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Frock horror! Pope struck by a meteorite!



Maurizio Cattelan's life-size waxwork sculpture which featured in the Royal Academy's *Apocalypse* exhibition in London

It's fun, but is it art? Tony Akkermans takes a potshot at modern art on the centre pages.

Also in this issue:

**How children suffer when they fall into the clutches of the godly
– see reports on pages 2, 3 & 6
The triumph of science over religion – page 7**

freethinking out loud: barry duke

"GOD," Christians are *so* very fond of telling us, "is love."

Well, I have a drawerful of press cuttings from all over the world detailing instances of the abuse that children have suffered at the hands of the godly, and from these one can only conclude that whenever God enters the life of an institution, family or individual, terrible cruelty, not love, is far too often the outcome.

So it came as no surprise to discover that religion played a major part in the horrifying case of Anna Climbie, the eight-year-old girl who came to Europe from the Ivory Coast at the instigation of her fundamentalist Christian aunt, and who died an appalling death in Britain less than a year later, in February 2000.

Throughout her trial for murder, Anna's aunt, Marie-Therese Kouao, 44, clutched a Bible – the same despicable tome which one must assume gave her and her 28-year-old boyfriend, Carl Manning, the idea that the



adorable little girl, sent abroad by her parents for a better life, was possessed by demons.

No sooner had Anna been placed in their care, Kouao and Manning (who called the child Anna Satan) began subjecting the little girl to the most horrifying abuse imaginable.

Within months, the bright, smiling child had become an ugly, balding specimen, with course skin, a flap of which hung partly over one eye. She was unable to stand up straight, her limbs having become contorted like those of an old woman. She was incontinent and smelt of urine and faeces. Before her death, she had been kept for days at a time in a cold bath, her hands and feet bound with tape.

The child was attacked with a bicycle chain, a belt with a large buckle, and fists. She was also subjected to cigarette burns and scalding.

The Old Bailey, where Kouao and Manning were sentenced to life imprisonment last month for Anna's murder, heard that Manning had concluded that the child was possessed, for no matter how hard he beat her, Anna never cried.

The nonsense that the child was "possessed" was accepted without question by the evangelical church to which she was taken for exorcism by Kouao and Manning. The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in north London held a "deliverance" service for Anna a week before her death last year, but the child had to be removed from the service because she shouted out – not surprisingly – that prayers could not help her.

Anna had been taken to the church twice, but on neither occasion did anyone detect that the child was the victim of terrible abuse.

The dealings Kouao and Manning had with the church turned out to be a major embarrassment for the Evangelical Alliance, which was forced by Anna's death to issue a warning to churches to seek medical opinion before performing exorcisms. Anna's death, the EA said, might have been prevented had Universal Church of the Kingdom of God sought medical advice.

Anna's case is by far the most horrible of all those I have read about in recent years, and has led me to conclude that no child should ever be

placed in the care of *anyone* professing a strong belief in God, and that any child born into a "God-fearing" environment should be very carefully examined for signs of abuse.

THERE'S bad news from the political front. Britain's wackiest political party has decided not to contest any seats in the coming General Election.

The Natural Law Party, which has given us so much cause for mirth, is giving up its attempts to gain a foothold in Westminster.

Sadly, this ability to amuse failed to translate into any form of electoral gain for the party in the past. In 1992 the party – best known for transcendental meditation and yogic flying – fielded 310 candidates, and 280 in 1997, but all lost their deposits despite their promise to create a crime-free Britain and halve all diseases within three years.

It also came up with an interesting defence plan which involved Nato instructing each member state to train 7,000 military personnel in the art of yogic flying – a painful-looking process which requires each flyer to sit cross-legged and bounce up and down. This, the Natural Law Party promised, would "prevent the birth of an enemy".

This leaves just one lunatic party left in the race for No 10 Downing Street, but I'm afraid the Tories – even though their leader is a clown – cannot raise a smile, let alone a good belly-laugh.

FINALLY, let me tell you a little more about the picture on the cover of this month's *Freethinker*. Cattalan's controversial work, depicting the Pope struck down by a meteorite, caused many Catholics a great deal of distress when it was unveiled for the first time last summer at the Royal Academy's *Apocalypse* exhibition in London.

The very thought that an artist could suggest that the Vicar of Christ might be laid low by such a cruel act of God was, declared some, "deeply offensive". But Father Michael Seed, ecumenical adviser to the Archbishop of Westminster, was not among the work's detractors, and he pointed out a precedent.

Pope Innocent III was depicted in a painting by Giotto as being crushed by his own collapsed cathedral. This work was painted after Innocent III, in 1209, was warned that being squashed like a bug under tons of rubble would be the price of his refusal to establish an order in the name of St Francis of Assisi. He apparently suffered nightmares from that day on.

Father Michael added that the Pope does not appear to have snuffed it in Cattalan's work. "The lesson is that the Church is often under attack but will always survive," he said smugly.

The Free thinker

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Another Catholic abuse scandal hits Scotland

FOUR months after a Catholic nun, Sister Marie Docherty, was convicted of four charges of cruelty against girls at Nazareth children's homes in Scotland in the 1960s and 1970s come allegations of cruelty and sexual abuse inflicted on boys by a number of monks and civilian staff in charge of St Ninian's List D School at Gartmore in Stirlingshire.

The allegations by a number of men who attended the school before its closure in 1982 are currently under investigation by Central Scotland police. Their report into St Ninian's covers a period between the mid-1960s and 1982.

Running in parallel with the police investigation is a civil action against the De La Salle order of Roman Catholic monks which operated the school, launched by a Glasgow lawyer on behalf of 11 former pupils at the school.

One, Christopher Fearn, now a social worker, was sent to the school when he was eight. He alleges that he was beaten with a riding crop two or three times a week for four years.

In an interview with the *Guardian* he said: "They were constantly beating us. They told us they would beat the devil out of us. One brother whipped me with a horsewhip. He'd tie knots in the ends to make it even more painful and I was beaten solidly for 10 minutes."

"I was battered so many times on my head and ears I cannot hear a thing on my left side, and I've undergone extensive surgery because of it. There was a field next to the school with an electric fence. I saw monks on a number of occasions forcing boys to grasp it until they cried out in pain."

The allegations are said to involve seven monks and five civilian staff. Two of the monks have since died, and the others, now aged between 68 and 92, have retired.

The police report, which has been submitted to the procurator fiscal at Stirling for his consideration, alleges that the boys were frequently subjected to sexual fondling and a range of "punishments". Several boys mentioned an electrical device, described as a type of generator, which was kept in the boot room. According to the report, boys were made to hold on to a pair of wires, leading from the machine, which induced electric shocks.

John McCormick, a lawyer representing the De La Salle order, said: "All the evidence available to me indicates that St Ninian's was run in an exemplary manner."

"Unlike those making the allegations and their advisers, I will reserve any further comment until after the results of the civil action are known."

US congressmen supports Vatican's special "observer" status at the UN

IN A non-binding resolution, the US House of Representatives voted 416-1 to confirm support for the Vatican's current status as a Non-member State Permanent Observer at the United Nations. California congressman Pete Stark, a vocal abortion-rights advocate, cast the sole dissenting vote.

The resolution was introduced in response to the "See Change" campaign, in which Catholics for a Free Choice, together with some 300 other organisations worldwide, have called for the Holy See to be stripped of its unique quasi-national status at the UN.

A leaflet produced by the "See Change" campaigners says: "Call it the Holy See, the Vatican, or the Roman Catholic Church, it's still a *religion* – not a country."

Asserting that "damage is done when religions are allowed to masquerade as states", the leaflet adds: "Every other religion with representation at the UN, like the World Council of Churches, is rightly restricted to an affiliation based on that of other non-governmental organizations. In a time when religious fundamentalism threatens pluralism, tolerance, and women's human rights, the UN must maintain a clear separation between religious beliefs and international public policy."

It continues: "Each year, 600,000 women die needlessly during childbirth and pregnancy. The UN increasingly makes decisions that will prevent these deaths. The Holy See, as a recognized country in the UN, has a powerful voice in these decisions. It uses this voice to limit access to family planning, safe abortion – even in countries where abortion is legal – and emergency contraception even for women who have been raped as an act of war."

The Holy See is also attacked "for its efforts to block international policy decisions that would make condom education and use a major tool in the prevention of HIV/AIDS".

Snippets

WHEN Peter Sutcliffe, the notorious serial killer known as the Yorkshire Ripper, embarked on a killing spree over a five year period which left 13 women dead, and another seven injured, he was, he said, "on a mission from God". Twenty years have now passed since he was jailed for life, but, according to recent press reports, Sutcliffe is as obsessed as ever with God. One paper revealed that he is now a devout Jehovah's Witness who receives daily Bible instruction.

ANOTHER nail in the C of E's coffin: research by the Office for National Statistics reveals 60 per cent of Britons are rejecting church weddings and are opting instead for civil ceremonies. This is an increase of 11 per cent in a ten-year period, and suggests that, if this trend continues at its present rate, in 40 years or so *no one* in the UK will want a church wedding.

A BIBLE with a built-in Southern US drawl has been published in America by Hometown 2 Press. As a result, the Commandment "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife" has become "Y'all ain't to make eyes to the neighbour's better half." Said a spokesperson for the publishers: "We expect to sell as many redneck Bibles to Northern liberals and intellectuals as we do to rednecks. This Bible is an excellent research tool for anyone interested in rural expressions and dialects. We have our critics who say this is a sacrilegious joke. We simply remind them that the Lord has been known to work in very mysterious ways."

HELL hath no fury like a clergyman scorned, as a vicar participating in the popular TV quiz game, *The Weakest Link*, recently demonstrated. He flew into a rage when fellow contestants voted him off the show. When the vicar, identified only as David, heard presenter Anne Robinson use her chilling catchphrase: "You *are* the weakest link, goodbye," he claimed he had been ejected simply because he was a churchman.

Millions of BBC2 viewers heard him declare angrily that "right from the start this has been a case of 'kick the vicar'".

"I'm very disappointed with the attitude of the other contestants. They didn't want me there regardless of what I was like at answering questions. It's all because I'm a vicar."



how many more church schools on the rates?

THE Church of England is calling for the greatest expansion of church schools "that has been attempted for over a century". This disturbing – but predictable – recommendation is included in a consultative report published in December by a C of E committee chaired by Lord (Ron) Dearing. Its 70 pages can be summarised by the four headings in bold below. Italics have been added to phrases in the text for emphasis.

1. Expand church schools because that is the C of E's only hope of survival.

The very essence of the report is its proposition that: "The Church has a great opportunity to pursue and develop its mission to the nation through its schools, *as nowhere else*". However they are measured, C of E church attendance figures are in free fall. Survey after survey demonstrates that in all age ranges people are becoming progressively less religious, and younger people are far less interested in religion than older people. This steep decline will therefore continue unchecked for the foreseeable future.

So, indeed, there is practically "nowhere else" other than church schools to which the C of E can direct its mission. No one else will listen, but pupils in a church school are a captive audience – by courtesy of rates and taxes paid by us all. Incidentally, the proposal is to open far more Anglican secondary schools throughout the country, as well as more primary schools in suburban areas.

Some church schools are undoubtedly popular, but I do not believe this is for religious reasons. It is rather because discriminatory selection has assisted such schools to take a disproportionately high number of academically gifted pupils, often with middle class or concerned parents.

2. Indoctrinate children, but pass this off as objective education.

We are assured by the report that "church schools will not actively seek to convert children from the faith [if any] of their parents", yet even the report acknowledges that the Church is not offering "education for its own sake". One of its aims is to "challenge those who have no faith", "offer the Gospel" in "the everyday life of the school". In these circumstances, rather than "offer", the word "impose" would seem more appropriate. church schools were established "to educate the poor in the principles of the Church of England", rather than, say, "to assist them to improve their intellectual fulfilment and material prospects".

Perhaps such wall-to-wall indoctrination would not matter so much if the vast majority of pupils were already religious, but just how religious are pupils in church schools?

By Keith Porteous Wood, General Secretary of the National Secular Society

Whatever parents' religious beliefs are (if any), the Church would clearly like to pretend that only a minuscule proportion of pupils are non-believers, or even capable of making an informed decision on the topic. A study conducted by the University of Carmarthen in 1995, however, demonstrated that 61 per cent of all pupils do not believe (and the proportion will almost certainly be higher now). I would be surprised if a high proportion of church

es", it contrasts them with church schools, each of which has "a well-grounded basis for its values and moral standards". The Church obviously considers community schools to be woefully inferior to church schools, which are "attractive to many parents because it is inherent in their claim and practice to serve Christ"

The report has the temerity to suggest that such meaningless mumbo jumbo amounts to "the pursuit of truth ... and the healthy enlargement of men's minds and personalities and the creation of truly human relationships". Although claiming some common aspirations with humanist values, the Report proceeds to condemn them and contrast them with the Church's, which have "a clear point of reference ... the love of God and the commandment to love your neighbour". The authors of the report reserve their greatest contempt for values not based on the Church's "clear point of refer-

Survey after survey demonstrates that in all age ranges people are becoming progressively less religious, and younger people are far less interested in religion than older people

school pupils were not also non-believers too, especially at secondary level.

After all, in church schools with spare capacity there will be little incentive to restrict admissions to children of religious households – and even where schools are over-subscribed, many parents feign belief to facilitate their child's selection. Given these factors, and the lesser inclination of the young to believe than their parents, it seems likely that the proportion of non-believing children will be little less in church schools than in community schools.

The C of E's 5,000 (mainly primary) schools teach a million pupils. If children have been taught in such schools for an average of, say, 6 years and could expect to live for around 65 years after leaving, that suggests that the population includes around 10 million people who have been taught at a C of E school. Yet only around 800,000 adults occupy C of E pews on an average Sunday, and some of these (including the family of former C of E pupils) will clearly not have been C of E pupils themselves. This strengthens my case that a high proportion of church school pupils are not Christians – or, at least, not at all active ones at least. And if this is the case, why does the state have to pay for them to waste their time on religious devotions and learning the minutiae of the faith?

3. Church schools have access to "the truth" and the primary source of morality, so are much better than community schools.

While the report concedes that "very many community schools have clear moral purpos-

ence": "Relativism", we learn, "has undermined the basis of any shared system of values".

4. The C of E should grab every morsel of privilege and advantage it can to maximise its control, and give Christian teachers every possible advantage to enable them to ascend the greasy pole faster than their infidel colleagues.

The huge expansion proposed of publicly funded church schools represents in itself an enormous increase in religious privilege. A further major recommendation made in the Report is that existing Voluntary Controlled schools (in which the Church does not have a majority on the Board of Governors) endeavour to transfer to Voluntary Aided status (where the Church does have a majority, but pays a little more). We also learn how even the 15 per cent contribution to capital costs that the Church is supposed to make for Voluntary Aided schools can be deferred (through the generosity of taxpayers, of course) by loans or through instalments spread over a long period. Another privilege enjoyed by Christian teachers – albeit there are relatively few of them – is their having privileged access to the huge number of jobs in church schools funded by the state, a privilege (not the only one) enshrined in statute.

The report recommends that "in new primary and secondary schools it should be the policy of establishing within measurable time – if it is not

(Continued on p6)

The big backlash begins against Boy Scout bigotry

THE Boy Scouts of America (BSA) may have notched up an important victory when the US Supreme Court last year affirmed its constitutional right to exclude gays (and, by extension, atheists) as members and troop leaders, but the case has since done the organisation a considerable amount of harm.

Following the court ruling, public opinion has been running strongly against the BSA, and many official bodies which had previously funded the organisation have withdrawn financial help.

And in New York City, Chicago, San Francisco, San Jose and other centres, the Boy Scouts are being denied access to public schools and other municipal facilities.

Among those at the forefront of the campaign to isolate the Boy Scouts is the Freedom From Religion Foundation, which has been vigorously lobbying public officials and various school authorities to exclude the Boy Scouts and starve them of funds.

"If the Boy Scouts stand for discrimination, they should stand alone," is the message the FFRF has been sending out. "We urge freethinkers to continue pressuring school districts and government to sever ties with the Boy Scouts because of the group's religion-based bigotry against both freethinking boys and gays," said Foundation President Anne Gaylor.

Patrick Boyle, writing in a recent issue of America's *Youth Today*, claimed that the BSA's anti-gay stance was a "case of money and Mormons". Boyle noted that the Mormon Church sponsors around 31,000 scout units. This is 12 per cent of all troops and covers some 400,000 boys. In total, 65 per cent of all scout units are sponsored by religious organisations.

The controversy erupted over the US Supreme Court case of Boy Scouts of America v James Dale, an Eagle Scout and former assistant scoutmaster who was expelled from the Scouts after they learned he was gay.

In August, 1999, the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that Dale's expulsion was illegal because it violated the state's anti-discrimination law. The BSA then appealed the decision, and mustered help from a variety of religious groups. Lined up against Dale were Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish and Mormon denominations and ministries.

Dale, however, was not without impressive support. Among those who filed briefs on his behalf were the attorneys general of 11 states, the National Education Association, the American Bar Association, the American Psychological Association and – somewhat surprisingly – a number of religious organisations including the American Jewish Congress, the Unitarians and United Church of Christ groups. Deans from a number of divinity schools also rallied to support him.

However, the US Supreme Court ruled by 5-4 in the BSA's favour.

John Fogg, Director of Communications for the UK Scout Association, told the *Freethinker* that there was no danger of British scouts being embroiled in a similar controversy. "Around five years ago we adopted an equal opportunities policy, and we do not exclude people on the grounds of sexual orientation," he said.

However, the UK Scout Association *does* exclude people who "cannot commit to a belief in a Greater Being".

"Agnostics may be able to join but not atheists," he said.



Cartoon by Steve Benson, reprinted courtesy of United Features Syndicate, Inc

Borley Rectory hauntings were faked

THE haunting of Borley Rectory, on the Essex-Suffolk border, was big news in the pre-war years. Harry Price, one of the best known psychic "investigators" of the time vouched for its authenticity in his book, *The Haunting of Borley Rectory*.

It was later revealed that the ghost hunter had a hand in the haunting. Now, another who was involved in the hoax, Louis Mayerling, has owned up, and published a book, *We Faked the Ghosts of Borley Rectory*.

Mayerling recalls that Price's book brought hundreds of coachloads to the rectory "keen to believe" in the paranormal happenings, and he, as a young man, and various servants helped to satisfy the spook seekers. He even walked the gardens at dusk in a black cape as a headless nun. Of course, some of the "celebrities" took it all in (Bernard Shaw and T E Lawrence among them) and the BBC "noted" more than 2,000 incidents, which it concluded were true.

suffer the little children

FIVE years ago, director Christopher Morris made a documentary for the BBC about a 14-year-old child preacher by the name of Shaun Walters. Last month, the *Everyman* programme screened a film following up what had become of the infant religious phenomenon. Talk about suffer little children!

Shaun's father, Mike Walters, is a religious fanatic of the old school. Every catastrophe in his life - whether self-inflicted or not - is laid at the door of Satan. Marriage broken up? Blame it on the devil. Run out of money? The Lord will provide. Got an autistic child? All the fault of demons. But Mike Walters is an adult and if he wants to throw away his life fighting the good fight in the company of like-minded loonies, then that's his choice. But when it comes to his children, it should be a different matter.

In the original documentary, Shaun was shown as a tiny blond-haired adolescent, with artificially inflated hair and miniature white tailcoat, running through the revivalist churches like a banshee, shouting impenetrable nonsense, casting out devils and "miraculously healing" the sick. Once he was in the pulpit there was no stopping him, but once he was off-stage he was a strangely quiet and withdrawn individual.

Now he's nineteen and, as the documentary showed, a broken reed. The demons and devils he's been casting out of other people are now chasing him through his own nightmares. At one point he confides to the documentary-maker that he fears he has become a vampire and that when the sun rises he will turn to ashes. As his father dragged him and his ten-year-old brother Jacob on a cross-country pilgrimage to get the younger child "ordained", Shaun was withdrawn, unhappy



Terry Sanderson reflects on the sad case of the boy evangelist who now believes he is a vampire

and obviously deeply disturbed.

When Christopher Morris questioned Mike Walters about the mental state of his son, Walters seemed unconcerned (no doubt because he was trusting in the Lord to see them through). He reluctantly admitted that Shaun had been diagnosed as "autistic", although he seemed to have no comprehension of what the word meant.

In the meantime, Mr Walters was priming his younger child Jacob (an attractively optimistic kid who was also good in the pulpit) to follow the same path that had so damaged Shaun. Jacob, naturally, did what his father told him, and I suppose he imagined that the crazy world they were inhabiting was normal, simply because he knew nothing else. Most of the film was taken up with following them on their journey across America's Bible belt to the cathedral

where Jacob was to receive his ordination.

Christopher Morris asked Jacob whether he was looking forward to his ordination. "Oh yes!" said the boy. "I've always wanted to be ordained. What's ordained, Daddy?"

When they finally arrived at the "cathedral" it was nothing but a converted house in a rather insalubrious part of town. The congregation of about 20 who had gathered to witness the ordination (and to scream, shout, talk in tongues and generally carry on like inmates of Bedlam) were a sad crew.

Reviewing the programme in the *Daily Express*, John Lyttle wrote: "What we didn't hear were the words 'child abuse'. Of course, claiming religious principles remains one of the best ways of frightening off the concerned. No one wants to be called intolerant. Or to wrangle with fundamentalists - something worth remembering in the Anna Climbe case as everyone denounces the police, social workers and doctors."

The journalist and satirist Auberon Waugh has died at the age of 61. Mr Waugh was something of a renegade in Fleet Street, a man with his own opinions and a healthy disregard for attempts to stop him expressing them. Those opinions were not always pleasant - he was irredeemably snobbish and had strange obsessions that he expressed freely and often in print. These obsessions were so strange that they actually became funny after a while. He was pro-smoking but anti-bats (as in the belfry). It was difficult to predict what stand he would take on any issue, and his stream-of-consciousness style would often have him start on one subject and finish on something totally unrelated a hundred words later.

Although ostensibly religious (in his last interview, however, he rejected the concept of life after death), his poisoned pen was often used to attack the churches. One of my favourite quotes was published in *Private Eye* (with which he was closely associated) in 1978.

"This is the Bishop of Winchester's new prayer, to be recited after abortion. 'Heavenly Father, You are the giver of Life and You share with us the care of the Life that is given. Into Your hands we commit in trust the developing life we have cut short. Look in kindly judgment on the choice we have made and assure us in all our uncertainty that Your love for us can never change.'

"A moving sentiment. It might also work as a Grace to be said before any meal which includes suckling pig, milk lamb or *petits poussins a la creme*. Even as I think about this I find my mouth watering. It is an extraordinary thing that the more one eats the more one wants to eat."

More church schools on the rates?

possible from the outset - at least a substantial minority of pupils with a Christian background". Such a recommendation could hardly be interpreted as discouraging the enticement of Local Education Authorities to agree to new church schools by proposing more inclusive selection criteria than it is intended to apply later. My suspicions were further aroused on reading that more inclusive selection criteria "will be important factors in winning the hearts and minds of our prospective partners".

The report calls for all Christian teachers with leadership potential to be given "in-service development to move on to senior positions". The report wants "the Church to work for the greater recognition of RE teachers in all schools." There is of course no recogni-

tion in the report that to give preferment to one is to discriminate against another. The report suggests their schools should "reflect the nature of the Trinity, a life shared and defined by reference to others". Presumably that reference to others is that they are inferior and deserve less.

The report's full title is: *The Archbishops' Council - Church Schools Review Group - Consultation Report, December 2000*. ISBN 0 7151 90458, price £1.50 or £2.50 incl. p & p. Call 020 7898 1301/2 for further details.

The National Secular Society will be responding comprehensively to the invitation to consult (by the deadline of February 14), but not necessarily in a way that their Graces will find particularly encouraging.

The triumph of science over religion

By Chris M Cumo

For millennia religion suffused human existence. As early as 60,000 years ago Neanderthals buried their dead, suggesting to anthropologists that they were the first humans to be conscious of human finitude and of the consequent need for immortality if they were to triumph over the grave.

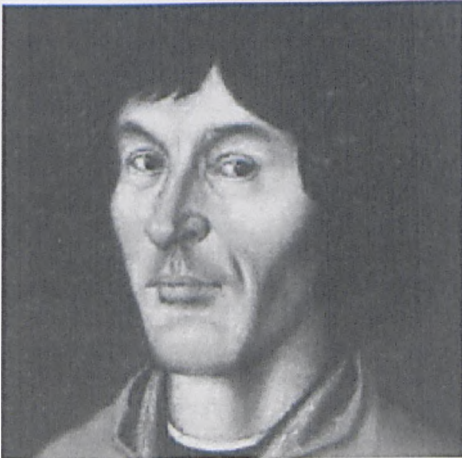
Accordingly they buried their dead in an east to west orientation, the putative path of the sun, and may have worshipped it as the giver of life.

Thirty-thousand years ago Cro-Magnons buried their dead with spears, presumably so that they could hunt in the underworld. Their cave paintings in Altamira, Spain, and elsewhere were likely to be a part of religious ceremonies in which a tribe's shaman communed with the spirits of bison and other prey.

The rise of agriculture in the Near East around 10,000 years ago led humans to settle in cities, where they created gods to guarantee the bounty of the harvest. The Hebrews simplified matters, substituting one god for the pantheon of deities common to most ancients. Christianity arose from Hebraic roots in Roman antiquity and shaped political and social institutions in Medieval Europe. The Church of the early 13th century had such wealth and influence that Pope Innocent III could depose emperors and raise armies.

From the summit of power, Christianity began to falter in the 16th century.

The Church taught that the earth was the



Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543)

center of the universe, but Copernicus revived the Greek idea that the earth was a planet circling the sun. Kepler, Galileo and Newton refined the Copernican model, and despite the Church's attempt to silence Galileo and ban Copernicus' writings, educated Europeans understood by the end of the 17th century that

science had triumphed over the Church.

Historians have made much of the Copernican revolution, but no less important was the work of British physician William Harvey. In the early 17th century he demonstrated that blood circulates throughout the body.

The heart is the engine that pumps the blood, and the body is a machine.

French philosopher and mathematician Rene Descartes realized the implications of Harvey's work, positing a dichotomy between body and soul. The soul animated the body; it was the program which ran the computer, to borrow a modern analogy.

If body and soul were separate, humans could perceive only the existence of the body, and empiricists began to doubt the existence of the soul, undermining Christianity. As early as the 13th century Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II asserted that the soul did not exist, a position that gained ground in the 19th century when Charles Darwin proposed that all life had evolved from primitive bacteria. No line separated humans from other organisms. We are part of the continuum of life, and if a bacterium lacks a soul, where in our long evolutionary trek did we get one? Man turns out to be nothing more than a machine built over millions of years by natural selection. Although Darwin was reluctant to enter the religious storm that broke after publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859, evolution had replaced God as the source of life. In the post-Darwinian world, Nietzsche declared that God is dead.

In his place is man the machine. The rediscovery of Gregor Mendel's laws of heredity in 1900 ushered in the genetic revolution. Humans are solely an aggregate of genes, and the Human Genome Project has catalogued our genes, making it possible to match each gene with a trait. Scientists should soon describe every idea, emotion and behaviour as the sum of gene interactions believes Francis Crick, one of the discoverers of DNA's helical structure. Crick is now working to correlate every electrical pattern in the brain with an idea or emotion, reducing the human to an electrochemical machine. Physics reinforces this view of humankind. We are merely a composite of atoms, and the rise of Quantum Mechanics in the early 20th century raised the possibility that physicists will one day describe the human as an aggregate of quantum mechanical states, notes Tulane University

physicist Frank Tipler. He views the human as merely a carbon-based computer, for both computer and human use an algorithm to manipulate information.

In a universe bereft of God, life is little more than a farce, remarked Nobel laureate Steven Weinberg. We inhabit a world circumscribed by the implacable limits of extinction. The average species lasts five million years, and species periodically succumb in waves of mass extinction. The greatest of these, the



Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), the Italian astronomer and mathematician who was condemned as a heretic in 1633 and imprisoned for his beliefs

Permian Extinction, claimed some 95 per cent of all marine invertebrates roughly 230 million years ago. Other episodes also wiped the slate clean, including the Cretaceous debacle, which killed off the dinosaurs. If God exists, he did a poor job creating life; he certainly did not build it to last.

Niles Eldredge, curator of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, estimates that 30,000 species become extinct each year. At the current rate, humans should be extinct in the next two to four million years. So much for the notion that we are the jewel of creation.

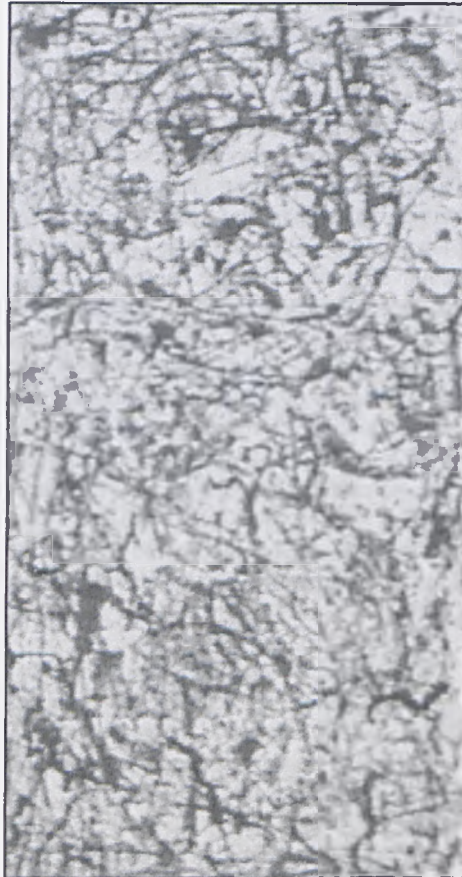
We may not be the apex of life, but we are masters of our fate. We have created science, and, whatever its shortcomings, it is the surest path to knowledge that we have yet devised. Science has replaced faith as the arbiter of truth, and in a universe devoid of the gods, we can rejoice in every mineral flake of stone and in every star in the heavens. The cosmos and its inhabitants, finite and imperfect, are nevertheless sacred in their own right.

We do not need to be happy.

The main problem when it comes to discussing art is one of definition. What exactly is art? In that sense the art debate parallels the God debate. If you say you are agnostic about God it is necessary for you to give a definition of God so that it can be known what it is that you are agnostic about. Equally, if you say that you have an appreciation of modern art; a definition is required. In its absence there is no limit as to what can be considered art, with the result that all manner of peculiar creations can be labelled art without anybody being able to argue. What this can lead to can be seen in the annual Turner prize competition. This seems to have degenerated into a race for the most banal and grotesque. An experience akin to being savaged by a dead sheep. Think of something gross that has not been displayed before and chances are that it will be picked up by the *aficionados* as something portentous and a suitable vehicle for them to invest with their personal brand of humbug.

In modern art enthusiasts I detect a great deal of similarity with arm-waving, glad-eyed Jesus freaks who, having waved goodbye to judgment, are now the helpless victims of their overpowering emotions. Witness the gallery visitors entranced in front of a square of orange paint; how are they different from the glassy-eyed recipients of the "body of Christ" during Sunday morning communion? Where is the substance? Where is the framework for these emotional displays? Does art come from within or from without? If it comes from within then every object, every action, every notion can be elevated to the pedestal of hallowed art. My absent-minded doodle on a message pad becomes somebody else's portentous statement. To the boot fetishist a muddy wellington becomes a more desirable and artistic object than Rembrandt's *Nightwatch*. Then art is what turns you on; end of discussion. To separate the crumpled sheets of Tracey Emin's bed from a portrait by Anthony van Dyck we are in need of a crucial criterion. Let's call it skill. Like Emin we can all mess up a bed and if we are self-seeking and brazen enough we can wheel it into the Tate and bask in sudden glory – but stand us in front of a canvas and ask us to paint a self-portrait and we are not half so clever. In activities other than art the importance of the skill factor is readily acknowledged. Apart from devoted wives and girlfriends, few people will turn out to watch the average Sunday league kick-about in the park. But to see Beckham and his like, tens of thousands make the weekly pilgrimage. Because every-

body can recognise and appreciate the difference in skill. For some strange reason art is exempted from this test and is left to marketing driven whims and fancies. Spin doctors and advertisers determine what is and what isn't fashionable art. Hundreds of quite skilful landscape painters toil away in penury whilst gimmick merchants of the likes of Damien Hirst can name their price. Because the criterion of skill is shunned by the world of modern art it is an open invitation to the brash and impudent. The loudest noises and the pottiest gimmicks win the day; he who bles wins. Carcasses in formaldehyde, elephant dung, dishevelled beds. Look at me ma, I dare to be the greatest piss artist, gimme the prize. And they do.



American painter Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) "used the unconscious mind to prompt his art in works such as *Black and White* (1948)", according to *Grolier Encyclopedia*. He perfected new techniques of application, dripping paint from cans and pouring and hurling paint onto unstretched canvases.

(Private collection/Bridgeman Art Library. Copyright 1995 Pollock-Krasner Foundation/Artists Rights Society, New York)

ART? OR OF POLI

Unlike traditional art, modern art cannot stand alone. It must be propped up by pretence and hyperbole. It only becomes art once the artist has established fame, by fair means or foul.

Most of us will know someone who in

Modern art, argues has a lot in comm

retirement or in boredom has taken up art. This tends to be impressionist art, for representational work is beyond most people's capability. Visitors are taken proudly to the "studio" to admire the offerings. Weird shapes and colours of no fixed abode. In deep embarrassment the viewer stammers an apologetic "It has got something, but I can't put my finger on it". In reality what they would like to put on it is a well-aimed baseball bat. And when the perpetrators of such frauds through skilful marketing have achieved their status, whatever they choose to unload on an unsuspecting public is sacrosanct. The onlooker stands bemused but silent. To criticise modern art is to criticise the Holy Grail. Once again compare religion: daft moral pronouncements issued by the Pope are listened to in awe; similar utterances by a London cabby is the stuff of a gormless bigot. To believers, paint dribbling from the end of Pollock's brush is art. A toddler splashing paint is making a mess. For those fortunate enough to have missed out on Pollock let me explain that a Jackson Pollock picture consists of a canvas decked in randomly dribbled paint, resembling the floor of an incontinent parrot's cage. Nothing daunted, some people possess an amazing facility for seeing what they want to see. Witness this review of Pollock's "Number 32" by art gallery director Bryan Robertson: "Pollock made some of the most heart-achingly beautiful and transcendent abstract paintings of this century. His art is without precedent in the perfection of its final form. Transcendent is the word: his paintings soar far beyond our normal concepts of time and space ... I was moved to tears by the evidence of the sheer effort Pollock expended in his quest for transcendence, to exorcise personal devils and free himself of the stylistic barriers inherited from Picasso, Miro, Sequieros and Orozco."

Now contrast this laudation with the assess-

A LOAD OF LOCKS?

es Tony Akkermans, mon with religion

ment made by humanist author Kurt Vonnegut: "It seems that after two world wars and the holocaust we know everything is so terrible all we can do is go blah-blah-blah or shut the fuck up. Art, literature, conversation, what's it all about? Then this man comes along, who

couldn't even draw, who had no talent, went blah-blah-blah and drove into a tree. And we respond as though he's just invented penicillin. We should have laughed, he was only fooling around. God help Jackson Pollock if he'd ever wanted to stop the dribbling when universities, galleries, museums and collectors were saying it is important and shelling out the big bucks. He must have thought the world was as crazy as he thought it was in the first place. Who was kidding whom?"

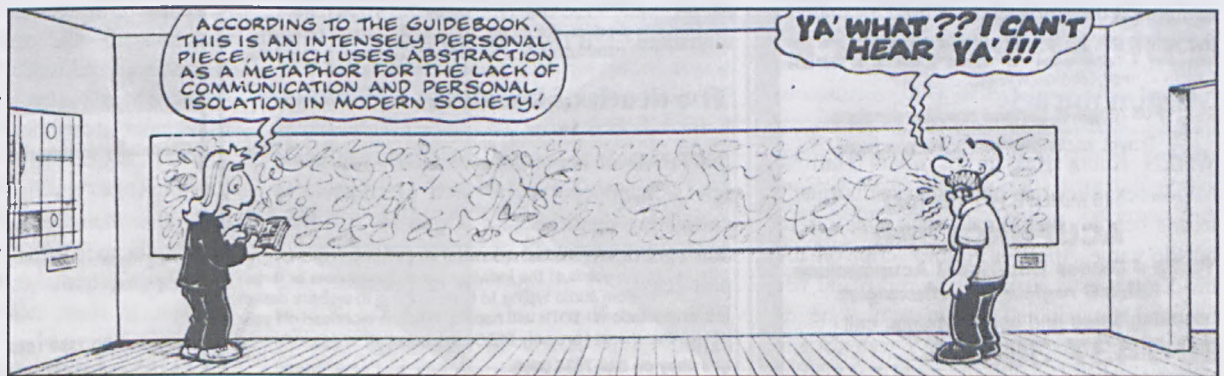
I have dwelled on Pollock for he epitomises the lie that is abstract art. Place half a dozen people in front of a Michelangelo and there will ensue a lively discussion about the skill and meaning of his art. Faced with a screen by Pollock these same people will be reduced to perplexed silence followed by a discussion around psychology.

Like religion, modern art deals in abstracts and its "truth" is in the eye of the beholder. But how verifiable are such truths? Let me share with you a compelling anecdote: there was this documentary on TV, years ago, but I remember it well. Lots of kids having fun doing modern art. Splashing paint on canvas. Stirring, spreading, throwing. They were riding across it on bicycles, doing little dances, slip-sliding away. The finished products, with splendid colour combinations, textures and patterns were given very impressive frames. Then all were arranged tastefully in a gallery and presented as the work of an up-and-coming Danish talent. The bogus artist,

with a blond, Scandinavian haircut, looked every inch the part in his tuxedo and bow tie. Next the art critics were let loose. They did not disappoint; all the usual blather and culture babble.

Blue periods, post somethingism, *fin de siecle*, dadaistic, reminiscent of improvisation no. 30 by Kandinsky; you know the sort of thing. Then these experts were shown on video how these "works of art" had been gathered. Oh, the faces and the fast talking that followed! What the tear-stained Mr Robertson would have made of it all does not bear thinking about. The point is, of course, that this kind of trick could not possibly be played in respect of traditional art. Yes, there have been forgeries, but the forgers are artists too. In Holland, a while ago, a famous "Red, White and Blue" (the titles are either totally obscure or they point out the obvious) had been damaged by an irate visitor (no, it wasn't me, I just laugh at them). It was felt that no one but the artist himself could effect the repairs. So at great expense he was brought over from the US. Ten minutes later the job was done. Whereupon it was discovered that he had gone to the local B&Q, picked up some cans of paint and repainted the three rectangles in question.

ural things - weedy unkempt tangles and tendrils, autumn vines whose leaves have gone. There are bodies in there too, a *deja vu* of breasts and hips, legs and necks, the curve and fall of drapery. There is a lot of air and space between the lines and the greenness beyond is more like atmosphere or the memory of scent than colour itself". There is much more of this but I'll show mercy and spare you it. It is clear that artistry in words is necessary to make up for the lack of it on canvas. In desperation some apologists even reach for a child's opinion. In his recent Richard Dimpleby lecture "Who's afraid of modern Art?" Nicholas Serota quoted a four-year-old who, on seeing Rothko's "orange and yellow", had said that it reminded him of God. To expose a four-year-old to both God and Rothko must rank as the worst form of child abuse. And gimmicks of course are never far away. I recently had the amusing task of translating the entries for a Dutch and German contemporary art exhibition. One of the works consisted of a childish and crudely painted bird. But this was not just an ordinary bird. No, it was an upside-down bird. The explanatory blurb made it clear that this was of great significance and a very new departure. Try as I might I could only



Cartoon by Ricky, reproduced courtesy of The Pink Paper

Well, what else would you expect the man to do? That is how the "art" had been created in the first place.

The crux of the matter is that none of these wannabe artists can paint. If they attempt any representational work at all it usually resembles a standard that would be offensive to a talented ten-year-old. Because of this unfortunate failing they have to resort to producing match stick figures, squiggles, vivid colours, profound squares, fancy frames and most of all a wide-ranging repertoire of obscurantist "art-speak" that could rival any "God moves in mysterious ways" pulpit flummery on an average Sunday. To illustrate the point once more let me quote Adrian Searle on Brice Marsden's Loops. "The painting and the line evokes nat-

see it as a rudimentary bird in an expensive frame, hung upside down. But what do I know? The translation, by the way, was one of the easiest ones I have undertaken. Because the text was in the realm of fantasy any word or phrase had equal merit. After all, whether a combination of purples and greens with a yellow dot is "ethereal" or "enlightening" or even "mesmerising" doesn't really matter; nobody is going to argue much. Believers, of course, will not be denied. The emperor continues to wear his clothes. Karel Appel, a Dutch expressionist painter of great fame, once demonstrated on TV how he went about his artistic business. In ten minutes flat he tossed off half a dozen "works". "I just mess about," he confessed.

(Continued on p13)

down to earth: colin mccall

The papal message

IN his New Year message, the Pope attacked western science and technology as an “enticing and alluring” model which the rest of the world was following with a “slavish conformity”. And he described it as a fatal attempt to secure humanity’s welfare by eliminating God.

“A culture that no longer has a point of reference in God loses its soul and its way, becoming a culture of death”, he said. “Detached from their Christian origins, these models are often inspired by an approach to life marked by secularism and practical atheism and by patterns of radical individualism” (whatever that may mean).

Rejoicing in the title *Dialogue Between Cultures for a Civilisation of Love and Peace*, the 24-page document condemned the “irresponsible” practices of genetic engineering as “unworthy of man”. Abortion and euthanasia were also denounced, along with such legitimate targets as torture, mutilation, racism, xenophobia and inequality of resources in the poorer nations.

John Paul expressed particular concern over his homeland, Poland, which was aping the west, rather than acting as a “spiritual beacon”. The people of that traditionally Roman Catholic country seem to be recognising that the spiritual can’t hold a candle to the material, let alone a beacon.

Muslim miracle

WHEN Kubra Kassam of South Harrow, Middlesex, sliced an aubergine “as normal”, lo and behold, she noticed what appeared to be the name Allah in Arabic script on the inside. It was 6.30 in the morning and her husband Hasanali had gone to the mosque for morning prayers. She couldn’t wait for his return to show him the “miracle”. He was equally thrilled at the sight of the sacred name, and hastened to spread the glad tidings; to let hundreds of fellow Muslims see what he described as “God’s message” (*Muslim News*, December 22).

God alone knows what that message was. J B S Haldane once, when asked what he thought about Jehovah, lightheartedly replied that he must have a particular fondness for beetles, because he had created so many. Perhaps in his other guise as Allah, he has a particular liking for aubergines, to the extent of putting his brand name on them.

A famous grandfather

I WAS in Lichfield on Boxing Day, where there is a newly-opened centre devoted to Erasmus Darwin, Charles’s grandfather, who

died 200 years ago. He was a popular physician in the city and, as *Chambers Biographical Dictionary* adds, “a prominent figure on account of his ability, his radical and free-thinking opinions, his poetry, his eight-acre botanical garden, and his imperious advocacy of temperance in drinking”.

The botany and the poetry came together in *The Loves of Plants*, written in heroic couplets “to enlist the imagination under the banner of science” and to draw attention to “the immortal works of that celebrated naturalist, Linnaeus”, the Swedish originator of binomial classification of plant and animal species, including *Homo sapiens*. In the poem, Darwin delightfully personifies stamens and pistils and plays on their numerical relationship in the various classes. Iris, for example, is in the class *Triandria* or Three Males, so we read: “The freckled Iris owns a fiercer flame, / And three unjealous husbands wed the dame”. But where male and female flowers are on different plants, as in the class *Dioecia*: “Each wanton beauty, tricked in all her grace, / Shakes the bright dew-drops from her blushing face; / In gay undress displays her rival charms / and calls her wondering lovers to her arms.”

I must say I fall for the charms of Erasmus’ poetry (“dazzling”, Wordsworth called it), and those who would like more can look up Stephen Jay Gould’s *Dinosaur in a Haystack* (Jonathan Cape 1996, chapter 33).

The death of kneeling

INSTEAD of being grateful that it still has a few worshippers, the Church of England is castigating them because – wait for it – they don’t get down on their knees to pray. Over the past few years, the bishops of Lancaster and Basingstoke have noticed what the former called “the death of kneeling” (*Daily Telegraph*, December 24). “People crouch, they stand, they sit, *in extremis* they appear to lie down; but hardly anyone kneels”. Then, after waffling about the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ 2000 years ago, he told “an ancient story that, on the first Christmas Day, the ox and ass were the first to kneel and worship the incarnate Lord”. We might follow their lead, he suggested. The Bishop of Basingstoke preferred to cite human examples like worshippers in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches.

When the *Telegraph* asked for a Catholic comment, however, spokesman Monsignor Kieron Conry put a spanner in the works. Pointing out that kneeling was also much less common in his church, he suggested that many people find it equally reverential to stand or sit while praying. And he added a reprimand to the bishops themselves: telling people to kneel was “carping”, he

said. Anyway, if the bishops think it is so important to kneel while praying, why don’t they come down from their pulpits and do so?

It’s that word again

I DIDN’T have to wait very long for it! On January 2, the *Guardian* carried a letter from two Muslim councillors from Westminster, Mustaq and Murad Qureshi, complaining about the paper’s report of a terror group claim that a suicide bomber who killed eight people in Kashmir on Christmas Day was British. Newspapers should not give publicity to Islam’s “lunatic fringe”, the councillors said; it encouraged Islamophobia, which was “a real social problem in the UK”.

Islam does not advocate people sacrificing themselves as human bombs, we were told. And I have no doubt that is true of the Qureshi’s “Islam”. Regrettably, however, that doesn’t apply to all Islamic sects. Sheikh Omar Bakri-Mahammed, founder of the London-based Al-Muhajiroun, a Syrian-born cleric who recruits British Muslims for “military service”, declared that “People who go from here and sacrifice themselves to Almighty God as human bombs will achieve martyrdom, and they will go to paradise. The enemy who dies will go to hellfire”.

I am sure the Westminster councillors would also condemn the persecution and killing of Ahmadis in Pakistan. Ahmadis regard themselves as Muslims but are not allowed to use that name; nor can they describe their places of worship as mosques. They are heretics, and a sign in the office of a “hardline” Sunni Muslim (quoted in the *Guardian*, December 22) read: “The death of an apostate is better than the deaths of all the non-Muslims in the world.”

Islam, in short, has more than one lunatic fringe.

Burying the hatchet

Can Satanists and Christians unite to resolve the enmity between the Devil and God? America’s True Church of Satan founder Dorel Reddie seems to think so, and Dr Paul Tremone, founder of Florida’s Tremone Ministries concurs.

“Unless you’ve had your head in the sand, you know that the bickering hasn’t slowed for a minute. I’m sorry, but enough is enough. We are asking everyone who believes in the cause to pray to God to make up with the Devil as soon as he can,” said Tremone.

Reddie, who admits he’s “no fan of God”, but does “respect and admire Satan”, added: “Satanists will be asking Lucifer to extend the hand of friendship to God as well.”

I wouldn’t hold my breath on this one.

I'M a slippery-slope atheist. My brother and son are road-to-Damascus atheists.

My brother, a dour Scot from a Presbyterian home, drifted away from the Kirk without ever specifically rejecting its teachings. He also drifted away from Scotland and ended up in royal Berkshire. He tells how one Sunday morning he tuned in by accident to a High Anglican service in which the vicar/rector/bishop or whatever was intoning in prayer something like, "Oh most holy God, whom cherubim and seraphim adore ..."

In a blinding flash of insight he realised what absolute drivel the whole performance was.

My son came to his Gethsemane earlier. He was a wee boy at the time attending Sunday school (my wife insisted, I acquiesced and it hasn't done him any lasting harm). There he was taught how much God loves us. He also learned at home that an elderly relative of whom he was fond was dying painfully. At first it seemed to him that this loving God was torturing the old lady to death. Then came the blinding flash – and God was gone.

I can't claim anything so dramatic.

I started out, as most of us did 40 years ago, as a Christian. In fact I remember being quite taken aback when, at a student political meeting, I met my first atheist.

My earliest memory of a confrontation involving my religious beliefs occurred when I was 17 or 18. I rarely went to church because, although I was interested in the subject from an abstract point of view, I recoiled from the idea of worship, which seemed to me, even then, to be sycophantic abasement before an egomaniac. So I had never considered joining the Church of Scotland to which my parents belonged.

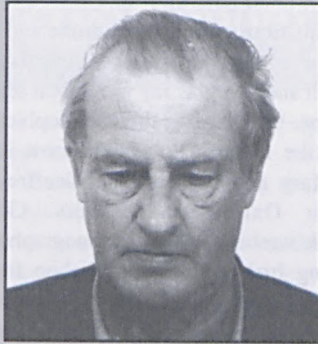
Then Billy Graham arrived at Glasgow's Kelvin Hall trailing clouds of publicity and backed by a thousand-voice choir. My parents brought me along. Fire and brimstone was the message and the delivery was machine gun sharp.

All of us, it seemed, were in peril of the damnation of our souls. Like timeshare prospects, we were to be allowed no time to reflect on our circumstances, but must commit ourselves to Christ "before you leave this hall to-night".

I was suspicious of Graham's reasoning, but he talked faster than I could think and he subjected me to an intellectual and emotional hijack. Only moral cowardice prevented me from going forth and giving myself to Christ that night.

After the show there was the bus journey home across Glasgow. This took half an hour and by the time it was over I had had time to think about what he'd said and to realise what rubbish it all was. Of course I was still a Christian; it was just that I'd seen through Graham's shallow brand of fundamentalism.

Jack Hastie, 65, a retired lecturer in history, is the 14th contributor to our *My Atheism* series. He has worked as an archaeologist in the Middle East. His wife of more than 30 years is an elder in the Church of Scotland. He has a son and daughter in their 20s, both of whom are atheists.



After that God simply slunk away from me – by stages.

Stage One was when I realised – I don't quite know why – that, although arguably a great teacher, Jesus couldn't possibly have been divine. I suppose I became, very briefly, a Unitarian.

But, quickly realising that the Biblical texts were not to be taken seriously (read Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Revelation if you doubt this), I slid down the slippery slope to Deism of the 18th-century variety. I think I read Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* about this time. And that was Stage Two.

I have always been fascinated by religion, though never seduced by her siren song, and so it happened that, one summer holiday, I discovered the Upanishads, mystical Hindu texts which teach a doctrine called Pantheism, ie that God doesn't exist out there or up there, but is immanent in all things.

The Upanishads are repetitive, obscurantist nonsense, but I was young at the time (about 20) and they did seem to be a lot more sophisticated than the naive anthropomorphic monotheism of the Bible and the Koran, or Tom Paine for that matter. So I became a Pantheist. And the evening and the morning were the Third Stage.

Stage Four came when I realised that the omnipresent, immanent Brahman of the Upanishads did not need to be thought of as a conscious individual being at all. The last vestige of God evaporated and I was an atheist.

There was a Stage Five – a sort of epilogue. There are Christian doctrines, original sin and atonement for example, of which I had been quite unaware when I was a believer and it was only after I had escaped the faith that I realised

the full extent of their absurdity.

My personal odyssey illustrates that the path from reverence to ridicule need not be traversed in one single step – a blinding flash of insight, as it was by my brother and son. It shows, rather, that once a genuine enquirer sets his foot at the top of the slippery slope of doubt he will inevitably slither downwards until he comes to rest on the stable platform of enlightened atheism. There is no place for liberals or reconcilers; there is no stopping point between fundamentalism and atheism.

Yet the platform is moving too.

In the 40 years since I first camped there I have learned much about man's place in nature; about the vastness and age of the universe, the probability of intelligent and morally responsible life forms existing elsewhere in it, the repeated and purposeless extinctions of species on earth; the course of human evolution from the last common ancestor with the ape; the futility of metaphysics.

I have also reflected on the brutality of history; witch-burning and slavery in the past; Nazism and Stalinism, the trenches and the holocaust, Dresden and Hiroshima in the century that's gone; Kosovo and Chechnya to-day; plague and famine in all ages.

That the Hand of Providence presides over these needs no refutation, but more significantly I have come to see religion, not just as the erroneous fruit of superstition, but as a positive force for evil which deceives us with protestations of a deity's love while enslaving us to its every arbitrary whim, so that intelligent and often kindly men and women have been tormented into perpetrating the most stupefying cruelties on the cross and the rack and the stake.

Yet in the microcosm, outside of the dreadful but limited operations of Spanish Inquisitors, Muslim fatwas and SS death squads, the sky is bright.

I have no difficulty in accepting that total scepticism on the cosmic scale can be reconciled with enthusiasm, zest for life and even optimism in the microscopic world of personal relationships within which we operate for our three score years and ten, even for those who live at the edge of poverty and sickness.

Atheism is not a dead end. In its humanist form it is a philosophy which, like the sciences, can evolve forever, precisely because it is not shackled to infallible texts which were generated in ages of superstition and ignorance.

It teaches, perhaps slowly after initial disappointment at the loss of "a happy land, far, far away" that, once the spiteful ghosts of Jehovah and Allah have been laid, we can have the courage to know that man is the measure of all things and no mere plaything of a vain and jealous god

ALTHOUGH she was well known in philosophical circles and had served on several governmental committees, it was in 1982 that Mary Warnock first came to the notice of the public, as chairman of the Enquiry into Human Fertilisation. She thinks she was a fairly ruthless chairman (the only type that is any good) and she had no patience with those irritating members who are "not happy" with a committee's decisions, but don't know why. She eventually had to give a little advice to a bishop's wife: that "we are not brought into the world to be happy".

It was Margaret Thatcher who chose the author to chair the human fertilisation enquiry – about the only act for which our first woman prime minister deserves credit. Mary Warnock thinks Oxford University was "deeply mistaken" to refuse Thatcher an honorary degree. It might have been ethical, but it had disastrous and long-lasting results for the universities and education in general, such was the resulting fury of the Tory government. But that is only one field of influence; the legacy of Margaret Thatcher is described as "still pervasive and harmful in society as a whole. The idea of the common good, which genuinely lay behind the welfare of the 1940s and 1950s, has simply got lost". Or, as I would say, has been banished, though I hope not for good.

Surprisingly, Mary Warnock doesn't condemn all that Margaret Thatcher did, and doesn't think anybody could. Yet, after mention of such "virtues" as good housekeeping, thrift and individual self-reliance, the final and valid assessment is that out of Thatcher's character and tastes arose "a kind of generalised selfishness hard to reconcile with the qualities of a truly civilised society".

One might expect, then, that Mary Warnock would have leftist tendencies, but no. Her commitment to Labour ended in the 1960s, particularly because it opposed Direct Grant schools. True, she likes Peter Shore, who is now, like her, in the House of Lords, but she is especially nasty about Tony Benn; and dismisses Leonard Woolf's socialism as "dogmatic". Woolf was the subject of a biography by the author's brother, Duncan Wilson, and she thinks "he found Woolf to be not only a dull, but terminally confused dog". Even if Wilson did, as a diplomat he was unlikely to stoop to such unfortunate and, to me, meaningless language.

This book, you will gather, is quite outspoken, even to the point of a rudeness that surprised me. It also lets us into a few secrets about prominent politicians she has known at Oxford parties or has personally entertained. On one of the latter occasions, she was anx-

Colin McCall reviews

A Memoir: People and Places

by Mary Warnock.

Duckworth, £18.00

ious about the non-appearance at breakfast of Harold Macmillan and discovered he had locked his trousers in the wardrobe and couldn't open it. At parties, she reveals, Hugh Gaitskell and Douglas Jay were great seducers.

For me, though, it is the philosophical content of the memoir that holds most interest. Both Mary and her husband Geoffrey were post-war Oxford philosophers. Geoffrey Warnock wrote a Penguin monograph on the intriguing Irish philosopher Bishop Berkeley in 1953; more recently Mary Warnock has written *Women Philosophers* (1996) and *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Ethics* (1998), both of which have been reviewed in these pages. Three more women philosophers are featured in this memoir. Philippa Foot, whose paper, "Moral Arguments" was critical of the work of another Oxford moral philosopher R M Hare, and, in Mary Warnock's words, opened "the door to what amounted to a revolution in moral philosophy".

Wittgenstein

The second chosen woman philosopher, Elizabeth Anscombe, was a disciple and translator of Wittgenstein, who "gloried in a probably exaggerated ignorance of earlier philosophy". Much more to Mary Warnock's taste were J L Austin's classes on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, and his joint class with Isaiah Berlin, where she first met her husband. Unlike the "temperamentally" Aristotelian author, her third woman subject, Iris Murdoch, was a thoroughgoing Platonist, hankering for "an Idea of the Good, which should be the goal of human aspiration, and a substitute for the no longer credible concept of a personal God...the object both of intellectual contemplation and of ineffable love". She sought a "theology which can continue without God", a contradiction, not only in terms but in actuality. Better

Quotable quote

WHEN religion controls government, it is not a pretty sight. When governments get involved [in religion], someone's rights inevitably are going to be trampled.

– American clergyman Brian Harbour, speaking last year in the run-up to the US Presidential Election.

go along with Aristotle. Iris Murdoch did, of course, write on Sartre and, although she rejected his Existentialist philosophy, she was profoundly affected by his view of the world.

Mary Warnock's philosophical restraint deserts her with respect to A J Ayer who, she says, "went off to Vienna to find out about the doctrines of the Vienna Circle". When he came back, she continues, "he had swallowed these doctrines whole", a disparaging way of referring to Logical Positivism. She seems to think that "meaning" can be given to "some sort of insight, such as that God is Love". Perhaps in her next book she could tell us what that "meaning" might be. In the meantime I go along with Ayer and treat it as nonsense.

At least she recognises the influences of Ayer and the Vienna Circle on post-war thought, including her own. "We were all wary of pretentious claims...Anything that was said was scrutinised to see whether, at a common-sense level, it could be believed or made sense of. We had become extremely sceptical about assertions for which no evidence could be adduced". Which was all to the good. J L Austin was never in agreement with Ayer, so much so that Ayer compared him to "a greyhound who doesn't want to run himself and bites the other greyhounds so that they cannot run either".

Mary Warnock thinks her husband's best book was *The Object of Morality*, which he regarded as a necessary device for making the human predicament less awful than it would be without it. Soon after their marriage in 1949, Mary took up a lectureship at St Hugh's College, Oxford where, in the 1920s the principal, Miss Moberley and her friend Miss Jourdain had combined on the immensely popular account of the spooks they had seen at Versailles, *The Adventure*. A later principal of the same college used to drink a mixture of gin and sherry every night before dinner which, we are told, meant that her rendering of the Latin grace, especially the phrase "*quae ex liberalitate tua sumpturi sumus*" was "at best sketchy". Grace before dinner presumably persists at the venerable university; and masters preside at Christian services in chapel, which presented a problem for Geoffrey Warnock when he was elected principal of Hertford in 1970. He liked the services but he had no religious belief of any kind and felt hypocritical when taking part. So he consulted fellow philosopher Isaiah Berlin, who regularly attended synagogue with his aged parents on Saturdays, although not himself a believer. Berlin's advice was that before starting to read or to sing hymns, one should say to oneself, "Our religion teaches ..." There's philosophy for you.

ERIC Paine, the Honorary Secretary of the Thomas Paine Society, died following a heart attack suffered hours after attending the Annual General Meeting of the Society at Conway Hall, London at the end of last year.

Born in Oxford in 1927, Eric was brought up as a Methodist, but left that denomination after having read Paine's *The Age of Reason*, and, having gone on to read other works by Paine, found his humanitarian ideas inspiring and a spur to action.

He spent his working life in local government, first with Oxfordshire County Council and then Surrey County Council. He married in 1961 but sadly his wife, Margaret, died in 1993.

Eric became secretary of the Thomas Paine Society early in 1989, becoming very active in promoting its aims. His favourite quotation from Paine, "My country is the world and my religion is to do good", can be said to summarise his outlook, for he sought to live up to this ideal in his own life by campaigning for human rights and the environment and against poverty in the Third World.

As a member of the Green Party he served on Selsey Parish Council and represented them in several parliamentary elections, though with

Eric Paine, Secretary of the Thomas Paine Society (1927-2000)

little success. He was also a strong republican and supporter of Republic, to which the Thomas Paine Society affiliated as a direct result of his advocacy.

From his years at school until his death Eric Paine was a keen sportsman, participating in football, cricket, badminton, cycling, tennis and squash. He had been playing the latter when he collapsed and died. He acted as a tennis coach and cricket umpire and recently won a doubles championship against much younger opponents at Chichester. Eric frequently participated in sponsored sporting events organised to raise funds for bodies such as Amnesty

International, War on Want, Oxfam and various environmental groups.

Eric Paine's funeral at Chichester crematorium was attended by a large number of people, including family members and friends, civic representatives and members and official representatives from the many organisations he had supported.

The Thomas Paine Society was represented by its President, Michael Foot, who gave the valedictory. Eric is survived by his son and daughter, his older brother and twin sister.

— R W Morrell

Editor's note: Last month's letters page carried a note from Eric Paine proposing a Thomas Paine Society conference in the Lake District later this year. Mr Morrell has asked us to point out that this cannot now take place, though the possibility of one, perhaps in the Midlands in 2002, is under consideration. Any correspondence for the society should now be addressed to Mr Morrell at 43 Eugene Gardens, Nottingham, NG2 3LF.

Art? Or a load of Pollocks?

(Continued from centre pages)

"Here is another one, worth £50,000" and as he spoke he chucked some more paint on to canvas in a dilatory fashion. "Here is one that resembles a human face; £ 70,000? And now I'll do one with phallic overtones; that always gets the punters going ... £100,000 plus."

Crop-circle hoaxers confess their nightly deeds but they too are disbelieved. Mystique hunters must have their Loch Ness monsters, their astrology, their miracles, their modern art. Tangible evidence, concrete proof, pragmatism must be shunned. It threatens their emotions, dreams and deep desires. Their sensibilities are well protected. Like religion, modern art is ring-fenced by a praetorian guard of fierce apologists. Woe is he brave enough at a dinner party to pronounce that modern art is bunk. The culture vultures will be on him like a ton of elephant manure. The epithet "Philistine" will not be long in coming. People who agree with you will keep their heads down for fear of being branded cultural barbarians.

But if random blobs of paint aren't art, if ruffled beds aren't art and orange squares are not, the question arises: What is? The dictionaries in my possession come up with heartening definitions: "Skill as the result of knowledge and practice; Technical or professional skill; The application of skill according to aes-

thetic principles, especially in the production of visible works of imagination, imitation or design; Skilful execution of workmanship as an object in itself; The exercise of human skill (as distinguished from nature)." It will be noted that this produces a very pleasing and vindicating recurrence of the word "skill". But before I am called a "Stuckist" let me explain that I am aware that art is on a continuum. In the 17th century artists were today's photographers. There were no cameras and they painted landscapes and portraits with amazing skill and accuracy. Today such skills are less relevant. Art is no longer strictly representational. Impressionism has its place. Newspaper cartoons are good examples. Who can forget John Major's underpants? But there must remain a frame of reference. There can be no identifiable meaning in a tangle of contorted paintstrokes. So for me art is anything that is enjoyable and recognisably talented and it doesn't stop at painting. What Sampras does with a tennis ball is art, what Hardy does with language is art, what Rory Bremner does with voices is art; what Steven Bell does with cartoons is art. But what Tracey Emin does with beds I don't want to know about – and it certainly isn't art!

Freethinker readers donate generously

DONATIONS from readers play an important role in keeping the *Freethinker* in production, and, as the magazine approaches its 120th anniversary in May, the need for financial support is as pressing as ever.

We thank the following subscribers for their generous support in the period October 20 and November 31, 2000, during which time a total of £552.00 was added to the *Freethinker* Fund:

£128.00 R C Crews; £50.00 E Durbridge, £35.00 T Bowen, S J Finebaum; £20.00 R Gerber, P T Beeton, S Belfield; £15.00 D Lennard, K S Clair, I G Payne, A A Rattansi, J J Penn, D C Doherty, C David; £10.00 M Ball, R M Harris, D Parker, C P Tott, M V Sloan, A Hennessy; £5.00 A Harvey, C E Douglas, S T Cradick, R Cook, S Eade, S Rose, L J Clarke, G Allan, R C Harrison, K R Wingham, D Dow, M Jackson, S Valdar, G Francis, C F Payne; £2.00 S Campbell, T G Turner.

At odds: Lords Carey and Jesus

AFTER listening to the Archbishop of Canterbury's Christmas message on the radio I wrote a letter, which was published, to the *Daily News International*, London, querying the contradiction between the utterings of Lord Carey and Lord Jesus.

This is what I said: "When delivering his sermon on Christmas morning, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, described Jesus Christ as The Prince of Peace.

"If we believe that to be true, then what do the following words spoken by Lord Jesus himself mean: 'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.' (Matthew 10:34-35 New Testament, New International Version, distributed by The Gideons International)

"Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division!" Luke: 12.51 (Ibid)

"My query may not reach the Reverend Archbishop but will some learned Christian friend enlighten me on this paradox."

MOHAMMAD HAMI
London

Racism and religious discrimination

AS THE author of two books, three commissioned UN reports and a discussion paper for the Commonwealth Secretariat, all on the subject of racism and its argumentative spin-offs, I am sorry to see Keith Porteous Wood, General Secretary of the NSS, lending even a little credence to the Runnymede Trust's idea that one can even mention religious and racial discrimination in the same breath. Quote: "The outlawing of injustice towards individuals because of their religion could be included in a reformed Race Relations Act." (*Freethinker*, November 2000.)

Yet he can hardly be blamed for this enormous non-sequitur, for the Commission for Racial Equality has itself been touting this batty idea around for some time.

Batty? Listen to the words of one of Nelson Mandela's predecessors as head of South Africa's ANC shortly before he was exiled internally and perhaps murdered:

"Religion is a mere belief or opinion, whereas race is a demonstrable biological fact. To try to compare the two, is like trying to compare a pound of potatoes with next Tuesday morning. One is a reality, the other an abstract. And it is precisely because of that, that racism is the ultimate evil, because there

is no escape for its victims. For a man can change his religion, or his nationality or his politics. But no man has ever changed his race." (Chief Albert Luthuli of Zululand.)

As I have myself remarked over many years, when you insult a man because of his religion, in effect you insult just that man. But when you insult him because of his race, you insult his very being, and perhaps all his thousands of ancestors as well.

So to use the Race Relations Act against religious discrimination, might be rather like charging careless drivers under the Pure Foods Act? Such laws would be totally farcical.

JOHN CLARKE
London

Homoeopathy

I DO not think we should take Jean Fawcett's anecdote about her experience of homoeopathy seriously. All such anecdotes are dependent on memory, which is notoriously fallible, and hers seems to be more fallible than most judging by the rubbish she writes about the study published in *Nature* to which she refers. (*Freethinker*, December.)

Her claim that *Nature* "tried but failed to disprove these tests" is a complete falsehood. It was well publicised at the time that the *Nature* team found serious methodological flaws in the work. It had not been properly blinded which had led to observer bias invalidating the results. As for alleged duplications of the results, none have withstood examination and some have been completely ridiculous, like the claim that the "effect" can be transmitted by e-mail!

I find it staggering that any scientifically qualified person should take homoeopathy's claims seriously. On the other hand it is equally staggering that there exist scientifically qualified young-earth creationists. It seems academic talent is no guarantee against credulity and delusion.

Of all the sciences one of the most relevant to debunking homoeopathy is chemistry, and I have yet to meet a chemist who regards homoeopathy with anything other than scorn. This is hardly surprising as even a chemistry GCSE student knows about Avogadro's number and molecular weights and so should be able to calculate the number of molecules of the active ingredient in a given quantity of a preparation. When this number turns out to be zero it is bound to cause credibility problems.

Undergraduate chemistry students learn about the behaviour of water molecules. They learn that H₂O molecules link up and break up again, over and over, at random, on a time-scale of about 100 picoseconds (a picosecond is a million millionth of a second). At the same

time the hydrogens (the "H" in the "H₂O") are constantly swapping places with those on neighbouring molecules. If that is not enough, the molecules themselves are vibrating on a time-scale that is a thousand times faster. Any "memory" imparted to the water by the homoeopathic agent would be scrambled in an instant. Little wonder chemists have such difficulty with homoeopathy!

The rest of Ms Fawcett's letter is just plain anti-science based on a few negative examples. She tells us prescribed drugs have killed hundreds, but does not mention the many millions they have saved (including me). She accuses scientists of failing "to feed the starving or wipe out disease". With a world population of 6 billion and soaring I'd say they've been rather successful in this regard.

Dr Villard hit the nail on the head in her letter on the same page. People with little understanding of science seem to fear it. Ms Fawcett is a fine example. Finally, whilst religion should remain the primary target of the *Freethinker* this does not preclude occasional forays into other realms of superstition. Keep it up!

STEPHEN MORETON
Cheshire

GM crops

IT IS a mistake to think that opposition to GM products is necessarily anti-science. Any reasonable person considers science to be an essential pursuit of knowledge. Opposition to GM products is based on the bad use of science by chemical companies. We have had experience in the past of the dangers of misuse; thalidomide, DDT, PB's organo-phosphates, as well as nuclear dangers.

Dr Villard (December *Freethinker*), may well be a specialist in bio-chemistry. Specialists tend to look at only their own fields. In the case of GM crops, which involves spraying a poison that kills every living thing except the doctored crop, then she should consult other specialists, entomologists, botanists and ornithologists. And there has not been full research on the long-term effects of GM foods. As for the benefits claimed by the companies, they are spurious. Remember how not long ago the Green Revolution was supposed to solve famines. The problem of famines is largely due to maldistribution and extreme poverty. The deficiency of Vitamin A in rice in the Far East can easily be cured by adding other crops to the diet. The farmer is tied to the chemical companies for buying the seed every year (not keeping some for the next season as is usual), and buying pesticide and fertiliser from the same company. What a lovely source of profit! That is why the American companies are putting such pressure on European

Governments to permit GM foods. Since most of the research into food is funded by these same companies, one can see how science is being misused.

V S PETHERAM
Devon

Responsible for one another

READING Paul Albrecht's letter (January) reminded me of the late Dame Iris Murdoch's belief that there was far too much suffering and cruelty in the world to believe in the existence of the Christian God.

I too have always subscribed to this belief but in the past 12 months my conviction has been reinforced by the fact that since the death of my wife (1999) I have been doing a little voluntary work in a local nursing home where many of the patients are in various stages of Alzheimer's disease. Whenever I look at these unfortunate people I ask myself the same question over and over again; namely, "What on earth's the point and purpose of this on-going suffering with its deeply distressing symptoms when the God of the Christians, allegedly loving, merciful and compassionate, could relieve them of their suffering by simply allowing them to die in their sleep?"

I'm afraid I always come to the same conclusion: that this simply doesn't happen because the God of the Christians exists in one place and one place only; ie in the mind of the believer. My humanism is rooted in the belief that we human beings are each responsible for one another because it automatically follows that in the absence of the Christian God only people can help other people.

The celebrated American actress, Katherine Hepburn, is credited with the remark "I'm an atheist and that's it. I believe there is nothing we can know except that we must be kind to each other and do what we can for one another."

I believe that her remarks embody the very essence of contemporary humanism, which is why I profoundly hope that the year 2001 will see a vast increase in the numbers of humanists and secularists.

MARTIN O'BRIEN
Gwent

'Default a-theism'

IN RESPONDING to Mr Albrecht's kind letter (*Freethinker*, January), may I repeat that "there is nothing logically impossible in the notion of a benevolent cosmic authority" is not a logically indefensible statement – unlike, for example, stating that there can be an omnipotent cosmic authority.

Omnipotence means having the power to do anything whatever – such as being able both to

generate an irresistible force and also to make an immovable object; to be able to do the one entails being unable to do the other. The second statement is therefore, unlike the first, indefensible on grounds of logical impossibility. (Believers commonly make both statements about their Omnigod, but that is by the way.)

When we entertain a logically possible hypothesis then we can go ahead to check it by experience. Leaving aside the silly excuses of evil things always being "blessings in disguise" or "part of a larger plan for good" or that "God moves in a mysterious way" ... leaving all such sophistries aside, the benevolent cosmic authority hypothesis falls not from logical impossibility but in the light of experienced undeserved suffering on the part of sentient beings. We can repair the hypothesis only if we make radical provisos about that supposed authority.

We can do so by supposing that the benevolence is limited (that there are some evils that the authority simply does not care about) or that its knowledge is limited (that there are some evils that the authority simply does not know about) or that it has limited power (that there are some evils that the authority simply can do nothing to prevent).

What is left of the supposed authority is pretty unimpressive. The most that can, unfalsifiably, be claimed for it is that it has been capable of creating the universe and then letting that creation go its own way - more or less. Such a view of the alleged cosmic authority is neither explanatory nor reassuring. It seems to me that all the god-ideas I have ever met collapse as a result of such analysis as I have attempted above.

Hence my default a-theism.

ERIC STOCKTON

Sanday

Bullying atheists

IT WAS with a sense of puzzlement that I read Alan Willson's letter (*Freethinker*, December), in which he tells us how he was a victim of bullying by behaviourist atheists.

He concludes from his experience that atheism and belief in free will are incompatible and that "atheism is a philosophy of despair".

While I can empathise with the feeling of being ostracised for failing to agree with what was, then, the dominant paradigm in human psychology, I would like to point out that his conclusions are not warranted.

While many (though not all) Christians do believe in free will, the concept of free will is not in any way a "theistic" belief. Our epistemological attitude towards the existence or non-existence of God does not entail anything

about whether or not human behaviour is determined or not. Therefore the idea that atheism and determinism are inextricably linked is unwarranted. It follows from this that even if determinism is a "philosophy of despair" (and I don't think it is), atheism need not be, as atheism and the concept of free will are completely compatible.

J V M McCALMONT
London

JOHN Edwards (*Freethinker*, January) produced a list of distorted aims of secular humanism which he had twice seen in a local newspaper.

The so-called aims were vaguely familiar, but they certainly do not strike me as having been put together from "half-reading articles and letters in the *Freethinker*".

The deliberately distorted "aims" were far more likely to have come from another source, the United States, where a few wealthy right-wing Christian groups have bees in their bonnets – or demons under their beds – about their pet cuss-phrase, "secular humanism".

I suspect far-out American religious literature blows around Solihull more often than copies of the *Freethinker*, but we could try to change the balance.

The religious right will always use distortions and smear tactics against freethought, however "positive" and pussyfooting some humanists try to be.

NIGEL SINNOTT
Australia

Surprised

I WAS surprised by Terry Sanderson's description of the New Labour leadership as "Christian Socialists" (*Freethinker*, January). They may be Christian; they are certainly not socialists.

D M BENNETT
Surrey

EDITOR'S NOTE: Lack of space has precluded us from publishing the large number of letters concerning the existence of Jesus. These will be carried in the March issue of the *Freethinker*.

Please address your letters (preferably typed) to Barry Duke, *Freethinker* editor, PO Box 26428, London SE10 9WH. E-mail: editor@freethinker.co.uk Phone/Fax: 020 8305 9603.

atheist & humanist contacts & events

Bath & Beyond Humanists: Meets at 7.30 pm on the first Monday of every month at the lounge bar of The New Inn, Monmouth Place, Bath. Information: Louise Anderson on 01225 462 053.

Blackpool & Fylde Humanist Group: Information: Ivor Moll, 6 The Brooklands, Wrea Green, Preston PR4 2NQ. 01772 686816.

Brighton & Hove Humanist Group: Information: 01273 733215. Vallance Community Centre, Sackville Road and Clarendon Road, Hove (buses 5 & 5a). Sunday, February 4, 4pm. Public meeting. Speaker and subject to be announced. Sunday, March 4, 4pm. Marguerite Laporte: *The role of the new spacecraft*.

Bristol Humanists: Information: Margaret Dearnley on 0117 904 9490.

Bromley Humanists: Meetings on the second Tuesday of the month, 8 pm, at Friends Meeting House, Ravensbourne Road, Bromley. Information: 020 8777 1680.

Cornwall Humanists: Information: B Mercer, "Amber", Short Cross Road, Mount Hawke, Truro TR4 8EA. Tel. 01209 890690.

Cotswold Humanists: Information: Philip Howell, 2 Cleavelands Close, Cheltenham GL50 4PZ. Tel 01242 528743. Worcester House, Pittville Circus Road, Cheltenham. Friday, February 23, 8pm. John Sutton: *Immigration and Tolerance*.

Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists: Information: 01926 858450. Roy Saich, 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth, CV8 2HB.

Devon Humanists: Information: Roger McCallister, 21 Southdowns Road, Dawlish, EX7 0LB. Tel: 01626 864046.

Ealing Humanists: Information: Derek Hill 0181 422 4956 or Charles Rudd 020 8904 6599.

East Cheshire and High Peak Secular Group: Information: Carl Pinel, 41 Horsefair Avenue, Chapel-en-le-Frith, SK23 9SQ. Tel: 01298 815575.

East Kent Humanists: Information: Tel. 01843 864506. Talks and discussions on ten Sunday afternoons in Canterbury.

Essex Humanists: Information: Brian Whitelaw, 66 Linnet Drive, Chelmsford CM2 8AF. Tel:01245 265664. Monthly meetings, second Sunday, 7.30 pm.

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA): Information: 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth CV8 2HB. Tel 01926 858450. Monthly meetings (second Friday, 7.30 pm) at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1. February 9, Hugh Jones: *Quakerism and Humanism*.

Hampstead Humanist Society: Information: N I Barnes, 10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 0HP.

Harrow Humanist Society: Information: 020 8863 2977. Monthly meetings, December – June (except January).

Havering & District Humanist Society: Information: J Condon 01708 473597 or J Baker 01708 458925.

Humanist Society of Scotland: Secretary: Ivan Middleton, 26 Inverleith Row, Edinburgh EH3 5QH. Tel. 0131 552 9046. Press and Information Officer: Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire. Tel. 01563 526710

Glasgow Group: Information: Alan Henness, 138 Lumley Street, Grangemouth FK3 8BL. Tel. 01324 485152.

Edinburgh Group: Information: 2 Saville Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 3AD. Tel 0131 667 8389.

Greater Manchester Humanist Group: Information: Niall Power on 0161 2865349. Public meetings second Wednesday of the Month, 7.30pm. Friends' Meeting House, Mount Street, opposite Manchester Town Hall.

Leeds & District Humanist Group: Information Robert Tee on 0113 2577009. The Swarthmore Institute, Leeds. Tuesday,

February 13, 7.30pm. David Cove: *Genetic Engineering - Winning or Warning?*

Leicester Secular Society: Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB. Tel. 0116 2622250/0116 241 4060. Public Meeting: Sunday, 6.30pm. Programme from above address.

Lewisham Humanist Group: Information: Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, February 22, 8pm. Barbara Smoker: *Do We Have Free-Will?*

Mid-Wales Humanists: Information: Jane Hibbert on 01654 702883.

Musical Heathens: Monthly meetings for music and discussion (Coventry and Leamington Spa). Information: Karl Heath. Tel. 02476 673306.

North East Humanists (Teesside Group): Information: C McEwan on 01642 817541.

North East Humanists (Tyneside Group): Information: Christine Wood on 0191 2763123. Literary and Philosophical Society, 23 Westgate Road, Newcastle. Thursday, February 15, 7.30pm. Annual General Meeting.

North London Humanist Group: Monthly meetings. Information: Anne Toy on 020 8360 1828.

Norwich Humanist Group: Information: Vincent G Chainey, Le Chene, 4 Mill Street, Bradenham, Thetford IP25 7PN. Tel. 01362 820982.

Oxford Humanists: Information: Jean Woodman on 01865 760520.

Sheffield Humanist Society: Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street, Sheffield. Wednesday, February 7, 8pm. Carl Pinel: *Mercy Killing or Merciful Release?* Information: Michael Granville 0114 230 9754 or Bill McIlroy 0114 250 9127.

South Hampshire Humanists: Information: 11 Glenwood Avenue, Southampton, SO16 3PY. Tel: 02380 769120

South Place Ethical Society: Weekly talks/meetings/concerts Sundays 11am and 3pm at Conway Hall Library, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Tel: 020 7242 8037/4. Monthly programme on request.

Somerset: Details of South Somerset Humanists' meetings in Yeovil from Wendy Sturgess. Tel. 01458 274456.

Sutton Humanist Group: Information: 020 8642 4577. Friends Meeting House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, February 14, 7.30pm. Malcolm Rees: *Sources of Inspiration*.

Ulster Humanist Association: Information: Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: 01846 677264. Meetings second Thursday evening of the month at Ulster Arts Club, Elmwood Ave, Belfast.

Welsh Marches Humanist Group: Information: 01568 770282. Alice Munn's House (WRVS), 4 Gravel Hill, Ludlow. Tuesday, February 13, 7.30pm. Public Meeting. Speaker and subject to be announced.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group: Information: 01792 206108 or 01792 296375, or write Julie Norris, 3 Maple Grove, Uplands, Swansea SA2 0JY.

West Kent Secular Humanist Group: Meets on 3rd Wednesday each month (except in the summer) at Age Concern, Wood Street, Tunbridge Wells. Information: Ian Peters on 01892 890485 or Chris Ponsford on 01892 862855. E-mail address: C862855@hotmail.com.

Please send your listings and events notices to Bill McIlroy, 115 South View Road, Nether Edge, Sheffield S7 1DE. Tel: 0114 2509127.