

£1.25

The

Vol 122 No 11
November 2002

Freethinker

Secular Humanist monthly

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

The Witch Report



The Wicked Witch of the West, played by Margaret Hamilton in MGM's 1939 movie, *The Wizard of Oz*

Those who embarked on the infamous witchhunts of the 17th century in Europe and America were “the intellectually stunted products of superstitious belief”. Today, similar beliefs manifest themselves in such terrible practices as exorcisms – often with horrific results – performed on people deemed to be “possessed”.

- see centrepage feature



Also in this issue:

What better gifts for the Winter Solstice than atheist badges and other merchandise? – p6
Worst of all possible starts for the new Archbishop of Canterbury – p5

Rationally speaking: Dr Jan Fortune-Wood

AN article in the September issue of the *Freethinker* exposed the fact that even the clergy have stopped believing in some of the myths of the church. It highlighted the decline in belief in the Virgin birth, as well as significant percentages of priests (more so amongst women priests) who disbelieve in the literal bodily resurrection of Christ or that Christ is the only way to salvation.

The priest quoted, Reverend Robbie Low, appeared to be shocked, but his organisation, Cost of Conscience, is famously antagonistic to women doing any more than make the tea in church, and it suits his purpose to be deeply saddened that these upstart women priests are more critical than their male counterparts.

He knew all along that they would lower the standards of belief and doctrine – and hasn't he just been proved correct?

Well, pardon me if I appear sceptical, but after fifteen years of campaigning against the likes of Mr. Low in my days as a spokesperson for the Movement for the Ordination of Women, I learnt not to trust statistics gener-

ated by this organisation, even if they said that white is not black. What's more interesting, I think, are Mr. Low's disingenuous protestations that disbelieving clergy are a new feature of a church that has allowed women to pollute its ranks.

Not so! Disbelief has been standard issue amongst clergy for some time. Not long after being confirmed in the Church of England, and clearly showing promise as a theology candidate at the precocious age of thirteen, I was given a book by my parish priest which questioned the veracity of the Virgin birth – this in the early 1970s.

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Doubting the Virgin birth is commonplace across clergy and laity. The latitude for interpretation and for holding faith peppered with gobbets of reason has always been a feature of a perhaps peculiarly British form of Christianity. Even the most radical disbelievers found in groups like Sea of Faith (a support group for church people, mainly clergy, who believe none of it but who want to maintain the regulative social and moral functions of religion) have rubbed along for years beside their more believing counterparts.

After a lifetime of church attendance and genuine, if selective, belief and after fourteen years as a deacon and priest, doubt was a personal revelation to me, but it was not the kind of doubt that Rev. Low protests too much about that caused me any trouble.

The belief that holds the Church together has little to do with creeds and much more to do with holding back the world; staunching the flow of free thought. What fundamentalists share with church-going doubters has nothing to do with arguments over whether Christ died for our sins and everything to do with the advocacy of a particular kind of social glue and control.

When I began to wrestle with doubt it was not my new rationalism or the absence of God

in my life that made me feel that I was well and truly in the wrong place – after all I could find those commonplace doubts reflected amongst colleagues and laity on any given Sunday. Rather, what made me a stranger in a once familiar environment was that I was beginning to doubt the medium as much as the message.

I could abandon all belief in God and still be welcome, but I could not doubt the Church.

The Church is in decline. It has a chronically aging population and, despite some almost surreal attempts to massage the figures, falling rolls. In this climate, belief is a bonus, but loyal belonging is what really matters.

The attempt to increase the number of church schools is a case in point – young people don't get religion in these places (they certainly didn't in the one I once taught in!) but they might be left with fond feelings of a quaint institution they can turn to for rites of passage and the odd crisis – and a few will decide that the soothing rituals and moral platitudes are worth preserving. Building more church schools won't increase belief, but it might just shore up the tentative, sentimental feelings of belonging enough to ensure some survival.

When I experienced three assaults in the parish church where I was vicar, two of them severe, none of my senior colleagues ever enquired about the effect on my faith. Frankly, they really couldn't risk hearing an honest answer. On the other hand, my loyalty was of real and deep concern: Might I say the wrong thing to the media? Couldn't I have the "good sense" not to tell the police about the latest incident – after all, the police only leak these things to the press? Wouldn't it be better to attribute my illnesses to personal weakness or even to domestic violence rather than allow any blame to point in the direction of an organisation that has no policy or procedures for dealing with personnel safety?

The Church, like a dying animal, is defensive to the point of aggression. Whether the clergy believe in God or not is not where it will make its last stand – the cornerstone is belief in the Church itself – the loyal propagation of its role as the guardian of morality or, more specifically, of order and decency.

Convincing people of the silliness of credal statements is one step forward in forging a secular society, but the sad sight of non-believing parents pushing to get places at church schools for their children should tell us that something much deeper is also needed. Secular thinkers have not only to show that rationalism stands up to scrutiny and that optimism is not dependent on hoping beyond hope and reason that there is life beyond death, but also that progress is not a dirty and fearful thing and, most importantly, that community and morality flourish without a church to prop them against.

The Free thinker

UK ISSN 0016-0687
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*Views expressed in the magazine are
not necessarily those of the
publishers.*

Subscriptions, book orders and fund
donations to the publisher:

Freethinker/G W Foote & Co Ltd
25 Red Lion Square
London WC1R 4RL

E-mail: fteditor@aol.com

Website:

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

Annual postal subscription rates

12 months: UK £15 or £10 unwaged. Overseas surface mail (including Republic of Ireland) £18 sterling. Air mail £25 sterling. Overseas subscribers are requested to obtain sterling drafts from their banks, but if remittance is in foreign currency (including Republic of Ireland) please add the equivalent of £5 sterling or USA \$8 to cover bank charges. Alternatively, send at your own risk currency notes, convertible in the UK, plus bank charges equivalent to USA \$3. Special trial subscription for readers' friends and contacts: £5 for six months. Send name and address of recipient with £5 cheque or postal order made payable to G W Foote and Company to the *Freethinker*, PO Box 26428, London SE10 9WH.

Printed by Derek Hattersley & Son
Sheffield

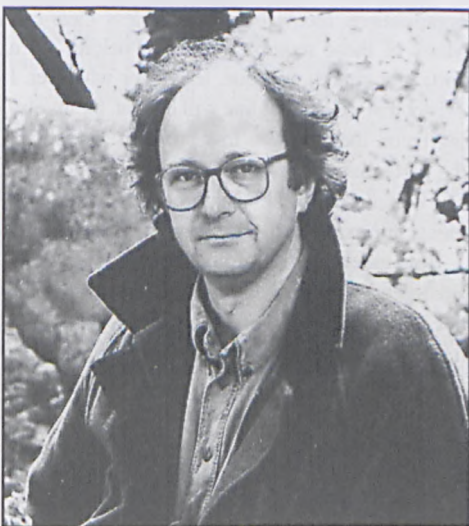
Top author attacks religion on 'Desert Island Discs'

CHRISTIAN book-burners, preoccupied with consigning copies of J K Rowling's *Harry Potter* series to the bonfire over the past year or so, will certainly now be targeting the works of Philip Pullman.

Pullman, 55, won this year's Whitbread book award for the final instalment of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, in which he created a parallel universe ruled by a senile, viciously sadistic deity who has to be deposed in battle so that the inhabitants can join with angels in creating a "republic of heaven". The *Catholic Herald* called his books "the stuff of nightmares" and "worthy of the bonfire". Another critic cautioned: "Christian parents beware."

Pullman, who writes for children but shuns the category "children's author", is only outsold by J K Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and has a vast adult readership.

Writing in the *Guardian* (August 12, 2002) arts correspondent Angelique Chrisafis, said of Pullman: "Keen to tackle received ideas on



Philip Pullman

religion, he recently called C S Lewis's highly Christian Narnia books 'blatantly racist' and 'monumentally disparaging of children'. Such is his hatred of domineering, organised religion, he has become something of an evangelical atheist."

All manner of Christian apologists for C S Lewis immediately went on the attack when Pullman, in an earlier *Guardian* piece, explained his dislike for the work. He later said: "When you criticise Narnia, what you are

doing. I have discovered, is not what you think. You think you are offering an opinion about the literary or moral qualities of a work of fiction. In fact, unless you offer unqualified and unstinting praise, you're blaspheming. Lewis's followers are unhinged."

BARRY DUKE reports on a best-selling author who has angered Christians with his forthright attacks on the church, which he describes as a 'malevolent force'.

Pullman added that he was "amazed by the frothing, swivel-eyed barminess" exhibited by his opponents, who accused him of "mean-mindedness, spite and every kind of twisted malevolence."

"Apparently, one of my motivations was envy, because Lewis's books have sold more than mine. Well, they would, with a 50-year start, wouldn't you think?"

During a debate on morality in fiction at the Edinburgh international books festival in August, Pullman warned that unless writers wrestled with the larger questions of moral conduct, they would become useless and irrelevant.

Ex-nun goes on trial

A FORMER Roman Catholic nun has gone on trial at Prince Edward Island, Canada, on five charges of child abuse. Lucille Poulin, a self-proclaimed prophet who says she talks to God and receives messages from the Almighty daily, is accused of assaulting children at a rural commune.

Poulin was described at the start of her trial as a domineering fanatic who beat children regularly with a thick wooden rod. She claimed the punishment came from God. According to witnesses, Poulin helped start a commune on a farm. She started off by taking care of the children, but she soon dominated the spiritual life at the farm as more people came to live there and share her fundamentalist religious attitudes. Along with this new way of living came a rigid form of discipline — the use of a rubber strap on children who were disobedient or disrespectful.

The *Guardian* article quoted Pullman — the grandson of an Anglican priest — as saying: "You can't leave morality out unless your work is so stupid and trivial and so worthless that [nobody] would want to read it anyway."

Pullman, who stopped believing in God as a teenager, said: "I am all for the death of God."

But his real bugbear, wrote Chrisafis, was with the "propensity of human nature to use politics or religion to set up one unquestionable truth — it could be the Bible, it could be the Communist Manifesto — and to then knock down all that went against it. This is what I am against. Not Christianity, but every religion and fundamental organisation where there is one truth and they will kill you if you don't believe it."

In early October, as a guest on Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs*, Pullman told presenter, Sue Lawley that he wanted to bring home to his readers "the understanding that if heaven exists at all, it can only exist in the world we live in. There ain't no elsewhere.!"

Lawley pointed that it was hardly surprising that this would anger the church. "Your latest book is anti-church. The church in your book is called 'The Authority'. It's a pretty malevolent force, isn't it?"

Pullman replied: "Well, churches are malevolent forces in our world. If we look at the history of the Christian church alone we see persecution, hanging, burning and torture carried out in the name of the God of Love. It's a history of infamy almost without parallel, and we don't have to look very far in the world today for examples of zealotry entirely fuelled and sustained by religious hatreds of one sort or another. Religion is a malign thing. What I am saying in my books is that goodness and wickedness both come from the human heart — there is no supernatural origin for these things. We are the origin of good. We are the origin of evil. There simply is no God."

New FT website launched

THE *Freethinker* website has just been given a smart new look, thanks to the efforts of one of the magazine's enthusiastic supporters, Paul Hempstock of Nottingham. We are very grateful for his efforts.

Please visit www.freethinker.co.uk and let us know what you think of the new site.



New religious law bites some harder than others

As we go to press, an Exeter man, Alistair Scott, is waiting to hear whether he is going to prison for insulting a Muslim neighbour, Mohammed Hudaïd. During the argument that led to Mr Scott's arrest, Mr Hudaïd called him "a Zionist pig-fucker". Mr Scott was advised by his lawyers to plead guilty to "religiously aggravated, threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour". Given the draconian nature of this offence, he had little option.

The new offence was part of David Blunkett's anti-terrorism measures, and unfortunately – unlike the incitement to religious hatred provisions – it survived the parliamentary process. Potentially, Section 39 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 is far more wide-ranging and severe than the blasphemy law that is currently being reviewed. Under the new law, those convicted could go to prison for seven years.

Even before this case, the first of its kind, the Society spoke out strongly against section 39 when giving evidence at the House of Lords to the Religious Offences Select Committee.

According to newspaper reports, the argument between Mr Scott and Mr Hudaïd began because Scott was upset because a friend's father was one of the fire-fighters killed in the Twin Towers tragedy on September 11.

According to the *Mail on Sunday* Mr Hudaïd told the court: "Scott put his face against mine. He wanted to know what Islam had contributed to the world. He said he would do things to my daughter and when I told him I didn't have a daughter he said he would do things to my mother. He said he hated Arabs and he hated Muslims. I felt threatened."

On the other hand, Mr Hudaïd reportedly admits picking up a stick and spitting on the ground during the row, but claimed it was to clear his throat. Hudaïd told the court that he "might have said" that "all Americans deserve to die" and that September 11 was a great day. He "might" also have opined during the altercation that Osama Bin Laden was a great man.

While Scott, who has never appeared in court before, accepts that he behaved badly, he maintains that he did not use violence or threaten Hudaïd's family and there was no physical injury. He denies he is a racist and says that he has lived among Muslims in Turkey without a problem.

It seems from the reports that there were no independent witnesses and the accounts of what occurred clearly conflict. What should probably have happened was for both of them

KEITH PORTEOUS WOOD,
Executive
Director of
the National
Secular
Society,
reports on
the absurdity
of the Exeter
religious
hatred trial,
and updates 'faith-based'
welfare developments



to have been given a wiggling by the police. The more one reads about this altercation, the more astonishing it is that it resulted in any prosecution at all, far less a conviction for a serious offence – and for just one of the combatants. Unsurprisingly, Scott feels victimised.

Scott's sense of injustice must have been heightened, however, when the police's original charge on a fairly minor offence was replaced, at the insistence of the Crown Prosecution Service, by the charge mentioned above – while Hudaïd still has no charges whatsoever to face.

We hope fervently that Scott will escape punishment or be meted out the most minor penalty possible. In the meantime, we will continue to oppose not only this law but any proposed "incitement to religious hatred law" that could lead to even more injustices of this kind.

Faith-based welfare – the allocation of public funds to religious organisations to provide welfare and health services on behalf of the state – is not just the political flavour of the month, but is likely to become a key secular issue of the new decade. The prospect of some of our social services being run by religious organisations drew nearer last month as the Prime Minister – in the face of strong resistance from the unions at the Labour Party Conference – reaffirmed his commitment to privatising public services.

Meanwhile, the leading campaigner for faith-based welfare, the Rev. Steve Chalke, launched his latest initiative at a high-profile event at Number 11 Downing Street with the Treasury minister Paul Boateng in enthusiastic attendance. A strong letter of protest has been sent by the NSS to Mr Boateng.

Worryingly for secularists, faith-based welfare is practically the only matter over which New Labour and Conservatives agree.

The original concept is, of course, American

in origin. "Compassionate conservatism" as it is called in the USA was one of the first policies that President Bush promised to put in place at his election. But such is the fear that America's constitutional separation of church and state will be violated that the policy has been stalled in the legislature ever since.

No such problems here though, and the pressure from religious bodies to introduce it here is now intense. As reported above, Paul Boateng spoke about it to an invited audience at Downing Street – and he did so in the manner of a revivalist preacher, lauding the role of the churches in influencing Government policy. A policy document has already been sent out to local authorities instructing them to make "compacts" with religious groups and not to automatically reject their applications for public money, as some local authorities have done up until now.

It is telling what the politicians are *not* saying about this initiative. What are their real reasons for their enthusiasm for faith-based welfare?

Saving money is clearly one. If these services can be performed by volunteers or staff with significantly inferior working conditions to those available in the public sector, it is bound to be cheaper. Similarly, if buildings such as church halls are used, this should cut down the cost too.

The second reason relates to the religious organisations themselves, and is less clear-cut. Many of those requiring welfare "belong" to a particular church, mosque, temple or whatever. I expect that the official line will be that, by involving them, there will be less problem "targeting" the particular client group, and the welfare itself can be tailored to the specific needs or requirements, for example dietary, of the recipients.

But, given the religious fervour of George Bush, and of Tony Blair and many of his cabinet – as well as some senior Conservatives – it is open to question just how much the enthusiasm for these policies is really rooted in a desire to promote religion generally. Imagine, all that money and so many welfare recipients being forced to enter religious premises in order to claim services that were once provided by a non-partisan secular institution, such as the local authority.

Our letter to Mr Boateng called on him to announce what steps will be taken to ensure that discrimination against staff and service users will not be permitted by religious welfare groups that receive public money. We also asked for measures to be put in place to ensure public money must not be used for proselytising, and that public services should never be made conditional on the recipients praying or engaging in religious activities – something that has already happened in the United States.

Mormons 'disinfect' Hollywood films for sensitive Christian audiences

THE state of Utah in the United States is predominantly Mormon – and that posed a problem for many of the inhabitants of this godly chunk of America who wanted to see the best Hollywood had to offer, but were prevented from doing so by their puritanical religious beliefs. Members of the Church of Latter Day saints, on the advice of their religious leaders, shun all adult-rated movies and even many with PG-13 ratings.

The problem was solved by a Mormon businessman, Ray Lines, who launched a sanitising venture which removes offensive scenes and language from popular films and brings them up to the standards demanded by the Church.

Lines began the business following the collapse of a practice carried out by the Church-owned Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. The university began editing newly-released R-rated movies and showing the "cleaned up" versions on campus at the varsity Theatre. But a combination of threatened lawsuits, charges of censorship, and claims of violating artistic expression led to the scrapping of the edited movie scheme.

Lines stepped in to fill the void by creating a video rental business called CleanFlicks, which purchases copies of recently-released videos and edits them, removing "much of the profane language, overt sexuality and gratuitous violence" the Mormons say typify many new movies.

The videos are then made available for rental through Lines's video stores. In addition, if the owner of a video or DVD wants it "cleaned up", Lines's offers a modestly-priced laundering service as well.

It's bye-bye blasphemy, sex and violence as the Mormon movie butchers axe "offensive" scenes from top feature films. But they may not be able to get away with it for much longer ...

Of course, it was only a matter of time before lawyers began examining copyright issues arising from this new business – and the Directors Guild of America recently announced that a lawsuit was about to be filed against CleanFlicks in which 16 film director plaintiffs – including such notables as Robert Altman, Norman Jewison and Michael Mann – would claim that the practice of editing movies for rental violated their rights as artists. One industry spokesman, Rob Friedman, of Paramount Pictures, said that while studios probably had no recourse against the editing of privately-owned videos, renting out altered tapes was tantamount to engaging in copyright

and trademark infringement.

Other studio-affiliated lawyers agree. Christopher C. Murray, the chairman of the entertainment and media division of the law firm O'Melveny & Myers in Los Angeles, whose clients include studios, actors and executives, stated that renting out altered tapes without authorisation violates federal laws.

But before any writ could be issued, Clean Flicks of Colorado, a licensed franchise of the Utah-based CleanFlicks chain, announced that it would sue first, and promptly filed a lawsuit against the 16 movie directors in Federal District Court in Denver, Colorado. CleanFlicks is suing for the right to continue distributing altered versions of Hollywood movies.

"Editing major motion pictures, especially removing foul language and nudity, is done for network television, for use on airlines, and in many other settings," said CleanFlicks of Colorado spokesman Pete Webb in a prepared statement.

"The directors allow those edits, but they've raised objections in the rental area. We think a jury will want to agree with us, that you shouldn't be required to watch what you find objectionable."

CleanFlicks operates two stores in Colorado and two more in Idaho.

Worst of all possible starts for new Archbishop

WITH angry homosexuals to the left of him, apoplectic evangelicals baying for his blood on the right, and furious liberal Anglicans gesticulating from the sidelines, the Archbishop of Canterbury-elect, Dr Rowan Williams, must be wondering just who on earth might be pleased to see him take over Lambeth Palace.

Williams' woes stem from his apparent liberal views on homosexuality. He once famously ordained a gay man. But when he saw how deeply offended the evangelical wing of the C of E was when he was named as the new Archbishop, he did a quick about-turn, stating that he did not intend to promote gay rights within the Church nor attempt to challenge anti-gay Church policy.

This prompted Terry Sanderson of the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA) to issue a statement saying: "This will come as a huge disappointment to lesbian and gay

Christians and their apologists who had hoped that Dr Williams was going to take his Church forward on this issue. It seems that he is quite happy to reassure the bigots among his flock that their prejudice will not be disturbed – in fact, it will be encouraged. We humanists are concerned because the C of E is the established Church. It is, in effect, an arm of the state and its policies still have some influence in our public institutions. What the Church of England says and does affects more than just its members."

Evangelical fundamentalists, on the other hand, were unconvinced by this about-face, and, just as the *Freethinker* was going to press last month, they stepped up their campaign to oust Williams by threatening to take "direct action" against him. The council of the Church Society, the Church of England's oldest evangelical body, has been joined by a younger evangelical pressure group called Reform in its

battle against the Archbishop-elect. The move is the latest stage of an increasingly aggressive attempt to destabilise the new Archbishop, whose left-wing political views are regarded with deep suspicion by the conservative fringes of the evangelical movement. His evangelical opponents claim to have drawn up an "action plan," including calling on bishops and primates of the 70-million worldwide Anglican communion, of which archbishops of Canterbury are the leaders, to distance themselves from Dr Williams' doctrinal and ethical position. It promised it would be "taking steps towards appropriate direct action".

It added that Dr Williams remained on the editorial board of a journal called *Theology and Sexuality* which, six months ago, published articles allegedly commending homosexual behaviour.

Webwatch

SOME might argue that a fondness for quotations denotes a trivial mind. Fair enough – I'm guilty as charged. However, the judicious use of quotes can be an exceedingly powerful tool if undertaken properly. The saintly and bizarre Karl Kraus, in his (mainly entirely self-penned) magazine *Die Fackel* (The Torch) used their very own words to roast and ridicule his Viennese compatriots. And in the present day some of the most illuminating and damaging sections of *Private Eye* are those which simply and with minimal comment string together the published inanities and inconsistencies of one or another public figurine.

Using quotes out of context is a practice brought to a kind of perfection by certain religionists, so here are some sites to redress the balance a little. Most are sourced but few are closely referenced. [Http://www.redbrick.dcu.ie/~odyssey/Quotes/Quotes.html](http://www.redbrick.dcu.ie/~odyssey/Quotes/Quotes.html) and [Http://www.cannedchaos.com/atheism.html](http://www.cannedchaos.com/atheism.html) and [Http://www.theexperiment.org/quotes.php](http://www.theexperiment.org/quotes.php) are excellent places to start. Science, religion, philosophy, humour – most tastes are served.

It's always great fun to see bits of religious text put side by side. You know the kind of thing – "I come to bring not peace, but a sword" next to "Turn the other cheek". The trouble is that in order to use these combinations effectively against one's Bible-dependent chums, one has to wade through the texts themselves. Given that much of the Bible is dull, dispiriting and frankly poisonous stuff, no sensible freethinker should be obliged to do this. Good news! The job has already been done and the results are available for free. Unfortunately they're not up on the web yet, as far as I know, but I can e-mail them to anyone interested. This is real nitty-gritty stuff, a kind of atheists anti-concordance. The person responsible, Ohio citizen Dennis McKinsey, surely deserves an award of some kind for creating such a useful resource.

Another list, now. A visit to [Http://www.catholic-forum.com/saints/indexsnt.htm](http://www.catholic-forum.com/saints/indexsnt.htm) will tell you more than you ever wanted to know about those prodigies of sanctity and the miraculous, the saints of the "holy" Catholic Church. And it's a growing list, too. It's been said that it's just the Pope's attempt to rustle up post-mortem support. His self-created so-solid crew now number over 450. One of the latest is Josemaria Escriver, founder of *Opus Dei* and provider of spiritual sustenance to that moral giant (and compatriot of his) the late Generalissimo Franco. Browse the strange world of the holy. Check out the stuff on "saint" Mother Teresa of Calcutta, too. It's

all there. In fairness to the site I should say that it's not all positive. Mind you, concerning Teresa, Christopher Hitchens said it all first and best. Read his *The Missionary Position – Mother Teresa In Theory And Practice*. It's good, scary fun for all (except, of course, popes).

NORMAN PRIDMORE surfs the net for sites of interest to freethinkers

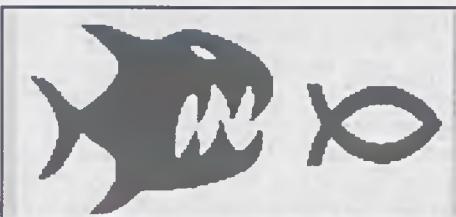
Now for an amusing quiz. Go to [Http://www.funnystrange.com/quiz/](http://www.funnystrange.com/quiz/) and see if you can tell who was responsible for uttering the various pithy comments it records. Was it Osama Bin Laden, or that two-backed beast known as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson? No prizes, I'm afraid, but a few shocks perhaps. Or maybe not.

A thoughtful and interesting site is that of Tom Clark at [Http://www.naturalism.org/](http://www.naturalism.org/) It's an attempt to express a view of life and the world that is consistent with a thoroughgoing and coherent philosophical materialism. It's a hard task, and this is one of the best efforts I've seen. I guess that living in the USA gives a little more to push against for secularists to do this kind of thing. Good stuff.

Check out too the site of Joe Sommer at [Http://www.humanismbyjoe.com/](http://www.humanismbyjoe.com/). There's plenty here that's careful and reflective – but plenty that's acerbic and challenging too. What is it with American lawyers? Where do they find the time? If they carry on like this they'll end up dragging the practice of law into high repute!

Back to Christianity? What's it all about then? If you or I had come up with it we'd be locked up by now, the beliefs are so mad! Sensible freethinkers know this all too well. But what about other beliefs, the more "fringe" stuff? There is an extraordinary site at <http://mailbox.univie.ac.at/~muehle9/index.html> tracing in loving and well-researched detail the history of various esoteric traditions and their modern manifestations. See how so-called New-Agery is often just old imbecility and superstition recycled. Lovers of the work of that wonderful historian Frances A Yates will especially appreciate this site.

Looking forward to that lovely year-end festival called Christmas, with all its wonderful



Christian symbolism like, er, fat bearded blokes in red and white and all the rest of it? Looking to

get your gift retaliation in first? Then visit http://www.elentaris.co.uk/sandleford/pages/na_secular.html and see what they have. It's very new and at present the range is small – but it is growing. I'm going to get a "Born Fine the First Time" bumper sticker. All I'll need then is a car to put it on Oh yes, and they do those wonderful Darwin fish, too – you know, the ones with bared fangs swimming up behind the Christian fish. Go on, you know you want one!

I'm in the process of compiling a list of links for the new, improved, and very good-looking *Freethinker* web site so that they can be accessed by means of a simple click.

As ever, more are always welcome, to norman@npridmore.fsworld.co.uk.

What do you do with a kiddie-fiddling priest (deceased)?

ROMAN Catholic priest Father Maurice Grammond's last wish was for a funeral Mass in the church of St Ignatius of Loyola, in Portland, Oregon, followed by burial at Mount Calvary, a cemetery with a special area for dead members of the clergy.

What he received instead was a lonely cremation, with his ashes buried by his 73-year-old sister at an unmarked spot. A memorial stone was deemed inappropriate, as she thought it would be vandalised.

The reason for Grammond's ignominious send-off was that the priest was a serial abuser of altar boys – around 40 accused him of various sexual attacks, some violent, carried out between the 1950s and the 1980s in, among other places, the confessional.

As the statute of limitations had elapsed for criminal proceedings against him, he never faced criminal charges. But his victims did file a series of lawsuits. The first was heard in 1999. A year later 23 of the cases against him ended in confidential financial settlements, along with apologies, from the archbishop, and changes in archdiocese policies.

When Grammond, who once claimed that "young children throw themselves at me", died at the age of 82 in a home for Alzheimer's sufferers, the archdiocese could not bring themselves to fulfil his wishes for a funeral mass, and left his only living relative, his sister, Dolores, to make the final arrangements.

"They wanted to stay clear away from anything connected to him," said the woman who discovered, two years ago, that both her sons were among those who had fallen prey to her brother's paedophile tendencies.

Down to Earth: Colin McCall

Theocracy v secularism

WRITING on the anniversary of September 11, Simon Schama, who now lives in New York and is professor of history and art history at Columbia University, drew attention to the struggle in America between what he called "power based on revelation (and thus not open to argument), and power based on persuasion, and thus conditional on argument; militant theocracy against the tolerant Enlightenment". As the United States was very much the child of the Enlightenment, one might have expected the case for "tolerant secular pluralism" to be made by the country's leadership. But no. The "shroud of mass reverence which enveloped everyone and everything after 9/11" and was blanketing the anniversary, had succeeded in "making secular debate about liberty into an act of indecency, disrespectful of the dead and disloyal to the flag".

It seems impossible in America, Schama continued, to question the competence of the Almighty, as Voltaire did two and a half centuries ago at the calamity of the Lisbon earthquake. "Bruce Springsteen's new hymnal, complete with gospel choir and ringing with resurrectional themes of *The Rising* will beat *Candide* every time". The Bush administration always prefers prayers to politics, said Schama, and "it is counting on a pious hush to bestow on its adventurism the odour of sanctity ... Apparently the dead are owed another war. But they are not. What they are owed is a good, stand-up row over the fate of America; just who determines it and for what end?"

All this could be academic, alas, if the Bush-Blair conspiracy has its way.

Ingersoll in heaven

I LEARN from the *Guardian* columnist Smallweed that a man called James Padgett in Washington DC has been posting claims on the net that the great 19th-century American freethinker and orator Robert Green Ingersoll has been sending messages from beyond the grave.

Smallweed quoted one which expresses Ingersoll's "regret and remorse with the recollection of my awful mistake while on earth, that I must release my soul from its burdens so far as confession can do it. I am Ingersoll and not the agnostic any longer, but the most repentant believer in God's spirit world".

From the messages he had seen, Smallweed concluded that Ingersoll's prose style had "gone off a bit" since he died and Smallweed spared us the website. But it seems there is more than one religious nut in Washington DC.

Six years in a seminar

AUSTRALIAN novelist Thomas Keneally, winner of the Booker Prize in 1982 with *Schindler's Arc*, wrote recently in the *New Yorker* about his

training for the priesthood and his decision to leave St Patrick's seminary in Sydney just weeks before ordination. Behind what he called the "compelling mystery" of Catholicism he found "a cold and largely self-interested corporate institution".

St Patrick's main building was draughty and unheated, and tuberculosis still broke out occasionally. The government sought the approval of the rector to check the seminarians for the disease, but he refused. His concern, said Keneally, was that when the X-ray trailer arrived with its crew of young nurses there would be an increase in the number of seminarians departing for "the world". The Catholic authorities took no responsibility and showed no sympathy when two of Keneally's friends contracted TB and needed lung surgery. And when Keneally left after six years in the seminary, the rector would give him no reference.

Now a "questionable Catholic", Thomas Keneally has "long since abandoned" any hope that "the institutional church will listen to its people" on such questions as celibacy and the ordination of women. Six years ago St Patrick's closed down because of lack of applicants.

Figures of fun

ANOTHER St Patrick's seminary has now closed owing to lack of applicants – this time in Ireland, which used to export priests all over the world. In explaining the decision to stop training priests, Father Christy O'Dwyer said the college in Thurles, County Tipperary, had received only one inquiry about enrolment this year. He hoped there would be a re-opening, but he was not optimistic: there seemed to be "a lack of understanding and appreciation of the priesthood".

Nicola Byrne, writing in the *Observer* (September 1) reported that priests had become "marginalised to the point of being figures of fun or contempt" in Ireland. Some rural areas had "bade farewell to their parish priests", and altars remained covered in the absence of anyone to say Mass.

Let's hope they stay that way.

Better than their Church

THOMAS Keneally's complaint that the Roman Catholic Church doesn't listen to its people was borne out in Los Angeles, where a new cathedral costing \$200m opened on September 2 amid protests that the money should have been spent on the poor. The cathedral is situated in LA's civic, business and entertainment centre, where 4,000 people, many mentally ill, sleep on the streets.

All-night vigils were held by Catholics who described the edifice as a "fat cats' cathedral" and by others critical of the Church's "handling of the sex scandals engulfing it" (*Guardian*, September 3). Seventy-two current or former priests from the LA diocese are under criminal investigation, and the Church is involved in costly settlements

with victims of priestly abuse.

Catherine Morris of *Catholic Worker*, which has been working with the Los Angeles poor for over 30 years, thought it totally inappropriate to spend \$200m on the building. There were already nearly 300 other churches in the archdiocese which could have been converted into a cathedral and the \$195m saved could have been spent in "more productive ways". Instead cuts have been made in social programmes.

Money for the cathedral was raised with the help of high-profile donors like Rupert Murdoch, who gave \$10-million, Bob Hope and Roy Disney. Anybody who wants to book a "resting place in the crypt" can do so. But he or she will have to pay \$50,000 for the privilege, such as it is.

Kaufman in Israel

NON-JEWISH critics of Israel must expect to be labelled anti-Semitic (an inappropriate term, as I have said before in this column). Jews can't say that about Gerald Kaufman, who denounced Ariel Sharon in the House of Commons as a war criminal whose actions stained the Star of David with blood. Instead the MP's hate mail condemned him as a "Jewish self-hating weasel" whose death no one would mourn.

But Kaufman continued his campaign on television (BBC2, September 7) in *The End of the Affair*, where he said that decent people in Israel were "fighting a losing battle for civilised values". He found Jerusalem filled with ultra-Orthodox Jews who wouldn't serve in the army that protects them. He did meet some soldiers who had refused to serve in the Occupied Territories; but the Jews who lived in the settlements were determined to stay there. As one woman said, the land was "promised to us".

That's the root of the problem.

Joan Littlewood

JOAN Littlewood, who died in Paris on September 21 aged 87 was, in my view, the most imaginative as well as the most radical theatre director of her time. And I say that, having seen virtually all her productions in the 50s and 60s, from Behan's *The Quare Fellow* in 1956 onwards, and reviewed many of them for this paper. She was also a theatre reformer. At a time when all other playhouses ended the evening with the National Anthem, she announced that this would only happen "in the presence of royalty"; and in the programme credits she listed all her workers, including the cleaners.

When the annals of the British theatre in the middle years of the 20th century come to be written, said Kenneth Tynan, "Joan's name will lead all the rest".

They once killed they exorcise t

Try looking up “The Suffolk Witch Trials” or “The Witch-Finder General” in popular old English encyclopaedias and you will find little if anything about the subjects. Titbits of biographical and geographic information about any number of obscure places, minor politicians and aristocrats, yes, but little or nothing about what was recently described in a Channel 4 documentary as “one of the worst episodes in English judicial history”.

Now, however, thanks to the internet, a search for “Witch Trials” or “Witch-Finder General” will produce a large number of websites detailing this period of infamous religious persecution in England in the 17th century.

In 1645 during the English civil war, two Puritan fundamentalists, Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne, combed East Anglia for witches. Their prey were mostly women – poor women, women who did not comply with the conventions of the time or fell foul of vindictive enemies who would denounce them for perceived “oddities” or real or imagined actions put down to supernatural powers.

Although the witchhunts were originally carried out against people who were mostly old, poor women, and a few children, some men if they displayed “odd” behaviour, or opposition to the witch-hunters, were also targeted. They were seized and subjected to “covert” forms of torture, with euphemistic names that belied their real terror. “Swimming” or “floating”, for example or “walking” (until they could not stand) and “waking” (sleep deprivation) were used to extract confessions (the law forbade “conventional” methods of torture, thought acceptable in other circumstances, such as thumb screws and the rack!) They were stripped and their bodies were searched for “proof”, (skin lesions such as warts which were supposedly there for nurturing “devils” or “imps”).

Hopkins and Stearne, the self-appointed witch-finders, were initially motivated by their fervent Puritan religious fundamentalism. Hopkins himself was the son of a minister, following the biblical injunction that “No Witch shall be allowed to live”. Later, as they began to charge for their services, they were to realise, as is usually the way with religious cults and sects, that it could also be a lucrative business.

There were a few dissenting voices – that of the Rev. John Lowes, vicar of Brandleston, who supported some of the women and, as a result, was hanged, and John Gaule, vicar of Great Stoughton in Huntingdonshire, who launched an attack from his pulpit on the work of Hopkins and Stearne and popular superstitions about witchcraft. He also published and distributed

The same superstitious mindset that led to witchcraft hysteria in the 17th century in Europe and America still exists today among

certain Christian groups – notably among members of the

Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG). It was at a

UCKG church in London that little Victoria Climbié was

declared to be ‘possessed by demons’ when, in fact, she was

being systematically abused by her

great-aunt, and her aunt’s

boyfriend – both of whom are now

serving life sentences for the abuse

that finally led to the 8-year-old’s

terrible death. The news that the

UCKG plans to expand its activities

in London by taking over the old

ABC cinema in Catford, south

London, prompted ANNE SHAW to examine the link between

the great witch-hunts of the past, and exorcism ceremonies

performed today by pentacostal organisations like the UCKG.



The Witches, by Goya

a tract condemning Hopkins.

Many of those accused of Satanism would undoubtedly have been mentally ill, or possibly under the influence of hallucinogenic agents such as wild mushrooms or ergot (a fungus found on grain crops in some years). Over the last 50 years scientific research has shown that the main symptom of ergot poisoning is horrific hallucinations.

This, of course, was not known in those days, and mental illness, or ergot-induced hallucinations would have been linked by the religious with “the Devil”. At the height of their reign of terror, an 18-month orgy of religious fanaticism, as many as 200 prisoners at a time were held in Colchester and Chelmsford jails. Suffolk, Norfolk, Sussex, Cambridgeshire and villages all around this part of Eastern England contributed to the

death toll by employing Hopkins and Stearne. Apart from those who were actually hanged, many died in the appalling jails of the time, from disease, malnutrition and suicide.

Neither Hopkins nor Stearne were ever brought to book for these crimes. But Hopkins is reputed to have been caught and treated to one of his own forms of punishment. He was “swam”. He died of tuberculosis in 1647. Sterne retired and became a consultant in his art of witch-hunting.

The lesson humanity should learn from the “Great Witch Trials” of Suffolk, Lowestoft and Salem is that superstition leads to distorted thinking and that distorted thinking leads to distorted behaviour. One should also bear in mind that the same primitive, punitive superstitious thinking that created the violent religious activity of the time, both at home and

ed witches, now the 'possessed'

Real life

abroad, still exists today in many forms – much of it fed by misogyny and religious fervour. For example, today there are Christian sects in England (and many more in the US) who practise exorcism. One organisation that recently found itself under the harsh glare of publicity was the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. It was to the UCKG's Finsbury Park branch that Victoria Climbié was taken for "deliverance services" by her great-aunt Marie Therese Kouao and her boyfriend, Carl Manning.

Even some Church of England clerics exorcise "the possessed".

The people of the Middle Ages, educated or not, were superstitious. Christianity had taught them to believe implicitly in gods and devils. This belief coloured their thinking, which in turn influenced their behaviour. It produced "trial by ordeal" – harsh, punitive and autocratic biblical attitudes characteristic of the religious, and, in the east Anglian case, the pursuit of witches by Puritans such as Hopkins and Starne in the mid-17th century.

The frightful hallucinations caused by neuro-toxins are no different in effect to similar but less violent or pathological or pleasur-

able "in-the-brain" experiences such as communicating with God, alien abductions, visions of saints, and states of surreal ecstasy. Whether visions and hallucinations are pleasurable or horrible, they both originate within the brain, in the structures of the temporal and frontal lobe, the areas of the brain that produce and process emotion, memory and perception.

Such "in-the-brain" experiences are diverse and universal. They can be produced and reproduced by taking hallucinogenic drugs, and altered states of consciousness can be induced by hypnosis. Furthermore they can be produced by electromagnetic stimulation of these areas of the brain in the laboratory situation, as has been demonstrated over the last decade by Professor Michael Persinger of the Laurentian University of Canada.

These "in-the-brain" or "god experiences" as Persinger calls them are as real to the person who is undergoing them as anything else they experience. People who have hallucinations are not witches nor their victims. They are not devils, saints or disciples. They are not God nor Jesus. They are not mad nor bad; they are just people having "in-the-brain" experiences.

What is really important is to recognise this

and apply the knowledge to all forms of superstition, and reassess all the old beliefs and behaviours that stem from them in this new light. Centuries of superstitious belief have seriously skewed our interpretation of our world and ourselves and have ingrained distorted thinking that contaminates how and what we think and how we behave as a result. This applies to the individual, the family, the community, the state and the world.

Had the people of East Anglia and Salem not been the product of centuries of religious indoctrination, brought up to assume that everything, good or bad, was the result of God or the devil, they may have reached a stage of development in which they would have been able to consider the strange upsurge in bizarre behaviour in so many people within their communities in a totally different light and look for rational explanations. They may have been willing and able to look at the evidence of geographical, scientific, cultural or other such possible causes, for something of which they must have had some knowledge even then ie that the symptoms were very similar to poisons they already knew quite a lot about. Instead they automatically jumped to the conclusion that it was evidence of the devil.

Without these centuries of superstitious interpretation, human beings might well have progressed much further, much quicker as a rational species, rather than remain intellectually stunted creatures filled with superstitious belief.

Women, 'weaker than men, were more likely to succumb to the Devil'

"LITTLE is known about the history of witchcraft in Europe, and what is known comes from hostile sources", according to an entry in *Grolier Interactive Encyclopaedia* written by E William Monter.

In traditional European society witchcraft was believed to be a kind of harmful sorcery associated with the worship of Satan, or the devil. The European doctrine of witchcraft was formulated in the late Middle Ages. Just how many of the beliefs about witches were based on reality and how many on delusion will never be known. The punishment of supposed witches by the death penalty did not become common until the 15th century. The first major witch-hunt occurred in Switzerland in 1427, and the first important book on the subject, the *Malleus maleficarum* (Hammer of Sorceresses), appeared in Germany in 1486. The persecution of witches reached its height

between 1580 and 1660, when witch trials became almost universal throughout western Europe.

Geographically, the center of witch-burning lay in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, but few areas were left untouched by it. No one knows the total number of victims. In southwestern Germany alone, however, more than 3,000 witches were executed between 1560 and 1680. Not all witch trials ended in deaths. In England, where torture was prohibited, only about 20 percent of accused witches were executed (by hanging); in Scotland, where torture was used, nearly half of all those put on trial were burned at the stake, and almost three times as many witches (1,350) were killed as in England. Some places had fewer trials than others. In the Dutch republic, no witches were executed after 1600, and none were tried after 1610. In Spain and Italy accusations of witch-

craft were handled by the Inquisition, and although torture was legal, only a dozen witches were burned out of 5,000 put on trial. Ireland apparently escaped witch trials altogether. Many witch trials were provoked, not by hysterical authorities or fanatical clergy, but by village quarrels among neighbours.

About 80 per cent of all accused witches were women. Traditional theology assumed that women were weaker than men and more likely to succumb to the devil. It may in fact be true that, having few legal rights, they were more inclined to settle quarrels by resorting to magic rather than law.

All these aspects of witchcraft crossed over to the Americas with European colonists. In the Spanish and French territories cases of witchcraft were under the juris-

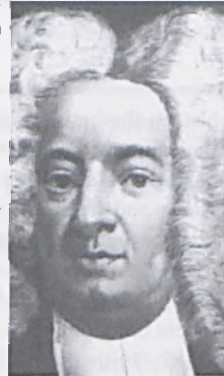
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The Witch report *(continued from centrepages)*

diction of church courts, and no one suffered death on this charge. In the English colonies about 40 people were executed for witchcraft between 1650 and 1710, half of them in the famous Salem Witch Trials of 1692. Cotton Mather (1663-1728), an American clergyman, theologian and author, wrote more than 400 works and was the principal spokesman of American Puritanism. His writing and preaching about witchcraft sustained the fires of public hysteria longer than they would have without his involvement. The witch trials of Salem Village, Mass. (March to September 1692) were America's most notorious episode of witchcraft hysteria. Belief in witchcraft was carried to colonial America from Europe, where in the two centuries before 1650 thousands had been executed as witches. The Salem incident began when two young girls in the household of the Reverend Samuel Parris began to behave oddly. The girls had participated in meetings at which incantations had been cast and attempts made to foretell the future. They were examined by

a doctor, ministers, and magistrates, who concluded that they were bewitched. The resulting frenzy spread rapidly. Hearings began on March 1, and by the middle of May, 100 persons were in prison awaiting trial.

The new royal governor, Sir William Phips, established a special seven-member court to try the prisoners. Jurors were drawn from church membership lists, and the chained defendants had no counsel. In early June, Bridget Bishop was convicted. A brief delay followed because some judges were uneasy about the validity of spectral evidence – testimony given by



Cotton Mather, the Puritan clergyman who fanned the flames of witchcraft hysteria in Salem

Picture credit: Bettman Archives

witnesses about voices or apparitions perceived only by them. The trials were resumed after several leading ministers advised the court that such evidence might be used, but only with "exquisite caution." By September 22 the court had tried and convicted 27 persons. Nineteen were hanged, and one, Giles Corey, was pressed to death by stones. In addition, about 50 had confessed, 100 were in prison awaiting trial, and accusations had touched another 200.

Witch trials declined in most parts of Europe after 1680; in England the death penalty for witchcraft was abolished in 1736. In the late 17th and 18th centuries one last wave of witch persecution afflicted Poland and other areas of eastern Europe, but that ended by about 1740. The last legal execution of a witch occurred in Switzerland in 1782.

Beginning in the 1920s, witchcraft was revived in Europe and America by groups that considered it a survival of pre-Christian religious practices. Some forms of modern witchcraft follow the traditions of medieval herbalists.

Witchcraft Act victim Helen Duncan jailed for nine months

THE last person in Britain to be jailed for witchcraft was Helen Duncan, a Scottish woman who, in 1944, was sentenced to serve nine months in London's notorious Victorian Holloway women's prison for the "crime" of holding "materialisation" séances.

A mother of six, and with a disabled husband, she worked in a local bleach factory by day and held séances for small fees and donations in the evenings.

By the 1930s and 1940s she was travelling the length of wartime Britain giving regular séances in hundreds of spiritualist churches and home circles.

One of many such sittings took place in a private house in Portsmouth on the evening of January 19, 1944. The séance was raided by police, and Duncan, together with three sitters, were taken up before Portsmouth magistrates and charged with vagrancy. Oddly Helen was refused bail for a crime that would only have carried a penalty of a small fine. Instead she was sent to London and forced to spend four days in Holloway.

The charge of vagrancy was later amended to one of conspiracy which, in wartime Britain carried the death sentence. But, by the time the case had been referred to the Old Bailey, the charge had been changed yet again. This time to one of witchcraft and an old Act of 1735 had been dredged out of the dusty law libraries.

Under this ancient Act Duncan and her sitters were accused of pretending "to exercise

or use human conjuration that through the agency of Helen Duncan spirits of deceased dead persons should appear to be present".

She was also charged under the Larceny Act which accused her of taking money "by falsely pretending she was in a position to bring about the appearances of the spirits of deceased persons".

Her trial took place a few months before the famous D-Day landings and lasted a week, at the end of which Duncan and her co-defendants were found guilty of conspiracy to contravene that ancient 1735 Witchcraft Act. They were acquitted on all other charges.

In court, Portsmouth's chief of police described Duncan as "an unmitigated humbug and pest" and revealed that in 1941 she had been reported for announcing the loss of one of His Majesty's ships before the fact had been publicly known.

Duncan received a nine-month prison sentence, and was denied the right to appeal against the sentence. Among the many shocked by the severity of her punishment was Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who expressed great anger at the start of the trial. He penned an irate ministerial note to the Home Secretary, saying "Give me a report of the 1735 Witchcraft Act. What was the cost of a trial to the State in which the Recorder (junior magistrate) was kept busy with all this obsolete tomfoolery to the detriment of the necessary work in the courts?"

"But his civil servants were over-ridden by

the all-powerful intelligence community. D-Day was coming and their levels of paranoia had reached an all-time high and even a Prime Minister's anger was to be set aside. Helen Duncan, mother of nine and part-time bleach factory employee was considered a risk and they wanted her out of the way when the Allies struck. Her case was a transparent conspiracy to frame her 'in the interests of national security'", wrote journalist and spiritualist Michael Colmer, who is coordinator for a campaign set up to clear Duncan's name.

Churchill visited Duncan several times before her release from prison in September, 1944, and promised that he would make amends to her. "True or speculative, it is a fact that in 1951 the damning 1735 Witchcraft Act which had been used to imprison Helen was finally repealed. In its place came the Fraudulent Mediums Act and some four years later in 1954 spiritualism was officially recognised as a proper religion by formal Act of Parliament," wrote Colmer.

But in November 1956 police raided a séance in Nottingham. They grabbed Duncan, strip-searched her, and took endless flash photographs.. They shouted at her that they were looking for beards, masks and shrouds. Duncan collapsed immediately after the raid. A doctor was summoned and discovered two mysterious second-degree burns on her stomach. She was so ill that she was immediately taken back to her Scottish home and later rushed to hospital.

Five weeks later she was dead.

Morals without religion

One of the most frequent claims of religious apologists is that you can't have morals without religion (normally, of course, their own). I have been told, by a bishop (C of E), no less, that before Christianity people did not show care or compassion for each other. Taken seriously this indicates a quite breathtaking ignorance, not to say arrogance.

One reason the argument seems superficially plausible is that, due to our peculiar Judaeo-Christian tradition, a "moral" person tends to suggest someone like the late Mary Whitehouse, with particular worries about sex. But in the dictionary (OED) the primary meaning is simply making a distinction between right and wrong, which has been characteristic, as far as we know, of all human societies everywhere.

There seem to me at least four arguments against the religious view.

The first is the natural observation that there are both good and bad religious and non-religious people. So religion seems to be neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for moral behaviour.

The second is that there are, and have been, innumerable religions, with perhaps as many sets of morals. Most are arbitrary hotch-potches of tradition, prejudices, magic, superstition, etc. and often self-contradictory. We are left with the question, which to choose.

Thirdly, if morals are to be derived from a religion, their value would seem to depend on that religion being in some sense true, at least in belief in an external authority. But I know of no reason for thinking this, and at least some for the opposite. This seems to pull the rug from under the corresponding moral system.

This brings us to a fourth argument. Moral behaviour, it seems to me, must involve conscious decision. War criminals on occasion offer the defence that they "were only obeying orders". This might be accepted if it were believed that they really had no choice. We do not condemn those so mentally ill as not to be in control of their own decisions. A newborn baby could hardly commit a crime even if physically capable, and it is a difficult argument as to when responsibility can be said to begin. The essence of most if not all religious moral systems (it seems to me, though some religious apologists disagree) is obedience, or at least acceptance. Islam for example is essentially submission to the will of Allah. It may be said that this submission is itself voluntary. To this there are two answers. The first is that psychologically, acceptance of a religion does not often appear to be under voluntary control. Some individuals are converted, which in most cases clearly involves emotions, often of overwhelming strength, at least as much as, if not more than, rational argument. Others, probably the majority, accept, usually without too much profound thought, the cus-

oms and traditions in which they are brought up. Numerous personal accounts show how hard it is to step outside this framework and look at the beliefs objectively. The other answer is that by accepting a total system in this way one is abrogating the right and duty to make decisions in particular cases. I suggest that whereas it may be a moral decision (although in my view a

The notion that moral behaviour can only be developed through devotion to the 'arbitrary dictats of an imaginary deity' is deeply flawed. There are far better ways of arming people with a sense of morality, argues JOHN RADFORD, Emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of East London.

mistaken one) to accept the will of Allah it is not a moral decision to say that an adulterous couple must be stoned to death because this is prescribed by the *sharia*. (Incidentally, it is reported that this is still done in post-Taleban Afghanistan, only now they use smaller stones. So that's all right then.)

If we admire the biblical "good Samaritan", it is surely because he transcended his own religion and made a personal decision to aid an individual of another faith. Morality, in short, essentially involves accepting responsibility for one's own decisions and actions.

If moral systems do not come from supernatural sources, God or gods, what are their origins? Clearly they can only come from the same place as those imaginary beings, namely ourselves. They originate in the same way as all our human characteristics do, from genetic potentials and propensities, modified by outside influences from the moment of conception and throughout life. Full analysis of the human genome will reveal which particular elements are involved in the tendency and ability to make moral decisions. Already, however, behavioural genetics shows the importance of what is inherited as the basis of emotional and social, as well as intellectual, behaviour. We can also see what may be termed proto-moral behaviour, both in very young children and in other species. This is in the shape of care and compassion for others. Individuals show concern when another is hurt or distressed, offer comfort and so on, which clear-

ly suggests an innate tendency. (So much for the Bishop). Psychologists have studied in detail how such apparently spontaneous behaviour develops into a mature morality (or in some cases fails to do so). Numerous factors affect the outcome, parental beliefs and actions, peer groups, formal education, prevailing religious and legal systems, mass media and so on. The initial effect can be seen as formation of what Freud called the super-ego. Not many psychologists now accept Freud's system in any detail, but it is worth remembering that the superego is "the primitive unconscious conscience", those rules and supposed rules that the child adopts before he or she is capable of thinking things out. Moral behaviour in contrast depends on the development of the ego, which includes the conscious rational aspect of the personality.

If the origin of morals is genetically based, one would expect some commonality across cultural groups. This is the case. It is relatively easy to identify what may be termed moral universals, to which nearly all would assent, as several extensive studies have shown. Some are shared by various religious systems. But the claim to universality is based on a natural, not a supernatural, origin. One could well argue that such universals, such as respect for life, tolerance, freedom, compassion, are in general evolutionarily useful, and that explains their prevalence. But their application brings problems. The devil, one may say, is in the detail. Thus nearly all people would agree that killing others is, in principle, wrong. But fierce battles rage over whether it is justified in for example self-defence, the death penalty, war, or the extermination of heresy. Here I think part of the way forward is the application of knowledge, in particular of human behaviour. If it is shown, for example, that the death penalty is both ineffective in reducing crime and subject to fatal errors, or that the violent enforcement of orthodoxy is destructive and self-defeating, we have taken at least a step towards a more rational decision.

I don't think that all moral dilemmas can be resolved by knowledge or reason. Some (such as, perhaps, euthanasia) remain questions of values. Does relief of suffering outweigh the ending of a life? If so, at what point? It is not my purpose to offer solutions. What psychology does show, I think, is that certain conditions favour the development of moral responsibility. In general, compassion, care, responsibility in families and society, encourage the same qualities in children. Like other qualities, too, moral "ability", if one may so call it, develops best when it is practised, at first with guidance, then independently. The process is not infallible. But it is a better basis for morality than the arbitrary dictats of an imaginary deity.

Book reviews

NICOLAS Walter's little book was first published in 1969 in the magazine *Anarchy*. It appeared as a booklet the same year and went through five editions by 1977, as well as being translated into many languages. When it fell out of print Freedom Press wanted to reprint, but Nicolas resisted because, his daughter tells us in her introduction, he needed to revise the text and add sections on feminism and environmentalism. But these revisions, although started, were never completed. Yet the publishers say he did revise the work. Knowing Nicolas, as I did, I find this hard to believe: he was a meticulous scholar and he would have amended some obvious errors.

The book was written pre-Thatcher and pre-Blair. In Britain, we read, "the community owns some heavy industries, air and rail transport, ferries and buses, broadcasting systems, water, gas and electricity", which, apart from broadcasting, it no longer does. Nicolas would not have left that passage in the present tense had he had time to revise the book. Nor are universities free any longer and virtually every new school or hospital is being built under the iniquitous PFI. Perhaps most tragically of all, progressive education has been banished from the curriculum. In short, as we all know, things have deteriorated since the book was written, and are still deteriorating.

In a sense, though, this justifies the anarchist's insistence that government can't be trusted and, indeed, is harmful. The people of Britain today feel, rightly, that they have no control over New Labour, which has forsaken all the principles it professed before coming to power; now we dread that Tony Blair may even take us into a war with Iraq which we don't want. As Nicolas pointed out: "If all

people are so bad that they need to be ruled by others, as anarchists we ask, how can anyone be good enough to rule others?" Our only hope, he continued, "is that, as knowledge and consciousness increase people will become more aware that they can live their own lives without any need for authority". Anyway, "if something cannot be done without the old kind of organisation, without authority and compulsion, it probably isn't worth doing and would be better left undone".

COLIN McCALL reviews
About Anarchism by Nicolas Walter, Freedom Press, £3.50
and *God Outside the Box: Why Spiritual People Object to Christianity*, by Richard Harries, SPCK paperback, £11.99

Anarchists come in various guises: mutualists, federalists, collectivists, syndicalists *et al*, but Nicolas believed that these differences had become less important in recent years, and suggested we might think of them as not so much types as "aspects of anarchism which depend on the direction of our interests".

If there is one area where anarchism may be said to be already "working" it is in personal relationships, where more and more people are making their own arrangements "without waiting for a revolution". All that is needed for the liberation of the individual is the emancipation from old prejudices and the achievement of a certain standard of living. The real problem, as Nicolas said, is the liberation of society. And he considered the various steps we might take in that direction. He ended by noting signifi-

cant historical moves towards anarchism in different countries of the world.

In her introduction, Natasha Walter, who was a baby when her father was hand-writing *About Anarchism*, assesses the book's arguments in the context of the current movement against global inequality. But let Nicolas have the last word. Most anarchists, he wrote, are engaged in "a struggle which we may not win and which may never end but which is still worth fighting". That may apply to his sterling work for humanism, too.

RICHARD Harries, the Bishop of Oxford, has asked us to review his book; but I am at a serious disadvantage from the start. I don't know the meaning of "spiritual". It seems that in a December 1999 poll by Opinion Research Business only 12 per cent of respondents said they were "not a spiritual person". Or, as Richard Harries puts it, 88 per cent resisted being called "not a spiritual person". Whether that 88 per cent had any better understanding of the meaning of the adjective, I very much doubt. Indeed, Harries informs us it included people with "a wide range of views such as those who are interested in various forms of meditation, who are members of one of the 500 or more new religions"; those who believe in astrology or the occult, and so on. Perhaps I should ask David Beckham, who professed a "sense of spirituality" and a desire to have Brooklyn "christened", but didn't know into what religion. As if the boy could be "christened" into Islam or Buddhism.

Having read *God Outside the Box* I am no wiser. Knowing the word's varied interpretations, you might expect the Bishop to be wary of its use, but far from it: he employs it constantly without definition. He tells us we may receive "spiritual sustenance and meaning through the arts", where I would substitute "aesthetic". In other places he distinguishes the "spiritual life" from "moral qualities" (with which it might be confused by some of those 88 per cent) and from "emotional". So what is left? Some belief in a soul, perhaps; but that gets us nowhere, for what is meant by soul?

Mind you, there is so much that is vague, ambiguous or contradictory that, while the book's attempts to meet objections to Christianity might influence those already of a religious disposition, it will have no effect on freethinkers. Time and again Harries states the objection, discusses it frankly and reasonably, then lapses into the language of the pulpit. God is "the source and standard of all values", "the ground of our being and the goal of our longing"; it is "in being at one with him that we find our peace and fulfilment". "Through his Holy Spirit he dwells within us and works in and through the mind and heart and conscience which he has given us". Or perhaps not exact-

Astral travelling: it's just a brain thing

PEOPLE claiming to have had "out-of-body" episodes, where the "soul" leaves the body and travels astrally, may have simply experienced an electrical stimulus to one part of the brain – the right angular gyrus.

A Swiss neurologist, Olaf Blanke of Geneva University Hospital in Switzerland, reporting in *Nature* magazine (No 419), found that by electrically stimulating the right angular gyrus he could repeatedly trigger "out-of-body" experiences.

Blanke and his team were using electrodes to excite the brain of a woman being treated for epilepsy.

With gentle stimulation, the woman, who could speak during the operation, felt she was falling or growing lighter. As the intensity increased she told them: "I see myself lying in bed, from above."

When asked to look at her raised arm, she

thought it was coming to punch her. This observation suggests that "alien hand syndrome" – when people feel that a limb is foreign – or "phantom" limbs that people can feel after amputations could be related to out-of-body experiences, says Blanke.

Out-of-body experiences are incredibly common, says clinical neurologist John Marshall of the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford, UK. Some are part of "near-death" experiences.

Some believe that the events have religious or spiritual causes, or that a person really leaves their physical body behind. They may, for example, interpret them as evidence that the physical and spiritual body can separate again after death.

Thrill-seekers will be hard-pushed to artificially create their own out-of-body experiences – you have to open up the skull to do so."

ly within us: he "puts us at a distance from himself – not a physical distance, because that is impossible as God is closer to us than we are to ourselves – but a distance of knowing". Grapple with that one.

It is a pity that Richard Harries slips into this gobbledygook, especially as he acknowledges that "the language of the Church has gone dead, or almost dead on us" and that its "images are strange, sometimes barbaric". He admits that the language of the Eucharist is cannibalistic and can have a stark effect on modern sensibility, so he presents it as "an anticipation of the heavenly banquet, a foretaste and a pledge of the time when all God's people will sit at his table". He then descends to earth, extolling eating together as "a basic and essential expression of human solidarity", and regretting that many families rarely sit down for a meal together. A paragraph later, though, he looks heavenwards again, to God inviting us "to feast at the table of life"; and finally giving us "the food of immortality".

Socially, of course, Richard Harries cannot be faulted. He is particularly affected by human suffering all around the world and he concedes that, in the face of it, even for a religious person, prayer can seem "totally unreal". We need, he says, "to question what we really mean by divine presence". Instead he invokes Simone Weil's conundrum that "God can only be present in creation under the form of absence". I was pleased to note that Harries can't always "fully ... understand" Weil's writings, although he apparently finds in them "a truth that both disturbs and draws us more deeply into the truth than we have been before". He ponders this presence in absence absurdity, asks how the "silence of God" differs from the "silence that exists because there is no God", and confesses there is no intellectual answer to that question.

Religion and science are not at odds with one another, says the Bishop, but the success of the scientific method contrasts very sharply with religion. "There are no generally agreed religious truths, religions are still prone to be antagonistic to one another; some religion is sheer bunk yet people believe it passionately, some religion is highly dangerous and damaging". He doesn't particularise. But all of them "seem stuck in an ancient world capable of adapting, if at all, only slowly" to the modern world. Which should, he suggests, "induce a certain humility in those of us who put forward the claims of religious truth". No quarrel with that; but we are immediately asked to bless God for the achievements of modern science and the improvements it has brought about in human health and well-being, "not in a mere niggardly or begrudging manner but wholeheartedly, fulsomely, for what the creative human mind and spirit have been able to

achieve" (my italics). So God gets the credit if not the Nobel prizes. But then the Bishop explains that "Religious language has a different kind of logic and purpose which has its own validity", which puts paid to any further discussion for those who have to rely on human logic alone.

It must be about forty years ago now that, under the guidance of Sir Julian Huxley and H J Blackham, British humanists initiated a series of dialogues with Christian humanists and, if there were to be any repeat of these, Richard Harries would surely be involved. He certainly favours inter-faith dialogues. Through dialogue, he says, "God changes us" – and "others". He is a reformist Christian who is not afraid to criticise the Church. The Crusades are indefensible and eternal punishment unacceptable. Indeed he reminds us that the Christian socialist F D Maurice was sacked from his professorship at King's College, London, for denying the "everlastingness" of

hell. Richard Harries' religion is a religion of love. His God is "the source and standard of all love" and he believes that love will ultimately prevail.

He has no difficulty accepting evolution, although he naturally posits a divine creator. And because the universe is unique, because there are "no categories of designed and undesigned universes with which to compare this one ... we are never in a position, from a purely rational point of view, to say that the universe is either designed by a divine creator or not". The fact that Richard Dawkins can set out the process of evolution in a compelling way, from a scientific point of view and "account ... for every feature of evolution, tells us nothing about whether or not there is a divine creator behind the whole process", says the Bishop. Granted. But like Laplace, we have no need of that hypothesis. This is certainly a valid case for applying Occam's razor.

Church's reputation sinks deeper in the mire amidst further sexual abuse allegations

POPE John Paul II last month accepted the resignation of an Argentinian archbishop who was accused of sexually abusing seminarians.

Archbishop Edgardo Storni, 66, of Santa Fe de la Vera Cruz, is one of the highest-ranking officials brought down by sex-abuse allegations which have been rocking the Roman Catholic Church this year.

He offered his resignation last month following allegations that he sexually abused at least 47 men at a seminary.

Storni, archbishop, since 1984, had said that the resignation "in no way signifies guilt on my part nor does it mean I accept the allegations. God is my judge."

The allegations against Storni were contained in a book by Olga Wornat titled *Nuestra Santa Madre* (Our Holy Mother). Wornat claimed that the Vatican investigated Storni in 1994 for possible sexual abuses but dropped the case after concluding there was not enough evidence to support the allegations.

Meanwhile, from the US comes news that John J. Geoghan, a defrocked priest at the centre of a huge sexual abuse scandal in Boston, has been named as a defendant in 17 new civil lawsuits, filed by men who say he sexually abused them as children.

The plaintiffs said the abuse by the former priest took place from 1964 to 1996, when they were aged between seven and 15. Geoghan is currently serving a 9 to 10-year sentence for sexually abusing a 10-year-old boy in 1991.

The lawsuits also implicate 20 other clergymen. The latest suits, along with two filed in June, bring to 19 the number of civil actions

pending against Geoghan.

The Archdiocese of Boston has already paid \$10 million in compensation to 86 of Geoghan victims.

Geoghan also has two criminal trials pending – one set to begin on December 2. He is charged with two counts of indecent assault and battery on a child in one trial and two counts of child rape in the other.

Closer to home, a twice-married Anglican priest was jailed last month for 18 months for sexually assaulting a 10-year-old boy in his vicarage.

The Reverend George Glover, known to parishioners as Father Eddie, indecently assaulted the boy at his home in Bensham, Gateshead, in April last year when his wife was out. Glover, 44, has also been placed indefinitely on the Sex Offenders' Register.

Another priest, living in London, faces extradition to New Zealand, where he is wanted in connection with indecently assaulting teenage boys between 1982 and 1985 while he was working as a teacher. Alan Woodcock, 54, was arrested in August as he returned from Greece to his home in London.

Quotable quote

A man's ethical behaviour should be based effectually on sympathy, education, and social ties; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death.

– Albert Einstein

Unfair discrimination

IN RESPONSE to David M Gostyn's letter, (September *Freethinker*), I am writing to assure him that there will soon be legislation in place to counter discrimination on religious grounds.

The UK government has signed up to EU Directives that require "member states to introduce legislation to outlaw unfair discrimination on the grounds of race, sexual orientation, religion or belief, disability and age." A consultation document has already been issued. It can be found at www.dti.gov.uk/er/equality/ under the heading "Towards Equality and Diversity: implementing the Employment and Race Directives". Chapter 13 covers religion. There is however a *caveat*, with special provisions intended for religious organisations to enable them to "preserve their particular ethos".

A second consultation on more detailed issues is promised for the autumn of this year with the declared intention that new legislation will be presented to Parliament, probably next year. As ever, though, the devil will reside in the detail – and in the translation of intent to practical enforcement.

MARGARET A. JACKSON-ROBERTS
London

Use of the word "gay"

WHATEVER one's views concerning homosexuality, it is not, nor should it ever be, anything more than that. Those who practice it are simply homosexuals, or more briefly homos. They are not "gay", a charming, evocative word which they have managed to hijack just to present a more generally acceptable image.

I was deeply disappointed that, in the October *Freethinker*, David Tribe showed that he has fallen for this con, and is prepared to give it respectability by treating the two terms as interchangeable. Our tenets include refusing to let the religionists throw dust in our eyes. Surely we should reject humbug of any description wherever it appears?

JACK WILSON
Altrincham

• **Editor's Note:** The word "gay" to describe homosexuals dates back to 19th century Britain, and pre-dates the word "homosexual". Around that time it was also used to describe a woman leading an immoral life, and was deployed in that context as far back as the 17th century. Philip Howard, in *New Words For Old*,

mentions London's Cleveland Street scandal of 1889 during which a male prostitute, testifying in court, described himself as "gay". "Homosexual" first appeared in English in 1892 as an adjective, along with "homosexuality", the noun form, in a psychological treatise translated from German (Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*). It was first recorded as a noun in 1912 by an English journalist.

So David Tribe's use of the word gay is perfectly correct and acceptable.

Reading the Bible

WHILE I agree with Peter Richards (*Points of View*, October) that it is a good thing for atheists/humanists to read the Bible in order to argue more effectively with Christians, I rather fear that many humanists would find it an intellectually and morally unpalatable task.

On the few occasions in the past when I have dipped into its pages (usually to find the answer to a crossword clue!) I was invariably shocked, appalled and horrified by the vindictiveness and countless atrocities perpetrated by the ferocious Jehovah, and I'm afraid the book went quickly back into the drawer. I have long believed that there is no greater misnomer in the entire English-speaking world than to refer to this catalogue of horrors as the "Holy Bible".

MARTIN O'BRIEN
Gwent

Vivisection and animal rights

THE human species has never been so unwell as they have been since the international trade in disease and death *via* vivisection atrocity and fraud was officially granted virtually full control of everything on earth.

In 1692 some hard-thinking person wrote: "Be very careful in all your business dealings because the world is full of fraud". By 1892 the world's most horrible and death-dealing fraud was officially blessed and savagely promoted by the Home Office in the transparent Cruelty to Animals Act, of 1876, which meant that vivisection cruelty and fraud suddenly became very lucratively big business. Vivisection atrocity and fraud was multiplied millions-fold in the necessarily *secretively*-secluded death-row labs. How else could anybody get away with mass torture, killing and fraud to produce "scientific" and lethal "medical" therapies to sell to make billions of pounds and dollars and yen?

The vivisectors had to come up with a big fool-proof (they imagined) lying machine. The mass media soon became staggeringly near to achieving one hundred percent success in their

richly-paid (by the pharmaceuticals empire) task on a grand scale.

Whence came, for instance, encephalitis, autism, epilepsy, cot death, arthritis, tuberculosis, leukaemia, glue-ear, diabetes, MS, social violence, criminality, AIDS etc.

It's no use asking the dumb "laboratory" animals. In the "science" labs, noisy protesting animals such as dogs have their throats slit during clever experimentation so that no-one important who happens to be near can hear their agonized cries for help.) No doubt a lot of the wealthy vivisectors could tell us, but they are as a rule more dumb than any animal (or reptile) they make their money out of.

I would recommend reading: *Slaughter of the Innocent*, Hans Ruesch of CIVIS (International Foundation for Abolition of Vivisection on Medical and Scientific Grounds) and *Blood Poison: Vaccine Assault on the Species*, Pat Rattigan, MD.

FRANCIS BACON
Notts.

IT COULD be natural and, in the best sense, profitable, extending compassion to a Muslim; doling it out on an alligator when you are in a pickle in the Nile, however tearful either party, would be neither.

It is precisely this kind of category confusion, not the baseball bats and balaclavas, the intimidation of lab workers, the terror caused at the home of a distinguished Oxford scientist, the nail bombs, and damage done by members of the cult, that unfits animal rightists to be guardians of the ruby slippers. Mr Liddle is quite right in implying that one should stick to the point.

KEITH BELL
Wrexham

'Thanks Mr Pope'

WHEN the Pope was in Poland recently he made a profound remark when denouncing "genetics" while wearing his best green frock and matching beautiful pointy green hat.

He said something like "People are behaving as if there were no God". Wow. So he has noticed. Thank you so much Mr Pope for acknowledging us at last.

GEORGINA COUPLAND
Preston

Disappointed by tone of report

I WAS somewhat disappointed by the tone of some of the reporting of the blasphemy demonstration (*Freethinker*, August). I do not feel that describing any group of people, however misguided, misinformed or badly-



behaved we might consider them to be, as a "fruit-and-nut assortment of Bible-waving, cross-bearing, steam-driven Christians" does much to encourage dialogue or *detente* and certainly not concord. Surely, this is to descend to the same depths as the extremists one encounters. Whilst I abandoned the Church long ago, there is something to be said of parts of Christian philosophy, and turning the other cheek can be a strong position to take. I do not mean by that allowing oneself to be steam-rolled by people whose posturing one finds offensive, but merely maintaining a quiet dignity and pitying them rather than ridiculing them.

I have always held to the view that most people need to cling to some myths and to feel a part of the continuity of some group or tribe. Most Christians are doing no more than this.

So long as one's beliefs cause no harm, then why not as individuals be indulged by others who do not share your views? Granted the Christian demonstrators at Trafalgar Square can be seen as part of a greater whole that has a questionable history, but they did not perpetrate all the crimes of the Church and, really, how much harm were they doing? I would have thought they only succeeded in making themselves look ridiculous.

I would also question the reading out of a pretty trashy piece of verse even if it had symbolic significance to the anti-blasphemy movement. If you are going to wave flags, at least let them be ones of some worth.

Much as I am opposed to organised religion and much as I am opposed to the blasphemy laws, I might have been provoked to start a counter-demonstration against both groups on the grounds of appallingly low taste.

As to the question of blasphemy, it has always been a simple matter to me and, if the argument against it is presented properly, irrefutable by even the most committed and fundamentalist of theists.

The major monotheistic religions all hold that the god they worship is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent and a thing than which nothing greater or exceeding it in perfection can exist. If that is true then blasphemy cannot even exist because humans, who are so much less than any of these things, cannot in any way hurt a being of such power and perfection.

And even if this supernatural being were capable of being hurt by the words and actions of humans in their relative insignificance, nothing less than that being would be able to protect it from harm by anyone or anything. Therefore, there is no such thing as blasphemy unless humans are being blasphemous ironically in their presumption that they could pro-

tect such a being with their paltry laws.

DEIRDRE SHAW
London

Arabs and Jews

MAY I suggest that Bill Barbour, as a humanist who rejects those who lay down the law about the truth, should be more modest before laying down the law about history. He would then find out with merely some superficial reading that his pronouncements about historical facts are very far from being factual.

Stage One: Zionism was not founded in the USA in 1897. The movement *Hovevei Zion* (Lovers of Zion) was founded in Warsaw (Poland) in 1881 after a long history of initiatives mainly in Eastern Europe. At the World Zionist Congress under the leadership of Herzl at Basel (Switzerland) in 1897, to the best of my knowledge, there were no Americans and most participants were from Eastern Europe.

Stage Two: Chaim Weitzman, having discovered a way to produce in a laboratory a substance necessary for the British war effort and which Britain was unable to import, negotiated on behalf of the World Zionist Movement the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The Balfour declaration confirmed the agreement reached.

Stage Three: Under continuous pressure from the Arab world, which Britain was keen to befriend, presumably because of oil and their geopolitical weight, the British Government issued various legal directives to limit or preclude the Jewish immigration.

The *kibbutzim* were not established in semi-desert land. Though some were established in difficult terrain which was not being cultivated, most were established close to sources of water.

The two entirely separate organisations Irgun Z L and Stern came about in order to fight the pro-Arab policy of the British Government, organise illegal immigration and eventually secure independence.

Stage Four: During the war the Grand Mufti stationed in Berlin continuously incited the Arab world to fight for a German victory. And in fact in Iraq there was a rebellion and a coup. Notwithstanding the distance, the Germans sent some planes to the new regime until the Allies put it down and restored the monarchy.

Stage Five: When the ONU partitioned Palestine in 1948 and Britain had to leave, Israel (the Jews in Israel have always called Palestine The Land of Israel) were with almost no arms apart from the few they had obtained by bribing British soldiers.

Russia at the time was rather sympathetic

towards the new Israel. The Israeli army obtained from Czechoslovakia (part of the Russian bloc) the German mauser rifles for all its soldiers, the German MG32 machine guns and a few Messerschmidt 109 for its new air force, as well as some German field guns.

Sten automatic guns were manufactured in Israel (precursors of the Usi automatic rifles).

The Arabs were entirely armed by Britain. The Arab Legion, British led and trained with a British commander and British officers, was a formidable force which managed some initial successes.

In Falujia the Egyptian fought well and were granted to leave and return to the Egyptian lines with their rifles. (Nasser was wounded at Falujia by a sniper, probably myself).

Stage Six: Eisenhower was very cross because the USA were left in the dark about the plans to retake the Suez canal which had been nationalised by the Egyptians expelling the British and French administration. Britain and France secured the assistance of the Israeli army and then pretended that they had to come in order to save Egypt.

Stages Seven and Eight: The Soviet Union had now put its might to support, train and arm Egypt and Syria, which had joined forces, and in 1973 the USA helped Israel.

In conclusion we humanists should make the effort to research the available records, before launching into recollections of historical events, but I totally agree with the last sentence of Bill Barbour's letter.

DAVID IBRY
London

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has moved to
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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, December 1, 4pm. Members' Forum.

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. Worcester House, Pitville Circus Road, Cheltenham. Friday, November 22, 8pm. *Readings: War Literature.*

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. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1. Friday, December 13, 7.30pm. Mansell Stimson: *Anthony Asquith, Gay Film Director Extraordinary.*

Greater Manchester Humanist Group: Information: Niall Power. Tel 0161 2865349. Monthly meetings (second Wednesday) Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester. Wednesday, November 13, 7.30pm. Musical Evening.

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, December 5, 8pm. David Robinson: 160 Years of Agricultural Research at Harpenden

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.

Dundee Group: Information: Terry Martin. Tel: 01250 874742. E-mail: terrymartin@dalcruie.fsnet.co.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. 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, November 28, 8pm. Don Langdown: *Fifty Years a Rationalist.*

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. Guest speaker: Poet and broadcaster Ian McMillan. Tickets: £11.50. Bookings: Hilary Cave on 01246 270628.

Sheffield Humanist Society: Literature and Information stall at Sheffield Peace Fair, Town Hall, Barker's Pool, Saturday, November 16, 11am - 4pm.

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, November 13, 8pm. Robert Landeryou: *Local Democracy.*

Welsh Marches Humanist Group: Information: 01568 770282.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group: Information: 01792 206108 or 01792 296375, or write Julie Norris, 3 Maple Grove, Uplands, Swansea SA2 0JY.

West Kent Secular Humanist Group: Information: Maggie Fraser. Tel: 01892 523858. E-mail: melgin@waitrose.com.

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

Please send your listings and events notices to:
**Bill McIlroy, Flat 3, Somerhill Lodge, Somerhill Road,
Hove, Sussex BN3 1RU.**
Notices must be received by the 15th of the month
preceding publication