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FREE SPEECH DEFENDERS ATTACKED BY RELIGIOUS FANATICS

Mob violence came to the streets of London last month when thousands of Muslim fanatics marked the end of Ramadan by demanding a ban on Salman Rushdie's book, *The Satanic Verses*, and calling for an extension of blasphemy law to protect Islam. Organised by the British Muslim Action Front, the demonstrators displayed violently worded slogans and carried mock gallows and effigies of Salman Rushdie, one of which was set alight in Parliament Square. True to religious form, they assaulted opponents and two Islamic factions fought each other.

Representatives of the National Secular Society, Rationalist Press Association and Free Speech Movement stood on the route of the march displaying banners proclaiming "Free Speech" and "Free Speech for All". But the studied moderation of these slogans made no difference. Barbara Smoker, Nicolas Walter and Christine Walter were soon surrounded by religious zealots screaming "Kill! Kill! Kill!" Their banners were ripped up and they were pushed and kicked. But for the intervention of some middle-aged Muslims, they could have sustained serious injuries.

Nicolas Walter said: "I have often got into trouble for calling for free speech, but it was an interesting and unexpected experience to be physically attacked by private individuals rather than being threatened by the authorities.

"I shall not be deterred in the future by a mob any more than I have been in the past by the police.

"Free speech is one of the few things worth suffering for, and a bit of rough stuff from a few misguided young Asians is nothing to what many other Asians and West Indians suffer from equally misguided young whites".

Commenting on her experience, Barbara Smoker said most people do not realise how appalling the Muslim violence was.

She added: "We had deliberately rejected the idea of a more provocative slogan, such as 'Religion Breeds Intolerance'.

"The organisers of the demonstration have tried to disclaim responsibility for the violence. But they did nothing to ensure that it would be a peaceful demonstration. Muslim leaders allowed the demonstration to go ahead with models of gallows and banners supporting Khomeini's death sentence on Salman Rushdie".

Referring to the Archbishop of Canterbury's message of support for the Muslim demonstration, Miss Smoker said that to the best of her knowledge Dr Runcie has not since dissociated himself from its violent nature.

"Had he given similar support to a socialist demonstration on behalf of the homeless, and the demonstrators carried gallows with effigies of Mrs Thatcher hanging from them, he would undoubtedly have retracted his support.

"In any case, the Muslim demand for the extension of blasphemy law is based on the fact that Dr Runcie has refused to give up the protection of this archaic law for his own Church, the only creed protected by it at present, preferring to urge its extension to other religions".

In addition to representatives of the traditional British freethought movement, Women Against Fundamentalism, led by the Southall Black Sisters, held a brave counter-demonstration in defiance of the Muslims. About 40 of them displayed banners and shouted slogans for a time without being attacked. They were protected by a large number of police.

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Editor: WILLIAM McILROY

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NEWS

RELIGION WITHOUT MORALS

Threats to murder Salman Rushdie have opened the eyes of all except, perhaps, the most dedicated of the ecumenical fraternity, to the true and objectionable nature of Islam. Like adherents to nearly every brand of religious superstition — most notably Christianity — Islam's expositors ooze sweet reasonableness when it suits their purpose. Even so, the real face of fundamentalism is revealed from time to time, like when one radio interviewee, asked if he endorsed Ayatollah Khomeini's death sentence on the novelist, hesitated a few moments before replying: "This is a tricky question".

Although non-Islamic religious leaders carefully distanced themselves from the homicidal Khomeini, they have abjectly apologised for Rushdie's "offence" and urged "respect" for the Muslims' erstwhile false faith. With characteristically twisted Judaeo-Christian logic, they blame the book, not the book burners and those who incite to murder, for outbreaks of disorder. While expressing profound regret for the injured feelings of Islamic non-readers of *The Satanic Verses*, religious leaders have not offered a word of sympathy to Salman Rushdie and his family who have been deeply offended and terrorised by religious fanatics.

From Rome to Canterbury, via the Office of the Chief Rabbi, *The Satanic Verses* has been denounced as blasphemous. The Archbishop of Canterbury and other Christian dignitaries have joined in the clamour, grateful no doubt for this fillip to their campaign for an extension of blasphemy law. Dr Runcie is head of an institution that for centuries claimed to be the true church in this country. Now the Church of England fraternises with the Roman Catholic Church which still officially declares it to be apostate. Canterbury also embraces the non-conformist rag-tag and bobtail whose predecessors it harrassed, persecuted and deprived of their civil rights. Bemused ecumenists of all denominations pay homage to non-Christian religions whose followers, where they are in power, give short shrift to Christians, particularly converts. These are the religions we are asked to "respect" and subsidise out of public funds.

Islamic fundamentalists are contemptuous of their flabby Christian fellow-travellers. They assert, quite correctly, that Christianity has been undermined by the sceptics, the questioners, the dissenters. As a result it is despised and rejected. And a good thing too!

For centuries the lives of millions were ruled by

S AND NOTES

a ferociously intolerant Christian Church. Its role was terrorising the faithful about their prospects in "the next world" and defending vested interests in this. Socially, its influence was as poisonous as that of contemporary Islam. Popes and bishops sent thousands of cross-carrying children on "crusades against the infidel" from which they never returned. In our own time, during the Iran-Iraq war, the aged Khomeini and the mullahs sent thousands of young boys to the battlefield with plastic "keys of paradise" around their necks.

In his poem, *Dover Beach*, Matthew Arnold writes of the sea of faith's "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar". But the institutions of religion remain, as do many of the social, legal and fiscal privileges they have acquired over the centuries. Nevertheless, the decline in sincere religious belief and commitment is one of the truly encouraging facts of history.

It would, however, be wrong and dangerous to suppose that all godites will abandon their superstition and privileges in favour of rationality and equality. Christians will hold on to captive audiences in institutions and passive ones in front of the television screen. Pressure groups are always ready to go into action against any reforming measure they claim offends "Christian moral values". Disciples of Mohammed burn books and, like ultra-orthodox Jewish sects, segregate their children and subject them to rigorous religious indoctrination.

It is not necessary to be offensive, but it is imperative that the freethought movement goes on the offensive. People may worship deities and honour prophets as they choose. But when religious zealots process through the capital city, holding aloft a mock gallows and dragging the effigy of a gifted writer through the streets, it is time for unbelievers — whether they describe themselves as atheist, agnostic, secularist or humanist — to make a stand. Toadying to Muslim zealots by Labour MPs like Keith Vaz is deplorable. But other voices are being raised, as writers, publishers, broadcasters and politicians speak out against book burning and for the abolition of blasphemy law.

The public execution by stoning of twelve prostitutes has taken place in mullah-ruled Iran. After they were buried up to their chests in the stadium at Bushehr, the judge who sentenced them threw the first stone. Executioners then threw stones and bricks at the women for half an hour, by which time they were all dead.

SUBSIDISING SKYPILOTS

Councillor Don Hewitt, the new Mayor of Slough, Buckinghamshire, has put the cat among conformist pigeons by refusing to appoint a chaplain during his term of office. He told policy chiefs: "I am not particularly religious". Good for him! Unfortunately there are not enough people in public life who are prepared to declare themselves.

The Mayor's decision not to be a toe-the-line hypocrite has angered Councillor Richard Stephenson (Conservative). "We are throwing to the wind the tradition of a Mayor's chaplain and civic service", he declared.

"It's not the Mayor we are talking about, but the town".

Quite so; and the population of Slough, like that of every other town in Britain, is an assortment of Christians, adherents to non-Christian faiths, indifferentists and unbelievers. The office of mayor should not be exploited for the benefit of any religion. Nevertheless, there are still Christians who arrogantly demand that their creed should have a privileged position in civic affairs. And of course there are others who regard it as a lark that boozy, fornicating, expenses-fiddling Alderman Bloggs should have his very own chaplain.

At least the financial cost of a town hall skypilot is minimal, which is certainly not the case with the national chaplaincy service. A leading evangelical weekly has just carried an advertisement for a chaplain to the West Midlands Police Force. The candidate must be "a mature and experienced Anglican priest . . . a pastor and counsellor" who will "have access to the Chief Constable and be responsible to the Bishop of Birmingham". The (unspecified) costs of the post "are divided between the Police and Church authorities". In other words, the post will be subsidised out of public funds.

In 1980 the National Secular Society published a survey, based on figures collated from official sources, which showed that the chaplaincy service to the armed forces, hospitals and prisons (but excluding universities, the Houses of Parliament, embassies and the police) cost over £12 million annually. That was nine years ago. Costs have increased, but there is no evidence that the chaplaincy service has been subjected to the savage expenditure cuts inflicted on the social services.

While church closures, mergers and dwindling membership are a cause for rejoicing, we should be aware that the "hidden church" carries on its work within secular institutions. Whether it gains converts or respect from mainly captive audiences is a moot point. What is indisputable is that a vast amount of public money is expended on the promotion of private superstition.

SABBATARIAN MIST CLEARS

There is much lamentation among defenders of "our Lord and His Day" over a growing tendency in Scotland to depart from the doom-and-gloom Sunday so beloved of the Lord's Day Observance Society. The latest depravity reported in the "Scottish News" column of the Society's quarterly journal, *Joy and Light*, is that the Traders' Association in Fraserburg "is determined to push ahead for the Sunday opening of shops in the town".

In the film, *Whiskey Galore*, the God-fearing, Sabbath-observing islanders waited in a state of stoic piety for the church clock to strike midnight on Sunday before setting off to steal cases of the hard stuff from a ship that had gone aground. Such devotion to sabbatarian principles is not now evident among Fraserburg's fisherfolk, as *Joy and Light* reports.

"Changes in the principles of Sabbath keeping have been radical within the fishing industry in Fraserburg and the neighbouring port of Peterhead, as well as in other ports along the coast of Scotland. Just a few years ago it was common practice that no fishing vessel sailed before early Monday morning. Now it is all too common to see them leaving the harbour around 2 pm on the Lord's Day".

Recalling the days of yore when fishermen were reluctant "to give up the principles of Sabbath keeping", *Joy and Light* sorrowfully records that "the young skippers and their younger crews were the first to break with the principles of their forefathers".

Sabbatarians have also suffered a defeat in the Western Isles where a ban on the Sunday opening of a £10 million leisure complex has been lifted. The centre is on the island of South Uist, which has a largely Catholic population. The ban was introduced, according to parish priest Canon John MacQueen, because of pressure by "the small but active Lord's Day Observance Society". Catholics who tend to be more relaxed and tolerant about Sunday observance were understandably annoyed when prevented from using the centre by a pressure group within the island's Protestant minority.

Some critics claim that the ban was lifted because the council feared the outcome if the matter had been taken to the European Court of Human Rights.

However, the sabbatarians have one consolation. The council still refuses to allow street sweeping on Sunday.

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.

KEEPING UP "APPEARANCES"

The mysterymongers certainly have stamina. You would have thought that they would have quietly folded up and put away the Turin Shroud when scientists from three international laboratories — nominated by the Vatican itself, not the National Secular Society — debunked claims that it was the burial cloth of Christ. Not a bit of it. Undaunted, believers continue to fight a rearguard action against the scoffers.

The annual Mass in celebration of the Shroud was held as usual in Turin Cathedral last month.

Writing in *The Christian Parapsychologist*, Ian Wilson, Britain's top Shroud salesman, makes a determined effort. He quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 which says, "You must not put the Lord your God to the test". Clutching at straws, Mr Wilson asks whether God was referring to the carbon dating test. He adds in a despairing tone: "I recognise that this may sound like some form of casuistry in the wake of an adverse dating result". Perish the thought!

Meanwhile, "the face" has made yet another appearance, this time in the homely surroundings of a Wanstead, East London, housing estate.

When John Mansfield, a 52-year-old cabbie, sat down in the kitchen for a cup of tea, the face of Jesus appeared on a newly-plastered wall. "When I spotted the face everyone was amazed", he says. So many neighbours kept calling to have a look he thinks the kitchen could become a place of pilgrimage.

"I'm not religious", declares the Wanstead visionary, "but it makes you think".

Indeed it does.

COMMUNITY WORK?

Calvin Sharpe, the Cheltenham Satanist, says his beliefs "are just as deep and sincere as any practising Christian's". That is why he disobeyed a court order to do 140 hours of community work. The work included carrying out repairs to a church, and it is against his religious principles to set foot in such a place. The magistrates accepted this as reasonable, and instead imposed a suspended prison sentence for his third drink-driving offence.

It will be asked, with justification, why the prison sentence for such a serious and repeated offence was suspended. However, another question arises. Just what is meant by the term "community work"? Certainly there is much work to be done in any community. But for courts to provide churches — private property which is already heavily subsidised — with cheap or unpaid labour, describing it as community work, is a perversion of justice.

A Pinprick for Free Speech

DAVID WEBB

Writing in *The Freethinker*, May 1982, on the debacle of Mary Whitehouse's Old Bailey prosecution of Michael Bogdanov, the National Theatre director of *The Romans in Britain*, I commented on the lack of critical acclaim the play had attracted, which I thought was rather unfair to its author, Howard Brenton. With regard to *Iranian Nights*, however, a play which Mr Brenton has written with Tariq Ali as "a pinprick for free speech", as he describes it in a foreword to the play, and, hopefully, "a pinprick to clear the air", the critics' apparent approval of it as a piece of theatre, appears to me to have let Mr Brenton, and Mr Ali, off very lightly. Perhaps that was inevitable, given the chilling post-Rushdie death-edict climate in which it has been so courageously and so quickly written, performed and staged at London's Royal Court Theatre.

True, Irving Wardle wrote in *The Times* that "It is not a well-organised play", and in *The Independent* Alex Renton called it a "loose collection of jokes, ideas and anecdotes". For me it fell between two stools. One moment it appeared as an extended satirical revue sketch, whilst the next as a serious, pseudo-academic attempt "to explore the nature of Tyranny, Britain's own responsibility for creating intolerance and the schisms within the Muslim community", as Michael Billington so described it in the *Guardian*. It was too long and drawn out to succeed as the first, and too short and superficial as the second. But then I've never liked "one-acters", and actors are well-known for being notoriously bad judges of plays anyway.

The performances of the three-handed cast were also treated by the critics with surprising kindness, I thought. That, too, may have been the result of unconscious admiration for their guts in appearing in the play at all, especially since two of the original actors cast had dropped out because of fears for their safety. I, of course, share that admiration, but I'm afraid that it cannot obscure all criticism of Nabil Shaban's vocally ill-equipped performance of the Caliph/Father, but which, again surprisingly, Michael Billington thought "effective" and Alex Renton "excellent".

Because of my own intense anger over the Khomeini-Rushdie affair, and, after the initial, almost formal, Establishment condemnations and protestations, the setting-in of, in Irving Wardle's words, "the normalisation process" where "politicians start seeing both sides of the question", I would have preferred a much more direct onslaught against the religious ruthlessness of a supposedly "Holy Man", and the cruelty and nonsensicality of Islamic fundamentalism alongside other equally

repugnant religious creeds. Perhaps that would be inviting the wrath, not only of already incited Muslims but also of the Mary Whitehouse-style mafias, ever eager and willing to pounce on the exponents of free expression whenever and wherever they dare to expose themselves.

Tempered down outrage though *Iranian Nights* may have expressed, it was still sufficiently forthright to require the Royal Court Theatre being turned into a fortress, for all bags to be searched on entry, and for police to be on duty outside. Further down the King's Road a Penguin Bookshop permanently parades a security guard at its entrance, and uniformed police guard Viking publishing headquarters in Kensington. Two other London bookshops have been fire-bombed and nowhere is *The Satanic Verses* openly displayed — except, commendably bravely, at the National Secular Society's London offices — and even here, I gather, the police advised them against it. Yet what, positively, is being done by the law enforcement agencies to combat this maniacal behaviour?

On 22 February, in a letter to Allan Green, the Director of Public Prosecutions, I sent a list of nine named persons who have publicly, either through the press, radio or television, clearly infringed the criminal law of incitement to murder by affirming that Khomeini's death sentence on Rushdie was right, that it should be carried out, and that they would be prepared to do it. I asked the DPP if he intended to institute criminal proceedings against them and if not, why not? He did not reply. I wrote again on 15 March and this time one of his staff wrote a fob-off letter which in no way answered my questions. I have written yet again and, at the time of going to press, I still wait to hear what he proposes to do. Nothing, I suspect. As far as I know no one has yet been brought before a court for any Rushdie-related offence, and it seems increasingly likely that the DPP has been instructed by the Attorney General not to pursue such matters. The double standards employed are a disgrace. If you or I were to announce such life-threatening intentions against, for example, the Prime Minister, we would be rounded up and dealt with before you could say "Sinn Fein".

During the run of *Iranian Nights* there was only one minor demonstration by a group of Muslims. Ironically that may be a bad sign, for it is just the sort of indication of "the normalisation process" which the DPP will use to help justify his policy or not properly pursuing these known criminals through to legal prosecution. Meantime — and for a long time, it seems — tough luck, Mr Rushdie!

Church and Revolution

PETER BACOS

In this, the first of two articles on the bicentenary of the French Revolution, the role of the Church is examined. At the outset, there were those who wished to abolish it as part of a programme of de-Christianisation. But at the beginning of the 19th century the Church was restored to the position it had previously occupied in French national life.

One of the most significant points to note about the Gallican Church on the eve of the French Revolution was that it was sharply divided. There was an enormous gulf between the aristocratic episcopate and the mass of the clergy beneath it. One of the great scandals of the *ancien regime* was that the leaders of the Church had lost any pretensions to spirituality and appointments to bishoprics were the exclusive preserve of the aristocracy. Many of these prelates were unscrupulous and even irreligious. When discussing the claims of one such unsuitable candidate for the vacant see of Paris it was Louis XVI who exclaimed that "the Archbishop of Paris must believe in God".

The lower clergy were unhappy with their lot and contrasted it with that of their superiors. Still, poor though they were, they were not despised or ridiculed by the mass of the populace. The reforms of the 17th century had created a pastorate the people could respect. Many of them wanted the parish priest to have a fairer share of the church's wealth, and few wanted to abolish it as an institution. It was to be reformed to support the new France, much in the way it had been the bulwark of the monarchy under the *ancien regime*.

One of the determinants of the course of the Revolution was the preponderance of the lower clergy in the Estates General. Of 296 clerical deputies only 46 were bishops while 208 were *curés*. The Constituent Assembly took an axe to the privileges of the Church, confiscating its property and thereby hoping in one fell swoop to pay for the cost of France's involvement in the American War of Independence. It also hoped to remove the threat of counter-revolution suspecting that the higher clergy, at least, were sympathetic to privilege. At the same time it hoped to make the course of the Revolution irreversible because once the lands had been sold, those who purchased them would have a vested interest in the maintenance of the new regime.

Monasticism was abolished, the teaching orders were suppressed, and from henceforth the clergy were to be paid by the State. Even more revolutionary, elevation to the episcopate was no longer to be through nepotism but by election. In July 1790 the Assembly promulgated the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, and forced the latter to take an oath

to it. It is estimated that only about half of them did. Throughout this period then there was schism in the church. Later, during the Terror, the clergy could be deported and even suffer the death penalty if they did not take the oath of Liberty, and were stripped of many of the functions they had previously performed such as registering births, conducting marriages and funerals.

As the Revolution became more extreme there developed a campaign of de-Christianisation. Churches were vandalised, idols smashed and sacrilege was everywhere encouraged. Some of the clergy themselves took part in this, probably because many of them had originally taken vows against their will. To celebrate the Festival of the Federation, 14 July 1790, a *curé* planted the first Tree of Liberty, a ceremony soon repeated all over the country. A "red" *curé* in Paris advocated secular burial ceremonies where the central theme was, "sleep without hope of awakening". Another advocate wanted a similar maxim to be inscribed on the gates of every cemetery proclaiming, "Death is an eternal sleep".

The source of inspiration for the de-Christianisation movement was Rousseau. Many of the deputies were deists who felt man did not need to communicate with God via an intermediary when he had the beauty of Nature all around him. In August 1793 the painter David organised a ceremony for the acceptance of the new constitution. The centrepiece of this was a colossal statue of the Goddess Nature with water gushing from her breasts into a pool, erected on the site of the Bastille. The calendar was remodelled and, while the division of the year into 12 months was retained, each month had only 30 days and was further subdivided into three weeks. Sunday was thus abolished, to be replaced by the *decadi* (the tenth day). This left a shortfall of five days in the year, but ingenuity and topicality filled in this gap with what were known as *sansculottides*. The months of the year were named after the seasons or the crops which could be expected at that time of year. So for Autumn there was Vendemiaire, Brumaire and Frimaire; for Winter, Nivose, Pluviose and Ventose; for Spring, Germinal, Floreal, Prairial; and for Summer, Messidor, Thermidor and Fructidor.

On 10 November 1793 the Festival of Reason took place in Notre Dame. For this occasion the cathedral became the Temple of Reason. Inside there was a mountain, on the summit of which was a Temple of Philosophy out of which issued a goddess called Liberty. At one ceremony in Beauvais there was a triumvirate — Reason, Liberty and Equality. Robespierre declared that the tenets of the new religion were, the existence of the Supreme

Being and the immortality of the soul. The inaugural festival of this Deity was held in June 1794. Another feature of this period was the replacement of Christian names by those of classical or revolutionary heroes. So in some families there was a Brutus or Cato, and if their parents were even more fervent, a Marat or Peletier.

The movement for de-Christianisation was concentrated among a small group of extremists in Paris and did not take root in the countryside. The religious revolution was a failure because the French could not be weaned from their traditional practices. But the movement is nonetheless interest-

ing, for in a decade when men turned the world upside down, they did not wish to abolish religion altogether, but replace it with a supposedly more rational faith. Napoleon's Concordat with the Papacy in 1802 finally restored the Church to the primacy it had once enjoyed, although with important alterations. If religion was to be the means of binding society together the politicians would have to resort to the traditional religion of the French people — Catholicism. Unfortunately philosophy cannot speak to the heart, a point modern humanists and secularists should take heed of.

New Sex Teasers for the Church

BARBARA SMOKER

Internal Christian disputes on matters of sex, sexuality, and sexism seem to be proliferating. Or have they just come out more into the open? There are also repercussions with regard to Church authority and the pursuit of Christian unity. Here the President of the National Secular Society surveys recent events, with a discernible twinkle in her typewriter.

Sex and sexuality have always loomed large in the problems that beset Mother Church — from the neurotic hangups of St Paul, through the sexual scandals of the medieval papal court and of supposed celibate clergy and monastics, through the Anglican schism triggered by Henry's lust for Anne Boleyn, to the insidious rebellion of millions of Catholic women since *Humanae Vitae* (1968) against the Vatican's continued ban on contraception. In every century there was some new aspect to the war between sex and the Church. But the timespan has now shrunk to that of the daily press. The advent of feminism, gay rights, and (horror of horrors!) sex-change operations, has brought fresh problems thick and fast to most Christian denominations; but above all to Rome.

Most far-reaching is the setback to ecumenism posed by the appointment in February this year of the first woman bishop (the black American woman, Barbara Harris) in the Anglican communion, for a bishop has the apostolic power to ordain new priests.

Until the consecration of this first woman bishop was announced, a truce had been maintained for some years within the Lambeth Conference by allowing the ordination and ministry of women priests in some national churches and postponing the evil day in others. While it was undoubtedly an awkward situation that, while the Church of England does not itself recognise women priests, it heads the multinational Anglican communion which includes several countries which do recognise them, the Conference was nevertheless able to cope with it. Now, how-

ever, there is a woman bishop — who, any day now, may actually ordain new priests, including male priests. Short of the Archbishops somehow having the passports of all Anglican priests confiscated, this means that the purity of the male line can no longer be guaranteed by simply barring women from priestly functions within this or any other country. Anyway, even the fantasy of passport control becomes ineffective with the latest news, as we go to press — that the Church of Ireland (which is, of course, part of the Anglican communion) has voted to allow women priests to be ordained for the Irish ministry. That brings the curse of Eve rather close to home.

If the priests (male or female) ordained by a female bishop were to be recognised as valid priests in some parts of the Anglican communion and not others, it could only mean schism within this Christian schism. That is the main problem raised by the appointment of the first Anglican woman bishop — and not just because of the rifts it is causing within the Anglican communion itself: it has also stymied the long-hoped-for reconciliation with Rome.

It is one thing for the Vatican to consider changing its infallible mind on the validity of four centuries of schismatic ordination in the Anglican Church, and quite another to expect it to recognise the validity of a female priesthood or that of any priest ordained by a female bishop. How, it is asked, could a mere female possibly inherit the true magic powers received by the all-male band of apostles from the male Christ, and pass them on into the future? The introduction of even one female into the apostolic succession nullifies the chain of male priestly powers conferred by JC himself.

In response to the common enemy of disbelief, there had been a concerted attempt in the Roman and Anglican Churches during the past quarter of a century to bridge the rift occasioned by the divorce of an amorous English monarch in 1533. The visit of Archbishop Ramsey to Pope Paul VI in 1966

marked the first major step towards the proposed annulment of the four-centuries-old schism, with amazing concessions from each side, on a Jack Spratt basis: Rome agreeing to differ on points of theological doctrine but not on authority, while the Anglican community was willing to grant ultimate jurisdiction to the Pope (a return to "the universal primacy of the Bishop of Rome") in exchange for autonomy in matters of theology.

The way now seemed open to the great final reconciliation, based on mutual recognition of priestly orders — as long as the Protestant priests were, of course, male. And there was no suggestion at that time that the Anglican ordination of women, let alone female episcopal powers, would soon demand recognition.

Now, Robert Runcie is faced with an impossible task: preserving the tenuous union of the Lambeth Conference while, at the same time, pursuing reunion with Rome. Characteristically, he is trying to have his cake and eat it. He has actually come up with the idea of requiring any ordination by a woman bishop to be backed up by a male bishop laying his hands, as it were, on top of hers; but, not surprisingly, this suggestion is seen by feminists as an insult to women, and has caused a furore among the American (and other) opponents of sex discrimination with regard to episcopal powers.

Following in Ramsey's 1966 footsteps, Runcie is to visit the Vatican in September in an attempt to resolve this dilemma. Between those two summit meetings there was a visit by the Pope to Canterbury in 1982, likewise part of the "quest for unity". But its fruition looks very much less hopeful since the episcopal consecration of Barbara Harris.

Much as the Pope would welcome the Anglicans back into the One True fold, he is sure to strike a hard bargain, as is indicated by a letter he wrote to Dr Runcie six months ago (but which has only just been made public) in which he declares that the ordination of women "has created a new and perplexing situation", and, referring to the 1982 mandate to study "all that hinders the mutual recognition of the ministries of our Communion", states that "the ordination of women to the priesthood in some provinces of the Anglican Communion, together with the recognition of the right of individual provinces to proceed with the ordination of women to the episcopacy, appears to preempt this study and effectively block the path to the mutual recognition of ministries".

Anglican traditionalists, both clergy and laity, having lost hope now in the progress of official unity, have been defecting to Rome in considerable numbers. One of them, the Revd William Oddie, explains that "The attraction to most Anglo-Catholics is that the Roman Church still has a theology of doctrinal authority"; adding "I feel that

many people may come over to the Catholic Church". The Revd Keith Haydon, leader of a group of Oxford Anglo-Catholic theologians and clerics whose recent letter to *The Times* expressed solidarity with the Pope on the issue of women priests, comments "Many are getting closer to Rome by the week now that it seems that full, visible unity has become a fantasy". And the Revd Robert Gould, another prominent Anglican traditionalist, is quoted as saying "It may well be the case that more Anglicans will join the Catholics now that unity discussions look doomed".

On their side, Catholics are pointing to the dramatic consequences of democracy in ecclesiastical structure with too great a willingness to allow different regions of a Church to go their own sweet way, and those who have been tempted to gloat over the Anglicans for their lack of any *magisterium* to hold the line have been counselled by a leader in the *Catholic Herald* to "consider what could happen to their own Church without a man as sure of his views as the current Pope at its centre".

Sure of his views he may be, but he no longer exercises the sort of authority over the hearts and minds of members of his Church that was accorded to popes as a matter of course before Vatican II. In most cases, those who disobey him (mainly, in the western world, by the use of contraception) contrive to salve their consciences and remain within the Church. Anyway, individuals who kick over the traces, whether by unrepented sinful behaviour or by doctrinal heresy, can always be accommodated. Indeed, heresy (which means "choice") can actually be looked upon as an aspect of freewill. Collective erosion of the papal unifying authority is far more serious. The Church of Rome has always seen schism — a collective denial of Jurisdiction — as worse than heresy, which is limited to the pastoral power of Order.

The papal way of dealing with incipient schism — as in the recent case of the recalcitrant Lefebvre — is to isolate it as far as possible by excommunicating the principals and issuing a grave warning to supporting priests and laity that those who persist in the error of their ways could likewise incur "the grave penalty of excommunication". Though this threat may no longer inspire among many Catholics quite the terror it once did, it can still be largely effective — while of course it is not open to Cantuar at all. On the other hand, when, last summer, Lefebvre went ahead and consecrated his own four new bishops, there was no way that the Pope could deny them the magical powers of the apostolic succession. Unlawful as they are, their divine orders must be valid. It is a disadvantage of belief in magic that once the power has been supernaturally conferred, it has to work — no matter for whom. Hence, for instance, Black Masses.

What, then, about the priest who has changed sex and is now a woman? "Once a priest, always a priest": that is an immutable principle, necessary to safeguard a gullible laity against the fear of non-transubstantiation, ineffective absolution, and other void sacraments. But women, of course, can never be priests. There is, however, at least one highly publicised instance of a transsexual priest, now known as Sister Paola: a classical case of the irresistible force and the immovable object.

It is, surely, the stuff that papal nightmares must be made of; but when the Pope wakes up, the nightmare doesn't go away. His one consolation is that, so far, sex-changes among the clergy remain rare.

More recent press reports concern a related, but comparatively minor, matter for decision in the papal in-tray: the case of a young Spanish woman who, having been baptised as a boy, now wants her baptismal certificate changed retrospectively so that she can be married in white. Come back Solomon!

Also in the news is a report on pornography from the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, saying that the root cause of the spread of pornography is a "pervasive moral permissiveness" and that the media have "tragically succumbed to the temptation of exploiting human weakness".

Another aspect of that human weakness is the number of priests who come to regret the vow of celibacy that they took in their youth. During the pontificate of Paul VI (1963-78), their requests to leave the priesthood were received sympathetically and many were able to give up their priestly vocation (though not, of course, their priestly powers) to marry, whilst remaining in the Church. The present Pope, however, has put a stop to this laxity, and it is now much more difficult for a priest to leave the priesthood without being excommunicated.

Homosexual priests also have their difficulties. On the other hand, in many religious orders — behind monastic walls — gay monks and nuns have never had it so good. All homosexual Christians, however, are subject to attempts by their churches to make them feel guilty about their own nature — even more guilty, that is, than the average Christian miserably sinner — and the more conscientious they are the more they suffer. But as more and more gays "come out of the closet", and more of the specialist mutual support groups are set up (such as, for instance, Quest — the society for Catholic gays in this country), the psychological oppression of the Christian homosexuals is minimised.

Controversy over divorce goes back, of course, to Henry VIII; but there is an ever-widening gap on this issue between contemporary culture and the Church's view that marriage is indissoluble. Vatican officials, and the Pope himself, have complained that RC diocesan tribunals in the USA, for instance, are granting too many annulments, on psychological

grounds.

Among other interesting religious news items within the past few months has been the eruption into the open of the increasing rumblings of discontent among progressive Catholic theologians. In January, a game old octogenarian, the German Redemptorist priest, Bernard Haering, who insists that the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* admits of exceptions to the ban on contraception, and in any case is not eternally infallible, spoke out in favour of a "world-wide birth control inquiry to consider the real feeling of Catholics", and openly castigated Mgr Carlo Caffarra (the theologian closest to the Pope) who had likened contraception to murder.

A week later came the *Declaration of Cologne*, signed by 163 North European (German, Austrian, Dutch and Swiss) theologians, since supported by about 200 more. It was a scathing attack on Vatican centralisation trends and intransigence on social issues, especially the Pope's hardline anti-contraception policy, which, it said, "mortifies the conscience of husbands and wives". Declaring that "the dignity of their consciences consists not only of obedience but above all of responsibility", the document demanded a modification of the total ban on contraception and a more speedy implementation of the collegiate and other reforms proposed by Vatican Council II. Countering this treacherous uprising, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Ratzinger, tried to downgrade the standing of the Council by saying that, being really only pastoral, it lacked the doctrinal weight of earlier councils with their infallible pronouncements. This has brought a protest, in the form of a three-page "open letter", from, most unexpectedly, 63 of Italy's leading theologians — including the President of Italian theologians and the President of Italy's moral theologians. Raising similar objections (though in far more moderate terms) to the Declaration of Cologne, they claim that theologians should have a right to freedom of research, even in the field of ethics, "with no spirit of intolerance". Tit for tat, there has been an immediate response from the old guard of the Italian Episcopal Conference — a stern rebuke, in the very spirit of intolerance that proves the theologians' case.

Ironically, none of this rebellion of the Left threatens to become schismatic, as the Right-wing rebellion of Lefebvre (whose views are in many ways closer to the Pope's) proved to be last year, when Lefebvre consecrated his own bishops in the apostolic succession. That magical laying-on of hands again.

As long as these internal Christian disputes stop short of persecution and religious wars, it is all good fun for atheists. And, more importantly — assuming the Good Book is right — "if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand".

BOOK

THE SATANIC VERSES, by Salman Rushdie. Viking Press, £12.95

A book that has been front-page news for much of this year hardly needs another review, you may think, but if you have been reading the papers instead of the book, let me urge you to have a go at the real thing. *The Satanic Verses* is an intriguing, entertaining, convoluted, profound work of art. It is nothing so prosaic or unimaginative as an attack on Islam, as its wild-eyed detractors have claimed. The brouhaha has obscured the fact that *The Satanic Verses* is a serious novel and not merely a rallying cry.

The Satanic Verses reads like three or four novels wonderfully intertwined. There is the main story of the two men, Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, who fall out of an exploding airplane and survive. When they resume their lives, one is, or thinks he is, the angel Gibreel or Gabriel, and the other grows horns and becomes a cloven-hoofed devil for a time. There is also the mythic tale of a desert city, Jahilia, built entirely of sand. Another separate story concerns a pilgrimage to Mecca undertaken by an Indian village led by a mysterious young woman clothed entirely in butterflies. These subordinate stories are wholly or partly dreamed by Gibreel, the Bombay film star and crash survivor, who may or may not also be an angel. Later it appears that some of these "dreams" of Gibreel's are films that he has made. The elements of the novel are loosely woven together by certain recurring themes and the dreams of Gibreel Farishta. There is the frequent problem that "the world of dreams was leaking into that of the waking hours"; dreams of various kinds are prominent in the novel. The language likewise varies from racy Bombay with touches of Damon Runyon in the syntax, to East End Jewish speech and the representation of a stuttering film producer.

The use of the name "Mahound", so bitterly resented by some people who have not read the book, illustrates the kind of misunderstanding that can arise through careless or incompetent reading. In one of the few authorial passages in the book, the narrator explains that he uses the form "Mahound" in order to reclaim it, in the same way that disparaging words like *Black* have been reclaimed and given positive meanings. If more people had read the book instead of burning it, they might have learned that it is not so offensive as the Ayatollah's literary advisers claim.

The "Satanic verses" are false doctrine concerning the acceptance of goddesses; the doctrine and goddesses are subsequently repudiated by Mahound. They are also suggestive doggerel spoken anony-

REVIEW

mously by Saladin Chamcha over the phone to Gibreel Farishta to arouse suspicion about his lover (who is a record-shattering mountain climber with flat feet).

As the novel concerns, among many other things, the situation of Indians between two cultures, those of us who are unfamiliar with Indian and Muslim culture will inevitably miss the significance of some allusions and nuances, just as readers unfamiliar with London may miss the telescoping of "Brick Lane" and "Southall" into "Brickhall". Details like that add to the enjoyment of the novel, but are not essential to an appreciation of it.

One of the most touching parts of *The Satanic Verses* is the final section, in which Saladin Chamcha returns to Bombay because his father is dying. His name reverts to its Indian form, Salahuddin Chamchawala, and the long estrangement from his father ends when father and son meet. "To fall in love with one's father after the long angry decades was a serene and beautiful feeling; a renewing, life-giving thing". In helping the older man to die the son grows in wisdom and becomes reconciled to disparate strands of his multicultural life. "Death brought out the best in people; it was good to be shown — Salahuddin realised — that this, too, was what human beings were like: considerate, loving, even noble. We are still capable of exaltation, he thought in celebratory mood; in spite of everything, we can still transcend".

The Satanic Verses is not a novel for everyone. It is not easy bedtime reading. The plot is not overly coherent. It is an intellectually challenging book, a novel both serious and playful with a positive, life-affirming stance.

SARAH LAWSON

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Christopher Brunel, 1920-1989

The announcement of Christopher Brunel's death caused much sadness among his wide circle of friends and colleagues, particularly in the film world. He was a dedicated freethinker and, like his father before him, an international authority on Thomas Paine.

Christopher Brunel came from a family three generations of which were professionally associated with the theatre and cinema. His grandmother, Madame Adey Brunel, was an eminent drama teacher whose pupils included Lynn Fontanne. His father, Adrian Brunel, was an actor and playwright who became one of Britain's foremost film directors. His mother, Irene Brunel, acted in early British films. Christopher, the Brunels' only child, went into the industry as an editor.

Inheriting his forebears' artistic talent and political radicalism, Christopher Brunel will be remembered as a man of professional integrity and firm convictions. While always ready to defend his principles, he was rather reserved in manner and unfailingly courteous.

Christopher Brunel had been ill for some time and died shortly before his 69th birthday. It was his wish that there should be no funeral or ceremony.

R. W. Morrell writes: With the death of Christopher Brunel, the Thomas Paine Society has lost not just its chairman but one of its most enthusiastic members. It was his father, Adrian Brunel, to whom he was devoted, who introduced Christopher to the work of Thomas Paine, and this was to remain a passionate interest for the rest of his life.

When Adrian Brunel died, Christopher inherited his fine Paine library and continued to build it. Visitors would find in his study a large number of books and catalogues, testimony to his acquisition policy. He built his Paine collection into one of the finest in private or public ownership anywhere. It is probably rivalled only by that of the wealthy American collector and admirer of Paine, the late Richard Gimbel, who is reputed to have provided most of the funds for the Paine statue in Thetford.

With such an interest in Paine, it was no surprise that when the idea for a Thomas Paine Society was mooted in the early 1960s, Christopher Brunel was one of the project's most enthusiastic supporters. He became the Society's chairman when it was established in 1963. Always an active chairman, he was frequently invited to speak to other groups and societies. In January this year he represented the TPS at the Thomas Paine birthday celebrations in Thetford where, in May 1971, he presented the Society's case at a public inquiry on the proposed demolition of Paine's reputed birthplace. It was eventually purchased by another member of the Society for incorporation into an hotel to be named

after Thomas Paine. It was also Christopher Brunel who, on behalf of the TPS, persuaded the late Ella Twyman to present the Paine collection of Ambrose C. Barker, which she had inherited, to Thetford Public Library.

Although Christopher Brunel was not a professional historian, his knowledge of Paine was so extensive that he was frequently consulted by scholars who were given ready access to his library. Many an academic treatise carries an acknowledgment of his assistance.

Christopher Brunel's death is a blow to the Thomas Paine Society. It is to be hoped that his magnificent library, along with his equally fine collection of token coins and medallions featuring Paine, will be preserved intact as a memorial to him. Personally, I will miss him greatly.

Peter Cotes writes: Christopher Brunel was a man of parts and master of many. His capacity for friendship was not the least of his qualities, for a friend he truly was, expecting to be called upon in either fair weather or foul, a living example of Shakespeare's Timon of Athens.

I am not of that feather, to shake off
My friend when he must needs me. . .
What need we have any friends, if we
should ne'er have need of them?

Leading members of the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians, the union which he served so well, have placed on record their admiration and appreciation for Christopher Brunel and his long years of industrious service. He never counted the possible cost to his own, sometimes tenuous, position with employers, adopting unequivocal attitudes on all manner of subjects and standing firm on matters of principle.

His heart and mind were were really in all branches of Film — its production, scripting and acting — from inception until the moment when he would occasionally march (if that's not too strong a word for his diffident walk) on to the set to watch some part of the proceedings he would later be asked to cut and edit. He never lost the capacity to enjoy all aspects of film making which he inherited from his talented father, the director Adrian Brunel. He was also sufficiently adept in still photography to become a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society.

Chris was naturally modest, but his self-effacement — unlike that of so many shy people who attempt to conceal their natural disposition with a veneer of brusqueness — never came over as mock modesty. At the end of an arduous executive meeting which

had perhaps gone on for too long, Chris, the abstemious one, would always be enjoying himself at the bar though he was not in the circle of drinkers (except on the rare occasion when he allowed himself a glass of wine in the interests of conviviality). He enjoyed being part of the whole, being with his chums and kindred spirits, and with his wife, Margaret, who shared so many of his interests and reciprocated his love.

A kind and gentle man, he was a brave spirit. Such folk are rare, and the last letter he wrote to me, only a short while before he died, left one in no doubt as to where he stood as an unquenchable fighter: "I have up days, and down days, but progress slowly, slowly, slowly goes on. You must know only too well about the slowness of progress. But we are all fighters".

Religious Charities to Escape Probe?

The Government has announced in a White Paper that it plans to exercise stricter control over Britain's 165,000 charities. With an annual turn-over of £13 billion, the Charity Commissioners' resources greatly stretched, and no statutory definition of charity, there is obviously considerable scope for mismanagement and fraud.

It is highly unlikely that the Government (or any Government in the foreseeable future) will tackle the injustice and anomalies relating to religious charity law. This is based on case law going back to the Statute of Charitable Uses of 1601 and a decision by Judge McNaughten in 1891. McNaughten ruled that there were four broad categories of charity, one of which, "the advancement of religion", has been so advantageous to the barmy and the unscrupulous. Some of the sects which are registered as charities are multi-million business empires; others are little more than family businesses.

A new addition to the list is a weird cult known as the Odinic Rite, one of the Norse blood religions which has a strong following among European Nazis. It is led in Britain by a Londoner who, in pre-war days, was a supporter of Mosley's blackshirts. A leading light in this unsavoury outfit is a lady who goes under the name of Freya Aswynn.

"Master race" Odinists were furious when a black performer was cast in the role of Wotan in a recent production of Wagner's *Das Rheingold*. They distributed leaflets at a theatre in Oxford condemning the production as "sacrilegious". The leaflet claimed that their religion "is a mystical and spiritual awareness that underpins a wholesome and noble lifestyle". As charity law stands, this hodge-podge of codswallop entitles the Odinic Rite to the status of a religious charity.

LETTERS

ORWELL AND SOCIALISM

George Orwell spent years of his life examining the hypocrisy and failings of a socialist political system that he both loved and hated. He wrote *Animal Farm* as a venomous attack on socialism in action and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a direct attack on English socialism. He could plainly see the growing number of simpletons ready to follow the politically ambitious who, when elected to power, would quickly destroy any ideas of enlightened democracy. He knew that socialists could be the worst enemies of socialism. This fact haunted him for the rest of his life.

In answer to John L. Broom (Letters, May), Orwell denied his attack because he knew the reading of millions of copies of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* had been instrumental in the devastation of the socialist philosophy in which he firmly believed. Why else use the term "English socialism"? Denial was his only option.

Colin Mills, in the same issue, says I ignored Orwell's long-standing socialism. I thought that fact was common knowledge and therefore not worthy of mention. In fact it goes against his argument. Why should Orwell be so troubled by the inevitable massive failings of a system he supported?

Colin Mills also says "... viewpoints like mine and Karl Heath's must be accepted as worthy of debate". Fair comment — and we should listen. But does he seriously suggest that socialist comment is not contained in the pages of *The Freethinker*?

In my unedited letter the suggestion was that *The Freethinker* had a more noble record than socialism, not "... compromise the independence of *The Freethinker*". This change we must attribute to the editor's modesty and natural charm.

ROBERT SINCLAIR

MARGARET THATCHER, SECULARIST SAINT

This time you have surprised yourself. It is one thing to fill *The Freethinker* with leftist articles; but when in your enthusiasm you provide a free platform for the views of our religious leaders ... well! I am referring of course to T. F. Evans's article (May).

Surely you and T. F. Evans must realise that something has gone seriously wrong with your secularism when you find yourselves echoing the views of Church of England bishops, to say nothing of rabbis. M. R. North seems to have put his finger on the reason (Letters, same issue) when he says "Socialism ... is virtually a form of non-deist religion". He might have said Humanism, and deleted the "virtually".

The true political concomitant of secularism today, whether you like it or not, is Thatcherism. Mrs Thatcher would vehemently deny this of course; after all, she needs the religious vote. But what could be more secular than to accept the reality of market forces, natural selection in the sphere of economics. State intervention, so beloved of the "creationists" of the Left, is just the non-deist equivalent of divine intervention — and it can't work either, not in the real world.

GLYN EMERY

FREETHINKER HORRORS

I fully agree with your correspondent, M. R. North, writing in the May issue. Bad enough for me to have more socialism preached, but even worse a couple of months ago to have an anti-Field Sports article to contend with.

IAN FORBES

GRIM OUTLOOK FOR EDUCATION

M. R. North writes (May): "The article by James Sang is, quite simply, a socialist attack on the education policy of the present Conservative Government and nothing more". If I had been making a socialist attack I think the article would have been quite different; and I, for one, would not object to some pithy political criticism enlivening *The Freethinker*! But my view was meant to illustrate the dangers of the Government's anti-intellectual stance which is surely a proper topic for *The Freethinker* in a year when we are celebrating the French Revolution and The Age of Reason.

Liberals, Conservative "wets" and employers' organisations have all emphasised the dangers of applying "market force" strategies to academia, and readers of *The Freethinker* will already know that they have cost us philosophy and classics departments in many universities. Worse is to come when subjects, universities and polytechnics have to compete for students' fees and their main source of income, as is now proposed. Where will the arguments for atheism come from if their academic roots are cut?

JAMES SANG

A BROAD VISION

Emergence of the secular movement's equivalent of Mary Whitehouse is seemingly imminent, for evidence of the same narrow fanaticism is perceptible in the comments of recent contributors on alleged political intrusion into *The Freethinker*.

The Freethinker openly declares itself a secular humanist publication and, by definition, the term secular permits an infinitely wider ranging field than one merely anti-religion. Such scope is even more implicit in its title. Whilst the main direction of its contents seeks to expose the absurdities of religious beliefs, it would be unreasonable to expect all discussion to remain within such rigid confines. Contributors legitimately feel free to use appropriate material in articles or letters, so it is inevitable that contentious matter will be introduced. Those readers unable to reconcile themselves to this situation would be well advised to seek out their uninhabited island or return to the writings of our founders and other radical philosophers to refresh their interpretation of freethought. Here were men and women of stature with a breadth of vision that could not be confined to the narrow spectrum of prejudice. They did not look for, or expect, unanimous acceptance of their views.

Adherence to religious belief is slowly declining, but in its place we are witnessing the spread of political authoritarianism lead by fanatics and attracting the unquestioning support of followers. It poses as great or even greater threat to individual freedom than religion now does. *The Freethinker* of tomorrow may well have political bigotry as its prime target, and may be an underground sheet.

The end of religious belief will not herald the dawn of Utopia. For unless a very radical upheaval takes place in human nature, there will always exist those who are intolerant of anything outside of and not feeding their personal gratification.

R. H. BARR

POLITICAL ACTION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

I was alarmed to note several correspondents in the April and May issues of *The Freethinker* deploring the inclusion of letters and articles which touch on political matters. I can only interpret their complaints as a request to the editor to act as censor. If we are to go down that road we shall find ourselves marching shoulder to shoulder with the ayatollahs, the bishops,

Mrs Whitehouse and her bosom pal, Mrs Thatcher.

All religious concepts are wrong, and since it is wrong to propagate error, we oppose religion as a social evil. To correct social evils it is necessary to take political action. An example of this is the Government's obscene child abuse involved in the recent Education Act which rigorously reinforced the daily act of worship in our schools. This Act can be modified or abolished only by political action. Until that happens, children will still be singing Mrs Alexander's pretty but dangerous hymns about "All things bright and beautiful", and "The rich man in his castle, The poor man at his gate, He made them high or lowly, And ordered their estate".

Your correspondents complain about "the Left". It was not a Left-wing Government which initiated and extended the scope of religion in schools legislation.

SIDNEY WAITE

SUSPICION CONFIRMED

Peter Ashberry's strong suspicion (Letters, May) that some of your correspondents would regard heaven as a place "where you are only allowed to read what you agree with", is amusingly confirmed in the very same issue by your anti-socialist correspondent, M. R. North, who candidly confesses that he "most assuredly" would not read any material in favour of socialism.

JOHN L. BROOM

POLITICAL SELF-SELECTION

Your correspondents who, from time to time, wish to exclude politics from *The Freethinker* are disingenuous. Without exception, they conceal the fact that they do not really object to politics, but only to Left-wing politics. Attack God, but not Margaret Thatcher, thereby conferring on her a status even more exalted than royal.

These same correspondents seem woefully ignorant of the role of politics in the history of freethought. By their standards, Thomas Paine, Charles Bradlaugh and Bertrand Russell would all have been prevented from publishing their political views in *The Freethinker*.

KARL HEATH

SCIENCE, LOGIC AND FAITH

If John Bray wants to have his religious views taken seriously, he'll need to produce something a lot better than the confused muddle he served up in the May *Freethinker*.

He began with a swipe at "atheist intolerance", even though these supposedly intolerant atheists have now twice included his religious views in their monthly magazine. Can he tell us, for comparison, how much atheism gets into religious journals, such as the *Church Times* or the *Catholic Herald*? And can he tell us when he last had even non-Christian religion, let alone atheism, in his newspaper God-spot?

Whether Mr Bray is qualified to preach to the rest of us on tolerance is very doubtful. Back in January, in a newspaper item about blasphemy, he described certain of his fellow-believers, who just happen to have a different god from his, as "cranks".

A couple of Mr Bray's *Freethinker* remarks were aimed specifically at me, the first being just a blatant double standard. In an earlier letter, I asked him if he would believe in a book which I had written and claimed was divinely inspired. His reply, which I thought very reasonable, was that he would first read the book, then test what it said against his experience and logic, and finally believe only what passed that test. By implication, if my book didn't pass his

empirical and logical test, he wouldn't believe it — there was no mention of his giving me the benefit of the doubt, and believing it anyway, as a matter of "faith".

But if science and logic — not "faith" — are Mr Bray's yardstick for judging my religious claims, how can he object when we use science and logic — not "faith" — to judge his? He can't have it both ways, surely? Presumably science and logic are acceptable to Mr Bray only when they tell him what he wants to hear.

John Bray went on to deny belief in a supernatural God, even though his previous comments (*The Freethinker*, February, p.30) clearly tell us otherwise. Perhaps it was to my list of God's alleged attributes that he objected, although I can't see how he can complain about that, since it was from his Bible that I compiled it.

What I said was that God was supernatural and capable of feats beyond the known laws of nature (Genesis 1.1, Job 38.4, John 1.3), that it was human-like (Genesis 1.26) and benevolent (1 Romans 1.7), that it was ever watchful (Psalm 121.7-8, Matthew 28.20), and that it rewards us for good behaviour (Matthew 5.19, 1 Romans 2.6). I concluded by saying that it had even appeared here on earth in human form (as is claimed in the entire so-called New Testament).

All these things Mr Bray now evidently objects to, which puts him in a rather tricky position. On the one hand he proclaims belief in God-by-name, yet on the other he denies belief in God-by-definition. How can he hope to persuade the rest of us to his point of view, when he doesn't even know it himself?

NEALE BLACKFORD

FAITH

In answer to John Bray's criticism (Letters, May) on my comments about faith, I agree that the basic definitions of religious faith and what I call rational faith are the same. The point of my article was that the grounds for having faith differ in the two cases. The strength of rational faith depends on how much evidence there is for any particular belief. The strength of religious faith tends to remain unchanged by any contrary evidence or argument. This fact is clearly revealed by a religious person who says "My faith is unshakable".

DAVID BLACKMORE

ALDRED ON FILM

Arising from reviews of my book, *Come Dungeons Dark*, a biography of Guy A. Aldred, I have received several enquiries as to the availability of Aldred's writings. These are all out of print, but the whole corpus of Aldred's works has been published on 22 reels of silver positive roll film by World Microfilms Publications. This includes all the pamphlets and journals from 1906 until 1962. Of special interest to freethinkers would be *The Agnostic Journal* (1905-6) which was edited by "Saladin" (William Stewart Ross), and over 50 pieces of fugitive writing. The price is £45.

A full list of *The Writings of Guy A. Aldred* can be obtained from World Microfilm Publications, 2-6 Foscoate Mews, London W9 2HH.

JOHN TAYLOR CALDWELL

Duo to pressure on space, several letters and reviews have been held over.

Ireland's Sceptical Young

A survey of over 700 young people in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic has revealed that more Protestants than Roman Catholics believe in God. The figures were announced last month at a meeting of inter-church leaders in Dundalk. Those present included Cardinal O' Fiaich and Archbishop O'Connell of Dublin.

The survey showed that 62.9 per cent of Protestants said they had no doubt that God existed. Only 29.8 per cent of Catholics expressed similar confidence in his existence.

A large number of Catholics (42.7 per cent) said that while believing in God, they nevertheless have doubts. This compared with 24.8 per cent of Protestants.

Despite widespread scepticism among young Irish people, a large proportion of them attend church regularly. Ten per cent of Catholics and five per cent of Protestants went to church at least once a month. About the same proportion, one per cent in each group, said they never went to church.

Social pressure probably accounts for the high number of young churchgoers in Ireland. They are discouraged from emigrating, particularly to Britain where many are lost to the Church forever.

Another development is causing the Church concern. The Republic's Health Minister, Dr Rory O'Hanlon, has just announced a 28 per cent increase in civil marriages over the last four years. Church marriages have dropped by ten per cent during the same period.

Register Office marriages in the Republic average around 600 a year. A Church spokesman said that disaffected Catholics were among those opting for a civil ceremony. While the cost of church weddings was a factor, he admitted there is a growing tendency among young people to reject the traditional values and beliefs of their elders.

Freethinker Fund

Readers continue to respond with generosity, and it is such goodwill that enables *The Freethinker* to commence its 109th year of publication this month.

J. Ancliffe, N. Barr, J. Brooks and J. C. Dixon, £1 each; N. G. Ball, F. R. Evans, C. R. Fletcher, L. T. Ong and H. A. Pugh, £2 each; C. R. Walton, £2.50; J. M. Azab, L. V. Keen and L. Stapleton, £3; H. Barrett, R. J. Hale, C. J. Hemming, O. Kaplan, R. La Ferla, P. J. Lownds, J. A. Ryder, A. C. Stewart, R. Tutton, S. Williams and F. Yates, £5 each; E. C. Hughes, £6; N. G. Bagulay and J. Gibson, £10 each; P. Barbour and S. M. Jaiswal, £15 each; M. Hill, £17; Anonymous and P. C. Cooling, £20 each; O. Grubiak, £25; Anonymous, £30.

Total for April: £248.50.

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. New Venture Theatre Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton. Sunday, 2 July, 4.30 pm. Tea Party followed by Annual General Meeting.

Edinburgh Humanist Group. Programme of forum meetings obtainable from the Secretary, 2 Savile Terrace, Edinburgh, EH9 3AD, telephone 031 667 8389.

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Meetings on the second Friday of the month at 7.30 pm (14 July, John White, Implications of the Education Reform Act).

Glasgow Humanist Society. Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Mrs Marguerite Morrow, 32 Pollock Road, Glasgow, G61 2NJ, telephone 041-942 0129.

Havering and District Humanist Society. Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road, Romford. Tuesday, 4 July, 8 pm. Public Meeting.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 29 June, 7.45 pm. John Evitt: Humanism — Analysis and Philosophy.

National Secular Society. Annual Outing. Sunday, 10 September.

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

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 12 July, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. Keith Gimson and Peter Heales: The Role of Censorship in a Democracy.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 2 July, 11 a.m. Barbara Smoker: Melting-Pot or Multi Culture — Denominational Schools, Veiled Women, Religious Slaughter-houses and Salman Rushdie.

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, 19 June, 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.

The Satanic Verses: Public Reading by Larry Adler, Martin Amis, Alan Plater and Arthur Jacobs.
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London,
Sunday, 2 July, 7 pm.

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

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Occupation (optional)

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Signature

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

Reign of Terror for Empire's "Lost Children"

A major scandal involving the exploitation, physical and sexual abuse of children in the care of religious charities has been exposed in a television documentary, *Lost Children of the Empire*. The television critic of a Roman Catholic weekly wrote: "The stories of these children, some old now, haunted me long after the midnight hour. . .

"They were treated as slaves in Canada and Australia where they were made to work for a pittance, enduring beatings, privation and sexual abuse".

Shown on ITV, in conjunction with the publication of a book with the same title, *Lost Children of the Empire* exposed the role of various charities, particularly Roman Catholic agencies, in transporting hundreds of children to colonial outposts before and after the last war. Their "homes" were often labour camps run by priests, monks and nuns.

Many of the children were tricked into believing that they were orphans when in fact they were illegitimate and their parents still living. Responding to the allegation of deception, Mgr Michael Connolly, secretary of the Catholic Child Welfare Council, said: "Children were described as orphans as opposed to illegitimate in order to take account of their sensibilities".

Little account was taken of the children's sensibilities when they reached their destination. Welsh-born Gordon Grant, aged 56, who recently visited Britain, was deserted by his mother when he was two years old. He described what happened when a group of boys arrived at Freemantle in 1947. After being herded into a large woolstore and finger-printed, "we were then forced physically, punches and blows delivered by nuns, to receive an apostolic blessing from Archbishop Redmond Prendiville, primate of Western Australia".

Gordon Grant's new home was Boys Town, Bindoon, run by the notorious Christian Brothers. Soon after his arrival, it was taken over by a new superior, Brother Paul Francis Keaney. He was a massive brute who bullied not only the boys but other members of his Order.

Keaney had one ambition — described by Gordon Grant as an obsession — which physically and emotionally wrecked the lives of many of his young charges. From the moment Keaney arrived at Bindoon all formal education stopped. Recreational activities were almost unknown and there was no social contact with other children or the local community. For two years Keaney used the boys as slave labour to erect five large buildings, including a technical college, a convent for the Benedictine Sisters and an administration block.

Safety regulations were flouted on the construction site, resulting in a number of boys being

seriously injured and maimed. Several who suffered serious head and spinal injuries are now invalid pensioners.

The boys were put under the "spiritual guidance" of the Benedictine Order which was based at a monastery 25 miles from Boys Town. One of the monks, Fr Eugene Perez, was a talented sculptor. His religious statues can still be seen at Bindoon. He was also a rampant paederast and must have seen his transfer to Boys Town as an answer to prayer.

Gordon Grant claims that a large number of boys were molested by the monk. His technique was to tell a boy that as he had no parents in Australia it was his duty to inform him of the facts of life. He recounted the occasion when he received a sex education lesson from Fr Perez.

"At the time we were erecting a statue to the blessed Virgin Mary on the wall of the convent of the Benedictine Sisters. He made the blatant action of grabbing me. My immediate reaction to this sexual assault was one of absolute shock and horror. I was very emotionally affected".

The Christian Brothers' reign of terror at Bindoon was financed by charitable donations.

A spokesman for the Order, which is based in Liverpool, commented on the allegations: "We are not in a position to say anything".

A Slight Hitch

An ecumenical service at Whitby Abbey in Yorkshire has been cancelled. It was to have been the main event in a festival marking the Dissolution of the Monasteries 450 years ago. An invitation to Princess Anne has been withdrawn.

The service on 29 June was intended to be one of reconciliation between Roman Catholics and Protestants. But after nearly two years of preparation, Catholics decided not to participate in the service.

The Rev Ben Hopkinson, Rector of Whitby Abbey, said he was put in the embarrassing position of informing Princess Anne's office that the service will not now take place. Commenting on Catholic withdrawal of support, he said: "I think there may have been fears on the part of Catholic authorities that the festival will be seen as a celebration, rather than a commemoration of what was a very nasty and shameful period in history".

An itinerant Protestant evangelist has been murdered by fellow-Christians in Mexico. Police say that Abelino Jerez Hernandez was chased and stoned by Catholic villagers. No arrests have been made.