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# Freethinker

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Why is an image like  
this so offensive to  
devout Muslims?



Barry Duke provides the answer on page 2

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In Pursuit of Commonsense - centre pages

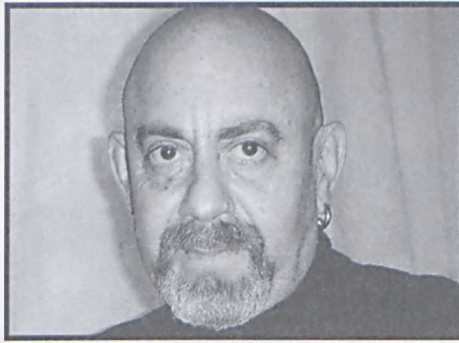
# freethinking out loud: barry duke

TO YOU and me – and, I shouldn't wonder, the bulk of British population – the photograph of a young girl and her dog on the front cover of this month's *Freethinker* is the very essence of innocence and charm. And, let's face it, more than a tad soppy.

But to a devout Muslim, this photograph is deeply offensive. Why? Because "the Muslim community teaches its offspring that animals like dogs, puppies, pigs and piglets are unclean" and that they should steer well clear of all such all beasts.

But, because pictures like these are common currency in British schools, "innocent" Muslim children are being "indoctrinated" to "love" pets. This is a *very bad* thing, according to Iftikhar Ahmad, of an organisation called the London School of Islamics.

Mr Ahmad has recently taken to giving me the shivers by e-mailing me his thoughts on education. For it would appear that the aim of the LSI, an educational trust, is to push for separate schooling for Muslim children by Muslim teachers, recruited from Pakistan.



This, argues Mr Ahmad, is the only way of ensuring that Muslim children are not exposed to "values and norms different from Islamic values, traditions and culture".

In other words, educational segregation. Or, put more bluntly, apartheid.

When a Muslim child, "whose mother tongue is not English", attends a multiracial school, says Mr Ahmad, "he is being given the impression that his language is a piece of rubbish and has no value, and that his cultural background is backward. He is going to be made a modern, civilised entity who will have nothing to do with his parents and their way of life. He is indoctrinated and brainwashed by his peer group under the supervision and control of a middle-class white teacher. The end result is that he starts suffering from identity crises which hinder his mental, emotional and personality development". Phew!

If such Muslim schools were ever allowed to proliferate in this country, I have no doubt that pupils attending them will emerge knowing the Koran backwards, forwards and probably even upside down. But what else will they be imbued with, apart from a horror of cuddling pets?

A belief, perhaps, that they will get their reward in heaven if they carry out a suicide bombing of innocent civilians? When Mahmoud Marmash blew up himself and five others at an Israeli shopping mall on May 18, he left a suicide note saying "Whoever thought that God and religion would prevail without blood and body parts was living an illusion. They don't know the nature of the religion."

Will pupils attending exclusively Muslim schools be taught, perhaps, that it is perfectly acceptable to dispose of anyone who they think may have maligned their religion? When Dr Younus Shaikh was arrested in Pakistan for blasphemy last October, after discussing the personal hygiene of the Prophet Muhammad in a physiology class, one of his students, Syed Bilal, 17, said: "Only out of respect, because he was our teacher, did we not beat him to death on the spot."

Will so much time be devoted to steeping young minds in Islamic superstition that other far more important subjects are ignored, thereby producing the sort of religious imbeciles who went on the rampage in Nigeria at the beginning of the

year? On experiencing a lunar eclipse, the Muslim youths deduced that was the work of "sinners" and ran amok, setting fire to around 50 hotels and bars, and chanting "God is Great".

Will Muslim children be taught to hate homosexuals and call for their murder? Last month Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammed, head of the fanatical Birmingham-based Muslim organisation Al-Muhajiroun, issued a *fatwa* demanding the killing of those involved in Al-Fatiha, a gay Muslim group. "Never will such a group be tolerated in Islam. The ruling for such acts is death," he trumpeted.

Calls for separate Muslim schools must be firmly resisted, and I am pleased that this opinion is shared by the Commission for Racial Equality, which recently stated: "Some parents may look at separate provision as the best way to give pupils real chances to achieve in an environment that reflects their needs. The CRE does not see this as a way forward.

"First, the creation of black-only schools can only ever educate a minority of black pupils. There will never be enough to provide for every black pupil in the country and so there will still be children missing out on the chance to succeed and reach their potential.

"Second, in creating separate education systems for one ethnic group, *all* ethnic groups lose out because children are denied the chance to mix and share experiences naturally. Finally, the solutions to the problems of underachievement and exclusion do not lie in separation but in getting *every* school to take action on racial equality and on genuinely meeting the needs of pupils from every background."

(See reports on pages 3 & 4)

SOME years ago I was regaled by the Monty Python team's wonderfully wicked parody of *All Things Bright and Beautiful*. I tried for a while to find a recording of their version – *All Things Dull and Ugly*, written by Eric Idle – but failed to track it down. Then last month I picked up a CD in a record store in London – *Monty Python Sings* – and to my enormous pleasure found it contained *All Things*, the first two verses of which I feel compelled to share.

*All things dull and ugly,  
All creatures short and squat,  
All things rude and nasty.  
The Lord God made the lot.*

*Each little snake that poisons  
Each little wasp that stings.  
He made their brutish venom  
He made their horrid wings.*

Other delights on the CD include *Always Look on the Bright Side of Life*, *The Lumberjack Song*, and *Every Sperm is Sacred*.

## The Freethinker

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# Bradford mosques 'partly to blame for unruly Muslim youths'

THE recent unruly behaviour of Muslim youths in Bradford has been partially blamed on the mosques in the city by a senior representative of a Hindu organisation who urged Pakistani parents and community leaders to take firm control of children involved in the rioting.

Hashmukh Shah, an Indian businessman who has lived in Bradford for 33 years and is the spokesman for the World Council of Hindus, said: "They [the mosques] are less religious centres, more like training grounds for the Taliban."

In April Pakistani mobs attacked property and cars owned by Hindus during riots in Bradford's Lidget Green area.

Mr Shah's pharmacy in Horton Grange Road, which he uses as a base to run activities on behalf of Bradford's 12,000 Hindus, was set alight, "causing damage worth half a million pounds".

Mr Shah said the relationship between Bradford's Hindus and the city's 80,000 Pakistanis – there are also 5,000 Bangladeshis – was "tense".

Comparing the behaviour of Hindu Indian children with their Muslim Pakistani counterparts, Mr Shah said: "They talk of economic deprivation, complain of the police and discrimination, but these are excuses. When

Indians came to Britain, they suffered from the same conditions.

"They had a level playing field. Because of our hard work, perseverance and keeping our youth under control, Indian children are leading in the field of education today. The responsibility for taking control of Pakistani youths lies with their parents and community leaders."

According to a report in the *Daily Telegraph*, Bradford has now become virtually the Muslim capital of Britain. "It is heavily Pakistani and especially Mirpuri in character. Kashmir is a big issue.

"In 1989, the mosques were at the forefront of the worldwide rebellion against Salman Rushdie when a copy of his allegedly blasphemous *The Satanic Verses* was ceremonially burnt in the city square by a mullah.

"A few years previously, Ray Honeyford, the headmaster of Drummond School, was forced to step down after attacking the whole notion of multi-culturalism.

"Politicised by the Rushdie affair, in the 1990s Pakistani youths forced white prostitutes out of Lumb Lane which runs down to the main Muslim settlement in Manningham, scene of the weekend's riots. The prostitutes' argument – 'we were here first' – left Pakistani vigilantes singularly unimpressed.

"Bradford has also seen the rise of a Muslim women's movement, sparked off by the case of Zoorah Shah, a Mirpuri mother who is serving a life sentence for murder – unfairly in the opinion of her growing band of supporters.

"She poisoned her Pakistani lover, a convicted drug dealer, with arsenic after suffering years of sexual abuse.

"However, contrary to appearances, Bradford does have a responsible Muslim leadership. The Bradford Council of Mosques is now moderate and very different from the radical organisation of the Rushdie years.

"The problem is that the Council, and the mosques, have little or no influence over the British-born generation. Bradford is also fortunate to have Pakistani leaders such as Mohammed Riaz, who has been the unsuccessful Tory parliamentary candidate in Bradford in 1997 and 2001, and Mohammed Ajeeb, a former Lord Mayor.

"They are both brave enough to put the blame in varying degrees on Pakistani youths for the riots in Manningham.

"Mr Ajeeb, a Labour supporter and one of the elders of the community, was recently awarded an OBE. He said: 'It will take us 10 years to put right what's happened.'"

## Nigeria to host African atheist/humanist conference in October

THE first International Humanist conference in sub-Saharan Africa will be held at the University of Ibadan, the capital of Oyo state in South West Nigeria during October 8-10, 2001.

Humanists, atheists and freethinkers from Africa and overseas will participate in the conference, the theme of which is *Humanism, Science and the African Renaissance*.

Invited speakers include Wole Soyinka, Norm Allen Jnr, Sheila Solarin, Hope Tawiah, Nkeonye Otafor and many other African and African-American humanist leaders, scholars

and activists.

Topics under discussion will include: managing ethnic pluralism, combating superstitions, religion and society, gay issues, child slavery, education, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, women's rights, and organised humanism.

For registration details and offers of sponsorship please contact Leo Igwe, Executive Secretary, Nigerian Humanist Movement, PO Box 25269, Mapo Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Tel: 234-2-2312099. Fax: 234-2-8103283, E-mail : nskepticleo@yahoo.com or humanistleo@hotmail.com.

## Taslina Nasreen convicted of 'blasphemy'

TASLIMA Nasreen, author and an honorary Associate of Rationalist International, has been convicted *in absentia* by a court in Bangladesh on charges of blasphemy. The verdict ends a criminal case, filed by an Islamic cleric against Taslima Nasreen for "hurting the religious sentiments of Muslims" with her novel *Shame*, and her criticism of the Koran. Taslima had to leave her country in 1994 because Islamic fundamentalists had issued death threats against her. In September 1998 she returned to see her dying mother, but had to flee once again from the wrath of the fanatics.



# 'why we must resist calls for more "faith" schools

IF SOCIETY at large is to enjoy and come to terms with its diversity, children from different cultures must be encouraged to get to know each other from the earliest age; this benefits those in both the minority and majority cultures.

Religious schools, however, tend to divide society because, as a result of them, pupils become segregated into religious groups which then tend to become exclusive.

A key element in this process of division is the proposed proliferation of C of E schools, which we note the DfEE welcomes. These extra schools will lead to ever more insistent calls from other religions/denominations for state funding for their own schools, on the grounds of equality – calls that will be difficult to resist. We do not suggest that minority faiths are any less entitled to faith schools than Christians. Our concern is that the greater number of faith schools (Christian, or other) there are, the more they will hinder the cohesiveness of society. If, however, as we advocate, all children from all backgrounds were brought together in community schools they would be much more likely to learn how to live in harmony. We would therefore seek to work towards equality through a programme of converting faith schools to community schools.

As the Green Paper notes, some Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Greek Orthodox schools already receive state funding. We cite Jewish schools as an example of the "ever more insistent calls" referred to above. Orthodox Jewish schools are not keen to admit non-Orthodox pupils, and a correspondent to *London Jewish News* reported that some Jewish children are being refused entry to Jewish schools if one of their parents (especially if the mother) is not Jewish.

Her solution was to "build more [Jewish] schools", yet, according to the official statistics, there are less than 90,000 heads of Jewish households over the whole country and they belong to a number of different types of synagogue. Other faiths have similar subdivisions and we could expect each of them to call for their own schools.

The more of these schools there are, the more children will be separated by religious (and therefore often racial, and sometimes sectarian, categories) at a very formative time in their lives, denying them the best, and perhaps the only, opportunity to learn about each other and to live together. An opportunity to challenge prejudice will be lost.

Despite their aspirations to ecumenism, most religions and their sects generally regard themselves as keepers of the one

truth. Children who have grown up without the benefit of positive multi-cultural childhood experiences will, because of this, be much less well equipped to avoid multi-cultural/cross-religious conflict in future generations, as we have seen in Northern Ireland. Problems in England (for example, Slough and Oldham) are already giving cause for increasing concern.

Yasmin Alibhai Brown, the respected Muslim commentator, made some suggestions about such problems in the *Independent* that are in the same broad direction as our own. "Oldham and other such areas must learn to ... unite people by giving them a local identity; [it] is a much more productive route than old anti-racist or colour-blind approaches. We might learn from conflict resolution work being pioneered in Northern Ireland by visionaries such as Dr Marie Fitzduff, the director of the Initiative on Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity. She works to increase 'equity and interdependence' between communities. It is the interdependence which is crucial.

"Almost all social policy in recent years has concentrated on issues of equity and even separate provision, and no attention has been paid to the issues that connect people.

"In very small ways this is now starting to happen – in Bradford, for instance, another place that is too often split across ethnic lines. One example. The West Bowling Youth Initiative has started work with secondary school kids of different backgrounds who are taken off on residential weekends simply to get to know each other. Muslim and white children who had never had a straight conversation in their lives started friendships. Nazaket Ali who runs the project is well pleased. And cricket can help, he tells me. His all-Asian team plays against an all-white team which has been running for 86 years: 'We don't want to break their traditions,' he says generously, 'but if we can play well together, with respect, we can live well together. There is so much to gain.' Just so."

The following letter to the *Guardian* also illustrates our concerns: "I went to university at Queen's in Belfast, where two separate populations met for the first time. The students had often been close, geographically, at home, but had never met. Why? The school system had segregated them. This was because the state schools in Northern Ireland were perceived to be 'Protestant' schools, so Catholic children were sent to Catholic schools ... Surely the ethos of 'state' education ought to be that it transcends religious divisions. The beauty of a state system should be that it can hammer home moral absolutes shared by all faiths with an interest in benefiting society and it allows children to learn about other faiths in an objec-

In the light of the recent riots in London and Bradford, the *Freethinker's* National Secular Society's response is a Green Paper on Education, published before the troubles erupted in Northern Ireland. Division, Understanding or Separation? A monthly column by Keith Poole, Director of the

tive way. What Mr Blunkett proposes is not religious diversity [as he claims] but segregation by the back door."

It would be much more equitable and harmonious if, as we recommend, all state schools were to become secular spaces where students (and staff) of all religions and none are there on equal terms.

(Protestant/RC) Sectarianism isn't the major issue in England that it is in Northern Ireland, with the possible exception of places such as Liverpool.

Nevertheless we are convinced that the provision of denominational schools can only encourage the development of a "community apart". We have heard this charge laid at Roman Catholic schools in England too: "Every aspect of the whole world outside the school was portrayed as being divided into RC and non-RC".

## Additional concerns

ADDITIONAL concerns arise for some minority faith schools, especially where the adherents tend to live in ghettoised communities, leaving children particularly cut-off from the majority culture.

Another problem of the double isolation of home and school is that there may be a reluctance to identify and report problems. References to "outside" authorities may be frowned upon as being disloyal to the minority community, especially such communities that maintain exceptionally strict disciplines and where women tend to be very much under male domination.

We are concerned that the curriculum of faith schools should equip pupils to participate fully in society. In particular we hope that the Department will ensure for such schools that:

- a) the time spent in normal school hours on religious studies or devotions is kept within reasonable bounds
- b) sex education is taught adequately, and
- c) no pupil is denied the opportunity to study a subject on the grounds of their sex.

There is only one advantage we can see in

at riots in places like Oldham  
 nker publishes section 3 of the  
 s response to the Government  
 on, which was written shortly  
 up. This item – *Unity or  
 g or Suspicion?* – replaces the  
 with Porteous Wood, Executive  
 r of the NSS

publicly-funded faith schools: that being publicly-funded they may be easier to control than equivalent schools that are privately-funded.

### The more faith schools there are the more community schools will suffer

APART from the potentially adverse effect on community relations, another potentially damaging consequence of a significant increase in the number of faith schools, with their ability to select, is on the standards in community schools.

The C of E Paper claimed that the C of E was not “in the business of creating surplus places by displacing other schools that are already providing valued service to the community”, yet it is inconceivable that this would not be the result of expansion of the order proposed by the C of E.

A direct consequence of a significant increase in the number of faith schools is that community schools would increasingly become the repository of pupils whose parents are unable or unwilling to find an alternative.

Also, the new church schools’ funding will inevitably reduce money available to the community schools.

Unless some generous additional funding is concentrated on community schools, the prospects for secular education (i.e. education that provides equal opportunities for all) seem to us therefore to be very bleak indeed: we anticipate a spiral of decline.

And that spiral will be very difficult to reverse, for once more faith schools have been sanctioned, closing them, especially those of minority faiths with attendant race sensitivities, with be something few governments would have the political will to tackle, even if convinced it was the correct course.

### The positive alternative

THIS spiral of decline is a far cry from what could be the situation without religious schools. Then, the whole community could be educated together in the same schools that could truly be called community schools. They would also benefit from the support of all concerned parents, including those that, otherwise, would have transferred their child to a faith school. As noted at the start of this Paper, cre-

ating more faith schools does not augment the number of concerned parents, but it can be expected to draw more of them away from community schools.

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (referred to earlier) commented in her book *The Future of Multi-Cultural Britain*: “After multiculturalism, we need to take a different approach – to fairly represent the society we live in without breaking it up further into minority groups aided and abetted by the State; the Church of England should be disestablished; the blasphemy laws should be scrapped, not extended; and there should not be state-funding for state schools of any religion. All schools can and should teach about the importance of faith to many instead of imposing secular liberal beliefs on all children. *But religion should not be practised in any state-funded school.*” (Our emphasis.)

We recommend that, before any action is taken on the proposals in the Green Paper, the Government should commission independent research into the likely effects on community relations of a multiplicity of religious schools.

The results should be published, and, together with other research we have proposed, we submit it should be completed prior to any more religious schools being sanctioned, and before a final decision is made on the reduction of capital contribution from 15 per cent to 10 per cent.

## Christians Want the Right to Persecute Gay Youngsters

THE Christian Institute (CI) and its patron, Lady Young, have launched a campaign to give Christians the right to make life even more difficult for gay school children.

The CI wants the General Teaching Council – the professional body overseeing teachers – to drop a clause in its new code of practice that requires teachers to “Fully respect differences of gender, marital status, religion, colour, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability. Teacher professionalism involves challenging prejudice and stereotypes to ensure equality of opportunity.”

The CI claims that this clause will restrict the right of Christian teachers to disapprove of homosexuals.

In a mail-out to its members, the Christian Institute says: “The world’s six main religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism and Buddhism) all view homosexual practice as wrong... Sexual orientation is a highly contentious moral issue. In effect the General Teaching Council has decided to promote the view that homosexual practice is right and to

put pressure on teachers to agree with them.”

George Broadhead of the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association, said: “The Christian Institute have pulled some pretty unpleasant stunts, but this one is really scraping the bottom of the barrel.

“To argue that gay schoolchildren – probably the most vulnerable of all pupils – should be left unprotected from bigoted teachers is nothing short of cruelty. The fact that some teachers hide their prejudice behind a cloak of religiosity is no excuse. Enough research has now been done into the experience of gay children in schools to know that some of them already live lives of unbearable stress and are victims of constant bullying. Now these Christians want to add to their misery by clearing the way for teachers to increase the pressure on these kids.

“The General Teaching Council must resist the pressure from the Christian Institute and

keep this clause intact. And Lady Young should be ashamed of herself for associating with such a pernicious and bullying initiative.”

Meanwhile, the General Teaching Council has been praised for their stance by Dr Ian Rivers, of the College of Ripon & York St John, a Church of England Foundation.

In a letter to the Council Dr Rivers wrote: “As a researcher in the field of education, I felt compelled to write to the Council to congratulate you on the production of an excellent draft code for teachers. I am heartened that Council believes that teachers should respect all forms of diversity including issues of sexual orientation.

“For the past seven years, I have been researching the issue of bullying in schools, specifically homophobic bullying, and have become increasingly concerned by the activities of various organisations that seek to ensure that sexual orientation is not dis-

(Continued on p10)

## real life: religion & aids - a toxic mix

DEVELOPING countries throughout the world are being devastated as the unchecked rampage of the Aids pandemic creates an unparalleled human catastrophe. At a UN conference to plan a global strategy to tackle the disease, the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell said: "No war on the face of the earth is more destructive than the Aids pandemic. I was a soldier, but I know of no enemy in war more insidious or vicious than Aids, an enemy that poses a clear and present danger to the world."

Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, revealed the extent of the disaster. "In the 20 years since the world first heard of Aids, the epidemic has spread to every corner of the world. It has killed 22 million people. It has left 13 million children orphaned. More than 36 million people worldwide are living with HIV/Aids. Last year alone, more than five million people were infected. Every day another 15,000 people acquire the virus."

In the face of such statistics you would imagine that every government, every agency, every organisation would want to take the gloves off and tackle this ghastly malady head on. Most do – except those that are controlled by religion.

In finalising the Declaration of Commitment at the UN conference, Islamic governments, with the connivance of the Bush administration, succeeded in watering down the final strategy targets by excluding references to gay men, drug addicts, prostitutes and prisoners – all the people most at risk from Aids.

Human rights groups had been lobbying hard to ensure that those in these high-risk groups, who are often on the margins of society, would be promised specific help in the document. But this hope was dashed. Islamic governments, with Egypt, the Gulf states, Pakistan and Malaysia as the most vocal, manoeuvred to ensure that specific mentions of homosexual men or those who work in the sex industry were removed. Their opposition was based on religious tenets – some of these countries have capital punishment for homosexuals.

An Iranian negotiator summed it up when he said: "What is being objected to by Islamic countries are the terms that refer to 'men who have sex with men' and 'sex workers and their clients'. Including those terms would imply recognition of them, and that is a flagrant violation of Islamic values."

The British representative, Clare Short, responded: "If you fail to face up to the need to take action to protect such groups, you will sentence your countries to higher rates of infection."

Such common sense had no effect at all

### Terry Sanderson shows how Muslims and Christians are uniting to sabotage the global battle against Aids

upon the dogmatists. In response to pressure from their own religious Right, which had argued that there was no need to specify "at risk" groups, the Americans allied themselves with the Islamists. The Vatican, too, joined in the religious objections, saying that only abstinence and fidelity within marriage would halt the spread of Aids.

Francis Kissling, president of Catholics for Free Choice, a liberal Catholic pressure group, was horrified at developments and commented: "The conservative Catholics and evangelical Christians are seen as the base of Bush's support, and to satisfy them, the administration has taken positions on reproductive health ser-

#### **'We are astounded that religious leaders who purport to be defenders of morality can stand in the way of the essential work that is needed to tackle this disease'**

vices and Aids that threaten the health of men and women." In Britain, the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association reacted angrily to the changes. George Broadhead, Secretary of GALHA, said: "To compromise such an important document to satisfy irrational religious objections is nothing short of evil. People are entitled to hold religious views, but they are not entitled to insist that those views cost the lives of innocent people. We can no longer pussy-foot around the real, human issues in order to satisfy religious bigotry. Gay men and sex workers are at particular risk from this virus, and their lives are at stake from ignorance and lack of resources. We are astounded that religious leaders who purport to be defenders of morality can stand in the way of the essential work that is needed to tackle this disease. Aids is related to sex and there is no escape from that fact. The world must not pander to religious sensibilities that try to deny this truth, nor accept the implicit message that those who do not heed religious strictures on sex somehow deserve their fate."

Although the Vatican is not a voting member of the UN General Assembly, it does have observer status (which is opposed by, among others, the National Secular Society). This status allowed it to materially influence the wording of the final document.

In its usual fork-tongued way, the Vatican said it welcomed the Declaration "with some

reservations". It later issued a statement saying that the wording of the document "in no way changed [the Vatican's] moral position with regard to the use of condoms as a means of preventing HIV infection".

That is to say, it forbids them. Instead of condoms and safe sex education, the Vatican wants "delayed sexual activity" and "faithfulness in marriage" and "abstinence and fidelity."

These are all very well, but they bear no relationship to the real world and the nature of the sexual impulse.

In Zimbabwe, where 26 per cent of the population is infected, there is a pattern of young men working away from home and family, and becoming infected by prostitutes or casual sex, and then coming home and infecting their wives. With a whole generation wiped out, impoverished grandparents are left to look after the young children.

Fortunately there is some resistance to the Vatican's doctrinaire intransigence. The Roman Catholic Church in Southern Africa is to consider defying Rome and backing the use of condoms to combat Aids.

The idea is contained in a policy paper to be discussed at a Bishops' Conference. It is expected to pit traditionalists against pragmatists who argue that the use of condoms must be reconsidered in the face of the onslaught of HIV. The document reiterates the Church's view that sex is reserved for marriage, but accepts that many people do not follow this rule. In the light of this, it says, the ban on condoms must be lifted.

Many of the countries where Aids is most destructive are in the grip of religion. Islamic countries will not permit frank and appropriate sex education that would arm their citizens with the knowledge to protect themselves from infection. Like Catholic countries they won't permit the most effective form of barrier to the virus passing from one person to another.

And yet, ironically, it is often religious groups that are doing most on the battle front. Many Catholic missions that are providing much needed help are, in the process, ignoring the Pope's ban on condoms. But they have to do it discreetly because if they are discovered to be in defiance of the Vatican's line, the whole repressive weight of the Inquisition will be invoked against them.

In the arena of Aids, unyielding religious dogma is profoundly counterproductive, and yet such is the power of religion in the areas most affected by the disease that there seems little hope for a great improvement in the situation.

As it has so often in the past, religion is trying hard to retard progress. In this instance, the most tragic consequences fall upon the people who can least resist.

THE WORD *filioque* means "and from the son", and on a recent holiday to Greece I was reminded of its theological significance.

The main doctrinal difference between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches is that the former believe that the Holy Spirit "proceeds" from God the Father alone, while the latter insist that It (He?) proceeds from the Father and from the Son (*filioque* in Latin).

This is an interesting dispute. On its resolution depend some weighty matters. In the Roman version there is a clear sequence of heavenly events:

- 1 God the Father was all alone
- 2 He begat the Son
- 3 The Holy Spirit began to proceed from them both
- 4 Collectively all three embarked upon the work of creation – angels first; then, after Satan's revolt, the material Universe; lastly mankind.

The order is less certain if we follow the Orthodox. It is not clear whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, because It (She?) started to proceed before the Son was begotten, or simultaneously with or subsequent to that begetting, but independently of it. Of course subtle Christians deny that any chronological sequence is implied; the Son, they say, is co-eternal with the Father and "begotten" denotes a relationship, not an event. In this they are supported by the fact that all the canonical literature states that the Spirit "proceeds" (present tense) from the Father, and not that, presumably at some point in time, s/he proceeded.

## In the wake of the Pope's recent controversial visits to Greece and Romania, Jack Hastie, a retired lecturer in history, examines the principal doctrinal difference between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches

This, in turn, raises the question of what, exactly, is meant by "proceeds" and "begotten" in a spiritual context in which neither physical movement nor birth arising from sexual intercourse and pregnancy is intended. If the two processes cannot be defined accurately enough for a distinction to be made between them, then Jesus cannot be said to have a unique relationship with the Father, as expressed by the famous formula "only begotten son".

At stake here is the nature of the relationships among the three persons of the Trinity, and the issue was thought important enough to give rise to a major – and still unresolved – schism in the church in the 11th century.

But there is another kind of problem with the *filioque* controversy. It clearly relates to the very nature of ultimate reality; so what aspects of cosmological theory would be affected if one or other opinion could be conclusively

shown to be true? Would it throw new light on relativity? Or black holes? Would it offer insights into what may have caused Big Bang at the beginning of time?

Of course not, say the faithful. These matters belong on a different plane of reality from questions relating to the nature of the Deity. Very well then, what are the implications of the controversy for questions that *do* involve the very nature of God?

What light would a definitive answer throw on the argument over whether salvation is to be achieved through faith alone or by good works? Would it open up new perspectives in the debate about predestination and freewill? In fact what conceivable difference could it make to any dogma or hypothesis at all?

A question from whose answer nothing else can be deduced is not worth asking, since, by its nature, it can be nothing more than a shadow dance of words. In this case not only the terms "proceeds" and "begotten", but also "Father", "Son" and "Holy Spirit" are vague metaphors, impossible to define accurately enough for logical reasoning to be applied to them.

Yet, not only have Christians been squabbling over this for 1,000 years, but there has been significant persecution of the Orthodox by Catholics in Greece and the Ukraine because of it. Fortunately, Muslims don't play this particular game; otherwise honest folk might now be in hiding from *fatwas* because they guessed it wrong.

## Now the Taliban give musical instruments the chop

A WEEK after prohibiting use of the internet, Afghanistan's ruling Taliban group has banned the import of more than 30 items.

They include alcohol, pork, nail polish,

### Braille Freethinker

**FREETHINKER** subscriber Ron Hutton has written to the magazine to say he has the resources to convert articles from the *Freethinker* into braille.

If any readers feel they would like to have articles converted into braille, please drop a line to the Editor, the *Freethinker*, PO Box 26428, London SE10 9WH, marking the envelope BRAILLE REQUEST.

musical instruments and "pornographic material". The Taliban say all the items are "un-Islamic".

Afghanistan's state-run Radio Shariat says border guards have been directed to confiscate the banned items.

The order was issued by the Taliban militia's supreme leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar.

Other banned items include pig oil, products made from human hair, dish antenna, material or machinery used in cinematography, videos cassettes, cassette recorders, neckties and tie pins. The Taliban regime has also banned playing cards, billiard tables, chess, and fireworks, as part of its rigid view of Islamic law, the *Sharia*.

## Freethinker fund boosted

THE *Freethinker* Fund was boosted by a total of **£438.45** during the period June 21 and July 23. We would like to thank the following for their generosity: **£50.00** D Bressan; **£30.00** D Plumb; **£25.00** W E Harman, M Phillips; **£20.00** P Hadfield, P M Housego; **£15.00** T Dryfe, A McCloy, A J Bloomfield; **£10.00** C Hanway, T Clifford-Winters, C Pinel, C Blackburn, M Smith, J Lavety, D Fane, R Newman, G Broady, F Wright, S Clarke, A Hamilton, W Compton-Hall, J R Mackay; **£8.00** M Ewing; **£5.45** N Sandieson, C Tott, D Whelan, C Matthews, E G Tuddenham, J R Hutton, M Tasnier, E Joyce, A Dick, B Cattermole, R Richardson, E Whyte, P Latham, J Lippitt, P Thompson.

# In Pursuit of C (or The Parable

Religion is a triumph of fear over reason. Illogical belief in an afterlife is probably inevitable in a species that has evolved the intelligence to be able to contemplate its own personal extinction.

Adherence to religious ritual demeans, degrades and denies human intelligence. To argue about the existence of a god is to dignify the ridiculous. When we are very young we believe wholeheartedly that Santa comes at Christmas, that babies are brought by the stork (in my day anyway), and dead people wake up and meet their grandparents again in Jesus' house. Usually, in most people, all but one of these pleasant myths are discarded, with some reluctance, at about the time they start school.

However, if you choose the commonsense route concerning the supernatural, you perforce consign yourself to a lifetime's contemplation of an eternity of nothingness at the end of your days, (which, when you think about it, is what we had before the start of our days too).

I can remember having wicked bouts of fear and black depression when I (very occasionally) thought about death as a child. I recall that once I cried in the night, hoping to be comforted by my mother with some great truth that I had overlooked. It never happened, and I can remember my envy then, at that young age, of the sad people who had been able to throw their brains out of the stained-glass window in return for the blissful promise of eternal life.

I had a very religious upbringing as a child in the North Midlands. As a family, our whole social life revolved around the chapel, with two evening visits a week and three on Sunday.

A verse on religious belief written by Omar Khayyam sums up my childhood quandary perfectly:

*Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and Saint, and heard great  
argument  
About it, and about;  
but evermore came out  
by the same door as in I went.*

Omar's epic *Rubaiyat*, written as it was nearer to the last millennium than this, shows that commonsense was desperate to assert itself, even in those days.

There are many, many forms of religion. A person's religion usually depends upon where they are born or the nationality of their parents. There are many ways to ensure your place in paradise. For example, you can amass great wealth and a fancy dress wardrobe, and live in opulence in a large palace. Or live in poverty and own nothing (the latter lifestyle being biblically pre-

scribed as mandatory, your Grace). To avoid pregnancy, use a thermometer and calendar but not a condom or pill. (Will someone please explain that one to me?) Have your healthy genitalia altered surgically. Allow *nothing* to be altered surgically. Deny your loved one life-saving medical treatment. Never have your hair cut. Shave off all your hair. Immerse your body in one of the most polluted rivers on earth (time and date is critical). Don't drive your car on Saturday. Don't eat pork. Don't eat any animal that hasn't been slaughtered cruelly (and, by any interpretation of our law, illegally). Suicide-bomb a school bus. Kill a *fatwa*-ed author, etc. You can make your own list – no matter how ludicrous and illogical, the chances are that your choice will be a mandatory religious observance for some sect, somewhere.

You can always mix and match. If you can't really do without birth control, alcohol and tobacco, or executing people, borrow a bit of someone else's faith whilst dumping some of yours. However, all the thousands of different religions and sub-religions have but two perceptions in common. First, that theirs is the one true religion. The other religions are, at best, well-meaning but misguided, or, at worst, dangerously corrupting and to be eliminated with violence. The second common denominator is the reason for the whole bit. This is that there is survival of consciousness after death. (There's a reward available to anyone who can find me a religion that doesn't advocate the notion of life after death – even if it is only as a crocodile or a tree spirit). The first assertion (the "one true" religion), demonstrates its own fallibility by direct logic. There just cannot be a thousand (or even two) "one true" anything in the same category. Some of the monotheistic religions address this anomaly by thinking of themselves as all being interpreters of the same basic "truth", although their beliefs and rituals vary so greatly as to render very questionable the common assertion of knowledge by "divine" revelation. With such a breakdown in communications, how can you be sure which, if any, of your pillars of faith are set in concrete? The second common tenet (eternal life) is a silly concept to all but the mentally inhibited, but technically impossible to disprove, as a state of non-existence cannot make itself known. And there's the rub.

Belief in this extremely cruel and quirky God is not exclusive to the poor and ignorant.

It would be so easy if it were. The fear of death is strong enough to baffle the brains of otherwise intelligent people. Once I sat and passed the Mensa entrance tests and joined the ranks of the (so-called) elite one per-cent. "Now", I thought, "at last I can be part of a forum of sensible, practical people." Not a bit

By Roy W

of it. My very first Mensa magazine contained the latest in an ongoing, heated religious debate via the readers' letters pages. The religious brain-boxes were slugging off the non-religious boffins and vice versa, just as they do everywhere else. (Apart from the big words and pretentious, incomprehensible philosophy). I was *so* disappointed. Who do you trust – and what does that say about the judgment generally of our peers and seniors, who give credence to such obvious nonsense? Recently I saw a sticker in the rear window of a car in a factory car park. It was based on the fish-shaped Christian-recognition logo of two intersecting arcs. On this sticker was a large fish labelled "Christianity" and a small fish called "Darwinism". The large fish (Christian) was swallowing the smaller one (Darwin). The caption was "The Survival of the Fittest". Supernaturalism in this case, presumably, being the "fittest". This was in the year 2000. It would be comical if didn't make your mind ache with frustration at the ignorance of some people. The person who displayed that sticker owned a big expensive car and (probably) held down a good job. How could you even hold a conversation with a person who thinks like that, let alone take orders from him/her? No wonder then that I have never been able to take people seriously (and probably under-achieved all my life because of that fact). No wonder then that some people believe in the integrity of professional wrestling, hypnotism, homoeopathy, reflexology, left-wing socialism, etc, in spite of overwhelming evidence from experience and observation. No wonder then that the blindingly obvious goes ignored or unnoticed by the less than astute champions of political correctness. Human philosophical thinking is flawed, and this is not so surprising. Once you believe in religion and its attendant superstitions it becomes that much easier to accept anything as the truth, and then everyone's perception of the truth is different. That can change societies for the worse. It holds back humankind. It prevents progress. It causes wars.



# Common Sense (The Parable of the Spider)

feature

It seems to me that individual thinking takes place on several levels, from shallow to profound. Whilst most people will routinely ascend to each cerebral plateau in progression, I am convinced that the religious will not allow themselves to move – on this subject at least – above the very first level of thought. I

Woolley

lest the truth of their folly become apparent to them, and bang goes their harp and halo. If you've ever tried talking to a Jehovah's Witness, you will know exactly what I mean. Your point of irrefutable logic slides right off the surface of their consciousness, making no discernible impression and leaving no trace behind. They don't want to know. It's like trying to push smoke through a keyhole with a knitting needle. How often have you heard the cliché of clergymen undergoing crises of faith? "I wrestled with the devil for days", they may say. What they really mean is that a lapse in concentration allowed their mental elevator to ascend to the second floor, and reason very nearly stepped in. Then how would they earn their living? (I hope this paragraph is clear, because I've just used up my quota of mixed metaphors).

In the Christian religion, Mary was dusted off and deified early on in the first millennium, solely to tempt dithering converts from European paganism who were severely put off by the fact that Christianity didn't have any female gods. Indeed, Mary was never described as a "virgin" in the first place. In a very early biblical translation a Hebrew word applied to Mary meaning "young woman" was mistakenly translated into *parthenos* – the Greek word for "virgin": thus creating the "Virgin Birth" – the Oxymoron that Changed the World, folks. Jesus himself, if he existed at all, was only one of many young mystics who were treated cruelly by the establishment for preaching radical religion. Saint Paul's single-minded and prolific campaign turned him (Christ) into a religion. "Faith", I suppose, is simply the ability to shut your mind to reason and to known fact, the better to inhabit your particular "comfort zone". This theory explains something that worried me for a lot of years – namely, how can people of intelligence and learning succumb to religious belief? In this, as in political correctness and extreme political thinking, I suppose, you just have to distinguish between those who haven't got the mental capacity and those who have, but have

their own agenda for not using it. Keep your elevator on the first floor.

Or as George Orwell said, "Some truths are so obvious that it takes a particular kind of intelligence to stop you from seeing them".

I, like countless others, believe in reason, logic and the limits of human intelligence. Obvious winners when competing against fear, ignorance and superstition.

Let me explain – and perhaps the best way I can do that is by means of a simple and naive analogy. The Parable of the Spider, if you like. And I make no apology for what follows: stating the obvious and over-simplifying to the point of patronisation has always been my style!

Consider the case of a spider that is born and lives and eventually dies in a potting shed, without ever leaving it. In the shed is a supply of food, a choice of mates for procreation, and shelter from the weather and predators. In short, all he/she needs for a good spider life. But the door of the shed remains shut during this spider's lifetime, and the windows are too dirty to see through.

Now, this spider knows nothing about double-decker buses, Dolly Parton, Microsoft, the Euro, sunflowers, the substance of stars, or, for that matter, any other interesting thing that inhabits the other universe outside the potting shed. Come to think of it, he doesn't know too much about the molecular structure of the old paint tins he crawls over. He can't even read the labels.

I have two points to make about this spider's life in order to illustrate my theory. The first is that the spider doesn't need to know about double-deckers, *et al.* Their existence does not impinge on his life in any way. (If you say "What if Dolly Parton carrying a laptop computer crashes a bus into the spider's shed?", I'm going to ignore you). The second point is that the spider would never, ever, understand our list of goodies no matter what learning techniques were applied. Our spider's intelligence consists of little more than genetically evolved responses and reflexes. He has not, therefore, the biological mechanism to understand much of anything. Like us really, except that the world is our potting shed, and our intellects are a tad better than the spider's. (We have learned to read the label on the tin). We do not need perfect knowledge to survive and prosper. Beyond and within our universe there must be things just as incomprehensible to us as our list of interesting things is incompre-

hensible to the spider. Intelligence is relative, and human intelligence is far from comprehensive. We know a lot more now than we did when Shakespeare wrote, "There are more things" etc, but there is a limit to the extent of our understanding, and, importantly, our potential for understanding. The answers to the great cosmological questions of time and space do exist (they must exist), but to us the answers would be double-deckers and Dolly Partons – if you see what I mean.

While Einstein left us a better insight into the workings of the universe, neither he, with his great intellect, nor religion with its lack of it, can explain the most fundamental questions concerning the boundaries and beginnings of time and space. The religious have kept pace with science as each new discovery has disproved age-old beliefs. Bible stories are now described as "symbolic" rather than the scientific fact that you could once be tortured to death for denying. I mean, no one believes any more that man and woman were manufactured in a Middle East green belt 6,000 or so years ago. Or rather, some do yet, despite all the evidence. (Remember our anti-Darwin car sticker?) When you hear about those people you begin to realise that some people's capacity for self-deception borders on lunacy.

And – before we leave the subject – let's see what happens when you take the symbolism cop-out towards its logical conclusion. Given that there wasn't much science about when the scriptures were written, could "life everlasting" be a symbol for genetic continuation? Could "God" be a symbol for nature, or even the collective conscience? Now we may be getting somewhere. Somewhere that could eventually lead to the elimination of the superstitious aspect of religion. Once you start admitting to symbols and metaphors a glimmer of symbolic light appears at the end of the metaphorical tunnel, and with it (hopefully) a dawning of the realisation that gods only exist in the fertile imaginations and wishful thinking of ignorant and frightened people – hence the diversity of religions. They have no basis in fact, experience or observation. The sciences of evolution and genetics explain, with incontrovertible proof, the beautiful symmetry and diversity of our "potting shed". But the legacy of primitive superstition is hard to expel. In the 21st century there is still one born-again every minute. Look at Cliff Richard. This is because religious influence is still condoned at the highest level by those who ought to

(Continued on p10)

## parable of the spider

know better. It is not "I am religious, therefore I will not shop on Sunday." Rather it is "I am religious, therefore you will not shop on Sunday." And meekly we accept this because that is the way it has always been. I read recently – I forget where – that if you believe in fairies they will send you to the psychiatrist. Believe in transubstantiation, human parthenogenesis and the re-animation of dead people – all by magical means – and they'll let you run the country!

The religious have formed the ruling hierarchy since their delusions were the only "science" known to mankind, and church and state were indivisible. The Queen (*Deo Gratias*) is the Head of the Church of England. God save the Queen. The bejewelled and befrocked church management clique is automatically installed in our House of Lords. Prayers are said and gods are invoked at all state gatherings and investitures throughout the world. Public figures who die will still be seen off by archbishops with big hats.

Come to think of it, we all depart to the strains of *All Things Bright and Beautiful* unless we specifically ask not to before our last event. A judge will ask for God to have mercy on your soul – if you are sufficiently ill-advised to be naughty in a God-fearing country that still executes its criminals – with or without a padre in attendance. (Thou shalt not kill?). Nobody asked the monarch, the judge nor us if we actually believe – historical superstitious ritual that no one has yet thought to review still goes with the job. It has to be said that nowadays more of this is done from habit rather than conviction, but it is still there – an endorsement for the ignorant and an assumption made on our behalf that still goes unchallenged.

Perhaps ordinary non-mystics like us should be less passive and less tolerant. All religious practitioners should be regarded as being what, truly, they are – quaint but highly influential minorities, with no intellectual standing whatsoever, who have a history of causing tremendous harm. To achieve this change in attitude we could campaign for secular education for our children as a right, and for the removal of religious influence and preference from all the common aspects of state and society. People could then choose for themselves. Sadly and inevitably, there will be some that need to suck the comforter of mysticism in order to get through life. But the remainder could unite in the task of making this world – the only one we know about – a better place, in which to live ourselves and to leave as a legacy for our children. We could strive to set an example of intelligence and uniformity of clear thinking. Mankind's seeming preoccupation with pain and death would no doubt be as hard to eradi-

cate, but perhaps then there would be more intact Catholic kneecaps and fewer Protestant widows in the world. Perhaps then there would be no more genocide and an end to the hatred spewed out in the name of fundamentalism. Perhaps then our beautiful planet would cease to be threatened by its greatest threat yet: that of over-population. Our children's children stand to inherit a grey cinder of a world. All because they say, arrogant in their ignorance, that it doesn't matter about the deforestation and global pollution caused directly by the population explosion, since there is another, better, place for us – when we, the silent, long suffering majority, know that there is not.

Religion cannot be proscribed. The Soviet intellectuals of old tried to rid themselves of the "opiate of the masses" as being an unproductive, distracting and wasteful irrelevance. Though probably right, they, typically, failed to make their case, and banning didn't work. Not for the first time, local religion went underground. After all, the greater fear (of personal extinction) kept people religious even when they were being fed to lions or burned at the stake (by other religions or denominations) for their illogical beliefs.

Are we now, at last, reaching an age when people can be encouraged by example to stop making fools of us all? Total disestablishment is a worthy goal. The fact that it could take a long time to achieve shouldn't stop us, for the greater good of mankind, from presenting with (at least) equal emphasis, the case against this affront to human intelligence and continuing source of discomfort to society.

We needn't lose anything worth having. We could still celebrate the lives and deaths of good people who tried to teach us the decent way, without making gods of them. I am not sure that I care for the West Midland local authority idea of "Winterval", but seasons dedicated to goodwill and giving need not be scrapped because they have lost completely their already waning religious observance element. Church buildings could (like the pyramids) be retained as places of historical interest for students of the old beliefs of the pre-enlightened age. Organisations dedicated to developing all that is good about the human race could replace the local church, thus providing a haven for the lonely and a reason for congregations of the well-intentioned. Just replace the word "spiritual" with "charitable" or "humanitarian". And, contrary to what the woeful worshippers would have us believe, a world predominantly populated by people who are willing to acknowledge their ultimate fate could – *would* – be a singing, swinging place. It's the only life we know about, so let's enjoy it, cherish it and preserve it – for all of us. It would be pointless not to.

When tackling the close sibling instincts of tribalism and religion, the two worst evils ever to pollute the human mind, John Lennon said "Imagine". Do that for a minute. Try to imagine a world without bigotry and persecution. A world without big people who think that they cannot love their own without hating others. A world ruled by commonsense and humanitarian principles rather than superstitious nonsense, ritual and taboo. A world without prejudice or hypocrisy, where morality is encouraged for its own sake.

Heady, isn't it?

• **Roy Woolley, 60, formerly a sergeant in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, teaches "very basic" engineering at a college in Bridgend, in Wales. He lives in Cardiff with his second wife, Grace. He has two sons and three stepsons.**

### Gay school children (cont from p5)

cussed within an educational setting.

"In a recent speech at the General Synod of the Church of England, I outlined the reasons why schools should include a discussion of sexual orientation in PSE/PSHE and PSRE classes, and advocated anti-bullying charters that clearly identify homophobic language or abuse as being not acceptable.

"Delegates at Synod were in broad agreement with my arguments, and there was a general consensus that lesbian and gay young people, or those who are perceived to be lesbian or gay, should be supported and encouraged to pursue their studies free from fear or intolerance.

"Based upon a three year study I conducted some years ago we now know that lesbian and gay youth have a 1 in 3 chance of being bullied, are more likely to contemplate and/or attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers and are likely to leave education with fewer qualifications due to enforced absence ... this aptly demonstrates the fact that teachers need guidance on how to tackle this issue in a supportive manner, regardless of their personal beliefs.

"I understand that the Christian Institute is currently petitioning teachers to write in to challenge the section relating to the recognition of diversity. As, I am sure you are aware, the Local Government Act 2000 (section 104) requires headteachers, teachers and school governors to do everything in their power to prevent all forms of bullying, so it is imperative that this particular clause remains."

# down to earth: colin mccall

## Prolife licked

THE General Election is old hat now, but let me tell you a bit of good local news. I live in Hertfordshire, close to the Buckinghamshire border, and, for some reason known only to themselves, the Prolife Alliance decided to contest two seats in the area, one of them my own constituency. "Vote for life; vote for justice" I was exhorted; and I was told that, if elected, the Alliance candidate would work to repeal the Abortion Act 1967 and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. In its additional "facts" on each act the Prolife language was highly emotive – and inaccurate. Over 500 "babies" are killed daily under the Abortion Act, we were told. They are not babies, they are fetuses. Prolife wasn't content, however, with that deception: in connection with the 1990 act, embryos became "humans".

The good news is that the Prolife candidates came bottom of the poll in both constituencies, receiving only 306 votes out of 47,269 in Hertfordshire South West, and 453 out of 45,283 in Chesham and Amersham (Buckinghamshire).

## For "grand" read "clumsy"

PRIMO Levi (1919-1987), the Italian chemist and writer, who spent ten years in Auschwitz, has had one of his last books, *The Search for Roots: a personal anthology*, published by Penguin. I haven't seen it yet, but the *Guardian* printed a long edited extract on June 2, and one item on Charles Darwin is worth noticing here.

Darwin has had many enemies, wrote Levi. "They were the upholders of religion, and they attacked him because they saw in him a destroyer of dogmas. Their myopia is incredible: in Darwin's work, as in his life, a deep and serious religious spirit breathes, the sober joy of a man who extracts order from chaos, who rejoices in the mysterious parallel between his own reasoning and the universe, and who sees in the universe a grand design."

Much as I admire Levi as a man, a writer and a scientist, I have to say he is completely mistaken here. Perhaps Darwin's most pertinent comment was in a letter he wrote to his friend Hooker, viz: "What a book a Devil's Chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful, blundering low and horridly cruel works of nature!" Hardly what you would call "a grand design".

## Papal preservation

VATICAN embalming must be improving. I remember years ago when that excellent

journalist and MP, the late Tom Driberg attended a papal funeral, he noticed that decomposition of the body had already set in. And it was reported (*Guardian* June 4) that conservation of Pius XII was so botched that the four men standing guard round the corpse had to be changed every 15 minutes because they couldn't stand the stench. With John XXIII things went rather better. Ten litres of embalming fluid (comprising various ingredients) were filtered into the wrists and stomach hours after his death on June 3 1963.

Sufficiently well, anyway, for him to be brought into St Peter's Square on the 38th anniversary of that date, in a bullet-proof crystal coffin for gawping thousands to see. Some hailed the preservation as a miracle, but the embalmer himself was critical of the wax mask that covered the beatified John's face. "It made me think of Madame Tussaud's", he said. Yes, but a good deal more unwholesome.

## Bishops don't tell

"THIS is not a trial of the Church, but a trial of a man of the cloth who failed in his duty to turn the priest in", said the French Public Prosecutor, Jacques-Philippe Segondat, criticising the "wait-and-see" attitude of Monsignor Pierre Pican Bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux in Normandy. The bishop was formally told of the paedophilic activities of one of his priests, Father René Bissey, in 1996, but did not inform the police.

Bissey, who was sentenced in October to 18 years in jail for the rape of one boy and the abuse of ten others between 1989 and 1996, had regularly confessed to his superiors about his sexual activities. He was sent first on a lengthy retreat and then to another parish.

According to the Catholic Bishops' Conference, 19 French priests face charges of rape or sexual abuse of minors, seven of whom have been remanded in custody. Thirty priests have been convicted of such offences in recent years, 11 of them receiving jail terms. But what about the silence of their superiors with their wait-and-see attitude? The prosecution in the present case has only asked for a four-to-six months' suspended sentence for the bishop who, in the words of one parent, abandoned the young victims to "a predator whom you yourself returned to the hunt". I can't think a non-clerical accessory would get off so lightly.

## RC ranter

I USED to be a regular reader of the *New Statesman* in the great days of Kingsley Martin's editorship. I haven't seen it lately, but I am confronted every Sunday by the Roman Catholic rantings of its present deputy editor

Christina Odone in the *Observer*. "Religious schools offer solid moral values as well as a good education" was her subject on June 17, after the Church of England had announced it would open 100 more state church secondary schools which would be staffed, as a priority, with Christian teachers. Odone heartily approved, although she – possibly unthinkingly – added that the "secularists are spluttering with righteous ire". (My italics.)

Church schools, she continued, offered "the best start in life", as do "the Muslim ones, and the Jewish ones". But that was by no means all. "When you're taught about eternity," went her absurd argument, "a setback in the shape of your AS history paper is not quite so gutting as it would be if you thought the here and now is all there is. When you believe that you are special in the eyes of the God who made you, failing a maths exam doesn't send you spiralling into despair". As if any child, religious or otherwise, would feel less "guttled" at failure by thinking of eternity; and if he or she is special in the eyes of God, they might well wonder why he didn't answer their prayers for success.

There was, too, the usual casual reference to teaching right and wrong, as though they were fixed values; and even praise for Jesuit education, her enthusiasm for which would – as a writer the following week commented – "burn rather less brightly had she shared my experience of it".

## "Holy" merchandise

THEY call him the shock rocker and the adjective seems apt. Marilyn Manson (real name Brian Warner) was making his first visit to Denver, Colorado, for two years, despite strong protests by church groups who say his music glorifies hate and violence and who regard the two Columbine High School shootings on April 20, 1999, as examples of his effect on impressionable young people.

But, according to the Beliefnet web site ([www.beliefnet.com](http://www.beliefnet.com)), Manson planned to give them a taste of their own medicine. Fans would not only hear his so-called "violent" point of view, he said, but "we can also examine the virtues of wonderful 'Christian' stories of disease, murder, adultery, suicide and child sacrifice". That "seems like entertainment to me" he added.

It may not be your or my idea of entertainment but Manson, whose father was a Catholic and his mother an Episcopalian, has Christianity taped. Describing the crucifix as "the most successful piece of merchandise ever created", he condemned it as having "caused more pain and suffering than a swastika or the hammer and sickle. Yet those images are taboo while the crucifix is considered holy.

ANNE Elizabeth (Annie) was the second child and first daughter of Charles and Emma Darwin, born in London on March 2, 1841. She died in Malvern, probably from tuberculosis, on April 23, 1851, leaving her parents heartbroken. A week after her death, Charles Darwin wrote a memorial of some 1,200 words so that "in after years, if we live, the impressions now put down will recall more vividly her chief characteristics ... her buoyant joyousness ... her sensitiveness ... and her strong affection". The thought of Annie ever afterwards brought tears to Charles' eyes and he would always refer to her when sympathising with others like Sir Joseph Hooker, whose own daughter Maria died at the age of six.

As a Christian, Emma Darwin believed that she and Annie would be reunited in heaven, and deeply regretted that Charles could not share her hopes. Emma brought up the children in her faith, not always with desirable results. After Annie's death, Henrietta, known as Etty (born in 1843) told her mother that she was afraid she might go to hell because she used to be a very naughty girl when Annie was alive. "Do you think God will forgive me?" she asked tearfully.

There was, then, a "painful void" between husband and wife on religious matters; but they agreed on most aspects of child-raising. They saw little value in discipline or learning by rote; were always ready to answer the children's questions, and let them play on the expensive new furniture without worrying about it getting shabby. As one of the Wedgwood cousins remarked: at Down House "the only place where you might be sure of not meeting a child was the nursery".

George Darwin, the second son, recalled how his father's microscope stool, mounted on casters, could be punted round the drawing room with a walking stick and that, "However hard my father was at work, we certainly never restrained ourselves in our romps about the house, and I should certainly have thought that the howls and screams must have been a great annoyance; but we were never stopped". Like any other father, Charles would join readily in his children's games; where he was matchless was in his walks with them in the countryside: he knew the name of nearly every beetle and he taught them many things he had learnt during his own collecting. He also kept notes on the development of his children from their earliest days – which he later drew upon in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and the Animals*, a new edition of which has been issued recently.

These are some of the insights into the family life of Charles and Emma which Randal Keynes, who is their great-great

### Colin McCall reviews

*Annie's Box: Charles Darwin, His Daughter and Human Evolution*, by Randal Keynes (illustrated). Fourth Estate, £16.99

grandson, is specially able to tell. He also, as his title indicates, has had unique access to Annie's box, the beloved child's morocco-bound writing case, which is shown with its contents on the frontispiece. He came across the box as he was looking through a case of family odds and ends, and he describes what it contained: stationery of various kinds, sealing wax, a wooden pen holder and nibs, two goose quill pens and a small penknife with a mother-of-pearl handle. To these Emma added some of Annie's letters, a piece of embroidery and one or two of her trinkets.

It is a deeply moving story, but Randal Keynes sets it in the context of life at Down House, where Charles Darwin continued his nature studies and, of course, developed his evolutionary theory of natural selection. After putting away his essay on the last named with a note to Emma to publish it in case he died, he turned to his *Beagle* notes, completed his *Geological Observations on South America* and began to look at the remaining specimens collected during the voyage. Two papers followed on arrow worms and flatworms. Then he microscopically examined a tiny orange barnacle with no shell, from an island off the coast of Chile, and was so intrigued by it that, after consulting others in the field, he embarked on a taxonomic study of barnacles which occupied him for eight years and yielded some remarkable results. Most barnacles, for instance, were hermaphroditic but a few had males and females, and Charles' first little orange barnacle (less than a tenth of an inch long) had two penises. In one species the female "had two little pockets, in each of which she kept

### Bush praises Pope

US President George W Bush, present at the opening the new \$65-million Pope John Paul II Cultural Centre in Washington DC earlier this year, praised the Pope for his anti-abortion views and exalted what he called "the culture of life". Bush said: "We must defend in love the innocent child waiting to be born," and added: "the best way to honour the Pope, truly one of the great men, is to take his teaching seriously."

a husband". Four drawers of Darwin's microscopic slides of barnacles are now kept in the Museum of Zoology in Cambridge.

The importance of such careful taxonomic work has to be seen against a background where the country's leading taxonomist, Professor Richard Owen, believed that the likeness between species reflected divine design. For Darwin, in contrast, classification consisted in "grouping beings according to their actual relationship, ie their consanguinity or descent from common stocks". Creationism held the field, but not for long. The Darwin and Wallace joint paper on evolution by natural selection was read to the Linnean Society in London in 1858 and *The Origin of Species* appeared in 1859. Five years later Wallace delivered a paper to the Anthropological Society on "The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man".

Darwin, who was then working on plants, had "collected a few notes on man" which he offered to his fellow evolutionist, but Wallace's thoughts had turned to the beyond. He was attending spiritualist seances and admitted the possibility that a Higher Intelligence had guided the development of humans. "I hope you have not murdered too completely your own and my child", Darwin wrote to him; and told him later: "I differ greatly from you, and I feel very sorry for it". Darwin's own *Descent of Man* was published in 1870, and Keynes reproduces one of the many Darwin-headed ape caricatures that embellished the popular press of the time.

In his autobiography Darwin describes how "disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but was at last complete. The rate was so slow that I felt no distress and have never since doubted even for a single second that my conclusion was correct". And Randal Keynes indicates again the difference on religious matters that separated man and wife. While Emma was reading *Fervent Prayer*, Charles subscribed to *The Index*, a newspaper which advocated reform "without deference to authority of Bible, Church or Christ" and proposed a humanistic "Free Religion". Darwin allowed the editor "to print in each issue a comment by him endorsing these views".

Darwin believed that religion had repeatedly perverted morality throughout human history. "Yet it is well occasionally to reflect on these superstitions", he wrote in *The Descent of Man*, "for they show us what an infinite debt of gratitude we owe to the improvement of our reason, to science, and to our accumulated knowledge". Darwin, of course, made a unique contribution to that fund of knowledge, and *Annie's Box* helps us to appreciate how he did so. It is Randal Keynes' first book, and it is a notable one, particularly for readers of this

journal.

RICHARD Ryder has been thinking about ethics since the age of 12 when his Christian upbringing "began to collide with certain realities". He decided to work out his own godless morality and now, almost fifty years later and after much thinking and honing, here is *Painism: A Modern Morality*.

This clearly written book will please the general reader. Dr Ryder's ethic is simple: the central criterion of ethics is pain. Pain in its widest sense ranges from distress, anger, fear and depression to all imaginable physical pains from headaches to torture. If we agree that pain in any form is the only evil then, guided by his list of conclusions (rules of thumb), we can work out for ourselves solutions to moral problems.

Ryder disagrees with the Utilitarian aggregation of pains and pleasures across individuals: "Around each painient individual is the boundary of consciousness." It follows that they can no more be added together meaningfully in a sum than can pieces of chalk with lumps of cheese. At the same time, the emphasis on an individual's "inherent value", so important to Rights Theorists, is too vague a term for him; instead he focuses on an individual's pain – pain in its broadest sense. In his

Heather Evans reviews

*Painism: A Modern Morality,*

by Richard D Ryder.

Centaur Press, London,

paperback £8.95

opinion, the extremes of both major theories can lead to absurd consequences. What was needed was an ethic somewhere between the two, hence Ryder's painism. "It is the quantity of individual suffering that matters and not the quantity of sufferers". Painism therefore always concentrates on whoever suffers most.

It isn't long before we begin to suspect that Ryder (gleam in eye) has slyly devised a huge game for us – a fun "learning through questions" game. Master his simple rules and then you're ready: the game's called Applied Painism. Play it, and your world will never be the same again.

Apply painism to the problem of school bullying, for instance, and it becomes obvious that pain inflicted on an individual is more immoral than, say, a non-violent robbery of a bank. But which gets the news headlines? Which prob-

lem do we urgently tackle? "The neglect of bullying is an example of where society has got its moral priorities wrong."

When Ryder probes the general hostility towards sexual practices like bestiality, paedophilia and incest, his conclusions may surprise you. In this book he applies painism to countless other subjects: abortion, euthanasia, divorce laws, animal protection (in 1970 he coined the word "speciesism" to show that we treat non-human animals like slaves), the police, British newspapers, lawyers, voting, ageism, harmless drugs, sport, politics and torture (the worst offence of all, according to painism).

Ryder has devised a clear moral code that ensures we ask the right questions. It's a welcome change to read the ethical theory of a progressive psychologist with a deep understanding of human nature rather than, say, a philosopher. For some tastes, however, his ideas may be too advanced; I remember Joan Bakewell chairing a *Heart of the Matter* debate (BBC2) and pleading, "But Richard, we're still not with you!" This book is for those who like to question society's assumptions, prejudices and taboos, for those who find excitement in learning to see things differently.

## points of view

### Verwoerd and the Jews

E GOODMAN (Points of View, July) says of my April letter that it is "nonsense!" to give the word "Semite" a racial definition, and that South Africa's Jews were hated by Dr Verwoerd for their religion, not their skin colour. That's interesting, because my *Oxford Dictionary* says of "Semite" that it is a "member of the group of races that includes the Jews and Arabs and formerly the Phoenicians and Assyrians"; although *Chambers Dictionary* does give secondary mention to language, also.

And Dr Verwoerd, were he still alive, would also disagree with Cllr Goodman. When the SS Stuttgart just beat the racist ban on Jewish immigration when it docked at Cape Town on October, 27, 1936, Verwoerd led an anti-semitic racial protest with the immortal words: "Any further Jewish immigration into South Africa will lead to the defiling of our white race." The Oppenheimers and Suzmans notwithstanding.

Further, one of the many significant facts, almost entirely ignored or suppressed outside South Africa, is that the basic laws of apartheid were copied directly from the Nazi Nuremberg Laws, which classed Jews as unfit to inter-

breed with white "Aryans". Compare them! the Afrikaner Nationalists in effect replaced "Jew" with "black" or "non-white". This Nazi racial-purity fanaticism was still alive 30 years after World War II, when the shrill (late) moralist "Patience Strong" – she of the sappy verses still on calendars, but true name Winifred Emma May – stated after a visit to South Africa that it was crime against both God and Nature for people of different races to interbreed – "a cat does not mate with a dog or a robin with a nightingale, thus ensuring the purity of the species"\*, so giving the weak-minded religious a heroine to cheer. (Sad that the Nazi term favoured by Goebbels for mixed-race offspring was "Mischling", which my German dictionary translates in English as "mongrel". Now where have I heard that friendly term recently?)

Finally, having assured Cllr Goodman that I am prepared to accept a 1-1 draw, I present one of apartheid's big jokes – which I am assured has happened, on occasion.

A Boer policeman was driving past a "whites only" church one day, when he saw something through the open door which caused him to slam on his brakes. Approaching the black man he had seen on his

knees in the middle of the church, he demanded "What are you doing here, kaffir? This church is for whites only!" The black man held up a scrubbing brush apologetically: "My boss, I'm the cleaner. I have to get the church ready for the evening service".

"Oh, all right then," said the policeman. "But God help you if I catch you praying!"

\* From her *The Other Side of the Coin*, Bachman & Turner, London 1976.

### The Census Religious Question

We will soon be told what percentages of the population belong to each faith. I have conducted a poll among those friends and relations who neither have religious belief, attend Church (except for weddings etc.) nor belong to any congregation. They included a studious loss adjuster with a degree in philosophy, a half-Jewish high-powered businessman and a pragmatic adult education lecturer. To a man and woman they answered "Christian".

The most irreligious of the lot, a practical chartered accountant, with no interest in

(Continued on p14)

philosophical questions (and who was never even christened) amusingly and perhaps significantly explained "Well, I'm not a Hindu, am I?" When pressed whether he believed that Christ died and revived after three days he exclaimed in mock amazement, "Did he?"

Most were not sure why they answered as they did although I believe it was either through their perception of their slot in society, family habit or laziness. Had my dear RC mother been looking over my shoulder I might once have taken the easy way just to mollify her!

Have those on the fringes of other religious groups filled in their forms similarly? I don't know anyone well enough to ask but I can imagine someone in Leicester saying "Well, I'm not a Christian, am I?"

The statistics, which may merely indicate social grouping, will be trumpeted by religious activists as declarations of faith. They will claim entitlement to exaggerated influence, and politicians will jump on a band wagon which I suspect runs mainly on herd instinct and inertia.

It would be interesting to know if any readers received similar responses. Perhaps the *Freethinker* could conduct a poll by proxy. I'd be glad to get e-mails on the subject: paulberyl@aol.com.

PAUL ALBRECHT  
West Sussex

## Robust read or bigoted rant?

MICHAEL J Rush's warning (Points of View, June) against bigoted material is apposite and should be taken seriously.

Assuming the *Freethinker* is not meant to be read exclusively, or even mainly, by convinced atheists, but also by agnostics, some of whom may not yet be ready to sever all contact with religion, intolerance is indeed out of place.

Readers indifferent towards the church and happy to let it continue to wither on the vine may not feel concerned about this, but what about those who see the possibility of pruning the vine?

A transition from religious belief to atheism is very often a gradual process rather than a "born-again" or "road-to-Damascus" experience.

Many thoughtful church people are uneasy and would like to be rid of mythology and to be able to disown their own fundamentalists, but are deterred by the risk of upsetting long-standing friendships within an agreeable social framework.

It would be a pity if such potential converts to atheism via agnostic humanism are being

put off rather than won over.

HAROLD DOWELL  
Minehead

THE correspondence about the *Freethinker* becoming a "hate mag" intrigued me. For real hatred you have to look to religion to set the standards – burning, ripping, stretching and killing those judged and found wanting. My own experience of religious hatred came many years ago from an acquaintance with fundamentalist Christian beliefs. Because I could not share his beliefs, which included insisting that the world was created in 4004 BC and every word in the Bible was literally true, he decided that I was destined for hell. I was reassured to be told that along with me would be everyone else on the planet who was not a Christian. As I was quite young at the time I suppose I felt there might be safety in numbers.

My acquaintance, not a man to do things by halves, included people who had never heard of Christianity or Jesus. He appeared to take an indecent satisfaction at the prospect of anyone not sharing his views being in hell. When I suggested that to be able to accept this dreadful prospect he must hate us all he assured me that we deserved our fate for rejecting Jesus. Compared to this kind of hatred, which can consign millions to hell with equanimity and be convinced that it will happen, anything in the *Freethinker* is minor league – no more than gentle criticism.

SAMMY BENN  
Rome

MICHAEL J Rush makes some very good points regarding the *Freethinker's* leanings towards an hysterical, bigoted tone and woolly thinking.

He's expressed much of what has been bothering me with the past five or so issues.

I'm still happy to re-subscribe and even make a donation to the *Freethinker* fund, but would like to add my support to his concerns (and perhaps many others too?)

C HANWAY  
Surrey

I CANNOT agree with Michael J Rush's rather harsh assessment of recent *Freethinkers*. The June edition was particularly lively and well-argued. A "hate mag"?, "close-minded"?, Well, one or two pieces now and then are over the top, but what about the articles on Mark Twain, the latest "My Atheism", Keith Porteous Wood's contribution about bailing out the C of E, and John Hunt's excellent piece on religious education?

The latter two articles should be read by

every MP and every councillor in the land.

I do remember times over the past 20 years when the *Freethinker* was too jokey and condemning of religion, but we deserve a few laughs at the expense of those who believe and practise the daftest things.

Recent numbers of the magazine have occupied my mind for at least an hour with their rich mixtures, compared to some quick flick-throughs in the old days.

BOB TUTTON  
Reading

FURTHER to the comments made by Michael J Rush I would like to express my own concern at what Mr Rush refers to as the "bigoted, intolerant tone" of some of the material in the *Freethinker*. As a new subscriber, I cannot comment on the particular article Mr Rush singles out for criticism ("Ten Reasons to Ditch Religion", March 2001).

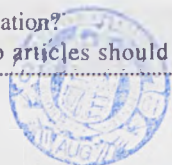
However, I feel that two news items in the June 2001 issue clearly illuminate the distinction between the responsible, rational comment we should surely expect from the *Freethinker* and its more worrying (though thankfully less prevalent) tendency to senseless anti-religionism.

The first of these items, "Faith-healing parents jailed", reports on a very real danger of basing one's behaviour on sincerely-held, irrational beliefs; precisely the sort of topical coverage we should expect from a secular humanist journal, in my view. The second, "Brighton man gets religion, cuts off mother's head", is superficially similar, purporting to report on an instance in which religious belief has driven an individual to violence. However, the article shamefully disregards the question of the killer's mental health (the judge apparently noted that his "responsibilities for that crime were significantly reduced"), choosing instead to highlight the fact that he had recently read the Koran. One is reminded of religionists' occasional claim that atheism leads to suicidal despair, or of tabloid-style simplifications of cause and effect: "Man watches *Taxi Driver*, shoots President Reagan", perhaps.

This irrational, sensationalist claptrap surely has no place in a proudly intelligent journal like the *Freethinker*.

Are there not enough legitimate, substantial grounds for challenging religious beliefs and practices, without seeking out flimsy scare stories of this kind?

I urge you to consider the tone of your reporting very carefully in future. For if the majority of rational, tolerant secularists come to feel that the *Freethinker* no longer reflects our values, where are we to turn for informed opinion – and how shall we make our voice



heard?

**GREG OWENS**  
Leeds

I AGREE entirely with Denis Watkins (Points of View, July.) "Humanist" groups which try to avoid antagonising the religious are like peace campaigners hoping not to antagonise warmongers. We need what we have in the *Freethinker*, a religion-hating paper in the tradition of G W Foote.

**DONALD ROOMM**  
London

### Science as religion

IT IS strange, isn't it, how science seems like a religion to some people? Just as religious people will say that God is not to blame if anything bad happens, it happened because people are wicked. Likewise, it is not scientists who are to blame for atomic weapons, nuclear waste etc, it is all the fault of technicians. I think it was rather more than a mere technician who first split the atom though, and made these things possible.

I resent Stephen Park saying my memory is at fault, I know that the doctor at the hospital knew what I had been taking for my eye trouble just by looking at my eyes. If Dr Hahnemann hit his medicines with a Bible, that is no more unscientific than testing them on animals.

Ian Quayles' definition of science is all very well, but I wonder what world he is living in. Research today is in the grip of the multinationals. The Rockefellers own 60 per cent of the American pharmaceutical industry, as well as Esso and Exxon. Do you really think they are motivated by anything other than profit? Nothing wrong with making a profit, Dr Moreton? I think there is if it involves unspeakable cruelty to animals in order to pass off unsafe products as safe. I will quote two scientists to show that it is not just unscientific me that thinks like this. Professor Tamino of Padua University has said: "Animal tests represent not only a useless sacrifice of animals, it is an alibi that enables the chemical industry to sell products which are classified as harmless, or almost so, but are in reality very harmful in the long run, even if taken in very small doses. The effect will be ascertained only when used by humans – the real guinea pigs of the multinationals. Professor Croce, MD, a doctor and pathologist, has said: "Methyl-fluoracetate is poisonous to mammals; however, it takes a dose 40 times bigger to kill a mouse than it does a dog. How will man react – like a mouse or like a dog? I have quoted two Italian scien-

tists. I could quote many more – American, German, French, but not so many British, for anyone who works in a British laboratory can go to prison if he speaks out of turn. This applies to commercial laboratories, not just government ones – Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. There is a similar clause in the Medicines Act. This 1986 Act made matters worse for animals, over two million a year of which die in British laboratories. Each year the Home Office figures list experiments to poison, burn, scald, cause psychological stress. How many years must they do these in order to find out all there is to know? Most of these experiments are not required by law. Mr Quayle talks about democratically-elected governments, but once elected there does not seem to be much democracy. Many laws are not debated, they are issued by civil servants as Statutory Instruments. Many of them come from Brussels. The 1986 act was pushed through on Friday afternoons. The drug and chemical industries gave thousands to party funds, and a number of MPs were paid consultants to the drug industry. Who are they supposed to represent? Their constituents or anyone who will pay them enough? There is not room to say all I want to say, but I don't think this is real science. Knowledge is a good thing, but you should not seek it by wrong means, or use it for wrong ends. True science would work for the good of man, beast and the planet, and harm none of them. Why don't some of you worshippers of science speak out against this false science?

**JEAN FAWCETT**  
Ipswich

### Ill-informed and prejudiced

AS A life member of the National Secular Society, a Jew and a dedicated Zionist, I am shocked that Colin McCall can be so ill-informed and so prejudiced.

He says in "Down to Earth" (July) that Israel has a belligerent policy to the people whose land they have expropriated. Of which land is he speaking? Has there ever been an independent Arab state in Palestine? Before Israel was formed, Palestine was subject to a League of Nations mandate under the British, and before that it was a portion of the Turkish Empire. Despite the betrayal of the British whose mandate was to create a Jewish State, the United Nations allocated a modest part of Palestine to the Jewish people. It also awarded a large part to the Arabs who said they did not want it. They were also offered a state in 1936, but they declined it.

When the British left in 1948 and the state of Israel was declared, the entire Arab world went

to war with the new state, led by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hitler's ally.

Of those Arabs who lived in what became Israel some left for reasons best known to themselves and some remained to become equal citizens of the only democratic state in the Middle East – and the most advanced.

How could they have been dispossessed? The Jews were outnumbered 200 to 1 and had been disarmed by the British who supplied arms to the Arabs. The world press was watching the war of 1948, and none reported this alleged dispossession at the time.

It is certain that 2,000 years ago there was a sovereign Jewish state in Israel. They were driven out by the Romans. The Jewish people continued to exist in a homeless and oppressed condition, and their return in 1948 was the fulfilment of a 2,000-year-old longing.

Colin McCall mentions the Beirut massacres of 1982. These were carried out by Christian Arabs – the Falangists. True, the Israelis had a duty to protect civilians under their charge, and they failed in that duty. I hang my head in shame. But which nation is without shame?

The Palestinians have been given their state on the West Bank and have been offered a share of Jerusalem. What more can they want? Can Colin McCall please tell me who the aggressors are?

And was Colin McCall as vocal in 1948 when King Hussein of Jordan illegally occupied the part of Palestine assigned by the UN to the Palestinians?

**DEREK WILKES**  
London

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

## atheist & humanist contacts & events

**Bath & Beyond Humanists:** Meets at 7.30 pm on the first Monday of every month in Bath. Details from Hugh Thomas on 0117 9871751.

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

**Brighton & Hove Humanist Group:** Monthly meetings resumed in September. Summer programme obtainable from Joan Wimble on 01273 733215. Sunday, September 2, 4pm Vallance Community Centre, Sackville Road and Clarendon Road, Hove. Public Meeting.

**Bristol Humanists:** Information: Margaret Dearnaley 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 Cleevelands Close, Cheltenham GL50 4PZ. Tel 01242 528743.

**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 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 at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1.

**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 Rita Manton 01708 762575. Hopwa House, Inskip Drive, Hornchurch. Tuesday, August 7, 8pm. Diane Munday: *The Pain and Pleasure of Campaigning on Humanism and Abortion.*

**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.

**Leeds & District Humanist Group:** Information Robert Tee on 0113 2577009.

**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.

**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, July 19, 8pm. Pat Buckley: *Issues Concerning Organ Donations and Transplants.*

**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. September 5, 8pm. Public Meeting.

**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, September 12, 7.30pm. Discussion: *A Good Life Without Religion.*

**Welsh Marches Humanist Group:** Information: 01568 770282.

**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:** Information: Ian Peters on 01892 890485 or Chris Ponsford on 01892 862855. E-mail address: C862855@hotmail.com.

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

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