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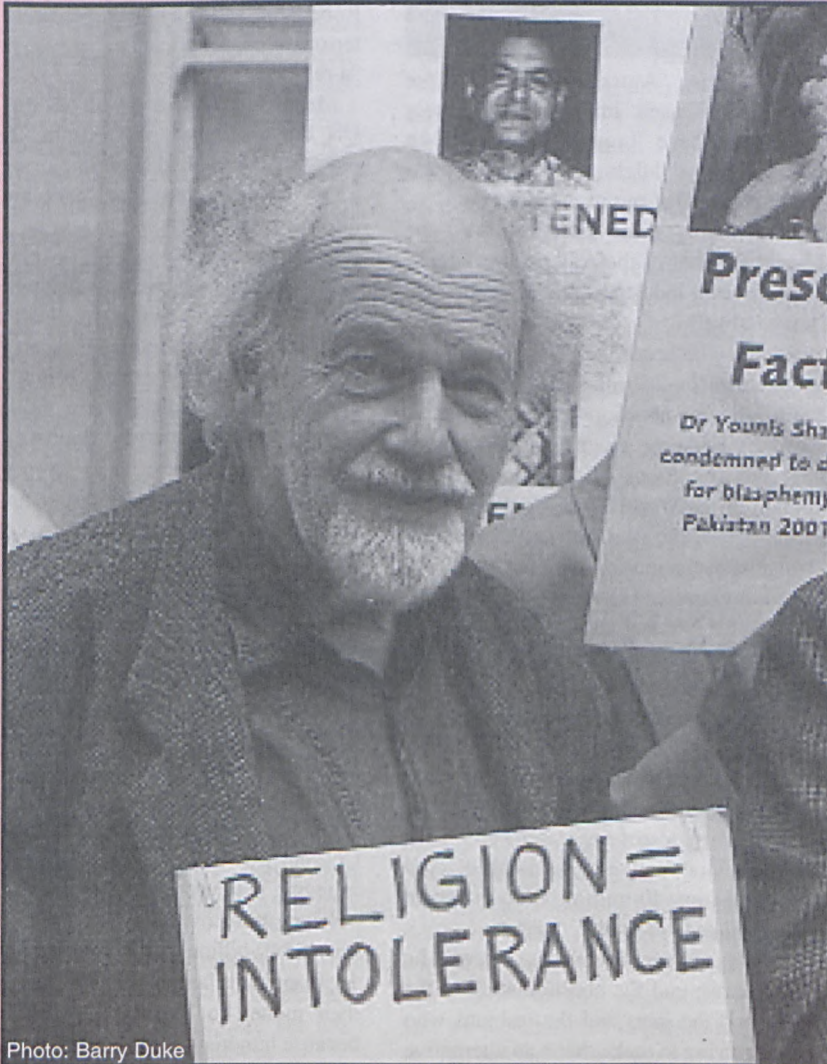


Photo: Barry Duke

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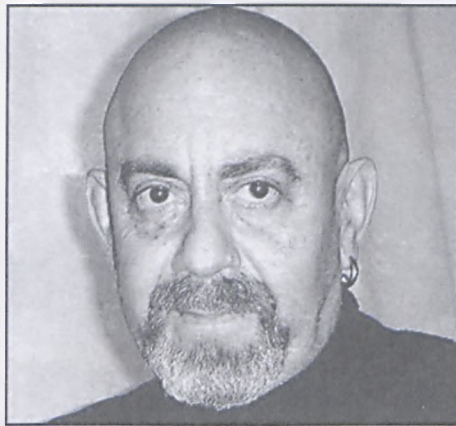
freethinking out loud: barry duke

BY THE time you get to read this, America and its allies may have taken dramatic reprisals against the Taliban in Afghanistan, or others abroad suspected of being involved in the Islamic terrorist attacks on New York and Washington.

Perhaps – although this is highly unlikely – they may even have succeeded in nailing the Bin Laden creature, whose creepily effete image has haunted the media ever since those ghastly acts of terrorism took place.

Alas, all to no avail, for the *real* culprits reside not in some craggy mountain hideout in Afghanistan but constitute a sizeable section of America's own population.

Who is this enemy? According to representatives of the American religious right, who have been stumbling over each other to air their views ever since the terrorist outrages, the ones who *should* shoulder the blame are civil liberty groups, women who opt for abortion, lesbians, gay men and just about anyone who does not profess a deep



love of Jesus. Americans, say these Armageddon-obsessed imbeciles with barely disguised glee, have “brought the tragedy on themselves” for indulging in material pleasures and taking God out of the classroom.

Foremost among these commentators – the Dumb and Dumber of the American evangelical entertainment industry – are Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell.

Robertson, who heads the US's dangerously crazy Christian Coalition, lost no time in blaming women having abortions, along with gays, lesbians, civil liberty groups and others for creating the conditions that precipitated the destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York, and part of the Pentagon in Washington, DC, by Muslim fanatics.

Falwell, a prominent Pentecostal, told a TV audience that “God continues to lift the curtain and allow the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve ... ACLU [the American Civil Liberties Union] has got to take a lot of blame for this.”

Speaking on Pat Robertson's popular “700 Club” TV programme, Falwell declared. “The abortionists must also bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked. And when we destroy 40-million little innocent babies, we make God mad.”

In a display of ever-increasing hysteria he blamed “pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make theirs an alternative lifestyle, ACLU, People for the American Way, all who have tried to secularise America – I point the finger in their face and say “you helped this attack happen”.

Robertson, in a three-page statement released by his Christian Broadcasting Network, chided Americans for insulting God, and said that the nation had lost the protection of heaven.

Robertson, whose website includes advice on financial planning and monetary prosperity, as well as a recipe for an “age-defying” milkshake “filled with energy-producing nutrients” said: “We have imagined ourselves invulnerable and have been consumed by the pursuit of ...

health, wealth, material pleasures and sexuality (sic) ... It (terrorism) is happening because God Almighty is lifting his protection from us.”

Robertson also denounced the US Supreme Court for “striking down prayer and other religious exercise” in public schools. “We have a court that has essentially stuck its finger in God's eye,” he trumpeted. “We have insulted God at the highest levels of our government. Then, we ask, ‘Why does this happen?’”

Other leading evangelicals agreed with Robertson and gleefully predicted that the terrorism on American soil would bring about “a religious revival”.

Meanwhile, Eddie Smith of the Christian US Prayer Centre in Houston, Texas, told reporters that he had been imploring Jesus for a revival for the past four years, but God told him it would “be served to you on a platter of ruin”.

What all this says to me is that when religion takes a grip on the human intellect, there is, in the final analysis, nothing – apart from silly headgear and an untrimmed beard – to distinguish a mad Middle Eastern mullah from a ranting redneck American Baptist.

GREED is one thing; stupidity another. But when it comes to religion, the two go together like Gilbert and George.

This I deduced after hearing the words of Deborah R Bortner, President of the North American Securities Administrators' Association, who recently declared: “I have been a securities regulator for 20 years, and I have seen more money stolen in the name of God than in any other way.”

Her remarks came a day after Gerald Payne, founder of the Greater Ministries International Church, was jailed in the US for 27 years for relieving believers of \$580-million.

Payne told investors that God had directed him to \$40-billion worth of gold reserves buried 15 ft under Liberian soil, and that he needed their money to help liberate the hoard. And because hundreds of silly religious f...er, suckers fell for the promise of fabulous returns, the Christian fraudster was able to fund a very nice lifestyle indeed. He was even able to buy himself a cosy little island off Honduras!

Bortner revealed that, in the last three years, religious con artists in 27 states had scammed at least 90,000 investors, netting \$1.8-billion in the process. “Con artists are clearly preying on the faithful more than ever before. They make faith in God synonymous with faith in the investment scam,” she warned.

Well, as I once told Mary Whitehouse during a radio interview, those who believe in God will believe *any* old tosh, and, try as I might, I cannot shed a single tear for any of Payne's victims.

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Cathedral condemned for permitting prayer

ATHEISTS have lodged an objection with Gloucester Cathedral over a prayer said at the beginning of a concert. The event, held recently as part of the Three Choirs Festival, featured *A Mass of Life* by the militantly atheist composer Frederick Delius, which he described as "pagan" rather than a mass in the traditional Latin religious sense. The words are by Nietzsche, famous for his phrase "God is dead".

A party from the National Secular Society was present at the concert, when Rev Judith Hubbard-Jones, a chaplain at the cathedral, introduced the music with a call to prayer. She chose some lines from Nietzsche and tacked on an "amen" at the end.

In a letter of protest to Ms Hubbard-Jones, the National Secular Society says: "While a few words of welcome from a representative of the venue would of course be acceptable, it seems to us an abuse of the captive, fee-paying audience to more or less oblige them to pray, or embarrass them by forcing them to refuse to do so."

The letter also says: "Delius' non-belief was

something he took very seriously and should be respected. Whatever your motive in reciting the 'prayer' it was not just inappropriate and insensitive, but could be seen as the church taking over something that isn't theirs."

Terry Sanderson, a spokesperson for the NSS, who was also present at the concert, commented: "I love *A Mass of Life*, and have seen it performed in all sorts of venues. The fact that it happened to be in a cathedral on this occasion didn't worry me, and I paid my £28.00 willingly to attend. But I thought this was part of a music festival, not a religious event, and I was mortified to find myself being asked to pray when I'm an atheist. It was wholly inappropriate to suddenly spring this upon the huge audience, many of whom would not have been Christians.

"Both Delius and Nietzsche would be revolving in their graves if they knew how their work had been hijacked."

• See Terry Sanderson review of Ken Russell's film *Delius – A Song of Summer* on page 13

Pro-life groups mobilise against Diane Pretty

A HIGH Court judge has cleared the way for a full judicial review of the DPP's decision in the case of Diane Pretty, a 42-year-old mother of two from Luton, who wants to choose when to end her life, but is so disabled that she cannot kill herself.

The judge granted her permission to challenge the Director of Public Prosecutions, who refuses to rule out prosecuting her husband Brian if he assists her in suicide.

Alert, the Medical Ethics Alliance and the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child immediately signalled their intention to oppose Mrs Pretty's application. The pro-life campaigners fear that her case could, if successful, make euthanasia legal overnight.

The Prettys' case is being supported by the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, whose director, Deborah Annetts, said: "We are delighted for Diane that leave has been granted and we look forward to the full hearing. This is an important day not just for Diane but for the British public, who have given overwhelming support to her and her right to choose when and how she dies. She feels that everyone in her posi-

tion should have the right to make that choice and says she is fighting not just for herself but for others who come after her".

At court, Liberty legal officer Mona Arshi, Diane Pretty's solicitor for the case, welcomed the news: "This is the first time in this country that the Suicide Act has been challenged in this way. It's the first stage of the legal process and we look forward to presenting the case at the full judicial review hearing.

"We believe this case has a tremendous importance not just for the Prettys themselves but for a small but significant number of people who, though in dire circumstances and fully able to take a rational decision to end their lives, are prevented from doing so legally by their physical disability.

"We hope that, given today's decision in the High Court, the DPP will reconsider his position. The case does raise broad and emotive issues that need open debate. But we would ask people to remember that it is principally about one person, Mrs Pretty, and how she believes she can best meet the end of her life with dignity.

In brief

Court confirms virgin birth

A GERMAN woman's claim that her child was the result of divine intervention has been backed by a judge. Brigit Weiss, 45, told the court in Idstein that she had never had sex with anyone after splitting from her husband – yet genetic tests showed that her estranged husband was not the child's father.

The husband had his former wife charged with fraudulently trying to get him to pay £7,000 in child maintenance, but judge August Henge cleared her, saying he supported the notion that she had had a virgin birth. "I cannot rule out the possibility of divine conception," he said.

'Meet my son, the lizard'

TWO weeks after a young Thai boy died in a motorbike accident, he "reappeared" in the form of a 5ft long monitor lizard. Charoen Taengniem's mother, Chamlong, said the lizard followed her home from her son's funeral. She immediately realised the creature was her reincarnated son when it took up residence in the boy's bed.

It also has a passion for his favourite drink of fresh milk mixed with yoghurt.

Now crowds are regularly gathering outside Chamlong's home 20 miles north of Bangkok to pay their respects and shower the beast with gifts. Many Thais are Buddhists who believe in reincarnation.

Big blow for Boy Scout bigots

THE BOY Scouts of America has suffered a significant drop in membership, according to its latest annual report. Observers attribute the loss to its discriminatory stance against gays. It also discriminates against the non-religious.

The reactionary bent of the Scouts is attributable to the fact that nearly half of Scout sponsors are churches and religious groups.

Good riddance to Bibles

GIDEON Bibles have been removed from guest rooms at two major hotels in Adelaide, capital of South Australia. The owners of the two hotels, the Stamford Plaza and the Stamford Grand, said Australia was a multi-faith society and hotel guests cannot be assumed to be Christian.



education white paper – some concessions won

THE Government belatedly published its White Paper on education last month.

As we had feared, its commitment to a greater number of faith schools – presaged in the original consultation document (the Green Paper) – remained.

Nevertheless, our campaigning was not without effect. The Government now realises that faith schools are not nearly as popular as it had assumed them to be, and the White Paper contains some *caveats* over the introduction of such schools which, at the very least, have symbolic importance to secularists.

At best, we may be able to use them in our fight to minimise the number of new faith schools. On the other hand, secularists can hardly claim much success on this issue, given that the policy of a greater number of faith schools remains. Yet, with such a religiophilic Government, how could we succeed?

Relevant extracts from the White Paper appear in the box opposite. Negative issues

There has been a barrage of opposition to faith schools in the broadsheets and educational press

for us are underlined; positive ones and examples of Government defensiveness are emboldened.

The problem of publicly-funded religious-based education has spread beyond old-style church schools, or even minority faith schools. The Government has shown great ingenuity in creating many more varieties of academic establishment with opportunities for injecting faith into unsuspecting pupils. So, we have the prospect of City Academies and new maintained schools; each can be faith-sponsored. There is also a clear invitation to hitherto private faith schools to come into the state fold. Perhaps this is the work of the new schools minister and prominent member of the Christian Socialist Movement, Stephen Timms.

But the Government has not had it all its own way. It must still be smarting from the press coverage over this issue. Since we asked Professor Richard Dawkins to write his polemic on Church schools in February for *The Times Educational Supplement*, there has been a barrage of opposition to faith schools in the broadsheets and educational press, not to mention many column metres of letters. Following the spring and summer of racial tensions in Oldham and Bradford, the publication of the White Paper was postponed.

The BBC website reported that “The argu-

By Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director of the National Secular Society

ment over the planned encouragement for an increase in the number of church schools became even more controversial because of the racial troubles seen this summer in cities such as Oldham and Bradford.”

The Government’s woes were compounded by a report on Bradford conducted by Lord

that they contained criticisms of Muslim elders in Bradford for encouraging segregation, and of the Council for being unwilling to tackle problems being generated by the minority faith communities.)

It is widely thought that these problems and the attendant publicity forced a rethink. The Government’s run of bad luck continued to the day of publication which coincided with the dreadful scenes of young Roman Catholic children being terrorised on their way to school

by Protestant bigots. Comment from the Society was almost superfluous, given the number of commentators and writers to the letters columns who ridiculed the Government’s enthusiasm for faith schools and cited the sobering events in the north west of England, and Northern Ireland. Most telling of all was a cartoon in the *Independent* on Sunday on 9 September. It showed three adjacent images: education in Belfast, in Afghanistan and in the UK. The first image portrayed a frightened Roman Catholic child running the gauntlet of protestant paramilitaries, the second depicted a mullah dismissing a distraught girl seeking schooling, and the final image caricatured the Prime Minister declaring that “the future is faith-based schools”.

This issue has generated a substantial number of media opportunities for the Society. In addition to extensive

national TV and radio coverage, we spoke on regional networks in Scotland, Wales and the Midlands, as well as on a large number of local radio stations. Our views have been referred to in the broadsheets and *The Times Educational Supplement*, where we also had an opinion piece.

The Society’s main 50-page response to the Green Paper, produced before any of these troubles, had pointed to the danger to race relations of more faith schools. We also wrote to the Secretary of State for Education, Estelle



A young schoolgirl gets her first lesson in religious education in West Belfast. Embarrassingly for the Government, scenes like this were broadcast around the world in the week it chose to publish its education White Paper extolling the virtues of faith-based schools

Photo: Justin Kernaghan, Photopress

(Herman) Ouseley, the former head of the Commission for Racial Equality. Lord Ouseley’s report stated (also according to the BBC website in early August) that: “There is a fear of confronting all-white and all-Muslim schools about their contribution, or rather the lack of contribution, to social and racial integration and segregation in schools...”

(Incidentally, a month after the publication of Lord Ouseley’s report it emerged that some hitherto unknown, and clearly sensitive, appendices had still to be released. It seems

on in fight over church schools

Morris, shortly after the problems, to urge her to reconsider this issue before publishing the White Paper. It does seem that all these forms of pressure have made some difference. I was interested to learn from an education journalist who attended the meeting to mark the White Paper's publication that the church school aspect was played down, as if it was some kind of embarrassment.

Selection

Implying (as the White Paper does) that C of E schools are "inclusive" when the only stipulation is that they should not be "exclusively Anglican" is ridiculous: inclusivity could amount to just one Catholic in an Anglican school.

We have been formally complaining about selection, and a consultation process on selection has recently been launched by the Department for Education and Skills.

Paragraph 15 of the consultation document,

for example, allows certain church schools which have special arrangements to preserve their religious character (they are called Voluntary Aided schools) and to keep places empty when there are not enough faith applicants. Others may not be permitted to do this, though they may give faith applicants priority.

We should complain that it is unacceptable to "keep places empty when there are not enough faith applicants".

In his report for the C of E, Lord Dearing claims he wants church schools to serve the whole community, but this is empty rhetoric while such blatantly discriminatory entry requirements are still in place.

The problem is even worse with Roman Catholic schools, a much higher proportion of which are Voluntary Aided, and many of these schools insist on admitting solely Catholic pupils. We should insist that (although we don't want them) if there are to be a greater number of church schools, they should truly become a community resource, and all entry

requirements based on faith should be abolished.

The consultation also suggests that the Government would allow community and Voluntary Controlled schools (the church schools which LEAs largely control, and towards which the faith organisations pay nothing at all) to object if they believe that the admissions policies of Voluntary Aided (ie church-controlled) schools are creating problems for them by, for example, refusing to take their share of difficult pupils.

Full details of the consultation are available from <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/cosa/> or Alan Clarkson (020 7925 6711) and Sue Garner (020 7925 5487).

Please send in your views before the closing date (November 7, 2001) on the appropriate form to: DfES Admissions Consultation, NOP Research Group Ltd., Caxton House, 91, Victoria Road, Chelmsford CM1 1JW. An email alternative is offered on the website.

Key extracts from the Government's Education White Paper

We will support inclusive faith schools

5.30 Faith schools have a significant history as part of the state education system, and play an important role in its diversity. Over the last four years, we have increased the range of faith schools in the maintained sector, including the first Muslim, Sikh and Greek Orthodox schools. There are also many independent faith schools and we know that some faith groups are interested in extending their contribution to state education. We wish to welcome faith schools, with their distinctive ethos and character, into the maintained sector where there is clear local agreement. Guidance to School Organisation Committees will require them to give proposals from faith groups to establish schools the same consideration as those from others, including LEAs. **Decisions to establish faith schools should take account of the interests of all sections of the community.**

5.31 We note that Lord Dearing's report to the Archbishops' Council recommends that the Church of England increase significantly the number of secondary school places it supports. Where there is local support, we will welcome that. **We want these schools to be inclusive**, and welcome the recommendation that Church of England schools should serve the whole community, **not confining admission to Anglicans.** We want faith schools that come into the maintained sector to add to the inclusiveness and diversity of the school system and to be ready to work with non-denominational schools and those of other faiths.

We will raise standards for pupils from ethnic minorities

3.29.... Working alongside community leaders, parents and representatives of faith communities, we will work to break down the barriers to equality of opportunity and tackle the cycle of disadvantage.

We will extend the City Academy programme

5.23 Our City Academy programme means that sponsors from private, voluntary and faith groups can establish new schools whose running costs are fully met by the state. They bring a distinctive approach to school management and governance and offer a radical option to raise standards in areas of disadvantage. ... Our aim is that by 2005 at least 20 City Academies will be open. We will legislate to allow for all-age Academies and for schools on the City Academy model in rural as well as urban areas. And we will examine the potential for developing PFI City Academies. All such schools will share their specialist expertise and facilities with other schools and the wider community and will of course conform to the law and Code of Practice on admissions. We will encourage wider innovation in the provision of new schools

5.24 As well as City Academies we want to develop new ways of encouraging innovative schools within the state sector. We therefore propose that where an LEA identifies a need for a new maintained school, it should advertise this fact and invite interested parties to bring forward proposals to establish the school by a specified date. Any interested party, including a community or faith group, an LEA or another public, private or voluntary body, will be able to publish proposals. Proposals may be brought forward for a City Academy as part of the competition.

a price worth paying?

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 will remain in our memory as one of the darkest days of history. In the biggest single act of terror thousands of innocent people were killed by a handful of fanatics, and millions are left in deep shock, grief and agony over the loss of their loved ones, family members, friends and colleagues.

The attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon has rightly been termed a crime against civilisation and humanity and stands strongly condemned by the entire civilised world. There is world-wide agreement that this new and alarming dimension of terrorism calls for immediate and extraordinary efforts of the world community to prevent further catastrophes. But there are different views about the character of the measures to be taken.

The US government has vowed revenge and has begun to mobilise for a world-wide war against terrorism. Military strikes are planned against terrorist groups suspected of involvement as well as against anyone supporting or harbouring them. States are being pressed into a decision to stand with "Us or Them" and are exhorted to offer unconditional cooperation or face the consequences. Pentagon officials say that the US government is prepared to "end" states and "wipe out" governments that refuse to cooperate. Afghanistan is expected to be the first country to suffer US bomb attacks for the refusal of its Taliban regime to surrender prime suspect, Osama bin Laden, "before seeing proofs for his involvement".

"The blow would be intended not only to destroy terrorist bases in Afghanistan but also to demonstrate to other nations that there is a heavy cost to be paid for those who shelter enemies of the United States", says a military analyst in the *New York Times*. Other states on the hit list include Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Libya, Cuba and North Korea. President Bush warns of a "wrathful, shadowy and inventive war".

The spontaneous urge for retaliation among the bereaved people in America may be understandable. But the adequate and considered answer of a civilised state on destruction and murder of innocent people perpetrated by a handful of fanatics cannot lie in more destruction and murder of more innocent people in other parts of the world.

The UN, which withdrew under the threat of US bomb attacks its entire international staff involved in various humanitarian programs from Afghanistan, has described the situation of the population of the war-ravaged and drought-stricken country as "dramatic". Thousand of people are internally-displaced, millions more are severely affected in villages, too poor or unable to move,

the majority of them women and children. The forced withdrawal of UN staff has interrupted life-saving programs for the civilian population.

Military strikes against civilians in Afghanistan or elsewhere are grave violations of human rights as well as of international law. They cannot be justified by any situation or under any circumstances. They cannot be con-

By Sanal Edamaruku, President, Rationalist International

sidered "a price worth paying", as Madalyn Albright classified the death of half-a-million children who died because of the current inhuman US sanctions against Iraq.

The consequences of a highhanded global war against terrorism would lead to infringements of civil liberties, arbitrary arrests, clos-



Osama bin Laden, the Frankenstein monster created by the USA

er surveillance of daily life, to name but a few.

Furthermore, it leads to mindless reprisals by groups and individuals against people they wrongly perceive to be terrorists. Immediately after the terrorist attack in the US, there were eruptions of hatred in various parts of the country against those of Arab origin and people of Islamic belief. A man tried to kill a little Arab boy with his car, mosques were torched, a young Indian Sikh was killed "by mistake", because his attackers could not distinguish between Sikh and Arab turbans. Many see their chance to use communal riots to settle old scores. Mass intolerance can spread very fast and can become more dangerous than a handful of fanatical terrorists.

For those who still feel that moral arguments do not have enough weight to stop the heavy military machinery of the USA, there is more: it has already been shown that retaliatory strikes

cannot deter attacks and bring more security to the USA. In 1986, for example, then US President Reagan bombed an area around the residence of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in retaliation for the suspected involvement of Libyan agents in an attack of a discotheque in Berlin, which cost the lives of two American soldiers. The bombing killed scores of innocent people – among them Gaddafi's little daughter, but it did neither help to prove Libyan involvement in the Berlin attack nor prevent Libyan agents from later blasting the PanAm plane over Lockerbie.

In 1998, President Clinton bombed a medicine factory in Khartoum, Sudan, suspected of being a hideout of Osama bin Laden, in retaliation for the bombing of US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya. This obviously did nothing to neutralise bin Laden.

Counter-terrorism not only fails to stop terrorism: there is historical evidence that it creates *more* terrorism.

One should also remember that Osama bin Laden is a creation of the US. During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, US officials supported and trained the anti-communist mujahedin through the CIA with billions of dollars. Osama bin Laden arrived in Afghanistan soon after the Soviet invasion in 1979. The CIA, as well as Pakistan's intelligence generals, recognising him as a capable leader, gave him a free hand. In addition to the USA sending fresh equipment and supplies to fuel this anti-Soviet war, the CIA used Muslim front organisations to recruit young fighters from Afghanistan and Arabian nations and gave them high-level training in special spy and sabotage training centres like Camp Peary ("The Farm") in Virginia.

The attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, which left observers stunned because of their "professional perfection", may be late fruits of the education the next generation of mujahedin received from the CIA.

If we do not stop the cycle of terror and counter-terror here, it will undoubtedly escalate to new heights.

There is no better and more efficient method to stop terrorism than trying to understand – and to change – the political, social and economic conditions that provide its breeding ground. But one will not be able to understand these conditions as long as one turns a blind eye to certain not-so-popular realities, as the example of the creation of Osama bin Laden by the CIA shows.

If one wants to continue to grow "useful" terrorism on one side, one may not be able to effectively stop "dangerous" terrorism on the other. If you measure the world with two yardsticks, you may sometimes mistake its size.

Pakistan must show its commitment to fighting Islamic terrorism by freeing Dr Younis Shaikh



A section of the crowd who took part in a peaceful demonstration outside the Pakistani consulate in London last month. Among those who addressed the demonstrators was Babu Gogineni, of IHEU, pictured below

Photos: Barry Duke

THE Pakistan Government could play a major role in demonstrating its opposition to Islamic terrorism by immediately freeing rationalist dissident Dr Younis Shaikh who was recently sentenced to death for blasphemy.

In calling for Dr Shaikh's release, American Atheists Inc last month urged Pakistan to "lead the Middle East in affirming secularism and human rights as an antidote to Islamic terrorism".

Dr Shaikh, a 46-year-old physician, has

been convicted under Pakistan's notorious blasphemy laws and faces death for giving a lecture that an Islamic court ruled had defamed Muhammad and the Islamic religion.

Human rights organisations around the world have condemned Pakistan's blasphemy laws which are routinely invoked against dissidents. Hundreds languish in Pakistan's jails – some awaiting execution – for having committed blasphemy.

General Pervez Musharraf, head of Pakistan's military government, is reportedly trying to change the blasphemy laws but faces stiff opposition from Islamic militants, many of whom support the Taliban government in neighbouring Afghanistan.

"Now that Pakistan has agreed to support the US initiative against international terrorism, that country has a unique opportunity to "drain the swamp" which encourages religious terrorism by standing up to Islamic extremism, and freeing Dr Shaikh and other victims of the blasphemy statutes," said Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists.

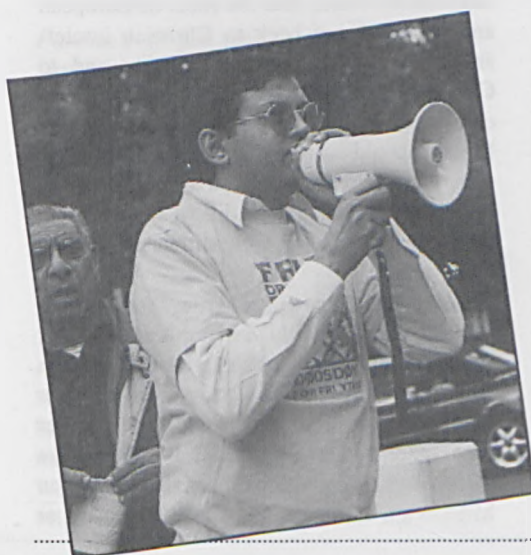
"We encourage Pakistan to lead the way in the Middle East by creating institutions that support rather than discourage human rights, and this could begin by address-

sing the case of Dr Shaikh."

Freedom for Dr Shaikh and other victims of repression would send a clear signal to the international community that Pakistan is a true partner in the fight against terrorism," Ms Johnson added.

Ron Barrier, Communications Director for American Atheists, added that the US needs to support Middle Eastern nations that are joining the fight against terrorism by encouraging reform and human rights. "We can't 'drain the swamp' of repression in which terrorism thrives without helping to address the social causes of violence such as poverty, lack of opportunity and personal rights. Building secular institutions – and that means helping to end blasphemy laws – may be more important in the long term than any military strikes the US or allied nations choose to launch."

A demonstration in support of Dr. Shaikh and other victims of Pakistan's blasphemy laws was held on Saturday, September 22, in front of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in Washington, DC. This demonstration came a fortnight after a similar gathering took place outside the Pakistan High Commission in London.



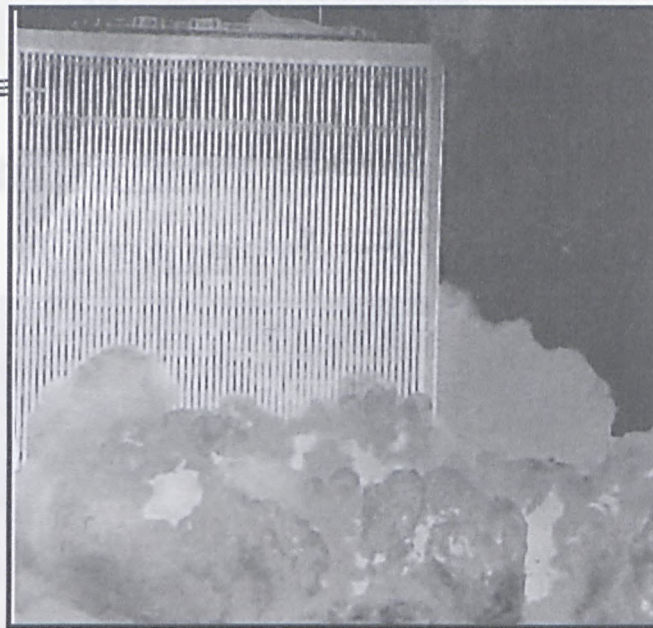
real life

THE MALIGNANT nature of religious fanaticism could hardly have had a more spectacular demonstration than the destruction of the twin towers of the World Trade Centre on September 11. Whether or not Osama bin Laden and his APQaeda organisation are behind this atrocity, it does seem clear that it was the work of Muslim fundamentalists. The word "evil" has been widely used to describe the hijackers, but, though their activities are abhorrent to any civilised society, these men were not evil in the sense that the Kray brothers were, or the moors murderers. Nineteen of them sacrificed their lives for their cause. And these were not volatile, impoverished teenagers goaded to fury by the presence of European occupiers of their land, as many of the Palestinian suicide bombers have been. Some had studied electronics at Hamburg University, most were proficient in foreign languages and seven were competent to fly jet airliners. They would have been the cream of the youth of any society. And they had spent the previous two or three years training for a mission which would inevitably end in their own deaths. The most horrifying aspect of their operation is that they were idealists who will be remembered as martyrs by many in their own countries.

The British Muslim community has been quick to condemn their actions as "un-Islamic", and this is true in so far as their victims were non-combatants, many of them women and some, apparently, fellow Muslims. But Islam cannot entirely dissociate itself from the tradition which inspired their behaviour. The concept of *Jihad* (Holy War against the infidel) is as old as Islam itself and a suicidal element has always been part of it because of the belief that the souls of those who fell in *Jihad* would go straight to paradise. This belief has inspired generations of Ghazi warriors who *intended* to die in battle because by so doing they would earn instant bliss. The most recent example is the clearing of Iraqi minefields by Iranian infantry during the war with Saddam Hussein.

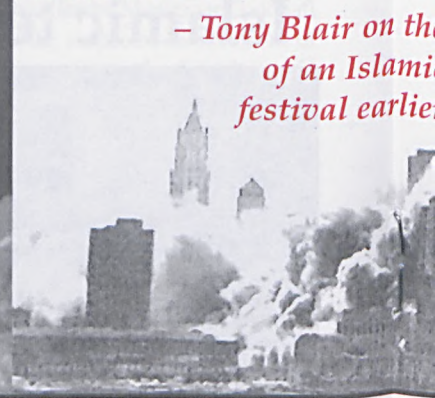
Besides, terrorism, commonly regarded as the 20th-century invention of the IRA and the Jewish Irgun, was in fact first deployed by the Muslim sect of the Assassins, who, from their strongholds in the mountains of Iran and Syria, and allegedly maddened by drugs (the word is derived from the Arabic *Hashishin* which means smokers of hashish) slaughtered sultans, caliphs and crusader captains in a series of suicide missions between 1090 and 1272 when they were smoked out by an Egyptian sultan.

Although, to be fair, the Assassins were



'Islam is a peaceful and beautiful religion that proclaims the sanctity of human life'

– Tony Blair on the occasion of an Islamic festival earlier



When culture

always heretical within Islam, suicidal terrorism is not so foreign to the religion as westernised Muslims would have us believe.

Amidst the virtually global clamour to have M-Qaeda exterminated, much less has been heard of the question which middle America should now be asking itself – "Why should anyone want to do this to us? Why do so many Muslims hate us this much?" A BBC *Question Time* programme which DID raise this evoked a storm of protest; the first subsequent edition of the *Sunday Times* raised the issue only tentatively, and the *Sun* was completely innocent of such a complication. The customer in the drug store in Kansas City probably knows nothing of the plight of the Palestinian Arabs who see themselves as dispossessed and humiliated by the intrusion of Israelis, largely of European origin, into their homeland. But the perception of the entire Arab world that Israel is aided and abetted in this dispossession by America is at the root of the problem.

Here we encounter a second variety of religious fanaticism. Current Israeli policy towards the West Bank, the Gaza strip and the old city of Jerusalem, is based on the legend that God promised the land to Abraham and delivered it to Israel in the time of Joshua. So we have the amazing spectacle of the foreign policy of a modern state being based on a fundamentalist adherence to a myth three-thousand years old.

The peace of the world seems now to depend on the outcome of a surrealist struggle between demented Muslim fanatics and fundamentalist Israeli settlers.

The chain of causation that led to the fall of

Jack Hastie, retired historian
Maiti of the Department
Burdwan University, India
terrorist atrocities

the twin towers goes a lot further back, however. The Israelis are, of course, themselves refugees from persecution. The blame for this cannot be laid directly at the door of religion. Zionism was a reaction to late 10th-century European secular nationalism and was legitimised by that malignant tumour of nationalism – Nazism – and ultimately by the holocaust. Religion played no significant part in this, though Pope Pius XII connived at the work of the Nazis. But the roots of European anti-Semitism run back to Christian intolerance of Jews in the Middle Ages and to Christian myths that Jews sacrificed Christian children and that the second coming of the Messiah could not occur until after the conversion of the Chosen People. So the trail from the falling towers leads back, like a slow fuse, to Christian bigotry and superstition a thousand years ago.

It would be easy to write that without religion there would be neither Jew nor Gentile, believer nor infidel, and that the lion would now be peacefully lying down with the lamb. Sadly this is not true. People will murder each other for reasons derived from racism (Stephen Lawrence), nationalism (Slobodan Milosevic), and tribal allegiance (Ruanda); or

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earlier this year

'Whoever thought that
God and religion would
prevail without blood and
body parts was living an
illusion. They don't know
the nature of religion'

— Mahmoud Marmash, Palestinian
suicide bomber who killed
himself and five others at a
shopping mall in
Israel earlier this year

ures collide

historian, and Dr Prasenjit
ment of Political Science,
ndia, reflect on the recent
cities in the US

in pursuit of intolerant secular ideologies like
Nazism and Bolshevism.

But at least none of these will persuade the
murderers to believe that by committing
suicide and massacring thousands of non-com-
batants in the process, they will earn the
approval of a God who is described as
"Compassionate", and go directly to paradise.

— Jack Hastie

*Farewell to you and the youth I have
spent with you.*

*It was but yesterday we met in a dream.
You have sung to me in my aloneness,
and I of your longings have built a tower
in the sky.*

*But now our sleep has fled and our
dream is over, and it is no longer dawn.*

— The Prophet, Kahlil Gibran.

AMERICAN political scientist Samuel
Huntington had expressed apprehension way
back in 1996 that the 21st Century would be
marked by conflicts between Islam and the
West, a throwback to the Crusades of the
Middle Ages. This projection was described in

Western scholarship as the Jihad versus
McWorld scenario, an eventuality that would
test the resilience of the free world against the
forces of religious fundamentalism and terror-
ist insurgency.

But it is rather disturbing that all such
doomsday prophecies came true on September
11, 2001, with terrorist attacks on the World
Trade Centre, New York and the Pentagon,
Washington DC. However, such mindless acts
of violence against the civilian population pro-
voke certain questions:

- Are the basic tenets of Islam incompatible
with other world religions? We know that it is
the religiously-assigned duty of Muslims to
wage war against non-Muslims in order to
transform the world into an acceptable and
exclusivist *dar-ul-Islam* (World of Islam) from
an unacceptable *dar-ul-harb* World of
Infidels). Islam as an organised world religion
should come to terms with the realities of the
new millennium, and should resocialise itself –
so to say – to cohabit with the emergent ethos
of pluralist multicultural societies.

- Does violence beget violence? It obvious-
ly does, but the United States at the present
moment should also appreciate the exact
nature of cross-border terrorism in flashpoints
like Kashmir, India, and help the other NATO
members as well as willing countries in the
Third World (like India) to destroy pockets of
insurgency, especially those drawing ideologi-
cal, military and financial support from Islam's
thoroughly discredited thesis of the *jihad* or
Holy War. Americans should now realise the
kind of trauma that Indian Hindu Pandits
suffer daily in Jammu and Kashmir – this for-
mer valley of the gods has now been tragically

real life

reduced to a valley of fear and death by
Muslim terrorists who have been trained and
equipped by rogue states like Afghanistan,
Pakistan and even Libya. Pakistan's army-
chief-turned-president even had the insuffer-
able audacity to describe these insurgents on
his recent visit to India as freedom fighters!

Are human rights and democracy
Eurocentric constructs? They are certainly
not, but the United States should stop acting
as the moral guardian of a unipolar world,
and should effectively build bridges under-
pinned by trust and a common agenda of
human development to reach across to
potential regional partners in the Third
World such as India, a country that has sus-
tained its liberal democracy – unlike
Pakistan – since Independence in 1947
despite poverty, malnutrition and hunger.

American policy-makers should realise that
it is high time they began dismantling the
country's strategy of cultural isolation and
indifference. It is a disquieting fact that an
average urban student of the Third World
knows more about the US than an average
American undergraduate knows about other
peoples and other cultures.

Dissemination of multicultural knowledge
should be facilitated both within and without
the American academia, industry and social
service sectors.

Familiarity can also breed understanding
and help expand world views of an entire
people. The logic of globalisation more often
than not has worked in an one-sided manner,
provoking even Western scholars to come
up with insightful expressions like
McDonaldisation, Coca-Colonisation and
The US is Us!

Moreover, the US should discontinue
backing wrong horses and should realise that
less developed countries in the Third World
may be impoverished but are not bereft of
dignity.

Like-minded countries like India should
be cultivated as reliable long-term allies on a
level playing field by a series of confi-
dence-building measures. The US should
also discontinue its interventionist policies
that have generated such universal animosity
and condemnation.

The clash of civilisations has only just
begun – it is now the obligation of a more
conscientious American people to learn from
their mistakes of the near and distant past to
salvage the future of their free and sanitised
and once-impregnable world. Those who
do not learn from history, demonstrably –
and most regrettably – are condemned to
repeat it.

— Dr Prasenjit Maiti

down to earth: colin mccall

Odone out of step

THERE is no harm in having conflicting views aired in the same newspaper if both are reasonably argued; but it was patent on September 9 how out of place the Roman Catholic Cristina Odone is in the *Observer*. The end of Christianity was “no bad thing” according to the paper’s main leader, commenting on the Catholic Archbishop of Westminster’s admission that Christianity was “vanquished” in Britain. “For far too long, religion has been supposed to be a precondition of morality”, it declared, but a “child brought up without religion can certainly be a moral human being. And in a multicultural society we need to develop a secular morality – of equality, honesty, fairness – which can unify, rather than divide, as religions have done so often in the past and still do”.

Odone acknowledged that we can be moral without religion, but was alarmed at the thought of our being “divorced from church rituals, alienated from a divinity ... becoming nothing more than a collection of individuals fleeing the great existential question: what is all this for?” Take Christianity from us, she said, “and we won’t know where we’re going, or why”.

It was regrettable, the *Observer*’s leader concluded, that just as society was becoming more secularised, the politicians were kowtowing to religious groups; and it was “ludicrous that ministers should be considering more, not fewer, faith-based schools”. For Ms Odone however – or for her imaginary “liberals who trumpet their atheism” – the new religious schools were to be welcomed, with their “inherent” ethos – “respect for others, honesty and discipline” plus, of course, “a sense of right and wrong”.

This in the same week that we saw pictures of Catholic children in Belfast being escorted to school by armed police in riot gear while Protestants hurled abuse and spat on them; and when we were reminded that no fewer than 15 walls separate the sects in the city.

Incense can damage your health

ROMAN Catholics, Hindus, Buddhists and hippies should go easy on what Cristina Odone calls the “sweet smell of incense”. It could be even worse for their health than tobacco. That’s the message from Taiwan, where Ta Chang Lin of the National Cheng Kung University found that levels of one chemical linked with lung cancer were 40 times higher in a badly ventilated temple than the homes of habitual smokers. The fumes from burning joss sticks also created

more pollution than road traffic, *New Scientist* reported on August 2.

Dr Lin collected samples of air from inside and outside a local temple and compared them with samples from a road junction. The temple air held very large concentrations of a highly carcinogenic group of chemicals known as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), which are normally released by burning. The concentrations were, in fact, 19 times higher inside the temple than just outside, and slightly higher than at the road junction. Levels of one PAH, benzopyrene, were 45 times higher in the temple than in the homes of smokers and 118 times higher than in homes where no one smoked and no one lit fires.

Dr Lin expressed concern for the health of workers in the temples where hundreds or even thousands of sticks are burnt at the same time during big ceremonies. “We truly hope that incense burning brings only spiritual comfort, without any physical discomfort”, he said. “But there is a potential cancer risk. We just cannot say how serious it is.” Possibly joss sticks should carry a health warning like that on cigarette packets.

Confessing in confidence

A JUDGE in America has ruled that Alcoholics Anonymous is a religion and that confessions between AA members should be treated as confidential in the same way as confessions to a priest (*Guardian*, August 3).

Judge Charles Briant of the US District Court in White Plains, New York overturned the manslaughter conviction of Paul Cox, who has served seven years for killing Laksman Rao Chervu and his wife Shanta in 1988, whom he mistook for his highly-critical parents. Five years after the two doctors had their throats slit, an AA member told police that Cox had talked about dreams and memories of killing the couple. And, at the trial, seven members confirmed that Cox had admitted his guilt.

The judge agreed with Cox’s lawyer that his client should not have been arrested on the basis of statements made in a religious context with the understanding that they would remain confidential. The law can indeed be an ass where religion is concerned.

No stopping the Teresa express

A 34,000-page report has been sent to the Vatican’s Congregation for the Causes of Saints supporting Pope John-Paul II’s proposed beatification and subsequent canonisation of Mother Teresa. But, as the *Observer* revealed on August 19, “secrets and doubts shadow” the miracle claimed to have been per-

formed by her.

In May 1998 Monika Besra, an illiterate tribal woman, was suffering from a “painful, gigantic tumour in her uterus”. Leaving her husband and five children behind, she “hobbled” into the home for the destitute run by the Missionaries of Charity in the West Bengal town of Patiram. She was in terrible pain and, as the paper’s account goes somewhat vaguely, “after several unproductive trips to hospital”, two of the nuns caring for Mrs Besra tied a silver oval-shaped medallion to her stomach. Not just any medallion, mind you, but one that had been placed on Mother Teresa’s body after her death. When Mrs Besra woke up next morning the tumour had miraculously disappeared. And Mrs Besra was sure that Mother Teresa had “made me all right”.

Mrs Besra has since gone back to her village and the nuns involved in her treatment have refused to discuss the case publicly. When the *Observer* visited the home for the destitute in the town of Raiganj, the nuns wouldn’t emerge.

“They have been given strict orders not to talk about it”, explained Bishop Alphonsus D’Souza. “Obviously what happened is an objective miracle. But the sisters don’t want to give different versions as that would spoil things.” Indeed it would.

There are other snags, too. Although the *Observer* “obtained” Mrs Besra’s statement, it clearly wasn’t written by her. And despite encouragement from the nuns, Monika’s sister Kanchan refused to write to the order’s headquarters informing them of the miracle, “so the nuns reluctantly put pen to paper themselves”. Moreover, at least one local doctor, Mainul Islam, rejects the miracle. “It isn’t possible for someone with a tumour to be cured like that”, he said. Not that any of this is likely to delay Mother Teresa’s beatification. Pope John-Paul has put that on “fast track”.

Religious psychosis

IN the first of the BBC2 programmes *Mind of a Murderer* (September 4), a series of case studies mainly from America, Tammy, the sister of convicted killer Cody Mitten, told how her brother became obsessed with Christianity, believed he was Jesus Christ and began visiting her at all hours of the night.

On the very day that a doctor failed to find anything wrong with Cody, he murdered his mother and her boyfriend.

He is now described as psychotic, that is, suffering from a psychosis, “a serious mental disorder characterised by illusions, delusions, hallucinations...”, which are commonly met with in the religious life.

This is no time for hatred cloaked in religion, says top US humanist

"AS IF our country has not suffered enough at the hands of religious fanatics with the recent terrorist attacks, we are now being treated to even more hatred cloaked in the mantle of religion," said Ed Buckner, Executive Director of the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH). Buckner was referring to remarks made by televangelist Jerry Falwell and other representatives of the Christian right in the wake of the terrorist outrage.

Said Buckner. "Comments like those of Jerry Falwell and echoed by Pat Robertson, are profoundly un-American. At a time of horrendous national tragedy, we urge everyone, whether religious or not, to act and speak with restraint

and respect for all our fellow citizens."

"I can't help wondering how the family and friends of David Charlebois, the gay co-pilot who lost his life on the American Airlines jet that crashed into the Pentagon, feel when they hear Falwell's hateful remarks," said D J Grothe, Field Director for the Council for Secular Humanism. "We are all grieving at this time. Some of us take comfort in the solace of their religious beliefs, but many others of us are able to express our compassion without recourse to religion. Everyone, religious or non-religious, should be respected at this time," added Grothe.

The CSH, headquartered in Amherst, New

York, joined thousands of other organisations around the world in condemning the violent attack on innocent people and in expressing our heartfelt sympathy for the victims and their families.

"Secular humanists, like everyone else in these difficult days, are concerned about the great pain so many of us are enduring and the future safety of us all. Those of us who devote our lives to reasoned dissent and questioning know that now is surely a time for restraint and mutual respect and support. There will be time soon enough for thoughtful disagreement and criticism," Buckner concluded.

New RC Archbishop of Sydney 'is from another universe'

DR GEORGE Pell, the new Catholic Archbishop of Sydney (lately of Melbourne) has been

Nigel Sinnott reports

entertaining the Australian public with his views on divorce. Archbishop Pell is concerned about the high rate of divorce in Australia, and advocates a tightening up of divorce criteria. He wants to reintroduce fault as a part of divorce proceedings, especially where custody and property are concerned, and he has also advocated a special tax on divorcees.

Dr Pell's proposals have been greeted with polite reservations in the local media. Most Australian journalists have expressed concern about the divorce rate, but have said that the Archbishop's remedies were inappropriate as likely improvements.

More forthright contributions have appeared in the letters pages of *The Age*, Melbourne's daily

broadsheet. Dorothy Waterfield of North Melbourne responded with: "If George Pell had been

married, even happily, I'd listen to him."

Mike Cahill of Sydney suggested another tax - "on single blokes in bibs and black uniforms". Dick Dankert came up with the idea that a church solemnising a marriage ending in divorce "should be taxed \$1 million a time, and the money used to support the divorcees and their kids through their difficult times". And Keith Handscombe observed that "Men are from Mars, women are from Venus, and George Pell is from another universe".

Dr Pell might agree with the last comment, up to a point, but he is clearly keen on meddling in this universe too, like most conservative Catholics.

Another skeptic was the Rev Alistair Macrae, moderator of the Uniting Church in Victoria. His church was also committed to strengthening family life. Mr. Macrae said, but he certainly did not support Dr Pell's "punitive approach" to divorce: "that is actually going to harm the children." Dr Pell had also claimed that a "strong family is a religious family", to which Mr Macrae replied that he knew of dysfunctional religious families as well as highly loving and functional non-religious families, observations that will come as no surprise to freethinkers.

Unforeseen setback for astrology degree courses

A DECISION by India's highest educational authorities - the Ministry of Human Resource Development and the University Grants Commission (UGC) - to establish Vedic Astrology as a degree course has unexpectedly run into choppy waters.

Rationalists and scientists have united to resist the attempt, and their fight against "the introduction of superstition and pseudo-science" in India's national curricula has triggered a broad public debate.

More than that, the matter has now gone to court, with a petition to the Supreme Court challenging the government's decision to introduce astrology degree courses.

Astrology is not a science, argues the petition, and its introduction is illogical and irrational. It represents "a giant leap backwards, undermining India's scientific credibility".

The UGC had informed universities in a letter sent in February, 2001, that courses in Vedic Astrology were to be introduced at graduate, postgraduate and research levels.

The argument for this decision was that Vedic Astrology was "not only one of the subjects of our traditional and classical knowledge", but also a "discipline which lets us know the events happening in human life and in the universe."

Catholic paper banned

AN ISSUE of *Catholic Church News* has been banned in Zimbabwe by the the Catholic Church for carrying articles on sexual abuse by priests and missionaries. A church spokesman said the bishops felt that "the ordinary Catholic would be disturbed and upset by such articles, and that the stories should never have been given publicity".

THERE were protest rallies at the gates of Princeton University when Peter Singer was appointed DeCamp Professor of Bioethics, and Steve Forbes, "the superrich aspiring presidential candidate" threatened to freeze his donations to his *alma mater* until Singer was sacked. According to the *New York Times*, it caused the biggest academic commotion since Bertrand Russell was (as he noted in his CV) "judicially pronounced unworthy to be Professor of Philosophy at the College of the City of New York" in 1940. Fortunately, unlike Russell, Singer was not sacked. Indeed, had it not been for the "commotion", his arrival would barely have been noticed and his controversial views on a variety of ethical issues would not have become "the topic of conversation around the country".

As is usually the case with such protests, many expressed antipathy without having read Singer's works. They can now remedy that. *Writings on an Ethical Life* is a comprehensive collection of his best and most provocative writing chosen by the author himself. Among the subjects addressed are animal liberation, environmental accountability, abortion, euthanasia and our responsibility for the world's poorest people. Singer also devotes a few pages to the Great Ape Project, which he set up with Paola Cavalieri in 1993 to protect our nearest animal relatives.

It was the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, writing when the French revolutionary government was leading the way in freeing black slaves, who realised that the next logical – as well as moral – step was to liberate the other animals. A full-grown horse or dog, he said, "is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day or a week or even a month, old. But suppose they were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?"

They not only can but do, both in the wild and in captivity; and while there is little or nothing we can do to prevent suffering in the natural state, there is a great deal for which humans are directly responsible. Circuses, zoos, obviously; hunting and fishing; laboratory experiments; but most of all rearing animals and then killing them for food. Our "tyranny over non-human animals ... has caused and is still causing an amount of pain and suffering that can only be compared with that which resulted from centuries of tyranny by white humans over black humans" says Singer; and the struggle against this tyranny is "as important as any of the moral and social issues that have been fought over in

Colin McCall
reviews *Writings
on an Ethical Life*
by Peter Singer.
Fourth Estate.

£15.00.

recent years". You may think that a wild exaggeration, he continues; not so: it is a sober estimate of a situation largely unknown to the general public. He then refers to the tens of millions of animal experiments, "only a few of which can possibly be regarded as contributing to important medical research", and he tells us what happened to our dinner when it was still an animal.

The crucial problem with humans is what Singer (following Richard Ryder) calls "speciesism", by analogy with racism and sexism, and equally to be condemned. Most religions treat humans as special (not surprisingly as they are all the work of humans); in the case of the Bible, created in the image of God, and given "dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth".

Exploited

Singer distinguishes between the "love" of animals displayed by those who keep them as pets and his own position of concern about inflicting "needless suffering on another being, even if that being was not a member of our own species"; his belief that animals are ruthlessly and cruelly exploited by humans; and his campaign to change that situation. "We have to speak up on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves". And he notes that the "rights of animals" was used to parody Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792. An anonymous satire appeared entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes*, now known to have been written by a Cambridge philosopher Thomas Taylor. "Equality", rather than "rights" is Singer's preferred term, whether speaking of humans or other animals; equality being a moral idea, not an assertion of fact. It does not entail equal treatment but equal consideration.

Most human beings are speciesists in their attitude to other animals: they are prepared to have farm animals killed for the dinner table while invoking the "sanctity of life" where their own species is concerned. And it was, of course, Singer's advocacy of abortion and euthanasia that brought out the pro-life protesters when Princeton awarded him his present chair. Singer's criteria in assessing particular cases are self-awareness and a sense of the future, not just membership of the species *Homo sapiens*. The embryo, the later fetus, the profoundly intellectually disabled child, even the newborn infant are all indisputably members of that species, but none is self-aware or has a sense of the future.

Plato and Aristotle thought that the state should enforce the killing of deformed infants; that it was better to end a life that had begun inauspiciously than to attempt to prolong that life, with all the problems that might bring. Since then we have had Christianity with the belief that all humans have an immortal soul. As Thomas Aquinas put it, the taking of a human life was a sin against God in the same way that the killing of a slave would be a sin against the master of the slave.

Is it true, Singer asks, that there is no significant dividing line between the fertilised egg and the child? He suggests that we should accord the life of the fetus "no greater value than the life of a non-human animal at a similar level of rationality". Species membership alone isn't enough when it comes to a question of "taking life, or allowing life to end" he told an American television interviewer in September 1999. The important qualities for a judgment are a capacity to experience something, to feel pain or to have any kind of feelings, which is something that we share with a huge range of non-human animals. When it comes to considering taking a human life or allowing a life to end, he would also say: "it matters whether a being is the kind of being who can see that he or she actually has a life – that is, can see that he or she is the same being who exists now, who existed in the past, and who will exist in the future". In short, a person who can live a biographical life, not just a biological one.

When it was suggested in the TV interview that he had abandoned the entire Judaeo-Christian tradition, Singer said he accepted the accusation; and when asked if human beings were creatures of God, he replied: "I don't believe in the existence of God, so I also reject the idea that each human being is a creature of God. It's as simple as that". What he would like to see was "a society that, in its laws and public ethics, was not dominated by any specifically religious doctrines". So, how did he decide whether an action was right or

wrong? You had to look at the effects: "what does it do, what impact does it have on people, animals, or the planet", an essentially utilitarian position.

Peter Singer was a child of Austrian-Jewish refugees, whose grandparents died in concentration camps, but he has been shouted down

when invited to lecture in Austria, Germany and in German-speaking Switzerland. There is, he regrets to say, "a peculiar tone of fanaticism about some sections of the German debate over euthanasia that goes beyond normal opposition to Nazism, and instead begins to seem like the very mentality that made Nazism

possible". Because the Nazis practised eugenics, anything related to genetic engineering in Germany is now smeared with Nazi associations. And it has led to the German parliament passing a law that prohibits all non-therapeutic experimentation on the human embryo.

KEN Russell made several dramatised biographies of composers for the BBC's *Monitor* series in the sixties and *A Song of Summer* is surely the best of them. It tells the extraordinary story of the collaboration between the British composer Frederick Delius and a young man called Eric Fenby, who offered to help Delius write down his music after the composer became blind and paralysed. The film is based on Fenby's memoir *Delius as I Knew Him*.

Living in France in the mid-1920s, Delius had become disabled and completely incapable of writing down his music because of the syphilis he had contracted earlier in his life. He was frustrated because he still had compositions he wished to finish.

At the same time, a 22-year old Eric Fenby was living in Scarborough, and was a self-taught musician of great gifts. He had become enamoured of Delius's music after hearing it on the radio. Reading about the composer's plight in a newspaper, he offered his services as an amanuensis for three or four years. Delius accepted, and Fenby set off for the most extraordinary experience of his life.

Briefly

Atheist savagery

"THE most savage wars of the past century were mounted by by atheist Nazi fanatics, and fanatical communists," according to historian Felipe Fernandez-Armesto.

In a *Sunday Times* article entitled "Islam is the friend we need to keep" (September ???), Fernandez-Armesto says "Buddhism and Hinduism are among the fastest-growing faiths in the West today. There are, it is said, more resident witches in England than Anglican vicars, so why not imams?"

Abuse settlement

FIVE Californian teenage boys have been awarded a total of \$5.2-million by the Catholic Church for abuse they suffered at the hands of Monsignor Michael A Harris, a southern California priest and high school principal.

Terry Sanderson
reviews *Delius - A Song*
of *Summer* (UK 1968).
Directed by Ken Russell.
Cert PG. 72 minutes;
b&w; published on DVD
and video by the British
Film Institute

It is a moving and inspiring portrait of the triumph of the human spirit over overwhelming adversity. As Fenby and Delius struggled to work out some means of communication that would permit the final works to be brought into being, a deep and respectful admiration and love developed between them.

This is despite the fact that Eric was a devout Catholic and Delius a relentless atheist. What united them was a determination to ensure that none of Delius's wonderful music remained unwritten.

All the same, the scenes in which Delius mischievously tries to undermine Fenby's faith are funny and endearing. Delius – portrayed here as both tyrant and genius – at one stage utters to immortal line: "English music will never be any good until they get rid of Jesus." He was absolutely right, of course.

The gulf between the man and his art is one that has always intrigued Russell. Here, he shows us the callous Delius, tyrannising all around him, while his music, tender and rhapsodic, swells on the soundtrack. Russell's achievement in *Song of Summer* is to make us see the pathos in this tormented old man, and to feel the urgent hunger for life trapped in his crippled frame that at last finds vicarious outlet in the music Fenby sets down.

Deeply engrossing and exquisitely paced, this film displays none of the excess that Ken Russell later brought to his big screen movies such as *The Music Lovers* and *The Devils*. Indeed, it is the restraint that gives this modest production its majestic quality.

The performances – Max Adrian as the



Max Adrian plays Delius and Christopher Gable the naïve and over-sensitive Fenby in Ken Russell's brilliant film

tormented, but none-the-less insufferable, Delius, Christopher Gable as the naïve and over-sensitive Fenby and Maureen Pryor as long-suffering Jelka, wife of the musical monster are all top notch. The imagery is extraordinary, particularly those scenes which concern France and Norway. They become even more incredible when the director reveals in a fascinating commentary (available only on the DVD version) that the whole thing was made entirely in England and on a shoestring.

It is a film of great tenderness that has introduced many grateful viewers to Delius's unjustly neglected music. Full marks to the British Film Institute for rescuing it from the obscurity of the BBC vaults, so that a new generation can be party to this remarkable story.

Special offer for *Freethinker* readers

The British Film Institute is offering copies of *Delius - A Song of Summer* at a specially reduced price for readers of the *Freethinker*. The video can be purchased for £9.99 (full price £12.99), and the DVD for £16.99 (full price £19.99). Post and packing £1.50 for the video, £1.00 for the DVD. Orders, clearly marked **FREE-THINKER DELIUS OFFER**, should be sent to BFI Video Publishing, 3rd Floor, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN

Post-death rewards

THE moment we heard about the American disaster, we all knew the perpetrators had to be Muslim extremists, for nothing but an unshakeable faith in post-death rewards will turn human beings into suicide bombers. This was the motivation of the Japanese kamikaze pilots, as it is of terrorists on both sides in Northern Ireland and everywhere else.

Yet since September 11 we have been constantly informed that the air-liner terrorists in America could not possibly be Muslims – or, at least, not *real* Muslims – since the greatest crime in Islam is to take innocent life. But, of course, to many Muslims, especially those whose countries have been victims of American state terrorism in recent years, Americans are not innocent.

Although the scripture that is the common basis of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, commands simply “Thou shalt not kill”, all three religions have introduced the element of guilt or innocence – which is morally irrelevant. The one salient moral criterion on utilitarian grounds is desire to live.

Insertion of the extraneous word “innocent” has enabled all three religions to sanction both warfare and the death penalty, while abjuring abortion (however early) and euthanasia (however late). And it makes guilty America a prime target for Muslim seekers after glory and ghostly houris.

BARBARA SMOKER
Bromley, Kent

Praise for Woolley

I WRITE to congratulate Roy Woolley for his article in this month's edition of the *Freethinker* and you for publishing it.

Imagine a world where this could be translated into every language and given to every child as soon as they could read and before they become indoctrinated with the standard mumbo-jumbo by parents and priests.

JOHN FORD
Suffolk

I WAS interested Roy Woolley's article. My impression is that religions are driven into children's brains as early as possible by loving parents. The process involves daily repetition, reinforced at school.

It reminds me of the “brain-washing” of allied prisoners by the communists in the Korean war.

After such an upbringing, most people find it difficult to apply reason to religious matters.

R K E TORODE
Kidderminster

Correcting Colin McCall

COLIN McCall says that Primo Levi “spent ten years in Auschwitz”. This is quite impossible, for the simple reason that the Auschwitz death camp itself only existed for about three years until over-run by Soviet troops on January 27, 1945.

KARL HEATH
Coventry

Misguided view

THE view that some of the material in the *Freethinker* is bigoted, intolerant and hateful towards religion is fundamentally misguided and altogether mistaken (*Points of view*, August).

Leaving religious ideas alone and unchallenged, as some would prefer, is simply not being sensible. Tolerance is not an absolute; it must be guided by reason and commonsense. No-one tolerates everything. Therefore, if something is genuinely wrong and harmful it should be criticised, satirised or ridiculed as much as possible. Enlightening the ignorant, indoctrinated masses with truthful iconoclastic information is giving people the option to think otherwise. Information that can help society should be propagated whether it offends godly faith or not.

The trouble with society is that religion is constantly being heard uncritically and always in a supernatural context. Secular balance is always needed in order to disrupt indoctrination, for how can anyone come to an objective unbiased conclusion when only one view is heard? The totalitarianism of religious absolutes chokes progress and enforces tribalism and separation which often breed conflict and bitter mistrust.

The evidence is overwhelmingly conclusive – religious material should and must be criticised, but always in a spirit of being helpful and constructive. It is positive and healthy to free people from error.

If we freethinkers and humanists don't reveal the contradictions, errors, fallacies and problems associated with uncritical supernatural religion, who will?

WILLIAM BURN
Northern Ireland

Let's have more Alpha

RATHER than lodging a complaint with the Independent Television Commission over *Alpha: will it change their lives?*, the National Secular Society should pass a vote of thanks to those responsible for the series. The witterings of the Rev Nicky Gumbel and his dupes

prompt a question: “Is this what Christianity has been reduced to?”

More please!

BILL MCILROY
Sheffield

Getting facts right

IF we're going to call ourselves “freethinkers”, it's surely essential to get our facts right. Which Cllr Goodman (*Points of View*, September) hasn't. Despite signing off “Yours for accuracy (even about race)”, he states that “under apartheid there were three defined races, “White”, “Coloured” and “Bantu”. Despite him recently scolding me for calling Semites race (Why not? - see the OED), he calls the Bantu a race when it's really a language (eg “the Bantu-speaking peoples”) and the blacks themselves refute the term as a racial description.

So instead of three “defined” races, the councillor quotes only two.

And to make matters worse, apartheid officially defined as many as *seventeen* races, grouped according to the propaganda theme being pursued. For instance, under apartheid's cruellest fiction, residence rights concentrated on six races: White, Coloured, Indian, Chinese, Cape Malay and black (“Bantu”) as defined by the Group Areas Act of 1950. I seem to have been the first to expose this Act as based on perhaps the greatest racial and historical fraud of the 20th century, its fake “history” awarding a white some 35 times more land and mineral wealth than a black (not so different even today). My conclusions were endorsed a decade later in UNESCO's academic work *Apartheid – Power and Historical Falsification* (UN, 1980, from HMSO).

A final point: most of my Jewish friends in Johannesburg said that Jews in South Africa were not fully defined as “white” until the 1930s, when the white government found their contacts throughout the world quite useful. But freethinkers may find a couple of quotes more interesting, as evidence of the close links between religion and insanity.

Said the late Garfield Weston, Canadian food mogul, after a trip to apartheid South Africa: “The government there are a fine body of upstanding Christians.” Said that government itself in the mid-sixties, “Our Afrikaner history is the highest work of the Architect of the Centuries.” Gorbliney.

Hamba Kahli (as the Zulus say).

JOHN CLARKE
Uxbridge

WITHOUT disagreeing with E Goodman's main point (*Defining Jews*, *Points of View*,



July), that Jews are not racially "non-white", I must challenge some expressions deriving from the 19th-century political race theory largely invented in Britain and France but later adopted by the German Nazis. The term "white", suggesting goodness and purity, is applied to people like me with pale, greyish pink faces and sharp noses. There are plenty of us palefaces around, but we are only a "race" (biological descent group) if you accept Nazi-style race theory. Eye and hair colour and blood group are genetically determined, but no one speaks of a green-eyed race, a red-haired race or a Blood Group B race, because there is no tradition of racial discrimination on those grounds. Similar physical characteristics can arise independently among genetically unrelated people: present-day Ainu of northern Japan are not "pure-bred" but their Ainu ancestors used to look like us palefaced Europeans; there is no reason to suppose a genetic connection. Papuans may look like African, (both are called "black" as in "blackhearted villain") but they are genetically more distant from dark-skinned Africans than we palefaces are.

Goodman says "Ethnic Jews are members of the Caucasoid (white) race". The pseudoscientific term "Caucasian", propagated by American police usage, comes from a 19th-century confusion between sharp-nosed paleface features and the Indo-European language family which some had speculated as originating in the Caucasus mountains. But numerous palefaces such as Basques, Finns, Estonians, and Hungarians have non-Indo-European languages, and as Goodman rightly recognises, linguistic and racial groupings are not the same thing. The terms "Caucasian", "Aryan" and "Anglo-Saxon" among others are part of 19th-century political racist mythology: their uncritical use serves to maintain that mythology: freethinkers should eschew them. And what is an "ethnic Jew"? Goodman says that black African Jews "are a special case, being an African tribe that converted to Judaism". But various palefaced tribes (the Khazars may be the best known) and individuals have converted to Judaism, and have mixed their genes with those of earlier Jewish populations. The New Testament refers to a number of "proselytes" – converts to Judaism, and the Chinese Jews of Kaifeng look like other Chinese. There are Jewish people, but there never was a Jewish race, nor was there ever a distinct white, Caucasian or paleface race for Jews to be part of. To be sure, some inherited physical characteristics are more concentrated in one local population than in another, but all these "races" are political constructs, nothing more.

The Greek word *ethne*, which classically translates into Latin as *civitas*, meant a politi-

cal unit (state or "tribe"). The belief that citizens of such a unit had to be all of the same "race" (shared biological descent) requires the hardly plausible assumption that women were never married to nor raped by foreigners. The misuse by Goodman, the Council for Racial Equality, and the British state machine of "ethnic" to mean "racial" is a tribute to the continuing power of Nazi-style race theory.

CONNAIRE KENSIT
London

Unrelenting discrimination

YOUR correspondents on the subject of the Middle East have all neglected to mention the real origin of the present problem, the treatment of the Jews by European Christians. In contrast to the tolerance shown in the Islamic world, this has been a story of unrelenting discrimination and persecution, frequently punctuated by mass expulsions, massacres, and pogroms. This culminated in the 20th century in the ultimate horror of the holocaust. As Israel Zangwill put it: "The Jews are a frightened people. Nineteen centuries of Christian love have broken down their nerves."

This relentless pressure eventually led many Jews to conclude that their only hope of safety lay in the creation of a Jewish state. The great tragedy has been that the part of the world that they chose had been lived in for many hundreds of years by the Palestinians. We are now confronted with a situation where mainly Moslem Arabs are paying the price for the foul deeds of Christendom.

D M BENNETT
New Malden

ONE could be forgiven, after reading Derek Wilkes' letter (August 2001) for thinking that Israeli policy towards the Palestinians has been extremely generous, and that the Palestinians, far from being dispossessed, were quite pleased to pack up and move into the refugee camps. I wonder what history books Mr Wilkes has been reading?

It may help to begin in 1917. The Sharif of Mecca was assured in a letter from Sir Henry McMahon, speaking in the name of the British Government, that the Arabian Peninsular (including present day Israel) would be granted independence, if Ottoman rule could be ended. All Arab leaders understood this to be a promise of self-rule. To this end the Arabs, including the Palestinians, duly revolted against the Turks (who were allies of Germany) and helped to overthrow them – only to find that Britain, through the Balfour Declaration, had already ear-marked part of their land as a Jewish Homeland. T E

Lawrence was highly critical of this diplomatic duplicity.

At the time Arabs outnumbered Jews in Palestine by about 13:1.

Then, at partition in 1947 the Jews were allocated 55 per cent of the land. It is true that the Arabs, though their outrage was understandable, shot themselves in the foot by refusing to accept the new-born Jewish state. In the fighting which followed, 1.5-million Palestinians fled from their homes. I think that few dispassionate scholars would deny that Jewish paramilitary groups such as Haganah and Irgun Zvei Leumi made it their business to evict or terrorise Palestinians from their homes. More land was taken in the 1967 war.

Coming to the present: when two sides are as far apart as the Israelis and Palestinians, there can be no solution without compromise. One or both sides have to give. The problem is that the Palestinians have lost everything and have nothing to give. They've lost their land, and have even recognised the right to exist of the country which has replaced them. What more can they give?

Thus the onus is on Israel. Unless they allow a genuinely independent Palestinian West Bank (as opposed to the present segmented set-up), the Middle East time bomb will continue to tick.

I'm grateful, at least, that Mr. Wilkes did not invoke God's promise to give the Holy Land to Abraham over 4,000 years ago!

DAVE SIMMONDS
Epping, Essex

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publication sent via
e-mail.**

atheist & humanist contacts & events

Abolition of Divine Sadism (ADS). Contact Charles Sayer on 0207 683 0615.

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: Vallance Community Centre, Sackville Road and Clarendon Road, Hove. Sunday, October 7, 4pm Public Meeting. Information: 01273 733215.

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 Cleavelands Close, Cheltenham GL50 4PZ. Tel 01242 528743. Worcester House, Pittville Circus Road, Cheltenham. Friday, September 28, 7.30 pm. Public meeting.

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.

Essex Humanists: Humanism Today Conference, Essex Records Office, Wharf Road, Chelmsford, Saturday, September 8, 9.45 am till 4.30 pm. Tickets and programme from Diane Whitelaw, telephone 01245 265664.

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. Friday, October 12, 7.30 pm. Mansell Stimpson: *The Legendary Marlene Dietrich*. Annual lunch at a Covent Garden restaurant, Saturday, November 17, 12.30pm for 1pm. Details and booking form now available.

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. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgores Crescent, Gidea Park. Thursday, October 4, 8 pm. Giles Hart: *The Children's Fiction of C S Lewis*. Thursday, November , 8pm. Norman Dannatt: *Funny Things Happen to Musicians*.

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. The Swarthmore Centre, Leeds. Tuesday, October 9, 7.30 pm. Dan Bye: *Against Religious Privilege: The Work of the National Secular Society*. November 13, Jeff Tee: *Ethical Issues in Psychiatric Treatment*.

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

Lewisham Humanist Group: Information: Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, October 25, 8pm. Susan Aldridge: *Seeing Red and Feeling Blue*.

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.

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

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

Oxford Humanists: Information: Jean Woodman on 01865 760520.

Sheffield Humanist Society: Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street, Sheffield. Wednesday, November 7, 8pm. Hilary Cave: *The Need for Secular Education*.

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, November 14, 7.30pm. Derek Lennard: *Introducing GALHA*.

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.

Please note change of adress for your listings and events notices. They should now be sent to
**Bill McIlroy, Flat 3, Somerhill Lodge, Somerhill Road,
Hove BN3 1RU**