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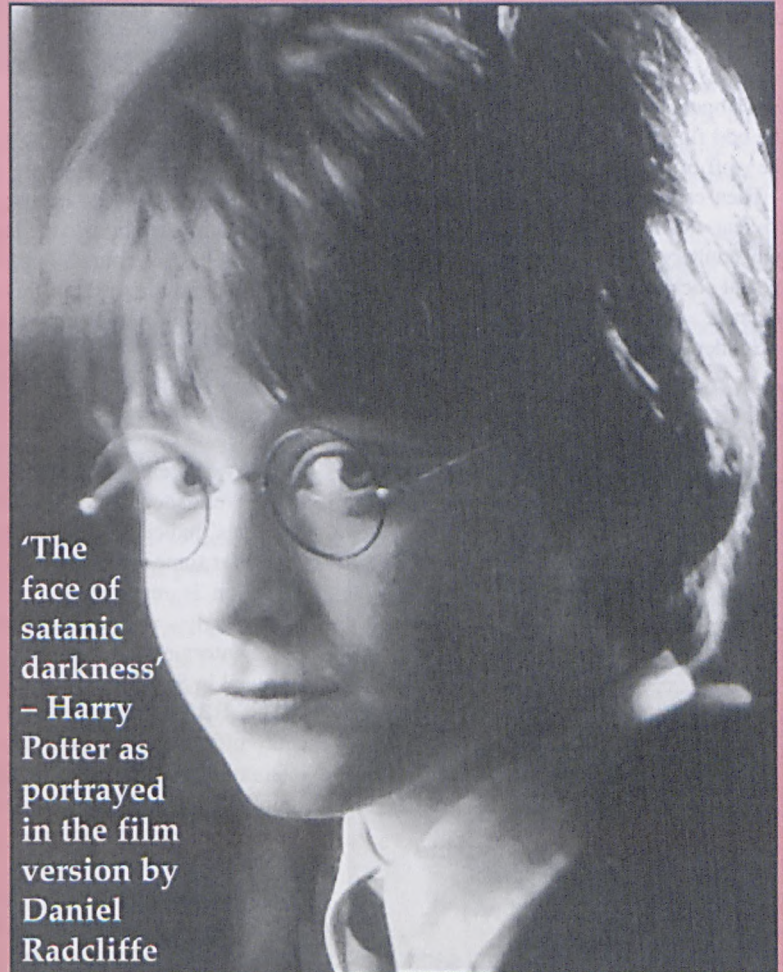
Freethinker

Secular Humanist monthly

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

**'Burn, Harry,
Burn!' Potty
Christians
torch Potter
books in a
display of
witchcraft
hysteria**

– see p3



'The
face of
satanic
darkness'
– Harry
Potter as
portrayed
in the film
version by
Daniel
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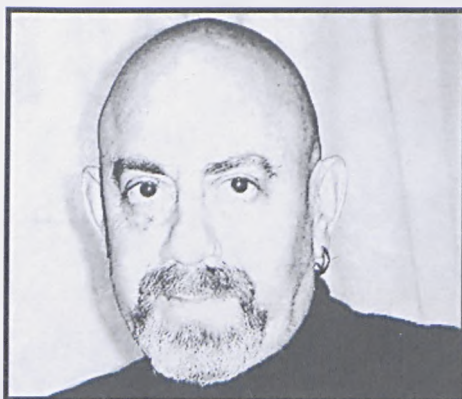
UH OH, here comes trouble I thought when I learned a couple of years ago that Nigeria's born-again Christian President Obasanjo had been suckered by Nigerian Muslims into agreeing to the introduction of *shariah* (Islamic law) in several of the country's northern provinces,

One does not need Mystic Meg's alleged powers to predict that problems would ensue. They always do when the religious take charge of matters which should, at all times, remain in the realm of the secular.

For a while, nothing too horrible occurred in the 12 provinces now under Islamic law; a few amputations here and there for theft and the odd flogging for other crimes are hardly the stuff of international headlines.

Then came the case of Safiya Husaini, a 35-year-old divorcee charged under *shariah* with adultery. Upon conviction, after a monumental cock-up of a trial, she was sentenced to death.

Suddenly, the world's attention focused on



Nigeria – or, to be more precise, the trouble Nigeria has brought upon itself by allowing its judicial system (essentially based on the English model) and its secular constitution, to be con-taminated by Islamic law.

Safiya has, of course, appealed against the sentence, and the result of this appeal will not be known until mid-March. Meanwhile, much distress and consternation has bubbled up among Muslim court officials over what they see as outside interference in what passes for their "legal" system.

This was predictable. The argument that we, in the West, should keep our noses out of other countries' judicial business crops up regularly whenever some miscarriage of justice or brutal execution is reported, but it was never put more clearly – nor more arrogantly – than in a BBC interview last month with officials involved in Safiya's case.

The BBC's correspondent reported that court officials, when told that there was an international outcry brewing over the sentence, simply shrugged their shoulders and said that "people are executed in other countries all of the time".

When it was pointed out to them that no-one in the West would be put on trial for something as trivial as adultery, nor put to death in the manner prescribed for Safiya, again they shrugged and answered that adultery was a crime deserving of death in the eyes of Islam, and the method of execution had been "ordered by Allah".

If Safiya loses her appeal she will be buried up to her waist in the ground, then stoned to death. How long will it take her to die? "That," said a court official, "depends on how good the aim is of the people who hurl the rocks."

This attitude is as repugnant to many non-Muslim Nigerians as it is to outside observers, and these Nigerians are wondering how the hell their secular state – a prominent member of the Commonwealth – could ever have allowed *shariah* to take root in their country.

If the Nigerians have any sense, they will immediately bring secular law back to those

states or face the consequence of having a large section of their country plunged into a theocratic dark age of the sort the Taliban imposed on Afghanistan.

Am I over-dramatising the danger? After learning that most of the boys born in the Nigerian city of Kano since September 11 have been named Osama, I think not.

Hospital officials in this Muslim stronghold reported "a massive increase" in the number of infants named after the world's most wanted terrorist. At least seven out of ten male babies brought to the paediatric ward of Kano's government hospital have been named Osama,

Father of one wee terrorist-in-the-making, 36-year-old Sadiq Ahmed, said "I named him after Osama bin Laden who has proved to the world that only Allah is invincible, by exposing America to shame despite its claim of being the strongest nation on earth. I want my child to imbibe his courage."

No doubt this twisted twat, who thinks it is "courageous" to arrange acts of terrorism from the safety of some distant cave, will also want his little Osama to grow up believing that women found guilty of adultery should be stoned to death, or that gay men should be beheaded – as occurred on New Year's day in Saudi Arabia when three men were executed for "the extreme obscenity and ugly acts of homosexuality".

Despite Prime Minister Tony Blair's warm regard for this "peaceful and beautiful religion that proclaims the sanctity of human life", there is no chance that we will ever see *shariah* manifest itself in the UK. But this is not to say that there aren't groups actively promoting Islamic law in Britain. One such group is SOS (Supporters of Shariah) which has two rather sinister logos – a sword, and a shackled hand poking through the bars of a cell, holding a book entitled "the Holy Quran".

What SOS aims to accomplish is a mystery. At the time of my writing this, SOS's website is on the fritz, so for all I know they are, at this very moment, planning to introduce execution blocks in every shopping mall in the United Kingdom.

What I do know is that SOS is headed by Muslim firebrand Abu Hamza, who has been described as a man who "personifies hatred". Hamza is said to have connections with another London-based Islamic extremist Omar Bakri Mohammed, who recently declared that he "wants to see the black flag of Islam flying over Downing Street" and once suggested that gay people should "throw themselves off Big Ben".

How in the name of sweet sanity these two dangerous imbeciles – and many others like them – were ever allowed into Britain is entirely beyond my comprehension.

The Freethinker

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Harry Potter is 'the face of satanic darkness'

HARRY Potter books have been burnt on a bonfire in New Mexico, by people accusing the fictional boy wizard of being the devil.

J K Rowling's novels were burnt alongside other items considered to be the work of the devil, including horror books by Stephen King, ouija boards and AC/DC heavy metal records.

But records by the rap singer Eminem, renowned for his often violent and homophobic lyrics were spared being torched and instead were thrown in a dustbin, along with

copies of Disney's Snow White film.

The congregation of the Christ Community Church in Alamogordo in southern New Mexico heard an anti-Harry Potter sermon in which Pastor Jack Brock claimed the character taught children to take up wizardry.

"Behind that innocent face is the power of satanic darkness," he said.

"Harry Potter is the devil and he is destroying people."

The theme of the books – in which Potter

attends a wizard's school and battles beasts and other wizards – has been attacked by some for attracting children to dark magic.

But most of the millions of fans of the books – the first of which has been turned into a hit film – have shrugged aside those arguments and embraced the stories as harmless, fantastical entertainment.

The anti-Potter sermon was followed by the night-time book burning, which Pastor Brock said was part of a drive for Christians to get rid of items that prevent them from communicating with God.

The Pastor said he had never read any of the four Potter novels, but had researched their contents.

But the book-burning session did not have universal approval. Several hundred people formed a counter-demonstration across the street to protest at the action.

"Burning books leads to ignorance, and that's why I'm standing out here," said Vicky O'Reilly, a resident of Alamogordo. "My son loves Harry Potter."

Some waved signs – including one reading "Hitler – Bin Laden – Pastor Brock – what great company".

Others wore pointed black witch hats and one carried a broom in support of the Potter books.

J K Rowling has previously dismissed those who think her books turn children on to witchcraft.

"I have met thousands of children now, and not even one time has a child come up to me and said, 'Ms Rowling, I'm so glad I've read these books because now I want to be a witch,'" she said in an earlier statement.

A number of schools and toy shops have already banned Harry Potter books and merchandise because they fear they will lead children to the occult, while a town in Somerset has raised a petition against the film.

A row had even broken out in the letters page of the Salvation Army newspaper, *The War Cry*, which had given sympathetic coverage to the launch of the Harry Potter film, and, as a result drew fire from a number of readers who want to see the books and the film banned.

Secularists renew their call for the release of Dr Younis Shaikh

FOLLOWING the condemnation last month of Islamic fundamentalism in his country by Pervez Musharraf, President of Pakistan, and his promise to free Pakistan from its malign influences, Sanal Edamaruku, President of Rationalist International, called for the immediate release of Dr Younis Shaikh.

In his latest appeal to General Musharraf, Sanal Edamaruku, wrote:

"Allow us to express our appreciation for your courageous address to the nation of Pakistan. We wish you strength and determination to fulfil your promise to eliminate religious extremism and obscurantism and to guide your country into a future of tolerance and progress.

"Your vision about the future of Pakistan shows great similarity to the ideas of another citizen of your country, who is currently languishing in one of the death cells in Rawalpindi jail, because he dared some years earlier to publicly speak about them. We would like to draw your attention – once again – to the case of the rationalist, physician and anatomy professor Dr Younis Shaikh, who, as a result of pressure from Islamic fundamentalists, was arrested on October 4, 2000 and condemned to death for 'blasphemy'.

"During the last year, Pakistan's embassies in many of the world's capitals from Washington to Dhaka, have been handed petitions and your personal office has received thousands of letters from rationalists around

the world, calling upon you to rescue Dr. Shaikh. If you want to break the power of fundamentalism, if you want to transform Pakistan into a free and democratic country, if you want to change the social and intellectual climate and open the minds of your people to the qualities of freedom, tolerance and progress, the release of Dr Shaikh has to be one of your first steps.

"As long as Dr Shaikh remains in jail and under the threat of death, your speech will be seen as nothing but rhetoric.

"Please do not hide behind the 'independence' of the legal system, which has shown itself incapable of withstanding pressure from religious fanatics."

Meanwhile, from Bangladesh, comes the news that the Dhaka High Court has declared illegal the detention of the prominent Bangladeshi writer, rationalist and human rights campaigner, Shahriar Kabir on charges of sedition. The decision follows massive national and international protest. According to the judgement, police had no legal authority to keep the arrested writer in jail for nearly two months without bringing him to trial, and the court ordered his immediate release.

Shahriar Kabir last year evoked the wrath of the Government by raising his voice against violence and terror against the Hindu minority in Bangladesh by Islamic fundamentalist supporters of the government. He was arrested on November 22.



FIRST things first: Thank you to everyone who sent in suggestions for sites worth visiting. Keep them coming. On the same subject – I do check out each site and sometimes I am just not able to get access. If a particular recommendation of yours does not appear, that's probably the reason!

In the January issue, I suggested the "Rael" site as an example of the deliciously barking. This time, I offer you, as promised, Benjamin Creme. He's been saying for years that the great "World Teacher", a mixture of the Buddha, Jesus, Krishna, the Mahdi (and probably Homer Simpson too, for all I know) is ready to stagger us with new and all-saving wisdom like, er, "Let's be nice to each other ..." Well, his site is at <http://www.shareintl.org/> and is great fun. There are photos, reports of "miracles", and all kinds of wonderful and mystical profundities to enjoy. Mr Creme himself seems a thoroughly nice chap, with a better haircut than Rael. Shame, though, that the "Master" Himself, in the photographs at least, looks so much like our old chum Osama. Perhaps it is a "religion" thing...

Next, a little bonbon from the USA. Find the "Televangelists Hall of Shame" at <http://www.dailylight.net/shame/shame.html>. This is a site dedicated to the lives and works of those human verrucas who infest the ether from sea to shining sea and promise the joys of heaven to those who ... send them money. It's not exactly a demanding site – more a kind of chamber of horrors. If you like a shiver now and then, it's worth a look.

On to something more substantial. James A Haught describes himself as "an old newspaper editor"... On the evidence of his site, he's also wise and tolerant and humane – and he manages to combine these qualities with an implacable hatred of things religious. He writes well, too. Find him at <http://www.holysmoke.org/haught/index.html#anchor6607>.

He prefaces his site with a couple of mottoes – "Man is certainly stark mad; he cannot make a worm, yet he will make gods by the dozen" – Michel de Montaigne, and "Religion is all bunk" – Thomas Edison. A very moving short essay called "Long Shadows of Evening", taken from a booklet he wrote for his children, is a particularly impressive and thoughtful piece of work.

Another UK site now – that of the Rationalist Press Association. They're at <http://www.rationalist.org.uk>. Don't be put off by the utilitarian name – the RPA site has some real goodies in it. There is an excellent news roundup, a selection of thought-provoking articles from a variety of newspapers,

Norman Pridmore surfs the net for information of interest to freethinkers

reports from ongoing debates, selections from the *New Humanist* magazine, as well as an online bookshop and a links section. It's not a flashy site, but substantial.

The British Humanist Association, at <http://www.humanism.org.uk> offers a solid site too (presently being redeveloped, but even so well worth a visit). My first impression of it was unfortunate: I'd been looking at some quite "loud" and flashy sites, and by comparison that of the BHA is very calm and orderly. It was a bit like hearing someone sober talking sense in a room full of drunks – hard to concentrate on at first, but eventually a huge relief.

For information about Humanism generally, and for some very good, clear and intelligent articles, take a look.

A recommendation by one of our readers is <http://www.positiveatheism.org/index.htm>. Yes indeed! There is a lot here, and something to interest and occupy any freethinker – and it's easy to navigate, clear, and fast loading. One of the gems I found in it was an on-line edition of Lecky's 800-page history *Rationalism in Europe*. Incredible!

The same reader also suggested the site <http://www.atheistalliance.org/index.htm>. As with the one above, this is a big, big site – far too much to even begin to describe here. It is truly superb.

Lastly, for those of you who are not utterly satiated intellectually, do go to <http://www.freethought-web.org/ctrl/>. Why? You'll see ... it's yet another proof, if such were needed, that the Internet is indeed the freethinker's friend.

Comments and suggestions are welcome. Email norman@npdridmore.fsworld.co.uk.

The battle must go on

WHEN G W Foote established the *Freethinker* just over 120 years ago, he knew that the battle against unreason would be both a long and a tough one.

And so it has turned out to be. The Victorian Britain he occupied is a very different place from our 21st-century Britain, but in matters concerning religion, few things have changed. Failure to separate church and state has allowed the tendrils of irrationalism to weave their way unchecked through every aspect of public life. Today – at a time when British society as a whole has never been more secular – an out-moded and dangerous religious ethos remains deeply entrenched in official institutions, and we now have a Government so high on piety that it sees nothing but merit in increasing faith-based education when others see religious schools as a path to greater divisions and vicious sectarianism.

The *Freethinker* is one of few journals which actively opposes irrationalism in all its virulent guises – and it does so with very limited resources. We are therefore grateful for the generous donations our readers make, and his month we would like to thank the following subscribers for their support: - **£100.00** B J David; **£60.00** W Donovan; **£50.00** T Bowen, R Johnston; **£40.00** M Harding, R K E Torode; **£35.00** T Morrison, R J Bollans, D C Hooley, M Ball; **£30.00** E W Sinclair, R H Peirce; **£25.00** J Beaven, I L Brydon, F Evans, E McCann, D Lennard; **£20.00** J R Rees, M E Hart, R M Raven, R I Raven, R Woodward; **£15.00** G L Verc o, L Martin, L E West, O Dumbleton, R Kuipers, J Boyd, A Powell; **£13.00** I A Williams; **£11.00** N Barbour; **£10.00** C Williams, K Haughton, R Whittaker, V Hennessy, J Lightbown, R Brown, H Lambert, N Lee, I Andrews, S C Chumbley, W Grahamslaw, K Partington, R Fennell, P Harvey, T Milton, B J Edgecombe, D J Gibbard, M Friederich, J N Ainsworth, P Hadfield, J Onyett, D Foweraker, D P Haslam, R Owen, F C Jones, C E Douglas, Y Bautz, I C Chandler, C Pinel; **£7.00** V Smith; **£5.00** J R Skoyles, C S Kershaw, J Dobbin, A J Ledger, B Robinson, R Woodward, R Kitching, D L Seymour, H Sadler, D A Franklin, R S Eagle, D G Mitchell, M Levin, K C Rudd, R Shayler, P Roberts, A J Brown, P V Gatenby, J Povey, Anon, R Liggins, J Hughes, J Segall, R A M Burt, H Kearsley, G A Weerasingha, M Fletcher, D A Thompson, H D Hichenes, R J C Hall, S Eade, A M Ashton, P A Doubleday, D Watkins, S T Cradick, J Chesterman, B A Burfoot, M Jackson, D Birrell, W Burns, S Rose, Glasgow Group, S Valdar, J E S Davis, S Campbell, D Dow, R C Harrison; **£3.00** H G Easton, A Hill; **£2.50** J Wimble; **£2.00** J Tiplady, T G Turner.

These donations were received between November 22, 2001, and January 16 this year. They total **£1098.50**.

Chairman of Jewish Defense League 'plotted bombing of a mosque'

FEDERAL prosecutors in Los Angeles have charged the chairman and another member of the Jewish Defense League with plotting to set off pipe bombs at one of the city's most famous mosques and at the office of a congressman of Middle Eastern descent.

The FBI has long suspected the Defense League of participating in the 1985 murder of an Arab-American activist in Santa Ana, California, but its involvement has never been proved.

The group's leader, Irving David Rubin, 56, was tried and acquitted in 1980 of soliciting the murders of Nazis in the United States.

United States Attorney John Gordon said the investigation began when a member of the organisation told the FBI last October that Rubin and his co-defendant, Earl Leslie Krugel, 59, a longtime member of the group, asked him to participate in the bombing. Federal agents then recruited the informant, who said he planted a bomb at a mosque under orders from the Defense League in the past, to help foil the plot, Mr. Gordon said.

In conversations secretly taped by the infor-

mant, Mr Krugel said he wanted the bombing to provide a "wake-up call" to the Muslim community by attacking one of their "filthy mosques", and if someone got killed, "*c'est la vie*," according to the government's charge.

The tapes also record Mr Rubin saying he wanted to "hunt down" Palestinians and prove that the Jewish Defense League was "still alive in a militant way", the charge added.

Mr Rubin and Mr. Krugel face federal conspiracy and explosives charges and are being held without bond. If convicted, they could serve more than 30 years in prison.

According to the charge, the men debated the appropriate target for weeks, at first choosing the Muslim Public Affairs Council, a local advocacy organisation that has run radio advertisements saying that American foreign policy was partly to blame for the terrorist attacks. Eventually they settled on the King Fahd mosque, a lavish, \$8.1 million landmark financed entirely by King Fahd and the Saudi Arabian royal family, as well as the office of Representative Darrell Issa, a California Republican whose grandfather was Lebanese.

'More humane' shariah emerges in Afghanistan

THE Taliban have gone, but *Shariah* remains in Afghanistan, according to a recent report in the *Rationalist International Bulletin*.

"In this country all law comes from Islam", said the new justice minister Abdul Rahim Karimi, himself a scholar of Islamic law, in an interview.

However, he condemned the cruel practices of the Taliban, which were based on "poor interpretation of Islam", and announced that *Shariah* in post-Taliban times was going to be properly applied.

Ahamatullah Zarif, high court judge in Kabul, explained the fine details of the changes between now and then:

"The Taliban used to hang the victim's body in public for four days – we will only hang the

body for a short time, say 15 minutes.

"Adulterers, both male and female, will still be stoned to death, but now only small stones are used. This gives the condemned person a chance to escape. If they are able to run away, they are free.

"The Taliban used to use large stones and hurl them with force.

"The chance to escape is only given to those who confessed their adultery. Those who refuse to confess and are condemned by a judge will have their hands and feet bound so that they cannot run away. They will certainly be stoned to death. The first stone is to be thrown by the judge, then court officials continue, and finally it is left to members of the public."

Sir Cliff Richard supports homophobic Christian publication

POP star Sir Cliff Richard – 62 and still a bachelor – is one of several celebrity Christians whose image is being used on giant billboards in Germany to promote a right-wing, anti-gay and anti-abortion evangelical Christian book.

Germans are being asked to call a number to get a free copy of a book that the celebrities say, "changed their lives".

German golfer Bernard Langer and the Bayern Munich soccer star Paulo Sergio are among the other celebrities promoting *Power for Living*, which, according to a report in the *New York Times*, is an "evangelical Christian text that opposed smoking, homosexuality and abortion".

The campaign is sponsored by the Florida-based Arthur S DeMoss Foundation. In its use of celebrity testimonials, it follows the American model, which in 1999 used sports and film stars to promote the book. The DeMoss Foundation is reportedly spending almost £3-million on the German campaign, which began after Christmas.

An estimated 50,000 people called to order the book in the first few days of the campaign. The response might have been larger except for the radio and television ban the authorities placed on the campaign. Unlike the United States, where the DeMoss advertisements were widely-broadcast, Germany prohibits broadcast advertising for religious, political or ideological causes. While the Reverend Thomas Gandow, a Lutheran pastor at the Church of Berlin and Brandenburg, supports the campaign, and the idea of "famous people outing themselves as Christians", like other German clerics he is troubled by the DeMoss Foundation's secrecy and its ties to right-wing groups in America.

Last year, the DeMoss Foundation had assets of some £352-million. It has helped to finance the Campus Crusades for Christ, Jerry Falwell's Liberty University and televangelist Pat Robertson. Mr DeMoss, who died in 1979, made his money from mail-order life insurance. His wife Nancy has since carried on the work of the foundation.

THE role of religion in international policy-making was the subject of a seminar held at the European Parliament in Brussels on November 28 last year.

Particular concern was expressed by many of the delegates about the extent of the Roman Catholic Church's influence over the policies of secular institutions, especially in policies covering women's reproductive rights and contraception. The Vatican's influence over the United Nations already impedes measures to reduce deaths in the developing world from AIDS and from childbirth through its resistance to the provision of condoms or other forms of contraception.

In Europe, on the other hand, the RC Church's message on "chastity", contraception and homosexuality is being routinely ignored, even by the majority of the RC laity. Yet, rather than encouraging more realistic policies, this dismissal seems to have spurred the Vatican into enforcing its inflexible and often inhumane message by other means. The Vatican is infiltrating areas of influence in order to impose its hard line on Catholics and non-Catholics alike. It is pushing to infiltrate the media, the diplomatic corps and governmental agencies including the European Parliament. Many influential positions are already held by those who deliberately keep silent about their links with arch-conservative Catholic groups such as Opus Dei.

Another manifestation of this sinister infiltration is the Vatican's race to sign concordats with the many (generally small) new eastern European states, so that when they join the European Union the Vatican's influence there will be greatly increased.

The object of this activity runs counter to the hopes for greater openness and liberalisation on sexual matters arising from the 2nd Vatican Council.

The current Pope has spent his entire papa-

Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director of the National Secular Society, reports on a seminar at the EU Parliament on the role of religion in international policy-making

cy blocking such liberalisation. The appointments he has made and the institutions he has empowered will ensure that his intransigent policies outlive him.

The seminar was therefore both crucial and timely – especially coming so soon after September 11. The overwhelming tone of the seminar was pro-secular, recognising the need to generate a much greater awareness about the importance of separation of church and state. Without it, the freedoms and tolerance for which we have fought so hard will be rapidly eroded. It has never been more important for secularists throughout the world to step up the fight for absolute separation of church and state. This is no less important in supra-national organisations than in national ones.

The seminar was sponsored by three Dutch MEPs: Lousewies van der Laan (the principal chair), Joke Swiebel, and Elly Plooijs and each spoke eloquently.

They are to be congratulated both for initiating debate in the European Parliament on this vital issue as well as for organising the meeting itself.

Another prominent speaker was Frances Kissling, President of Catholics for Free

Choice, whose withering attack on the Vatican would have impressed any secular audience. CfFC campaigns for the removal of the RC representation from the UN. (The National Secular Society is affiliated to CfFC who provided generous support for the seminar.)

As well as the National Secular Society, I represented the International Humanist & Ethical Union at the meeting and spoke twice. Just as the debate was being wound up, I encouraged those within the RC Church to continue their fight to liberalise the Church, noting that such reform could only come from within. But I emphasised that such efforts must not be allowed to distract us from fighting for the complete separation of religion from our state and public institutions. This sentiment seemed to encapsulate the mood of the meeting, attracting applause.

The European Humanist Federation was also represented, with their Secretary General, Georges Lienard, contributing effectively to the debate. And there were many more speakers providing examples of the undue influence of religion in politics.

Officially at least, the Vatican declined to send a representative to the meeting, perhaps not wishing to recognise its legitimacy. Instead, John L Allen Jr., Vatican correspondent for the (US) *National Catholic Reporter*, had been invited to articulate the non-secular position. He argued that if British Petroleum has the power to lobby the EU, why shouldn't the Catholic bishops? One speaker from the floor, very much in the minority, argued against the ordination of women.

The seminar is to be welcomed as marking a growing (albeit belated) awareness of the urgency of organising active resistance to the encroaching influence of religion in the EU, but much more needs to be done.

I hope that readers will urge secular European politicians to make contact with the seminar's sponsors to lend their support. Were a secular EU parliamentary group to be established, it could spearhead such work. It would be helpful if an e-mail group were established to enable interested parties to communicate and exchange intelligence.

In closing the seminar, Ms van der Laan MEP expressed the hope that there would be further seminars on the topic, the next one probably being in 2002. Concern was expressed by several speakers about the plight of women in Islamic countries, and Ms van der Laan anticipated that the next seminar would concentrate more on Islam and less on the RC Church. IHEU is also considering the possibility of a conference on the separation of church and state, and is in discussion about it with the National Secular Society.

Robertson resigns as Christian Coalition crumbles

IN ITS heyday in 1994, it helped elect the first Republican Congress in decades, had a budget of \$25-million or so and boasted a membership of four million or more. But today, America's right-wing Christian Coalition is broke, with membership down to around two million – and the man who founded the organisation, the controversial televangelist Pat Robertson, 71, has decided to resign his post of President.

In announcing his resignation, Robertson said that he wanted to concentrate more and more on expanding his religious broadcasting network, at home and abroad, and that he intended to leave grass-roots political work like legislative lobbying, candidate recruitment and voter registration to others.

Some political experts and critics of the coalition said Robertson's resignation would in all probability finish off the faltering group. Most political experts say that whatever its earlier political accomplishments it played just a marginal role in the election last year.

Roberta Combs, executive vice president of the Coalition, has been named to succeed Robertson.

the myth of natural evil: Brian King

The world was so much easier to understand for Christians, including most of the educated class, before Darwinism started to make its impact. There was, on the one hand, the natural world designed in detail and created by God, in which one could perceive a "war of nature" (Darwin himself, *Notebooks*, 1842) of animals killing animals in sometimes very distasteful ways in untamed wildernesses, with intermittent earthquakes, floods and disease-eruptions to pile on the agony.

Such phenomena are designated collectively as "natural evil" by moral philosophers, often theologians themselves, trying to make sense of Christian post-evolutionist apologetics. On the other hand, there were the humans, a special creation with souls, whose proper preoccupation is to keep that heavenly, superior part of them free from contamination by this physical world until its return to Soul Central.

Tiny simulcra of God though we were, we could not expect to have any influence on the above-mentioned, sometimes catastrophic, "acts of God": we could only pray to the Lord to ask him to do this. In every parish church, at least up to Victorian times, prayers were offered yearly in an attempt to obtain good weather, bumper harvests and disease-free livestock in just that part of the Kingdom.

Failure of God's favour was interpreted, in the time-honoured way, as the result of the locals not sticking close enough to the Christian rules of behaviour – especially sexual behaviour, for sex is a prime mechanism for facilitating that most physical and worldly thing, the evolution of viable life in all its exuberant autonomy.

Sex, being such a powerful and ever-present representative of what is amoral, organic evolution was from early times seen by the Christian priesthood as such a threat to their life-denying dogmas as to constitute a sin in itself, if not an actual evil – an intrusion of "natural evil".

When Darwinism and the fossil record revealed that there had been no six-day creation and annihilated the idea of God as a solicitous parent with a special interest in his human creatures, the ascription of evil to things in the natural world became that much less easy. With regard to animal behaviour particularly, this "evil" had in reality consisted of projections by humans of all their worst characteristics – viciousness, cruelty, brutality and so on – onto the animal world, especially onto our predatory competitors such as lions and wolves, whose instinctive vocabulary in fact has no voluntary malice in it. Its existence had been explained by the fact that lower beings had no souls and so were cut off from the heavenly essence that made humans capable of

moral behaviour. (Even among humans there was a gradation of moral capacity: the lower classes and many foreigners tended somehow to have less of it and were consequently liable to "act like animals" unless rigorously supervised).

Now that it became clear that humans had evolved like every other living thing from a common bacterial ancestor and lie at the end of a continuum of animal and vegetable life-forms, the dating of the acquisition of the soul became highly problematical for the theologians. A similarly threatening consequence was that any "natural evil" observable in nature must also have been inherited to some degree or other by humans as a species, and not just by the aforementioned lower types. Even pious Anglicans – even the Calvinist elect! – couldn't any longer feel safe in the possession of a soul from all that nastiness going on "out there".

With the pushing back of the religious para-

**'All animals,
however ferocious, are
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its atmosphere are entirely
morally-neutral'**

dig by science in all its developing disciplines, there came the realisation that, in reality, humans were the only beings that killed for reasons other than those of feeding themselves or sexual rivalry, tortured for similar non-essential reasons (including the imposing of religious orthodoxy), and stunted countless lives among their own and other species with increasing but ignorant efficiency: that, consciously or unconsciously, we were the unique source of evil in the world, in the sense of intended pain and suffering; that all animals, however ferocious, are innocent in their instinct-boundedness; and that all natural processes taking place on Earth's crust or in its atmosphere are entirely morally-neutral.

The truth is that "natural evil" as a concept disappears as soon as one starts to look at individual putative examples of it, in a situationist way. The underlying storyline is life, or rather an uncountable number of individual lives, struggling for full realisation (the ultimate

good) under greater or lesser domination by their genetic blueprints. "Evil" is then anything that, from one of these individuals' viewpoints, tends to prevent such realisation, and is therefore as multifarious as the life-forms themselves. Thus a flood may be bad news for human valleybottom dwellers, but a great opportunity for fish to fill up on drowned worms and achieve maximum breeding condition. Folk wisdom recognises this in such old saws as "it's an ill wind that blows nobody some good". There is no conscious intention, good or bad, behind the various strategies that have evolved in nature for survival and reproduction, and most obviously not behind the mechanics of plate tectonics and the solar-powered weather system. Conscious intention is surely an essential ingredient of evil, as against just "shit happening".

It was only with the emergence of humans, consciousness and intention that the capacity to disrupt and manipulate natural processes – and lives – on an epidemic scale developed. (Other primates are capable of varying degrees of guile and simple tool-use, but none to our devastating degree).

To wherever humans have spread, the local flora and fauna have usually been subjected to intensive exploitation at the least, and total annihilation at the worst, and all this historically was done with the approval of the Christian church with its sanction of domination derived from Genesis.

Scientific knowledge acquired only in the last two centuries, in the areas of animal (and human) behaviour and psychology, has revealed how much suffering had been caused by humans in ignorance or even with full knowledge, as in laboratory experiments. It is the latter form of subjection to conscious, knowledgable will for mere personal gratification or for no essential human purposes that surely qualifies, if anything does, to be called evil – and only humans are capable of it.

But, in the same way, only humans are capable of being good, kind or generous – to their own species and, in sympathetic extension of concern, to all other species which are becoming increasingly dependent on our good will for their survival even in the wild.

These better qualities humans assembled to make a loving God in the helplessness of their scientific ignorance, in the hope of evading the "natural evil" they themselves had defined into existence. Once this "evil" is reintegrated through scientific knowledge back into a true and full picture of life on our beautiful planet it disappears – like God – and a purely human construct must do.

Catholic power g

WE represent this part of Polish society which particularly favours the integration of Poland with the European Union, since – in our perception – it will not only serve the economic interests of our country but will also help Poland to come up to the well-developed democracies in respect of individual freedoms, equality of all citizens, tolerance of pluralistic views and ways of life and the separation of Church and State.

To our knowledge, the countries which seek membership of the European Union are required to meet certain conditions defining the minimal standards of modern democracy. Such requirements accelerate the process of advancement of civilisation in the candidate countries. In our opinion, however, the said conditions are not sufficiently clearly presented to these countries. It also seems that the image of contemporary Poland as perceived in the West is at odds with reality. What seems to go unnoticed is the fact that since the early 1990s, Poland has been heading towards a religious state and, despite four years of Social Democratic rule when this process slowed down, it is now close to this model of the state.

‘Support is granted to Catholic television and radio stations, even if they advocate anti-Semitism, religious fundamentalism, intolerance and xenophobic nationalism’

This situation cannot be explained by traditional Polish religiosity: the process we are referring to has been progressing against the will of a majority of our society. It is, however, supported by the new, so-called post-Solidarity political elite, which eagerly satisfies political ambitions of the Catholic Church in return for its full political backing. Such political agitation, which abuses the political naivety of uneducated people, commonly takes place during religious gatherings and in the increasingly growing number of the media controlled by the Church.

In 1997, this led to the electoral victory of the ultra-conservative coalition called the Electoral Action “Solidarity”. Soon after their coming to power the newly-elected authorities rewarded the Church by adopting

several laws to its advantage and assuring the clergy that the future governmental policies would satisfy their economic, ideological and political aspirations in Poland and abroad. One should remember that, according to the present Pope, Poland should become a source of inspiration for the so-called “re-evangelisation of Europe”, which would in reality lead to the Catholic Church regaining the status of the only repository of truth as regards worldview and social morality. Regardless of whether this vision with respect to Europe is realistic or not, Poland itself is being ardently adjusted to the requirements of such a scenario – its role in it subjugated to the interests of the Polish Catholic clergy and their political allies.

One of the important consequences of these aspirations is the large body of legislation which turns some aspects of the Catholic ideology into national laws and reinforces the position of the Church in social life. The first piece of such legislation legalised religious instruction in public schools (initially introduced against the law) and ensured that catechism teachers are paid by the state, which, however, has no say whatsoever as regards the content of such instruction. Another example of such legislative acts is the law enforcing respect for “Christian values” in television and radio programmes, which resulted in a practical ban on anything that has not been accepted by the Church.

In 1996, at the demand of the Church, whose representatives took part in the work of the Constitutional Committee on equal terms with the Members of Parliament, the provision on the separation of Church and State was replaced with an enigmatic wording providing for their “mutual impartiality”. Another constitutional provision obliged the government and the parliament to regulate relations with the Church in an international law concluded with the Vatican, the so-called Concordat. The Concordat was finally ratified in 1998, in a manner and version which was the source of a heated controversy. This agreement sanctioned and extended privileges thus far obtained by the Church and in some cases provided for additional prerogatives. Numerous provisions of the Concordat violate constitutional guarantees of freedom and equality before the law.

Another example of the Church’s unconstitutional role in Polish politics and public life is its influence on some verdicts of the Constitutional Tribunal, an institution established in order to independently decide about the conformity of laws with the Constitution. In 1997 we were provided with a striking evidence of such influence: the Tribunal – clearly without any legal grounds – decided that the

relatively liberal law on abortion was not in conformity with the Constitution and with the principles of the state governed by the rule of law. This verdict was used by the conservative majority in the parliament to reintroduce the ban on abortion on social grounds.

These examples of laws and policies adopted to satisfy the aspirations of the clergy show that the Church is treated by Polish authorities as a source of law and at the same time as an insti-

“THE people of Poland are known worldwide for their religious freedom. In the October 8, 1998 issue of *Awake!*, the religious

But far from setting out to show that this was the substance, the article lamented the fact that the religious was on a losing ground. “There is a widespread disregard of the law and the corresponding grumbled, pointing out that a religious freedom and religion and God 16th in a list of their concerns. The article followed by honesty, justice, kindness and reliability. Tadeusz Borowik of Jagiellonski University, showed that “47 percent of those who believed in an afterlife, 47 thought that priests should be allowed to divorce”.

Any secularist reading this article would have been shocked by the devout Poles giving Catholicism the finger. The article remained with me until I received a copy of a submission to the European Union by the Polish Humanist Federation and Polish Humanist Union.

In it, the two bodies set out to show that, far from being a threat, the Church is in fact becoming more and more powerful. The submission on this page is an abbreviated version of the full text.

The submission on this page is an abbreviated

tution whose interests are above the law. There are numerous examples of the clergy violating laws with impunity: insults hurled at disobedient MPs, racist and anti-Semitic speeches, and infringements of financial regulations, even though public authorities diligently help to keep them from the knowledge of the general public. Institutions dealing with the administration of justice abstain from prosecuting in such cases, and those few prosecutors who try to instigate legal proceedings against clergymen are being punished by their superiors.

State authorities also provide increasingly generous assistance to the ideological expansion of the Catholic Church. They support a large number of religious publishing houses, grant almost unlimited presence of the clergy in the public media, sponsor the Pope’s travels, activities of the Papal Theological Academy and theological seminaries.

Openly declaring the Catholic identity of Poland and authenticating these declarations by symbolic acts (such as hanging the cross in the Parliamentary plenary sittings room or organising a pilgrimage of MPs to the religious centre of Poland in Czqstochowa), they contribute to the growth of religious fanaticism in Poland. This phenomenon can be best illustrat-

grows in Poland

real life

ed by the support granted to Catholic television and radio stations, even if they advocate anti-Semitism, religious fundamentalism, intolerance and xenophobic nationalism.

Members of the state authorities in their public appearances promote the cult of the Pope and demonstrate obsequiousness to him. Celebrations of all historical anniversaries and other state ceremonies include spectacular religious rituals, and Church hierarchs are consulted

ide for being very religious." Thus began an article in a religious magazine.

at this universal perception of the Poles had some regard for the teachings of the church," the *Awake!* magazine reported. A recent survey had shown that Poles rated family life, the Church's reliability. Another survey, carried out by Irena Kowalska, showed that "only 50 percent of respondents said they thought priests ought to be allowed to marry, and 64

and have been delighted. The thought of the Church's influence certainly pleased me, and that pleasure was expressed in a submission made last year to the European Parliament and Polish Humanist Association.

at, far from losing power in Poland, the Catholic Church is becoming more powerful in matters of state, and is turning Poland into a theocracy. This is a revised version.

— Barry Duke

on all important social and political matters.

Educational policy of the government has also in great part been shaped by the Church. Following its recommendations, the minister of education decided to withdraw sexual education from schools. For the same reasons Parliament rejected a proposal to remove the grades for religious instruction from school certificates (the presence of such grades violates a constitutional guarantee and contributes to discrimination of non-believers, thus exerting psychological pressure to participate in religious instruction). Similarly, the minister of defence has failed to respond to the complaints of soldiers who are forced to practise religion while serving their military duty.

Another important issue is the question of legal and illegal financial privileges of the Church and clergymen. Some of those privileges originate from the so-called communist Poland whose authorities tried to buy the support of the Church; a great majority of them, however, have been introduced after the polit-

ical transformation in Poland.

Despite being a relatively wealthy social group, Polish clergy are encumbered with minimal income taxes, while their real earnings remain unknown. The Church has been granted numerous tax allowances, reductions and exemptions from customs duties for imported goods without proper control of the way such goods are used (many of these goods, particularly cars, are being sold in the open market with huge profits). The inequitably strong position of the Catholic Church in Polish politics has had specific adverse consequences for members of sexual minorities. Recent opinion polls show that homosexuals are the least tolerated minority, even among young people. This unfortunate situation is being entrenched by prominent senior officials of the Catholic Church who have made numerous public statements in which they have voiced prejudiced and homophobic opinions by claiming that homosexuality is a moral deficiency and/or disease. The Church shows little interest in the existential conditions of members of sexual minorities, even if they profess belief in God. In 1992, the episcopate ignored the request for the appointment of a chaplain made by a gay and lesbian ecumenical community. The anathematic social attitudes reinforced or even produced by the Church have their counterpart in the State's legislation. Due in part to the Church's influ-

ence, the newly adopted Polish Constitution, which came into force in 1997, fails to proscribe against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, even though a stipulation to this effect had been considered in an early draft. Furthermore, while the Constitution explicitly defines marriage as the union of man and woman, Polish law fails to provide for any form of legalised partnership between persons of the same sex. The fact that a same-sex union may not be registered under Polish law makes it impossible for same-sex partners to fill joint income-tax statements and to benefit from each other's health insurance and pension schemes. It also makes inheriting property both problematic and subject to high-rate taxation. In practice, same-sex partners are also not allowed to adopt children. Efforts by the homosexual citizens of Poland to influence the course of politics and to win public support for their causes are met with obstacles. In 1998, the Lambda Group in Warsaw was refused permission to hold a gay pride parade; in apparent deference to "family values" as propagated by the Church, the officials responsible declared the city's streets off-limits because of "strolling mothers with children".

Finally, we want to give a more detailed account of a joint Church/government policy toward women's rights, as – according to many – it is most strikingly incompatible with European standards, particularly as regards violence against women. The issue of women's rights are to be dealt with by referring to the so-called government family programme, as women and their problems are seen by Polish authorities only in the family context, as wives, minders of the sick, and, first of all, as reproductive units deprived of individual freedoms and rights.

The above-mentioned Government Pro-Family Policy Program has been based on the Pro-Family Policy Program devised and developed by a group of ultra-Catholic experts from the Electoral Action "Solidarity". Explicitly based on the Vatican Family Rights Charter, this document defines the family as a basic social unit and a natural relationship more fundamental than the state or community, with its own inalienable rights. According to the Program, no law may infringe on the inalienable rights of the family, the fundamental unit of Poland.

The real meaning of this vaguely phrased definition emerges when the goals of the program are analysed. Its authors proposed, among other policies, to introduce the institution of separation (the substitute of a divorce based on Canon Law), ban abortion.

(Continued on page 13)



About 95 percent of the Polish population professes to be Roman Catholic, according to the report in *Awake!* magazine

Criticising Islam

THANKS to the defeat of David Blunkett's religious hatred clause by the House of Lords, we are free in these columns to criticise Islam and any other religion: so we may as well make the most of it. As will become clear, others are not so ready to do so. Criticism of Islam is virtually taboo in the present intellectual climate, and that's why Ibn Warraq's article "Honest intellectuals must shed their spiritual turbans" (*Guardian*, November 12) was so welcome. If an intellectual is really committed to the notion of truth and free inquiry, he wrote, "then he or she cannot stop at the gates of any religion – let alone Islam". Or, as Richard Dawkins said after September 11, "Revealed faith is not harmless nonsense, it can be lethally dangerous nonsense ... it teaches enmity to others. And [it] is dangerous because we have all bought in to a weird respect, which uniquely protects religion from normal criticism. Let's now stop being so damned respectful".

Ibn Warraq told of a scholar working on recently discovered manuscripts, who showed some of his startling conclusions to a distinguished colleague, a world expert on the Koran. The latter didn't even ask him the evidence for his arguments, he simply warned him that the thesis was unacceptable "because it would upset Muslims".

Very recently, Warraq continued, Professor Josef van Ess, a scholar whose works are "essential to the study of Islamic theology", cut short his research "fearing that it would not meet the approval of Sunni Islam". Worse still, Gunther Luling was "hounded out of the profession" by German universities for proposing a radical thesis that at least a third of the Koran was pre-Islamic Christian hymnody that had nothing to do with Mohammed.

The title of Warraq's piece was taken from another German Arabist who summed up the appalling situation. Academics, he said, were now wearing "a turban spiritually in their mind", practising "Islamic scholarship" rather than scholarship on Islam. Blunkett's failure means that the most I can be accused of is Islamophobia – and there is nothing new in that.

A good religion?

A MONTH earlier a German Muslim, Sharif Lone of Nidderau, confirmed that "we are not allowed to express the shortcomings of Islam" in a letter to the *Guardian* (October 4). "You can get into serious trouble", he said, if you suggest that the religion needs

reforming; and he added alarmingly, "the fanatics will ensure your obliteration".

Islam was a good religion, the letter went on, but if it wants to be respected it must initiate reforms like Martin Luther did for Christianity. And equal treatment of women must top the agenda.

Hear, hear.

Gays under Franco

ON December 12 the Spanish parliament pledged to wipe clean the criminal records of gays who were locked up by the former Roman Catholic dictator, General Franco, and to consider ways of compensating them for imprisonment and torture. During Franco's 40 years in command, thousands of homosexuals were jailed, put in camps or mental institutions, where some were given electric shocks.

One of those demanding compensation, Antonio Ruiz of Valencia, was sent to prison at 17 in the dying days of the Falangist regime, after he told his mother he was gay, and she asked a nun for advice. "The nun went straight to the police and I was arrested and sent for trial", he recalled (*Guardian*, December 13). He spent three months in prison and was raped there and in the police cells and psychologically tortured by both the guards and the prison doctor. It took him until last year to get his record formally destroyed.

A notable homosexual murdered by Franco's Nationalists during the civil war was the poet and playwright Federico Garcia Lorca, subject of a biography by the Irish writer Ian Gibson, who had previously written *The Assassination of Federico Garcia Lorca* in Spanish, published in Paris in 1971. The book was banned in Franco's Spain.

Beware evangelists!

UNIVERSITY students may find themselves the targets of religious sects seeking new members, was the warning given by Kate Coxon in *Guardian Education* (November 6). First time students keen to meet others and make friends were particularly vulnerable, she said. And she cited the International Church of Christ, which described campus evangelism as "the goose that laid the golden egg".

Halls of residence were the Christian's evangelical paradise, providing "the best environment imaginable for seeking and saving the lost".

Adrian Hill, spokesperson for the London Church of Christ, denied that his particular church of Christ (how many are there, I wonder?) targeted anybody. But, he said, "we evangelise everybody".

Darwin day

FEBRUARY 12 is the birthday of Charles Darwin, and a campaign has been launched to establish the date as an international day of celebration of the man described by Richard Dawkins as "along with Shakespeare and Newton ... our greatest gift to the world ... our greatest thinker" (*Observer*, January 13).

The Darwin campaign was formed two years ago in the United States to resist the anti-evolution activities of Christian fundamentalists; now the aim is to create a global celebration by 2009, the bicentenary of Darwin's birth.

"We have very little chance of getting a national holiday for Darwin in the US – there is far too much anti-science and pseudo-science", said organiser Amanda Chesworth. "We are more likely to get one established in Europe, particularly in Britain, his birthplace".

In recognition of Darwin day, the Washington Area Secular Humanists (WASH) are providing money for science teachers under the Evolution in Teaching 2002 grant programme.

These and other details can be found on the excellent Friends of Charles Darwin website www.gruts.demon.co.uk/darwin.

The Jewish atheist

"DO you believe in God?" *Observer* literary editor Robert McCrum asked Oliver Sacks. "No", replied the neurologist without hesitation: "I'm an old Jewish atheist, whatever one means by this. I don't know whether I ever believed. I've never been able to imagine any sort of personal god, but I think one wants to say there's a divine order and beauty about the world". He didn't clarify what he meant by this; but he insisted "There is beauty and order everywhere, but it doesn't mean there's any agent behind the beauty and order. I can't imagine any transcendent entity".

Nor can I, but I don't see divine order and beauty everywhere either.

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the exaggerated importance of sex

EARLIER this year I read a refreshing and uplifting letter in the *Freethinker* in defence of celibacy – and regardless of one's individual views on sex his letter was courageous enough to point out that celibacy is a valid and acceptable state – not a view often heard. I concur with this sentiment and would like to expand on it.

Last year, an article in the *Freethinker* entitled "Better Dead than Defiled" highlighted the dangers of sex as being elevated to a degree where it is regarded as the most important thing in life. This exploitation of sex by advertisers, media and business is designed to sell anything and everything, from soap to cars. The emphasis and all-pervading use of sexual imagery is out of all proportion to its real place in many people's lives, and the emphasis given to it leads to a distorted notion of its value, especially in regard to women's lives, and causes cruelty and violence of the most extreme kind.

One of the results of this obsession has been to make celibacy at once abnormal, a sign of failure, a punishment and even a perversion. While much has been said and written about all forms of sexuality, homosexuality, transsexuality, impotence and frigidity, celibacy as a choice remains largely undiscussed. It is associated in the public mind with "oddness", sexual repression, sexual assault, child abuse and Catholic nuns and priests.

While enforced celibacy may well distort a person's sexual development and lead to sexual problems, if it is a freely chosen lifestyle it is likely to enhance the lives for those people who choose it.

While sexual activity may, for some, be a very high priority throughout their adult lives, and for most at some stages of life, for many its real priority is somewhat lower down in the scheme of things. As I read somewhere recently, "When did you last hear a bloke say, 'When I get home I'm tired, I just want a meal, a good book and a good nights sleep?'" The image most men seem to prefer is the youthful, "up for it any time" as often and for as long as possible and even with as many people as possible.

It is the combined and competing forces of religion and commerce that fuels this distorted image.

Although at first it may appear contradictory, a strong contributory factor has been religions' – especially Christianity's – attitudes to sex and procreation, and the guilt and shame that it has engendered about sexual activity and the human body. Their attitudes to sex are themselves contradictory, at once sinful if indulged in for pleasure, acceptable for the expression of love but only within marriage,

but really desirable only for procreation. The very notion of a religion dedicated to the worship of an asexual god, born to a virgin mother, administered by celibate men and women, priests and nuns (Brides of Christ) whose celibacy is supposedly the highest sacrifice and yet the purest form of life, is odd to say the least. It says a lot about its attitudes to sex, and the social problems they cause, as well as to divorce, contraception and abortion.

A Shaw offers a personal view

The churches' sexual symbolism and doctrines have had a profound effect in shaping our cultural attitudes, mores etc. In fact the more they preach against it, the more people are likely to react with "equal and opposite" behaviour, now that there is less susceptibility to guilt caused by belief in an all-knowing, all-seeing god, and fear of divine retribution. So once again religion distorts life at a personal, and social level, creating confusion and problems where there could and should be choice for individuals and couples to decide for themselves how best to order their personal lives, for their own and the greater good.

These contradictory messages leads to an inability for many people to discuss the subject in a rational way, and impede the free flow of ideas and information. This in turn hampers the widest understanding of all the emotional, physical, and psychological and health aspects attached to sex. Similarly, the drug debate has been hampered by the religious attitude which suggests that pleasure and happiness can only be achieved through religion and "spirituality", that earthly pleasures are only a poor substitute. Sexual pleasure is seen as being one of

these second-rate pleasures.

It is often the case that, during the process of breaking away from all the gobbledygook of superstition, some people experience confusion and conflict, and in this state take up "equal and opposite" behaviour, which can be equally harmful.

People vary in their need for and desire for sexual activity. The problem now is that it has become almost impossible for anyone to "admit" that sex is not all that it's cracked up to be and that they can "take it or leave it", and that for some, many even, their lives are full enough with better things. This is the new heresy.

It is unacceptable that people should have to feign sexual feeling that they do not have. Compulsory sex is as bad as no sex when it is desired. The days should be long gone when women have to fake orgasms, succumb to unwanted sex for fear of being called "frigid", and when men have to make up or exaggerate their sexual prowess or number of conquests.

When every relationship is judged on the sexual attractiveness of the partners, people are, from a very early age, driven to a distorted view of the importance of appearance. This has led directly to today's obsessive and widespread consumerism. In turn this has led to the pursuit of designer labels, alcohol to enhance an attractive view of oneself, despair for those who feel unattractive, acceptance of underage sex, anorexia, etc.

The concentration on sexual activity and attractiveness as the be-all and end-all of human life, blights lives, and forms a major part of the ageism of modern western society. Once one's sexual attractiveness declines, one's value as a human being is seen to decline too, and women are the first and most deeply affected by this devaluation.



Caption contest drew a flood of amusing entries

THE winner of our contest, which drew a large number of entries, is Ralph Herdan, of Derbyshire, who came up with this caption: "From this perspective I see no problem with faith-based education." Ralph wins a two-year subscription to the *Freethinker*. Runner-up is Trevor A Millar of Tilbury, with "OK, which one of you bastards moved the pool?". He gets a year's subscription.

INESSA Armand (née Stephane) was a very remarkable woman who, as head of the Women's Section of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, became probably the most powerful member of her sex in post-revolutionary Russia. Yet, as Michael Pearson says in his opening notes, hardly anyone outside the small academic world of historians of Russia has ever heard of her. She was also the mistress and close confidante of the great revolutionary leader whose vision she shared. She was fortunate in having a wealthy, though left-wing husband, Alexander Armand, who accepted her unorthodox lifestyle, including an ardent love affair with his brother Vladimir, while continuing to maintain her, paying her bail when she was jailed, and aiding her escapes.

That she was attractive and vivacious goes without saying; she had a fine mind, could hold her own on the platform with the best of the men, was fluent in four languages and a brilliant pianist. She was important to Lenin as a translator and, in Pearson's words, as his "troubleshooting lieutenant", his "front" when he wished to stay in the background, and a friend who could discuss tactics with him, as well as consoling him in times of setback and rejoicing with him in his victories.

Inessa's mother had run away from her Moscow home to live with a French opera singer, Theodore Stephane; and Elise, as Inessa was first called, was born four months before her parents were married. They later split and Inessa was taken back to Russia and brought up by her aunt and grandmother, who gave her a sound education in music, languages and literature although, as she regretted, somewhat lacking intellectually. She was later to thank Vladimir for instructing her in Marxism and then completed a two-year course in political economy at Brussels University with a diploma after only ten months.

Even when young, Inessa resented being treated as the "second sex". As she told Alexander before they were married, she found men condescending. "They think they are masters of creation. They have an absolute disdain for women that finds expression in their respect for feminine weakness".

After her marriage Inessa entered into the social and intellectual life of Moscow, and was particularly influenced by Minna Gorbunova-Kablukova, who held a Sunday salon for philosophers, poets and artists where the "woman question" was often discussed. Minna, says Pearson, played a large part in Inessa's transition from a "giddy young girl" to "the skilled, clear-thinking revolutionary she became". And when, in

Colin McCall
reviews *Lenin's
Mistress*, by Michael
Pearson, illustrated
Duckworth, £20.00

1899, the older woman started a society for improving the lot of women, Inessa became secretary and later president, although by this time she was under surveillance by the Okhrana, the Tsarist political police.

Inessa was devout in her teens, but was refused admission to church as "unclean" when bearing her third child in 1898, an incident which, according to one friend, made her question the tenets of her faith.

In January 1903, Inessa went on holiday with her lover (and brother-in-law) on the Neapolitan coast, where she became pregnant with Vladimir's child. It was about this time, too, that she read a book by that other Vladimir, Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, which caused her to become a Bolshevik.

She progressed speedily as a revolutionary, building up a network and educating its members, but she was closely watched by the police and took to holding workers' meetings in fields with lookouts. But the police couldn't be eluded during marches and there were often bloody clashes, culminating in "Bloody Sunday", January 9, 1905, when troops fired on a peaceful procession led by an Orthodox priest, killing hundreds of workers.

That year Inessa was arrested with others and imprisoned, first in a large cell with mostly male prisoners and then in solitary confinement, probably, Pearson suggests, for her own protection. After three months she was released against guarantees by her husband and his father. And while still facing trial, she was allowed to go to Nice with Alexander's brother, who was seriously ill with TB. While in her native France she was able to follow the unrest in Russia following "Bloody Sunday", with widespread strikes, no trams or trains, telegraphs or telephones, with post offices closed and water feared polluted.

"I admire the way the working class have performed", she wrote to Alexander. "They are real heroes. What strength and grandeur and what a splendid fight". Meanwhile, Lenin and his wife Nadya returned to St Petersburg from exile, using aliases and moving constantly to avoid the attention of Okhrana. But there was no chance of Inessa meeting them then, as she was herself exiled in 1907 to Merzen in the Russian north, where the temperature dropped

to minus 40 degrees C and "even a cup of coffee would freeze in seconds".

After Vladimir's illness had forced him to leave, she was able to escape, but she had to keep a low profile in Moscow. Then it was a secret dash, via Finland and Sweden, to Nice, where Vladimir died in her arms in early 1909. "Everything ends with death", she told her daughter. "You know it seems to me that you only realise this when you lose someone. It is hard to believe that everything is finished and that you will never again meet the person you love".

She wished she could believe that death was only a temporary parting; but her atheism imprinted on her "the necessary spirit to fight and wrestle for a better life for us and for others".

Socialism and religion are not necessarily incompatible, Michael Pearson comments. No, but the two really do address different worlds: this one and the next, and to that extent belief in the latter must detract from the former.

Back though to our heroine and, at last the meeting with Lenin at the Russian emigré café in Paris in 1909, when she was 35 and he 39. She was in awe of him at first and it was only when she started doing his translations that she got "a bit used" to him. From then on she was to share his life, his setbacks, successes and final triumph, all of which have been well documented, but are also detailed here. Lenin was married, of course, but his wife, Nadya, accepted Inessa and was particularly fond of her children. It was, as Nadya presented it, if not a *ménage à trois*, then three close friends living serenely together. The two women sat side-by-side in the front row when Lenin outlined his programme in the April Theses.

Inessa agreed with Lenin on most political matters, although she was not afraid to differ when necessary; but he never quite shared her feminism. He once accused her of behaving like "the Holy Virgin" in which neither of them believed; and he criticised a pamphlet she wrote arguing for "the freedom of women throughout all aspects of family life – including making love or *not* making love". Unfortunately the pamphlet was never printed; but when she was head of the Women's Section of the Central Committee Inessa was able to improve women's conditions in the factories. But she was working too hard and too long, and Lenin suggested she should go south to the Caucasus to recuperate. She died there of cholera on September 24, 1920, aged 46.

She was, says Michael Pearson in his summary, "a woman of great courage, of loyalty, of vision, of enormous effort directed at the improvement of the state of women and, indeed, also of mankind. She deserves to be remembered". She does; and he has done a fine job in celebration.

enforce Canon Law marriages, restrict minority churches, withdraw sexual education from schools, censor the media, and grant family benefits and tax deductions to families with children, particularly many children.

The ultra-Catholic model of the family promoted in the Program has no regard for individual rights or freedoms of family members, as it ignores their needs and interests. The family is understood as a monolithic collective whose abstract interests, defined in practice by the Catholic Church, are considered superior to individual interests, particularly those of women.

Public statements made by its main proponents have reinforced the document's language. The most controversial of them was the previous Minister for Family Affairs, Kazimierz Kapera, the former head of the Catholic Families Movement, who was once dismissed from a ministerial position because of his offensive public declarations about the homosexual minority. On numerous occasions, Kapera defined the institution of marriage as an unbreakable bond, which cannot be terminated in any circumstances. In a series of interviews, he expressed the opinion that abortion cannot be allowed, even in the case of a 12-year-old girl rape victim. The minister provoked public outcry over his critique of the campaign against domestic violence by saying that "the problem [of violence against women] has been exaggerated and that such campaigns should not be supported, as they might dissuade young women from marrying".

The Program's formal language and public declarations of ultra-conservative politicians became one of the most visible parts of governmental policy, particularly with regard to the measures intended to curtail women's rights. The Prime Minister, Jerzy Buzek, announced the importance of such pro-family policy in November 1997, and Polish women didn't have to wait long for concrete steps to be taken to put the Program's provisions into practice.

First, in November 1998, the Government replaced the Office of the Governmental Plenipotentiary for Women and Family Affairs with the Office of Plenipotentiary for Family Affairs: the office's first move was to suspend the program, "Against Violence: Towards Equal Opportunities," which was previously jointly developed by the former Polish government and the United Nations Development Program

Violence in the family is discussed in a sub-section on children and teenagers and pertains mainly to child-beating. Incest or sexual abuse in the family is not discussed at all. In the authors' opinion, the only existing sexual abuse of children occurs in child prostitution, and the abusers are mainly the so-called sex tourists, "particularly of German origin." Characteristically, in discussing child prostitu-

(Continued from centre pages)

tion, the report only mentions girls, although it is a well-known fact that the problem concerns male teenagers as well. This one-sidedness further indicates that the document is solely ideological propaganda that promotes a stereotyped model of society and the idealised Catholic model of the family.

The long-term goal of this policy is clear: it is an authoritarian model of society in general, and of the family in particular; the model according to which the family is an unbreakable bond, superior to the individual dignity and freedom of its members. Such a model disregards individual suffering, humiliation, and violations of rights and interests of the family members; what counts is the preservation of each and every family at any price, in the name of the dogmatic beliefs of the fundamentalist minority, regardless of internationally recognised fundamental rights and freedoms. The authors of the Program complain in its introduction that international documents lack direct legal protection of the family and that family itself is a notion not uniformly understood in the legislation of various European Union Member States.

The Polish government is not trying to disguise its discriminatory attitude to women and its critical opinion about the EU policy promoting gender equality. Recently, at the 45th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the representative of the Polish government refused to endorse the statement by Margareta Winberg, who spoke on behalf of the European Union and the associated states. She said that governments must ensure that women enjoyed all human rights and fundamental freedoms. "We have to remember that women are not born vulnerable, but are made vulnerable by persistent gender-based discrimination", she stressed. The Union believed that further action to remove discriminatory practices through human rights education, for example, were needed to ensure that every woman and man could fully enjoy all human rights. Polish Minister for Family Affairs, Maria Smereczynska, has found the language of this statement unacceptable. She argued that Poland should not support the statement, as it contains such terms as "sexual rights" and "sexual orientation" which have not been defined by the United Nations. The true reason, however, is different: the European policy promoting women's human rights and gender equality is abhorred and rejected by the Polish government on ideological and religious grounds.

It is not true (as some foreign commentators seem to believe) that Polish authorities eagerly meet the demands of the Church because

Polish reforms and the process of integration with Europe can succeed only on condition that they are supported by the Church, or otherwise they wouldn't gain social support. Polish society approves of the reforms aimed at integration with Europe, but does not approve, as has been confirmed by the findings of sociological studies, of the Church's interference with politics (the majority of the respondents assessed the Church's political ambitions as excessive) and of its exaggerated financial aspirations. The Church's support is required and bought at the cost of democracy and social interests in Poland exclusively to the advantage of those politicians and political groups who are afraid of losing social support as a result of their incompetence and disregard for basic needs and fundamental rights of the majority of the Polish people.

In its appeal to the Governments of the Member States and community level decision-making bodies of the European Union, the two bodies said:

"In the first part of our letter we have outlined the situation in Poland, particularly as regards the incompatibility of Polish laws, government policies and practices with the standards of democracy and respect for human rights and individual liberties as recognised in the European Union and other developed democracies.

"Speaking on behalf of Polish non-religious minority and other groups discriminated against by laws and practices based on the state ideology and religion, we appeal to all European Union Member States and Community-level decision makers, who are involved in the process of the European enlargement, to address the issues we are concerned about in the negotiations with the representatives of Polish government and other Polish officials, with particular emphasis given to the issue of gender and world-view based discrimination so blatantly favoured by Polish officials on numerous occasions, domestically and internationally.

"Based on our knowledge and experience from the sporadic contacts with Polish authorities, we are of the opinion that the situation in the foreseeable future can only be improved as a result of international pressure, particularly if exerted by EU leaders and negotiators. There is no doubt that Polish ultra-conservative politicians are ready to make substantial concessions on the rough road to full integration; after all, if Poland is to fulfil its mission to re-evangelise Europe, it must join its institutions to effectively influence European laws, programmes and policies."

Cause for concern

AS AN atheist, I certainly have no great fondness for Christian missionaries; but I still think Helen Cox's comments on the evils of proselytising (*Points of View*, January) contain much to cause freethinkers concern, however sincere she may be.

No doubt Helen is right that "Conversion is disruptive and divisive and causes great suffering" in countries where religious dogma and intolerance are prevalent. But to suggest that we should therefore seek to preserve the status quo in such countries by opposing the spread of any ideas contrary to their dominant religion – presumably including non-religious ideas – strikes me as perverse in the extreme. Surely these are the very countries where established ideas on religion most need to be challenged, and the free exchange of ideas most encouraged?

What Helen seems to be suggesting is that religious and intellectual freedom are Western luxuries not appropriate to people in other areas of the world, whose "needs and values" are all adequately expressed by their countries' official religions. In response to this, I would firstly point out that had the Church in Europe succeeded in preventing the spread of "divisive and disruptive" ideas over the past few centuries, we would enjoy no such luxuries today; and secondly refer Helen to Azar Majedi's excellent article in the Winter 2001 *New Humanist*, in which she argues that "Cultural relativism is a fancy name for racism because it justifies two sets of values, rights and privileges for human beings according to a subjective, arbitrary concept such as culture".

All people – even "naive and impressionable people", as Helen calls them – have the right to accept any religion or none. Trying to stamp out religious persecution by preventing the spread of heretical ideas is rather like trying to stamp out ethnic conflict by preventing different ethnic groups from mixing – impractical, illiberal, and an evasion of the real problem of intolerance.

GREG OWENS
Leeds

Islam centuries behind Christianity

I CAME across this in a recent book on musical theory:-

"Dancing, singing (other than hymns), bells, and even incense were banned. Biblical exegesis assumed the rule of law: A man was jailed for naming his child Claude instead of Abraham. Women were punished for

their hairstyles; new statutes controlled the colour of clothes and the number of dishes at a meal. The penalties were severe: Public burning became one of the few means of entertainment officially sanctioned."

This is describing Geneva under Calvin. It sounds pretty similar to Afghanistan under the Taliban, and is another example of Islamic society being very similar to Christianity but a few hundred years behind.

One could argue that the fundamentalism current in Islam is the equivalent of the Christian Reformation. However, I wouldn't go so far as saying that we would like to see an Islamic Counter-reformation!

RICHARD SAGE
London

Mary Whitehouse – again!

AT THE risk of becoming a regular contributor to your letters column – such a prospect I am sure will fill your readers with dismay – may I please be permitted to refute a falsehood in the letter from Keith Ackermann (*Freethinker*, January 2002).

The assertion by A N Wilson, first made in the *Evening Standard*, Nov 26, 2001, that Mary Whitehouse and the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association was "financed by Moral Rearmament" is not true.

For the last 25 years I have handled all of the many thousands of subscriptions and donations received by the Association and can verify that no contribution has ever come from this source. The truth of this was confirmed in a letter published in the *Evening Standard*, Dec 11, 2001, from a former Chief Accountant of Moral Rearmament. It is unfortunate that your correspondent evidently rushed into print before being in command of the facts.

It is, however, good that Mr Ackermann and I can at least agree about the damaging influence of Channel 5 TV!

JOHN C BEYER
Director
Mediawatch-uk

I TOO think I should devote a little attention to the passing of Mary Whitehouse if only to point out that having arrogantly attempted some years ago to deprive us of our right to judge *The Last Temptation of Christ* by having it banned, Mrs Whitehouse then, according to the media, admitted she hadn't even seen the film. When it was shown on TV, I thought it the most sympathetic and adult view of Christianity I'd ever come across.

In describing anti-apartheid protests as a "raucous left-wing clamour to overthrow the

regime", John Beyer scores an own goal of monumental proportions, for it is an easily proved fact that the evil, basic race-laws of apartheid were directly copied from the main (anti-semitic) race laws of Nazi Germany.

B J Vorster, who was later to become a South African Prime Minister, was interned during World War II for such treasonable – but illuminating – statements as, in 1942: "We stand for Christian Nationalism, which is an ally of German Nazism. You can call this anti-democratic principle dictatorship if you wish."

In deriding those who fought against apartheid, Mr Beyer is in danger of being regarded by many as pro-Nazi.

JOHN CLARKE
Uxbridge

Hitler and atheism

IT always irks me when opponents cite Hitler as an example of atheism gone bad. It is even more frustrating when freethinkers make the same mistake as Jack Hastie, in his otherwise excellent article (Jan issue), appears to do.

Although Hitler disliked organised religion, he was always a theist and continued to subscribe to his Catholic faith. To underline the point I am offering a selection of quotes. There are many more.

"I believe today that I am acting in the sense of the Almighty Creator. By warding off the Jews I am fighting for the Lord's work."

[Adolph Hitler, speech, *Reichstag*, 1936]

"I am now as before a Catholic and will always remain so"

[Adolph Hitler, to General Gerhard Engel, 1941]

"Anyone who dares to lay hands on the highest image of the Lord commits sacrilege against the benevolent creator of this miracle and contributes to the expulsion from paradise."

[Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* Volume 2 Chapter 1]

"The society-minded man, in particular, has the sacred duty, each in his own denomination, of making people stop just talking superficially of God's will, and actually fulfil God's will, and not let God's word be desecrated. For God's will gave men their form, their essence and their abilities. Anyone who destroys His work is declaring war on the Lord's creation, the divine will."

[Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* Volume 2 Chapter 10]

"Almighty God, bless our arms when the time comes; be just as thou hast always been; judge now whether we be deserving of freedom; Lord, bless our battle!"



[Adolf Hitler's prayer, *Mein Kampf*, Volume 2 Chapter 13]

TONY AKKERMANS
Shropshire

Editor's note: An Associated Press report of July 3, 1934, quoted one of Hitler's aides as saying that Christians of the world – Catholics and Protestants alike – should be grateful for Hitler's rise to power. Dr Ernest Hansfstaengl, said: "If Hitler had not won out a year ago last February, Germany would have gone red-bolshevist, and Christianity would have disappeared overnight. It would have been the end of all religion. The clerics should be grateful to the man."

Hardy updated

JACK Hastie's timely article Two Thousand Christmasses (January, 2001) concludes by asking what exactly the Gospel story has delivered after all this time. I am reminded of a sardonic couplet written by that great poet, novelist and agnostic Thomas Hardy at the time of the horrors of the First World War:-

*After 2000 years of Mass
We've got as far as poison gas.*

To which I may perhaps offer an update:

*2000 years since Jesus died
We've got as far as genocide.*

JOHN HUGHES
Sheffield

Public memorial services

THE aftermath of the tragic events in New York has shown again the needs of people to share common grief.

Once again, public memorial ceremonies in America and Britain have been led by the churches. These services have supposedly been for everyone, but inevitably incorporate religious aspirations and prayers to a god.

The people affected by these tragedies are of all religious faiths and many are non-believers. Most of those attending are there primarily because of feelings of common human grief – not because of a particular religious belief.

Will it ever be possible to devise, and have accepted, a form of commemoration for such tragedies (whether terrorist bombings, fires, earthquakes, shipwrecks or even our annual Remembrance Day) which the whole community can support together?

I feel that humanist organisations should be seeking to produce and promote such a format, in the interests of humanity as a whole.

ROGER MCCALLISTER
Devon

Sex in Paradise

IN HIS December letter, Steuart Campbell challenges my use of the epithet "ghostly" for the virginal houris promised to devout male Muslims after death. But are they really supposed to comprise flesh and blood? And what of the men themselves, whose original bodies are mouldering in their graves? Do they get supplied with duplicates? Another puzzling aspect of this posthumous prize is where the houris come from. If they are devout female earthly Muslim virgins likewise deceased, how come there are so many of them to spare – especially as, I understand, women rarely attain the Islamic Paradise?

I seek enlightenment prior to conversion.

BARBARA SMOKER
Bromley

Physical punishment

I READ with interest Barry Duke's article (December 2001) on physical punishment in schools, and would like to add something.

There is an aspect of all this that is rarely, if ever, talked about and that is that any kind of physical abuse of children may result in masochism or sadism in later life. We need these consequences to be more widely known and understood if we are to make sure that physical punishment never reappears in our schools and is abolished in the home. Masochism and sadism can ruin your whole life and the lives of others.

We have all heard people (usually men?) saying after hitting their child "Well it happened to me, and it didn't do me any harm". The fact that they are saying it means that it did.

I think it is well known, but perhaps not to the people who do it, that if you are treated with cruelty as a child (and I am not speaking here of an occasional smack on the hand by a mother at the end of her tether who has tried everything else), you have a chance of growing into a cruel adult.

What does this have to say about such things as street violence and child murder? I don't think that it can be stated too often that if a child is brought up with nothing but kindness and gentleness the chances are that he or she will grow into a kind and gentle adult.

GEORGINA COUPLAND
Preston

Are believers missing a gene?

CAN any reader of the *Freethinker* explain why worshippers of an external god hold to their delusions? Are they missing a gene for common sense, causing a glitch in grasping

what reality is?

Children, when indoctrinated with evangelical nonsense – and adults in fundamentalist cultures who have no recourse to counter punitive religious authority – have confused thinking and inhibited intellectual development.

But what prevents adults in Western countries, when free of admonitory religious influence and surrounded by irrefutable scientific evidence to the contrary, outgrowing biblical fictions? Is religious dogma so embedded in their memory that they are disabled by it, unable to break free of the closed loops of irrational reasoning, or does belief in fantasy as fact manifest brain dysfunction and an incapacity for dispassionate synthesis of the evidence?

I think such questions should be asked and answers sought.

Does any contributor to the *Freethinker* know? An article on the subject would be interesting.

GRAHAM NEWBERY
Southampton

The holy men of N Ireland

A FREQUENT feature of reports on the troubles in Northern Ireland is interviews with priests or bishops sanctimoniously posing as champions of peace and reason. They seem totally blind to the fact that it is their own activities, their own churches, and not least their very own confessional schools which more than anything maintain that vicious split which for so long has been the curse of Northern Irish society.

YNGVE BAUTZ
Newcastle upon Tyne

Address your letters (preferably typed) to Barry Duke, *Freethinker* editor, PO Box 26428, London SE10 9WH
Phone/Fax: 020 8305 9603
E-mail: editor@freethinker.co.uk or fteditor@aol.com
Please include your full postal address in letters sent by 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: Information on 01273 733215. Vallance Community Centre, Sackville Road and Clarendon Road, Hove. Sunday, March 3, 4.30pm. Bill McIlroy: *The Secularisation of Human Rites*.

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.

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: Secretary Alex Hill 0208 741 7016 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.

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, February 8, 7.30pm. David Ibry: *Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden*.

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 (off Balgores Lane), Gidea Park. Thursday, February 7, 8pm. Michael Edwards: *Religious Education in Schools*.

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, February 12, 8pm. Judith Hart: *The Galapagos - Darwin's*

Inspiration (illustrated).

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

Lewisham Humanist Group: Information: Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, February 28, 8pm. Terry Liddle: *George Harney - Atheist, Chartist and Republican*.

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: The Secretary on 01434 632936. The Literary and Philosophical Society, 23 Westgate Road, Newcastle. Thursday, February 21, 7.15pm. Annual General Meeting.

North Stafford & South Cheshire Humanists: Information: Sue Willson on 01782 662693.

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, March 6, 8 pm. Barry Johnson: *Is There a Case for Terrorism?*

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

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

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

Sutton Humanist Group: Information: 020 8642 4577. Friends Meeting House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, February 13. 8pm. Okasha el Daly: *Islamic Fundamentalism in Context*.

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.

Ulster Humanist Association. Information: Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: (028) 9267 7264. E-mail: brian@mcclinton.to
website: www.ulsterhumanist.freeservers.com

Please send your listings and events notices to:
Bill McIlroy, Flat 3, Somerhill Lodge, Somerhill Road,
Hove, Sussex BN3 1RU.