

# BOOKS

**BEYOND THE PALE: THE CHRISTIAN POLITICAL FRINGE**, by Derrick Knight. Caraf Publications Ltd, St James's Vicarage, Highfield Street, Coalville, Leicestershire, £3.50

Have you heard of the Christian Affirmation Campaign? The British League of Rights? The Christian League of South Africa? The International Christian Network? The Biblical Creation Society? The World Anti-Communist League? I hadn't until I read *Beyond the Pale*. But I'm glad I know about them, and numerous other similar bodies, now.

All are extreme Right-wing, avowedly Christian groups, mostly (but not all) Protestant, run by people who are fanatically racist, pro-apartheid, fundamentalist-biblical, Creationist (believing that Darwinism is the spawn of the Devil), anti-Communist, and who adhere to the "Satanic-Jesuit-Zionist-Marxist conspiracy theory" of history so beloved of the Nazis. Some of these people—such as Lady Birdwood—are familiar names to students of the rabid Right. Others—like Bernard Smith and Donald Martin in this country and the Rev Fred Shaw (Methodist) in South Africa, who founded the (South African Government-backed) Christian League of South Africa—are less well known but more influential.

According to these people, the support given by the World Council of Churches to racial integration and to groups fighting segregationist governments in (formerly) Rhodesia and (still) South Africa is simply part of a worldwide Communist plot. The mainstream British churches are run by "subversives", the Archbishop of Canterbury is a Soviet agent (alas, poor Runcie! I knew him well . . .), all the bishops are Communists and the World Council of Churches is run by the KGB.

Utterly dotty? Maybe: but, as Derrick Knight points out, all these themes are old favourites of South African Government propaganda, which justifies apartheid with biblical arguments. And he discerns South Africa as the co-ordinating impetus, and often, paymaster, behind these and similar groups' bids for world attention in recent years. Still more sinister, he traces personal and organisational links between several of them and overtly fascist and anti-semitic groups such as the National Front, the British Movement, League of St George and British Israelites, as well as with more "respectable" Right-wing organisations like the Monday Club, Tory Action, the Institute for the Study of Conflict and the British Council of Protestant Churches, of which the Rev Ian Paisley is Vice-President. Some operate world-wide, and have affinities with other dubious anti-Communist groups such as the Moonies.

For a sceptical critic of conspiracy theories, Mr Knight (who now works for Christian Aid) doesn't

# FREETHINKER

do too badly himself. In fact, he postulates that the prevalent paranoia of these groups leads them to imitate what they believe their enemies are doing, and to engage in conspiratorial activities that are basically anti-democratic. Because they have the backing of a powerful and paranoid government—that of South Africa—they are able to publicise their own cranky theories in various Western countries, and have contributed to the marked rightward shift which the political centre of gravity has undergone in both Britain and the United States since the advent of Thatcher and Reagan. (Indeed, Mr Knight reveals the droll fact that the South African Government has been warned by its agents in the United States to dissociate itself from some of its Southern contacts there because they are "so far to the Right that it definitely hurts our image in associating with them".)

These Christians indulge in indiscriminate smears of their opponents and lobby vigorously for their own point of view while protesting that they themselves are "not political" and that politics ought to be kept out of religion. In a May Day week which has seen Michael Heseltine branding CND as the tool of Moscow and Cardinal Hume rebuking Monsignor Bruce Kent for becoming "too political" (while the Pope conspicuously refrained from similarly admonishing Cardinal Glemp), this scenario seems less funny than it otherwise might. There is usually just a grain of truth in paranoia—but clearly, the paranoid fantasies of the lunatic Right are being given more plausibility by the Conservative and Republican parties—if only for electioneering purposes—than is democratically healthy.

Ideology, whether political or religious, befogs clear perception and fosters burgeoning humbug. What detracts from the value of Mr Knight's book for me—essential reading though it is—is the occasional whiff of humbug in his own stance, as when he professes shock that these birds of a feather *should* flock together, and that they endeavour to conceal the fact; and his naive assumption that those whom he describes as "desperate people seeking their basic freedoms" and "liberation movements acting against oppressive and even illegal regimes" can by no stretch of the imagination ever plausibly be labelled "terrorists". Unfortunately, life isn't as simple as that. Personally I increasingly abhor ideological arguments and jargon, of whatever hue, and prefer to use old-fashioned political categories like "tyranny"—an accurately descriptive label which fits the governments of both South Africa and the USSR.



# REVIEWS

The main lesson of *Beyond the Pale* is that religious belief all too easily lends itself to the big lie. The chief enemy of human freedom, happiness, peace and progress is irrationalism, and when this is compounded by religious bigotry in an age of high technology, we are all increasingly at risk of a nuclear holocaust. If that occurs, the particular political or religious ideology of the person who presses the fatal button won't matter: they, of course, will believe that they had no alternative, because they will be paranoid. Religion, far from being the answer to paranoia, is a major ingredient of the problem. The more fanatical religious belief is, the more it will express itself in paranoid political activity; and all religious people, because they believe in something that is fundamentally irrational, are slightly potty. Far too many of them, as readers of the *Freethinker* well know, are more than somewhat potty.

ANTONY GREY

and unsure by what they are told in the name of religion. Once humanists resolve to make this their message, announce it boldly, demonstrate it rationally, and show how to apply it to controversial questions, such as abortion, people will be reassured, and will gain confidence to set about resolving all kinds of differences rationally, to give everyone a chance to serve his interests and fulfil his desires. Humanism will have conquered the West, on the road to the time when all people will be humanists because it is so obvious that they are not aware that it is possible to be otherwise.

This is an amusing example of a systems analyst applying his mind, if not his technique, to an historical society. You have a model, and ask, What would happen if. . .? What you have left out destroys the validity of your conclusions. All the same, the new setting induces new views and compels some fresh thinking. Lucien Saumur rushes in where philosophers have trodden warily, and found no evangel waiting for reason to uncover. No harm done.

H. J. BLACKHAM