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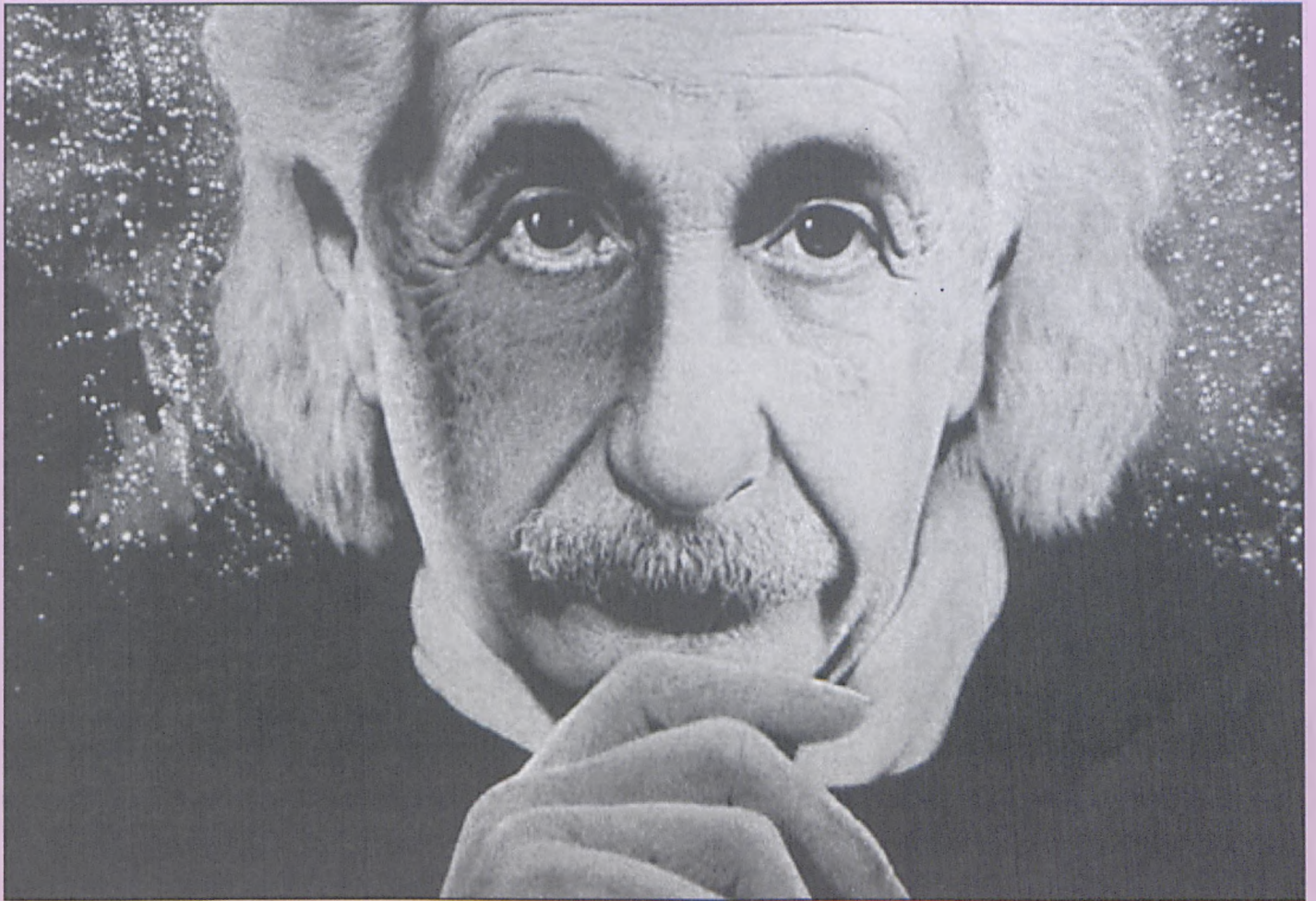
The

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# Freethinker

Secular Humanist monthly

Founded by G W Foote in 1881



Albert Einstein was voted Man of the 20th Century in a *Time Magazine* poll. But why, asks Chris Volkay, did Mother Teresa, Ghandi and the Pope rate so highly in the same poll? – see centrepage feature

## Also in this issue:

'We have the biblical right to smack children', say Christians – p3

The Weird World of Religion – p5

Catholic Church faces financial ruin over abuse claims – p6

Playing into the hands of the Far Right – p10

# freethinking out loud: Georgina Coupland

I AM angry. I am angry that a lot of children in Pakistan are being taught only the Koran. No history, world affairs, science or maths, just the Koran. I am angry that these children are growing up with nothing but hatred in their hearts for everyone who isn't a Muslim. And they obviously are not being given any idea of how to appraise, with some sort of logic, the truth or otherwise of a statement or belief. If they grow up to be dangerous fanatics it won't be their fault.

I am angry that young men should have been brainwashed so well that they believed that the ancient myth of the houris would apply to them. Why were they not instead taught the truth – that suicide would be against their religion?

I am shocked and filled with grief because a whole segment of our world should think it is right to stone people to death. And to cut off someone's hand because they have stolen something. I read somewhere that they amputate the right hand, and since the amputees are not permitted to eat with their



left hand they will (hopefully?) starve to death. This is like going back to the Middle Ages when it was OK to cut someone's head off for adultery; by then, society should have known better. This was a lot worse than some of the cruelties carried out in ancient biblical times when they *really* didn't know any better.

I am angry that when I was at school 40-odd years ago I wasn't taught much about the effect religion had on the shaping of history. Maybe some of it was my fault for not being interested in history, but I am now, having learned that you cannot make sense of the present without understanding something of the past – they forgot to tell us this.

I really think that in our schools then and later there was much misrepresentation of facts, evading of issues and omissions.

Why wasn't I told, for instance, that the Civil War was very much a religious affair, as was the Gunpowder Plot? How was it that it wasn't made clear to me that Catholics and Protestants always hated each other so much that hundreds of thousands were killed during the religious wars, the Inquisition the Witch-hunts and in the Crusades. In my day the Crusades had something to do with brave knights on black chargers going patriotically off to defeat a wicked people. We didn't know of the plunder on the way, the murder of thousands of innocent people, the slaughter of Jews and others. We were not told that the "wicked peoples" were more civilised and a lot more educated than we were.

When I was growing up I believed that Luther was altogether a good man; if he was a "reformer" he had to be, didn't he? I didn't know he believed in burning people to death for their beliefs. I also thought that all the popes were good and holy men, leaders of this religion of love. If they had told us that popes were out for what power they could get, were the instigators of intolerance and cruelty, to say nothing of the fleecing of ordinary believers to keep them in beautiful palaces, fantastic treasures, gold rings and posh frocks, our scrip-

ture lessons might have been different and I might have become an atheist much sooner.

I am angry that I was told religion as fact not opinion, but I suppose most people were in my day. I didn't know until well into adulthood, for instance, that the early chapters of the Old Testament were made up of various bits and pieces of mythology and legend collected from all around the Middle East, and from different times. These were not the history of the Jews as such. The same was true of the New Testament. I am sure that if people knew that the Jesus story was made up of myths and miscellanies from pagan beliefs, they would never believe it. Everyone should be given the option not to believe it.

Perhaps this is asking too much, but I really would have liked to have been told something of pre-history – how it all began, and how there was a time of peace before civilisation (and therefore organised religion) began. As far as archaeology can tell, the signs of the origins of religion were in the ritual burials of the Stone Age. Developing from this minor beginning we had superstition, imagination, inventions, fears, many gods, one god, theology, the invention of big words and long sentences (Humanists do this also, thereby alienating half the population) and quarrels over the meanings of words. There was fighting and killing and persecution, argument and interpretation and misinterpretation, translation and mistranslation. There has been cruelty and countless millions of deaths. There has been elaboration with much embroidering and exaggeration.

As I see it there must have been a time, possibly before the Stone Age, when there was no belief in gods at all. Some people will say that men have always believed in gods, even if you go back to before there was any evidence. How do they know this? I'd say their guess was as good as mine. I guess that men managed perfectly well without God – say, two million years ago. Multiply two million by nothing, and you still get nothing.

In other words, if God didn't exist at that time, he doesn't now.

But what *have* we got now? We've got Northern Ireland, the Middle East, September 11th and, most recently, religious fighting in India. And on top of all that we've got President Bush, who is planning to drop bombs on half the world and who can't see why Muslim extremists hate America. I think I'm almost as angry with America as with anyone else, and the constant ramming down our throats of "God Bless America", as if there wasn't another country worth blessing.

Richard Dawkins recently told us it was "time to stop being so polite". I'm starting here.

## The Free thinker

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# Welsh education minister 'right to oppose religious schools'

WELSH Assembly Education Minister Jane Davidson is working in Wales' best interest by opposing the establishment of more religious schools, says the National Secular Society.

Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director of the NSS, came out in support of Ms Davidson after she had been criticised by the Evangelical Alliance in Wales.

In a letter of support sent to Ms Davidson in April, the NSS urged her to disregard attacks from religious bodies "because these were self-serving".

According to the *Western Mail* (April 24), Dan Boucher, an EA spokesperson, said that Jane Davidson's statement that she did not want fundamentalism and brainwashing in Welsh schools was "misinformed". He said her branding of the teaching of creationism in Emmanuel College in Gateshead as "fundamentalist" would offend Christians in Wales.

But Keith Porteous Wood responded: "Jane

Davidson has nothing to apologise about. Teaching Genesis allegories in science lessons amounts to biblical fundamentalism at its worst. Teaching such fantasies as fact abuses the whole educational process. There can surely be no room for fairy stories in science classes – or are we to look forward to the Flat Earth Society's policy making an appearance in Welsh schools?"

More seriously, Mr Wood points out that the EA's claim that faith schools reserve 25 per cent of places for people of other faiths was simply untrue.

"Many religious schools – especially Catholic schools – reserve all their places for people from their own religion. Although some schools will admit pupils of other faiths when there are spare places, others will bus children in from distant towns in order to ensure that only children of their own faith attend."

Mr Wood said that the proliferation of church schools that is proposed in England would inevitably lead to divisions in society. "It is utterly wrong to separate children on the basis of their religion. We can see the results of religious separatism all around us, and it is not a pretty sight.

"Jane Davidson should be congratulated on seeking to save Wales from future conflict by her brave and far-sighted policy. In England, although polls show massive opposition to more faith schools, Tony Blair intends to press ahead with more of them.

## Muslim Malaysia scares off tourists

TOURISTS have begun shunning Malaysia after one state in this Islamic country banned holiday-makers from wearing bikinis. The Terengganu state government also decided to segregate men from women at swimming pools and in hotels.

Malaysia's tourism minister Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir says he is disappointed over the decision, and said that many European tourists had cancelled trips to Malaysia because of the announcement.

Meanwhile, according to an Ananova news agency report, Malaysian Muslims are becoming obsessed with death as they attempt to strengthen their religious beliefs. More and more are taking a death awareness course which involves looking at graves, lying in coffins and listening to the last rites.

But the country's religious affairs minister says the course, run by a Muslim group, is unnecessary and could result in people becoming backward.

Datuk Abdul Hamid Zainal Abidin said: "They will be so preoccupied with death that they may neglect their responsibilities as Muslims. I worry that if more Muslims get into such a mindset they may become backward."

# Schools demand 'biblical right to smack children'

PRIVATE Christian schools must be allowed to smack pupils with parents' consent, the Court of Appeal has been told.

Forty schools, spearheaded by the Christian Fellowship School in Liverpool, want a change in the law to allow them to use corporal punishment. Their attempt to challenge legislation banning smacking in schools by claiming it did not apply to independents was rejected by the High Court last year.

The schools claim that smacking is part of a religious doctrine protected by the European Convention on Human Rights.

Paul Diamond, representing the schools, told Lords Justices Buxton and Rix and Lady Justice Arden that the Convention gave everyone the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Corporal punishment, he said, was a doctrine advocated in the Bible and was thus part of the ethos of evangelical schools.

There was evidence to show that teachers no longer had the means to deal with the rising tide of violence, bullying, disruptive and anti-

social behaviour in schools, he told the judges.

Christian schools view corporal punishment of an unruly child as part of a biblical mandate. He said the law as it stood breached the schools' rights under the Convention and the Court of Appeal should put this right. Judgment was deferred.

## Correction

IN LAST month's issue we inadvertently gave the name of the writer of "Long live conscious evolution" as Jonathan Bonython. His name is **John Bonython**.

John Bonython was born in Adelaide, South Australia, in 1930. He attended the Architectural Association School in London in the 1960s. He says he is predisposed to see things from an historical perspective and that he thinks of himself as an evolutionist. He and his historian wife live in London and Cornwall.



## Webwatch: Norman Pridmore

ONE of the last projects of the late John Diamond was a book highly critical of "alternative" medicine. Sadly incomplete, it has just been published by Verso with the title *Snake Oil*. As well as the eighty or so pages on the main theme, there are another two hundred pages of Diamond's journalistic writings. The medical stuff is excellent – astringent, bracing, intelligent. The rest is pretty good too.

But why do I mention it here? Because once or twice Diamond cites the work of a man whose website was to be this month's first suggestion. Is there message and meaning in this strange coincidence? Are the spirits and energies trying to tell me something? I expect Dr William Bloom (for it is he!) might well say "yes". Take a look at his web site and see what you think. It's at <http://www.williambloom.com/>

The egregious Bloom proudly proclaims that he "held his own" in a "Moral Maze" radio debate with Dr David Starkey, but only after several days of martial arts training. Now look, I know that Starkey is clever, but hell's bells – are we supposed to be impressed? He also writes some appalling guff about how he and other enlightened characters around the world helped to "guide the spirits" of the three thousand or so killed on Sept 11 into the "clear light". He even suggests that there may be some connection

between what happened then and the genocide of the native North Americans; you know, karmic energy, reincarnation, that kind of thing. I'm sorry, but this kind of thinking is so "free" that it has escaped from rationality itself. Those who relish "New Age" twaddle will enjoy this site. Me, I think it's even more barking than Christianity! Oh alright – maybe not.

On the subject of "weird" I should just mention that *Snake Oil* has a superb foreword by one R Dawkins. The man is so ubiquitous it makes me suspect that he is concealing a talent for bi-location.

Troubled by Mormons?

Then visit the site of William Shunn at <http://www.shunn.net/mormon/> Shunn is an American sci-fi writer and ex-Mormon – and possibly the only Mormon missionary to ever be arrested, charged and booted out of a country for the offence of hijacking (from Canada, of all places!). It's good for specific stuff on the anti-freethought and very authoritarian nature of Mormonism, and on its bizarre theology and history; and it's especially good for its description of how tortuously slow the process of losing one's beliefs can be – especially for those brought up in a specific religious mindset. Substitute "Muslim" for "Mormon" as required to generate the relevant insights: it's all much the same, whatever the faith.

How about a visit to the Closet Atheist at

<http://www.closetatheist.com/>

This anonymous webmaster has to be in the running for the title of World's Politest Atheist! It's a site with a variety of links, but the main interest is in the short but thoughtful essays and responses to letters that it contains. There's also a report by the excellent Michael Shermer about his public debate with one Barry Minkow, a "reformed" American scam-artist who found God whilst in chokey and saw a new career blossom before his eyes... evangelism! Nice. Now why does the name Jonathan Aitken come to mind, I wonder ... ?

Now three home-grown mainstream magazines to save money on – the *Spectator*, the *New Statesman* and *Prospect Magazine*. Why these? Well, because they are fairly representative of much contemporary thought and opinion – and because over recent months they have all contained articles of real interest to freethinkers, atheists and secularists. Islam, secular education, and the wonders of religion have all been covered – often very well and from some interesting angles. Go to:

<http://www.spectator.co.uk>

<http://www.newstatemen.com> and

<http://www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/>

All are free, though *Prospect* only has the full contents of one edition available at a time (and that only a month after the print edition comes out – ah, economics!).

Now a suggestion for lovers of poetry, wit and wickedness. Visit "Worldlings Christian Poetry" at <http://home.freeuk.net/worldling/> Its amusing strap line is "Making Fun of Christians Because They're There". Me, I've never heard a better reason – I'm having the slogan engraved in stone at this very moment! Do visit, and join in too. It's a smallish site now, but the idea is great and it is really well put together. If I could rhyme and had the time, I'd send a poem down the line ...

Finally, another "must see" site. It is that of the extraordinarily named "Freethought Firefighters International", and it's at <http://www.freethoughtfirefighters.org/> Slick, funny, thoughtful, humane, sharp, literate (Bruce Monson, the site's head honcho, is not only a real fire-fighting paramedic but an excellent writer too). It is full of discussion, passion and crisp no-nonsense links. What a gem!

Now a plea. I'm especially interested in anti-creationist sites just now (I picked a fight with some fundamentalists ...) Any suggestions along such lines would be especially welcome. Others too, of course – of any kind.

Thanks to everyone who has contributed so far. All suggestions to:

[norman@npridmore.fsworld.co.uk](mailto:norman@npridmore.fsworld.co.uk)

## DTI seeks NSS's views on the employment of clergy

SO VALUED have the National Secular Society's views become among Government departments that the NSS has even been asked for its thoughts on the employment rights of the clergy.

The Department of Trade and Industry wrote to the NSS concerning clergy employment rights last month, and received the following reply from NSS Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood.

"It was most courteous of the Department to write to me on the question of extending statutory employment rights to clergy. I have taken the precaution of seeking the view of the Society's Council before replying. You will be pleased to learn that their view was unanimous.

"As we understand it, the employment status of ministers of religion differs from

that of other employees in that ministers of religion are deemed to be employed by God.

"The only problem we can see with this is for those members of the clergy who do not believe in His/Her/Its existence.

In the interests of equity, we propose that those clergy who are prepared to sign a declaration to this effect should be deemed to have a terrestrial, rather than a celestial, employer (on whom the serving of enforcement notices could prove problematic).

"Normally, as your colleagues on the Employment Directive team will testify, I am only too happy to get together with DTI staff to elaborate on the finer points of contentious issues. Unusually, on this topic however, I have little else to add.

"We hope that our contribution has been of assistance."

# Prophet's hateful words lead to heavy fine for 'devout' Muslim

A "DEVOUT" Muslim has made legal history in Britain as the first person to be convicted for using a religious text to incite racial hatred.

Father-of-two, Iftikhar Ali of east London, distributed leaflets quoting the prophet Mohammed's 1,400-year-old backing for a holy war against Jews.

London's Southwark Crown Court heard that he stood a stone's throw from a synagogue and a mosque, handing out what prosecutors branded a "call to arms".

Ali, a London Underground worker, of Holme Road, East Ham, who denied charges, had earlier been convicted of dis-

tributing "threatening, abusive or insulting" material in October 2000, with the intention of stirring up racial hatred.

He was also found guilty of possessing the material. Ali was fined £3,000, ordered to pay £1,200 prosecution costs and complete 200 hours of community service.

The leaflets began with the words: "The Holy Land, Palestine crying for Jihad", before quoting a "Hadith", or spoken word when Mohammed said "the hour will not come until Muslims fight the Jews and kill them". The literature went on to invite recipients to a talk by Sheik Omar Bakri Mohammed, the fanatical leader of the

Muslim political group Al Mahajiroun.

The organisation is reported to have recruited people in Britain to fight the Russians in Chechnya and support the Taliban in Afghanistan.

When he was arrested, still clutching more than 100 leaflets, Ali, 33, insisted: "What is written on the paper is true. The Jewish people must die."

Passing sentence last month, Judge Jeremy McMullen, QC, told him that it was clear he was a "devout" Muslim, and while he had initially considered jailing him, he now felt that would prove "counter-productive".

## Their lips are sealed

PROSTITUTES who attended a church service in a Romanian town left vowing never to offer their clients oral-sex services ever again.

They took the decision after attending a church service in Deva, Hunedoara. One of the prostitutes, named only as Mirela E, told the *Libertatea* newspaper: "After we went to church, we thought about how big sinners we were.

"Even if we can't give up what we are doing at least we can try to be more religious and give up perversities."

## Priest in porno video

A SPANISH priest in the Costa del Sol resort of Nerja has been forced to resign after his former gay lover distributed copies among local parishioners of a video depicting the pair performing sexual acts.

It later emerged that Eladio Ocana Serrano had been blackmailed by his ex-lover.

Serrano has now retired to a monastery "to pray and to reflect."

The case has added fuel to a controversy currently raging in Spain over sexuality among the Roman Catholic clergy.

Earlier this year, a priest fell in love over the internet and gave up his post and got married, another was jailed for involvement in an inter-

## The weird world of religion

net child porn ring, and a third was suspended after revealing in a magazine interview that he had been leading a secret gay life for decades.

## It ain't just the Catholics

A RETIRED American priest who has admitted molesting boys has been indicted on charges that he sexually abused a 12-year-old boy a decade ago.

The Rev Ronald Paquin, 59, who was arrested last month at his home in Malden in Massachusetts, is being held on \$100,000 cash bail pending his arraignment on three counts of child rape.

Paquin was removed from active service at St John the Baptist Church in Haverhill in 1990 following allegations of sex abuse.

The church has paid settlements to at least four of his alleged victims.

Paquin is also accused in a civil lawsuit of raping a teenage boy while he was in a treatment centre for troubled priests, a charge he denies.

## 'Hide me, I'm a Muslim'

A NORWICH man who put up a six-foot fence in front of his home to hide his devout Muslim wife from public gaze has lost his crown court appeal against a fine of £400 for failing to lower the fence.

Norwich Magistrates heard that Daryoush Danesh put up the fence because his wife felt uncomfortable in her living room when she was not in full traditional dress and veil, as people could see her from the road. He said that without her full dress his Iranian wife would not be adhering to her religion, and they are now planning to move out of Norwich to North Walsham to get more privacy.

## D'uh!

FOUR teenagers set fire to a Sikh temple in the United States last November because they thought it was a Muslim place of worship dedicated to Osama bin Laden.

The temple in Palermo was in fact called the Gobind Sadan USA temple. The teenagers told authorities they set fire to the temple because they thought it was called "Go bin Laden".

Numerous hate crimes have been committed against Sikhs in the US since September 11. Sikhs have been mistaken for Arabs or Muslims because of their turbans and beards.

# Abusers: the cost keeps mounting

Over a billion dollars changes hands secretly. Illicit sex takes place with astonishing frequency. Criminal acts are covered up by the establishment. A senior cardinal is involved in a court-room drama. Another senior cardinal is forced by public pressure into a humiliating policy reversal. Add to this a police-car chase, a shooting, a suicide, and staff sent off by their employers to third-world countries to escape prosecution – and the Holy Father (or should that be the Godfather?) gets blamed for the lot.

*What a story!* I hope someone writes it. Yet, had it been written as fiction just six months ago, it would have been dismissed as being far too implausible to print.

What I am describing is the fall-out from the child-abuse scandals involving the Catholic Church. It seems that the entire edifice of the Church has started to crumble before our very eyes. Crises have been unfolding with increasing rapidity in the United States over the last few months. And just when they think it couldn't get any worse, along comes yet another catastrophe, often dwarfing its predecessor in scale or import.

So many people are involved: not just the paedophiles and those that have harboured them, but the victims who have come forward, and the thousands that have yet to do so. Each has the potential to create more adverse publicity and keep this drama running for years.

In the few days before I wrote this piece a priest was shot in Baltimore by one of his alleged victims – and another, in Connecticut, committed suicide.

The Vatican could have weathered the storm relatively easily – in financial terms at least – if only the crisis had been somewhere other than the USA. But America is by far the largest contributor to the Vatican's rapacious coffers. This is presumably why the ailing Pope recently summoned the US cardinals to the Vatican for a crisis meeting.

The rumbling child-abuse saga seems to have acquired a momentum of its own when the public first learned that Father John Geoghan of Boston archdiocese had been accused by more than 160 people of having molested them over 30 years, although so far he has "only" been convicted of molesting one boy, and is serving ten years in prison. The public were less scandalised by Geoghan's litany of crimes than they were that the archdiocese had repeatedly ignored warnings about him, simply moving him from one parish to the next as soon as the complaints became too strident. One of those responsible for moving Geoghan on, Bernard Law, has since become Cardinal Archbishop of Boston.

Cardinal Law has, we think, the dubious

distinction of being the first cardinal to be questioned in court under oath about allegedly covering up abuse by a convicted child molester. The charge stems from his being a line manager for Geoghan. Law has obdurately ignored US-wide calls for his resignation, and it is unlikely that he could have resisted such pressure without the Pope's personal intervention. These calls for Law's resignation were loud and clear even before the latest of his public humiliations, which were adverse publicity about his conduct in the court hearings and also his having to announce that his own archdiocese's board of finance had reneged on an agreement to pay out \$15-30 million in compensation for abuse by priests of 86 victims.

**The Catholic Church is heading for a 'financial black hole' says Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director of the National Secular Society**

And the problem is not confined to Boston. Numerous US dioceses have similar problems, as is evident from the \$1-billion already believed to have been paid out to US victims. Nor is the US by any means the only country to suffer major difficulties. Multiple cases are reported in Australia, Brazil and South Africa. In Austria the Church has admitted that accusations of paedophilia levelled against its former head, the Archbishop of Vienna, are substantially true.

Nearer to home, Ireland has just reached a £78-million settlement with victims, and a bishop has resigned. The Archbishop of Wales also resigned after criticism of his handling of paedophile cases. And the short primacy of England's Cardinal Murphy O'Connor has been almost completely overshadowed by his incompetent mishandling of at least one child-abusing priest.

I accept, though, that there are genuine attempts in England to put the matter right, albeit belatedly.

Where is all this leading? Clearly towards a financial black hole – caused not only by the payouts so far and in the future, but a disastrous decline in income. This is a direct consequence of the Church's disintegrating reputation. It is being seen by everyone, even – belatedly – by its own parishioners, for the corrupt institution it is. Priests now avoid walking in US streets in their clerical garb for fear of being spat upon. What a change from having their boots licked!

The Church admittedly also does much chari-

table work, and it will doubtless be the poor and needy who will be the first to suffer from this catastrophe. Nor should anyone be surprised if the financial victims turn out to include the taxpayers too. As you read this, someone in the Church will be lobbying for additional aid from the public purse – perhaps under the guise of saving a "faith-based welfare" scheme from foundering – or simply by claiming that the Church cannot afford the payouts awarded by the courts. And these lobbyists will already be working on the best strategies to minimise the Church's losses, such as asking governments or courts to limit the compensation to their victims. And shouldn't the US authorities insist on a public undertaking from any US diocese with any likelihood of going bankrupt that they will not send any cash to the Vatican? Some hope.

And what are their excuses? Most of the offences were committed a long time ago. This may be true, but could the lesser number of recent cases simply be attributed to the fact that modern children are now more street-wise and less blindly obedient than they used to be? And of the older cases, many of the perpetrators are still working for the Church. Another excuse often made, including by Murphy O'Connor, is that we weren't aware of this sort of thing ten or 20 years ago, in the way we are today. Well the public *were*, and I distinctly remember my parents talking to me about it in the 1950s. Do these self-appointed so-called expert guardians of public morality really consider the rest of us to be so credulous that we will swallow such self-serving lies? Did they not know it was wrong, and the innocent were victims, often repeatedly, thanks to them?

The National Secular Society has not sat back idly during the Vatican's current crisis.

Just as the Boston problems were reaching a new crescendo, we learned that a special session of the United Nations was to be convened on children's matters in New York over several days in May. We established that both (the ultra-liberal) Catholics for a Free Choice and the International Humanist & Ethical Union were sending a full complement of delegates to the session. The NSS made a formal request to both organisations for them to focus on the RC child-abuse issue in their contribution to the conference, as we were convinced that the Church had not yet taken appropriate steps to ensure that all the cases of suspected abuse are independently investigated. I discussed strategies for the session with the CfFC President and my counterpart at IHEU, and sent them copious briefing material for the session. I would like to thank them publicly for their co-operation.

More detail of the child-abuse issue is contained in the NSS's May/June Bulletin, which will be sent free to any reader who requests this through the *Freethinker* editor.

# Anyone for aromatherapy?

I USED to teach in a College of Further Education. We took students on day- or block-release from business and industry and trained them in the basics of plumbing, electrical installation, motor-vehicle mechanics and office studies. Although our feet were planted firmly on the vocational ground we also targeted the academic heights. We prepared candidates for Scottish Higher Grade exams in such recognised disciplines as English, maths, languages and the sciences.

After some time in retirement I re-visited the old place on an open day and was handed a brochure which listed new programmes about to start in January 2002.

Things seem to have changed. The old staples are still there, but they have been joined by a new and exotic menu. The College now offers Aromatherapy, Reflexology, Indian Head Massage (*sic*), Lymphatic Drainage and Shiatsu. I half-expected to find Astrology, Alchemy, and Reading the Tarot in the catalogue, but perhaps these will appear later when funding can be found to make it profitable to offer them.

Even more surprisingly, these courses were

not advertised as leisure activities, but as leading to diplomas or certificates awarded either by a body called the Vocational Training Charitable Trust or by the College itself. Significantly, however, they are not accredited by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority for England and Wales or by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, and do not confer NVQs or SVQs.

## A bemused Jack Hastie poses the question

Intrigued by these new para-medical disciplines I decided to surf the internet. Here I discovered that aromatherapy "stimulates the human growth hormone." At the age of 66 I wasn't sure that I wanted mine to be stimulat-

ed, but I was relieved to learn that "in adults the growth hormone has a rejuvenating effect". I was also delighted to discover that many low-price offers (of essential oils) are available through the net.

I further learned that Indian Head Massage is extremely effective in treating not only "stress and emotional tensions" but also sinus problems, not to mention lymphatic drainage.

Shiatsu is equally versatile; not only does it "tonify the immune system", it is effective in the treatment of anxiety and depression as well as such closely related maladies as respiratory and digestive disorders.

More serious claims are advanced for Reflexology. Despite the improbable theoretical hypothesis that there are invisible vertical zones running through the body so that each organ has a corresponding location in the foot, there is, apparently, some evidence that it can reduce pain, nausea and anxiety in cancer patients as well as treating high blood pressure, digestive disorders and asthma.

The remarkable versatility of these therapies is explained by the fact that they "holistically" treat the body, mind and soul simultaneously.

In fact there is no significant clinical evidence that any of these alternative therapies has any effect whatsoever, other than as a placebo.

I therefore wrote, expressing my concern that a publicly funded college should be peddling such stuff, to the Scottish Minister for Education. She passed the buck to the Department of Enterprise and Lifelong Learning. Here, the "appropriate official", as he described himself, simply passed it further to the Scottish Further Education Funding Council and HM Inspectorate of Education, without addressing the points I had made in any way.

I may pursue the matter with them, but meanwhile I feel as if I have arrived at the Hogwarts School of Further Education and that Harry Potter's old Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, may turn up as one of the Assistant Principals.

If, under Albus' direction, this subject area expands, one might expect to see adverts in the *Times Educational Supplement* for posts which might attract such current Hogwarts staff as Professors Flitwick (Charms) and Snape (Potions). I hardly suspected that there might be a place for Professor Quirrell (Defence against the Dark Arts) until I discovered that the old College board room had been turned into a multi-faith prayer room.

Quirrell for college chaplain?

## Belgium legalises doctor-assisted dying

BELGIUM last month became the third European country to allow terminally ill adults who are suffering unbearably to request medical help to die. The new law, supported by 72 per cent of the Belgian population, sets out strict safeguards to protect the vulnerable, after research showed assisted dying was going on unregulated. The law has overwhelming public and parliamentary support: Last night Belgium's Chamber of

Representatives voted 86 to 51 in favour, the Senate voted 44 to 23 in favour last October. VES Director Deborah Annetts said: "It is good to see another European Government taking steps to allow terminally ill adults choice and dignity at the end of life and increasing the protection of the vulnerable by regulating assisted dying. If only the British Government had followed Belgium's lead, Diane Pretty could have chosen medical help to die rather than suffer a long, distressing death."

Diane Pretty died on May 11 at 4.25 pm with her husband Brian at her bedside. Aged 43, Diane from Leagrave, Luton suffered from the fatal Motor Neurone Disease, and had gone

to court for the right to choose when and how she died. On April 29 Diane lost her appeal at The European Court of Human Rights.

She died in the hospice which had helped care for her throughout her illness.

Said Deborah Annetts: "Diane was an extraordinary woman. Everyone who had the privilege of meeting her was struck by her humanity and bravery in the face of unbearable suffering."

### Flouting the law in India

TWENTY thousand young children have been married off during a Hindu festival in northern India.

The mass weddings in the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh come despite a government ban on the practice. They were part of the Akha Teej festival.

Though child marriages have long been held illegal in India, a large number of minors end up tied in matrimony by their parents for religious and social reasons each year.

Police are still in the process of investigating the mass marriages.

In a world that seems to desperately need and even deify “heroes” I thought it might be interesting to audit three of its big box-office icons a little more closely. The three mentioned here continue to be universally loved, adored and idolized throughout the world, with seldom a dissenting word.

When *Time* magazine set about nominating their “people of the twentieth century”, they didn’t consult me. If they had I would have had a wee bit of a bone to pick with at least three of their nominees.

The “godmother” alluded to in the title is Mother Teresa. Mahatma is naturally Mahatma Gandhi and the “Pontiff” is Pope John Paul II.

Well, in light of these nominations, and more importantly, the continuing world-wide adoration and influence that these three “holy people” command, I thought we might take a closer look at them, and also see if we can do a better job in compiling future “great people” lists.

Let us start our investigation with our “godmother – Mother Teresa. One brief *caveat* here. For an in-depth examination of the afore-said nun, read the very talented Christopher Hitchen’s work regarding the Mother. I just have some random thoughts here that I would like to add to the public discussion.

Recently I’m motoring down the road here in Los Angeles and I see a public service billboard extolling the virtues of compassion. Of course, there was a mammoth picture of Mother Teresa in the ad to emphasize the point. Mother Teresa has come to symbolize compassion throughout much of the world. She won the Nobel prize for her work with the orphans of India. She is billed as a compassionate saint who selflessly sacrificed her entire life in the service of others. I can only ask at this point, and quite seriously, is the whole world tipsy?

In my opinion, Mother Teresa and people like her are among the most selfish, megalomaniacal, ego-consumed, corporate profiteers on this planet.

Mother Teresa was an employee of the most powerful corporation in the world, the Catholic Church. Like any corporate employee, her charge was to benefit the corporation, bring in money, profits, recruits, positive PR. She went to India to “minister to the orphans”, aka in the corporate sales world as “opening up a new territory”. India was woefully Catholic-free as far as the Holy Roman Church was concerned.

By sending missionaries into these regions they can pump up the piteous numbers of local parishioners. Why are numbers important? Well, money, power, influence. Let’s face it, the more people you have, the more power. In fact,

if you could monopolize the religious, you could effectively control the world. But what good are the poor starving orphans of India? What can they contribute? Well, folks, it’s really just one big TV commercial. The orphans attract tremendous sums of cash from the well-heeled people of the Americas and Europe. Those are the prized milch-cows there to be constantly milked.

Back to the godmother. She is still in India, tending to the orphans. She is against birth control, against abortion, against anything that would halt the flow of orphans, because without orphans where is your ministry?



**Mother Teresa, aka the “Albanian prune”, cynically used the orphans of India to attract huge sums of money into the Vatican’s coffers**

She goes about her business recruiting and converting as many Indian people to her corporate sponsor as possible. What was ever done to actually aid, empower or educate these people? What was done to help them stand on their own feet?

Nothing. All that was done was to substitute one set of fictions and mythologies for another. The people were kept ignorant, superstitious and weak, but then again, they had to be, because how can you peddle your religious fictions to people who are strong and independent and who think for themselves?

But what of the notion that the godmother was such a selfless, self-sacrificing saint? Well, as I previously stated, I see it altogether differently. To the religious mind, when the Ted Turners and Bill Gates and Rupert Murdochs of this world build their greenback pyramids of vainglory to themselves, they are merely amassing secular, temporal fortunes

that will come to an end upon their deaths at the end of a 70- or 80-year span. That’s peanuts, dear friends, chickenfeed, nickel and dime, penny ante stuff at best. When you serve God – no, let’s try that again – when you are one of God’s chosen, when you are one of his representatives, what do you have? Well, simple ... all of eternity. These people have simply made a bargain, a calculation, a business decision. “You shall in time pass away, and maybe

Godm  
Mahatm  
Pon

By Chris

even burn in hell, but we shall live forever and forever, and having done God’s good works, we will sit at the right hand of God.” That’s a far sweeter deal than anything else being doled out on this grubby floating orb.

I believe that this is exactly what these religious, so-called self-sacrificing, people do.

During their entire time on earth, are they really sacrificing, or are they building up brownie points in God’s big eternity sweepstakes? “Your face will probably be eaten by worms, but I shall sit on God’s throne, break bread with him, slap him on the back, tear at large legs of buttered mutton and sip carefully-aged and refined ambrosia, ah yes, the 1937, a very good year.”

Is it really sacrifice, or just angling for the bigger *enchilada* at the end of this veil of tears?

Now let’s move on to the Mahatma. I got my weekly edition of *The Nation* and I read an article once again praising the Mahatma for his non-violence and his liberation of India back in 1947. In fact, Gandhi is known the world over as the poster boy for non-violent protest and victory over oppressors.



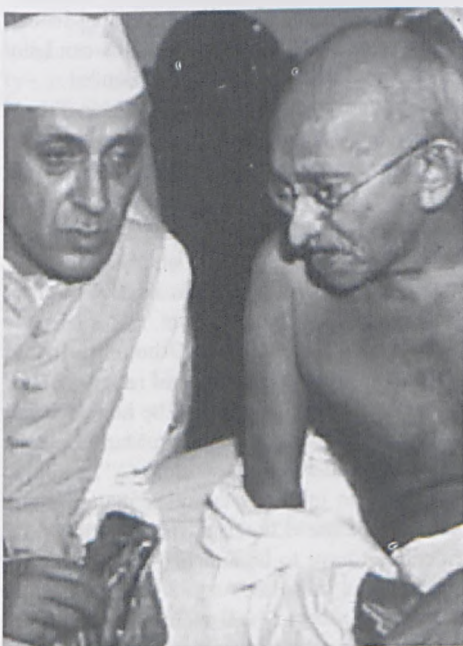
Richard Attenborough made a film of him, in which, of course, he praised and lauded the Mahatma.

Why? Gandhi was absolutely anti-human.

Here was a man who refused mosquito nets for himself and his subjects. Why? because the nets were born of science and technology. In the name of asceticism and spiritual discipline all manner of things were done. He and his wife and sons were regularly cleaning toilets to

# mother, ma and ntiff

## 's Volkay



*The Mahatma Gandhi, right, in discussions with independent India's first Prime Minister Nehru*

achieve spirituality. He once threw his pregnant wife out of the house for not cleaning latrines. He refused to let his children be educated. Why? Because, of course, he was against science, technology, medicine and education in general.

Why? Because all these disciplines stimulate the intellect and encourage questioning attitudes. Where is your corporate religious sponsor when this occurs? His son Haridas managed to escape the cult. Why? He wanted to be educated. But this was a great sin. His son eventually converted to Islam.

Gandhi was further enraged. It seems the Mahatma, who had regularly preached that all religions were "one", was suddenly not so tolerant.

One could go on, of course, but let's look at the big picture for a moment. In India you have a people that had been living in misery and poverty for thousands of years. Certainly not all, but many.

Why? Because their various religions have all been teaching that everything is a product of past lives and if your current state – poverty or misery – is a product of bad deeds in some imagined past life, then you are getting exactly what you deserved, so lie back and take it.

These are the principles that have been taught in India for thousands of years. Gandhi was just one in a long line of proponents.

**F**inally we come to the current head of the Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II. There have recently been a higher than usual number of cases involving priestly misconduct relating to sexual matters involving children. What was the pontiff's reaction? To condemn the priests? Well, not exactly. He denounced the scandal itself. It was hurting the Catholic Church and *that* was what he found objectionable. Another legion of Catholic priest child-molesters swept under the already overcrowded papal rug?

But the main thing that caught my eye and got me thinking was the following from Reuters news service in February 2002. It was entitled "Pope has performed three exorcisms." It seems that as late as September, 2001, the pontiff performed an exorcism on a 20-year-old woman. According to Father Gabriele Amorth, the girl is still undergoing treatment. The pope later said in an address, "The devil, the 'prince of this world', even today continues his insidious actions."

At this point I really don't feel that any commentary should be necessary. What is there to say? I hope the young woman in question at some point falls out of the clutches of the devil and into the hands of someone with an MD behind their name.

But of course in the end it's really not about the young woman anyway. It's about the millions of followers who from time to time need to be reminded just how important it is to be good contributing members of the church, lest these types of vexing vicissitudes be visited upon your first-born.

In a world that is constantly crying out for heroes and leaders, are Mother Teresa, Gandhi and the Pope really the best we can do?

Thankfully, Albert Einstein was chosen the person of the century and rightly so. His contributions opened up a century of science and technology – but the age-old battle



*Pope John Paul II: concerned more by the scandal of sexual abuse than by the abuse itself*

between science and superstition shows no sign of a let-up. It was, and continues to be, in my estimation, the most important battle raging on our planet today.

As we proceed into a new century, we can only hope that by this century's end the forces of science, technology, rationality and humanism will have been able to effectively exorcise at least some of the age-old, debilitating superstitious and religious beliefs that have so terribly crippled this planet since the very beginnings of civilization. I'm not holding my breath, but one can hope.

Perhaps by the end of this century we will be a little wiser as to those we choose to worship and lionize in both press and the media.

• **Chris Volkay** a member of the Council for Secular Humanism in the United States. He writes both fiction and non-fiction and is the author of *Laughing Gas: How to live rationally in the land of Illusion*.

# Playing into the hands of the Far Right

**D**anger: you are entering a minefield! Britain is trying to talk about race, immigration, Islam and western liberal values, but every attempt to open that debate is immediately curtailed by cries of “racism”, “Islamophobia” or “fascism.”

So, given that it is almost impossible to say anything without provoking an “anti-racist” backlash, how are we to address these issues? How are we going to express our concerns about what is happening all around us without being immediately cast into the role of being “no better than a member of the BNP”?

I have some experience of this, because I put my head above the parapet last month and wrote a letter to the *Guardian* on behalf of the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association. In it I merely stated that as gay people we were worried about the terrible things that Islam says about homosexuals in Britain and what it does to them around the world. I said that some British Muslim leaders had called for the death penalty for gays, which is true.

I said that Islam was illiberal when it comes to women’s rights, gay rights and human rights in general, and that if we were to come successfully to some accommodation with the Muslim community in this country, then we would have to face up to the fact that many Muslims do not accept the secular liberalism upon which European society has based itself.

Because the *Guardian* published my email address I was immediately inundated with messages from Muslims telling me off for singling out Islam. What about Catholicism, Judaism, Anglicanism – all equally anti-gay and thoroughly conservative in their dogmas? Why didn’t I attack them, too? I was, it seems, guilty of pure “Islamophobia”.

I’ll be honest, I am Islamophobic. I am also Judophobic, Christophobic, Hinduophobic – in fact, religiophobic. But I am not anti-Muslim – nor am I anti-Semitic or anti-Christian. It’s just their barmy and dangerous belief systems I can’t stomach.

In my time I have been critical of all religions, major and minor. As far as “faith” goes, I accord contempt on an entirely equal opportunities basis. But this time the debate happened to be about Islam.

Islam is different from most other religions, in that it does not recognise that the religious world is best kept separate from the political and civic world. In Islamic countries, religion and the state are the same thing. Many Muslims consider their religion to be the most important thing in their life and an immutable part of their identity. Ultimately, they believe that there are no laws but God’s laws and that all people and

institutions must submit to Allah.

But in the west, we do not believe this. We live in what is, to all intents and purposes, a secular society, and most of the population have little or no interest in religion. They are, in the main, happy to jog along with their gay friends, with the unmarried couple next door and the teenage mother down the road. They don’t feel the need to moralise or campaign against contraception or abortion or voluntary euthanasia, and attitudes to soft drugs are definitely loosening up.

**Terry Sanderson warns that stifling debate on immigration and race could lead to serious problems**

Personally, I think we are a better society for this. The tight-arsed, curtain-twitching, self-righteous attitudes that ruled the 1940s and ‘50s were horrible. The awful censure and social castigation that awaited anyone who didn’t conform is hardly imaginable today. The tiresome censorship and snobbery, class-consciousness and privilege were grotesque.

Only dedicated *Daily Mail* readers would want to go back to that. We dumped all that nastiness and social control through the democratic process. We voted for people who were going to take our society forward.

But Islam isn’t like that. There is no democratic Islamic state anywhere in the world. Islamic states are ruled by clerics with minds warped by an excess of religion, minds that can justify stoning women to death for what we in the West would consider minor infractions, or cutting off the hands of petty thieves.

That is why people get nervous when they see their own hard-won freedoms being challenged on their own doorsteps. Militant Islamists have established themselves in this country and in other European countries and they make threatening noises at other people with apparent impunity.

And before anyone writes to call me a racist, I know that there are tens of thousands of good, kind Muslims in this country: people who wouldn’t hurt a fly and who are as appalled as I am about what the fanatics do in the name of their religion. I bear no ill-will towards those people and wish them every success in their lives here, and anywhere else.

But that doesn’t solve the problem of the militants who are also here, and who, we have seen, will stop at nothing – literally nothing –

to achieve their ends. And until the Government can face this problem fair and square without being immediately condemned as racists or Islamophobes, people will have to look elsewhere for the debate.

Enter the BNP, Jean-Marie Le Pen, Jorg Haider and others trailing in their evil wake. Most of us can see through the transparent rotteness of these people, but now there is another name to the list: Pim Fortuyn, the Dutch politician assassinated last month.

He didn’t fit into the Nazi mould. In fact, he despised Le Pen and wasn’t promoting discrimination against the immigrants already settled in the Netherlands. He simply asked for the borders to be closed until this present generation has been integrated into Dutch society.

Many people see that as nothing less than racism – picking on Muslims for special exclusion. But Fortuyn wasn’t only advocating the exclusion of further Muslim immigration. He wanted to close the doors to *everyone* until Holland has made its peace with its existing minorities. This is not of itself a bad idea, although there may be better solutions that no one has suggested yet. But there is definitely a culture clash coming, and as Islamic influence increases in Europe, the war for supremacy could turn nasty.

Although we in the West have almost entirely rejected and sidelined Christian influence (though I accept there is a never-ending push to reinstate it), we may now see a gradual increase in Islamic thinking in our politics and institutions.

Personally, I don’t want to live in a society where Islam has even a *small* role in policy-making, any more than I want to live in one that is ruled by Christianity. But how can I say this without being accused of racism?

Pim Fortuyn had a go at addressing these issues, and the Dutch people responded. Unfortunately, as our own politicians run scared of speaking out (see what happened to Peter Hain when he tried to open up the debate recently by saying many Muslims simply won’t integrate), the appeal of parties like the BNP and the National Front will increase.

We need a moderate, thoughtful and informed debate on the place of religion in our society. That debate will not be helped if the only people talking are the Jean Marie Le Pens and Jorg Haider of this world.

This is an intensely complex matter, and I know there are a thousand clarifications and riders that have to be attached to almost anything that is said. Let’s try to be a little more tolerant of views which we might not totally agree with but which are made in the spirit of progress and creativity.

Debate is surely about learning from each other, not about winning.

## P B Medawar

THE eminent heart surgeon Sir Magdi Yacoub, who had to cease NHS operations a year ago on reaching 65 years of age, paid tribute to Sir P B Medawar, whom he called "the father of organ transplantation" in *Saga Magazine* (May). After recounting details of Sir Peter's life and work, Yacoub told us that Peter was a humanist and a Christian, who talked about creativity, defining it as "producing ostensibly out of nothing something of beauty, order or significance". And Yacoub added "I think that's a fantastic definition of creativity".

I cannot, of course, argue about what Medawar may have "talked about", but I can cite what he wrote on the subject and there is nothing "fantastic" about it. "That 'creativity' is beyond analysis is a romantic illusion we must outgrow", he said in *Pluto's Republic*. "It cannot be learned perhaps, but it can certainly be encouraged and abetted. We can put ourselves in the way of having ideas, by reading and discussion and by acquiring the habit of reflection, guided by the familiar principle that we are likely to find answers to questions not yet formulated in the mind" (pp 109/110). Yacoub was certainly right when he called P B Medawar a humanist, but surely wrong when he called him a Christian, and certainly wrong if he thought creativity "ostensibly out of nothing" covered divine creation, as can be seen from the treatment of the Design argument in *Aristotle to Zoos*, written by Peter Medawar and his wife, Jean.

It is true that, as President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Peter Medawar read the lesson at the annual religious service in 1969: "an unfamiliar activity", as he called it; and it was while doing so that he suffered a stroke. But it is clear from his autobiographical account (*Memoir of a Thinking Radish*) that neither he nor Jean took the service seriously. He even mentioned that his friend Karl Popper teased him, saying "I understand that when your illness struck you, Peter, you were engaged in some religious activity".

Perhaps the most convincing evidence of Medawar's non-Christian views, though, can be found in his withering review of *The Phenomenon of Man*, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's attempt to reconcile Christianity and evolution. You will find it in *Pluto's Republic*.

## Save me from my friends!

POOR Thomas Paine suffers at the hands of his friends, let alone his enemies. The latest offender is Patrick McGrath who, while researching his novel on the American Revolution, *Martha Peake*, was inspired by the republican hero. He loves Paine, he wrote

(*Guardian*, April 6): "He may have been smelly and not always sober, but by the power of his fiery prose he kept the revolution alive and with it the fledgling republic. I have done what I can for him, even giving him a small cameo late in the novel, where he terrifies a child just by looking at it. I would propose him as the patron saint of writers everywhere, had he not been a godless atheist".

However well intentioned, Patrick McGrath hasn't done much for the man he loves. He has followed Theodore Roosevelt, who maligned Paine as "that filthy, little atheist", three lies in three words. As for the cameo: words fail me.

## Desecration?

GREECE is apparently the only European country that denies relatives a choice of funeral rites. At present a burial with an Orthodox priest in attendance is the only legal means of interring the deceased. No crematorium exists to service those of different beliefs (*Independent*, April 15). And the Church is fighting an attempt by a cross-party alliance of MPs to legalise cremation. It is defending burial alone as "the ancient custom of civilised peoples", and protecting the country from "the encroachment of Western secularism" and the "desecration" posed by cremation.

## Billy liar

TAPES of conversations that took place in 1972 between the then President Nixon and the Rev Billy Graham, recently made public in the USA, show the two men bewailing what they saw as Jewish control of the media. "The stranglehold has got to be broken or this country's going down the drain", said the evangelist, and the president agreed. Graham also accused the Jews of "putting out this pornographic stuff" (*Guardian*, April 15).

When Nixon's aide H R Haldeman previously alluded to the two men's anti-Jewish views, Billy Graham denied the allegations. The new tapes prove Haldeman was right.

## A lonely atheist

THE *Guardian* also cited an article in the *New York Times* magazine last year by Natalie Angier, who said how lonely it was to admit to being an

atheist in the US, and who researched the possibility of having an atheist president. While 92 per cent of the population would be happy to vote for a woman (up from 76 per cent in 1978), and 95 per cent would elect a black leader (up from 73 per cent), only 49 per cent could countenance a non-believer (up from 40 per cent). Even these figures seem far too high for the most piously Christian country in the world.

## Was this the first?

WHILE reading the late Roy Porter's *Enlightenment* (Penguin, £8.99) I began wondering if Ambrose Philips' *Free-Thinker* (1718-21) was the first English periodical of that name. I am inclined to think it was. In *A Short History of Freethought* (1915) J M Robertson rightly gives Anthony Collins credit for giving the word a "universal notoriety" with his *Discourse on Freethinking, occasioned by the Rise and Growth of a Sect called Freethinkers*, before mentioning Philips' "weekly journal on the lines of the *Spectator*".

Porter tells us it was a bi-weekly with Horace's *sapere aude* (be sensible and be bold) on its masthead. However, the comparison with the *Spectator* seems apt because, as Robertson adds, Philips' paper had "no heterodox leaning".

## Just one He

IT must have been disturbing to the 35 per cent of Americans who believe the Bible to be the literal word of God to find that the latest version of the New Testament had played havoc with the sacred King James version text. Today's International version breaks with tradition in being "gender neutral", so that "men" become "people", "sons" become "children" and wherever "he" is used generically it is replaced by another neutral word.

You recall, for example, that, in the Authorised version, the risen Christ announces "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live". The new version changes this to "Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die". All is not lost, however: God himself remains masculine and is still capitalised as a pronoun.

## Warning to the PM

I WAS glad to see that my old journalistic acquaintance, Richard Harries, now Bishop of Oxford, led the Anglican bishops who joined with scientists Richard Dawkins, Sir Martin Rees and others in a letter to Tony Blair, warning of their "growing anxiety" over the spread of faith schools in Britain.

## Quotable quote

THE Church says the earth is flat but I know that it is round. For I have seen the shadow on the moon, and I have more faith in a shadow than in the Church.

— Ferdinand Magellan, 1640-1521

Ted Honderich likens his autobiography to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*, with not so much left out. The little that has been omitted for the sake of another party concerns "a momentary adventure of two in love", an exclusion which is surely permissible. Otherwise, as he said in a recent interview, "in so far as I'm capable of telling the truth about my life, it's in the book"; and it strikes the reader as an honest story, very engagingly told. Moreover, as the Grote Professor of Philosophy at the University of London and as the editor of the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (1995), Honderich has known all the prominent philosophers of his time, many of whom feature in these pages.

Canadian by birth, he was raised as a Mennonite, an Anabaptist sect, in the province of Ontario, and he attended the University of Toronto, during which time he worked as a reporter on the nightshift on the *Toronto Star* – and slept through the next morning's lectures. His journalism, he thinks, strengthened his inclination to "plain-seeing and plain-speaking" which was bound up with "a habit of scepticism and empiricism", in keeping with "the main line of philosophy in the English language".

He concedes that it may seem dull to "those of a more literary or spiritual bent, or those who want the lift of Parisian speculation, or to remain in awe of the German deep, or to wonder at fierce idiosyncrasy at Cambridge"; but it enables him to resist the temptations of Sartre, Heidegger or Wittgenstein. The last named's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* earns the description "that march of mystic propositions whose numbers were so inscribed in the minds of its devotees". He can understand the attraction of Iris Murdoch's *Platonism* to his latest partner, Ingrid Coggin Purkiss (to whom the book is dedicated), but he can resist that, as well: there is "too much metaphysical mist" about it. As for religion, including immortality, it is unthinkable.

It was while at Toronto that Honderich's thoughts turned to philosophy, and he actually got a place at Harvard, but, having been "wonderfully enspirited" by *Language, Truth and Logic*, he preferred to study under its author, A J Ayer, at University College, London. Alas, he didn't. On arrival he was informed that Professor Ayer had left the University of London for the University of Oxford. Nevertheless Honderich stayed, latterly under Bernard Williams, then married to Shirley, at that time still in the Fabian Society and the Labour Party.

A lectureship at the University of Sussex

Colin McCall reviews  
**PHILOSOPHER: A  
Kind of Life**  
by Ted Honderich  
Routledge  
paperback  
£9.99

followed, where the architect Sir Basil Spence proposed to erect a chapel in the middle of the campus: "superstition at its centre", as Honderich comments. However, that didn't distract him from his first lectures and tutorials, including "On Free Will or the lack of it". And for Honderich there is a lack of it. "One large item of my inner furniture is determinism", he says, which he expounded to his first-year undergraduates for their general introduction to philosophy. And it is worth considering what he means by the term. Very roughly, it is that "each of the actions and also the willing and choosing of it is an effect. It is the effect of a sequence of events or states or properties, each of these also being an effect. The sequence starts further back than any first thought or feeling about the action, let alone the choosing or willing of it. Indeed, the sequence goes back to events that are not thoughts or feelings at all. Each effect is what it sounds like, something that had to happen. There was no other possibility." And, I sug-

### Stephen Jay Gould (1941-2002)

STEPHEN Jay Gould, Alexander Agassiz Professor of Zoology at Harvard University, who died of cancer on May 20, aged 60, was an outstanding populariser of science and particularly of evolutionary biology, who has been compared by his friend Steven Rose of the Open University, with J B S Haldane (1892-1964). The comparison with Haldane is particularly appropriate as both men had Marxist backgrounds and were politically as well as scientifically engaged.

In 1974 Gould began a monthly column on "This View of Life" for the American magazine *Natural History*, and continued it for 26 years. He only stopped writing these 10,000-word essays in 2001 on reaching number 300. They were issued at intervals in book form under titles like *The Mismeasure of Man*, *The Panda's Thumb*, *The Flamingo's Smile* and *Bully for Brontosaurus*, a number of which I have had the pleasure of reviewing in these pages.

– Colin McCall

gest, that as biology advances we are learning more and more about the genetic and environmental factors that "determine" our behaviour.

But, to continue Honderich's case. Supposing there are events that are uncaused or random at the physicist's micro-level of reality: do these random events "translate upwards into events at the level at which determinism is concerned, the level of the brain events, choices, actions and so on?" It is good sense to doubt it, he says, "for an excellent reason". That reason is that we encounter no random events at all in the world we experience. "No planet leaves its orbit without explanation. No bicycle tyre goes flat for no reason. No spoon ever levitates at breakfast."

He contrasts his position with that of Professor Elizabeth Ainscombe of Cambridge, a Wittgensteinian, whose idea of an effect was not of an event made to happen or that had to happen, given the cause that went before; it was just of something that might or might not happen, since we took what went before as no more than enough for what came after. This implies, he says, "that when you hit the ordinary hen's egg on the marble floor with the ten-pound hammer it might or might not break".

Honderich was invited back to University College, London in 1964 by Bernard Williams, where he later became Grote Professor, a post previously occupied by the man who had first brought him to London, A J Ayer. The title of his book gives primacy to the professional side of his life and he regales us with tales of academic rivalries. But there is much more here. Honderich is no armchair philosopher. In January 1967 the *Times* said that Britain's Labour government should withdraw its support for the American bombing of Vietnam. It was signed by 1,600 university teachers, 240 of them in the University of London; and Honderich had much to do with "getting the 240 in line". He was also at the demonstration at the American embassy in Grosvenor Square. Indeed, university teachers like Honderich made significant contributions to the continuing campaign which, as he remarks, "contributed more than voters to the eventual ending in defeat and disgrace of a piece of barbarous aggression on behalf of free enterprise". Tony Blair take note.

In lighter vein, Honderich, while still in Canada, aged 23, travelled for a while with Elvis Presley, witnessing a "tribute" of panties from shrieking girls and seeing the King's powder blue Cadillac turned more or less pink, "having been worshipped by kissing".

And then there are the loves and marriages, but I must leave you to read about those yourselves.

## More about memes

I FEAR that Mr McCalmont has misunderstood the concept of memes. A meme is defined as "that which is imitated", or more generally that which is copied from person to person. Indeed, the word is derived from the Greek for that which is imitated. Unless Mr McCalmont wishes to deny that people copy words, songs, stories, religious practices, and scientific methods from each other then he should have no doubts about the existence of memes. If words exist then memes do. The interesting question is not whether memes exist, but whether viewing copied information as part of a new evolutionary process is a worthwhile scientific step. In my opinion it is.

Several of the predictions I made in my book *The Meme Machine*, have already been confirmed and time will surely tell as further empirical work is done.

As for publication, there is a refereed electronic journal *The Journal of Memetics*, devoted entirely to the subject, and to my knowledge articles on memes have been published in at least three print-based refereed journals.

There are probably many others I am unaware of. Perhaps it is because Mr McCalmont has only read the popular reports of memes that he has become confused about what they mean.

DR SUSAN BLACKMORE  
Bristol

## Evolution not a theory?

Reading Colin McCall's item entitled "Mis-education" in his "Down to Earth" column in the May issue, I was quite surprised to find that evolution is no longer a theory but a "fact". I'm no biologist, let alone anyone who has a good knowledge of the study of the various theories of evolution, but his claim seems more than a little astonishing to me.

What's even odder is that he says that he's "insisted" that evolution is a fact and not a theory. Is this the same form of insistence used by creationists when they insist that evolution is "only a theory"? Speaking to a friend who works in the field (and to other friends who are scientists), it seems that the greatest annoyance, for them, when engaging with creationists is that they don't seem to understand that this is exactly what evolution is, a theory. The "only" makes little sense and is only there for negative spin.

Mr McCall seems to me to have added to this confusion, to have furthered the "only a theory" argument by insisting that it isn't a theory at all (the implication seeming to be that if something is a theory it isn't worth much).

As a recent subscriber to this magazine I seem to have missed the article where he has shown that evolution is no longer a theory. Might he be so kind as to write an article giving all the details?

DAVE PEARSON  
Sleaford

## Freewill

IT SEEMS to me unnecessary to postulate a god or freewill.

Freewill goes beyond the economy of hypothesis based on empirical data, and is founded on common sense and experience.

Science continually shows us the fallacies of common sense, and "experience" is often used in support of religious mythology.

The uncertainty principle applies to elementary particles, not to the macroscopic world, and if it is random, how does that mean we have freewill? It is random, chance, unpredictable; that doesn't give us the necessary control for freewill.

In chaos theory a small divergence (essentially, but not exactly, the same circumstances) causes a vastly different outcome, but this is only logic once chaos (as a science) is accepted. I would not be arrogant enough to suppose I could originate such a causal chain.

That does not demean me. I can accept I am a "thing" like any other "thing", and I will not behave differently knowing this than I would behave immorally just because I did not think I would be punished.

The fact is I am going to die and be no more than the fact is I am an automaton than I don't feel any different!

STAN VIOLETT  
Watford

## Science and religion

IAN Quayle's reply to John Radford's article on the compatibility of science and religion encourages me to add a few comments in the latter's favour. I would agree that on a significantly broad front, science and religion are in conflict; why else are we having these current problems with young-earth creationists, at Emmanuel college, Gateshead and elsewhere?

I was on a plane to South Africa a few years ago, and accompanying me as fellow passengers were a group of Muslims, one of whom was reading a book entitled *Perished Nations*, containing photographs which I recognised as being some of those unfortunates of Pompeii who were caught in the eruption of Vesuvius, thereby leaving to posterity their petrified remains. The man reading the book was proclaiming enthusiastically to his companions

that God had struck them down because they had been sodomising each other on the ground! As I believe Voltaire said, they who believe absurdities will commit atrocities.

Science and religion should perhaps deal with separate questions, however, ever since Old Testament times, believers have been encroaching on what is now at any rate, scientific territory, viz an explanation of the origin of the universe, and of life.

This is the major subject which continues to be disputed by both sides, hence the incompatibility. True, religion can restrict itself to the why question, though I suspect this will also come under the aegis of science in due course.

With regard to what is truth, and whether or not it and reality actually exist; science has to accept that it does, otherwise even starting to do science would be impossible, and we would all be floundering around in a morass of post-Modernistic relativism, in which any and all opinions can be accepted as equally valid, with no regard for empirical validity, just so long as it makes you feel good. I agree that truth is conditional on further data, and can probably never be final. One must keep an open mind.

Is there not a logical fallacy in trying to invoke Heisenberg's Uncertainty principle, or quantum mechanics or chaos theory to support the non-existence of truth and reality? Do these support the notion that it is absolutely true that there is no absolute truth?

Perhaps it is absolutely true that there is no ultimate cause, and quantum randomness rules.

Regarding Original Sin; one can certainly use it as a useful and instructive allegory, but, the wording of the book of Genesis, assuming accurate translation, appears to demonstrate that it was considered fact, not allegory, as were the creation accounts.

The apparent fine tuning of the universe may just be an illusion, explainable by the weak Anthropic principle, but if valid, and if one accepts evolution as a fact, including pre-biotic evolution, then why not ultra-Darwinism, as an explanation of the fine constants themselves; evolution all the way down?

Finally, I think Ian Quayle is probably on to something when he asserts religion is incompatible with civilisation.

DR REGINALD LE SUEUR  
Jersey

I AGREE with Paul Stevenson that science (or logic or common sense or whatever) will probably never disprove the existence of

God. But the “intelligent religious” (an oxymoron?) have had to retreat so far that belief in God has become irrelevant: did someone light the blue touch paper (and then stand well back) or not? – who cares? There is no need to use God as an explanation for the universe and belief in God is not useful to human progress. Such belief will therefore wither and die – and it’s our job to stick the knife in as often as possible, to limit the harm that theistic belief is doing and will continue to do, even in its death-throes.

IAN ANDREWS  
Oldham

## Science and the Koran

I ENJOYED Stuart Campbell’s critique of the Koran as a scientific document.

I would also like us more often to confront the moral imperatives in the Koran. For I often hear it said that the Koran exhorts us to be gentle, peace-loving, merciful; to respect our elders, etc; that it is not anti-women, and so on. Well, I’ve been doing some homework.

The Koran certainly does tell us to be gentle, merciful etc, but this only highlights the contradictions. For it also instructs us to crucify or “cut off the hands and feet from opposite sides” of anyone who wages war against God” (eg atheists, Salmon Rushdie) (*surah* 5.33); it prescribes 100 lashes for fornication outside of marriage for both men and women (“let pity not move you in their case”) (*surah* 24.2-4); any woman found guilty of lewdness must die (*surah* 4.15); the testimony of a woman is worth precisely half that of a man; slavery is allowed – owners of slaves having the right to sleep with female slaves, even if the latter are married (*surah* 4.3, 4.28) and so on.

In fact, almost as much cruelty, contradiction and absurdity, proportionately, as can be found in the Bible.

DAVE SIMMONDS  
Epping

STUART Campbell’s interesting examination of Koranic cosmology omits some detail concerning the orbit of the sun and the moon. It is clear from the full *ayah* he references [36.40] that its context is the sequence of night and day: “It is not permitted to the sun to catch up the moon, nor can the night outstrip the day. Each swims along in its own orbit.” The orbits of the moon and sun around the earth are separate and paced, therefore there is no danger of their colliding, or of the sequence of night and day being upset. The idea that they are both in orbit is assumed: the point is made that they are sep-

arated. This of course is how it appeared to a 7th-century human; and a Being who created the universe in six (or eight) days would know better, and would not mislead its creatures.

As good an indication as any of the Koran’s human authorship, therefore, this reference to the “orbit” (*falak*) of the sun is irrefutable. It has therefore led to the exorbitant claim that the “orbit” in fact refers to the recently-discovered movement of the sun around the centre of the galaxy once every 250 million years or so.

Yet the *ayah* refers to the orbit of the sun, in relation to that of the moon, to explain the sequence of day and night – something clearly relevant to an orbit round the earth, and totally irrelevant to any orbit around the galactic centre. Notwithstanding that the earth in any case travels with the sun (courtesy of gravity) in this irrelevant cosmic journey, people are not known to wake up in the morning and observe that the sun has travelled 0.00000000000001% of its way around the galaxy.

Still, with the recent furore over Christian creationism in mind, it may be of some consolation that in the case of Islamic theology it is always the revealed text that is distorted to match science, rather than vice-versa.

PETER MCKENNA  
Liverpool

## Mysticism parading as humanism?

JOHN Bonython’s feature article in the May *Freethinker* smacks of religious fanaticism, even though the article is sprinkled with sensible secular humanism.

It seems to me that the author has got an idea in his bonnet about the universe and consciousness and has explored it to its fundamentalist end, inventing a language to go with it. The result is a largely unintelligible porridge of repeated phrases that no doubt say a lot to the author but have little relationship with any philosophic or scientific ideas.

His use of the word “evolution” is particularly suspect when it is used in the sense of simple change, which is all that he is saying in “No one is in a position to deny the existence of whatever it is that makes the universe evolve”.

His repeated use of “human consciousness is the universe itself in conscious mode” is typical of the kind of language one finds in some religious pamphlets and unworthy of a major feature article.

DAVID BROUGHTON  
Isle of Wight

HAS John Bonython been sipping the nectar of American Transcendentalism? His paean to evolution smacks of the indefatigable yeasaying of Ralph Waldo Emerson. In his essay *Fate* the

Concord sage transmutes nature’s blood baths into a miraculous alchemy of purification: “The whole circle of animal life – tooth against tooth, devouring war, war for food, a yelp of pain and a grunt of triumph, until at last the whole menagerie, the whole chemical mass is melted and refined for higher use—pleases at a sufficient perspective.”

To a sadist, perhaps. Evolution is not only red in tooth and claw, it is slipshod, inefficient, fumbling. A century ago in *The Nature of Man*, Russian biologist Elie Metchnikoff traced most human suffering, both physical and psychological, to the ineptness of evolution. Over one thousand human illnesses, we now know, are directly linked to genetic defects.

In *Apes, Men, and Morons*, published in 1937, Ernest Hooton eloquently describes the catch-as-catch-can puttering that engendered the paragon of animals.

“In the course of evolution, man’s ancestors have functioned as arboreal pronogrades and brachiators – not to mention more remote stages involving other changes of habitat, posture and mode of locomotion. This protean history has necessitated repeated patching and reconstruction of a more or less pliable and long-suffering organism. The bony framework has been warped and cramped and stretched in one part or another, in accordance with variations in the stresses and strains put upon it by its different postures and by changes in body bulk. Joints devised for mobility have been re-adapted for stability. Muscles have had violence done to their origins and insertions, and have suffered enormous inequalities in the distribution of labor. Viscera have been pushed about hither and yon, hitched up, let down, reversed and inverted. In making a new machine out of an old one, plenty of obsolete spare parts have been left to rattle around inside. There are no few evidences of ungifted, amateur thinking.”

Hence, the thousand aches and pains flesh is heir to.

Mr. Bonython views human consciousness as the *creme de la creme* of the evolutionary process. Between self-congratulatory cheers, we might recall that human consciousness now threatens the entire planet.

GARY SLOAN  
Louisiana (USA)

THE word “humanism” is used in at least two distinct ways. Sometimes it is a euphemism for atheism. At other times it refers to the humanist religion, which worships humanity as a god. Confusion of these two meanings may let a religious essay appear in an anti-religious publication. I wonder if this has happened in the case of John Bonython’s “Long live conscious evolution”?



In olden days, before it was improper to use masculine words for both sexes, the word "man" was sometimes used to mean people in general. But in sentences like "man is the universe in conscious mode", "man" seems to mean something posher than mere people, perhaps the Platonic ideal Man, of whom the men we actually encounter are mere approximations or shadows.

The sentence, "...through processes of evolution. ...human consciousness comes into existence and does so, necessarily, as the universe itself in conscious mode. ...", seems to suggest that human ability to think arose through evolutionary processes which were themselves purposeful, rather than through Darwinian natural selection.

The whole tone of the piece is mystical.

DONALD ROOM  
London

## Catholic sex abuse

IN SPITE of speaking out forcefully (at last) on child abuse by priests, the Catholic Church has still managed to show its hypocrisy in dealing with this terrible affair, and demonstrated its intent once more to keep the Church above the law.

Although damning the abusers in the priesthood, the Pope has let off the hook the numerous bishops who knowingly moved paedophile priests around between dioceses where they were free to offend again.

In his speech to the American bishops called to the Vatican for the abuse "summit", the Pope suggested that bishops either had "generalized lack of knowledge of the nature of the problem" or were reassured by the advice of "clinical experts" into making the wrong decisions. This is the most disgraceful whitewashing of an issue – every bit as serious as the abuse offences, a point largely ignored by the mainstream press in the UK.

Over many years those same bishops were aware enough of the issues to demand gagging orders on the victims in return for compensation, as they strove to sweep the mess under the carpet. That they continue in their roles completely free of any punishment or criminal prosecution for aiding and abetting child abuse is a sad reflection of the contempt in which the Catholic Church continues to hold the abuse victims.

ALISTAIR MCBAY  
Maidenhead

## Vulgar and childish

I TRUST that I am not alone in writing to say how strongly I agree with M C Grant's recent complaint about the regrettable tendency of the *Freethinker* to, at least occasionally, publish

articles which embarrass one with their rather vulgar and even childish attacks on those who hold, often no doubt in all sincerity, their (admittedly irrational) views as to the existence of a "God". While such belief is fundamentally mistaken it should not be attacked in such ill-mannered ways, if only because to do so is definitely counter-productive. Let us not conduct ourselves in the manner of children who confront one another with reciprocal jeers and "smart, streetwise" remarks. Truth is certainly not to be found at the bottom of a barrel of muddy water!

Recognising that this alleged "God" represents the production of an often perplexed mind in search of reassurance and certainties, we should contrive to provide "Him" with a dignified funeral! After all, if we ourselves had been so unfortunate as to be indoctrinated in the same manner as the believers we too might profess their erroneous beliefs!

ALBERT ADLER  
London

MAY I add to M C Grant's letter in this month's issue. I have been a member of NSS for some six months and have been receiving *Freethinker* since September.

I look forward to it every month and I hope beforehand it will not be diminished by any of the kind of invective it often does contain when it lapses into terms of abuse. I regret to say that the editor himself seems especially prone to resort to this.

I, like him, seethe with anger and frustration at the idiocies and practices of all religionists and the stupidity of their various beliefs. Even as I write I can feel it boiling up inside me and tempting me into using vituperative terms of abuse myself.

May I plead with the editor to have a final read through his script and those of contributors, eliminating abusive adjectives and expressions, so that I for one could leave my copy on the Underground to promote in a small way the secular cause, instead of just filing it. I feel I can't do so if it contains unnecessarily abusive bits liable to alienate a casual reader and diminish the integrity of the *Freethinker* and the NSS into the bargain.

I'm reminded of what a former boss of mine said to me after reading

a draft letter of complaint I'd just written to a sub-contractor when I was an engineering manager. He said "John, aren't you supposed to be persuading him to see the error of his ways and to do what you want him to. If you send this it may well make you feel a lot better, but it will sure put his back up and he'll be rude to you in return! Sleep on it, control your anger, and tone it down before you send it."

For example in the March issue we have a

reference on P2 to "wailing bloody imams calling the foolish to prayer". "Wailing" says it all; "bloody" adds nothing.

(Actually "wailing muezzins" would have been more accurate!)

JOHN GOLDSACK  
New Barnet

## Fruits of Muslim Martyrdom

FURTHER to my February letter, in which I asked the source of the virginal houris promised after death to Islamic martyrs, I am now informed that they are not human virgins at all, but merely raisins!

According to the *New York Times* and *International Herald Tribune* of March 4, a scholar of ancient semitic languages, Christophe Luxenberg, has recently uncovered a Koranic mistranslation, in which the original Syro-Aramaic word for "white raisins" was mistaken for a similar word meaning "houris".

My informant comments that, however sweet, the asexual fruit said to await suicide bombers in paradise may prove a bit of a disappointment.

BARBARA SMOKER  
Bromley

## Demonic editor?

IN "Freethinking out Loud" (May 2002), Barry Duke tells us that he often rips down religious posters. As his portrait shows, he dresses himself wholly in black.

Mr Duke over-reacts: even though he is an atheist, there is no need for him to imitate the action, and the garb, of Old Nick.

H G EASTON  
Connel

Editor's note: I always thought Old Nick dressed in red. Or am I thinking of Saint Nick?

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

# atheist & humanist contacts & events

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

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

**Brighton & Hove Humanist Group:** Information on 01273 733215. Vallance Community Centre, Sackville Road and Clarendon Road, Hove. Sunday, June 9, 4.30pm. Marguerite Laporte: *Images from Space*.

**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. Website: [www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com](http://www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com).

**Chiltern Humanists:** Information - 01494 771851.

**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, June 14, 7.30pm. Graham Robb: *Move Over, Sylvester Stallone*. July 12, 7.30pm. Blasphemy! 25th anniversary of the *Gay News* trial.

**Greater Manchester Humanist Group:** Information: Niall Power. Tel 0161 2865349. Monthly meetings (second Wednesday) Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester. Wednesday, June 12, 7.30pm. John Hughes: *The Shelleys, Godwin, Woolstonecraft and Byron in an Age of Revolution*.

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

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

**Havering & District Humanist Society:** Information: J Condon 01708 473597 or Rita Manton 01708 762575. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgores Crescent, Gidea Park. Thursday, July 4, 8pm. Charles Rutter: *Independence Day*.

**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. Website: [www.humanism-scotland.org.uk](http://www.humanism-scotland.org.uk).

**Glasgow Group:** Information: Alan Henness. Tel. 07010 704776. Email: [alan@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:alan@humanism-scotland.org.uk).

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

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

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

**Lewisham Humanist Group:** Information: Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. Website: [www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com](http://www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com). Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, June 27, 8pm. Annual General Meeting.

**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, June 20, 7.15pm. Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director, National *Secular Society: Secularism and Rationalism, now and in the Future*.

**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.

**Sheffield Humanist Society:** Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street, Sheffield. Wednesday, July 3, 8pm. Public Meeting.

**Sheffield Humanist Society:** Literature and information stall, 11am till 5pm. Saturday, July 6, South Yorkshire Festival, Wortley Hall, Wortley. Saturday, July 13, Sharrow Festival, Mount Pleasant Park, Sitwell Road and London Road, Sheffield.

**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. Website: [www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com](http://www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com). Wednesday, June 12, 8pm. Discussion: *Where do moral values come from?*

**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: Maggie Fraser. Tel: 01892 523858. E-mail: [melgin@waitrose.com](mailto:melgin@waitrose.com).

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

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