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Freethinker

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Bloodied but unrepentant

Secular blues
musician
Billy Jenkins
discovers
that it is
not only
*Thought for
the Day* that
seeks to
stifle
atheist voices
– see p2



Photo Copyright: Nick Corker

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Freethinking Allowed: Barry Duke

I LOVE the blues. This should come as no surprise to readers because this *genre* is regarded by many as “the devil’s music” and therefore entirely in keeping with what some say is my mildly Satanic image. Lest you start worrying that I might be a closet follower of Old Nick, let me assure you that I have no leanings whatsoever towards the Dark Arts. But I do think that Satanism is considerably less dangerous (and far sexier) than the world’s three main monotheistic religions, and I am deeply distressed that prison officials in Kentucky have temporarily banned inmates from worshipping Hell’s horny head honcho.

The issue arose earlier this year when an inmate at the medium-security Green River prison in Central City requested permission to practise Satanism.

The warden, Patti Webb, mindful of the guidelines on religious freedom, allowed the man to conduct weekly black masses with other inmates in a supervised environment throughout the summer. The sessions were suspended last month by the Kentucky Department of Corrections which “had no idea” that devil-worship had been added to

Green River’s devotional curriculum.

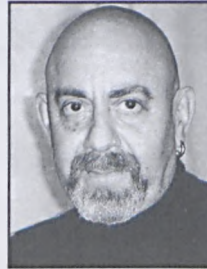
“For now we won’t aid or abet Satanic worship. We’re researching it to see what we are required to allow under the law”, said a departmental spokesperson.

Donald Kaspar, a prison chaplain in Texas, where satanic services are prohibited in prisons, said: “We’ve looked at the satanic bible and are convinced that what it advocates would put our prisons at risk.

“One of their tenets is revenge: if somebody hurts you, hurt them back.”

And there’s silly me, thinking that “an eye for an eye” was the sole preserve of the noxious Abrahamic religions.

**This month
Freethinker editor
BARRY DUKE, in
a devilish mood,
reflects on the
blues, Beelzebub
and the vicious
manner in which
conservative
Christians are prone to attack
one another**



Anyway, back to the blues, and, in particular, to a British blues guitarist and singer, Billy Jenkins, who is having some trouble getting his material aired by the BBC.

Jenkins is the nephew of the former Bishop of Durham, David Jenkins, and he says he has long been driven by the same “wind-up” genes (albeit humanist) that propelled his uncle into the headlines during those dark days known as the Thatcher era.

For those who don’t know it, blues music can sometimes lean towards the religious, and it is this variety that tends to get a fair amount of exposure on radio. Jenkins’ music, on the other hand, is unashamedly secular.

Which led to a spot of bother when Jenkins, a guest on a BBC jazz programme last year, was tersely told by the presenter, seconds before they went live, that he wanted “no blasphemy on air as he was a born-again Christian”.

This, Jenkins told me, “was a bit of a blow, as I was unable to expand on the philosophy of the band I had led for 18 years. I was also unable to pontificate realistically on the role of secular blues as an antidote to religious humbug.”

Jenkins, 46, launched his third Blues Collective CD entitled *Life* (VOTP records VOCD23) at his second Alternative Easter Day Family Secularist Celebration at the Barbican in London on March 31 – but found that its “secular gospel” contents prevented it from getting any BBC air time.

So it seems it’s not only *Thought for the Day* that seeks to stifle secular voices.

IF THERE’S one thing Christians are good at, it’s making complete asses of themselves when-

ever they choose to attack non-believers. But when they fall out among themselves, the results can be side-splittingly funny.

Take, for example, the almighty kerfuffle that blew up last month in the USA where a prominent television commentator, hitherto regarded as the voice of conservative Christians, made the horrible “mistake” of describing religious right-wingers as “fanatics” and “holy rollers”. Moreover, Bill O’Reilly – host of *The O’Reilly Factor* on FOX News – did so in an interview with a gay magazine, the *Advocate*.

The well-known conservative went on to endorse a number of anti-discrimination measures for gay men and lesbians, and said that right-wing Christian opposition to such law reform should be ignored.

He also said he did not believe in the Old Testament, nor the concept of Heaven and Hell. Also that much of the Bible was “allegorical.”

Once they’d stopped hyper-ventilating, the “fanatics” and “holy rollers” threw teddy out the pram, big time!

First among many to brandish their rattles at O’Reilly was “ex-gay” Stephen Bennett, spokesperson for the Concerned Women for America. In what can best be described as a queenie fit (sorry, *ex-queenie* fit) of volcanic proportions, Bennett shrieked that O’Reilly “was an affront to Catholics across this nation as well as the world”. (O’Reilly describes himself as a Christian and Irish Catholic.)

Bennett’s concern for “the Catholics of the world” is sweet. It is also just a tad insincere, because the “former homosexual” is a Baptist, and if one dips into the Bob Jones University’s Baptist website, one learns that these folk don’t like Catholics very much, as these three quotations illustrate:

- “Roman Catholicism is ‘a pagan counterfeit of the Christian religion’”.
- “A Catholic may be saved in spite of his Church. He will never be saved because of it.”
- “The Roman Church is not another Christian denomination. It is a Satanic counterfeit, an ecclesiastic tyranny over the souls of men, not to bring them to salvation but to hold them bound in sin and to hurl them into eternal damnation. It is the old harlot of the Book of Revelation – ‘the Mother of Harlots.’”

Bennett then foolishly agreed to appear on *The Factor* at the beginning of September “to discuss the homosexual agenda and its destructive effects on America and our children”. Alas, only to be turned into hamburger.

The Concerned Women for America were outraged, and the day after Bennett’s disastrous TV appearance, they issued a statement saying that “O’Reilly used the occasion to verbally attack Stephen, to mock God, the Bible, and to reiterate his distorted views of Bible-believing Christians who believe homosexuality is a sin”.

Poor loves, one wonders if they will ever grow up and get a life.

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Few tears shed over death of the bigoted baroness

THE hagiographic obituaries that appeared in the British press following the death last month of Baroness Janet Young, 75, patron of the Christian Institute and the only other woman to serve in Thatcher's cabinet, signally failed to disguise the fact that her passing was a cause for considerable celebration – and not just among atheists.

Richard Kirker, of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, said: "I am appalled that some people in the obituaries I have read called her a fine example of a Christian woman. She seemed to be the very antithesis of a Christian person. To try and square Christianity with any form of discrimination is deplorable."

Kirker, of course, was referring to the fact that the Baroness, the former Conservative leader of the House of Lords, had, in the latter years of her life, made a career of impeding gay rights in Britain and rose to become a high-profile homophobe on a par with the Roman Catholic Cardinal Winning and the Rabbi Lord Jakobovits. She succeeded in blocking the abolition of the disgraceful section 28, but failed in her bid to prevent the lowering of the age of consent for homosexuals to 16.

With the backing of the Christian Institute, she was planning to derail upcoming bills which could give gays partnership and adoption rights, protection against discrimination at work, and equalised indecency laws.

Human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell, of Outrage, said there would be "a collective sigh

of relief" over her death, adding: "Historians will place her on a par with the defenders of slavery and apartheid. She was a first-class bigot who defended discrimination and never

gave a damn about the prejudice stirred up by her anti-gay crusades."

Not surprisingly Tory leader Iain Duncan Smith, whose party first introduced clause 28 in 1988 to forbid the promotion of homosex-

uality in schools, and who talks about replacing it "with something similar", expressed sadness over the loss of the Tory's Bigot-in-Chief.

"I have always had huge admiration for Janet's courage, conviction and tenacity. She was a principled campaigner in the Lords and in the wider country, tirelessly fighting for the causes in which she believed, with both passion and intellectual vigour ... she was a great Parliamentarian and a great Conservative who will be sorely missed."

Colin Hart, Director of the Christian Institute, had this to say of "old tin knickers" – the nickname Young earned herself among fellow members of the House of Lords: "The Trustees and all the staff of the CI thank God for her life and witness."

He ominously added: "We remain dedicated to those tasks to which she committed herself so faithfully." From that we can deduce that the CI's virulent anti-

gay campaigns are set to continue, but the death of the baroness will hopefully make their task much more difficult. One thing is certain: her passing will transform the House of Lords into a much more humane place.

GEORGE BROADHEAD, Secretary of the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association, reports on the death of 'a high-profile Tory bigot'



Baroness Young: a "first-class bigot" with a kindly smile

Elvis's ghost floating around Europe

TWO musicians – one an Elvis Presley impersonator – are claiming visits from the ghost of the rock 'n' roll legend, who died 25 years ago.

Toon Nieuwenhuisen, of Holland, who set up an Elvis shrine in his home, said that Presley's ghost recently visited him, and that, on the 25th anniversary of his death on August 17, a plaster bust of Elvis "started weeping just before breakfast".

Elvis has also called on Littlehampton

singer Rick Bonner, who told the Brighton *Argus*: "He was at the end of my bed, dressed in normal clothes, not one of his jumpsuits."

He said that Elvis, who called at 3 am on the 24th anniversary of his death, spoke in a "familiar, syrupy voice". He talked about where he was, saying that "he was happy and living with his mother in heaven".

Rick, who said he was "an agnostic" before the visitation, has now embraced Christianity.

In brief

DR A C Grayling, the prominent philosopher and writer, has become the latest honorary associate of the National Secular Society. Dr Grayling will be familiar to many readers as the author of a long-running series in the *Guardian* called "Last Word". He has been an enthusiastic supporter of several of NSS campaigns over the past year – being a reader of the blasphemy poem on the steps of St Martin in the Fields, and a signatory to our letter about *Thought for the Day*.

THE person most associated with the word "Christian" among American college and high school students is not the Pope, Mother Teresa or even Billy Graham, but an utter nerd called Ned Flanders, the Bible-bashing cartoon character in *The Simpsons* who sports a Mexican bandit-style moustache, a fashionless green jumper, and spectacles with thick, black rims. A report in a recent issue of *Christianity Today* magazine revealed that a poll carried out at the end of the 1990s showed that 91 percent of children between the age of ten and 17 could identify *Simpsons*' characters, and that Ned – frequently a target for satire – was their idea of what a typical evangelical Christian was like.

PETER Mullan, one of the UK's most uncompromising directors and actors, has won the coveted Golden Lion Award for best picture at the Venice festival for his controversial film about sadistic Catholic nuns. *The Magdalene Sisters* was denounced by Vatican officials for its unflinching portrayal of the cruelty inflicted on vulnerable young girls by an order of nuns. It tells the story of four girls interned in the Magdalene Asylums in Ireland in the 1960s and their struggle against the daily brutality of the Sisters of Mercy.

THE Jesuits have agreed to pay \$7.5 million (£4.8 million) to two men who say they were sexually molested for 30 years at the Californian retirement home for priests where they worked as dishwashers.

The two unidentified men aged 51 and 56 complained of the abuse for years but were ignored until a local shopkeeper decided to take their allegations of sexual assault and false imprisonment to court. The settlement is one of the biggest in the current spate of legal actions arising from abuse within the Catholic Church (see report on page 12).



Get off the bus if you're not a Roman Catholic!

Another school year begins and once more the ugly face of religious discrimination scars the new start for some children. They aren't the right religion, you see, and therefore they can't ride with their class mates on the school bus.

It seems incredible in these days of so-called "inclusivity" that religious schools can still reserve places on the school bus only for members of their own faith or denomination.

The latest example of this mean-spirited religious privilege comes in Northumberland where a 13-year-old Sikh girl, Mandeep Ladhar, has been given a place in a Catholic school (something of a miracle in its own right) but she is not allowed to go to school on the school bus because she isn't a Catholic. This is despite the fact that there are empty places on the bus.

Her parents have understandably complained vociferously about this unforgivable disadvantaging of their daughter, and have

objected to the policy that permits it. In another case at the same council, a child has been refused a place on the bus because of being "unbaptised".

KEITH PORTEOUS

WOOD,
Executive
Director of
the National
Secular
Society,
reports on
school



transport discrimination
and updates the *Thought
for the Day* controversy

It seems that the policy of restricting free transport to RCs at this school has been in

place for many years, but was not being applied, until now. It is probable that the reason for this, and the reluctance to reverse the strict application of the policy, may be related to the Council's desire to contain costs.

Naturally we would prefer free and subsidised transport to be retained, as it is obviously an essential service for many children. But it must be available to all. Such blatant religious discrimination is simply not acceptable in a society that is trying to accommodate so much diversity.

What we have done

The NSS approached the parents of both these children with a view to helping them bring their complaint to the local council, telling them that the policy is practised all over the country and is causing inconvenience and insult to all kinds of people – including non-believers.

We wrote a comprehensive letter to the leader of Northumberland Council calling for an end to the discrimination. We suggested that the subsidised school transport should either be available on a non-discriminatory basis, or it shouldn't be available at all.

NSS member Owen Dumpleton represented the "unbaptised" child and the Society at a meeting with councillors in Northumberland's City Hall. The Sikh girls' parents were also there to make their case. The Council is relying on the Education Act 1996 Section 509 (4) (b) in which the Council has to have regard to "any wish of his parent for him to be provided with education at a school or institution in which the religious education provided is that of the religion or denomination to which his parent adheres".

Preliminary advice from our human rights lawyers suggests that there is a *prima facie* case that provision of free transport to Roman Catholics, but not other pupils, would now constitute discrimination under the Human Rights Act. We have the distinct impression that the Council and the Department of Education feel uncomfortable with this issue. We are keeping up the pressure.

The absurdity and injustice of the system was further emphasised in the case of the "unbaptised" child whose mother is non-religious but whose father is Roman Catholic. The father takes the enlightened view that children should be able to make up their own minds about their religious beliefs when they are old enough, hence his decision not to baptise his daughter.

When his daughter was refused free school transport, he looked into the regulations. These showed that it was the family's religion (and therefore the parents') that was relevant, rather than the child's. Northumberland's response to his informing them of this was that they would review the father's claim for free transport – but only if he could produce his own

Thought for the Day: we've lost – or have we?

AS REPORTED in the last issue, the NSS wrote to the BBC on 13 August to protest over the unwarranted exclusion of non-believers from this slot. The letter was co-signed by over a hundred luminaries and the kindred organisations. Concluding with the words: "We have therefore exhausted all other avenues of appeal" the letter was addressed to the BBC's Governors. The response, which said it was "replying on their behalf", came from a senior official who described herself as Head of Public Accountability and—curiously—the BBC Secretary to the Central Religious Advisory Committee.

Her letter rejected our protest on the grounds that "*Thought for the Day* occupies a very brief religious slot in what is otherwise an almost entirely secular agenda". The letter acknowledged that: "as part of its commitment to a balanced reflection of the views of its audience, programmes should include the perspective of secularists, humanists and those sceptical of religion's claims". Perhaps realising that the reasons given for the initial rejection were weak, the majority of the letter was devoted to this peripheral issue listing a number of programmes that the BBC considered address this 'sceptical' aspect. One programme cited will not be screened until 2004. Another was part of BBC Radio 4's *Sunday* programme on 18 August. This had been a brief examination of secular humanist organisations, which had clearly been prompted by the release of our complaint. (As well as the NSS, representatives of the British Humanist Association and Rationalist Press Association had taken part.)

Several small clues emanating from Broadcasting House led the NSS Council to be dubious about whether our complaint had in fact been considered by the Governors, and when we brought our concerns to Polly Toynbee's attention she was keen to investigate them. Her persistence yielded an admission that the Governors had not seen our complaint, as she said forcefully in an excellent article in the *Guardian* on September 6, complete with relevant cartoon. Fellow NSS Associate Joan Smith also brilliantly "put the boot in" on the same subject in the following *Independent on Sunday*.

Just before Polly Toynbee's article, the NSS wrote a follow-up letter to Sir Robert Smith, Chairman of the Governors' Programme Complaints Committee. As well as reiterating the complaint, we asked searching questions about the way it had been handled so far. We also took the opportunity to counter the arguments that the BBC had proffered for its latest rejection. We pointed out that the slot was sandwiched within a prestige programme, giving it a much larger audience than the slot itself would command. Nor was the TftD soap box slot remotely comparable to the rest of *Today*, where interviewees are challenged. We also drew attention to the unfairness of TftD contributors deriding the non-religious, when they have no opportunity to redress the balance.

The BBC has formally acknowledged this letter, assuring us it will receive Sir Robert's personal attention.

baptism certificate – which he can't find.

The NSS's involvement has been reported by the *Newcastle Journal* and other regional papers. One national paper that ran the story angled it as a case of racial discrimination, which it plainly was not, although the family are in touch with the Commission for Racial Equality. The wide publicity this case has received, so important for building up pressure, is probably connected with the fact that the girl comes from a minority religion. Other cases have not received quite the same attention – although the results of the discrimination are exactly the same.

The NSS has also written to the Secretary of State for Education, Estelle Morris, drawing her attention to this and other cases of transport discrimination on the grounds of religion.

HANG on to your hats, everyone – Einstein was wrong. And that's not all. The churches, and religions in general, are part of a conspiracy to suppress the truth. And before anyone smugly says they knew that already, it seems that we atheists and secularists are part of it too. CSICOP? James Randi? The Spiritualists? The Royal Society? Yep, they're all in it. Oh, and the various peer-reviewed journals of science.

The fact is, ladies and gentlemen, that Death is Not The End. And this is not some wispy religious conviction, but Established Scientific Fact. We are just too blind to see it, too led astray by the baleful influences of the religious/secular establishment. Physics and mathematics prove (I repeat, prove) that Death is Not The End.

As the sums are quite complicated, and as I've always struggled with physics I shan't even attempt a précis of what's involved. What I can do, though, is direct your attention to the website in which all this (and more) is revealed and explained. The URL is <http://www.cfpf.org.uk> and the name of the organisation is The Campaign for Philosophical Freedom. Whew! Go there and marvel.

"Why be born again when you can just grow up?" and "It will not do to investigate the subject of religion too closely, as it is apt to lead to infidelity" are just a couple of quotes taken from <http://www.bigeye.com/atheism.htm>. The first was by the prolific "Anon". The second was by Abraham Lincoln. Surprised me, too. Another I rather liked was "If you believe that exposing your children to violence is a problem, by all means keep them away from the Bible". The site is a collection of links to a whole range of resources, as well as being a collection of more home-grown material. Well worth a look.

Another of a similar kind is at [We asked the Minister to outlaw such discrimination through national regulations, and reminded her that the NSS had already recommended this in its formal responses to the Education Green Paper and White Paper.](http://</p></div><div data-bbox=)

And those parents not wanting religious schools for their children?

One of our members living in a small Lancashire village has told us that the only school available in the village is run by the Church of England. He doesn't want his daughter to be educated in a religious school, but the council will not subsidise her transport to the nearest non-religious community school. This is despite the fact that they will subsidise local Catholic children to

get them to the nearest Catholic school.

We pointed out in a formal meeting between the Society and senior civil servants at the Department of Education in 2001 that it was significant that our enquiries had failed to uncover a single case where a non-religious family had been offered subsidised transport so that its children were not compelled to attend a religious school. We were assured then that such a policy was operated in Hertfordshire. A subsequent check with a senior Hertfordshire councillor failed to confirm this.

Our lawyers are, however, hopeful that the section quoted above from the Education Act 1996 could, as a result of the Human Rights Act, be relied upon to insist on such transport for non-religious families. We'll keep you informed of developments.

members.aol.com/bbu84/biblicalstupidity/home.htm called "Christianity Bogus Beyond Belief". Visitors are guaranteed hours of innocent amusement. Be sure to tell your pious friends about it.

Fancy something a little more wide-ranging? Then check out the site of 'Godulike' at <http://www.godulike.co.uk> Plenty to choose

NORMAN PRIDMORE surfs the net for sites of interest to freethinkers

from here, whatever your tastes. Read a potted history of whatever sect, religion or philosophy takes your fancy (you can add your own comments too). The various outlines are often witty, and frequently acerbic. There are even sections on atheism and agnosticism. The strapline for atheism is "No proof, no god, no problem". Seems fair enough.

A while ago on TV there was an excellent programme about the wacky world of "alternative" therapies. A sceptical woman spent a few days at that kook-fest of a town called Glastonbury, staying with a pair of mystery-mongers called (tee hee) Argon and Isis (isn't argon an inert gas or something?). They run some kind of residential centre there, and offer (for a price) stuff like rebirthing and psychic surgery and whatever else the harebrained punters want. It made good television, for sure – and pretty tense viewing at times. The woman, Harriet Moore, has an excellent web site at <http://www.pink-unicorns.co.uk/> which should be required reading for anyone tempted to tread the path of zaniness ...

A pleasant little site is that of Atheist Parents. It's at <http://www.atheistparents.org> and is put together in an effort to give support and a sense of community to atheist parents (and other

relatives) in the good ole USA. The articles are short and often quite personal, and the emphasis is very much on coping with the influences of the American religious scene. But even so, there's enough there to make it worth anyone's while (especially parents) to take a look.

Looking for fun? Try Thamus at <http://www.thamus.org/>. The section on "How to be a Bible apologist" might be especially helpful to those who find arguing with fundies difficult or frustrating. This thorough eight-step guide will help logical thinkers enter the believers mindset. I found the section on "Learning to believe two contradictory ideas simultaneously" especially useful. There is also an interview with the Pope in the "Evil Atheist Conspiracy" section (though this may just be a hoax – it's hard to tell).

I can't let a column go by without mentioning yet another resource for those interested in the creation v evolution debate. Why? Because it matters. Those who are trying to foist nonsense on kids in school know that once the Trojan Horse of dogma is successfully placed within the walls of the education system, the rest of their religious nonsense will begin to follow. "Intelligent Design" is the latest bit of fundie nonsense, and anyone concerned to fight it should visit <http://www.talkdesign.org/> for material to combat it. It's an excellent site.

Finally, to the excellent NSS Newline service. It's available free and arrives by e-mail on a regular basis, is well-written, and is unfailingly topical and interesting. It's also very easy to subscribe to. Just send a blank e-mail with "Subscribe to Newline" on the subject line to enquiries@secularism.org.uk and they will do the rest.

Please refer suggested sites to me at norman@npridmore.fsworld.co.uk.

Reading the Bible is a revelation

When Christians describe God they often use expressions like, 'God is Love', 'God is the Perfect Being', 'God is all-knowing, all-powerful and all-good', and 'God is merciful and compassionate'.

I have discovered that a thorough reading of the Bible reveals some very different character traits of God.

In Genesis, after God has created the whole world and all of the creatures on earth and finally man in his own image, he is pleased with the result. However he is disappointed to discover later that man has misused his freewill and become wicked. This is God's response.

Genesis 6.1

And the Lord said; I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

This looks like an experiment that has gone horribly wrong and he has had to scrap it and start all over again. This is surprising because one would have thought that an all-knowing God would have been able to predict the outcome.

Noah and his family and one pair of each type of animal are saved, but nevertheless this is what I would call an Almighty cock-up. I think 'incompetence' should be added to a new list of his characteristics or at least 'lack of foresight'.

Then there is the fact that God is guilty of mass murder, which cannot be overlooked.

When God discovers that the men of Sodom are wicked, He once again takes action.

Genesis 19. 24-25.

Then the Lord rained down upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.

This strikes me as the reaction of an aggressive and violent being. It is the type of wholesale slaughter of which Osama bin Laden would be proud.

When Moses requests the release of his people out of Egypt, the Pharaoh's response is to refuse to let the Israelites go.

God then proceeds to inflict no fewer than ten plagues on Egypt. These include waters becoming blood, frogs, lice, diseased livestock, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and death of the firstborn. This is how the Bible describes the final plague.

Exodus 11.4-5.

And Moses said, Thus saith the Lord, About midnight will I go into the midst of

Egypt: And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the first-born of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of the beasts.

Even the cruelties inflicted by Saddam Hussein on his people lack this degree of vicious variety. It will be remembered that Sadam has deprived the Shiite population of Iraq of food and medicine, and has used chemical weapons against his own Kurdish population.

When the Lord spoke to Moses with instructions on laws for the people of Israel and the appropriate punishments for their breach, God's homophobia is revealed.

Atheists, says PETER RICHARDS, should spend more time reading the Bible because, by doing so, we can strengthen our arguments against Christian fundamentalism.



Leviticus 20.13.

If a man also lies with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

When the Israelites are confronted with King Sihon, who would not let them pass through his land, the Lord comes to their aid.

Deuteronomy 2.33-35.

And the Lord our God delivered him before us; and we smote him, and his sons, and all his people.

And we took all his cities at that time, and utterly destroyed the men, and the women, and the little ones, of every city, we left none to remain:

Only the cattle we took for a prey unto ourselves, and the spoil of the cities which we took.

I don't see much compassion there!

God encourages Joshua and the people of Israel to attack Jericho.

Joshua 6.2.

And the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour.

This is what follows.

Joshua 6.20-21.

So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him,

and they took the city.

And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword.

Any human perpetrator of such a crime would probably find themselves before an international tribunal charged with genocide.

When the Philistines took the Ark of the Covenant, from the people of Israel, God took his revenge.

1.Samuel 15.9.

And it was so, that, after they had carried it about, the hand of the Lord was against the city with a very great destruction: and he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts.

Vengefulness is then the latest of God's attributes to add to our list. According to the revised authorised version of the Bible, a more up-to-date translation of the word emerod is tumour.

Anger is another trait, which is frequently displayed by God in the Old Testament as this reference demonstrates.

Jeremiah 7.20.

Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon trees of the field; and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched.

It seems that God is in need of anger management skills.

According to the Bible, God's sense of justice is particularly Draconian.

Ezekiel 9.4-6:

And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.

And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity:

Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark, and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house.

God's reaction to prostitution makes Mary Whitehouse's protestations seem quite mild by comparison.

Ezekiel 16.36-40.

Thus saith the Lord God; Because thy filthiness was poured out, and thy nakedness discovered through thy whoredoms with thy lovers, and with all the idols of thy abominations and by the blood of thy children, which thou didst give unto them;

Behold, therefore I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all

them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated, I will even gather them around about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness.

And I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged, and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy.

And I will also give thee into their hand; and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and shall break down thy high places: they shall strip thee also of thy clothes, and shall take fair jewels, and leave thee naked and bare,

They shall also bring up a company against thee, and they shall stone thee with stones, and thrust thee through with their swords.

And so it goes on.

Another display of God's more unpleasant traits, typical of the Old Testament, can be found in the following quotation.

Ezekiel 25.14

And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel; and they shall do in Edom according to mine anger and according to my fury; and they shall know my vengeance saith the Lord God.

In the New Testament, God appears to be quite different in character, much calmer and less prone to fits of anger and violence, although Jesus Christ, his earthly incarnation, certainly does encourage the fear of hell, as this passage demonstrates.

Mark 9.42-48.

And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched.

Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched,

And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire:

Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Jesus also warns people to fear God,

Luke 12.4-5.

And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath the power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.

Let me sum up. According to the Holy Bible, God is an incompetent, aggressive, violent, cruel, homophobic, merciless, vengeful,

angry, Draconian, whore-hating, fear-provoking mass murderer.

There is clearly a discrepancy between what Christians say and what the Bible tells us about God.

If Christians believe that the Bible is in fact Divine Revelation, as many do, then they must accept that the Church is guilty of "spin" because these negative traits of God, which I have highlighted, are conveniently pushed to the background.

It is of course also true that many Christians do not accept the authority of the Bible and foremost amongst these in England is Don Cupitt, a lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion at the University of Cambridge and author of a controversial book entitled *The Sea of Faith* (1984). His non-realist interpretation of religion denies the literal truth of religious creed. His ideas have inspired like-minded radicals to form a Christian humanist movement known as The Sea of Faith Network.

I suggest that if more Christians read the Bible critically then less might be inclined to accept it as the divinely revealed Word of God.

I also think that it is worthwhile for Atheists, like myself, to read the Bible, because by doing so we can strengthen our arguments against Christian fundamentalism.

Note: All scripture citations are from the King James Version of the Holy Bible.

Moral lowlands

FACED with "the Church's greatest scandal in modern times" and "a cancer at its heart", even Roman Catholics are asking a number of fundamental questions. Unfortunately, the answers given by the hierarchy, while partly true, are far from the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

The first embarrassing question is: Is clerical child abuse a peculiarly Catholic phenomenon? Setting aside fringe religious cults, the answer appears to be yes, involving both physical (excessive corporal punishment in schools and other institutions) and sexual predation. In the current debate the media have ignored the former to concentrate on the more sensational and admittedly graver paedophilia. Then the question arises, why?

On American television prominent Catholic clergy are now voicing speculations that would have been unthinkable a mere decade ago. Does the priesthood contain a disproportionate number of gay men? If so, as most of the victims that have come forward so far are male, is paedophilia the result? If celibacy were abolished, would both phenomena vanish?

While no statistics are available, homosexual tendencies do seem to be more common among

Catholic (and Anglo-Catholic) clerics than Protestant ones. And despite Church denials, "celibacy" may have something to do with it. (I put "celibacy" in quotes because it literally means

DAVID TRIBE, a former Freethinker editor now living in Australia, considers the problem of paedophilia among Catholic priests

an unmarried state, whereas what is expected of the priesthood is total abstinence from sex. It may be a libel or an anachronism, but I've read that priests and nuns are supposed to shower inside a gown so as not to reveal or handle their genitals. If the Vatican really wished to relieve sexual tensions in its pastors while preserving the illusion of total dedication to their flocks – or the institution – it would sanction masturbation tomorrow.)

In a society where heterosexual marriage or cohabitation is the norm, those who eschew this path are potentially homosexual or asexual in orientation. They can of course simply be promiscuous or exceptionally dedicated to their work, which may be religious, artistic, scientific

or social. Here arises another scandal virtually unique to Catholicism within Christianity, though it parallels practices in some other religions. While final vows are taken at a mature age, most postulants are selected by devout parents, teachers and parish priests for a "vocation" at a tender age and are thoroughly brainwashed before the first eruption of pubic hair.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that most priests who renounce holy orders subsequently marry (women), while novices and priests who readily adjust to the all-male *ambiance* of seminaries and vestries and the ceremonial *ambiance* of incense and vestments (profanely called "clerical drag") have a higher than average likelihood of being gay. But does that equate to a higher than average tendency to paedophilia?

Global statistics show that most gays are *not* paedophiles, and most paedophiles aren't gay. Instead, they're heterosexuals who prey on their own families. Paedophiles who operate outside the home tend to be repeat offenders

(Continued on p10)

A New Dark A

Niger states Islam

Anyone who says that mixing of religion and politics can be of good to any society should take a critical look at Nigeria – and, in particular, the recent conviction of Amina Lawal .

On Monday, August 20 this year, the Upper Sharia Court in the Northern State of Katsina, upheld the death sentence earlier passed on 30-year-old Amina Lawal by a lower court for committing adultery.

According to a report in *The Punch*, Lawal, cradling her seven month old baby named Wasila, sat in the dock, and with tears dropping from her face, she listened to the presiding judge Alhaji Aliyu Abdullahi Katsina as he affirmed the judgment of the lower court in Bakori.

In a 50-minute judgment which was punctuated with chants of *Allahu Akbar* (God is great), the judge ruled that Amina should be taken to a public place, buried up to her neck and stoned to death. Amina is to be executed immediately after weaning the baby.

The alleged father of Amina's child is Yahaya Mahmud, the boyfriend whom she said had seduced her with an offer of marriage. Mahmud admitted being Amina's boyfriend but he swore by the Koran that he was not the father of the child!

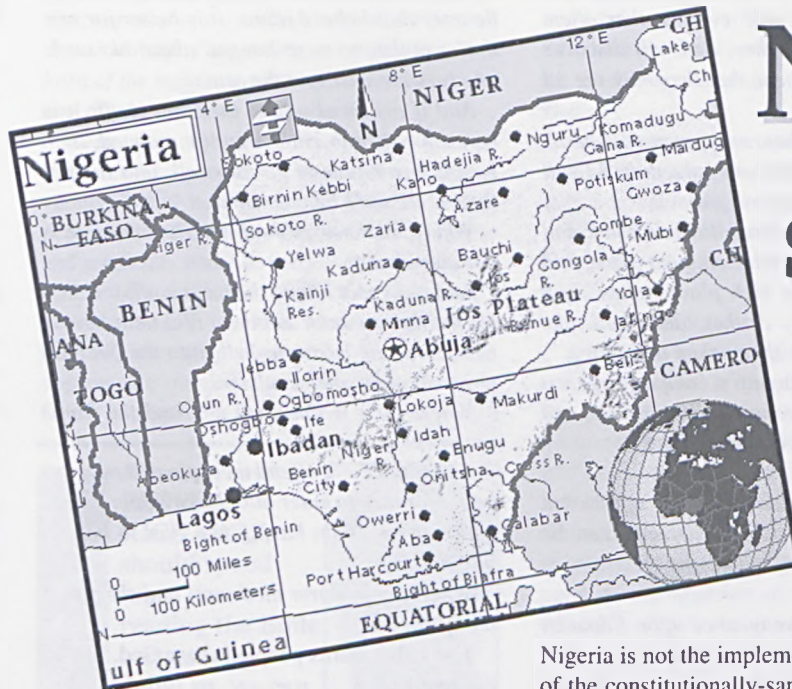
He was discharged, while Amina was tried and convicted on the basis of her confession. Under Sharia's absurdly rigid rules of proof, four witnesses are required to convict a man. And the witnesses must catch the man while his penis is inside the woman's vagina!

There are still other technicalities that make it extremely difficult to convict a man for adultery under *sharia* law. Moreover, *sharia* does not accept nor recognise evidence from DNA tests. So, that means Amina Lawal is to die alone, for a "crime" (if that is really what it is) she did not commit alone. What an injustice!

The Islamic legal code is operational in twelve States in northern Nigeria, with Zamfara being the first state to adopt Islamic law. Other Nigerian states implementing *sharia* are Bauchi, Bornu, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsia, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto and Yobe. Since *sharia* was adopted by these states, several Nigerian Muslims, as well as non-Muslims, have fallen victims.

Mallam Bello Jangedi became the first victim of the controversial law when he had his left hand amputated for stealing a cow in Zamfara State. Lawali Isa, a firewood seller, was the second person to suffer amputation for stealing two bicycles.

In Jigawa State, Alhaji Abba Aliyu of Kazaure received 40 strokes for having a woman, Faiza Bala, who was not his legal



wife, living at his home.

In Bauchi state, Hajo Poki, a pregnant woman was given 100 strokes for committing fornication. And Attahiru Umaru, a 35-year-old man was sentenced to death in Birnin-Kebbi, Kebbi state, for forcefully having anal sex with a seven-year-old boy.

In Sokoto, Safiyatu Hussaini, was sentenced to death by stoning for committing adultery. As in Amina's case, the man allegedly responsible for the pregnancy was released for want of evidence. But following international pressure, the *Sharia* Appeal Court in Sokoto, set Safiyatu free on March 25, but only on the grounds that she had committed the crime before the introduction of *sharia* in the state.

While I was writing this piece, news came in that in Niger state two people – Ahmadu Ibrahim, male, and Fatima Usman, female – had been sentenced to death by stoning for committing adultery. And in a bizarre act of punishment, a man in Bauchi state, Bappah Adamu Maidoya amputated one of his wife's legs because he suspected her of adultery. Maidoya, who is now in custody, told police he was carrying out the will of Allah.

Generally, the implementation of *sharia* in Nigeria has been marked by much confusion, conflict and controversy. Initial attempts to introduce the law in Niger, Kaduna, Bauchi and Gombe states sparked off violent clashes between Christians and Muslims. The Nigerian Supreme law prohibits the adoption of any religion as state religion. However, it provides for the implementation of Islamic personal law.

So, what is happening in the *sharia* States in

Nigeria is not the implementation of the constitutionally-sanctioned Islamic personal laws, but the application of the entire Islamic legal code. Unfortunately, this process had been endorsed by top Northern (Muslim) politicians.

Among them are former president Shehu Shagari, and former Head of State, Major General Buhari. It should be pointed out that in 2000, ex-president Shagari, who never introduced *sharia* during his tenure as the country's helmsman, vehemently opposed the decision of the Federal Government, after the riots in Kaduna, that "sharia governors" should return to constitutional status *quo ante*.

Shagari had once remarked that no one can oppose Islam and succeed politically in the North, and in Sokoto last year, Buhari advised Nigerian Muslims not to vote for a non-Muslim presidential candidate in the 2003 election. He said it was only a Muslim president who could product the rights and interest of Muslims in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, Buhari has declared his intention to run for the presidency in 2003, but he needs the votes of millions of non-Muslims in Nigeria to win the election. A vote for Buhari is certainly vote for Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism in Nigeria.

That notwithstanding, both President Obasanjo and the Justice Minister Mr Kanu Agabi have described the implementation of *sharia* as unconstitutional. But they have yet to challenge the matter at the nation's apex court or take any serious measure to call the erring

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Age looms as Nigeria's northern states fall victim to Islamic law

Parts of Nigeria have descended into religious barbarism as a result of the spread of *sharia*. LEO IGWE, Executive Secretary of the Nigerian Humanist Movement, and IHEU's Growth and Development representative in Sub-Saharan Africa, describes how the menace of *sharia* is turning the clock back in his country.



today, *sharia* has become a thorn in the flesh of Nigerians and their fledging democracy. The Islamic legal code has become the proverbial (Igbo) fly on a festering sore – if one kills it, one is in trouble; if leaves it, one is still in trouble.

Thus, for all Nigerians, particularly those residing in the 12 *sharia* states, the outlook is a harvest of death, blood, tears, sorrows and shame.

Of one thing I am certain: if Nigerians are to have a modern, strong, united, free, peaceful and progressive society, the Nigerian government must abolish *sharia* law. And if some states must implement the so-called Islamic personal laws, then such implementation must be within (and not without) the confines of the nation's secular constitution, human rights, gender equity and justice.

More importantly, the Nigerian leaders must

devote themselves to the task of secularising the Nigerian polity. They must strive to achieve a clear separation of religion and state including the separation of the powers of the Muslim (and Christian) clerics and the powers of the president and governors.

More especially, they need to ensure the separation of religious sins and punishment (as decreed by Allah) and state crimes and penalties.

Furthermore, the Nigeria government needs to learn from countries like Iran, Algeria, and Sudan especially, that mixing religion and politics in a multi-religious society is a recipe for war, chaos, anarchy and disintegration.

• The Nigerian Humanist Movement (NHM) works and campaigns to promote humanism, “understood as an ethical and democratic life-stance which maintains that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their lives”.

The NHM provides a sense of community, family and fellow feeling to all Nigerians who are unchurched, unmosqued, unshrined or do not take religion seriously – including Nigerians who are atheists, agnostics, freethinkers, rationalists and free religious”.

Africans *can* learn to live without God

“TO GET young Africans weaned from their almost congenital reliance on fate, they must be educated to stand on their own feet. The worst bane of Africans is a chronic dependence on the deity to solve all their earthly problems. Give everybody an education for self-reliance and we will vie with the best nations everywhere.”

– Tai Solarin

TAI Solarin, who died in 1994, was a leading Nigerian educator and social critic. Internationally known, and a well-respected writer for such leading Nigerian newspapers as *The Guardian*, Solarin was brave enough not only to profess his atheism in a country where almost everyone is extremely religious, but to actively promote it among the young.

Solarin received a Christian missionary schooling in Nigeria, and he completed his education in England, where he discovered the humanist writings of Robert Ingersoll, H.G. Wells, and others. He soon took the view that religion was nothing more than an instrument for keeping black Africans in a submissive role to white Europeans.

“Every Nigerian,” he once said, “is born saddled with a god to worship. It took me almost thirty years to get the sledgehammer to break the shackles around my mind.”

Solarin returned to Nigeria in 1952, where he was hired as headmaster of a local school. During this time, all schools conducted mandatory religious activities in the classroom – starting off each day with hymns and prayers, and attending Church on Sunday. When Solarin expressed a determination to remove religion from the school's activities, he was fired.

He founded his own private secular school in 1956, naming it the Mayflower.

Solarin was convinced that the under-development and passivity he saw all around him in Africa was due to the indoctrination every African received as a child – learning that they must

(Continued on next page)

Sharia in Nigeria

submit to a divine deity to solve all major problems of the world. He passionately believed that people needed to be taught to rely on themselves – to become educated, to work hard, and to take risks where appropriate. One of his favourite quotations was from H G Wells: "I shall die, as I have lived, the responsible centre of my world."

When Solarin first opened his school in 1956 he had seventy students. By 1992, there were 1,800 male and female students. It became a state-run school in the late 1970s, although the government asked Solarin to stay involved because they recognised his role in its success. Its students had the reputation of working harder than average, and employers eagerly sought out Mayflower graduates. Because the school is not categorised a "unity" (ie a faith-based) school, it receives roughly one third to half of the funding that other schools receive. Private funding from parents' organisations finance the difference. The school is so popular, four out

of five students have to be turned away. The first woman engineer in Nigeria was a graduate from Solarin's school, which also boasts the largest number of science and engineering graduates.

Solarin believed that the principles embodied in his school could be applied with equal success in other areas of Nigeria – with the exception of Muslim areas, where "it would be tantamount to heresy to proclaim that man is the master of his fate, the captain of his soul." Heretical, because the word "Islam" means just the opposite – "submission" to the will of Allah.

Shortly before his death, Solarin was interviewed for an article in the American magazine *Free Inquiry* by Norm Allen, Director of African Americans for Humanism. He told Allen he believed that only through humanism and atheism would Africans succeed in freeing themselves from their debilitating reliance on religion.

Those who rely on religion, he said "are laden with a burden that humanists have shed: Fear." Most Africans are taught from birth to fear – to

fear daylight, life, death. Witches, angels, the Devil or Satan, thunder, lightning, nocturnal birds, are all objects that generate fear. The African child is brought up *not* to ask questions. Precocious children are silenced. Any human being so shackled is shorn of the equipment that is strongest in the armour of the humanist – courage. Strip the African of all objects of his fears and he will be as courageous as any other man across the world. Inject education into his or her life and you have led him or her halfway up the ladder of humanism.

Asked whether humanism or atheism could ever take root in Africa, Solarin said he believed it could – but a prerequisite was education. "The blacks hold onto their God just as the drunken man holds on to the street lamp post ... Habit is difficult, but not impossible to break."

But, he said, forces against the broadening of the base of literacy in Nigeria were formidable. "Governments in the Third World do not like the masses of the people being educated."

over very long periods, and a powerful reason for choosing male victims is that boys are less likely than girls to complain to their parents or discuss it with friends. Nevertheless, worms can turn and the careers of most paedophiles are punctuated with arrests, interrogations and successful or unsuccessful prosecutions. Why, then, hasn't this been the experience of most clerical offenders?

The answer is, of course, systemic institutional cover-up. Catholic victims and parents who tend to go to other priests and bishops, rather than to the police, are told to forget about it and paid off if they won't. As in other instances of hush money, payment has been conditional on signing a non-disclosure agreement. The offender is then quietly moved to another parish or diocese.

At last the Church has admitted this saga has been going on for decades. We may conclude it's been going on for centuries in Protestant countries. (In many Catholic countries no-one would dare to complain or seek compensation.) Why then are we just hearing about it? The answer will appal the faithful, and it won't please the burgeoning brigade of snide postmodern sycophants of superstition – people who don't believe a word of religious orthodoxy but won't hear a word against it, who in their liberality will tolerate anything but honest "old-fashioned" freethought. For this is what has created a climate where victims can feel safe in coming forward, a society which is secularised if not secular. Segregated "faith" institutions can no longer contain scandals internally.

Traditionally theology was the queen of the sciences and the priesthood the prince of the professions. Among their flocks priests were the shamans who transubstantiated bread and wine, the thought police who heard confessions, the demigods who absolved from sin.

Moral lowlands

(Continued from p7)

Peasant girls they impregnated considered their offspring holy babies. In the popular imagination papal infallibility expanded to clerical inerrancy. Courageous heretics declared immoral priests shouldn't officiate, indeed had no divine mandate. Fearing the consequent invalidity of sacraments and ultimately of the apostolic succession, and/or a collapse of its *magisterium*, orthodoxy purged this heresy while Church apologists denied immorality was occurring.

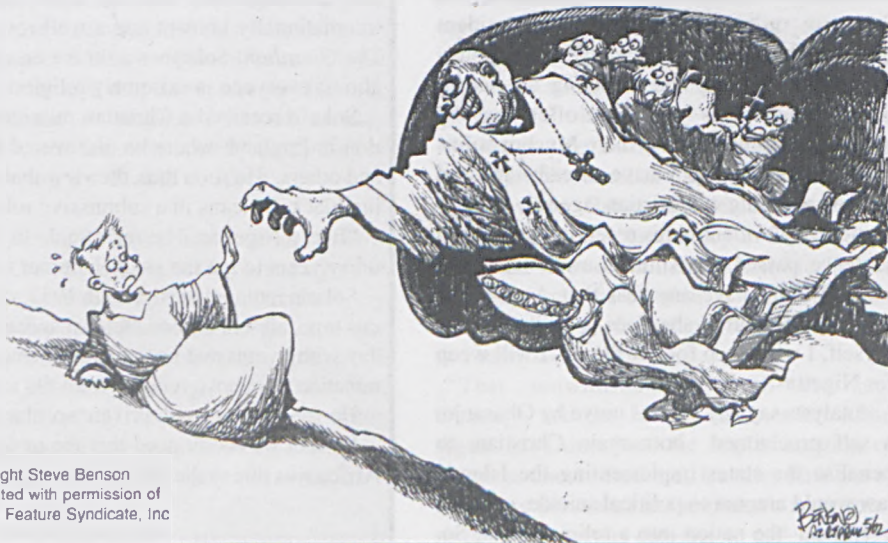
For two millennia secular philosophers and

scientists have questioned the dogmas of Christianity. When sophisticated apologetics eventually failed, the Church fell back on the moral argument: The faith may lack proofs of truth, it may even be untrue, but belief in it makes men and women better people. The world now knows this belief is also untrue.

A postscript on the Most Reverend George Pell, RC Archbishop of Sydney (July *Freethinker*). Not only had he shielded Father Gerald Ridsdale in the past, he accompanied him to court to lend moral support. Recently he denied confidentiality clauses were still included in settlements while his lawyers were busy imposing them. (An oversight of course.) And, yes, he denies the sacrament to non-paedophile gays.

"A GREAT WORK OF ART MAY BE BLEMISHED, BUT ITS BEAUTY REMAINS."

- Pope John Paul II, speech to US cardinals, Rome, April 2002



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Trusting in Genesis

BECAUSE orthodox religion is responsible for so much of the world's bloodshed (his words not mine) Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks believes it is no good coming up with "secular, rational arguments" to get Jews, Christians and Muslims to live together in peace. So he has gone back to the first 12 chapters of Genesis, before Isaac and Ishmael part: "the symbolic moment when Judaism and Islam begin their separate journeys". Instead of the familiar "one God, one truth, one way", Sacks is "claiming divine approval for human variety", said his interviewer Jonathan Freedland (*Guardian*, August 27).

"Religious tolerance and pluralism have always been secular doctrines that could be dismissed as western or decadent by fundamentalists", the Chief Rabbi argued; but he thought that even religious fundamentalists would take notice of his message extracted from the sacred texts the three faiths share.

No one can doubt Jonathan Sacks' sincerity, and it turned out that he had already held meetings with a variety of "radical Muslims" and established a common language "within minutes". So although to the critical, it may be a lot of mumbo jumbo, it might just work if both sides believe it. And we know Dr Sacks does. He even believes Moses wrote the Pentateuch.

African fundamentalism

WOLE Soyinka, the Nigerian Nobel laureate, novelist, dramatist, poet, political activist, who lives in exile in Los Angeles and teaches at Emory University in Atlanta, was in London recently to collect an honorary fellowship from the School of Oriental and African Studies, with which he has had a friendly relationship since his student days in Leeds.

Soyinka has been an outspoken critic of corrupt regimes in his own country and was detained as a political prisoner between 1967 and 1969. He was forced to flee Nigeria during the Abacha-dictatorship of the 1990s because his life was at risk. "There have been some improvements since the end of the Abacha regime", he told the *Education Guardian* (August 6), but there are still big problems, with the erosion of local traditions and the rise of both Christian and Muslim fundamentalism. We are having religious riots in both universities and secondary schools. I say a plague on both your houses". And so do we.

Grave matters

A VICAR in Cambridge has issued an appeal to "sponsor a skeleton" at £10 a time. The Rev Chris Boulton of St Andrews church, Cherry

Hinton, has more than 600 lots of remains which were unearthed two years ago, when excavation work began on a neighbouring burial site.

The skeletons may be 1,300 years old Mr Boulton told the *Church Times* (August 2) and are thought to have had a Christian burial. So his job when the bones came back from the archaeological trust where they had gone for analysis, was to re-inter them on the present Christian site. It would cost £5,000 to do this and reproduce an eighth-century Canterbury cross in stone. The church had so far raised £2,000 by its sponsorship scheme. The re-burials would just about fill the graveyard which dates back to medieval times.

Mr Boulton stressed that the "sponsor a skeleton" scheme was being done respectfully and had created "worldwide interest". "I've had calls from the *New York Times*", he said, but he didn't mention how many skeletons the paper had sponsored.

Israeli ethicist

YITZHAK Frankenthal's son was murdered by Palestinians while serving with the Israeli army, but he doesn't want the security forces to seek revenge. "I would rather have the finger that pushes the trigger or the button that drops the bomb tremble before it kills my son's murderer, than for innocent civilians to be killed", he told a rally in Jerusalem on Saturday, July 27. "I would say to the security forces: do not kill the killer. Rather bring him before an Israeli court."

Ethics are not black and white, Frankenthal continued, they are all white and they have to be free of vengefulness and rashness. It was unethical to kill innocent Israeli or Palestinian women and children; but it was also unethical "to control another nation and to lead it to lose its humanness ... We lost sight of our ethics long before the missile bombings. The breaking point was when we started to control another nation."

In this remarkable and moving testimony, Frankenthal put himself in the position of the Palestinians. Had he been born into the political and ethical chaos that is the Palestinians' daily reality, he would have undoubtedly become "a freedom fighter and would have killed as many on the other side as I possibly could".

He feared that there was worse to come, but as long as there are Israelis like Yitzhak Frankenthal there is hope, however slight.

London rabbi booed

SADLY, when a London rabbi criticised an Israeli missile attack in Gaza which killed nine Palestinian children, he was forced to pause in his sermon after booing and shouts of "rubbish" (*Times*, August 3). Rabbi Jeffrey Cohen

of Stanmore United Synagogue later said he was 100 per cent behind the state of Israel, and the country should make no concessions on that. But, he added, "when we are talking about the loss of human life, there is no compromise on that".

Apparently not all Stanmore Jews are so uncompromising.

Trespassing

MEANWHILE, I read with a wry smile (in the same paper) that Israel has offered to mediate between two Christian denominations whose clergy came to blows in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

It seems that a scuffle broke out on the Sunday previous, when a 72-year-old Coptic Orthodox priest "moved into a shaded area of the church's roof belonging to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church". A brawl ensued and twelve men from both denominations ended up in hospital in this real clash of orthodoxies.

Unsympathetic pastor

MOST commentators sympathised with Celtic footballer Neil Lennon when he withdrew from the Northern Ireland team of which he was captain before a friendly match against Cyprus on August 21, after receiving death threats purporting to come from the paramilitary Loyalist Volunteer Force.

Most, but not all. Pastor Kenny McClinton, who has mediated between the LVF and the government, tracked down the ruling army control and said they totally repudiated this death threat against a sportsman. He accused Lennon of accepting the authenticity of the threat too quickly. The player should have "stood his ground" instead of folding "in the face of a hoax threat by some clown with a 10p piece".

Standing one's ground is a bit risky with so many paramilitaries around.

Walter McCrone

WALTER McCrone, the American chemical analyst who proved the Turin Shroud to be a fake, died on July 10 at his home in Chicago.

When McCrone analysed the shroud in 1978, he found red ochre and vermilion paints, common in the 14th century, but no blood. He concluded that it was simply "a beautiful painting". Despite several death threats, he refused to soften his stance. Vindication came in 1988 when an international team of scientists applied sophisticated carbon-dating techniques to the shroud and dated it to the 1300s. The *New York Times* described him as a "debunker of legends".

IT IS unfathomable to most of us that the Nazis could have behaved as they did in the Holocaust, but here is a shrewd explanation. *Eternal Treblinka* disturbs us, not because of any gruesome pictures or graphic descriptions of the Holocaust, but because (inevitably though tactfully) it holds up to us, its readers, a clear mirror to look at ourselves anew.

Charles Patterson is a social historian and Holocaust educator living in New York. In his book he explains the important parallel between the Holocaust and our treatment of animals. His preface quotes Franz Kafka: "I think we ought to read only books that bite and sting us ... If the book we are reading doesn't shake us awake like a blow to the skull, why bother reading it in the first place? ... A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us."

Alas, not every reader wants an axe to his skull so that his frozen attitudes may painfully be axed away. And therein lies a problem! But Kafka would have applauded *Eternal Treblinka*, already nominated for umpteen book awards in the States. It grips like a thriller, our attention held by two questions: how could they do it? and how could other people stand by and let it happen? – imperative to know, of course, to guard against a recurrence.

Patterson diligently traces Man's emergence as the dominant species – a very recent development in our history. We used to be afraid of many other animals; they could hunt us! But now, since their "domestication", we are the self-appointed Master Race and, with our technology, we can rule the planet with dangerous power, we can tame all creatures into submission. Sociobiologist Edward O Wilson laments this emergence of humans as the dominant species: "It was a misfortune for the living world in particular that a carnivorous primate and not some

benign form of animal made the breakthrough". This tendency in humans to be Nazis over all creation is what *Eternal Treblinka* is all about.

The author recalls Sigmund Freud's observation that man, not content with mere supremacy, was pretentious enough to invent a large gulf between humans and other animals. This pretentiousness Freud called "human megalomania" (man getting too big for his

HEATHER EVANS
reviews *Eternal Treblinka*
by Charles Patterson.
Lantern Books,
New York.
Paperback, £16.95.

boots). The Church in particular perpetrated this man-made gulf by granting "souls" to humans only; humans were special, a cut above the others. Humans also are prone to making unfair divisions, between skin colours, races, creeds – and other species. ("It's not like us, kill it" is an inbuilt reaction we haven't learned to check.) This arrogance led to the quest for "racial purity" in the United States and in Germany and the enthusiasm for eugenics.

Our habit of looking down on other animals, never really acknowledging their painience (chosen pets excepted – there is nothing consistent about this prejudice), led to a general vilifying of those animals we exploit as lesser beings. Racist remarks often liken victims to animals. And likening Jews to the animals that humans were accustomed to abusing was the start of the dehumanising process that enabled the Nazis to carry out their crimes against humanity.

Patterson details how our institutionalised cruelty to animals breeds violence against humans; it is the root cause of mistreatment of fellow humans. Slavery had been modelled on the "domestication" (enslavement) of animals. The Nazi's model too was animal exploitation; they already knew how it was done! At first just animal-breeding techniques were implemented for use on the Jews, eg compulsory sterilisation and euthanasia. Then death camps appeared emulating vivisection laboratories and slaughterhouses – all in hushed up and secret places. Throughout the Holocaust, Nazis needed only to replicate the models already established for our use on animals. The slaughterhouses with their assembly-line conveyor-belts in the States had effectively kept their workers too rushed off their feet to reflect overmuch on their task, so human death camps were managed in a similar way. Even gold taken from the Jewish victims' teeth after their murder imitated the uses we have found for every piece of animal – from tusks, hides, fur, to bones for stocks and soap.

By exploiting animals so ruthlessly we have unwittingly set the precedent and impetus for some of our own species to be horrendously killed. The implication is: if we think it's all right to cruelly exploit any species that WE don't personally value, then why be surprised that the Nazis did the same to a group that THEY did not value? Does the pain of only our own species matter? Wouldn't extending our compassion to all things painient have been a good thing for all of us long ago, and a better example to set before the "naughty boys", the thugs?

Eternal Treblinka profiles people from the German-speaking side of the world. Christa Blanke, formerly a Lutheran pastor in Frankfurt, revealed: "During the Nazi period many Germans had some kind of 'pet Jews', the ones who were really nice and not to be mixed up with the 'ordinary ones'". The same thing happens to animals. There are pets like minipigs and riding horses, not to be confused with "slaughter pigs" and "slaughter horses". This ethical schizophrenia is openly supported by governments and the meat industry, while various media brainwash the public, as they did in Hitler's day.

Dietrich Von Haugwitz, from Eastern Germany, insists people at the time didn't want to hear details of the extermination: "If you know, please don't tell me. I don't want to know the details." (It would be too upsetting.) He sees the same denial operating today about slaughterhouses and vivisection laboratories; we are all in denial. Perhaps now we do understand the two big questions in this book – and we can identify with them.

The only problem is that Kafka's axe to the skull really is painful for us.

Boston abuse victims settle for \$10-million

THE Archdiocese of Boston in Massachusetts, USA, last month finalised a \$10 million (£6.5 million) settlement with victims of defrocked Catholic priest John Geoghan, six months after a much larger settlement was unexpectedly scuttled.

Judge Constance Sweeney told victims she wanted to acknowledge their pain, and make clear that the settlement meant the civil court recognised that Geoghan committed the offences they had accused him of.

An earlier settlement worth up to \$30 million had been announced in May, but the archdiocese backed out of that deal soon afterwards, saying it could not afford this sum as hundreds of other lawsuits were in the process of being filed.

The victims agreed to the lower figure because they want to try to put the abuse

behind them, their attorney, Mitchell Garabedian, said. "They want closure, and they understand that the church does not really care about their emotional well-being", Garabedian added.

According to the terms of the deal, the bulk of the settlement — \$9.3 million — will be divided among 50 people who say they were molested by Geoghan. Twenty people who say Geoghan exposed himself to them will receive \$540,000, and 16 parents of children who say they were abused by Geoghan will get \$160,000.

Geoghan is serving a nine- to 10-year prison sentence for fondling a child and faces at least one more criminal trial stemming from allegations by about 130 people that he molested them during his more than 30 years as a priest.

Arabs and Jews

I WAS so amazed by the ignorance displayed by Derek Wilkes (*Points of View*, July) that I feel impelled to attempt some corrections. In doing this, I have come to realise that no British person under the age of 60 can have any real idea of what actually did happen in Palestine in the course of the 20th century. I myself am 81 years old, and served in the British Army during the years 1945-1947, mainly in Egypt, so I can claim to have a little more knowledge and a little more understanding than most others.

Stage One was the foundation of Zionism in the USA in 1897. At this time the Jewish population in Palestine amounted to some two per cent of the total. During the next 20 years a number of Jews, encouraged and financed by the Zionists, moved to Palestine and expanded the Jewish land area, largely by purchasing from Arabs.

Stage Two came in 1917, when the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, and his Foreign Secretary, Mr. Balfour, issued the Balfour Declaration in an effort to persuade the American Jews to support an American declaration of war against Germany. The gist of this Declaration was that Britain would actively support the Jews in their efforts to settle in Palestine (which was then a subject District under the rule of the Ottoman Empire). The Balfour Declaration included the proviso that the Jewish-settled areas would form a National Home with no independence and no separate political rights. Jewish settlers totalled 5 per cent.

Stage Three lasted from 1917 to 1939. During these years there was a slowly increasing Jewish settlement in Palestine, which was totally under the rule of Britain. This increase came about partly by purchase as before; but now the Arabs were aware of what was happening and attempted to boycott the sale of Arab land to Jews. These boycotts were declared illegal by the Palestine (British) Government and attempts to impose them by force were ruthlessly put down. Other methods of expansion were by *kibbutzim* (agricultural settlements in semi-desert land) using artesian wells. The Jews claimed that no one owned these lands, which was untrue. The third method, increasingly, was intimidation of Arabs from lands adjoining powerful Jewish settlements. The Jews were supported by Britain in all this expansion. The Governor of Palestine was quite often Jewish. The British Army was permeated at that time by a curious cult of British-Israelism; and the Palestine Police, which was officered and to a large extent manned by ex-Black-and-Tans and Irish volunteers, was extremely anti-Arab. General Spears is said to have claimed that Palestine when populated by Jews would form another "loyal little Ulster". There were a series of Arab uprisings in these 20 years, all of them ruthlessly quelled. Campaign

Medals were issued to the troops involved, and the risings were often dignified as "Wars". Targeted assassinations were utilised by the British Occupying Forces; General Orde Wingate is said to have insisted that the actual head should be produced of the wanted Arab, before any reward was paid out. In view of the constant Arab threat to Jewish lives, the Jews were permitted to form a Defence Force, the *Haganah*, which resembled the later British Home Guard, or more closely resembled the Ulster "B" Specials.

In addition, the Jews formed a separate illegal force known as the *Irgun Zwei Leumi*, called by the British the Stern Gang. These latter also indulged in "targeted assassinations" largely ignored by the Occupying Power.

Stage Four. This is the period of the Second World War, and it ended in the total domination of Palestine by the Jews, now known as Israelis. The Jews scored politically by forming the Jewish Brigade to support the Allied cause; but the internecine feuding between Arab and Jew was now so intense that two battalions of regular British Troops had to be stationed in Palestine in support of the Palestine Police. The Arab leadership disintegrated under this pressure, and three Arab leaders, including the Grand Mufti, fled from Palestine to seek help from Germany. None was given. When the war ended in 1945, there were huge supplies of armaments in dumps all over Egypt, occupied by British forces until 1951. Many of these armaments found their way legally or illegally into Palestine where they buttressed the Jewish (Israeli) armed forces. The Israelis were now totally bent on annexing the whole of Palestine, and very naturally all the more so as the realisation spread of what had actually happened in Europe to the Jewish people during the Holocaust. Britain at first was determined to continue its occupation of Palestine, and the Israelis had to eject the British Occupying Power by force. Huge reinforcements poured into Palestine from all over Europe of Jews who were determined never to be subject to pogroms or Holocausts ever again. These often arrived fully armed from the detritus of Europe's war on the Eastern Front and they were fiercely opposed to British Occupation.

Israelis were given every support by the USA, and they went from strength to strength, firstly assassinating Lord Moyne, the unfortunate Irishman sent by the United Nations to achieve some form of political settlement. Then the Israelis blew up the King David Hotel, the Centre of British Occupying Government, causing huge casualties. Finally, the *Irgun Zwei Leumi*, under the command of Menahim Begin, later to be President of Israel, annihilated the village of Deir Yassin, slaughtering 219 villagers, men women and children. None were left alive, and even dogs and sheep were shot.

At this point Britain abjectly abandoned its League of Nations mandate.

Stage Five was the War of 1948, in which Israelis easily prevailed over the largely ill-armed and untrained Arab opposition. The Israelis then seized control of all the territory that they, at that time, could dominate.

Stage Six was the so-called Suez War, in which the forces of Israel, France and Great Britain attacked Egypt. This war was ended by the intervention of the USA under President Eisenhower, the only occasion on which any support has been given to the Arabs by a Western Power.

Stage Seven was the war of 1967, in which the Israelis attacked and defeated the armies of Egypt, Syria and Transjordan, and annexed huge further areas of Palestinian territory, as well as the Sinai Desert between Palestine and Egypt.

Stage Eight was a curious war in 1973, in which Egypt attacked and gained a momentary advantage over the Israeli forces. This war ended with a settlement in which Egypt recovered Sinai.

These are the facts concerning Jewish expansion into Palestine over the last 100 years. My reason for writing this account is not to express any political feelings, either pro-Israeli or pro-Arab; but only to emphasise the appalling results which religious hatreds can bring about – the hatred of the Nazis for the Jews, which brought about the Holocaust; the hatred of the Jews for the Arabs, as shown in wars and targeted killings; the hatred of the Arabs for the Israelis, as shown in suicide bombings. If only religion had not existed, none of these appalling things would ever have come to pass.

I have nothing but praise for the efforts of the *Freethinker* to undermine religion everywhere, and I wish it success with all my heart.

BILL BARBOUR
Northern Ireland

CLEARLY I am considerably senior to Dave Simmonds (*Points of View*, September) since I do not need to read about *Irgun* and the Stern Gang. I remember them well; even met one or two of them and delivered lectures upon their activities to the Royal Navy.

The British administration in Palestine was betraying its League of Nations mandate by unjustly and cruelly refusing to admit to their homeland the survivors of the Holocaust. *Irgun* and the Stern Gang used violent methods to see that these policies did not succeed, and it was largely because of them that the British had to withdraw.

I have never heard it suggested that they ever terrorised Arabs. When the British withdrew in 1947 these organisations ceased to exist, and since the alleged expulsion of the

Palestinians took place in 1948, it is impossible to see how they could have taken part in it.

Readers should consider what happened in 1948. The Jews accepted the UN partition resolution. The Arabs did not. So, without negotiations, without an ultimatum, without a declaration of war, six Arab armies descended upon the nascent state of Israel. They were influenced by Hitler's ally, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and Nazi war criminals seeking sanctuary in Egypt and Syria. Their objective was to commit the Holocaust, Round Two, as my Arab fellow students at the Inns of Court assured me. The Arabs had been armed to the teeth by the departing British, and the Jews, who were outnumbered 200 to one, were denied arms. The Palestinians could not have been too frightened.

A quotation from a newspaper printed more than 30 years after the event is not very convincing. Where are the contemporary records of the Palestinian expulsion? The letter reads like a soldier's recollection of one minor battle in which the Jews escaped genocide.

Dr Mikdadi should be comforted. If the Palestinians would make peace he would surely be compensated for any injustice as part of the settlement.

But what of the 800,000 Jewish refugees, driven out of Arab lands in the 1950s and their property sequestered (UN figures). Who will compensate them?

How can a *Freethinker* reader be so unjust?

DEREK WILKES
London

The Eruv in North London

BARRY Duke (August *Freethinker*) focuses on the absurdity of anyone needing an *eruv* for non-observances, but misses out that the underlying motivation for the Barnet Eruv boundary is ethno-religious assertion. Unlike the boundaries of urban *eruvim* in other countries, Barnet's offensively imposes *eruv* symbolism on the lives of people with other beliefs, religious or secular. This it does in three ways.

First, the Rabbis insist that the *eruv* poles are installed closely adjacent to existing structures, mostly houses, in order to compel everyone to pass through a poles-and-wire symbolic "gateway" (their term) to enter or leave the *eruv* "domain". This imposition will be permanent, not just on the Sabbath, for its claimed purpose.

Second, the frontages of blocks of houses on private land are designated as parts of the *eruv* boundary without even informing the residents. The imposition of this *eruv* belief on residents with other beliefs, religious or secular, could be in breach of the right to respect for the home under the Human Rights Act.

Third, instead of seeking individual consents

of the affected residents, which is required by ancient religious law, a Rabbinical dodge obtained their proxy consent for the *eruv*-believers. Barnet Council was given a financial gift by the United Synagogue *Eruv* Committee (USEC), which the Rabbis recognise as a symbolic "domain rental" signifying the consent for the *eruv* of all residents who are not *eruv*-believers! Unsurprisingly, Barnet Council denies that this was the purpose in its acceptance of a gift of £4000 from USEC, although a documented alternative use of the gift has not been produced.

The imposed religious symbolism – compulsory passage through *eruv* gateways in public streets, house frontages forming parts of the physical *eruv* boundary, and the surreptitious "domain rental" – could amount to a nuisance in the legal sense to those for whom this is offensive. Unfortunately, Christians turn the other cheek, and there are insufficient secularists directly affected to fund a legal challenge.

DR JEFFREY J SEGALL
London

JUDAISM may be as misguided as any other religion and the construction of *eruvim* may be as silly as anything else. But you have to remember that: 1. The various sects of Judaism have not spent recorded history fighting and killing each other; 2, an *eruv* affects no-one but Jews and 3, Judaism does not try to impose itself on anyone else.

You would do much better to concentrate your bile on the totally ridiculous C of E, which presumes to have a permanent say in the government of this country in the form of bishops, however many in the House of Lords (another subject).

JOHN STUART
Exeter

THIS *eruv* thing is pretty daft but it is only practically objectionable if the notional boundaries are on public display. Why should they be marked other than on maps available to interested fruitcakes who choose to apply for copies from their religious organisations.

The maps of all the *eruvim* nationwide could be collected into a booklet called *The Good Eruv Guide*. There could even be a Sacred Rivers supplement.

ERIC STOCKTON
Orkney

God's lies

REGARDING the creationist debate, in Genesis 2:17, the Lord God gives us a wonderful clue about his character: He tells lies. Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he warns Adam, "thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die!". Adam eats the apple and lives for 230 years! The serpent

tells Eve the truth – that "ye shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:4) – and is condemned to eternal punishment. I asked a Christian to clarify this, and the response was, "Oh, God didn't mean physical death". "Death" could mean "spiritual death" or "death to innocence". Fair enough, but either the Bible is literal or it is not. Creationists cannot have their apple pie and eat it. Having set a precedent so early on, one wonders what else the Lord God said was lies.

ROY OSBORNE
London

Knowledge and proof

PENELOPE Forrest (*Points of View*, August) seems to confuse – or at least assumes that "most people" confuse – two kinds of knowledge and two kinds of proof.

Scientific knowledge relates to objective reality. Its hypotheses may be derived mathematically but they can be supported or falsified by comparing what they predict with what is actually observed – in the case of general relativity the previously unexplained anomaly in the orbit of Mercury, for example.

Mathematical knowledge is the product of deductive reasoning. If we accept the premises and the argument is valid the conclusion MUST be true and, unlike a scientific hypothesis, cannot be falsified by observation. If we accept Euclid's axioms (premises) about the geometry of plane surfaces, the theorem (not hypothesis or theory) describing the property of the square on the hypotenuse of right-angled triangles (Pythagoras' theorem) is true, whatever we observe.

If we draw a right-angled triangle on a curved surface where Euclid's axioms don't apply, or an imperfect right-angled triangle on an imperfectly plane surface, and measure the squares, the observed results will not agree with the conclusion of the theorem. But these observations will not affect the truth of the theorem which is absolute, even if Euclid's axioms don't apply anywhere in the real world.

JACK HASTIE
Scotland

Animal liberationists are not terrorists

HAVING read Keith Bell's contribution to *Points of View* (September), I think I would prefer the company of the most militant and inflexible animal rights activist to his. Without a shred of evidence he depicts animal rights activists as terrorists. In fact the vast majority campaign peacefully for improvements in the lot of animals both domestic and wild. Even the Animal Liberation Front goes to great pains to ensure no animals or humans are injured by its actions.

No animal abuser has been killed by animal rights activists. However, several have been killed



or seriously injured by the animal abusers. The animal rights movement does not set out to kill – unlike Islam which is responsible for numerous deaths from Afghanistan to Indonesia and beyond.

If one values life, the horrors perpetuated by vivisectionists, furriers and huntsmen are just as bad as those perpetuated by Islamic jihadis.

If Islam were vegan, as a secularist I would still oppose it. But its abuse of animals makes me oppose it all the more. Surely, a rational philosophy has to address the question of the relationship between humans and animals and in so doing extend the circle of compassion from our own species to the others with which we share the planet.

TERRY LIDDLE
London

Free Speech for Muslims

FINSBURY Park Muslims mocking the September 11 commemoration in London were shown on television with a banner proclaiming FREE SPEECH FOR MUSLIMS. Remembering the assaults that Nicolas Walter and his wife and I suffered for daring to hold FREE SPEECH and FREE SPEECH FOR ALL banners on the route of the Muslim march demanding the death of Salman Rushdie, I can only assume there was insufficient space on the Muslim banner for the rest of their slogan: BUT NO ONE ELSE.

BARBARA SMOKER
Kent

Borrowing from religion

IT IS not easy being interviewed, or engaging in a discussion on air, so I do not like to criticise anyone's efforts. But one cannot let it pass without comment when a spokesperson for humanism says on radio, as Claire Rayner did in August, that of course humanists borrow things from religions, that Moses was a great law-giver, and that the Ten Commandments, or some of them, are very good laws for everyone to follow.

This is a muddle. Surely humanists take the position that human beings are capable of working out for themselves what is right and wrong, and what ethical behaviour should be. Experience tells us that this is so. If we were not capable of such judgements, how would someone know which of the Ten Commandments we should comply with today, and which we should reject? We also know now, these old rules are inadequate. We have to go further. The moral standards of most of us in 2002 are higher than these ancient laws stipulate. It would be surprising if it were not so.

A responsible adult cannot take decisions on the basis of some ancient text, or by following anyone else's advice. We must examine all the facts and make up our own minds. This is what humanists need to emphasise. This is what we

are positive about, rather than just being negative about religions. We are against religions, not just for the hell of it, but because we are for rational thought and scientific method.

Also, to the best of our current historical knowledge, there was no such person as Moses, any more than there was such a person as Apollo. The Ten Commandments were not thrashed out on Mount Sinai by an Israelite with an Egyptian name, but probably go back to the Code of Hammurabi, ie Babylon several centuries before the Exodus story, under the god Baal. Zoroaster also received the tablets of HIS law on a mountain top, from Ahura Mazda. Borrowings were probably also made by the Jews from the Hindu Vedas, and from the Egyptians, and elsewhere.

Where religions have any good ideas, these have been hijacked from ordinary human beings. The priests then claim that only in religion can these transcendent truths be found.

MS RASJIDAH ST JOHN
London

Lament for a bee

ANY sensible person, even a Buddhist monk, would have a sense of proportion about this hapless bee (*Down to Earth*, August). What Colin McCall missed is the self-criticism of the lamenting "Barefoot Doctor" who is shocked at his failure to modify his instinctive behaviour with a concern for the environment. Many of us would not have cared a hoot about the bee. Even the story-teller may not have worried too much about it, but perhaps he was worried about his lack of self control, and rightly so.

Because it may be instinctive to take a swipe at an annoying insect, it is not necessarily right. There is an unfortunate belief that humans have a right to do what we like to the environment and not to bother about inter-relatedness, ecology. It is of just as much concern to the non-religious that we modify our relationship with fellow animate inhabitants of the Earth. The future of mankind probably depends on it, but preferably not accompanied by his sentimentality. Mind you, if he is a practising GP he's probably at war with nature anyway.

PETER ARNOLD
Alderney

No need to organise us

WHY do we need, as Albert Adler states, to "win the hearts and minds" or "find an audience" of people who have given up religion? If they have given it up they do all the normal non-religious things that everyone does all the time. The alternative to "believing-in-god-and-religion" is "not-believing-in-god-and-religion". It does not leave a gap – it merely removes an obstacle.

Why should we want to replicate functions and services and activities that are already in

existence? They come through normal everyday life, joining clubs and organisations, writing letters, posting on message boards, campaigning, and any number of social and community activities. Instead of going to church or agreeing with religious ideas and going to Bible meetings, you have a lie-in, disagree with religious lobbying, and join an evening class. Or if you really feel bugged with the interference and want to help to resist their activities, join a campaigning organisation like the NSS.

Secularism or secular humanism's impact, cultural or political, depends entirely on the extent to which it forces religion back to its rightful place (if you think there is one) in the private lives of its devotees, and out of the public and political domain. It does not need "welding", its purpose is to promote secularism (or secular humanism if you wish). When religion gets its sticky fingers out of our lives, we will just get on with living, we do not need humanists to organise us, tell us what to do, and with whom to do it. The church tells people how to run their lives, and I certainly do not think we should attempt to emulate them with a "programme of rewarded involvement which establishes the sense of being a congregation"!

S E LORD
Westerham

Army chaplains

On BBC2 *Newsnight* (18/09/02), there was a report on the terrible state of the army medical service. While I was watching this I remembered the report in last month's *Freethinker* about the army requiring "a substantial increase in the number of chaplains to minister to the needs of all those pious, church-going" squadies. It is clear now that this requirement for chaplains is sensible forward planning by as the army expects it will have to bury a lot more soldiers in the future.

PAUL EDMONDSON
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The Freethinker has moved!

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atheist & humanist contacts & events

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, Sunday, October 6, 4pm. Robert Stovold: *The Evolution of Ageing*.

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. Saturday, November 9, 12.30pm for 1 pm. Reunion lunch. Navajo Joe, 34 King Street, Covent Garden, London. Bookings: George Broadhead on 01926 858450.

Greater Manchester Humanist Group: Information: Niall Power. Tel 0161 2865349. Monthly meetings (second Wednesday) Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester. Wednesday, October 9, 7.30pm. Denise Taggart: *What is Theosophy?*

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

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

Havering & District Humanist Society: Information: J Condon 01708 473597 or Rita Manton 01708 762575. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgores Crescent, Gidea Park. Thursday, October 3, 8pm. Giles Hart: *Why Bertrand Russell was not a Christian and Why I am Not One Either*.

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 Hennes. 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. Swarthmore, Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Tuesday. October 8, 8pm. Jennifer Jackson: *Ethical Issues in*

Medicine. November 12, 8pm. Jim O'Shea: *Youth Detention – Retribution or Rehabilitation?*

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. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, October 31, 8pm. *Hallowe'en – a Pagan and Christian Approach*.

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

Musical Heathens: Monthly meetings for music and discussion (Coventry and Leamington Spa). Information: Karl Heath. Tel. 02476 673306.

North East Humanists (Teesside Group): Information: C McEwan on 01642 817541.

North East Humanists (Tyneside Group): Information: The Secretary on 01434 632936.

North Stafford & South Cheshire Humanists: Information: Sue Willson on 01782 662693. Newsletter and details of programme available.

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. Annual Dinner, December 4.

Sheffield Humanist Society, Grosvenor House Hotel, Charter Square, Sheffield. Wednesday, November 6, 8pm. Dorothy Rowe: *Depression – Mental illness or Moral Dilemma*.

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, October 9, 8pm. Public Meeting. Speaker: Hanne Stinsen, Director, British Humanist Association.

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:
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Hove, Sussex BN3 1RU.
Notices must be received by the 15th of the month
preceding publication