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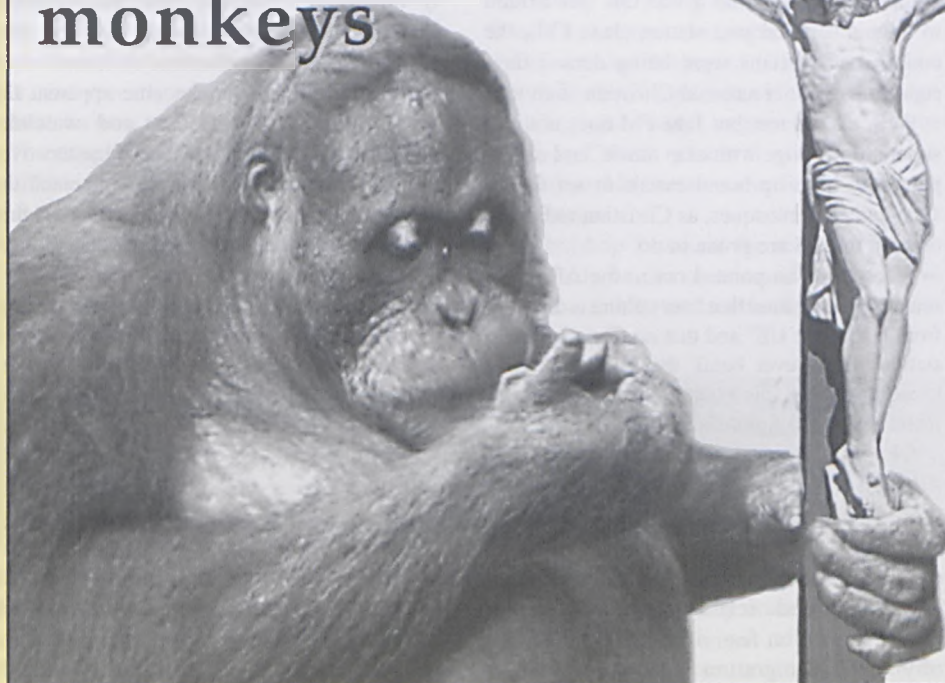
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Freethinker

Secular Humanist monthly

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

Evolution
made humans
out of
monkeys



But it
takes
religion
to make
monkeys
out of
humans!

*Go for the jugular when dealing with creationists!
That's the advice NORMAN PRIDMORE offers in this
month's centrepiece feature*

Also in this issue:

Church of Scotland 'guilty of bigotry' – p3

Christians and Muslims gang up on women and gays – p7

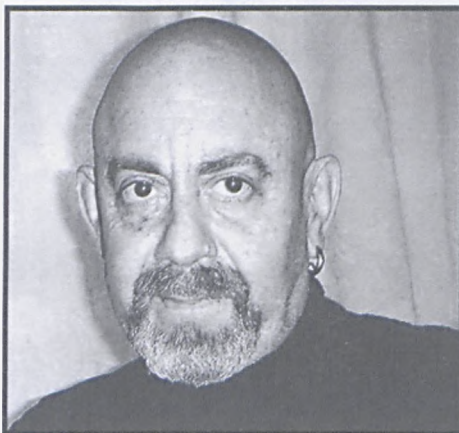
freethinking out loud: Barry Duke

ARMED with that handbook of hate otherwise known as the Bible, Christian zealots have, over the centuries, used fear and violent language as their principle method of recruitment. Thus their ranks have always been swelled by people attracted by the overt sado-masochism of this noxious religion, and have enthusiastically used it to rubbish anyone or anything considered "unChristian."

From the Crusades through to witch-burning to the destruction of Harry Potter books in the 21st century, Christianity's record has been abysmal – and it led Nietzsche once to describe it thus:

I call Christianity the one great curse, the one enormous and innermost perversion, the one great instinct of revenge for which no means are too venomous, too underground, too underground and too petty – I call it the one immortal blemish on mankind.

Well, in Britain, this "immortal blemish on mankind", which has always demonstrated utter contempt for the human rights of people



it disapproves of, is now bleating that its human rights are being trampled upon because the Government (surprisingly, given its religious credentials) won't allow a Christian radio station a national broadcasting licence.

Speaking on Radio 4's *The Message* on June 14, a spokesperson for the Evangelical Alliance complained that, while it was OK for Britain to have a national jazz station (Jazz FM), the country's Christians were being denied their right to listen to a national Christian station.

Well, excuse me, but Jazz FM does not mix superstitious bilge with crap music, and exhort people to bash up homosexuals or set fire to synagogues or mosques, as Christian radio stations in the US are prone to do.

When this was pointed out to the AE representative, he insisted that "our culture is different from that in the US" and that no Christian radio station would ever break the rules governing broadcasting in this country. It "would never incite racial or religious intolerance".

Oh, but they already have, Mr Evangelical Alliance person!

In December 1999, the ITC imposed a financial penalty of £20,000 on the Christian Channel for several breaches of the Advertising Code relating to political impartiality, playing on fear, offence to human dignity and denigration of other beliefs. Subsequently, Premier Christian Radio in London fell foul of the Radio Authority. The RA upheld seven complaints against the station, which was found guilty of breaching several broadcasting rules, including those designed to prevent criticism of other religions.

The National Secular Society has been in the forefront of those lobbying the Government not to grant a national licence to a Christian broadcaster. In its response last year to the Government's White Paper on Broadcasting, the NSS said: "As the White Paper recognises, religious broadcasting is contentious and, unless closely controlled, can rapidly deteriorate into unpleasantness and exploitation such as is already the case with some US television and radio stations. This exploitation tends to be of the audience's emotions, and all too

frequently their material assets too ...

"It is essential that those contemplating any relaxation of the restrictions in this area currently in place in Britain are cognisant of the extremist nature of many religious programmes in the US and we do hope that they familiarise themselves with them ...

"Because of the sensible restrictions here, the UK has been largely spared the horrors of televangelism, which has such a long and dishonourable history in the United States. We should be careful not to open the way for it now."

The NSS added that it was likely that "UK religious stations would follow the American pattern of religious broadcasting, which involves the constant denunciation of homosexuals, adulterers, abortionists and non-believers. It is common for US evangelical Christian broadcasters to use inflammatory language to incite disapproval of those they consider morally inferior, in order to increase donations. Lesbians and gay men do not have the same protection against incitement to hatred as do racial minorities. It has become apparent that broadcasting self-regulation and watchdog organisations cannot prevent broadcasters overstepping the mark, and we are concerned that religious programme-makers will use their platforms to attack homosexuals, and those of other faiths and none".

The NSS also pointed out that there are large numbers of preachers in the UK who claim to possess various kinds of supernatural powers. "The NSS successfully complained to the Advertising Standards Authority about one such Pentecostal preacher who claimed to be able to perform miracles, including curing AIDS and raising the dead. Even though our complaint was upheld, we fear that many such preachers continue to play on the fears and gullibility of their congregations. We would not like to see such people being given unrestricted and unchallenged airtime, because the temptation to use such exploitative techniques would be almost irresistible."

There's nothing I can add to that except to continue to urge those who regulate broadcasting to hold firm against outfits like the Evangelical Alliance. Given that their entire existence is based on the lie that our lives are governed by a omnipotent, interventionist God, how can we possibly believe them when they say that they will refrain from attacking others, *when attacking others is their raison d'etre*?

THIS month's cover design is based on a trenchant leaflet produced by Leicester Secular Society for a creationist meeting at Leicester University. I would like to thank Mr Lyn Hurst, LSS President, for providing me with the inspiration.

The Free thinker

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Tutu calls for a more liberal Church of England

ANGLICAN leader Archbishop Desmond Tutu has called for a more liberal leadership of the Church of England – and says that the link between church and state in Britain should be broken. The former Primate of Southern Africa told BBC's *Newsnight* last month that the New Archbishop of Canterbury should be Dr Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Wales, who was "head and shoulders above" the other candidates.

In calling for the disestablishment of the Church of England, Tutu said it should "cut its apron strings" with the state so it could choose its own leaders democratically.

Dr Williams is widely regarded as one of the most liberal of the leading contenders for the post, and recently acknowledged that he had ordained a man he knew had a gay partner.

Throwing his weight behind Dr Williams, Archbishop Tutu said "For my money the Archbishop of Wales really towers head and shoulders above any of the other people.

"We've got many very good candidates, but intellectually he has always been there or thereabouts the leading theologian in our

Communion." He added that Dr Williams had "an incredible way with language" and would be a "very distinguished incumbent" of Lambeth Palace.

Some conservative African and Asian clerics are likely to oppose the selection of Dr Williams, and have called for Dr George Carey's successor to hold "traditional beliefs" on doctrine and morality.

Archbishop Tutu maintained that if the Crown Appointments Commission failed to select Dr Williams "they will have lost - or we and our Communion will have lost - a tremendous opportunity for telling the world that we are a Church that wants to keep abreast of things".

The next Archbishop of Canterbury will be chosen by the 12 members of the Commission, including one wider representative of the Anglican Church who will not have a vote. The Prime Minister has the final say on the appointment.

Archbishop Tutu said the selection process would only be democratic and representative when the link between church and state was broken.

Church of Scotland admits it has been guilty of bigotry

FOR the first time in its history, the Church of Scotland has admitted it had been guilty of religious bigotry, particularly against Irish Catholics.

According to an Ananova news report last month, delegates at the church's annual general assembly voted overwhelmingly in favour of a motion stating that the church "regrets any part played in sectarianism by our church in the past and affirm our support for future moves towards a more tolerant society."

The motion acknowledged it was time to "consign bigotry to the history books, where it belongs", said the Rev Alan McDonald, convener of a church committee that assesses church-state relations.

"We have to face up to the ugly side of Scotland today. The hard end of sectarianism is that people can die on our streets as a result," he told 800 general assembly delegates at the Mound in Edinburgh.

Scotland's national church is Presbyterian,

and the monarch and the government have no role in its affairs, as they do in the Church of England. Scottish religious reformers, led by the Calvinist John Knox, broke away from the Roman Catholic Church in 1560, abolished the authority of the Pope and forbade the celebration of Mass.

Even in 1999, an opinion poll reported in the *Guardian* that 34 per cent of respondents felt there was a deep-rooted anti-Catholic attitude throughout Scottish society.

Rev McDonald read an excerpt from a church report presented to the general assembly in 1923, entitled "The menace of the Irish Race to our Scottish Nationality."

Roman Catholic Archbishop of Scotland, the Most Rev Keith O'Brien, said it was vital to "erase every trace of sectarianism from Scotland. It is the scourge which blights the horizon of our young people".

Outside the meeting, several dozen protesters blamed Roman Catholics for sectarianism.

Cash offered for silence over abuse

AN Australian Roman Catholic archbishop has admitted on television that he offered the family of two child sex-abuse victims cash if they kept silent about a priest's assaults. The admission was made by Sydney's George Pell, the Church's most senior clergyman in Australia, on Nine Network's *60 Minutes* programme.

He made the offer to the family of two girls who were sexually abused by their local priest over six years since 1987, when the youngest was five years old. The girls' parents told the programme that, following a meeting with Pell, then an auxiliary bishop, they were sent a letter from lawyers on Pell's behalf saying they could either take A\$50,000 (£20,000) in compensation for the abuse of their eldest daughter, or take the matter to court where the Church's case would be "strenuously defended".

Pell initially denied on the programme offering the parents any money. But after being presented with the letter, he admitted he had. "I offered them 50 grand in compensation according to the publicly acknowledged procedure," Pell said. "They chose not to accept that."

The Australian programme also revealed that Pell, when he was an auxiliary bishop in the Ballarat diocese in Victoria state, also tried to buy the silence of David Ridsdale, who was sexually abused by his priest-uncle, Father Gerald Ridsdale. Fr Ridsdale pleaded guilty in 1994 to 46 sexual assault charges, and was sentenced to a minimum of 15 years in prison.

Muslim jailed for assault on sister

A DEVOUT Muslim who whipped his teenage sister after she stayed out too late has been jailed by a London court for six months. The attack followed months of family unhappiness over the 15-year-old's behaviour and began within seconds of her arriving home last September.

A blow to the head, which punctured her eardrum, was followed by a flurry of slaps. Abdul Khan, 27, of Bow, East London, then went upstairs to get a buckled leather belt, which he folded double before resuming the assault. The beating only ended when her father came in and told his son to stop.



Religious slaughter ... and more on RC child

Needless cruelty to animals on religious grounds was the subject of a formal submission recently made by the National Secular Society to the Department of Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

The submission registered the Society's objection to the religious privilege whereby animal welfare regulations generally do not apply to religious slaughter carried out as part of Jewish and Islamic rites.

Some readers will oppose religious slaughter in principle while others consider any slaughter at all to be abhorrent. We believe, however, that the majority of our members would simply want us to insist on the withdrawal of exemptions that result in extra suffering.

Our submission also aimed to convince the officials that our proposals were realistic and practical, and we sought to offer the officials some arguments that might persuade our opponents to adopt the position we advocated.

Our main recommendation is that, even in

ritual slaughter, animals should be stunned beforehand. In broad terms, the religious objection to stunning is that it contravenes the requirement which demand that, immediately before slaughter, the animal must be healthy, ie neither injured nor already dead.

We suggested to officials that they should emphasise that modern (generally now electric, rather than percussive) stunning methods neither kill nor injure the animals: if left for half-an-hour or so after stunning, the animals would normally recover fully.

Another part of our submission that we hope is helpful in persuading the religious to re-consider their position was our demonstrating that other countries manage without this cruelty. In the course of the research we conducted into practices elsewhere, we discovered, for example, that Sweden does not permit religious slaughter. Nor does Switzerland, and – encouragingly – a recent referendum to reverse this position was defeated as a result of a powerful campaign by animal activists. Australia insists on pre-stunning for all animals, and it seems that the religious “authorities” there accept this.

Even Saudi Arabia is reported to accept that pre-stunning is acceptable for halal slaughter.

Our research appeared to give the impression that intransigence over accepting pre-stunning in religious slaughter is more firmly entrenched among Jews than Muslims. It may be, however, that this hard line response was articulated more clearly because of the hierarchical structure of Judaism.

We also included as supplementary evidence to our submission two excellent reports from Compassion in World Farming called *The Welfare of Animals which are Subject to Religious Slaughter* and *Animal Welfare Problems in UK Slaughter-Houses*.

Our research led us to some unexpected places, particularly Internet sites of the far Right. They are citing the inhumanity of such slaughter and using it as a stick with which to beat Jews and Muslims in a racist manner. One site even went so far as to say how much Hitler abhorred such activities.

I speculated in my article in last month's *Freethinker* that the Pope was resisting accepting resignations by US bishops for fear of a domino effect. Since then, three have resigned. One has admitted abuse, another has multiple accusers of abuse, and the third – an archbishop – had paid out over £300,000 to settle a claim against himself.

The Times devoted a whole page to the US abuse scandal on June 10, and it came to many of the same conclusions as my article. The article disclosed some even more lurid statistics, mainly concerning the activities of lawyers. The newspaper found a firm of lawyers in Minnesota which has opened a department devoted to this issue – and it is staffed by no fewer than 14 lawyers. The firm has already represented more than 400 people, and business is looking up: they are now taking “100-200 calls a day”. Even this is not the largest firm, however. The paper also names a Boston firm with a staff of 30 RC-abuse specialists. One of their partners is confident that this will be “a multibillion-dollar problem before it ends”.

But for the lawyers – who must be rubbing their hands so energetically they risk friction burns – it will be a bonanza. *The Washington Post* estimates that the plaintiffs' lawyers alone will typically take a third of the damage award. It also quotes a dean of a legal faculty saying “You are seeing lawyers advertising for clients now”.

As each day passes, the multibillion-dollar tag becomes more likely. Quite apart from the dreadful problems in Boston which I described last month, just one Archdiocese – that of Santa Fe – is in the course of paying out compensation to 187 victims. And there are many

Ritual slaughter: summary of NSS recommendations

- We urged the UK government to ban as soon as possible religious slaughter, unless the animal has been stunned in advance.
- A Commission of Enquiry to be established into the extent of needless animal cruelty inflicted in religious slaughter, drawing up a plan for the removal of pre-stunning exemptions for religious slaughter.
- Much greater supervision to be exercised by secular authorities over religious animal slaughter, with greatly increased powers to prevent abuse. Only those passing a strict slaughter competency examination (overseen by independent secular authorities) should be permitted to carry out religious slaughter, which should be prohibited unless carried out in licensed slaughter-houses.
- Regulations to be (if necessary, introduced and) enforced that slaughter can only be carried out: with the sharpest of knives; employing the most humane methods of restraint; with animals being prevented from seeing and – as much as possible – hearing others of their species being slaughtered. Those breaking these proposed regulations should be heavily fined, and if offending persistently, have their licence revoked.
- All animals killed by religious slaughter without prior stunning to be indelibly marked as such immediately after slaughter, and all meat sold from such animals to be labelled at the point of sale – including butchers, supermarkets, cafés or takeaway vendors such as kebab establishments – or clearly stated on the list of ingredients if it forms part of a prepared product such as beefburgers or ready made meals. (One reason for these stipulations is that far more meat is religiously slaughtered than is sold as kosher or halal meat.)
- A ban to be imposed on the export of live animals for religious slaughter to places where it is believed to be carried out in a barbaric way. (Widespread concern has been expressed about some religious slaughter in France, for example.)
- A ban to be imposed on the import of religiously slaughtered meat where it is believed to be carried out in a barbaric way.

The submission is available on the NSS's website www.secularism.org.uk and will be sent free to NSS members who send to the office an A5 or larger SAE bearing a 33p or 41p stamp marked *Religious Slaughter Submission*.

abuse in the US: Keith Porteous Wood

more: over 1,000 allegedly errant priests have been identified so far in the US, and the number is rising rapidly.

The funds available for settlements are even tighter than I had thought. The three largest US dioceses (New York, Boston and Chicago) are already reported to be running massive deficits, and it seems unlikely that insurance companies will be continuing to subsidise the payouts to victims at anything like the level they have until now.

A Pennsylvania judge has, according to the *Washington Post*, accused church lawyers of

employing "scorched-earth tactics". This ties in with the BBC's Sunday programme reporting a change of policy in some parts of the US – from the Church accepting and settling cases to its fighting them.

Perhaps the most astonishing development uncovered by the BBC was of the Church filing counter-negligence suits – for example charging parents with contributory negligence! This was seen as an attempt to dissuade others from filing suits. The specialist lawyers are convinced, however, that these hard-ball tactics were having quite the opposite effect.

Finally, I am delighted to report that journalist and TV presenter Joan Bakewell will not be prosecuted for reading part of James Kirkup's "blasphemous" poem in one of her *Taboo* programmes on BBC TV.

The Crown Prosecution Service has dropped a case brought by the evangelical Christian Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens, who acted on a complaint from Mediawatch-uk, the new name for the late Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers and Listeners Association.

IN THE latest (June) National Secular Society bulletin, NSS President Denis Cobell wrote of the need for grassroots noise in support of the secularist agenda. He mentioned the value of meetings, and perhaps even bringing back the NSS presence at Speakers Corner. Excellent idea! But why not spread the noise? After all, the Internet is a modern "speakers corner", and one that all of us with net access can use. It doesn't matter how quiet or uncertain our physical voices are or how unimposing our actual presence may be – or where we live, either. We're told in the slogan that it's "our" BBC. Let's claim it, and show that it really is!

Go to the Beeb website at <http://www.bbc.co.uk> and explore a little. Click on the "Message Boards and Chat" line in the upper right area of the page and that will get you going nicely.

There are discussion groups covering any number of topics. Take a look, then join in – the registration process is pretty straightforward (if a little tedious). Christian fundamentalists and Muslims seem to lurk especially thickly in certain areas (religion, morality, science) as though they have some kind of monopoly on them.

It would be good to contribute some sense of reality and sanity and to offer intelligently provocative alternative views that do not parrot the contents of old books written by dull, angry, deluded uneducated tribesmen and their assorted dupes. There is some argument (often very entertaining) but it really is a case of the more, the merrier! Those of a sensitive disposition should be warned that fundamentalist bigotry and imbecility is displayed here raw and undiluted in all its gruesome glory. Yuk.

The work of Amnesty International is vitally important in protecting freedom of thought, conscience and expression throughout the world – ideals that are (despite the claims of religion) essentially secular and humanistic. They have a website at <http://www.amnesty.org/> that's full of news and information. Along similar lines

Webwatch with Norman Pridmore

"Liberty" (the old National Council for Civil Liberties) has a website at <http://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk/>. Given the attempts by religious groups to undermine free speech in the name of "toleration" and "respect" (terms that are turning quite sinister in this new context), it's good to know that these bodies are monitoring what is going on and are fighting against suppression. The sites themselves are both well-devised and very user-friendly (Amnesty's, especially, is much improved). Essential resources, in these troubling times – allies of freethought indeed.

Now to exercise some of that freedom in an utterly pointless cause.

Take a tour around the Reverend John Legion's Christian Pornography site at <http://www.christslove.com/>. The porn itself is curiously elusive (you might be luckier than I was) but the rest is highly entertaining. Buy "Holy Smokes", the "Christian" cigarette, and perhaps treat yourself to a nourishing snack of low-mercury (causes less blindness, apparently) "Holy Mackerel" fishcakes. Take a look too at Noggin's Bible Story animations and cartoons (be patient while they load). Puerile and in poor taste? Yep – and why not?

A site I was delighted to be told about is at <http://www.cyberdespot.com/jesustricks/index.html>. It's called "Stupid Jesus Tricks" and it's a section of the main "Enlightened Despot" site at <http://www.cyberdespot.com>. The guy that operates the site rejoices in the genuine name of Christopher Kink.

One tradition of freethought has been that of extreme scepticism about the historical existence of Jesus. I don't much care either way, frankly – but an interesting and intelligent site putting the "anti" case is the Jesus Puzzle at <http://pages.ca.inter.net/~oblio/jesus.html>. It's certainly worth a look, offering some novel angles on the story. Even if you disagree with the conclusion, some things here may surprise.

Lastly, on to the monkey business of the creation-versus-evolution farce. There are any number of sites on the subject, but I'd like to offer four that I think are especially good. They all have fine links too – often to the sites of creationists. Do visit these: they're funnier than a year's worth of *Viz* back numbers...

<http://www.geocities.com/lflank/> is the "Creation Science Debunked" home page of the site run by the excellent Lenny Flank. He's good on snakes too. From it, you can navigate around the Darwin "web ring", a linked ring of over thirty sites and nearly two thousand pages of stimulating science, argument and solid good sense.

There's also a good discussion board and e-mail "evolution news" service that those with a real interest can sign up for. <http://www.talkorigins.org/> is the address of "Talk Origins", and <http://home.austarnet.com.au/stear/default.htm> is the address of "No Answers in Genesis". They are both quite wonderful – their design, content, functionality are all first rate: perfectly evolved, I'd say. Lastly check out the USA National Center for Science education site at <http://www.natcensci.org/>. A word of warning. Those with even a moderate interest, beware: these are absorbing sites – keep a clock close by or those hours will fly past...

Thanks for all the suggestions. More please, to: norman@npnidmore.fsworld.-co.uk.

Secularism is not enough

It has recently emerged in the Scottish Press that a report made to the Church of Scotland concludes that, unless trends alter significantly, that Church will have ceased to exist within fifty years. A cause for rejoicing and triumphalism among secularists? I suggest the rejoicing should be muted and the triumphalism suppressed. First, secularists should recognise that, while secularism has made huge strides in the last generation, secularists and their organisations have had very little to do with that. Secondly, secularists should observe that the world which the disintegration of religion is bringing into being has very little connection with the world organised secular humanists would like to see.

It is a safe assumption that fully 99 per cent of the Scottish population who are phlegmatically consigning the Church of Scotland to limbo are unaware of the existence of secular humanist organisations, even though one of those is centred in Scotland. The situation in England can be assumed to be comparable. The tiny minority of self-aware and campaigning secularists may be working hard to promote their cause. The officials of their organisations are certainly working hard and may feel, because they are nowadays quite regularly consulted by Government, that their efforts are bearing fruit and are destined to bear more.

But secularism has not won its present hold as a result of either secularist campaigning or gradually burgeoning Government acceptance. It owes its spectacular advance to a combination of technology, free enterprise capitalism and the media, which have together bred an ambience of irreverence, hedonism

and infinite expectation of this world, while doing little if anything to promote a rational and realistic approach to life and less than nothing to strengthen social responsibility.

Jim Ross puts the case for forming secular humanist groups in the UK into two distinct operations: one for the service and education of those inclined to secular humanism, the other dedicated to campaigning on a broad front for the adoption in national policies of secular humanist attitudes and their social implications

At the Centennial Conference of the Rationalist Press Association in 1999, the Executive Director of the International Humanist and Ethical Union asked why so few were present to celebrate the centenary, and hinted that the RPA was not the dynamic force it had once been.

One reason is surely that flogging the reli-

gious horse is no longer so relevant now that the horse is plainly dying, and other, hardly less destructive, animals are taking over the field.

Government consultation with the secularist organisations is unlikely to mean what these organisations would like to think it means. In responding to invitations to consult and submit views the secular organisations are being more of a convenience to the Government than a threat to religion or a help to constructive social secularism.

When Government wants to be seen to be consulting, it needs to identify organisations with whom to consult. Some organisations are so obviously well-supported that Government has no option but to take them very seriously. But if the relevant organisations are small and short of resources and there is substantial doubt about how strongly the public at large feel about the cause they represent, so much the better for the Government, which can then please itself about the weight to be attached to their arguments. This is not mere speculative cynicism. For a decade I was a major Government Department's specialist in what we then called "public participation".

The Government no doubt recognises that certain types of religious privilege which are liable to affect personal and family patterns of living in terms of education, shopping, ceremonies, etc., are coming to be resented by increasing numbers of people and that these feelings must be accommodated to some extent. The Government will also be conscious of the fact that the claims of the religious organisations are politically unrealistic and will be happy enough to have some moderating evidence to deploy in discussions with the religious interests. In the absence of other organisations promoting secular causes, the Government will find it convenient to engage with the NSS and BHA through which it can take secular concerns into account so far as it is inclined to do so.

But the Government clearly wants to support religion, wants to retain it as part of what it conceives to be its own moral armoury. Government will be well aware that, even among those having little or no religious conviction, the number of people valuing their local church as a social centre, the number of people participating in or financially supporting charity bodies operating under a religious umbrella, the number of people prepared to send their children to a religious school if it has a good local reputation, not to mention the number of clergymen taking the lead in all manner of generally approved liberal causes, far exceeds the number currently inclined to join secular organisations or participate in consciously secular activities. In practical politi-

Help needed with research

Freethinker subscriber Terry Liddle is undertaking research for an article – possibly a pamphlet – on the Deptford Secular Institute.

In the 1870s this was situated on Union Street, which has long since vanished.

He would also like information on the related Deptford Secular Society and Deptford Radical Society, which were active in the republican agitation of the 1870s.

Terry would also like to know more about William Reynolds, the leading figure in the Institute, and the Deptford Radical William Curner who was killed in the Bloody Sunday riots of 1887 – a large column had marched from Deptford.

He needs leaflets and other publications, newspaper reports, minutes of meetings and details of social, educational and other activities. If you can help, contact **Terry Liddle at 83, Sowerby Close, Eltham, London, SE96EZ**, phone: **0208 8504187**, e-mail: **tliddle@freeuk.com**.

cal terms the necessity to dodge and weave on the religious question is a long way from the need to accept the secular humanist case, and will remain a long way from it unless and until that case is presented within a broad framework of public interest which wins a significant amount of popular support.

Those representing us in discussions with Government should not imagine, because they encounter the occasional supportive MP or sincerely sympathetic official, that this will make a noticeable difference to the thrust of Government policy. Such isolated individuals or small groups can make occasional noises or secure spasmodic media attention but they can bring effective pressure to bear on Government only when they are articulating strongly and widely held public feelings. The secular case is not within remote sight of being strongly or widely held. The humanist case is even further from such a status. Secularism exists among large groups of the population, but simply as a sheet of paper from which the religious writing has almost entirely faded, to be replaced mainly by the outpourings of commercial interests and assorted forms of self-

indulgent irrationalism.

At the moment, the secular/humanist associations are neither organisationally nor presentationally set up to make any significant impact in default of positive Government support, which they have not got and are not on the way to getting. In this age of professedly widespread Government consultation, and of voracious media ever on the hunt for news items and "features", they come in handy to be put on research assistants' lists of "spokesmen" for particular points of view. But neither Government nor media are keen to help the public reach carefully weighed conclusions which might prove unwelcome, and both are happier dealing with narrow, so called practical, issues, such as Health Service waiting lists, than with problems arising from the prevailing stimuli of social attitudes.

The present congeries of secular/rationalist/humanist organisations makes no sense for a movement with ambitions to establish the reference points of social morality and culture. And such ambitions are implicit in the secularist case and explicit in the humanist case, however much the members of the relevant organ-

isations may prefer to stick with the familiar old activity of flogging the dying horse. I have submitted this article to the *Freethinker* because I'm a subscriber to it and because it is evident from its pages that its readers include many enthusiastic floggers, but my message concerns the entire secular humanist movement.

That movement grew up piecemeal long since in response to circumstances very different from the present. It needs now only two arms, one for the service and education of, and exchange of views between, those inclined to secular humanism, the other dedicated to campaigning on a broad front for the adoption in national policies of secular humanist attitudes and their social implications. The first would be entitled to be a charity under present Charity Commission rules. The second would not. Both arms should arrange their own publishing to meet their own requirements. There seems no need for a separate organisation devoted almost entirely to publishing. It's time to take a hard look at how we go about our business and to consider what that business ought to be.

CONSERVATIVE American Christian organisations have teamed up with Islamic governments to halt the expansion of sexual and political protection and rights for homosexuals, women and children at United Nations conferences, according to the *Washington Post*.

Writing in the June 17 issue, Colum Lynch revealed that "the new alliance, which coalesced during the past year, has received a major boost from the Bush administration, which appointed anti-abortion activists to key positions on US delegations to UN conferences on global economic and social policy".

However, the coalition has largely been galvanised by conservative Christians who set aside their doctrinal differences, cemented ties with the Vatican, and cultivated fresh links with a powerful bloc of more than 50 moderate and hard-line Islamic governments, including Sudan, Libya, Iraq and Iran.

"We look at them as allies, not necessarily as friends," said Austin Ruse, founder and president of the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute, a New York-based organisation that promotes "conservative values" at UN social conferences. "We have realised that without countries like Sudan, abortion would have been recognised as a universal human right in a UN document."

Lynch continues: "The alliance of conservative Islamic states and Christian organisations has placed the Bush administration in the awkward position of siding with some of

Christians, Muslims gang up against women and gays

its most reviled adversaries – including Iraq and Iran – in a cultural skirmish against its closest European allies, which broadly support expanding sexual and political rights.

"US and Iranian officials even huddled during coffee breaks at the UN summit on children in New York last month, according to UN diplomats. But the partnership also has provided the Bush administration with an opportunity to demonstrate that it shares many social values with Islam at a time when the United States is being criticised in the Muslim world for its continued support of Israel and the nine-month-old war on terrorism."

Mokhtar Lamani, a Moroccan diplomat who

represents the 53-nation Organisation of Islamic Conferences at the UN is quoted as saying: "The main issue that brings us all together is defending the family values – the natural family. The Republican administration is so clear in defending family values."

According to Lynch, the Islamic-Christian alliance claimed an important victory at the UN children's meeting last month when the Bush administration led the coalition in blocking an effort by European and Latin American countries to include a reference in the final declaration to "reproductive health care services," a term the conservatives believed could be used to promote abortion. Some Western countries and liberal activists say they are alarmed by the influence of the Christian right at the United Nations, where more liberal women's rights organizations have held sway for the past decade.

"They are trying to undo some of the landmark agreements that were reached in the 1990s, particularly on women's rights and family planning," a UN-based European diplomat said. Adrienne Germaine, president of the International Women's Health Coalition added: "This alliance shows the depths of perversity of the [US] position. On the one hand we are presumably blaming these countries for unspeakable acts of terrorism, and at the same time we are allying ourselves with them in the oppression of women."

Finally I cracked. It was all that stuff on TV and radio about the teaching of creationism that did it. No longer able to contain myself I wrote in my regular(ish) column in the local paper, the *Lincolnshire Echo*, 700 or so balanced and judicious words to the effect that creationism was a farago of nonsense and that to believe in it one would have to be palpably insane. Nothing too contentious, I felt ...

The response was almost immediate. Writing at the time of the Scopes trial the great H L Mencken called creationists "inflamed half-wits". I had thought when I first read this that it was mere decorative hyperbole. I was wrong. It was an example of philosophical perspicacity of the first order.

Within days the benighted Lincolnshire

descendants of Mencken's originals were writing to the paper. Replies issued forth, counter-replies, counter-counter replies. On and on it went. It would be going still had the editor of the paper not stepped in and, with a despairing cry, called a halt.

One might imagine that such debates should

be straightforward and easy. After all, the facts are pretty much in concerning evolution. After 140 years of testing by the most able and critical minds, one is talking about knowledge and fact, not some hare-brained stew of barking speculation.

Meet the man who wants to see creationism introduced in every British school

KENNETH Ham, 50, is America's most influential creationist, writes Barry Duke. The Australian-born American, who heads the Answers in Genesis (AiG) organisation, two years ago completed an eight-date lecture tour of Britain as part of his life's mission to convince "secular humanists" that man and dinosaur once lived side by side.

Despite being regarded as a class A balmptot in many circles – his views, for example, were described by Professor Steve Jones, head of genetics at University College, London, as "basically stupid" – he commands a huge following in the United States, where around 40 per cent of the population believe that the world was created in six days. The fact that Darwin is part of the science curriculum in Britain horrifies Ham, and he crossed the Atlantic to tell skeptical Britons that they dismiss creationism at their peril.

In an interview with Precious Williams of the *Independent on Sunday* (March 26, 2000), Ham said: "These humanists are teaching kids that we are evolved from animals and that there is no God. If the next generation believe there is no God, then who, as far as they are concerned, decides what is good and evil?"

"If you read the Bible," he told delegates at an AiG seminar in Wales, "it will be clear to you that dinosaurs and humans once lived together. The word 'dragon' crops up in the Old Testament and in some of

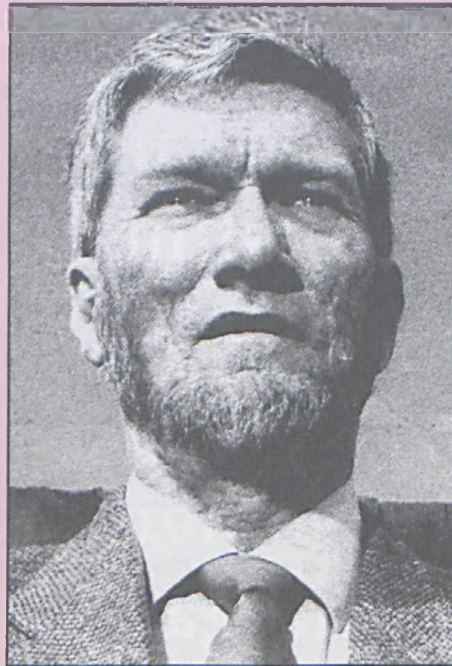


Photo: Alistair Berg

the oldest of English literature. If you just replaced the word 'dragon' with 'dinosaur' it would fit very nicely." So widely-held is this theory that dinosaurs have become the mascot of the creationist movement – and the sartorially-challenged Ham usually appears in public wearing a vivid dinosaur necktie.

Ham, who applauds the work of anti-abortionists and believes that homosexuals "are very wrong", says that "evolutionists are frightened of creationism being taught to students", but it is *only* this teaching that will ensure the moral, physical and emotional well-being of modern society.

Forget civilisation just go for it

Norman Pridmore futility of engaging debate with mo

The debates are, however, not easy. Controversialists as able as Nobel Laureate Murray Gell-Mann and the late (and very wonderful) Stephen Jay Gould lamented, for example at the time of the Supreme Court appeal in 1986/7 concerning the Louisiana Equal Time Act, the difficulties of debating with creationists. If they found it tough and frustrating, no wonder I did too!

After reflecting upon the debate I have reached a few conclusions about how it might have been better conducted. I share my thoughts here in the hope that others might find them helpful or useful – or, at the very least, entertaining.

First, a simple question and a (perhaps) unexpected answer.

Q - What is the best way to debate with creationists?

A - By ignoring all the normal rules of civilised discourse and going straight for the jugular.

This bitter and melancholy truth runs profoundly against the grain for rationalists. Nevertheless, there is no alternative (unless one is willing to compromise one's mental health – never a good idea, generally speaking).

The essence of the problem is that creationists have removed themselves from the arena of rational debate. This is not, for them, any kind of a difficulty or problem – and their case does not suffer one whit as a result. On the contrary, it confers upon them a powerful advantage. It permits them to use all the means of persuasion and all the devices of rhetoric that have

sed discourse, the jugular

been the stock-in-trade of fanatical and dogmatic monomaniacs since time out of mind. A sense of charity obliges me to say that for some (perhaps for most) "non-professional" creationists, this is not likely to be a deliberate tactic but is probably something they simply cannot help.

ore discovers the ging in intelligent most creationists

This introduces, however, yet another layer of difficulty for those who wish to debate with them. This layer is that of what is called "compound ignorance".

"Simple ignorance" is just that – the state of not knowing something. I am affected by this form of ignorance very profoundly in all kinds of ways. It encompasses all those things I do not know which I know I do not know: the German for "water-buffalo", say, or the time of high tide at Greenwich, or why Cherie Booth wears spooky crystal jewellery.

"Compound ignorance" is a step deeper into the mire. It is the state of not knowing that one does not know. To lift a phrase from the textbook of mystical religious cant, compound ignorance envelops those affected by it in a "Cloud of Unknowing".

This is why debating with most creationists is futile – they are, quite simply, befogged. Not only that, but they are perfectly at home in the fog, and move about in it as fish move in water: perfectly adapted, one might almost say – if one wished to be facetiously Darwinian.

Given this sad truth, one should either not attempt to deal with any of the claims of creationists in any debate of any kind, and refuse debate altogether. Or one should meet them headlong, ignoring their points and the issues they raise in favour of pursuing one's own critical and combative agenda.

To ignore them is frankly wussy. It also conveys by default the impression that their case is so strong that opponents are unwilling or unable to counter it. This is not an impres-

sion that ought to be conveyed under any circumstances.

To attack, then. But how? What are the most effective ways of exposing creationist absurdities without being drawn into their dizzying whirlpool of obfuscation and argumentation?

An analysis of the various creationist "positions" gives some very substantial hints. Here are a just a few.

The "general public" (those most likely to be swayed by creationist rhetoric and to form on the basis of that rhetoric misplaced opinions concerning creationism's intellectual status and validity) probably see it as a unified and coherent body of ideas. They will not be aware of how internally divided it is – or of how fundamental those divisions are. It might therefore be useful to include at an early stage in any debate an outline of the three competing creationist dogmas ("Old Earth", "Young Earth" and "Intelligent Design") highlighting with as much clarity as possible the differences between them. Faced in debate by a creationist one must get him or her to show their hand concerning their chosen version of the dogma. Once this is done one can ask why their version is the true one and why the others are false, and demand that they give the reasons for their opinion.

This will oblige the creationist to attack his or her putative allies, to question their interpretations of the biblical account and of the scientific evidence, and to generally rubbish the alternative beliefs. This spares the evolutionist the job! There is a kind of poetic justice in this, given that creationists make so much of "disputes" within evolutionary theory. One should not resist the temptation to mention if possible that the disputes within creationism are far more extreme and far more bitter than those between (say) "gradualist" evolutionists and those of their kin who incline towards the "punctuated equilibrium" model.

It might also be useful to describe the two very different versions of the creation story found in Genesis, and to ask in sincerely bewildered tones which of them is correct or how they can be reconciled. Be prepared to witness some ugly intellectual convolutions if this challenge is taken up.

Another tactic might be to ask creationists why the "creation" is so imperfect. For us humans who walk upright, the spine/pelvis/head combination is a travesty of functional design, and the male prostate is the work of either an incompetent imbecile or an utter sadist! Throughout nature there are abundant examples of flawed, inefficient design. The work of a perfect god? A short list of such design faults should stimulate some interesting replies and justifications.

Moving on to a different kind of attack, one might ask creationists to address the issues of pain and suffering that "God" has locked into the natural world at all levels – issues that are not a problem for evolutionary theory but that require prodigious leaps for creationists of every stripe.



In a satirical cartoon from 1874, Darwin demonstrates to an ape how alike they are

Can they answer the problem of suffering without multiplying explanations and bringing in the notion of "sin" and the "fall"? If they do, can they then additionally explain why the rest of creation was implicated and made to suffer and be the cause of suffering, rather than just those responsible (I mean, of course, Adam and Eve)? If there is a dependence upon revelation (and this seems inevitable) then how can creationism be said

(Continued on next page)

Go for the jugular (cont from centrepages)

to be consistent with its proponents, claims that it is "scientific"? This is something else one can reasonably demand to have explained.

One could also become fairly technical, and ask some entertaining questions about Noah. The flood story, that charming nursery tale, is central to much creationist "thought", so we should perhaps make the most of it. One might cheerfully enquire about the size of the ark, about how long it might take to build given the woodworking technology of the day, and about how sufficient food of the right kinds was procured for the journey. One might ask about the demands of keeping predators and prey separate, about the practicalities of feeding the beasts and removing the products of excretion with so few humans to do the work, and of how everything survived, post-disembarkation, in a world of slime, mud and devastation. There is the small matter of how Noah rounded up the creatures and got them aboard in the first place. Were they all living close by, those kangaroos and tapirs and Siberian bears and Komodo Dragons? How about the birds? And those Galapagos tortoises? Presumably the slower animals had some kind of divine "advanced warning" – and a map to the shipyard. Such issues of detail would be analogous to the questions of detail that creationists raise about transitional fossils or about how new information arises and is transmitted within DNA (except that "Noah" questions are much harder to answer). And of course, given the general prohibitions against incest in the Bible, one might innocently ask creationists to account for how the world was populated post-Eden and post-flood without recourse to more than acceptably close levels of familial intimacy.

One could also raise the important but often overlooked logical problem arising from the question of how many species Noah took aboard the ark. If he took (as we are told) one pair of every species – including those that became extinct between the end of the flood and the present day – then no vessel could have been sufficiently large. If he did not take two of everything, then not only is the inerrant word of god somewhat errant, but we are obliged to conclude that new species must have arisen, since only this can account for the present variety in the world. Given that two out of three creationist schools loathe the idea of "speciation" this issue is not a minor one ...

One last amusing question might be to ask "Noah believers" to account for the sudden presence and rapid absence of a volume of water sufficient to top Mount Everest. A temporary extra five-mile depth of water

over the whole earth really is something that they should be able to account for ...

"Flood believers" will be obliged to resort to non-naturalistic (ie miraculous) explanations. When this occurs it should be pointed out with somewhat merciless clarity.

Definition of science

Creationists claim that their dogma is science. Given this, one might reasonably demand from them a definition of science. Ask them to state explicitly whether they are verificationists or falsificationists. If they are not sure, explain what each is, and try again! Either way, they should be asked what would verify or falsify their particular version of creationism. One should insist on a few concrete examples, of the kind that evolutionists routinely suggest when asked the same question (anomalous fossils being perhaps the best, but not the only, example). It should be held in mind that the overthrowing or confirming of one theory is not confirmation or the overthrow of another. In terms of debate this means that creationists cannot be allowed to get away with statements to the effect that if evolution could "come up with" transitional fossils, then creationism would be overthrown, or that failure (as defined by themselves) to do so confirms their beliefs. The matter of proof or disproof should arise from within the theory itself – otherwise it is simply parasitic. This point should be aggressively insisted upon!

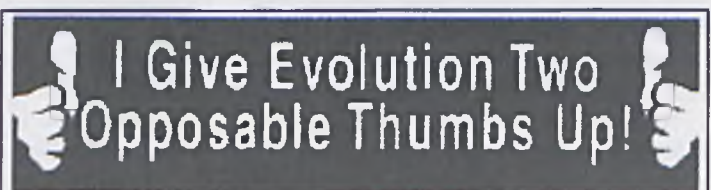
Creationists might then be asked to account for what is known about the consistency of the fossil record – the absolute absence of anomalies. Within an "Old" or "Young Earth" creationist account, is this wondrous regularity explicable in terms of known biological and geological processes, or is a miraculous explanation required? If so, what conclusions can be drawn about a god who, by design and intention, arranges the world in such a way as to ensure that those who know most about it, have studied it most closely, and thought about it most intelligently and carefully, conclude that divine intervention had no part in it? After all, "God" would also have created the human mind with which such a conclusion was reached. It is reasonable to ask creationists how their theory accounts for these appar-

ent paradoxes, and what purpose might be served by them.

These are just a few examples of questions that one might choose to raise in debates with creationists. They are not the only ones by any means, but they are the kind of questions that can be framed succinctly, vigorously and unambiguously. The crucial thing is always to take the initiative and to attack. One is not going to "win" any debates in the usual sense of the word – but one will have exposed the creationist nonsense more effectively than would be the case if "normal" rules applied.

There is no reason, of course, why one should not recommend to creationist disputants a few of the best books on evolution, and to suggest they take a look at some real science instead of the creationist parody of it – after all, they'll be suggesting the Bible enough times, so it's only fair. Even if they themselves don't choose to read them, others might. This would be entirely to the good. Such a suggestion (even if ignored) will make the point that one is not avoiding addressing the science – simply that one is concerned enough to want to do so (unlike the creationists) properly and at the necessary level of detail and coherence. One can even state this quite explicitly. Creationists won't like it, or be impressed – just as they won't enjoy the rest of the arguments I've outlined here. But then, that's the whole idea ...

Among the books I would recommend are *Almost Like a Whale*, by Steve Jones, published in paperback by Black Swan; the very easy to read and handsomely illustrated *Evolution* by Carl Zimmer, published by Heinemann; and *What Evolution Is* by Ernst Mayr, published by Weidenfeld and Nicholson. And pretty much anything by Gould or Dawkins.



Offering an antidote to rampant creationism in the US is a website called www.evolvefish.com.

RELIGION 
STOPS A THINKING MIND!

Here one can find an astonishingly large, and very amusing, stock of anti-creationist bumper stickers, badges, T-shirts etc. The site also offers a more general array of anti-religious material.

Equivocation

AT LAST journalists seem to be contesting the imputation of Islamophobia whenever one criticises religious or political Islam. "Intolerant, politicised Islam is hard to reconcile with our liberal democracy", wrote Ian Buruma (*Guardian*, May 21). Indeed Muslims have a hard time entering the mainstream of European societies, he continued. And it is difficult, he said, to imagine a programme similar to *Goodness, Gracious Me* that treated Islam satirically. The enemies of Salman Rushdie, for example, were "somewhat lacking in the humour department, especially about themselves". And he insisted that to say Islamism is a barrier to integration is "not a sign of Islamophobia. It is the only way to protect the freedom of Muslims as well as everybody else".

Some Muslims, however, don't seem to be interested in the freedom of others. The next week (May 29) another *Guardian* writer, Rod Liddle, reported that a French author, Michel Houellebecq, was being charged with racial hatred in an action brought by four French Muslim organisations. Houellebecq's crime was to state in an interview that Islam was "the most stupid of all religions", a "crime" that, as Liddle said, had nothing to do with racism, but was really a case of blasphemy. Houellebecq has also been "threatened and vilified" by Muslims and "liberals" for the beliefs and actions of the chief character in his latest book, *Platform*, due out here in the autumn.

Liddle rightly thinks it would be a shame "if, after the decent and noble stand made for Salman Rushdie, we were to become suddenly equivocal over Houellebecq as a result of our new phobia about Islamophobia". A pertinent point.

Consider the radishes

NEUROLOGIST Oliver Sacks' latest book, *Uncle Tungsten*, a memoir of his childhood, won the non-fiction category of the *Jewish Quarterly's* Wingate literary prize, a matter of some surprise to him. He asked his interviewer, Oliver Burkeman, to tell him why they were giving it to "an old Jewish atheist who has unkind things to say about Zionism". And he recounted how being abandoned by his parents and boarded at a brutal school during wartime made him think that the God they'd raised him to believe in didn't care for him all that much. So, as a child, he tested the belief "scientifically" by planting two rows of radishes in the school garden, and asking God to make one flourish and the other die. But they both came up the same (*Guardian*, May 10).

Science, particularly chemistry and physics – "the reassuring permanence of matter", not God – satisfied Sack's youthful craving for

order and stability. "It's just the fact that atoms are forever – the stability of elements. Predictability". Even now, he said, "when I get depressed, I think of astronomy. I try to take refuge in something impersonal like that".

Odd bods

FROM a Jewish atheist to Muslim ones. Hanif Kureishi, author of the play *My Beautiful Laundrette*, described how his uncle once asked him "with some suspicion", "You're not a Christian are you?" "No", the playwright answered, "I'm an atheist". "So am I", said the uncle. "But I'm still a Muslim". When his nephew said that "a Muslim atheist" sounded odd, the uncle replied "Not as odd as being nothing, an unbeliever".

Odder, I should have thought.

Sadness in New York

WHAT a sad place New York City has become, exclaimed the *Guardian's* distinguished foreign correspondent, Jonathan Steele. Not, he said, because of grief over the twin towers massacre (those wounds are slowly healing). No, the reason was "a stifling conformity which muzzles public discourse on US foreign policy, the war on terrorism and Israel" (May 16).

An old college friend confessed to Steele that if people knew he held "subversive" views on the Middle East, he wouldn't be able to stay in a top Federal position connected with foreign affairs. And another friend, a liberal rabbi, about to set off on a regular visit to Israel, contrasted "the usual furious public arguments which she expected to find there" with "the behind-the-hand mutterings of New Yorkers".

Reasoned argument had been abandoned in the name of a witch-hunt against terrorists, and a strange alliance of evangelical Christians in Congress had come together with the leaders of American Jewish organisations who normally support the Democratic party. "We live in a culture where there is a diminishing tolerance of dissent" Steele was told.

The encouraging news was that a Noam Chomsky book criticising US foreign policy had sold 160,000 copies; the bad news was, that while CNN International was prepared to interview the author, the CNN US channel did not dare to do so.

God's book-keeping problem

FOR the last 12 years of his life, the French novelist Alphonse Daudet (1840-1899) was wracked by the effects of syphilis, which he described in a notebook now translated for the

first time by Julian Barnes, *The Land of Pain* (Cape).

Daudet was, says Barnes, kind, generous and sociable, a passionate observer and an unstoppable talker, and, as Henry James said, "the happiest novelist of his day". And he died during dinner with his wife and children, talking about Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, which had just gone into rehearsal.

As Barnes remarks, Daudet had no illusions about immortality. He and Jules de Goncourt had discussed the matter in 1891 and agreed that death meant complete annihilation, that "we are mere ephemeral gatherings of matter" and that, even if there were a God, expecting him to provide a second existence for every single one of us would be "laying far too great a book-keeping job on him". Which is a point Christians might consider.

Beyond expectations

THE first episode of *Spooks*, the BBC 1 fictional MI5 series (May 13) centred round an anti-abortion group led by an American woman who had blown up one family-planning doctor and had a list of future assassinations, all in the save-the-fetus cause. She dutifully said a prayer in church before planting the second bomb.

A "slightly unexpected story" one critic called it, and she was right. But of some importance.

The unanswered question

IN a worthy tribute to John Bunyan (*Guardian*, May 11), Bob Holman who, like the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, believes that Christians should be overwhelmingly on the side of the poor and should constantly challenge those who oppress them, admits that, again like Bunyan, he goes through agonising periods of doubt.

Holman lives in an area (in Glasgow, I suspect) where death among children and young people is "not uncommon", and where a 15-year-old girl he knew recently died. He struggles both to understand how this squares with a God of goodness, and to answer neighbours' questions such as "Why does God allow this?" He goes through periods when he cannot pray and feels alienated from the church. What he learns from Bunyan is "persistence": "I now know that if I don't give up on God, he does not give up on me". But young people still die. And there's still the neighbours' question to answer.

WHEN she was asked about the feud between astronomers Fred Hoyle and Martin Ryle, the astrophysicist Virginia Trimble said: "I knew them both and neither person was overwhelmingly easy to get along with"; then she added: "Nobody who does something earthshaking is likely to be". This seems to be the case in most examples of scientific rivalry, says Michael White, yet not always; and while it is tempting to find links between the personalities of the rivals, such connections are "at best vague". He sees three factors as motivating the scientist: satisfying the demands of their society; struggling to understand; and seeking recognition. That seems to apply to the characters here.

White's first pair of rivals are Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz, but he precedes this chapter with a quick look at history ("The Long Road to Reason") from the ancient Greeks onwards, and with particular reference to Leonardo da Vinci, "the first scientist" as he has described him in a previous biography, whose greatest rival was not a person but the Roman Catholic Church. Leonardo "refused to be nailed to any cross"; his only vision of God was a pantheistic one; and he made no mention of the divine in anything he wrote.

Newton, the subject of another White biography, clashed with the Astronomer Royal, John Flamsteed, and fellow member of the Royal Society Robert Hooke, at home, as well as having a forty-year-long battle with Leibniz over the calculus. Leibniz's idea that "one man makes one contribution, another man another", was anathema to Newton who, as White points out, held an obsessive conviction that "there could only be one genuine interpreter of divine knowledge in the world at any one time and that he was this one unique being". He was the chosen intermediary between the Creator and humanity. And while he had reluctantly been persuaded to write to Leibniz in 1676, he didn't mention the calculus.

When Leibniz delivered his first paper on the subject, Newton suspected plagiarism, mistakenly believing that material he had shown to a London bookseller over a decade earlier had been passed to his rival. Even when he was instructed by Leibniz's Hanoverian patron, now King George I of England, to write a conciliatory letter to Leibniz through an intermediary, Newton did little more than reiterate his side of the dispute. Leibniz, anyway, was now ill. He died in November 1716 and, as a friend put it, "was buried like a robber rather than what he really was, the ornament of his country". Newton, in contrast, was buried in Westminster Abbey, where his marble monument dominates Scientists' Corner. White,

author of *Isaac Newton: The Last Sorcerer*, notes, however, that there is tactfully no reference to the great man's greatest preoccupation, alchemy.

White sees the conflict between Newton and Leibniz as exaggerating a national rivalry between Britain and mainland Europe. So, too, did that between Joseph Priestley and Antoine Lavoisier, although this was "underpinned by great differences in their religious perspectives". Lavoisier was not a Catholic but a scientific humanist who had no time for religious dogma; for Priestley the only thing worse than a Catholic was an atheist.

Despite the work of Robert Boyle which had

Colin McCall reviews

Conflict as the Fuel of Science

by Michael White. Vintage

paperback, £7.99

shown that when a substance burned it gained weight, the phlogiston theory of George Stahl was dominant in 1774, when Priestley discovered oxygen and Lavoisier began to theorise upon the discovery. And it was a theory Priestley continued to hold. From the start Lavoisier was meticulous in his experiments and he soon saw the fallacy of phlogiston. As he noted in his memorandum, "sulphur in burning, far from losing weight on the contrary gains it". Priestley wrote sensibly enough about scientific methods but didn't apply them to his own work. It was Lavoisier who, with his *Elements of Chemistry*, "laid the cornerstone of modern chemistry".

There are two biological rivalries in the book: the Darwinian controversy, of course, and the race to discover the structure of DNA. And rightly, White presents the former, not as a clash between Darwin and Wallace, who co-operated, but between Darwin and Richard Owen, curator of the Hunterian Collection at the Royal College of Surgeons. Darwin "admired" Owen but was hated in return. The crucial difference, however, was the priority Owen gave to religious belief. Some idea of the gulf between the two may be gained from a letter Owen wrote in 1845: "The man who is willing to believe that his great-great-great etc grandfather was a Baboon, and his great-great etc grandmother a Chimpanzee, will not be converted by whatever manifestation of the *mens divinator* may shine in a refutation of such an opinion".

Religion was also a factor in the Darwin-Wallace relationship. Although both used the term "natural selection", Wallace's conception was not "natural" in the Darwinian sense. For

Wallace the process was not self-contained: God played a guiding role in the development of species. Wallace was also drawn to spiritualism, but Darwin, while regretting this, helped to support his fellow evolutionist materially and used his influence to secure a Royal pension for him. Another antagonist dealt with here, Thomas Edison, advocate of DC (Direct Current), also spoke of communication with the dead, after his long "battle of the currents" with the Croatian AC advocate Nikola Tesla, who had no time for the occult.

James Watson's *The Double Helix* has been widely read, so many people know at least his side of the race to find the structure of DNA. Many know, too, about the early death at 37 of the brilliant woman in the case, Rosalind Franklin. Michael White has the additional advantage of having been a student of Maurice Wilkins, who shared the 1962 Nobel Prize with Watson and Francis Crick. The prize can only go to living scientists and can only be split three ways, so Franklin could not be honoured then. But she was not entirely forgotten in Stockholm: a friend of hers, Sir Aaron Klug, who was awarded the prize twenty years later, used his acceptance speech to honour her memory. "Had her life not been cut tragically short", he said, "she might well have stood in this place on an earlier occasion".

The recent threat of nuclear war between India and Pakistan makes White's chapter on "Atom Bombs and Human Beings" particularly relevant. It was, as he says, a rivalry like no other before it. No one can doubt that the Russian-American struggle advanced our understanding of atomic physics, but, in the process, the fate of human beings was often the last consideration. In White's words, "it exemplified how pure intellect, corrupted by greed and fear of rivals, and supercharged by vast resources, is capable of transforming the world".

We should be thankful, he says, in his penultimate chapter on the space race, that the political ambitions behind it are gone. And "as our descendants walk through the ravines of Mars and kick up moon dust in the Sea of Tranquility, they may perhaps choose to forget the grand rivalry that took them there". Meanwhile, most of us today are more directly affected by the battle of the cyber-kings, to which, I confess, I gave little attention before reading this book. But, like White, I can smile at the thought of computers as big as rooms and codes punched on cards. The first time I saw one it was exactly like this – at Imperial College, London.

Whatever the future holds, Michael White's resumé of past rivalries adds significantly to our understanding of science and scientists. The book confirms my view that he is one of the best science writers of the present.

Evolution a fact – not theory

DAVE Pearson asks me why I say evolution is a fact. Let me refer him to *I Have Landed*, the last volume of essays by that authoritative palaeontologist the late Stephen Jay Gould, just published (Cape £17.99). There he will find references to “the factual basis of evolution” (p 75); “evolution is true” (p 217); “the fact of evolution in general (and the theory of natural selection in particular)” (p 219); “The factual truth of evolution” (p 269). The penultimate quote expresses my own position. I distinguish between the fact of evolution and the theory of natural selection.

Finally, let me cite Gould in more detail: “Evolution is as well documented as any phenomenon in science, as firmly supported as the earth’s revolution around the sun rather than *vice versa*. In this sense we can call evolution a ‘fact’. (Science does not deal in certainty, so ‘fact’ can only mean a proposition affirmed to such a high degree that it would be perverse to withhold one’s provisional assent)” (p 204).

COLIN MCCALL
Hertfordshire

TO clear up any confusion between the theory and the fact of evolution, raised by Dave Pearson in the June issue, I cannot do better than quote a letter from Christopher Young printed a month or two ago in the *Guardian*: “Please will somebody explain to ... all the refuseniks ... what ‘theory’ means in the context of science. It does not mean ‘hypothesis’ but the body of methodological tools and data which provide a context for science.

“Evolution is a fact. So are mathematical sets, which are studied using set theory. The context for studying the facts of evolution is evolutionary theory. The fact that evolutionists refer to the theory of evolution no more means that the fact of evolution is in question than the fact that mathematicians talk about set theory casts doubt on the fact that the next number after one, two, three is four.”

EDWARD GWINNELL
Yeovil

“I’M especially interested in anti-creationist sites just now”, writes Norman Pridmore (*Freethinker*, June 2002) and asks for support. And in the same issue Dave Pearson is surprised to find that “evolution is (said to be) no longer a theory but a ‘fact’.”

Well, if it were by any means quite impossible for women to carry in their bodies cellular and even visible evidence of human evolution from early four-legged creatures on all-fours to our two-legged state today, then the creationists would have to perform their usual semantic/logic gymnastics to explain it.

Because some women do have more than two breasts, in the form of short lines of nipples below their breasts, coupled with micro-cellular evidence of recessive breast tissue beneath.

Having heard of this clear proof of evolution (via a four-legged pre-biped ...like a dog or pig, with breasts beneath) from a medical researcher some years ago, when a close relative – a leading FRCS – visited me last year I asked his opinion. He said that not only did such relict features exist in some women today, but that it was not entirely unusual to come across women with a line of nipples below each breast. (Surgically removable). At which point I asked: so the reason men have useless nipples is also linked to evolutionary change? – to which he answered “Yes”. Which makes a nasty mess of Genesis, where Adam came first (complete with useless nipples) and provided Eve with (nippled?) breast-ribs(!) for her “hey-presto” creation. A Biblical cart before the horse. It all reminds me, affectionately, of one of my main chuckles: the analogy of a creationist, whose body is living proof of evolution, denying that evolution exists: like a man swimming across a large lake while shouting “There’s no such thing as water!”

Creationists are a pain in the neck. They dumbly believe some silly idea invented perhaps by cave-men, then waste their lives trying to twist reality to fit fictions which even other religions often reject. And in doing so they block human progress; in some cases by hindering medical research.

JOHN CLARKE
Uxbridge

THERE must be something fundamentally wrong with a school evaluation system which awards the highest credits to schools teaching the most glaring nonsense. I refer, of course, to Emmanuel College in Gateshead.

Are the inspectors all pious Blairites and creationists?

YNGVE BAUTZ
Newcastle upon Tyne

DAVE Pearson (June 2002) raises an important point concerning the words we use to describe the status of evolution. Is it a theory? Is it a fact? Who decides? And finally, does it matter what we call it? We know that a consensus is sometimes reached concerning particular theories. Take the theory that the earth moves around the sun. Gradually evidence in support of this odd notion became so overwhelmingly great and so universally accepted that it was (almost without exception) accepted as a fact.

The same is now happening with evolution and for equally good reason. Creationists

object to this and insist upon the theoretical status of evolution because it suits their agenda and their methods of “debate”. For them the word “theory” translates as “pre-posterous and contentious notion”. Deprive them of such a useful word and they wail in honor, appalled that one of their few pitiful weapons has been taken from them.

If we were to be scrupulously technically honest we would always describe evolution as a theory (as we would heliocentrism – consistency would demand nothing less). But in doing so we would have an understanding that what we meant by the word was very different to what creationists meant. Unfortunately our honest pedantry (sorry, but that’s the correct term!) would confer advantage upon the dishonest religious dogmatists. Choosing to call evolution a fact is an act of verbal politics, a recognition that our scrupulosity is going to be abused and that our intellectual integrity is likely to give a hostage to fortune to those who care nothing for these things: in other words to the creationists (or “irrationalists”, to make explicit their other name).

It is unfortunate that by our doing this the word “theory” is made to look even more like a way of describing something “iffy”. Still, it’s not a desperate problem. If anyone raising a query about the matter is sincerely interested, then the kind of explanation and reasoning I have outlined here will go some way towards explaining the problems of usage that rationalists face – and to give an insight into the wider argument between science and defensive dogmatism.

Debates like these really do show how much words matter. If we use words in unusual or provocative ways it’s good to have those ways pointed out and questioned, just as Dave Pearson has done. I for one look forward to the day when we no longer have to preface the word “evolution” with the phrase “the theory of ...” – if for no other reason than that it’s such a bloody waste of time and ink!

On another matter, may I please humbly request with the utmost politeness and deference that the editor of this esteemed organ carries on being rude and vicious about religion and about the behaviour of religious persons and institutions. Otherwise, what was the point of Villon, Rabelais, Swift, Voltaire, Twain and the rest? Or of the personal sacrifices made by those *Freethinker* editors of old who knew the place and value of satire and ridicule and raw insult in the fight against cant and snivelling piety and self-serving religious smarm? After all we’re only being rude – not proposing to send them to hell for eternity, which is what’s in

store for us, according to their "compassionate" beliefs!

NORMAN PRIDMORE
Sleaford, Lincs

... and more about rudeness

A BIT of balance here, and a bit of support for the more forthright authors, such as Barry Duke, who have "stopped being polite".

I am encouraged no end by strong rhetoric, I get a real buzz from the cutting joke aimed at religion, I feel buoyed up by writers who ignore PC and go for the jugular when confronting the excesses and dishonesties rampant – and indeed endemic – in religion. (And before someone starts up about religion being essentially good but misused by some of its adherents, I would point out that the adherents *are* the religion. It is irrelevant that some practise without harming others. The good and loving would be good and loving without religion; the hateful and bigoted would have no vehicle for their hate – and no "official" sanction! They would be seen for the sort of people they were.)

It is both frustrating and sad that there are those *Freethinker* subscribers who persist with the "meek will inherit the earth" bit.

No, they won't!

John Goldsack is perfectly right that politeness and diplomacy have much more chance of winning over those who hold an opposing view, but the very nature of religion is so irrational that no amount of diplomacy will ever change that mindset.

The *Freethinker* shouldn't be aimed at winning over the religious anyway, it should be aimed at giving confidence to those who see the failings of the myths they were brought up with, but who need that extra bit of courage to let go of their theistic dependency and embrace atheism. By being sharp and forthright (and not getting struck down by lightning), Barry Duke and the others demonstrate that one can safely say "there is no god!"

What the constant mewling of the "let's get on with the religious" choir does is to suggest that the whole secular humanist movement is as timid and afraid of confrontation as they are. The BHA has become a pale, ineffectual shadow of itself under the influence of these would-be Gandhis. (See the article in the June *Freethinker* 2002 for a glimpse of how enlightened *he* was!).

If the NSS is to become strong then it must be seen to be strong, for only then will the strong seek to join.

VAUGHAN R EVANS
Isle of Wight

I WOULD like to give my full support to Mr Duke as editor of the *Freethinker*, and to say that, far from the magazine being too abusive and aggressive towards the follies and crimes of religion, I am amazed at its restraint!

With the threat of state schools being segregated on sectarian lines, and while the Catholic Church campaigns for the criminalisation of consenting gay adults while people are dead or dying of HIV/AIDS because churches hoped this disease would be a "Final Solution" to the Permissive Society, I think we have every right to be angry and express that anger in no uncertain terms.

S C CHUMBLEY
London

Freewill

1. I AGREE with Donald Room (*Points of View*, May) but am reluctant to use the word "determined" since it smacks of "predictable" or "mechanical". With the complexity of our genes added to the enormous variety of our environments and experience perhaps freewill is just a way of describing an emergent phenomenon of all this. I am frequently puzzled by people's confident use of phrases such as "cannot prove a negative", etc. Mathematics has many theorems proving something does not happen or proving something does not exist. Since maths is ubiquitous, I do not understand how those nonsensical phrases got started or why they continue. Perhaps they are an example of a meme?

2. Jesus was misplaced in Yal N Alagan's list (*Points of View*, May): Jesus was not an historical person. He is legendary only in so far as the NT stories can be said to be about one person. However, it seems that the person described is just a fictional composite.

3. I disagree with M C Grant (*Points of View*, May): I've not noted any attacks which are "devoid of any rational basis". There are some very nasty religious people about and I find it refreshing to read sensible articles in the *Freethinker* on the damage they cause, in contrast to the unquestioning and irrational sycophancy elsewhere.

4. Do not worry, Paul Stevenson (*Points of View*, May): if some people you've heard of have really been pushed back to the position of a one-off creator then they will soon drown in quicksand. For a very effective demolition of the theist's first cause argument I can do no better than recommend Daniel Harbour's excellent book *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Atheism*. Briefly, there's no support for this poor argument even among the intelligent religious.

PETER LANCASTER
Essex

Soldiers of evil

HAS anyone noticed that belief in God makes a person worse morally, despite outward appearances? If I hit my brother without believing in God I am hurting my brother, not God. If I believe in God, my act is even more malicious because I am also affronting a being of infinite goodness, who therefore must hate sin infinitely – meaning, as far as intent goes that there is no limit to my evil. Those who propagate belief in God are soldiers of evil.

Religion will answer that it makes the good we do infinitely valuable as well, and that redresses the problem; but the trouble is that only a handful reach sainthood level early in life and the Church says anybody can become a saint, so we are more sinful than good when we fall short. All sin must be equally bad when it is all infinitely offensive to God, for infinite means cannot be any greater.

The Catholic priest, Anthony de Mello, wrote in his famous book *Awareness* that to need anybody is not to love them, because if they won't give you what you need then you refuse to be happy, so it is manipulation. He says we should be detached from all things to be happy and to be really capable of love. I say to work this means that we should not need God. Yet Jesus said that we should prefer him even to the parents who made us and love God with all, not some, of our faculties. That makes Jesus one of God's biggest enemies and the craftiest purveyor of misery that ever lived. The frightful unnaturalness of what he asked is plain, for you cannot put God first when you are more sure you exist and that others do than you are that he exists. If he rose from the dead then Satan was responsible, and perhaps Satan hypnotised the soldiers to take Jesus out of the tomb and dump him and forget about him while he pretended to be the risen Jesus. Jesus was the one who said you know the Devil's disciples by their fruits. God and Jesus make mental health a sin.

How the God-cultists with such dark implications can expect to make a lasting contribution to world peace is beyond me.

PATRICK GORMLEY
Co Donegal

Libelling the Jews

YOU have done it again! In publishing a review by Enver Carim of Tariq Ali's latest book (*March Freethinker*) you repeat the lie which is the modern version of the mediaeval blood libel. Sometimes I wish collective libel was actionable.

That lie is that Jews drove the Palestinian inhabitants from their ancestral properties.



May we know when they did this and what was the method employed, and can you quote any contemporaneous account of this event? And how come a million Palestinian Arabs are today living in Israel as equal citizens?

Neither Tariq Ali nor your reviewer seems to be aware that the Zionist movement to reinstate the Jewish homeland began in the late 19th century and proceeded from then.

It is said that no Arab was ever associated with the "Final Solution". How can you show such contempt for facts? Have you not heard of Haj Amin el Hussein or the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who was Hitler's ally and spent the war in Berlin? And what of the Nazi war criminals who obtained sanctuary in Nasser's Egypt?

Furthermore, the oil-rich Arab Office persuaded the British Colonial Office to forbid Jewish emigration to Palestine.

The criminals who threatened genocide are now posing as victims, and I hope your readers will not be taken in by them..

DEREK WILKES
London

READING the article concerning the "biblical right" to smack children at private Christian schools (*Freethinker*, June 2002) set me wondering. If the head of the Christian Fellowship School in Liverpool views corporal punishment as a "biblical mandate" and should he win his case, how long before he would be back at the High Court quoting Deuteronomy chapter 21, verses 18 to 21? This vile passage of the bible has, I am sure, been quoted in your pages before. In essence it states that a stubborn and rebellious son should be presented to the elders by his parents. These elders will then arrange for all the men of the town to stone the son to death. A "biblical mandate" if ever I read one! Though I hardly think it is what St. Mark's gospel has in mind when it states "suffer little children to come unto me". But just when would this lunacy stop? How long would it take to run out of sadistic "biblical mandates"? The only surprising factor in that biblical passage from Deuteronomy is that it is the male who is the recipient of the savagery. Normally that degree of inhumane treatment is directed at the unfortunate, ever vilified female.

KEN MOORE
Shropshire

Conscious evolution

THOUGH David Broughton, Gary Sloan and Donald Rooum (*Points of View*, June) raised some objections to my article *Long Live Conscious Evolution* (May *Freethinker*), none of them said that man, with his human con-

sciousness, is *not* the universe in conscious mode and none offered an alternative description of human consciousness in relation to the universe. If the human race has not evolved out of the universe and does not therefore have some fundamental connection with it, some other history for it must be found. At the moment it seems that the human race has evolved out of the universe and that its matter and processes are as much a part of the universe as any other aspect of it.

Gary Sloan said "we might recall that human consciousness now threatens the entire planet". That thought was a large part of the reason why I wrote the article: the human race's attitude to global ecology depends to a very large extent upon its attitude to itself.

If human consciousness is not the universe itself in conscious mode (sorry I have to repeat this again, Mr Broughton) it would be worth discussing some alternative ideas.

JOHN BONYTHON
London

Science and religion

MANY recent letters have referred to the compatibility or otherwise of science and religion. If, by "science", we are referring to those subjects normally taught under that heading in the school curriculum, ie biology, chemistry and physics, then there is no necessary incompatibility or contradiction between it and religion. After all, if we accept the "Big Bang" theory of the creation of the universe and the theory of evolution by natural selection, then this does not necessarily preclude the existence of a god, since the god or gods might have "caused" the Big Bang and "designed" the mechanism of evolution. To take the argument further, the Big Bang, whether detonated by a god or not, does nothing to increase our understanding of what was going on before the explosion.

On the other hand, if "science" is taken to mean "scientific method", the situation changes. Scientific method should be applied to all forms of research in all subject areas, including the humanities and the social sciences. The most important features of this method are its dependence on evidence/proof and the use of rational methods for gathering and assessing it. Such methods are not fool-proof but they are, at least, attempting to avoid reaching conclusions which are contrary to, or take no account of, the evidence. Religion, by the admission of its own supporters, is nothing without faith. The dictionary defines faith as "...strong belief, especially without logical proof...". To be religious, ie, to have "faith", means applying a standard to one area of investigation and analysis that would be total-

ly unacceptable if applied to another area of study. What would be the reaction if a medical scientist claimed that a particular vaccine would work because he had "faith" in it? Or if a historian claimed that the holocaust never happened because he "believed" it didn't? Such people would be ridiculed, probably even by the religious themselves!

The problem is the concept of "faith" itself. Obviously a person can have faith in anything they like, eg that a Briton will win Wimbledon or that paradise exists in the afterlife, but this does not make them likely or even possible. What such people are really talking about is "hope", what they would like to be true. Faith can only be meaningful to an individual who has undergone a paranormal "religious" experience which seems inexplicable by the standards of modern science. Such experiences, however powerful they may seem to the individual, must be meaningless to the impartial onlooker.

The importance of the distinction between scientific method and faith lies in the way in which religion is dealt with by our education system. Religion should be dealt with, if at all, by the same standards that are used for all other subjects.

DAVID UPTON
Middlesbrough

Please note change of address

Until further notice please
address all correspondence,
subs renewals etc to:

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G W Foote & Co
47 Theobalds Road
London WC1X 8SP

A new telephone number
and post box number for
the magazine will be
advised next month. Please
address all e-mails to:
fteditor@aol.com only

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, July 7, 4.30pm. Annual General Meeting. No meeting in August.

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.

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, 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, July 10, 7.30pm. Francis Walsh (Electoral Reform Society): *Make Votes Count*.

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

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

Havering & District Humanist Society: Information: J Condon 01708 473597 or Rita Manton 01708 762575. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgores Crescent, Gidea Park. Thursday, July 4, 8pm. Charles Rutter: *Independence Day*. Thursday, August 1, 8pm: Public Meeting.

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.

Glasgow Group: Information: Alan Henness. Tel. 07010 704776. Email: 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. Summer programme available.

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

Musical Heathens: Monthly meetings for music and discussion (Coventry and Learnington 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, July 18, 7.15pm. Rabbi Moeshe Vehidai-Rimner: *The Middle East from the Viewpoint of a Humanist Rabbi*

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, August 7, 8pm. Annual General 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. Wednesday, July 10, 8pm. Karen Rosen: *Population Concern*.

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.

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

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