

# The Freethinker

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## RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISTS LEADING ATTACK ON FREEDOM

"It is the right of all human beings to come to terms with their own idea of God in their own way — including the idea that God does not exist — and to communicate those terms to others", declares the Campaign Against Censorship in its annual report. "That right is absolute and must not be yielded to accusations of bad taste, complaints of hurt feelings, or threats of physical violence", it adds.

The report says that until about a year ago, no one would have believed that religious freedom would become literally a life and death issue in the 1980s. Although in many ways the cases of Martin Scorsese's film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, are not comparable, the fact that one followed the other should clarify our thinking on the issues they have raised.

"Fundamentalist intolerance is not a monopoly of one country, one culture, or one faith. . .

"With the steady growth in numbers of those who choose to live their lives without the crutches of supernatural sanction or supernatural penalty, it is probably inevitable that the various kinds of faithful will start to cling together. There were Muslim demonstrators against *The Last Temptation of Christ*. There have been some equivocal statements (to say the least) from Christian leaders over *The Satanic Verses*. When *The Last Temptation* was released on video at the beginning of August, some rental chains declined to stock it, apparently in the belief that Christian protestors would take a cue from the Muslims and their premises might be at risk".

The attempt by Tony Benn, MP, to get blasphemy law abolished is welcomed.

Turning from what it describes as "fundamentalism in things of the spirit", the report asserts that "we also have to contend with fundamentalism in matters

of the flesh, otherwise known as anti-porn feminism.

"The parallel is instructive both ways. On the one hand fundamentalism is to religion as rape is to sex: 'do as I say or else'. On the other, feminism has bred its own fundamentalists who insist that there is only one 'right' way to think about sex and that is the way they think. It may be significant that a disproportionate number of 'anti-porn feminists' went to convent schools. Evidently the habit of being dogmatic about sex, once inculcated, will survive intact any changes in ideology".

During the year under review, films, books, art and libraries were all targets for would-be censors.

"Not for nothing was the entire September 1988 issue of *Index on Censorship* devoted to the UK", the report declares.

In the sphere of literary censorship, the Chatterley syndrome — "some things must be kept out of reach of people who can't afford hardback books" — is alive and well.

Art did not have a very good year, with an exhibition at Goldsmiths' College, London, being closed after a refusal to remove from it a portrait of a nude male.

There was also a move by "anti-porn feminists" to bring what the report describes as "their limited viewpoint and total lack of knowledge of the history of either obscenity or art to bear on pictures in art galleries as well as magazines. There is something grotesque about late 20th-century educated women parading the mentality of a Victorian policeman".

It was the year when the Broadcasting Standards Council appeared on the scene, and the Campaign Against Censorship "would like to see it disappear as soon as possible". This superfluous body is "potentially very dangerous". It should not be given

(continued on back page)

# The Freethinker

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# NEWS

## THE JESUS JUNKIES

Last month's March for Jesus Across the Nation was yet another gimmick to attract an indifferent public. The March in over 40 towns and cities was sponsored by the lucrative Jesus industry and groups of fundamentalist dinosaurs like Pioneer Trust ("committed to maintaining and promoting evangelical Christianity and upholding Biblical and traditional values").

Such events are, in part, desperate attempts to revive interest in a clapped-out religion. Like kerbside hucksters, evangelistic salesmen make grandiose claims for their shoddy articles of faith. But however the "born again" fraternity try to tart up "the old, old story", Christianity remains just another form of religious superstition.

One aim of the March for Jesus organisers is "to see Britain thoroughly evangelised by the year 2000". However, if the carryings-on witnessed by the present writer in Sheffield — and readers should appreciate the *Freethinker* editor's sufferings in the line of duty — are anything to go by, evangelising Britain by the year 2000 is a forlorn hope. It is hard to believe that "an explosion of faith" will result from phoney togetherness, slogan bawling and rendering of "with it", pop-style hymns by songsters of limited talent. Rather than gaining converts among the ungodly, the exercise must have caused thoughtful Christians to squirm.

This view is confirmed by a *Christian Week* reporter who was at the March for Jesus in Huddersfield. He wrote: "The worst part was undoubtedly the beginning when a landline linked local marches with central London.

"I squirmed with embarrassment at the banality of much of the material delivered from landline and local organisers alike. By the time we got to the 'Gimme a J; gimme an E; gimme an S. . . ' I was beginning to wish the earth would open up".

Participants were told to pray: "Where there is apathy, indifference and unbelief, Deliver us from evil". This will be understood to mean that those who are uninterested, critical or actively opposed to Christianity are "evil" — an expression much favoured by religious zealots like the Roman Inquisitors, the 17th-century witch hunters and most recently by Reaganite fundamentalists in the United States.

No doubt the majority of marchers for Jesus are easily manipulated, sheep-like groupies who dutifully turn up at revival rallies and crusade meetings. But



# S AND NOTES

a careful study of the printed programme reveals the names of individuals and organisations which have a "moral majority" ring to them. This is reinforced by exhortation to "pray for the Kingdom of God to be extended in education, medicine . . . and every part of the media". In practical terms this means intensification of religious indoctrination in schools, restriction on medical research, and censorship of the written and spoken word.

During the Seventies such events were organised by well-funded, reactionary elements in order to rally Christian fundamentalists for an onslaught against reforms that were won during the previous decade. Some organisations, like the Festival of Light, have changed their names; others like the Conservative Family Campaign have been formed. It would be a mistake to dismiss the March for Jesus circus as a bit of harmless fun.

## POTTY PILGRIMS

Another example of how religious beliefs can transform otherwise sensible people into credulous loonies comes from normally down-to-earth Lancashire.

A group of 26 pilgrims, led by Fr Leon Morris, of St Mary's Roman Catholic Church, Sabden, recently visited Medugorje, the village in Yugoslavia which has become a popular venue on the shrine circuit. Their stories make Billy Liar's tales seem the quintessence of unblemished truth.

Fr Morris, visiting Medugorje for the eighth time, has related how on the day they arrived, "some of the group went to the church to say the rosary. The rosaries of half a dozen of them turned to gold.

"They were amazed, and came to me almost white faced".

The off-white pilgrims then climbed a mountain and linked arms around a stone cross. Nothing remarkable happened; "we just felt this tremendous presence of Our Lady". Undeterred, they returned to the village where they were told about a marble statue of Our Lady in a courtyard.

Fr Morris says: "We saw the statue lift up its head, its eyes opened and it smiled at everyone. One of the lads in the group caught it on video".

On the return journey, some disgruntled pilgrims complained that their rosary beads had not turned to gold. But disappointment was soon banished by prayer. As their coach approached Sabden, more rosary beads changed to gold.

Fr Morris is thinking of chartering a plane for next year's pilgrimage to Medugorje.

## ISLAM AT THE BALLOT BOX

Formation of the Islamic Party of Britain may be no bad thing. Although it could score limited successes in local council elections, its chances of winning a significant number of parliamentary seats are dim. And, most importantly, it will divert fundamentalists up a political blind alley where they can do less damage than in the established parties, particularly the Labour Party.

The Islamic Party was launched at Regent's Park Mosque, London, by eight glum-faced men and, sitting at a respectful distance, two heavily-draped women (one of them a convert). It is led by Daud Musa Pidcock, another English convert, and the party aims to put into practice Islamic principles expounded in the Koran. Its main policy thrust will be on economic affairs.

Leaders of the Muslim community are not overjoyed by the Islamic Party's appearance on the scene. Dr Zaki Badawi, chairman of the Council of Imams and Mosques, has commented on the role of British and European converts. He said: "It is the converts who are taking the lead. Few have any roots in the community".

Another Muslim leader said: "It is not in the best interests of the Muslim community to have a segregated political party. . . I don't think they can become a substantial force. Not even many Muslims will vote for them".

One Birmingham Muslim said the Islamic Party would be the Screaming Lord Sutch party number two. The comparison is rather unfair to Screaming Lord Sutch. He and his Monster Raving Loony Party may be somewhat shaky on the workings of the economic system. But they are a wildly cheerful bunch who don't bomb bookshops or advocate the death penalty for blasphemy.

## GILLICK AND THE GREENS

The Green Party is in trouble with the breeding lobby. It wants the population of Britain reduced from 56 million to between 30 and 40 million, and aims to persuade couples not to have more than two children.

Victoria Gillick, secretary of the National Association of Catholic Families, has denounced the proposal as "wholly sick". She says the Greens have spoiled their chances "by aligning themselves with the population freaks". Unlike the career celibates who are constantly dispensing advice about parenthood, Mrs Gillick is a champion breeder (ten children so far).

A report to the Green Party conference in Wolverhampton last month described population growth as "probably the greatest long-term threat to ecological stability".

## TOLERANCE WITH REALISM

It was briefly reported in our August issue that a motion put to the annual general meeting of Birmingham Humanist Group that it should affiliate to the National Secular Society was defeated. Writing in the current issue of the Group's magazine, Danny Collman explains why he opposes affiliation.

He declares that "very few facts about the NSS were given at the meeting". His criticism may be justified, so perhaps members of Birmingham HG would be interested to know something of their city's tradition of secularist organisation and activity. As far back as 1822 there was a Thomas Paine club in Birmingham. The first secularist organisation was formed in 1854, and during the next few years Birmingham was the regional centre for Midlands groups. The *Secular Chronicle* (1872-79) was published in Birmingham. In 1885, for the first time, the National Secular Society held its first conference there, and did so again on at least seven occasions. There was a Birmingham branch of the NSS until the 1960s when national membership was introduced and local groups were invited to affiliate (around 20 have done so).

It was always the case that many secularists, usually in defence of their livelihood, were compelled because of Christian intolerance to conceal their views. So it is a neat distortion of fact when D. Collman informs Group members that unlike the British Humanist Association ("it has in its ranks many people whose views are distinctly different from the stated principles of Humanism"), the National Secular Society is "a group which defines itself by its lack of tolerance".

D. Collman goes on to say that "Humanism, as a way of life cannot, by definition, be 'anti' any belief system which gives succour, pleasure and hope to countless millions of people, and which improves the quality of life (as far as they are concerned) for so many". So it follows that the NSS is intolerant because it is openly "anti" the Roman Catholic Church's mischievous and often cruel social teachings; "anti" the hatemongering Protestantism of the Rev Ian Paisley; "anti" harmful sects like the Moonies and the Jesus Army; "anti" Islamic zealotry which inspires Allah's faithful to burn books, bomb bookshops and pass the death sentence on an author.

Snobbishness and ignorance of the National Secular Society's principles and history make some of its critics impervious to facts. But D. Collman should not describe as intolerance the impatience sometimes shown those who are sad cases of muddle-headed wimpery.

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**Unforeseen circumstances have forced psychics to cancel their convention in Hutchinson, Kansas. A 1909 city law forbids such gatherings.**

## AN ALARMING PROSPECT

The Free Church of Scotland is worried in case an atheist becomes Britain's next Prime Minister. In an editorial, the church's *Monthly Record* magazine says that if Labour leader Neil Kinnock takes up residence at 10 Downing Street he will lead or at least support an attack on biblical values presently enshrined in legislation.

The editorial pinpoints areas of the Christian lifestyle it regards as "particularly vulnerable" if Labour wins the next General Election. It claims that many in the Labour Party favour abortion on demand and advocate gay rights.

"Many favour a secular State where all religions are treated even-handedly", it adds.

The *Monthly Record* is not too keen on the present Government's defence of "our Christian heritage" either. But better the Tory devil you know, it concludes.

"The situation could get worse, and Christians will view the prospect of an atheist Prime Minister with forboding". Or as Hilaire Belloc advised the child: "Better keep a-hold of nurse, For fear of meeting something worse".

## ANOTHER VERSION OF THE "INFALLIBLE WORD"

Less than 20 years since the New English Bible was published, a revised version has appeared. A commission chaired by Lord Coggan, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, worked for 14 years to produce the Revised English Bible.

One purpose of the REB is to meet the need for a linguistic update of the text. Out go words like "thee" and "thou". Some passages have been altered to take on a "non-sexist" form.

The commission agreed to sanitise the new version in deference to the sensibilities of Uncle Sam Bowdler. The prudish faithful across the Atlantic regard the word "ass" as obscene, so it has been replaced by "donkey". In the Authorised Version, Jesus enters Jerusalem "sitting upon an ass, and a colt (both at the same time?) the foal of an ass". In the new version he is perched upon "a donkey's colt".

It was also felt that a section of Psalm 23 as it appears in the New English Bible could be misunderstood. "Thy staff and thy crook are my comfort" becomes "Your shepherd's staff and crook afford me comfort". Co-ordinating editor Roger Coleman explained: "We don't want people to equate 'crook' with a shady character". With headline-catching financial scandals involving the Vatican Bank and America's televangelist con artists, such caution is commendable.



# The Innocent Face of Superstition

R. W. MORRELL

Some Christian groups are denouncing the fun and games taking place at Hallowe'en. In particular, pressure is being exerted to banish such "pagan activities" from the classroom.

I recently came across a collection of press cuttings reporting the reaction of some Christian groups and individuals to the celebration of Hallowe'en. Although the tradition goes back many centuries, it appears that alarm bells have been sounding in certain Christian quarters because the event has become popular amongst supporters of occult practices. According to the Evangelical Alliance, an organisation said to have over a million members and which is headed by an Anglican bishop, Hallowe'en is "the innocent face of superstition and occultism", a time when "witches, devil worshippers and other occult followers" are active.

Not all Christians seem to have been persuaded by such warnings, for another cutting gives details of the unholy row which broke out among members of a church at Blackbraes, in Stirlingshire, where the minister, the Rev John Patterson, held a Hallowe'en party for his Sunday School pupils. Irate church members ganged up with the Sunday School superintendent and the editor of the church magazine to protest about the event on the grounds of Hallowe'en being a totally pagan festival. "If you believe in the Lord", said one mother who had refused to allow her two children to participate, "you should have nothing to do with anything which worships the devil and glorifies Satan". Mr Patterson, however, brushed the protests aside, informing his critics there would be another Hallowe'en party next year.

The Association of Christian Teachers has taken a similar stand to that of the Evangelical Alliance, but following adverse publicity arising from their protests in previous years, has adopted a less strident approach. As part of a campaign designed to influence teachers, ACT have published a booklet entitled *Hallowe'en in Schools?*, in which the author, Margaret Cooling, though reluctantly acknowledging Hallowe'en to be a theme teachers have found helpful in stimulating pupils' artistic efforts, considers the subject to do more harm than good. "In an ever expanding curriculum", she writes, "Hallowe'en takes up valuable time, and there are other more central subjects worthy of study". This may be true, depending upon what these subjects are, though if pressure on available time is so great, any subject included in a school curriculum must be assessed for inclusion in terms of its educational value.

Margaret Cooling indulges in special pleading for religious studies in general and Christianity in particular, wishing to see it incorporated into the content matter of many subjects. In claiming that Hallowe'en takes up valuable time which could be put to better use, one wonders why she remains pointedly silent when it comes to the inordinate amount of time devoted by teachers and pupils in many schools to rehearsing for carol concerts and nativity plays when Christmas approaches.

If Margaret Cooling is a teacher, she must know that, unlike work preparing for Christmas, no art work involving Hallowe'en takes place outside the time allocated in the average school to art, so there is no pressure on the curriculum. Her claim, then, is a red herring which teachers will soon recognise as being designed to deflect attention away from ACT wishing to see a great deal more time devoted directly or otherwise to the promotion of religion in schools.

Presumably to give greater weight to her dislike of Hallowe'en, Cooling claims it worries some pupils, with its "emphasis on witches, monsters and evil" and creates "unnecessary fear" in those of a sensitive nature. As no evidence is offered in support of this assertion, it is not unreasonable to infer from the omission a desire to avoid discussing the fear generated by her own religious beliefs. The employment of the term "unnecessary fear" indicates she is fully aware of it doing this, but to have acknowledged the fact in an unambiguous manner would cut away one of the main props supporting her argument against Hallowe'en. Margaret Cooling is a committed, and perhaps university-educated Christian, so I would expect her to have been familiar with the role fear plays in her own cult, though I suppose it would have been expecting too much to ask her to admit this fact, or ACT to publish such an admission. However, it is frankly dishonest of her when discussing Christianity and children's fears not to introduce the Christian doctrine of hell, if only to attempt to show how this would not influence sensitive children while the activities of witches does. Surely the pious Margaret Cooling and her colleagues in ACT are not claiming they have never seen an evangelical tract on the reality of hell, which graphically describes the torments awaiting there for those, including small children, who do not toe the Christian line. Is she seriously suggesting the teaching of this should be promoted in schools?

What became Hallowe'en had its origin in the ancient belief amongst the people of northern Europe that the sun died during the late part of the year and magical rites were required to revive it.

Central to the rituals to bring about the re-birth of the sun was the lighting of huge bonfires; as fire was considered to be a purifying agency, various concepts relating to it being able to destroy evil and malignant influences also became part of the beliefs associated with the festival the Celts called Samhuin or Samhain, meaning fire of peace. This festival, under its Celtic name, has been revived as one of the major "holy days" celebrated by contemporary self-styled neo-pagans and witches, who revel in the ignorance of the past as though this represented some sort of wisdom. In doing this they have turned what had become little more than an excuse for a children's party into a religious occasion and in the process thoroughly alarmed many Christians. Naturally our latter-day pagans play down the fact they are promoting beliefs based upon ignorance of the operation of natural phenomena, nor do they stress the fact that the ancient Celts used human sacrifices in their Samhuin rituals.

From almost its inception, the Christian cult indulged in the practice of adopting and adapting a great many of the beliefs and rituals of their rivals, including the pagan deities. Thus, for example, the Celtic fire goddess Bride/Bright became St Bride. Bishops encouraged the construction of churches on pagan holy sites or existing structures were adapted for Christian use. Pagan festivals and holy days did not escape, and a great many joined the Christian catalogue of acquisitions. Naturally Samhuin was included, largely because the Celts refused to give it up. Consequently the festival was clothed in Christian garments, but the religious rites in their Christian form were celebrated the day after a now secularised Samhuin.

Of course, long after Samhuin was secularised people probably continued to practice the ancient religious rituals and maybe passed the knowledge on to the young. But inevitably the knowledge was lost with the passage of centuries, and what were once serious religious beliefs became little more than popular superstitions.

Until relatively recently, Hallowe'en remained a popular celebration in many parts of the country. In the Scottish Highlands it was a common practice for youths carrying torches lit from the bonfires to run around field boundaries and the homes of women in child, great care being exercised to ensure the torch was carried in the right hand and running was from right to left. The origin of this practice is to be found in pagan fertility rituals, as is that of another practice: surrounding the houses of women in child, or where unbaptised infants lived, in order to prevent the infants being snatched by fairies or little people, who were also thought to leave their own ugly and deformed children in the place of the children they took. It was this tradition that lay behind the barbarous practice of burning the toes of

ugly or deformed infants who might be changelings. In some places the effigy of an old hag was burned on the bonfire, and while this act may be suggestive of having originated during the witch-hunting mania of the 16th and 17th centuries, or was a residual memory of the pagan practice of symbolically destroying the malevolent forces with which a community had had to contend over the past year, there is also the possibility of it being a relic of the Celtic practice of human sacrifice. Another feature of the Hallowe'en celebrations was the consumption of prodigious amounts of apples and nuts, which in some parts of the north of England led to it being called Nutcrack Night. In parts of Lancashire it was also called Teanday, a corruption of the Celtic word *tan* or *teindh*, meaning fire or light.

As already stated, the Evangelical Alliance associates witchcraft and devil worship with Hallowe'en. This claim is strenuously disputed by those who describe themselves as witches, and with equal vigour they deny even believing in the devil much less worshipping him. This was put plainly by Dr Leo Louis Martello in his book, *Witchcraft, The Old Religion*. "I am a Witch", writes Dr Martello. "I don't believe in the Christian devil or hell or their heaven. I certainly don't worship Satan, I don't desecrate churches or graveyards, as my religion respects those who have passed on and we honour them on Hallowe'en".

The modern witch cult was produced by the late Gerald Gardner, who outlined its doctrines in his book, *Witchcraft Today*, first published in 1954, three years after the Witchcraft Act was repealed. He claimed his cult had its roots in pre-Christian religious ideas and had survived centuries of Christian persecution. Historical facts do not support his thesis, even if it can be shown that paganism survived far longer as an active religious force than Christian history suggests. The infamous witch-hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries were a product of the sick minds of eminent theologians, motivated by political as well as religious considerations. They were faced with growing doubts about the value of their cult, and as this was allied with the political structure of Europe, anyone who questioned Christianity was seen as an enemy of both Church and State. To maintain the *status quo*, methods were employed which generated fear and produced victims whose fate was a public example to others of what would happen when authority was questioned.

Atheism was associated with witchcraft as being an end product of the work of the devil. However, the Christian inquisitors were unable to locate many atheists, not because they were lax in seeking them out, but because unbelievers used their intelligence to protect themselves. This is acknowledged by Nicolas Remy (1530-1612), who was responsible for



## Progress in Scotland

At this year's Scottish Humanist Council conference a new draft constitution was discussed and its framework given approval. The present constitution of the Council limits membership to 12 (four each from the Glasgow and Edinburgh groups and four elected at the annual conference).

For some time there has been a general feeling that humanists in Scotland who live outside cities and towns are at a disadvantage. The only national organisations open to them are London-based. Under the new SHC constitution, membership would be open to all humanists living in Scotland and groups could affiliate. It is expected that with an extended membership, the Council's name would be changed.

The Council is seeking the views of Scottish humanists about these proposals. These should be received not later than 31 October by Robin Wood, honorary secretary, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire, KA3 2DJ.

The latest — and excellent — issue of *Scottish Humanist* contains a selection of articles, reviews and reports that will be of much interest to readers, Scottish and Sassenach alike. It is now being published quarterly and a snip at £2 for four issues. *Scottish Humanist* is edited by the tireless Eric Stockton, of West Cott, Sanday, Orkney. He will be pleased to receive enquiries and subscriptions.

## Court Warning

Ismail Demir, described as a devout Muslim, has been ordered to pay £887 in fines, costs and compensation by Pontefract magistrates.

Prosecuting counsel Vivienne Welsh told the court that Demir, who is married with five children, attacked his pregnant girl friend, Carole Stevenson, as they watched a television documentary on *The Satanic Verses*. When she started asking questions about the book, Demir punched her in the mouth and stomach. She fell to the floor, and when her mother intervened, she was also assaulted.

Mrs Doreen Hoyle, chairman of the bench, told Demir: "This is not the first time you have used violence. The court will not tolerate this kind of behaviour".

The court ordered an investigation into the information given by Demir on a legal aid application form. He is the owner of four takeaway food shops.

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At a conference in Paris, Turin Shroud devotees have concluded that the truth about the holy relic has not been established. Three hundred shroudies spent two days solemnly discussing the piece of cloth in which they believe Christ's body was wrapped. Carbon-dating tests have shown that the image on the cloth is a forgery dating from the 13th or 14th century.

the deaths of over five hundred people accused of witchcraft in a 15-year period. Remy wrote that the number of atheists in his day had "reached a figure that is not easily creditable", but "because they brood in silence over their blasphemies and, hiding behind the cover of whatever form of religion come to their hand, escape detection and accusation".

Although the witch hunting mania has long since ended, partly due to increased scientific knowledge and partly because so many people, Christians included, have become thoroughly sickened by the witch-hunters' activities. But their successors are still with us. These people firmly believe in witchcraft and are quick to quote the identical biblical texts Remy did. We may laugh at the antics and indignation of bodies such as the Evangelical Alliance, the Association of Christian Teachers, itinerant street preachers and American televangelists when they rant and rage about Hallowe'en. However, they represent the only group within the Christian cult now attracting substantially increased support and considerable financial backing from certain rather sinister sources. To dismiss them and their views is to turn a blind eye at the successes they have achieved in recent years. For example, commenting upon the changes made to the recent Education Reform Act, the Anglican Bishop of London, Dr Graham Leonard, said these amounted to "a considerable coup", that would "probably not have been possible had a group of fundamentalists not been demanding that recognition should be accorded to Christianity alone". No longer, gloated Dr Leonard, would all religions be treated as being of equal validity in the classroom. "Children will be taught that Christianity is our faith".

In the Britain of 1989, religious indoctrination introduced by law into State schools under the 1944 Education Act has been reinforced by making this openly Christian indoctrination. Evangelical fundamentalists, the Christian equivalent of the Iranian religious bigots, instigated the campaign to bring this about. Can we ever be sure that given more power the Christian fanatics would not take action to curb through further legislation any criticism of their cult? They are already complaining that the existing law against blasphemy is no longer adequate and requires extending to protect other faiths, except, one assumes, the beliefs and practices of our latter-day witches and neo-pagans.

### BOOKS MENTIONED

- Highland Superstitions*, by A. MacGregor, Stirling, 1901.
- Earth Rites*, by J. and C. Bord, London, 1982.
- The Book of Days, Vol 2*, R. Chambers, Ed, London, 1864.
- The Winter Solstice*, by Shirley Toulson, London, 1981.
- Demonolatry*, M. Summers, Ed, London, 1930.

# Paul Thiry d'Holbach, Baron de Hesse et de Leande (1725-1789)

H. J. BLACKHAM

This year marks the 200th anniversary of Paul Thiry d'Holbach's death. He was a vigorous pamphleteer, uncompromising in his hostility to Christianity and its institutions.

The Baron, of German lineage but a naturalised Frenchman, is generally thought of as a wealthy man who played host to the *philosophes*. He was that, and much more. Even Horace Walpole, not well disposed, called him "the host of Europe". Not only the home of his coterie of radical thinkers, his house was the noted meeting place of Europe's intelligentsia when they happened to be in Paris. Thus there are reports from Gibbon, Laurence Sterne, Walpole, and of course Hume, and many others. It was a place where fruitful acquaintances were made. A unique masculine salon, there were regular dinners there each week on Thursdays and Sundays, when from 10 to 20 men of parts would engage in "the freest, most animated and most instructive conversation that ever was", at table and after for some six hours.

No mere patron, he was personally the most engaged of militant freethinkers. His prolific propagandist output under cover of many pseudonyms, to enable him to continue his campaign, earned him such nicknames as "the Parson of Atheists", the "Personal Enemy of God", and by a modern writer, "a paladin of atheism". He contributed more than a thousand articles to Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, on chemistry, metallurgy, and other technical subjects, but also on religious and political topics. Three of the most trenchant, *Prêtres, Théocratie, Représentants*, attributed to Diderot, have recently been identified as his.

The *System of Nature*, reputedly his principal work, serves his driving purpose less than his *Social System* and *Universal Morality*, but it is the necessary foundation of his moral and political contentions. It is an exposition of materialism that goes back to the Greek Atomists, and, unlike Descartes, takes movement as an original property of matter, which is not inert. In this, he seems to have been influenced by Toland, the first of the radical Deists in print in English, who took it from the materialist tradition established by the pre-Socratic Greeks. This book, on which his public reputation was founded, is generally regarded in its style as prolix and tedious, a "grey" discourse. Prolific he was, but did not have the flare of a Paine or a Rousseau to catch the world's ear. All the same, there are many passages of lucid and persuasive analysis in the book, parti-

cularly where he is exposing the anthropomorphism of our reading of Nature, which we alone invest with "order" and "purpose". He had the highest regard for Hume as a supreme philosopher.

d'Holbach's analysis undermines fundamentally and fatally the possibility of natural religion, a cherished enterprise of those in the 18th century who were not happy with Biblical Revelation; like Voltaire, who, alarmed and antagonised by d'Holbach's book, was at pains to castigate it in his *Philosophical Dictionary*. The teaching which d'Holbach found necessary for the salvation of humanity, atheism. Voltaire was sure would be the ruin of society. He was profoundly convinced that belief in God is necessary, that it cannot be rationally denied, and that it is needed as the only effective sanction of society. d'Holbach's base is that religion in general and Christianity in particular have been used systematically to deceive and degrade humanity. Imposters — priests and their tools, kings — have promoted and used superstitious beliefs and fears to take away individual independence, dignity and responsibility. These essential human attributes have to be restored, which can be done only by wiping out religion by exposing its nefarious work of deception and exploitation.

d'Holbach owned a well-stocked library. His reading was wide, and he had a ready understanding and a retentive memory. He was not a scientist nor a philosopher. Like Epicurus, he used a scientific theory or assumption as the basis for his outlook and activity, in his case a social campaign to undermine and overthrow religion. Thus, those who think of him as scientist or philosopher, have reason to find fault. A modern French historian of philosophy concludes that he confused the useful and the true, using atheism as a tool. Criticism on this line amounts to accusation of dogmatism and intolerance to the point of bigotry in unbelief. This is the Freethinker's dilemma, to be constrained to carry Freethought to the point when it is no longer free thought. Hume could be the model sceptic, just because he did not make a cause of it.

d'Holbach's escape from the dilemma, which is indeed a serious one for Freethinkers, can be construed on these lines. The animus which makes the dogmatic propagandist in this cause is not against religious ideas as ideas; it is political, rather than ideological, against those who in order to dominate and rule have exploited these ideas to deceive, subject, and degrade the mass; so that they have to be



exposed and opposed. The cause of Freethought is then the demand that thought shall be free, not an instrument of State. On those conditions, let people believe what they will and learn what they can. Education, not indoctrination, and moral and political truths will sooner or later benefit all, like the natural sciences. They will meet with violent opposition, till experience teaches that they bring only blessings.

His mode of argument can be seen briefly in the three articles in the *Encyclopédie*, that have been mentioned. In *Prêtres*, he begins by saying it is sweet to dominate one's fellows, and goes on to show how surely and completely it can be done by the exploitation of religious beliefs and fears, the mechanism by which the authority and power of the State can pass into the hands of priests. He picks the most lurid cases in Egypt or the Aztecs; and then under medieval Popes. Having made his point in the scheme of the exposure, he can end: "It is not like this in countries enlightened by reason and philosophy; the priest there never forgets that he is a man, a subject, and a citizen". Readers can judge the reality of that for themselves. That is how the

*Encyclopédie* got past the censor, by fits and starts, and did its work of enlightenment.

On Theocracy, he takes the Pentateuch, with Moses as the mouthpiece of the Lord. When the Children of Israel demand a ruler of their own, a king, they are told they can have one, and it will be the worse for them; the consequences are foretold (I Sam, viii, 9). God-rule and King-rule have specifiable consequences. *Représentants* is designed to show that the public interest is constituted and served only when all the corporate interests in the State are fairly represented in the law-making assembly, and are kept in balance.

d'Holbach is to be recognised, remembered, and honoured as the archetypal Freethinker, more than any of the other *philosophes* or of the Utilitarians who were their English heirs. His honesty, fearless outspokenness, and single-minded dedication to the cause makes him so. An added note of interest is that John Wilkes and d'Holbach were students together at the University of Leyden, and remained friends. The *philosophes* made much of him. *The System of Nature* (1770) was translated into English, and reached a third edition in 1817.

## Alternative Medicine: the Importance of Choice

KEITH PORTEOUS WOOD

Terry Sanderson's "Return of the Witch-Doctor" (August *Freethinker*) justifiably drew attention to the dangers of alternative practitioners without medical training not recognising serious illness that may require more orthodox treatment. I believe there should be a minimum standard of medical training for such practitioners who, having satisfied the criteria, should be registered. Only those so registered and agreeing to a code of practice should be permitted to practise. Those breaking the code should be liable to expulsion.

Having had extensive personal experience of both, I totally disagree with Terry Sanderson's analysis of homoeopathy and osteopathy. No belief is necessary in any supernatural force in order to benefit from either. I therefore don't need external assurance, but if I did, I would find homoeopathy's wide recognition, including by the NHS, France — most pharmacies there offer remedies under both systems — and possibly even the Royal Family somewhat more compelling than Terry Sanderson's doubt.

These doubts appear to be based on their inability to compete in the conventional double-blind tests and there being no scientific explanation yet of its principles. These are basically that "like cures like" and that extreme serial dilution accompanied by violent mixing enhances the effectiveness of the remedy. The first principle is by far the most impor-

tant — some remedies are given in undiluted form and are effective too. The "like cures like" was also practised by the Ancient Greeks. Some remedies have also been used in conventional medicine, for example Cinchona bark (containing quinine) for malaria.

The reason that double-blind tests are inapplicable to homoeopathy is that the whole person is treated and that two people with the same complaints but with different medical histories may be treated with different remedies. Non "anecdotal" evidence of its effectiveness was in the unusual or perhaps unique situation of a homoeopathic hospital being used in an epidemic. During an outbreak of cholera in 1854, the Royal London Homoeopathic Hospital's patients mortality rate was 16.4 per cent compared with other hospitals of 51.8 per cent (*Samuel Hahnemann*, by Trevor Cook/Thorsons 1981). Significantly, attempts were made by the mainstream medical profession to suppress this information.

Science is no stranger to effects being observed before explanations are found — is there perhaps some similarity too in this respect to catalysis?

I refute the "placebo" argument — homoeopathy is used effectively with both children and animals. In some of the diseases that Terry Sanderson suggested

(continued on page 157)

**THE DIVINE SUPERMARKET**, by Malise Ruthven.  
Chatto & Windus, £14.95

Buy a huge second-hand motor caravan, travel 10,000 miles around the United States of America, and write a book about it with an uninformative title, *The Divine Supermarket*. Prospective readers might well fear something trivial and superficial. They would be quite wrong. Despite the author's modest disclaimer ("This is an impressionist, not a scholarly work"), it is, in fact, a work of scholarship, graced by eloquence, style, clarity, intellectual insights and a sense of history. I wonder whether the author realised that between his outward journey from the New England states to the far North-West, and his return journey, by way of California and the Bible Belt, he travelled through time as well as space, distinguishing between the religious Utopianism of the 19th century and the mammonist hypocrisy of modern fundamentalism. More of this later.

At the time of the Pilgrim Fathers the first Governor of Massachusetts, John Winthrop, spoke of building "A Shining City on a Hill"; quoted, nearly four centuries later, and with fake Hollywood emotion, by Ronald Reagan. Ruthven correctly traces this Utopianism in American religion. America was "The Promised Land", "God's Own Country". Later, the Mormons would claim that the ancient Israelites were the first people to occupy America. Small wonder that the United States became the refuge for "Phalanstères" and "Icarus" communities. Utopianism and also — dissent! Without an Established Church, with a Constitution which forbids religious instruction in State schools, the US remains one of the most religious and church-going countries on earth. One hundred and eighty-four new religions were founded there in the 1960s — food for thought for the Church of England! With the collapse of any scientific basis and the challenge to its ethical monopoly, the Church of England, apart from some bolder dissenters, has become little other than a more decorative form of Register Office.

Ruthven began his journey in New England and then travelled through northern New York State, called in the 19th century the "burned over" district because so many evangelical movements had pastured there. There were the Shakers who denied sex and depended entirely upon conversions for the continuing existence of their community. There was the Oneida community which, ingeniously, solved St Paul's problem of sexual enjoyment without procreation, and, at the same time, Onan's problem of wasted seed, by advocating "Carezza", "coitus reservatus", with older women instructing younger men, and older men instructing younger women. One

wonders whether their leaders had seen ancient Tantric pictures of Indian couples enjoying interval cups of tea without disengaging.

Ruthven then describes the Mormon revelation — Joseph Smith, visited in a dream by the angel Moroni, directed to a hillside, Hill Cumorah in New York State, where he claimed to have found gold plates inscribed in a secret language, the text of the Book of Mormon. Moroni said he would also find two stones, Urim and Thummim, which he could use as spectacles to translate the secret symbols. Like much of the Book of Mormon, Urim and Thummim come from the Old Testament, mentioned in seven or eight books as instruments of divination, but first in Exodus where Jehovah instructs that they are to be fixed on Aaron's breastplate, on top of his ephod, in his capacity as High Priest.

Despite all these fantasies, the sects of the 19th century appear genuine when compared with today's money-grubbing evangelists, who set out, wilfully, to exploit the gullible. The Shakers produced great works of art and ingenious inventions. Oneida prospered by manufacturing steel traps and silverware. The Mormons displayed the utmost heroism and self-sacrifice in their trek to Utah. The contrast between their sincerity and today's religious corruption is manifest in this book.

Moving from the past to the present, the author visits a Nazi racist religious group in northern Idaho called "The Church of Christ — Christian Aryan Nations". He inspects the relics of Bhagwan Rajneesh's community in Oregon, where the faithful provided nearly one hundred Rolls-Royces for their spiritual leader. But a hundred Rolls-Royces do not match the multi-million dollar exploitation of religious faith Ruthven begins to encounter in California and back eastwards through the Bible Belt. It begins with Robert Schuller's "Crystal Cathedral" where "self-esteem" is preached as a Christian virtue for the wealthy — "Love thyself" rather than "Love thy neighbour". I agree with Ruthven that there is a need for self-esteem to counter the old Christian obsession with guilt and sin, but there are other lessons in the Beatitudes.

After that it becomes religious gangsterism — the modern Elmer Gantrys, parallel to Al Capone, "Bugs" Moran and "Legs" Diamond. The latter only shot the bodies of hundreds; the former have destroyed the spirits of millions.

There is religious gang warfare, too. Jim Bakker is accused of his affair with Jessica Hahn, and of his wife's drug addiction. Jimmy Swaggert, Bakker's accuser, is caught with prostitutes and, thereafter,



# REVIEWS

confesses endlessly on TV that he is a miserable sinner. Since he never did this before it seems that his sin was "being found out". Jerry Falwell takes over Bakker's "Praise the Lord" religious empire; but in the concentration upon trivial sexual peccadilloes, the real crimes of exploitation and fraud tend to be overlooked. Selling "Jesus Power Packs" to thousands of naïve people who cannot afford them is more heinous than sex.

This same crowd of "born again" ignoramuses, so skilled in multi-million dollar fraud, dare to challenge the whole edifice of civilised human achievement, of biology, of evolutionary theory, of geology, of astronomy, of physics, of, in short, almost all rational human understanding. Jerry Falwell, Reagan's spiritual mentor, told his devout followers that, before Armageddon, they will suddenly shoot upwards in "the Rapture". Leaving their clothes behind, they will ascend naked. If they happen to be driving cars, or piloting planes, they will leave carnage behind them. One wonders why American airlines serving the Bible Belt have not advertised a guarantee that all their pilots are atheists who will not be "raptured".

The greatest benefit I have gained from this book is the contrast between the genuine religious sects of the last century and the corrupt outfits of today. The 19th-century sects emphasised happy communal living, creative, inventive, caring and mutually sustaining. Today's religious racketeers exploit selfishness and greed.

KARL HEATH

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**FASCISM DOWN THE AGES: FROM CAESAR TO HITLER**, by F. A. Ridley. Romer Publications, £4.95

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Sadly this is not a new book from the prolific pen of Frank Ridley, a name well known to secularists and socialists alike. It is a compilation of his writings on Fascism from the late 'thirties, when that evil creed was in much of Europe at the height of its power. Although Fascism lost much of that power during world war two, it is, as the activities of Le Pen in France and the National Front in this country show, still a force which needs to be fought against. Ridley traces the historical and ideological roots of Fascism back to the fall of the Roman Republic and the rise of the Caesars, fore-runners of the Duces and Fuhrers of our own time. As he rightly points out, the advent of Caesarism was the product of a bourgeois society riddled from top to bottom with crisis beyond solution. Aspiring Caesars and Fuhrers

of the 'eighties may well wear striped rather than black shirts, and would exercise their totalitarian power through the computer rather than through bands of armed thugs. But the threat which they present to democracy and liberty is none the less. Ridley has much to say about Christianity and of how it became the State ideology of Rome. This he dates from the death of Julian at the hands of the Persians. It was at the end of the classical age; the Christian Middle Ages were about to begin. Seeing the rebirth of a virulent fundamentalism one wonders if the Middle Ages have ever really ended.

Ridley next examines the Papacy and the infamous Inquisition. Of the former he writes: "The anti-thesis of Darwinism in its dogmatic creed and its world outlook, the Roman Catholic Church is in a certain sense the supreme example of Darwinian evolution, in that its will to survive is equalled only by its supreme efficiency in finding, and in following to a successful issue, the path that does actually lead to a happy way of escape".

Many parallels can be drawn between the Inquisition and the persecution by Fascists of those they saw as racial sub-humans or as political opponents. Torquemada would have been at home in the SS. If there is any difference it is one of degree rather than of kind.

Of the infamous Ignatius Loyola and his fanatical Jesuits, Ridley writes: "Hitler resembled Loyola more than any man in history. . . Like Loyola, Hitler demonstrated his genuine political character by his ceaseless reiteration of the supremacy of the will as against the reason". There would be many others, Salazar in Portugal, Franco in Spain, Degrelle in Belgium and Pavelic in Yugoslavia, who would follow in the footsteps of Loyola and draw inspiration both theological and political from Rome. But without doubt Hitler was the master of them all.

Ridley makes it plain that for him the only effective opponent of reaction in all forms, political and religious, is socialism. He writes: "The victory of socialism would of necessity be absolutely fatal to Roman Catholic Christianity and the Papacy. In practice, socialism does not leave room for the Church".

All in all, for those interested in both politics and religion there is much in Ridley's book worthy of serious study. And for those who wish to learn more about the man's thought there is an excellent bibliography, although sadly many of his books and pamphlets are long out of print. The book however is not without fault. It looks as if it was printed straight from a none-too-good computer print-out, and it obviously has not been proof read. A great pity, for Ridley's writings whether one agrees with them or not, deserve far better treatment.

TERRY LIDDLE

*Reviews continued on next page*

"Has Mrs Thatcher created a Nonconformist Conscience against her", asks Walter Schwarz, "uniting the churches and high-minded non-believers in a grand moral alliance?" Since Mr Schwarz has chosen to write about it, his verdict is of course: "There are solid indications that something of this kind is happening".

Non-conformism has dwindled over the years. Indeed, of the great social movements of the late 19th century, perhaps only secularism has suffered more. So while Walter Schwarz, as befits a Religious Affairs Correspondent, seeks to emphasise the role of religion in what he calls the new dissent, he beefs up this non-conformist conscience by co-opting iconoclastic clerics of all churches (while ignoring the circumscribed role of dissent within the established Church or Roman Catholicism), and enquiring minds beyond the reach of religion.

The author warmly approves of dissent, and no doubt would embrace A. J. P. Taylor's aphorism that "if there had been no trouble-makers, no Dissenters, we should still be living in caves".

This slim book gives voice to the vigour of intellectual and social policy debate in modern Britain. In some ways, it is an antidote to the despair which — at least until recent months — seems to have infected many of those who view the present Government's agenda with distaste and alarm. But it reads rather like a script for an up-market radio programme. Brief paragraphs by the author link copious verbatim quotes from dissenting voices. This has the benefit of letting the principals speak for themselves. But the range of voices is inexplicably narrow.

On education, we hear the views only of Tim Brighouse, once Oxfordshire's chief education officer; on local government, the sole authority cited is the academic, Vernon Bogdanor; and on women, surely a prime platform for the new dissent, we get just Labour's Jo Richardson.

Similarly, Walter Schwarz scatters the book with sceptical quotes which challenge his whole enterprise of piecing together some coherence in the new dissent, without seeking to follow through the argument. Thus Eric Hobsbawm takes the view that it is Mrs Thatcher who is the dissenter:

Thatcherism is non-conforming to what most people in Britain believe, except that Thatcher is in government and quite deliberately organising what amounts to a revolution in the British way of life. But it is not a revolution which is backed by the majority of the people which conforms to the basic moral ideas.

Who, then, are the real dissenters? The issue is not

taken up. Jonathon Porritt warns against imagining that the various strands of dissent share a common ethos, and draws an analogy with the Janata alliance which briefly took power in India:

It was an unmitigated disaster because those groups did not share any common view apart from saying "no". The same would apply here. Many of the dissenting voices could coalesce around a kind of reformed, Labourist, socialist consensus. But Greens have no truck with that. Why should we?

So how unified or disparate is this new dissent? Again, the issue is not directly addressed.

In the closing pages of the book, Walter Schwarz asks whether we should improve society to produce better people, or must we make better people first. Given the discrete authorial presence to this point, his concluding paragraph in response to this dilemma is liable to take the reader by surprise:

The answer is that we must do both. That is liberation theology, in which Marxism and Christianity converge. It is the answer given by most of the church members and the secular people in this book. It is a message of hope.

This final flourish conflicts with so much of the argument and opinion presented that it can only be seen as a triumph of hope over experience.

JOHN PETHER

**A video film about the life of the Carmelite St. Theresa of Avila has been banned by the British Board of Film Classification. The Board was advised that Visions of Ecstasy was blasphemous and that showing it would be illegal. Producer James Stephenson said the film explores sexual ecstasy and religious mysticism. He accused the Board of pre-empting the law by banning a film which had not been tested in the courts. Sister Teresa Joseph Pegus, Superior of the Carmelite Sisters of Corpus Christi, said she "thanked God that the Board stopped this film". A spokesman for the National Council commented: "The blasphemy laws are unacceptable and anachronistic, and should be abolished".**

**Staff at the W. H. Smith shop in Slough, Berkshire, have been instructed not to wear their uniform in the street. The ban was imposed after a 61-year-old assistant was pulled off her bicycle by four Asian youths yelling "Smith's are bastards". Management and staff believe the attack was carried out because the firm sold copies of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.**

**A new edition of the Irish in Britain Directory provides a wide range of information for emigrants. The Dublin Diocesan Emigration Advisory Service has refused to distribute the Directory as it contains advice on abortion.**



## Alternative Medicine

have high rates of spontaneous clear-up, conventional medicine is often spectacularly unsuccessful, even with such unwieldy drugs as steroids. How revealing was his quote from the eminent — and even more smug — surgeon: "If a drug doesn't have side effects it doesn't have any effects at all". This epitomises the attitude of the majority of conventional doctors. They give out like confectionery powerful, and often addictive, drugs without sufficient thought about whether and how the drugs could be avoided, what the side-effects are, or whether the drugs are in fact just suppressing symptoms and leaving the underlying problem. Some years ago I visited an old man in hospital who deteriorated within a week from being totally *compos mentis* to becoming blubbery and child-like. His wife had the strength to insist that he be taken off the drugs. Her rationale was that he would be better dead than as he was. The hospital stopped the drugs and he returned within a day, mercifully, to his previous charming self.

Terry Sanderson claims that alternative therapies are fixed and do not progress. Homocopathy is, for example, reacting to AIDS and one practitioner in South London with a large number of AIDS patients has told me that he believes he has materially improved their quality of life and that there is evidence of a significant retardation in the progress of the disease in many of his patients. Whilst I accept that there has been an enormous amount of successful research and development in conventional medicine, there seems on the other hand to be an arrogant and blind belief of many doctors in only that which they were taught at college or that which appears in an attractively marketed box from a large drug company.

Incidentally, the homoeopaths' treatments are rather cheaper than the £30-£40 Terry Sanderson suggests and often include the remedy. How much would an hour with a private doctor, plus medicine, cost?

I was amused to hear from an osteopath friend that he had just received a call from a top surgeon at St Thomas's Hospital in London, to the effect that one of his operating team who had cricked his back had just been dispatched by taxi for "emergency treatment", by the osteopath — the surgeon desperately needed him back by return so that the afternoon's operations could proceed!

The discussion is really about choice; Terry Sanderson wishes to "consign to the dustbin" most alternative medicine, a little like burning books perhaps? Subject to my opening point, I believe this would be the act of a dictator, certainly for the two therapies I have mentioned. I do not claim either that my list of acceptable therapies is exhaustive —

I have tried these two extensively and know they work. In China, western and traditional herbal treatment compete. Patients in hospital are given a presentation by each camp, and decide for themselves — a healthy approach as neither side has a monopoly of right or wrong.

I should have mentioned one last area where I agree with Terry Sanderson — that conventional doctors should be taught to use massage, counselling and relaxation techniques. Could any reader imagine more than an enlightened ten per cent of doctors thinking this was a good idea — and would more than one per cent use them in practice in our wonderful new cost-efficient prospective "health" service?

## Religious Racketeers

Many of the regular worshippers at the Church of St Maria Auxiliadora, in Medellin, Colombia, have gone missing. They include Pablo Escobar, one of the world's richest men, who attended Mass and took communion every Sunday. Like other notorious drug barons, he is now in hiding following the Colombian Government's clampdown.

St Maria Auxiliadora is one of Colombia's most popular saints and the unofficial patron of the drugs cartels. The barons and their henchmen are regular churchgoers, and holy places, the Church of St Auxiliadora most of all, have been the recipients of their bounty. The rows of confessional boxes have been refurbished and the doors fitted with gold handles. Its statues and altar are covered with gold leaf and the stained glass was imported from Italy.

The Colombian Government, stung into action by the murder of a vice-presidential candidate, has declared war on the barons. The pews are not so crowded now that the ruthless operators who control the cocaine racket can no longer flaunt their wealth and piety.

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A jury in Pennsylvania has convicted Leona and Larry Cottam of third-degree murder by starvation of their 14-year-old son. The court heard that the Cottams fasted for six weeks, believing that God would intervene to save them. While the family starved, they had nearly \$4,000 saved for their church.

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Birth rates are falling in Catholic European Community countries as standards of living rise. Italy now has the lowest birthrate in the European Community.

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.

# OBITUARY

## Mr D. Campbell

Denis Campbell, whose death at the age of 72 was announced in last month's *Freethinker*, suffered from diabetes and heart problems for several years. He died in a Colchester hospital after a third stroke.

A man of high principles and unwavering convictions, Denis Campbell had long since rejected all ideas of the supernatural. He did not believe in any deity or that there is a "life after death". Always eager to contest claims made on behalf of "religious truths", he did this formally through membership of the National Secular Society, British Humanist Association and South Place Ethical Society. He was a generous supporter of the movement and while living in London a familiar figure at meetings and social events.

Ten years ago he and his wife moved to Frinton-on-Sea, and cremation took place at a crematorium near the town. The secular committal ceremony was private with only members of the family present. All religious artifacts were removed prior to the ceremony which included readings from the works of Thomas Paine, Bertrand Russell and William Shakespeare. His ashes were scattered on the sea off Frinton.

## Freethinker Fund

Memorial donations to help good causes are increasingly replacing ostentatious floral displays at funerals. Patrick Maguire was a staunch freethinker, and when he died earlier this year his parents decided to commemorate him by making donations to free-thought organisations and to this journal. We are deeply grateful to them and all who financially support "the best of causes".

The latest list of contributors to the Fund is given below.

C. Beninson, A. D. Gore, T. Liddle, J. Shaw and P. D. Ward, £1 each; A. J. Hoyle, R. W. Philpott, D. Pickett, E. Wakefield and G. Williams, £2 each; G. Sanders, £2.50; W. R. Grant and M. W. Smith, £3 each; A. Varlet, £4.40; C. F. Ablethorpe, S. Beer, J. L. Broom, K. Byrom, J. M. Cardy, J. E. Dyke, A. Ewing, H. Jack, C. F. Jacot, L. T. Johnson, A. T. Lambert, G. E. Loomes, A. Negus, W. N. Ramage, W. H. Seddon, J. A. B. Spence, A. Willans and D. Wright, £5 each; D. S. Lee, £6; J. W. Mooney, £6.50; R. J. Condon, E. L. Deacon and D. Harper, £10 each; P. Willig, £15; Anonymous, £20; N. Everitt, £25; Anonymous, £30; In memory of Patrick Maguire, £500.

Total for August: £750.40.

# LETTERS

## THE HUMANIST HOUSING ASSOCIATION

The Humanist movement has always been most supportive of the Humanist Housing Association, certainly with encouragement and praise, and, on the few occasions we have asked for it, with money.

Things have changed a lot since we started in a modest way with one converted house providing a dozen self-contained small flats for elderly people who needed warden assistance. In those days priority was given to Humanists in need, though we never meant to be exclusive and always housed religious people as well. Today we have nearly 900 one-bedroom units, not all of them for elderly people, and a number of sheltered leasehold schemes for elderly people whose means, though fairly modest, preclude them from publicly subsidised housing, particularly since the country's housing problems have become so desperate for so many.

In our 33 years, the Management Committee, until a couple of years ago drawn exclusively from the Humanist movement, has had to meet ever changing challenges, not least the all too frequent Housing Acts produced at regular intervals by every Government. You read a lot last year of the negative effects of the 1988 Housing Act on the homeless and all people on low incomes. Basically, there will no longer be 100 per cent loans from public funds, and Housing Associations who want to continue building will have to use their own resources, or, more likely, go to the financial markets. We, like many other Housing Associations, are a non profit-making charity so we have very little in the way of free resources. And financial institutions want to make a safe return on their investments, and homeless people and those on low incomes don't look like a good investment.

So what does the Humanist Housing Association do? Of course we could decide to rest on our laurels and just act as caretakers of the property we already have. But we have a determined Management Committee and good experienced staff, and that is not our choice. We want to raise a million pounds!

A million pounds sounds an awful lot. But it is only half a dozen or so ordinary houses — in the South East at least!

If anyone reading this has experience of housing management, care of the elderly, financial institutions, financial risk management, or Housing Association finance, and would like to discuss the possibility of joining our management committee, we should be delighted to hear from you. We can promise you an interesting and challenging time, and the job is not too arduous!

Please let us hear from you if you would like any further information or would like to help us in any way.

DIANA ROOKLEDGE

Humanist Housing Association,  
311 Kentish Town Road,  
London, NW5 2TJ

## WORKING TOGETHER

I thought that Terry Sanderson's article, *Return of the Witch-Doctor* (August) was not really fit for publication — it was so biased and so ill-informed. Homoeopathic doctors cannot make clinical trials because they treat every patient differently. I have had acupuncture all my life — I don't know how I would have survived without it — and my orthodox doctor says the best results can be achieved when orthodox and alternative medicines work together.

OLIVE MARKHAM



## TAKING LIBERTIES

George Strang (Letters, September) misreads my little piece (*This Shylock Business*, August) and although I have no objection to his doing so about a matter of opinion, he must not put words into my mouth or attribute anti-Americanism to me. Many of the greatest entertainers have been American; even so there must be a limit to the liberties taken with characters so well defined and classically orientated as that of Shylock. As well ask the late Wee Georgie Wood in his lifetime (he had ambitions to play Hamlet) to play Shylock as to have Mr Hoffman, an admirable American actor, play the Jew of Venice. (Never let it be thought, however, that the title of the alleged "comedy" is anything but *The Merchant of Venice*). Whatever balance the actor achieves he must dominate the play. This, in my humble (not sneering), opinion Mr Hoffman singularly fails to do. But then neither would I wish to see Groucho Marx play Bertie Wooster, although I have no doubt that such an attraction would be equally successful and without doubt the talk of the Town.

PETER COTES

## RELIGION AND THE FAMILY

I beg to differ with Eric Stockton (*Religion Rots Reason?*, September).

Religion does rot reason. It has recently caused the breakup in the close relationship my husband and myself thought we had with our daughter and her family. Both she and her husband are deeply involved with a local religious sect and live a blinkered life revolving around Jesus and virtually blotting out the outside world.

As a result I have been banned from their house since the beginning of this year and do not see my grandchildren, aged seven and five. I am convinced this situation has arisen because they know my non-religious convictions.

We have had many discussions with our daughter, but to no avail. Her mind is warped by her religion. We are totally devastated, my only consolation being that my husband is loyal to me and will not visit their home without me.

So much for religion!

RUTH GLASGOW

## AN EASY END TO A LONG LIFE

I am an enthusiastic supporter of the movement to legalise voluntary euthanasia. Now in my 95th year, my main concern is to avoid a lingering, painful end to what has been a fairly pleasant life. Most of my intimate friends and relations of my generation are dead and I live alone. The Social Services provide me with home help, and I am very grateful.

I am still interested in world affairs, but am of no use to anyone and wish to be as little trouble as possible. If there was a God who, having no father or mother, no brother or sister, and only one illegitimate son, a mongrel half-human half-god, he must be laughing his head off.

RALPH C. PROCTOR

## EVENTS

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group.** New Venture Theatre Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton. Sunday, 5 November, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. Members' Forum. Annual Dinner, Saturday, 25 November. Details from Joan Wimble, honorary secretary, 67 St Aubyns, Hove, BN3 2TL, telephone Brighton (0273) 733215.

**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.

**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, 7 November, 8 pm. Public Meeting.

**Leicester Secular Society.** Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Public meetings Sunday evenings 6.30 pm. Programme obtainable from the Secretary, telephone Leicester (0533) 813671.

**Lewisham Humanist Group.** Unitarian Meeting House, 42 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 26 October, 8 pm. Public meeting: a Green Future?

**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).

**National Secular Society.** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Saturday, 4 November, 2.15 pm. Annual General Meeting. Admission by current membership card.

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

**Sutton Humanist Group.** Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 8 November, 7.30 pm for 8 pm. David Thornton: Social Housing Under the 1988 Housing Act.

**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, 16 October, 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.

COMMITTEE AGAINST BLASPHEMY LAW

PUBLIC MEETING...

CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE  
LONDON WC1

FRIDAY, 20 OCTOBER, 7.30 pm

Speakers include LARRY ADLER

CABL: telephone 01-226 7251 or  
0742 685731

# "Bleak Future" as Clergy Numbers Decline

"The Church of England faces a bleak future", declared the Rev Steven Walton of the Church Aid Pastoral Society last month. The Society's vocation and ministry adviser was referring to the shortfall in requirements for new clergy which may be around a thousand by the middle of the 1990s.

The expected decrease of ten per cent will occur because new entrants are not keeping pace with retirements and resignations. Four hundred ordinations are required every year and in 1988 there were only 240.

Mr Walton says: "The parochial dream of a minister responsible for every square foot of England is under strain. A further drop in numbers means that the work of evangelism in our secular land will be put back further".

One reason for declining numbers in theological colleges is that High Churchmen are deterred by the spectre of women priests.

Another is that it was policy a few years ago to encourage aspiring priests not to seek ordination until they had been in secular employment for some years. "The result is that we have lost a generation of potential recruits", says Mr Walton.

The United Reformed Church is faced with similar problems. A spokesman said that while the church needed 35 new ministers every year, the colleges were producing ten fewer. URC ministers are aged between 38 and 40 by the time they take over their first church.

The Roman Catholic Church is also experiencing

difficulty in recruiting priests. Fr John Danson, secretary of the Committee for Ministerial Formation, admits that the numbers for 1987 and 1988 were "rather low".

He added: "The requirement of celibacy is a deterrent to new vocations in the present atmosphere".

Not so long ago "a priest in the family" was a matter of considerable pride in Ireland. But this is no longer the case, and the shortage of priests is so acute that it may be necessary to bring missionaries from Africa to take charge of Irish parishes. Referring to a big drop in recruits to the priesthood and religious orders, a church spokesman says: "Nowadays parents are worried in case their son or daughter may not be happy or perhaps may leave the religious life later".

## Reform Sunday Laws

A survey carried out by a west London newspaper, *The Gazette*, shows there is strong support in the area for Sunday trading.

Writing in the paper's "Viewpoint" column, the Rev Neil Richardson, rector of Holy Cross Church, Greenford, says: "In our country today, religious groups observe Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays as their sabbath. Most Christians fail to observe Sunday as a day of worship, and if you attend any of the big DIY shops you will see just how popular Sunday trading is.

"In virtually every town in the country, you will find Sunday opening for shops, markets, street vendors, restaurants, entertainments and other services", he writes.

Mr Richardson argues that Sunday is not a regular day off and never could be. So long as workers are protected from unscrupulous employers and allowed to opt out of Sunday work, the law should be changed to permit Sunday trading.

And he offers this advice. "Those Christians who wish to keep Sunday special may do so for themselves as members of what is, to be fair, a religious minority. . .

"It is unwise to try and use the law to impose a particular social condition upon a community".

One of the few voices raised against Sunday trading is that of Fr Pat Foley, of Our Lady and St Joseph Roman Catholic Church, Hanwell. This is somewhat ironic. Traditionally the Roman Catholic Church has been far more liberal on the question of Sunday observance than the Protestant denominations. Furthermore, Catholic church clubs now do a roaring Sunday trade in drink, tobacco and other items.

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### Attack on Freedom

statutory powers or the authority to pre-censor programmes.

The White Paper on broadcasting is also a matter for anxiety.

"Existing broadcasting services look likely to be trapped between Government control on the one hand, and market forces on the other".

The report warns against the danger of dropping our guard in the fight against censors, official or self-appointed.

"We should be grateful to the Ayatollah for reminding us that the temptation to compromise, to give a little in the hope of gaining more, has to be resisted", it declares.

The Campaign Against Censorship (formerly the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society) is in the front line of the battle against those (mainly religious) groups which are seeking to restrict freedom of expression. Campaign secretary Mary Hayward says: "We must be constantly on our guard against those elements who don't want people to think for themselves".