

# The Freethinker

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## GULLIBLE CHRISTIANS: THERE'S ONE "BORN AGAIN" EVERY MINUTE

America's new wave of investment swindlers are raking in millions of dollars. And their clients have already been victims of one monumental confidence trick — Christianity.

A national survey organised by the North American Securities Administrators' Association and the Better Business Bureau has revealed that gullible Christians have been fleeced to the tune of over \$400 million during the last five years. The organisations' report, "Preying on the Faithful", shows that those who love Jesus have learnt nothing from the financial scandals involving leading televangelists a couple of years ago.

Announcing their findings, NASSA president John A. Baldwin commented: "Religious swindles are one of today's hottest tickets for investment con artists".

Investigators found that thousands of fundamentalist Christians have been hoodwinked by "false prophets of investment, self-proclaimed 'born again' financial planners and givers of 'divinely inspired' investment advice about coins, precious metals, real estate and oil wells".

The report gives many examples of how Christians who have long since abandoned their critical faculties are parted from their money. Praising the Lord for guiding them to an investors' paradise, they place their trust (and capital) in the sticky hands of Bible-quoting hustlers. One such operator, a Sunday school teacher, conned more than 600 of the faithful "who believed they were dealing with a man blessed by God with extraordinary business abilities". He is now behind bars.

The treasurer of a large church in Alabama, also now in the cooler, promised clients a huge return on their investment. He milked them of \$18 million.

"It was sort of comforting to see a Bible verse printed at the end of the monthly statements", said one blessed-assurance-Jesus-is-mine investor.

Investors were assured by an oil and gas drilling company that it would be guided by Old Testament prophecy when deciding where to drill in Israel. The company has been instructed not to make such promises in future.

The State of Idaho's finance department recently filed a civil lawsuit against another company, headed by Lawrence W. McGary, charging fraud and misrepresentation.

McGary sold partnership interests and promissory notes to fellow-members of a fundamentalist church. His prospectus is littered with Bible verses and references to divine inspiration. When the company bought a block of property, "we believe we were led by the Holy Spirit". And of an oil and gas development, the prospectus claims: "God is leading us to move ahead in this very area where no one else is interested".

In a separate investigation, the Better Business Bureau probed an institution known as the United Christian Church and Ministerial Association. Suspecting that the UCCMA was one of the many "ordination-by-post" rackets now flourishing in the United States, the Better Business Bureau submitted an application for ordination on behalf of one Teddy Calligan. The United Christian Church and Ministerial Association duly informed their client of his new status as a clergyman. The Better Business Bureau then revealed the identity of the applicant. Teddy Calligan is in fact a tom cat.

William McDonald, director of the California Department of Corporations, says that religious groups provide a perfect environment for the con artist. Even when fraud is discovered, many members refuse to believe it.

# The Freethinker

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# NEWS

## PUBLIC ORDER OR RELIGIOUS DISORDER?

Has the Archbishop of York taken leave of his senses? This query is prompted by Dr John Habgood's suggestion that a new Christian-Islamic working party might consider whether the Public Order Act "could have a category of incitement to religious hatred".

Now it is indisputable that religious hatred has been responsible for much of the crime inflicted on suffering humanity. Millions of the faithful have been vilified, persecuted and done to death because of their religion. What members of the working party (set up at a meeting in Lambeth Palace) must remember — even if they prefer others to forget — is that incitement to religious hatred and its bloody consequences have largely been the result of rivalry and disagreement among religionists. The most assiduous inciters of religious hatred have been the dedicated followers of one religion or another.

For more than a thousand years the Christian cross was a symbol of hatred and terror in Europe and wherever else it was planted. Christian hatred of other faiths has its roots in biblical teachings. Jews in particular have been on the receiving end of systematic persecution by the Christian churches, Roman Catholic and Protestant. At long last it is being acknowledged by some Christian leaders that the anti-Jewish sentiments fostered by their church paved the way for 19th and 20th-century pogroms, culminating in the Nazi "final solution" extermination programme.

Incitement to religious hatred was a key factor when popes and bishops persuaded hundreds of thousands to join the Crusades (also known as Campaigns of the Cross) against the Muslims. But perhaps it is indelicate to mention this black period in Christian history at a time when church leaders are so sensitive about wounded feelings among followers of an erstwhile false faith.

Religious hatred is not just a subject for the history books. Not a day passes without reports of religious mobs on the rampage in some part of the world, attacking and killing followers of other gods. And religious hatred is the driving force behind the violence that has torn Northern Ireland apart.

Even Britain is not unpolluted by the fundamentalism that breeds religious hatred. Roman Catholics and High Anglicans on pilgrimages to the shrine at Walsingham are increasingly being abused and insulted by Bible-brandishing fellow-Christians of extreme Protestant persuasion. And woe betide any Muslim who converts to Christianity.

# S AND NOTES

Religious hatred is ugly, dangerous and all too prevalent in contemporary society. If the Public Order Act is amended as the Archbishop of York suggests, the courts will be filled with followers of assorted gods, saviours and ayatollahs.

## GREEN CHRISTIANITY

Christopher Patten is the first Roman Catholic in the Cabinet since Norman St John-Stevas departed to the House of Lords in 1981. A product of St Benedict's School, Ealing, and Balliol College, Oxford, he served for a time on the committee of the Catholic Institute for International Relations. Recently promoted by Mrs Thatcher, Patten is ambitious, widely experienced and popular at Westminster. It has been suggested that he could become Britain's first Roman Catholic Prime Minister.

It is ironic that a Catholic should be appointed Secretary of State for the Environment. There is already a wide and increasing recognition that population growth poses the most serious challenge to the quality of life, particularly in underdeveloped countries. Yet the church of which our environment suprema is a loyal son denounces contraception, undermines birth control programmes and encourages excessive breeding.

It was much the same in 19th-century Britain where unchecked population growth, useful to Church and State for the supply of pew and cannon fodder respectively, was responsible for atrocious living conditions and blighted lives. Vast numbers of babies born in the "golden age" of Victorian values did not survive the ravages of disease, malnutrition and infanticide. Those who did, grew up in towns and cities where overcrowded slum dwellings and inadequate or non-existent drainage certainly did not make for a healthy environment.

It has not yet been claimed that Jesus was the greatest environmentalist of all time. But the churches have taken on a green tinge of late, vying with each other in expressing concern for "God's world". We welcome their new-found emphasis on the importance of this life which is far more realistic and humane than rabbiting on about "the life to come". But it should not be overlooked that as early advocates of family planning, unbelieving secularists were the forerunners of today's environmental movement.

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Medical advisers to the Vatican's Congregation for the Cause of Saints are considering convening a world congress on miracles.

## RESISTING THE CENSORS

It is small wonder that religious leaders, Christian and Islamic, endeavoured to persuade BBC Television that the transmission of Tony Harrison's *The Blasphemers' Banquet* should be "postponed" — another euphemism for censored. The programme's scenes of hysteria and fanaticism must have opened many eyes to the menace of religion and the threat it poses to freedom of expression. The presence of very young children at orgies of religious fervour, including self-infliction of wounds, was particularly nauseating.

Had the BBC capitulated and the programme not been shown as arranged, it is highly likely that zealots would have used the delay as an opportunity to harass and threaten the broadcasters. But, to its credit, the Corporation stood firm, rejecting impertinent demands that the excellent programme be postponed — in fact dropped.

If Roy Hattersley and the handful of Labour politicians who are presently salaaming to the mullahs over Salman Rushdie's novel watched Tony Harrison's programme, the fact may have registered that far more damage is being done to the Islamic faith by its book-burning, bookshop-bombing fundamentalists, than all the copies of *The Satanic Verses* ever printed.

Labour leader Neil Kinnock, who recently visited Salman Rushdie in hiding from potential assassins, has made it clear that he will have no truck with religious terrorists, even if it costs his party Muslim votes. There have been suggestions that Labour could lose up to ten seats at the next General Election if it does not support demands that *The Satanic Verses* is banned and blasphemy law extended to protect the Islamic faith. If the Labour Party loses seats through making a principled stand on this question, so be it. In fact it may do nothing of the kind, if the experience of Michael Hindley, Member of the European Parliament for Lancashire East, is anything to go by.

Mr Hindley, whose constituency has a very high concentration of Muslim voters, has written to the Committee Against Blasphemy Law about his recent election: "I openly campaigned on the Salman Rushdie issue by saying that Muslims should have equality before the law in this country, but that equality should be based on the abolition of blasphemy laws, not their extension. . .

"I put forward this view in entirely Muslim audiences and received applause and understanding, but not one sign of hostility or anger. The majority in Lancashire East went from 7,900 to 39,100".

Other Labour MPs, particularly Employment spokesman Michael Meacher, have been urging that plans to publish a paperback edition of *The Satanic*

*Verses* be abandoned in deference to religious sensibilities. A paperback would of course be less expensive than the original hard cover and consequently attract a wider readership, possibly including the Muslim on the Bradford omnibus.

Mr Meacher and his colleagues who oppose a paperback *Satanic Verses* are in tradition of censors who were prepared to turn Nelson's Eye to politically radical, religiously unorthodox, or sexually explicit material so long as it was published between expensive hard covers. Such work posed no threat while the readership was confined to the upper-crust of society. But when cheap editions became available to the lower orders, it was regarded as a threat and had to be suppressed. It might not be suitable, in the immortal words of Mervyn Griffiths-Jones, prosecuting counsel in the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* case, "for your wife or servants to read".

Those Labour politicians who are advocating book censorship — however they camouflage the rhetoric — should be reminded that freedom to publish was achieved at considerable sacrifice by past generations. Henry Hetherington, Richard Carlile, Francis Place, Matilda Roalfe and Charles Bradlaugh, together with hundreds of their brave helpers, courageously defied the secular and ecclesiastical authorities in defence of the written word and its dissemination. We must not now give way to the censors in Canterbury, Rome and Tehran.

## SCREEN FREETHINKER

The American actress Butterfly McQueen, who was at the Edinburgh Film Festival last month, is one of the few surviving cast members of *Gone With the Wind*. The famous Hollywood film comes back to the cinema, its Technicolour print refurbished, 50 years after it was made.

Miss McQueen played the part of Prissy, Scarlett O'Hara's maid. After a series of similar roles, she refused to play any more stereotyped black women. She left Hollywood and show business, in later years devoting much of her time to social work.

Next month the 78-year-old actress will be in Atlanta, Georgia, participating in events celebrating the 50th anniversary of *Gone With the Wind*. Miss McQueen will also be receiving a special recognition award at the 12th annual convention of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, of which she is a Life Member.

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The Victorian Society wants the removal of the Ecclesiastical Exemption under which churches are not liable to planning restrictions. A spokesman said that churches were "wreaking havoc on listed buildings".

## SUSAN'S "LIFE STYLE"

The appointment last month of a new editor for the *Havering Yellow Advertiser*, a local Freebie, went virtually unremarked save for an 11-line announcement in the paper itself. Yet 15 years ago Susan Kentish, described as a former Fleet Street journalist, was something of a national figure.

Michael Litchfield, a fellow journalist, joined forces with Kentish to write a lurid little book called *Babies for Burning*. This celebrated but fictitious sociological study had its genesis in a series of articles in the *News of the World* written by the same pair. The proof copy of the book is said to have inspired MP James White to put forward his anti-abortion Bill in 1975, and the paperback certainly became a handbook of the anti-abortion lobby in drumming up support for the Abortion (Amendment) Bill. It is still occasionally quoted.

One aim of the authors was to discredit pregnancy testing and abortion counselling services by declaring, for example, that seven samples of Litchfield's urine sent to seven agencies were all found positive whilst Kentish, pretending to be pregnant, talked doctors into offering her legal abortions. Included in the authors' "researches" were such reputable bodies as the British Pregnancy Advisory Service and Brook Advisory Centres.

But in the end it was the book's and the authors' credibility that bit the dust. Starting with a damning exposé in the *Sunday Times* headed "Abortion Horror Tales Revealed as Fantasies", and finishing, in 1982, with a High Court award of £7,000 ordinary damages plus £15,000 exemplary damages (plus costs) against the authors.

In the interim there had been, in 1978, on the eve of the British Pregnancy Advisory Services's libel action reaching the High Court, an apology and retraction to the charity. In 1980, £40,000 and costs were awarded to a pregnancy testing agency proprietor who was earlier forced out of business by the false allegations made against him, whilst in 1981 a Receiving Order was enforced against Kentish in Bankruptcy Proceedings.

When a critical review of *Babies for Burning* appeared in *The Freethinker*, solicitors acting for "the virginal and pristine young journalists", as they had been described, wrote to the editor and the reviewer. Nothing less than a retraction, an apology, and compensation would console Kentish and Litchfield "for the distress and embarrassment they have been caused". They are still waiting—unconsoled.

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.

# Divorce and the Clergy

DANIEL O'HARA

The General Synod of the Church of England recently passed a Measure which would have allowed (in special circumstances) the ordination to its ministry of both those divorced and remarried, and those married to divorced persons with a previous spouse still living. This break with the centuries-old traditions of the Established Church might have been seen as well within the range of other liberalising reforms introduced in recent years, and to put those seeking ordination on the same footing as those already ordained. After all, it was only a few years ago in 1981 that the Rt Revd Stephen Verney, then Suffragan Bishop of Repton and himself a widower, caused a minor flurry of interest and indignation in more conservative quarters by marrying a woman who had been divorced. They were not allowed to marry in an Anglican Church, but went through a marriage ceremony in a non-conformist church. At the time there were a few hysterical calls for Bishop Verney's resignation, but he had the full support of his Diocesan Bishop (Cyril Bowles of Derby) and the parade of hurt feelings soon subsided. Bishop Verney's case was not unique, so it was presumably felt in the corridors of ecclesiastical power that the position needed regularising.

The Clergy (Ordination) Measure would have given the Archbishops of Canterbury and York discretion to permit the ordination of those currently barred by Canon Law on the grounds that they themselves or their partners had offended against church discipline on marriage, the fiction being that, as Jesus had outlawed divorce, divorcees who remarry are living in sin!

Having passed through all its stages in the Synod, the Measure had still to be passed by both Houses of Parliament before it could become Law. In spite of strong opposition in the Lords (notably from Lord Denning, who at 90 has become decidedly less liberal on some issues at least than he was as Master of the Rolls), the Measure passed there, with Lord Hailsham being one of its strongest and less predictable supporters. The Archbishops had been anxious about the Measure's passage through the Lords, but seem to have assumed that its passage through the Commons would be a mere formality. How wrong they were! After a lengthy debate on the Antarctic Minerals Bill which went on into the small hours, the Clergy (Ordination) Measure finally came to the vote in the Lower House at 3.36 am on 18 July and was lost by 51 votes to 46.

A powerful opponent of the Measure in the Commons was John Selwyn Gummer, himself a member of the General Synod which had passed it. As he holds Cabinet Office, Mr Gummer had briefly to return to the back benches to launch his attack. A clergy son (his father, Canon Selwyn Gummer,

used to provide, for a fee, sermons to those of his brethren who lacked the time, intelligence or inclination to prepare their own), this notorious opponent of things liberal and humane presumably felt he was upholding the standards in which he was raised.

Editorial comment in both the secular and religious press was mixed. The *Daily Telegraph* upheld Parliament's right to veto Synod, and hinted darkly that the alternative for the Church of England might be "the cold winds of disestablishment" (19 July). This provoked a confused and petulant response from the Dean of Winchester, Trevor Beeson, who, on the one hand, felt that Establishment was a doubtful privilege for the Church, and on the other that Church and State should both be pushing hard "the Christian values, on which the best of our national life is based". The Dean is, of course, wrong on both counts. The Establishment of the Church of England is to its own inestimable benefit, and a millstone to the rest of us. Furthermore, "the best of our national life" has nothing whatever to do with the privilege, sycophancy, vanity and mendacity which are the principal hallmarks of the Established Church.

But back to the offending Measure. The hand-wringing of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the robust riposte of Lord Hailsham ("... a foolish decision. You can't test a man's vocation to become a priest by a majority in Parliament. It has to be done by the Church authorities") have not met with sympathy in all quarters. *Christian Week* was remarkably even-handed in its reporting of the affair. Its editorial recalled the case of a man who had left the Church of England and joined the United Reformed Church after himself having matrimonial difficulties with which he got "no support at all from his pastoral supervisors". But it then went on to deplore "the forces of secularism, materialism and humanism... making their presence felt in the ecclesiastical corridors of power" (sic!).

The same paper also carried in consecutive issues articles taking diametrically opposed views of the issue. John Gladwin argued that "the idea that only those who have kept their record clean are fit for the ministry is deeply false and damaging" (28 July). Gordon Wenham (4 August) was, however, not to be sidetracked by considerations of what might be charitable or humane, and stood by the Church's age-old illiberalism: "the proposed measure not only conflicts with the teaching of Jesus and Paul, but with the teaching and practice of the early church (which) understood that Jesus had taught that Christians should not remarry after divorce (and if they did) were usually excommunicated... sometimes for life". Not surprisingly, Mr Wenham goes on to

applaud Parliament for defeating the Measure.

What can secular humanists learn from all this? First, that the Church is as confused about its basic principles as ever it was, and as arbitrary in applying them. Secondly, that within the Church there are those who would like to make it more liberal and humane but they can be defeated at any time by appeal to ancient dogma and prejudice. Thirdly, that the Church contains enough conservative

elements able to appeal to dismal precedents that suit their cause to ensure that it will never change radically.

Only radical freethought, the throwing off of all arbitrary claims to authority based on alleged revelation, will help the cause of human progress, by dissolving factitious problems caused by the prior acceptance of irrational dogma, thereby setting us free to address the real problems of life.

## Ghetto Schools in Britain?

BARBARA SMOKER

Our perennial campaign for the abolition of church schools has escalated in urgency and importance over the decades — but never so rapidly as it has in the past eight months, as a consequence of the Rushdie affair, which has brought to the fore the demand of Muslims for their own State-subsidised schools, on a par with those of Christians. As this up-to-date survey reports, the Muslim (and other religious) schools controversy is now approaching crisis level in the major political parties — especially in the Labour Party, which it has split down the middle, torn between one principle and another and between principle and electoral expediency. This article will form part of a pamphlet with the same title, to be published by the National Secular Society on the 25th of this month.

The long-simmering demands by fundamentalist Muslims living in Britain for the public funding of their own religious schools, in line with those of the Anglicans and Catholics (and a handful of Methodist and Jewish schools) was fuelled first by the reactionary religious clauses of the Education Reform Act, 1988, with its new emphasis on Christian teaching and worship, and then by the late Ayatollah Khomeini's notorious death sentence on Salman Rushdie.

The simmer consequently came to the boil, and some of the more responsible newspapers — notably *The Times* and *Independent* — have woken up to the social harm that acceding to these demands would entail. The policy of the *Guardian*, on the other hand, seems to be divided — their editorials and articles coming down finally on the side of separate schools, while the letters editor appears to favour the secularist arguments. Letters on the subject went on appearing in the *Guardian*, day after day, from 22 July to 4 August, almost all of them on the secularist side.

The main argument used to back up the demand for Muslim (and other non-Christian) schools is the one of parity with Christians: as long as Christian sects are allowed their own State-aided schools, non-Christian religions should, on grounds of equity, be

given the same privilege. This argument is certainly difficult to brush aside unless one is campaigning at the same time (as the NSS and *The Freethinker* have always done) for the existing church schools to be phased out — but, even so, most of the applicant schools are (and are likely to be) far more discriminatory and socially divisive than the existing voluntary-aided schools.

This parity argument is closely paralleled by that used in support of the extension of the blasphemy law to non-Christian religions — and in both cases it is basically the argument that two (or more) wrongs somehow make a right.

The Archbishop of Canterbury and other leading members of the major Christian churches have given open support to both Muslim demands — for the extension of the protection of the blasphemy law to Islam (and other religions) and for Islamic (and other religious) schools to be given the public funding associated with voluntary-aided status — presumably preferring this to the logical alternative of losing these privileges for themselves. However, in his usual manner of attempting to have it both ways, Dr Runcie also preached (on 16 July) against religious bigotry and fundamentalism in general.

The Conservative Party has tended to warn the Muslims against extremism — for instance, on 4 July Mr John Patten (the Minister of State at the Home Office responsible for race relations) said that the Government felt it would be unwise to extend the blasphemy law to Islam ("To rule otherwise would be to chip away at the fundamental freedom on which our democracy is built"), and two weeks later he wrote a letter to the Advisory Council on Race Relations concerning the need for the Muslim community to integrate with the rest of society, warning that "one cannot be British on one's own exclusive terms, or on a selective basis". The second leader in the *Independent* of 20 July commented: "If Britain's more extreme Muslims ignore John Patten's advice and continue to adopt hardline positions, they are likely to turn educated, as well as popular, sentiment against them".

A few Conservative back-benchers, such as Harry Greenway and Rhodes Boysen, have gone against the Party line and backed the Muslim demands — but as they themselves are exponents of Christian fundamentalism, maintaining that everyone who disagrees with their theology is in error, their motive in wishing to sponsor the perpetuation of such error through their taxes is obviously more like that of the South African National Party's aim of ethnic "separate development" than that of genuine fellow feeling with the Muslim community or respect for their creed.

The Labour Party, though generally opposed to an extension of the blasphemy law, is split right down the middle on the issue of separate Muslim schools. Indeed, the denominational schools issue seems to have taken over from nuclear unilateralism as the current main divisive factor within the Party. On the one hand are those to whom sound educational principles and equal opportunities for girls are the most important factors in this debate; on the other hand are those to whom the overriding factor is "race relations" — which, in practice, inevitably means relations with the most vociferous extremists in an ethnic group.

On 16 March the education committee of the Labour-controlled Association of Metropolitan Authorities, in a unanimous resolution, urged its constituent local councils to oppose any attempt to set up, or accord voluntary-aided status to, Muslim or other new religious schools, declaring that publicly-funded schools should be "committed to equal opportunities on grounds of gender as well as race".

There was an immediate threat from Mr Ibrahim Hewitt, general secretary of the Islamia Schools Trust, which is seeking to establish a voluntary-aided Muslim primary school in Brent, north London: "The real effects of this decision", he said, "will be felt at the ballot box". And this was followed by an announcement that steps were being taken to set up a separate Muslim political party, with Muslim personal law on its agenda.

It is true, of course, that hitherto the Muslim vote has been almost entirely Labour and that in several marginal constituencies Labour MPs would have lost their seats in the last general election without the Muslim vote. But one or two of those most likely to lose their seats in that eventuality have nevertheless been brave enough to come out in favour of principle rather than expediency. The remainder, however, have taken the opposite view — and have unfortunately secured the support of the national Party.

Jack Straw and Derek Fatchett, Labour's education spokesmen, lost no time in distancing themselves from the resolution of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, and were very free with

their accusations of "racialism". As Ngaio Crequer commented in the *Independent*, "This is tantamount to saying you cannot discuss children's educational needs if it involves daring to question religious traditions".

On 13 July, the Labour Party's pledge of appeasement to the Muslim community was enshrined in an official policy document entitled "Multi-cultural Education". This states that "The right of a school to apply for voluntary status must be available to non-Christian denominations, such as Muslims and Orthodox Jews, as well as to Anglicans and Roman Catholics". It does go on to stipulate that "the exercise of the right must depend upon any applicant school meeting clear criteria about their educational standards and their ability to meet the requirements of a national curriculum" — but, as Mr Crequer pointed out in the above-mentioned article, "This is wanting the cake and eating it. It is also dishonest, because presumably Muslim schools could not adhere to such a stipulation and so could not receive voluntary-aided status". He might have added that if their standards are nevertheless accepted by the authorities, the consequence will be not only the public sponsorship of a fundamentalist medieval theology and of blatant sex discrimination, but a great explosion of similar applications — as the National Secular Society pointed out in a letter signed by 23 of its most distinguished members and supporters and published in the *Guardian* on 9 July, 1986.

But it took the ill-conceived Education Reform Act, 1988, together with the hysterical outbursts of the dying Ayatollah this year, to bring it to the forefront of public political debate.

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**An Early Day motion calling for the legalisation of euthanasia has been tabled by 15 Members of Parliament. John Oliver, general secretary of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, says that the purpose of the motion is to identify parliamentary supporters of euthanasia.**

#### **THE FREETHINKER**

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# Religion Rots Reason?

ERIC STOCKTON

Not all Christians are theological fundamentalists or Moral Majority-style reactionaries. The editor of *The Scottish Humanist* asserts that it is possible to work with liberal Christians without compromising secularist principles.

There is much going on among Christians that we should be careful not to misunderstand. The Reformation began the process of liberation from the presumed authority of the Church — effectively the presumed ascendancy over people's lives exercised by the self-authorising tendrils of Rome. This authority has been challenged by the supposition of prior biblical authority — meaning in practice the ascendancy over people's lives by the most determined and assiduous of the textmongers. But authority, once challenged, is weakened, and subsequent attempts to assert it are weaker than those they supersede. Such is the reality behind the recent reaction in religion — the rise of frenzied Bible-worship promoted by the modern means of mass communication. This development is a reactive threat both to the ultimate heirs to the reforming tradition — the secular humanists — and to its more immediate heirs, those Christians who think that their religion is of permanent value to humankind if only it can be freed from the ideological lumber that has accumulated over the centuries.

It is important not to overlook these liberal tendencies among Christians. A very good friend of mine — a lay preacher — told me that he and his local minister were doing their best to “de-mythologise Christianity”. To us secularists such a project seems like trying to re-write Robinson Crusoe without the desert island. Nevertheless, to those decent, conscientious people, it is a challenge that they could easily duck, but do not. I suggested to my friend “what you need is a second Reformation. The first one liberated you from Rome. . .”. He interrupted me, saying: “That would liberate us from the Bible”. He said it for me!

I have since heard him deliver a sermon in which he virtually told his congregation to take Paul's writings on such matters as politics and the status of women with a grain of salt. Some of his argument seemed flimsy to me, but at least he made an honest attempt to do what I am in no position to do — challenge dumb conformity from the pulpit. We disregard or undervalue such people at our peril. At best, they are possible allies; at worst they are a futile distraction from the business of promoting secularism. We serve no good purpose by treating them as enemies or fools.

The title of this article, without the question mark, was put forward some while ago as a campaign

slogan by members of a humanist group in the London area. Their intention was to use it on car-stickers and such things as part of a general publicity and recruiting exercise. The idea was not adopted by the group.

The incident is interesting as an occasion for considering what we think about the religions that trade in the current ideological market (not a false image considering the money involved and some of the people deploying it) and how we should conduct public work for the secular humanist causes. Two questions arose from the proposed use of the slogan: (1) is it true — or true enough to be worth amending or qualifying to make it approximate more closely to the truth; and (2) would its use as propaganda, supposing the answer to (1) is “yes”, be productive?

The short answer to (1) from the secular humanist point of view is plainly “yes”. The orthodox (with a small o) versions of the principal religions rest upon the unquestioning adherence to one or other set of dogmatic assertions from which all else follows more or less rationally. This is the only worthy role of reason in the orthodox religious scenarios. An essential of rationality — that a conclusion cannot be more dependable than the initial premises (except by the good luck of being right for the wrong reasons, which happens sometimes) is simply ignored by most ordinary believers. Indeed to mention it at all is to be accused of “undermining faith” — which of course is precisely what we should be doing except that we would call it “inviting people to think”.

But the role of reason in religious orthodoxy is not limited to deduction from reason-proofed assumptions; reason is forced into a false role too. This happens when the assumptions lead logically to conclusions that are either internally inconsistent or plainly at variance with general experience. Internal inconsistencies can often be ironed out by refining the assumptions with supplementary hypotheses. This is often absurdly contrived but, with a little perseverance and a lot of nerve, it can pass muster among the uncritical who, in any case, feel they “must believe something”. A clear example is the idea of an all-good, all-powerful god creating a world in which evil, as he is held to define the term, is perceived actually to exist. The supplementary hypotheses that purport to iron this one out are (1) we have free will and so can create evil and (2) the sufferings we endure are thus of our own making and are a deserved, and potentially educative, punishment for our abuse of free will. Such supplementary hypothesising is the corruption of reason — its “rotting” into “rationalisation”. Such gymnastics leads to many a tripping up over real facts. When a pure and dutiful wife contracts AIDS from her



promiscuous husband, and gives it to the foetus resulting from her obedience to that promiscuous husband, she might be thought, at a pinch, to be receiving punishment for some previous offence. The foetus has no imaginable free will to misuse, but is punished just the same and, indeed, its very innocence is held to be an absolute bar to killing it by termination of the pregnancy should such a course be considered. To resort to such "argument" is indeed to "rot reason".

The extraordinary attempts to square the manifest inconsistencies in the Bible, the elaborate pretences that it really says what it plainly does not, are examples of rotted reasoning striving to sustain the unsustainable assumption that the Bible has special authority as a source-book of goodness and wisdom. How anybody, who takes Romans 13, 1-6 as true, can claim to uphold democracy is quite beyond all comprehension; how the excuse, "Paul was a man of his time and place", squares with the assertion that the Bible is eternal truth is equally beyond comprehension.

The circular arguments commonly advanced for the Design Theory represent a rotting or degeneration of reason that is truly awful to contemplate. The (for example) moth's wing is proclaimed to be so perfectly adapted to its function that only a Divine Designer could have produced it and because of this Divine Design — therefore it must be perfect. This sort of thing, in less transparent form, is a commonplace of pious polemics. The notion that observation shows only that the moth's wing is evidently adequate for the moth's needs and is not self-evidently perfectly so adapted, is simply overlooked; to entertain this possibility is to "undermine faith". Indeed it is!

Unexamined assumptions, rationalisation, special pleading and circular argument are not the monopoly of religion. So while it is true that "religion rots reason", it is not the whole truth. Not a few secularists are equally at fault in these respects. Membership of the British Communist Party in its Stalinist phase convinced me, over thirty years ago, that the vices of religious thought can survive the extinction of "god" as surely as the legendary grin survived the Cheshire Cat. You don't have to be religious to have the intellectual dishonesty of religion.

So the slogan is true, but it is not the "whole truth". Stances, other than those normally termed "religious", can "rot reason". Is it then "nothing but the truth"? To attempt to answer that, one has to consider the real world — as always. Such consideration reveals that when we try to make progress on secular humanist issues we very often find ourselves allied with religious people of a liberal turn of mind — people who hope, and somehow think, that positive assumptions as to the supernatural are

necessary if ice is to be cut in the natural social world. These people are "religious" by any ordinary test, but they recognise that their religion is not fool-proof or villain-proof either. They try to stop the rotting of reason and they can sometimes succeed quite as well as can some secularists. We have practical aims in common with such people and, most important, we have enemies in common too — "fundamentalists" of every kind both religious and secular (although with the eclipse of mid-twentieth century "Marxism" and the rise of rave-up pieties, the religious sort present the greater current danger). It is not mere tactical opportunism for us to work with liberal believers; it is to reject self-satisfied sectarianism in ourselves and to get on with opposing real opponents with the help of real allies.

So the slogan "religion rots reason" had better be amended if we are not to make enemies of people who have it in them to be our friends. An amended form might be "religion, among other things, can and often does rot reason if its adherents are not careful". This is scarcely a slogan! A banner carrying that in reasonably large letters, would take a lot of people to carry it; a sticker so inscribed would need a long vehicle to stick it on! Who would read it? The fact is that slogans are no substitute for hard thought and patient work. The humanist group in question was right to disown the slogan "religion rots reason". It would only get a fair and intelligent hearing in a world where the rot had not yet set in. But in the real world it is a part-truth that can alienate our potential allies and be distorted to our discomfiture by the aggressively superstitious and the oppressively authoritarian — the common enemies of all who aspire to be effective liberal-minded human beings.

## Another Rebuke for LC

Lord Mackay, the Lord Chancellor, appears to be on the high road to perdition, at least in the eyes of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

Earlier this year he resigned from the church after being suspended as an elder for attending the funerals of two Roman Catholic judges. His latest enormity has convinced the Rev Donald McLeod, Clerk of the Free Presbyterian Synod, that their action was justified.

It seems that Lord Mackay hosted a prayer breakfast in Glasgow, which sounds innocent enough except that it was attended by two prominent Roman Catholics, Archbishop O'Brien and Bishop Conti. In doing so he broke two church rules: taking part in a service with Roman Catholics; and the use of bagpipes in worship. (There is no evidence that the Lord Chancellor actually played the bagpipes. But in Free Presbyterian circles, that is no excuse.)

Lord Mackay's suspension and later defection has split the Free Presbyterian Church.

**A MOTHER'S TALE**, by Victoria Gillick. Hodder & Stoughton, £2.95

If any reader of *The Freethinker* was under the impression that Christianity had much to do with charity or tolerance, this book by a Christian publicist, published under a Christian imprint, should certainly disabuse them. Mrs Gillick, Roman-Catholic-Mother-of-Ten, as is by now all too well known, has a long list of pet hates. These include liberals, humanists, feminists, birth controllers, all who believe in privacy and personal choice, Lady Brook, who, it is hinted, is discriminatory for encouraging black as well as white young women to use the group of birth control clinics for young people that she so heroically founded a quarter of a century ago; and a hapless former member of the Family Planning Association's staff, Rose Shapiro, who has contributed to *Marxism Today*, for which she is roundly denounced.

I too have contributed to *Marxism Today* in my time, so I suppose I am lucky to get away with simply having my name misspelt. But then I have also in my time contributed to the Right-wing *Spectator* so perhaps I deserve a few extra Brownie points. Even Cardinal Hume gets it in the neck for not offering Mrs Gillick's various campaigns sufficiently enthusiastic support. Indeed, acute embarrassment seems to have characterised his relationship with her. One even finds oneself having some sneaking sympathy for him.

Victoria Gillick writes in the gushing schoolgirl style reminiscent for those of us who are old enough to remember them, of the pre-war schoolgirl magazines. She harks back to a fantasy golden age, when children were innocent and pure, television did not exist, parents were in undisputed authority, people had not yet been corrupted by central heating, birth control and materialism, abortion was illegal (and caused large scale death and injury).

What is one to say of the morality of a religious activist who has no hesitation in telling the rest of the world what to do, while producing ten children during periods when, as she relates in this autobiography, her husband was sometimes without a job and the family were living on social security paid for out of taxes paid by Atheists and others who had irresponsibly restricted themselves to having only that number of children they could support themselves without excessive State or charitable handouts. After all, someone had to stay at home and look after the ten kids while Mrs Gillick was out and about preaching the word.

When her GP timidly enquired whether she might

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not like some contraceptive advice, she writes: "Insulted beyond words, I never risked going to see him again". However, despite being still in the child-bearing age group, Mrs Gillick has at last it seems stopped producing children, which might suggest that even the most lunatic Catholics draw the line somewhere. Perhaps, however, it is simply God acting in His usual mysterious way.

My favourite passage in this book is when the Gillicks go to the Palace when one of their children is receiving an award from the Prince of Wales: "Have you *really* got ten children?" he had then asked me, as he shook my already shaking hand. "Yes, indeed", I replied beaming from ear to ear. "No more on the way, I hope?" he added somewhat to my surprise". For having reproduced this exchange, Mrs Gillick must at least be credited with a sense of humour of sorts. This, and a remarkable flair for publicity which we might all envy and wish had been expended on a less discreditable cause, is about as much as can be said for *A Mother's Tale*.

MADELEINE SIMMS

**WILLIAM BLAKE: VISIONARY ANARCHIST**, by Peter Marshall. Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX, £2

What does one do with William Blake, the Romantic poet who sounds like a proto-hippy with his half-baked anarchy, free love and quirky Christianity? Blake's jog-trot verses with disturbing overtones are like Perrault interleaved with Nostradamus. Peter Marshall, however, brings a certain coherence to Blake's theories.

Blake lived through the Industrial Revolution and was briefly cheered by the political revolutions in America and France. A devout anarchist, Blake concluded from the evidence before him that, in Marshall's words, "conventional politics in the form of governments are a denial of life and an insuperable bar to human freedom". Authority in both politics and religion was the principal cause of evil. Even the libertarian possibilities of a parliamentary democracy did not impress Blake, as "all governments by their very nature perpetuate violence, disorder, and injustice". Marshall remarks somewhat glibly: "Blake was one of the first to recognise that war is the health of the State". Blake agreed with Godwin that there was no such thing as a legitimate social contract. All such contracts, together with religious and moral codes, were the "creation of the fallen mind". Blake dismissed the

# REVIEWS

very idea of law because no law could cover all individual circumstances; law was therefore inherently unjust and the cause of social disorder and moral chaos.

Blake's generalisations could have been based on totalitarian regimes of this century, where law has been put to every inhuman use and made to give a veneer of legitimacy to dictatorships. However, I find it hard to take seriously the argument that an absence of law is always preferable to an imperfect legal system. It is like solving one's spelling difficulties by abolishing the alphabet. Although Peter Marshall presents Blake's ideas lucidly and intelligently, he seems to be urging them as a valid system of thought, but finally they are not very convincing on that level. An absence of law, moral codes and social contracts, it seems to me, would simply create a vacuum into which something else would inevitably move. Empty spaces tend to attract things to fill them, and the first concern in getting rid of something, whether it's a legal system or an old fridge, is to be quite sure that what takes its place is going to be an improvement.

But Blake saw these social and moral institutions less in terms of consumer durables than of the Augean stables. The absence of existing systems was his system: he says "I must Create a System or be enslaved by another man's". His "system" was simply a free society, which he believed would eventually be realised. Far from being a gloomy fault-finder, Blake was apparently a cheerful man. "He is undoubtedly a visionary", says Marshall, "but he combines mysticism with social radicalism and common sense. He valued above all bread, music and the laughter of children". Blake anticipated Marx, Nietzsche, and Wilhelm Reich (to say nothing of Freud, whose teachings, according to Auden, were contained in Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*).

Peter Marshall has written an interesting little introduction to this one-of-a-kind poet and philosopher whose message is simple, Marshall assures us, in spite of the complicated and obscure mythological structure in which Blake expressed it. This is a valuable and accessible guide to the man who gave the Women's Institute its song and the film "Chariots of Fire" its title.

SARAH LAWSON

Christopher Hill's *History and the Present* (see next column) is obtainable from South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (£1.50).

# History and the Present

CHRISTOPHER HILL

This is an extract from the 1989 Conway Memorial Lecture, which was delivered at Conway Hall, London. Dr Christopher Hill is a distinguished historian and former Master of Balliol College, Oxford. He has published many highly acclaimed works and earlier this year received the W. H. Smith Award for his study of John Bunyan.

In my lifetime, there has been a re-evaluation of English history because England has ceased to be top nation. British freedom used to be seen as slowly broadening down from precedent to precedent until Parliamentary government reached its perfection, and history, in the immortal words of Sellar's and Yeatman's *1066 and all That*, came to a full stop. All that we had to do was to export the English constitution to lesser nations, and we should all live happily and peacefully ever after. Alas! But the emphasis continued to lie on constitutional history; on the history of "freedom", as it was called, as it is still called in the USA. From the Angles and Saxons in the forests of Germany, there had been something specifically "English" about liberty and constitutionalism, an idea which — against all rational probability — has recently been revived.

What I could never understand is what happened to all those free peoples who remained in the forests of Germany. Did they become Prussian Junkers? The free Anglo-Saxons brought with them to England lower classes known as boors, villeins, clowns, rascals. The meanings which these words have acquired today suggest that perhaps some free Anglo-Saxons were less free than others.

The idea that English history is uniquely different from that of the wicked "continong" does not bear serious examination. To resort to national character as an explanation means that you have no explanation: national character changes with history.

In the 1920s I had a political discussion with my bank manager uncle, in which my views so shocked him that he protested: "Surely you are patriotic enough to admit that the British Empire is the greatest force for good the world has ever known?" I replied, with teenage Whiggishness, that if it was true I hoped I should admit it whether patriotic or not; patriotism should not determine truth. There have been many worse institutions than the British Empire; but it is time we faced up to the fact that it was not an unqualified source of blessings for humanity.

The wealth of the first British Empire was very largely founded on slavery, of which we won a virtual world monopoly from the beginning of the 18th century. The labour of a slave in the West

Indies, said the economist Charles Davenant in the late 17th century, "is worth six times as much as the labour of an Englishman at home". Six times: it is quite a large figure if you think about it. "Worth", of course, means "worth to his employer or owner". No wonder the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, which owned slaves in the West Indies, did not wish *them* to be instructed in the principles of Christianity lest they get ideas above their station. The churches, and English liberal opinion generally, played a great part in the 19th century in getting slavery and the slave trade abolished; and all credit to them. But by that time there were economic as well as humanitarian arguments against it. And by that time the cancer of slavery had spread all over the world. We were not *exclusively* responsible for this, but we must bear primary responsibility.

The profits of the slave trade, and of slavery, contributed greatly to the accumulation of capital which made Britain the country of the first Industrial Revolution, and so consolidated her position as the greatest world power. Nor is this only a matter of economics: it affected culture too. That great historian Richard Pares, as he sat in the magnificent Codrington Library in Oxford, surrounded by a superb collection of books, used to reflect sorrowfully that it had all been paid for by slavery. The profits, and the human suffering, had been enormous. We shudder when we read that 20 per cent of the slaves shipped from Africa did not survive the middle passage: perhaps they were not the least fortunate. But there was a similar rate of mortality among seamen in the ships which transported the slaves. Comfortable profits were made even after these assets had been written off.

A state paper, possibly drafted by Milton in 1655, proclaimed the principle that "since God hath made of one blood all nations of men . . . on earth, . . . all great and extraordinary wrongs done to particular persons ought to be considered as in a manner done to all the rest of the human race". A good principle, if we had lived up to it. When we teach children about the wickedness of drug-trafficking, should we not remind them of the war which England fought in the mid-19th century to force the opium trade on China?

Have we come to grips with these horrors in our past, as German historians are trying to come to grips with Nazism? The presence of descendants of slaves in our country today, in large numbers, poses social problems. They come here because the economies of the West Indies have not recovered from the concentration on slave-grown crops to the detriment of other forms of economic activity. For this we are mainly responsible. Is this not something that a new curriculum might encourage children in British schools to think about?

Many messages of congratulation have been received by the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association on the occasion of its tenth anniversary. The Gay Humanist Group, the Association's original name, was founded in 1979, largely as a result of the successful prosecution for blasphemous libel brought against Gay News by Mary Whitehouse. In this article, the secretary of GALHA provides information about the organisation, and contends that the main opposition to both gay and humanist rights comes from the British "Moral Majority".

This year the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association celebrates its tenth anniversary. The only autonomous organisation for lesbian and gay humanists worldwide, GALHA has close ties (including overlapping membership) with other organisations in the British humanist movement. It is an associate member of the International Humanist and Ethical Union. Its president, Maureen Duffy, is also president of the Writers' Guild of Great Britain. GALHA has the support of many prominent humanists including Sir Hermann Bondi, Claire Rayner and Barbara Smoker who are on its panel of vice-presidents.

With members in many parts of the UK and abroad, GALHA provides a fellowship and voice for non-believers in the lesbian and gay community. Its principal aims are to promote an awareness and understanding of the humanist outlook in this community (particularly with regard to sexuality) and to campaign for lesbian and gay rights as human rights.

The affinity between homosexuals and humanists was pointed out in a *Freethinker* article written to mark the founding of GALHA in August 1979: "Traditionally, homosexuals and Humanists have been at odds with authority — the former because they have refused to conform to so-called norms dictated by Church and State, and the latter because of their constant challenge to irrational beliefs and the laws used to enforce them".

A few years previously, the author, barrister and MP, the late H. Montgomery Hyde, wrote: "My personal belief is that homosexuals' complete social acceptance here is only a matter of time . . . (and their love) may in the fullness of time come into its own without fear and without reproach as the expression of a satisfying and socially acceptable human relationship".

Not surprisingly, Dr Montgomery Hyde was a humanist and an Honorary Associate of the Rationalist Press Association. He supported the campaign for homosexual law reform leading to the 1967 Act (which provided only partial decriminalisation) and with fellow humanists became a

# Same Opposition

GEORGE BROADHEAD

sponsor of *Towards a Charter for Homosexual Rights* published by the Campaign for Reason in 1978.

However, the events of the past year or so show that despite the efforts of humanists and other rationally-minded people to help lesbians and gays make further progress towards legal equality and social acceptance, Dr Montgomery Hyde's optimistic prediction seems as far away as ever. In fact recent indications are that the population of this country as a whole is becoming increasingly intolerant where sexual morality is concerned.

The report, *British Social Attitudes*, published at the end of last year, revealed that more people are accepting the Bible-based Christian teaching on sexual morality, with hostility to sex outside marriage, including, of course, lesbian and gay sexual relationships.

The influence of the virulently anti-humanist British "Moral Majority" (composed mainly of Evangelical and High Church Christians) is growing, and it achieved some notable successes last year, especially in its campaign to get Clause 28 included in the Local Government Act.

The leading proponents of Clause 28 included Baroness Cox, Lord Halsbury and Dame Jill Knight, MP, all committed Christians and staunch supporters of "Moral Majority" pressure groups like the National Council for Christian Standards in Society. And these same people, together with the Bishop of London, succeeded in getting measures included in the Education Reform Act which aim to force schools to impose Christian worship on pupils.

It is clear, therefore, that the lesbian and gay movement and the humanist movement are confronted by the same opposition and that they both face an uphill task in the years ahead to defend hard-won rights, let alone achieve equality.

GALHA welcomes the support of Humanists, of whatever sexual orientation. It issues a lively quarterly mini-magazine free to members, arranges regular open meetings and social events at Conway Hall, London, as well as weekend events in various parts of the country. For brochure with membership details, write to: GALHA, 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth, Warwickshire, CV8 2HB or phone (0926) 58450.

## LETTERS

### THE RIGHT NOTE

Robin Wood (Humanism and Pop Music, August) should treat himself to the "Tarkus" LP by the (sadly defunct) Seventies supergroup, Emerson, Lake and Palmer, whose lyrics frequently attacked religion. People who "Kneel at the shrine, deceived by the wine" are asked "Can you believe God makes you breathe, why did he lose six million Jews" in an ostentatious quasi-hymn which finishes with the classic line, "You gotta believe in the human race".

Equally significant is Greg Lake's hit single, "I Believe in Father Christmas", which equates faith in JC with faith in Santa. This reached number two in the charts at Christmas '76, to the intense amusement of those of us who actually listened to the words!

MARK PALMER

### ORTHODOX AND OTHERWISE

Terry Sanderson's article, *Return of the Witch-Doctor* (August) fell short of *Freethinker* standards.

"Alternative medicine" is an unfortunate umbrella term which admittedly embraces dubious practices. But many doctors trained in orthodox medicine would not reject homeopathy, osteopathy or even acupuncture out of hand.

The credulity of some supporters of alternative medicine is matched by Terry Sanderson's credulity about the pharmaceutical industry. That industry is not so much in league with the medical profession as with the Government. It was recently reported that a majority of members of the Government Committee of the Safety of Medicines were sponsored by the drugs industry.

We now learn from Professor Lacey of Leeds University, a member of the Government Committee on Veterinary Safety, that the Government has suppressed the committee's criticism of the hormone BST treatment of cattle, and instead published a favourable report compiled by the Ministry of Agriculture and the drug manufacturers. While John Selwyn Gummer, Minister of Agriculture, is allowed to say that BST is perfectly safe, Professor Lacey is prevented (because he had to sign the Official Secrets Act) from explaining why it isn't.

KARL HEATH

### HOFFMAN AS SHYLOCK

It is true, as Peter Cotes says (*This Shylock Business*, August) that Dustin Hoffman is a film star. So were Fredric March, Henry Fonda and several other distinguished stage actors. Hoffman himself is not without stage credentials. He was playing in Beckett a quarter of a century ago. Recently he was a creditable Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*.

It is also true that he is an American. So was John Barrymore, considered to be the greatest Hamlet of his time. And Orson Wells, whose stunning Othello at the St James's Theatre in 1951 remains a brilliant milestone in my theatregoing memories. It is not unusual to damn Americans for playing Shakespeare. Beverley Baxter found Barrymore's Hamlet "for no logical reason" difficult to accept because his accent was not English.

It is the case too that many in the packed audiences at the Phoenix Theatre were there simply to see Hoffman in the flesh. Some might even have been able to echo the words of Toots Shor, the Broadway restaurateur, when he was taken to see *Hamlet*. During the interval he was heard to say that probably he was the

only guy present who didn't know how the play was going to end. But better bums on seats than closure at the end of the week.

Peter Cotes in rambling fashion quotes Chapman Cohen, James Agate and the theatre critic of the *Daily Telegraph*, but says little of Hoffman's performance other than that he "fails to dominate the proceedings". In my view Hoffman's style of playing was a refreshing contrast to the school of acting in which wooden sticks pose theatrically in mock Tudor costumes whilst declaiming the soliloquys in fluted voices. His Shylock was a man to be pitied rather than hated.

Mr Cotes sneeringly suggests that Hoffman is just a "kid from Brooklyn". Clearly he needs to do something about his critical faculties.

GEORGE STRANG

The reference in Peter Cotes's article to Ernest Milton "possessing books" should have been "possessing looks".—Editor.

### RELIGIOUS CONFORMITY

The recent declaration by Labour leader Neil Kinnock that he is an atheist is indeed a significant indication that at least outside of the Conservative Party, it is no longer necessary to submit to the blackmail of religious conformity in order to hold a public office in Britain.

Compare this to a 1987 Gallup poll in the United States which reported that the percentage of Americans that would not vote for a woman president was 12; for a Jewish president 6; for a black president 13; but for an atheist president 48. Is it any wonder that any serious contender for a public office in the United States declares "born again Christian" status, or at very least remains secretive and promotes the illusion of a deeply religious nature?

PETER R. SMITH

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The British Humanist Association plans to make a part-time appointment of someone (a) to tackle the heavy demand for funeral officiants in London by expanding the existing network; and (b) to take the first steps towards the long-term aim of extending the existing regional organisation outside London to become an effective national network. Initially for six months, it is hoped to extend the appointment to one year. The post will be based in London, and applications should reach the BHA by 23 September. Further information is obtainable from the BHA, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 5PG, telephone 01-937 2341 or Jane Wynne Willson, telephone 021-427 8995.

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Fr David Brown, chairman of the Glasgow Archdiocesan Youth Council, has condemned a plan to open a clinic at which young people would be given expert advice on contraception and abortion. Dr Elizabeth Wilson, of the Family Planning Clinic which is backing the scheme, says: "We want to create an attractive environment for teenagers to come for confidential help with their problems".

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Cedar Travel, a Worthing, Sussex, bus company which employs only Bible-carrying Christians, has been ordered by the traffic commissioners to cease operating because of poor maintenance.

## Spiritual Healer's Victims Win Court Case

An Australian judge has awarded substantial damages to three pupils of a psychic teacher to cover the costs of courses, medical bills and lost income. John Fitzsimmons, who ran a spiritualist group in Melbourne, told Judith Kelly, Reinhart Stratemayer and his wife that they could become psychic healers, be cured of illness and become more "spiritually aware".

Miss Kelly testified that Fitzsimmons assured her that undertaking one of his courses would cure her of asthma and dermatitis. Her hearing would also be improved. Under his direction, she went on a diet to lose weight, the purpose of which was "to enable her to run from the effects of a world catastrophe". She spent nine weeks, three of them in hospital, recovering from the effects of the diet.

Mr Stratemayer told the court he was promised by Fitzsimmons that a speech impediment would be cured and that there would be an improvement in his marriage. After the hearing, he said he felt too foolish to discuss the case.

## Freethinker Fund

Our front page report cites yet more examples of people's readiness to hand over their money to sanctimonious, Bible-quoting confidence tricksters. And it is not just Americans who are easily hoodwinked by holy hocus-pocus. A network of sects is flourishing in Britain, financed by those who have more money than sense.

*Freethinker* readers who contribute to the Fund are not promised dividends in this life or heavenly mansions in "the life to come". But they have the satisfaction of knowing that their donations promote "the best of causes", keeping in existence a journal that continues to wage war on religious superstition and irrationality.

The latest list of contributors is published below with much appreciation.

R. W. Simmonds, £1; J. Bridle, D. A. Hartley, C. Jones, P. Proctor, £2 each; J. B. Humphreys, £2.75; D. A. Langdown and J. M. Woodman, £2 each; R. Stratton, £4 and \$40; K. M. Barralet, F. Hiorth, F. Munniksma, D. A. Rickards and G. B. Stowell, £4.40 each; G. J. H. Forrest, £4.50; J. Barr, A. Chapman, R. J. Condon, L. Dubow, H. N. Feather, N. D. Haemmerle, K. Hudson, P. J. Kerr, L. Lewis, R. Lewis, C. J. MacDonald, P. Rowlandson, E. A. Whelan and R. J. Wood, £5 each; R. Huxtable and O. Thompson, £10 each; B. Aubrey, £15; G. H. Williams, £18; Anonymous, £110.

Total for July: £283.25 and \$40.

# OBITUARY

## Janis Delaurey

The totally unexpected death of Janis Delaurey at the age of 41 was a grievous blow to her family and a host of friends in the Brighton area. She was a warm, socially conscious person who lived life to the full, and the tributes from many quarters bore testimony to her capacity for friendship.

Janis Delaurey was involved in voluntary work from her teenage years when she was an active member of a local youth club. More recently she was absorbed in the work of various peace groups. One of the Greenham Common Women, she was arrested several times and spent seven days in Holloway Prison. But nothing deterred her when campaigning for a good cause, always with good humour and an infectious enthusiasm which inspired others.

She was closely associated with the Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, of which her father, Ron Delaurey, has been chairman for many years.

Janis Delaurey's funeral took place on the day the US Air Force started to remove Cruise missiles from Greenham Common. Her family was joined by a large number of friends at Brighton's Woodvale Crematorium where a secular committal ceremony took place.

## H. Montgomery Hyde

In a period spanning half a century, H. Montgomery Hyde, who died last month, published around 50 books on a wide range of subjects. He became a successful barrister and acknowledged expert on criminology and espionage.

Harford Montgomery Hyde was born in Belfast where his father was a magistrate. He was called to the Middle Temple in 1934, and practised on the North-Eastern circuit. He was commissioned in the Intelligence Corps in 1940.

After the war Montgomery Hyde became assistant editor of the Law Reports. He was elected Unionist MP for North Belfast in 1950 and held the seat with a five-figure majority. He was a member of the Howard League for Penal Reform and played a prominent role in the campaign to abolish capital punishment. A strong advocate of homosexual law reform, he urged the Government to accept the recommendations of the Wolfenden Report. His liberal views were anathema to the cretinous backwoodsman of Ulster Unionism, and he was "deselected" before the 1959 General Election.

H. Montgomery Hyde was an Honorary Associate of the Rationalist Press Association.

We regret to announce the death, at the age of 72, of veteran freethinker, Denis Campbell.

# EVENTS

**The Committee Against Blasphemy Law.** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Friday evening, 20 October. Public Meeting.

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** New Venture Theatre Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton. Sunday, 1 October, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. Nicolas Walter: The Rushdie Case and Blasphemy Law.

**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. Friday, 13 October, 7.30 pm. Barbara Smoker: Monks, Nuns and Their Sexuality.

**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, 3 October, 8 pm. Public Meeting.

**Leeds and District Humanist Group.** Swarthmore Institute, Swarthmore Square, Leeds. Monday, 9 October, 7.30 pm. Public Meeting. Speaker to be announced. Subject: Probation — How Effective?

**Lowisham Humanist Group.** Unitarian Meeting House, 42 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 28 September, 8 pm. Barbara Smoker: Melting Pot or Multi-Culture? Third World Fundamentalism in Britain.

**London Student Skeptics.** Room 3c, University of London Union, Gower Street (near Dillon's Bookshop), London WC1. Wednesday, 18 October, 7.30 pm. Bob Morris (Koestler Chair of Parapsychology, University of Edinburgh): Strategies for Faking Psychic Ability. Admission £1 (which includes one year's membership).

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

**Oxford Humanist Group.** Clarendon Press Centre, Walton Street, Oxford. Friday, 15 September, 7.30 pm. Nicolas Walter: The Rushdie Case and Blasphemy Law. Enquiries: Jean Woodman, Oxford 60520.

**Sutton Humanist Group.** Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 11 October, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. Anthony de Reuck: The Obsolescence of War.

**South Place Ethical Society.** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sundays: Lecture, 11 am; 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, 11 September, 7.45 pm for 8 pm. Public Meeting. Monday, 16 October, 7.30 pm. Human Rights Forum. Speakers from WHG, Amnesty International and National Council for Civil Liberties.

# Secularists Win Battle of the Cross

Secularists in the London Borough of Lewisham have won a minor but nevertheless significant battle against Christian privilege.

Following representations by members of the National Secular Society and Lewisham Humanist Group, the local Council has agreed to remove a huge brass cross from the chapel of the municipal crematorium. In its place will be a small portable one, which can be easily removed during a non-Christian funeral. Alternatively, it had been suggested that a set of curtains could be used to conceal the Christian symbol.

Since Lewisham Crematorium was opened in 1956, any non-Christian family who wanted the cross removed had to pay a surcharge. Between 1982 and 1988 the charge increased from £25 to £146. Repeated protests were made about the offending object which was so cumbersome that its removal and replacement required five men who were paid danger money!

In a letter to NSS president Barbara Smoker, who lives in the borough, Lewisham's Environmental

Health and Consumer Services Officer says the plan to provide curtains proved expensive and complicated.

"An alternative has been implemented which I am sure you will find at least as satisfactory. A new demountable cross has been purchased which will be positioned at the head of the catafalque for those who wish it, and can be removed completely from the crematorium for those who so prefer, in a matter of seconds. . .

"The large cross on the wall was removed this morning".

One reason for the delay in resolving this matter was that the ecclesiastical authorities had to be consulted as "there is a complication with Canon Law which binds the Council in some ways". The municipally-owned building, paid for out of the rates and fees collected from all sections of the community, was consecrated in accordance with Church of England rites. So it has taken seven years of wrangling and debate for the secularists' modest and justified request to be met.

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## New Laws Demanded Pilgrims in Trouble

Bashir Mann, leader of Scotland's 35,000 Muslims, has outlined Islamic demands for changes in British laws and customs. Interviewed by a Glasgow newspaper, he declared: "From the cradle to the grave, our life is governed by the injunctions of our religion".

This means, among other things, that Muslim men should be legally entitled to take up to four wives. Britain's divorce system is lengthy and expensive, whereas under Islamic law a simple public proclamation is sufficient.

Muslims also want the introduction of public holidays to mark the end of Ramadan and the commemoration of the sacrifice of Abraham.

Mr Mann demanded that Muslim children should be taught their own religion and culture in State schools.

"And since Islamic law is very clear on preventing boys and girls over the age of 12 from mixing, we would need separate schools for the girls", he added.

But Professor Ross Harper, president of the Law Society of Scotland, supported Home Office Minister John Patten's statement that a decision to participate in British life must be made on terms that are broadly acceptable to all.

"For laws to be successful, they must be uniform", said Professor Harper.

"Just look at British people living in Islamic countries where alcohol is forbidden. There is no law allowing them to drink".

A Tyneside coach driver is to seek substantial damages after being attacked by passengers he had driven to France. It was not lager, but communion wine louts who inflicted cracked ribs, a spleen injury, face cuts and bruises on driver Dave Thompson who ended up in hospital.

Mr Thompson was driving a party of Christians to the Catholic shrine at Lourdes when three pilgrims took part in two attacks on him. The French police were unable to initiate proceedings as the pilgrims had been taken back to Britain by another driver.

Mr Thompson's solicitor said: "It is a peculiar situation being beaten up by your own passengers. He has to get over the trauma and go back to work, facing being alone with passengers a long way from home".

Another party of Lourdes pilgrims experienced trouble of a different kind. Returning to Ireland, they were laid low by food poisoning. The coach was immediately diverted, not back to the healing waters of Lourdes, but to a Bristol hospital.

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A public appeal for £100,000 has been launched for repairs to two Norwich churches, St Augustine's (congregation of 50) and St George's (congregation of 12). The financial situation is rosier in the diocese of Oxford where a house with swimming pool has been acquired for a suffragan bishop at a cost of £500,000.