political adventurers try to climb into bed with them or compromise the independence of *The Freethinker*.

Contributors to *The Freethinker* seem aware of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (indeed some are very fond of using it as a dire warning of some vague, totalitarian State system). Orwell was not vague at all. The book is a direct attack on Socialism and the intolerant attitudes developing in English Socialism during the 1930s. Orwell wrote: "Newspeak was the official language of Oceania and had been devised to meet the ideological needs of Ingsoc, or English Socialism". This kind of writing was a cruel blow to fawning humble Socialists, it set their ideology tottering, it made people suspicious, cynical and less ready to support

loud-mouthed rabble-rousers bent on their own political ambitions.

Karl Heath's memories of the 1930s seem, in the 1980s, to have become the frustrations of an older but no wiser man. He appears to lack the resolution or maturity to accept the truths that George Orwell indicated existed within the English Socialist movements. Neither is he willing to admit that in the name of the Left, a great deal of social and human harm has been done world-wide.

ROBERT SINCLAIR

A WASTE OF SPACE

I agree with Ellen Winson (Reviews, March) that political matters should not be included in *The Freethinker* unless they touch on religious issues. However, in most issues there are such political articles. Also in March, for example, the article by John M. Florance has no reference to religion, nor does the review by Ted McFadyen.

Surely not only is this a waste of space, but also the purpose of *The Freethinker* is to combat religion and promote atheism, rather than enter into unrelated political arguments which many readers will not agree with.

What do other readers think?

JUSTIN M. GRIFFIN

NON-RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES

Joan Wimble (Letters, February) asks whether the British Humanist Association should have issued a statement in connection with the recent spate of rail and air disasters. In my view the answer is a very firm "Yes!" Karl Heath (Letters, March) takes the opposite view, and raises some highly pertinent points in his objections. In particular, he notes the ghoulish aspects of certain politicians who pay tribute to our wonderful rescue services when their purpose is to bathe in the reflected glory of the services concerned.

I believe, however, that Joan Wimble is right in principle, and that the BHA should act in a manner that avoids the unacceptable infringement of personal grief. At such times genuine comfort is needed. When a family suffers a sudden tragic death, they have no time to think and automatically opt for a religious service. The relatives and friends have no association with a church. They have to be introduced to the vicar. He has then to try and find out what the victim did in his or her lifetime. Then he goes through the ritual of linking the deceased with a God, a faith, and an afterlife, which is embarrassing and distasteful for all concerned.

In the televised excerpt from the service after the Purley rail disaster, the vicar joyfully instanced the couple on their way to Twickenham who escaped injury. "Someone up there was looking after us", he quoted. How did the injured and relatives of the dead feel about being told they were selectively chosen for their fate by "someone up there"?

After the Lockerbie air disaster, at least one victim did have a humanist funeral. It was an exclusively family occasion, and even the official Pan-Am representative was asked not to attend.

Pressure should be applied to "authority", to establish a natural alternative to a religious ceremony as a matter of course. Perhaps the BHA could liaise more closely with funeral directors. I hope, too, that Karl Heath could find a way to lend his support. There can be nothing more relevant than making it easier for the bereaved to arrange an appropriate and dignified committal.

ALAN STUART
Berkshire Humanist Group

Freethought at Brighton International Festival

In this bicentennial year of the French Revolution, Brighton International Festival celebrates the principles and ideals that led up to the Declaration of Human Rights. The literature programme includes debates, forums and readings. The theme of the Festival is A Sense of Freedom and, appropriately, the writings of Thomas Paine provide a focus. He lived for several years at nearby Lewes.

Events of particular interest to freethinkers include Paul Foot's lecture on Paine, who is described in the festival brochure as "the heartbeat of the American Revolution, hero of the French Revolution. . . For the liberties we have, we owe him a great debt". (Old Ship Hotel, Thursday, 18 May, 6 pm, tickets £3, concessions £1 off.)

The following evening a distinguished panel debates the legacy of Paine's *Rights of Man* and *Common Sense*. The speakers will be Sir Leslie Fielding (Vice-Chancellor of Sussex University), Michael Foot, MP, Madame Nicole Questiaux (Cultural Department of the French Embassy), Neal Ascherson, David Willetts and James Manor. (Old Ship Hotel, Friday, 19 May, 8 pm, tickets £5, concessions £1 off.)

"Revolution — the Story" brings together two distinguished scholars, Professor Richard Cobb and Dr Hugh Gough. They will discuss the role of the press on the French Revolution, and its lessons for today. (Old Ship Hotel, Saturday, 20 May, 6 pm, tickets £3, concessions £1 off.)

Ted McFadyen, a journalist and contributor to *The Freethinker*, has devised "The Spirit of Dissent", an anthology of protest from the 1930s to the present day. He and Pamela Grace and Edward Thompson will be presenting it. (Brighton Museum, Sunday, 21 May, 2.30 pm and 3.45 pm, tickets £1.)

The (free) Festival brochure is obtainable from Brighton Arts Information Centre, 111 Church Street, Brighton BN1 1EQ, telephone (0273) 23755.

Plans are in hand to set up a humanist group in Preston, Lancashire. Georgina Coupland, formerly of the West Glamorgan Humanist Group, would like to hear from interested readers. Her address is: 26 Spinney Brow, Ribblesdale, Preston, PR2 6YG, telephone (0772) 796829.

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) 813871.

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. New Venture Theatre Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton. Sunday, 7 May, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. T. F. Evans: New Thoughts on Shaw.

Edinburgh Humanist Group. Programme of meetings obtainable from the Secretary, 2 Saville Terrace, Edinburgh, EH9 3AD.

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.

Leeds and District Humanist Group. Swarthmore Institute, Swarthmore Square, Leeds. Tuesday, 9 May, 7.30 pm. Public meeting: The Official Secrets Act — Gag or Safeguard?

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 27 April, 7.45 pm. Tony Milne: The Great Dinosaur Mystery.

London Student Sceptics. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Monday meetings at 7 pm. 17 April, Channel 4 TV programme and discussion: Is There Anybody There? 1 May, Eric Mornard: Water Divining. 15 May, Adrian Furnham: Graphology. 29 May, Cult Busters.

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

Scottish Humanist Council. Cowane Centre, Stirling, Saturday, 22 April, 10 am - 5 pm. Annual conference. Details obtainable from Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, telephone (0563) 26710.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 10 May, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. Barbara Smoker: Euthanasia.

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.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Friends Meeting House, Hill Street (off Corporation Street), Coventry. Monday, 17 April, 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.

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, 117 Springvale Road, Walkley, Sheffield, S6 3NT.

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

President: Barbara Smoker

Founded 1866 by Charles Bradlaugh

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Secularism affirms that this life is the only one of which we have any knowledge and human effort should be directed wholly towards its improvement.

It asserts that supernaturalism is based upon ignorance and assails it as the historic enemy of progress.

Secularism affirms that progress is possible only on the basis of equal freedom of speech and publication; that the free criticism of institutions and ideas is essential to a civilised state.

Affirming that morality is social in origin and application, Secularism aims at promoting the happiness and well-being of mankind. Secularism demands the complete separation of Church and State and the abolition of all privileges granted to religious organisations.

It seeks to spread education, to promote the fraternity of all peoples as a means of advancing universal peace, to further common cultural interests and to develop the freedom and dignity of mankind.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

(Please use block capitals)

To the Secretary, NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL.

I accept the Principles of the National Secular Society as shown, and apply to be admitted as a Member. I am over 18 years of age.

Name

Address

Post Code..... Telephone.....

Occupation (optional)

Date

Signature

Minimum Annual Subscription: £2
Bankers' Order Forms are obtainable on request

Religious Charities

of the people employed in the ventures that I have mentioned are not paid for their endeavours. In some cases they are paid, but, immediately on being paid, they are asked to sign a form stating that they have donated their pay in total or in part to the Moonie organisation.

"I have in my possession some horrific accounts of ex-Moonies who describe in detail how they were dispatched in groups from all over the United Kingdom, with everything from pot plants to toys, prints and other items which they made made to sell door-to-door in high streets and in pubs and clubs to raise money for that body.

"Worse still, they were told to refrain from telling potential customers the truth of the offer of sale and, instead, were encouraged to lie to be successful sellers.

"It really is not good enough for the Minister to say that they cannot act because of the law in its present form. Evidence exists of hundreds of cases of the sort that I have described. Other opportunities exist in the laws related to tax evasion. . .

"Excuses that the law is difficult do not hold water, especially as the Government have a reputation of changing, scrapping or introducing new law at a pace that will be recorded in the annals of history".

Mr Meals sharply criticised Government funding by £120,000 a year an organisation known as INFORM.

"The organisation's initials stand for Informed Network Focus on Religious Movements. I am reliably informed that it has never inspired any confidence among those working in the field to help combat the effects that people suffer as a result of their involvement in religious cults. . .

"In fact, this Government-funded organisation seems to serve the opposite purpose, especially in dealing with requests for information or advice on religious cults — notably that requested on the pseudo-religious organisation, the Unification Church".

Mr Meale asked why a director of INFORM, Dr Eileen Barker, is described by the Moonies' information unit as their consultant with outside bodies if no sympathy existed between the two organisations.

"Why would that same organisation, which is widely distributed by everyone connected with religion in the United Kingdom, welcome the establishment of INFORM — a body which, shortly after its formation, changed the description of 'cult' in its literature to 'new religious movements' to match its own title?

"The Moonies' recognition of INFORM is one of the major reasons why I feel that Government funding of the organisation should immediately

cease. It has to be reiterated that groups such as the Moonies cannot be treated in a casual manner by any Government-funded or supported agency".

Mr Patten agreed that the Government should keep a close eye on cults. He said that a characteristic of such groups is the elevation of a charismatic leader into a divine or semi-divine status.

As a result, he added, wealth is often accrued to those leaders at the expense of their ultimately misguided followers, leaving them disillusioned.

"There are real difficulties in grappling with the problems which are created by organisations which operate under the protection which is afforded to religious bodies. That is well illustrated by the reception which was given to the proposals for a system of voluntary guidelines adopted by the European Parliament. These were criticised not only by new religious groups, but also by the established churches, which considered them seriously to limit religious freedom and likely to affect the established churches too".

The Minister agreed there was a feeling that those responsible for setting up INFORM are too closely involved with the cults and their objectives. Defending the Government's attitude, he pointed out that the churches were working in close co-operation with INFORM.

He added: "If there was any doubt about INFORM, the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Free Church Federal Council would not have welcomed the establishment of INFORM. They were represented on the working group which set up the organisation and are now represented on the board of governors together with representatives from the British Association of Counselling and the British Sociological Association's sociology of religions study group.

"The Most Reverend Primate, the Archbishop of Canterbury, is a patron together with Bishop John Crowley from the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Westminster. The General Synod of the Church of England is also providing funds. Those are distinguished people from Churches representing a variety of faiths".

Mr Patten promised that the Government will keep the cults under careful scrutiny.

Rajinder Singh Batth and Mangit Singh Sunder, both of them members of fundamentalist Sikh groups, were jailed for life at the Old Bailey last month. They were found guilty of murdering a religious leader, Mahraj Darshan Das, during a prayer meeting at Southall two years ago. A member of the congregation also died and another was seriously injured. The judge described the attack as the "disgraceful and pre-planned slaughter" of Mr Das. As the killers were led from the dock they cried "God is great".

