

£1.25

Vol 127 No 9
September 2007

The Freethinker

The voice of atheism since 1881

'Pissed-off faithless' intensify their assault on religion

ATHEISM is beneficial both to individuals and societies, according to a study written by Phil Zuckerman, American professor of sociology and religion, for *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*.

Under the chapter heading *Atheism: Contemporary Rates and Patterns*, Zuckerman concludes that "high levels of organic atheism are strongly correlated with high levels of societal health, such as low homicide rates, low poverty rates, low infant mortality rates, and low illiteracy rates, as well as high levels of educational attainment, per capita income, and gender equality.

"Most nations characterised by high degrees of individual and societal security have the highest rates of organic atheism (atheism which is not state-enforced through totalitarian regimes but emerges naturally among free societies). These include most of the nations of Europe, as well as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Israel.

"There also exist high degrees of atheism in Japan, Vietnam, North Korea, and Taiwan. Many former Soviet nations, such as Estonia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus also contain significant levels of atheism. Conversely, nations characterised by low degrees of individual and societal security have the lowest rates of organic atheism. In some societies, particularly Europe, atheism is growing ..."

Zuckerman's observations were made more than two years ago – the *Cambridge Companion to Atheism* was published in 2005. We do not know whether Zuckerman anticipated the extraordinary assault on religious belief that was to come in the wake of his study, but if he did, it is doubtful whether he anticipated the power and virulence of the assault.

This onslaught has taken the form of a number of top-selling atheist books, TV and radio programmes – and a phenomenal groundswell of public antipathy towards religion in Europe and in the US.

Examining this phenomenon, Freedom from Religion Foundation member Robert Weitzel – a school councillor who lives in Middleton, Wisconsin – recently revealed in an article in the *Capital Times* that "Christopher Hitchens, contrarian



Christopher Hitchens

atheist and slayer of all beasts fascistic and theocratic, will be in Madison this fall to present the keynote address at the FFrF's fall conference.

"Anyone who is familiar with Hitchens' substance and style will expect a speech that is irreverent and uncompromising and totally worth the price of admission.

"Predictably, letters to the editor and op-ed pieces appeared bemoaning Hitchens' upcoming visit and calling him a boorish bigot for his willingness to describe the emperor's nakedness in all its scabious and purulent magisterial arrogance.

"Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris are not bigots. They are an unholy trinity of best-selling atheist authors who are fed up with having to tap-dance around people of faith whose religious beliefs are as irrational as they are ubiquitous, and as potentially deadly as they are personally cathartic.

"This unholy trinity is the rising voice of over 10 percent of Americans who identify themselves as atheists (closeted or

(Continued on Page 4)

**Religion
in the raw**

– p2

**The end
is nigh!**

– p4

**Scientology
exposed**

– p8

UP UNTIL the summer of 2005, I believed the one place you'd be safe from evangelists would be a nudist beach, as devout Christians are almost as paranoid about the unclothed human form as Muslims – who, as I pointed out in last month's *Freethinker*, regard nudity with undisguised horror.

Then came the shock. I was dozing on Brighton's official nudist beach, along with a friend, when I became aware of a skinny, bearded figure standing over me.

Using one hand to shield my eyes from the sun, I looked up at the naked man and said: "Yes, Can I help you?"

The reply I got was "You, my friend, have been blessed by JEE-SUS!"

To which my companion snappily retorted: "Shame Jesus hasn't blessed you to the same extent – now piss off."

Looking a little sheepish, the naked Christer shot off, and found some other poor sap to harangue.

I wrote off this encounter as a one-off incident – but I now have a horrible feeling that there is more of this to come.

Why? Because I have today discovered the existence of the Christian Nudist Convocation – a body established in the United States to, among other things, "equip believers with training and knowledge so that they can effectively impact the naturist community with the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Which is whaffley code for "we're out to make a nuisance of ourselves in places where we are clearly not wanted."

And what happens in the US is very soon replicated in the UK – especially if it's of the delusional variety.

But let us take solace from the fact that the Holy Joes and Janes who may start bothering us here won't be quite as gross as those targeting nudists in the US, because, as one American comedian recently observed, Americans eat like the British drink – and boy, does it show!

So we may be spared scenes like this, reported by Nashville Scene's Elizabeth Ulrich, about a CNC gathering at the Cherokee Lodge in Tennessee.

"It's apparent that if the CNCers lack anything, it's body shame. They adjust themselves in plastic patio chairs that leave horizontal marks between their shoulder blades. Some are squished so tightly into the dirty seats that their flesh presses into the armrests and spills over the sides.

"Kevin's gone through the Bible and marked every reference to nakedness, give or take a few. He talks about how God spoke to Isaiah and told him to walk barefoot and unclothed. How Peter fished naked near the shores of Galilee. And how Jesus was nude when he washed the feet of his disciples. 'But there's nothing in there that says nudity is inherently wrong,' he says. For much of the weekend, their dialogue centers on such nude biblical references.

"One woman sits facing the congregation. She's clothed only in a pair of thin cotton shorts with an elastic waistband hiked up almost to meet her large, heavy breasts. She takes hold of one breast, lifts it off her stomach and covers the flesh underneath with a thick swipe of deodorant. She moves slowly and deliberately. No one seems to notice.

**Freethinker editor
BARRY DUKE
shudders at the idea
of naked evangelists**



"Rick's wearing a 'Watch Out!! I'm Here to Raze Hell' T-shirt, which covers a boyish upper body with no tan lines. He's managed to avoid the round belly and love handles common among the mid-life nudist set. You might not notice him at a bar in the city, but here, at a party in the thicket of the Cumberland Plateau nearly two hours east of Nashville, Rick's a silver fox...

"He has joined more than 20 others for the Christian Nudist Convocation, a semi-annual gathering of salt-of-the-earth folks whose dedication to being nude whenever possible is rivaled only by their love for Christ. 'May the Lord protect our nudity from the sight of those who will not benefit, and may He allow us to be seen by those who will ... Amen,' goes the prayer from one of the nudists' websites.

"In three days, they'll hike, swim, barbecue, have sing-alongs, and, of course, praise Jesus *au naturale*. Some won't put as much as a shirt on all weekend. For most, the convocation is a respite from their churches, neighbors and families – the prudes of the clothed world who are scared to high heaven by the thought of bare butts on church pews. For others, it's a coming-out event, a safe place to test the waters where 'Christian nudist' isn't considered an oxymoron."

Posting a comment on one blogger's site, an observer of the phenomenon asked: "If I get wood while thinking about Jesus, am I pious, or just a bi-curious necrophile?"

I AM delighted to report that Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, is coming to Brighton in early October to present a show celebrating the life of Marlene Dietrich.

Dietrich – the most glamorous atheist of all time – was one of the greatest entertainers of the 20th century, with a career stretching from the theatres of Weimar Germany to the cabaret stages of the 1960s and 1970s. All this via a legendary Hollywood career that placed her among the immortals of the silver screen.

Her career is well-chronicled. What is less well-known is her atheism, which was prompted by her experiences during the war. La Dietrich was, indeed, one of the great heroes of World War II. Not just because she spent nearly the whole war touring the European battle-

fields entertaining the Allied troops, but because she defied Hitler and Goebels who desperately wanted her to return to Germany to help with the Nazi propaganda campaign. The fact that she decided to abandon her German heritage was her greatest coup against the Nazis.

"Dietrich," Sanderson points out, "would have none of it and, unlike dear Pope Ratzinger who jogged along in the Hitler Youth without protest, she had no problems identifying the Fuehrer as a monster from the very start."

After the war she declared that she had seen preachers invoking God in front of men who were about to be sacrificed on the battle-field and she'd lost all interest in "a light that guides or anything like that". She wrote in her biography: "If God exists, he's mad."

During her appearance on *Desert Island Discs* in the 1950s, Roy Plomley asks her: "Do you have a religious faith that would sustain you on this desert island?" She hesitates for a moment, then replies "No, not really." And in the Oscar-winning documentary that Maximillian Schell made about her, he asks "Are you afraid of death?" She scoffs at him: "Of course not – it's ridiculous. The idea that they are all floating around up there. It must be terribly crowded."

Sanderson is presenting his tribute to Marlene Dietrich in Brighton on Saturday, October 6 at the Marlborough Theatre, Princes Street at 7.30pm. The show will consist of an affectionate skim through some of her Hollywood films, a look at her medal-winning war heroism, and finally a showing in full of a recording of her famous one-woman show, recorded in 1963 in Stockholm, when she was accompanied by Burt Bacharach and his orchestra.

Tickets are £10 and can be booked online at www.gayhumanist.com/marlene or by post from Marlene, PO Box 130, London W5 1DQ.



Marlene Dietrich, the most glamorous atheist of all time

The moral mess of 'Christian values'

AUSTRALIAN Prime Minister John Howard and Labour Opposition Kevin Rudd are both appealing to Christian values in an effort to enhance their status as worthy leaders. "But what are these Christian values we're supposed to admire?" asks the Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc.

As neither Howard nor Rudd is keen to spell them out, the AFA decided to take a look. "We discovered it's easier to gain an understanding of Christian values by looking at the things they oppose rather than the things they reckon they support," said the AFA, which compiled this list:

1 Christian values oppose granting relief from misery and unremitting pain to terminal-ly ill patients who desire to die with dignity.

2 Christian values oppose equality for women; by (a) maintaining they should be subservient to their husbands, and (b) insisting they have not the right to decide whether or not they are able, emotionally and/or financially, to give a child the best possible upbringing. To this end they oppose both legal termination of pregnancies and the availability of RU486 (the chemical that induces abortion), thus denying the benefits from its widespread introduction that have been observed in advanced Western nations.

3 Christian values oppose equal rights for same-sex couples.

4 Christian values oppose anti-discrimination legislation, by demanding exemptions for all activities in which they have some interest.

5 Christian values oppose broad comprehensive sex education for all students, despite voluminous research proving it is the best way to prevent unwanted pregnancies, premature sexual experimentation and sexually transmitted diseases.

6 Christian values oppose stem-cell research which has the real potential of cures for many intractable health problems besetting humanity.

7 Christian values oppose strong opposition to the teaching of creationism and so-called "intelligent design", thus undermining both science, and the development of rational thinking in students.

8 Christian values oppose a balanced approach to teaching about religions. Instead of a broad-based study of human religions, beliefs and values throughout history, they want to indoctrinate young minds with their own unsubstantiated belief system.

9 Christian values oppose the right of state school students to be free of religious indoctrination, by demanding access to state schools through tax-payer funded Christian chaplaincy programs, thus replacing properly trained School Counsellors – a social disaster!

10 Christian values oppose a fair deal for everyone by refusing to pay tax on the profits of their enterprises, thus creating an enormous,

unfair burden on honest taxpayers who haven't this right to evade their moral duty.

The AFA has sent a questionnaire on a number of these matters to all federal politicians. "It is alarming how few have responded. Are our representatives with no 'faith' frightened to be honest because of a possible religious backlash? Or are they merely the lap-dogs of political power-brokers, fearful of repercussions for non-compliance?

"Whatever their reasons, it is inexcusable that those touting for votes by pushing Christian values are so contemptuous of the electorate that they refuse to state them in the Atheist Foundation of Australia survey.

"Our parliamentarians enact laws binding on all Australians. If they are using Christian values to determine what makes a good law, then it is high time these values were written down clearly, and published for everyone to see. How else can we learn to trust political decisions? By concealing their values and motives, politicians undermine our fragile democracy.

More than half the voting population has no interest in religion, so to continue pretending that Christian values are somehow better than,

or different from, the universal ethical guidelines that have kept humanity going for a couple of hundred thousand years, is stupid and unrepresentative.

AFA president, David Nicholls said: "If the citizens of Australia want to keep their society democratic, secular and pluralist, then they should demand answers from would-be politicians, whether they represent a political party or are 'Independents' – far too many of whom are merely front men and women for religious organisations. This is the only way to make your vote count."

According to a *Daily Telegraph* report, Religion losing its allure (July 03, 2007), religion in Australia is on the decline.

According to the Australian Census, since 2001 the number of people saying they have no religious conviction has risen from 2.9 million, or 15.5 percent of the population to 3.7 million, or 19 percent.

So, over a period during which the total population has grown by just under a million, the number of non-believers has risen by 800,000. Which means the percentage increase of non-believers is close to 30 percent.

Carry on laughing at religion

A "video monologue" posted on the internet by atheist comedian Pat Condell, a National Secular Society member, has received over a million hits. The five-minute film is entitled *The Trouble with Islam*.

Pat Condell said that the huge number of people viewing his film proved "that there is an enthusiastic audience for comedy ideas and opinions which are routinely censored out of existence in the UK's mainstream media, thanks to misguided political correctness."

Earlier this year, members of the City of Berkeley's Peace and Justice Commission in the US drew widespread ridicule when they publicly condemned the video as racist hate speech.

According to the website Mediawatchwatch, "Condell's views are certainly robustly expressed, but not racist (Islam is not a race). He makes the point that the increasingly shrill demands of various religions are largely the result of vocal Muslims getting their way via threats of violence.

"Condell points out that 'they've shown everybody else what can be achieved by bullying and intimidation, so now every crackpot in the country feels entitled to respect for their precious beliefs'.

"He describes fundamentalist Muslim men who oppress women as 'primitive pigs whose only achievement in life is to be born with a penis is one hand and a Koran in the other' – which seems fair enough."

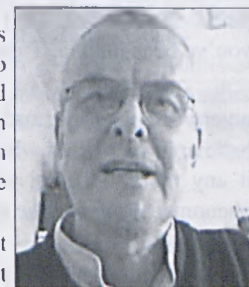
So far, Condell has made 20 short video clips lampooning and criticising religion. In total, they have been viewed almost three million times.

Another great source of mirth last month was the hit Edinburgh Fringe Festival show, *Ca\$h in Christ*, which skewered evangelical Christianity.

The musical satire featured sing-along hymns and extracts of real sermons to poke fun at and draw attention to the threats posed by the rise of extremist Christianity in Britain. It was written and performed by Van Badham and Jonny Berliner, who spent months at London "mega-churches" – including the home of the Alpha Course, Holy Trinity, Brompton – doing research.

Ms Badham, who is a practising Catholic and an award-winning playwright, is quoted in *The Times* as saying: "I don't think people really understand that the growth of these churches over here threatens our way of life because their values are antithetical to a secular society.

"They give other Christians a bad name. These people are organised, rich, growing very fast, and dangerous. I'm trying to understand why this isn't more alarming to more people."



Pat Condell

Prepare thyself for the Kingdom of Heaven

WE have received the prophecies. We have seen the signs. The Apocalypse is nigh. Our sins have angered the Lord and we must now face the Ultimate Truth as the Day of Judgment approaches. And please take heed that the Day of Judgment is a designated public holiday, so should it fall on a weekend you get Monday off.

Heed also that the Day of Judgment is that Glorious Day when we shall stand before Almighty God to seek admittance to the Kingdom of Heaven based on our earthly conduct. It is not to be confused with *Judgment Day*, which is the name of the 1991 *Terminator* sequel which God Himself deemed to be a pretty good movie that holds up on a second viewing.

When the Day of Judgment arrives there shall be no time for excuses, no time for repentance, no time for moral redress or even to finish your skinny frappuccino. We – all of us – shall have to stand before God in turn, so please remember to take a number because otherwise it's back to the end of the queue, no excuses.

The question you must now ask yourself is: are you prepared to meet Almighty God? And if you are not, would you like ten minutes to freshen up? And don't worry if you're a few minutes late, for our God is a merciful God.

But God also smites. God smites the wicked and the evil and those who ride bikes on footpaths. And when God smites, you know you've been smited. To be smote by God is to

get such a smite you'll never want to be smited again. So while God is compassionate don't forget about the smiting, which can really sting, especially if you get it around the ear.

Paradise will soon be upon us, so book early, says JIM SCHEMBRI in *The Age*, Melbourne

God shall favour the Faithful who have put their Love and Trust in the Lord Jesus who said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, and also within Me, for I Am the Lord – so I guess it goes without saying, though referring to Myself in the third person like this can be a bit confusing. Anyway folks, keep the faith and thanks for coming out. And watch the carbs."

Those who follow the Word of the Lord shall be granted admittance to the Kingdom of Heaven, with entry passes to be sent in the mail, so please do not turn up without one and expect to get in.

Those who are not baptised need not worry, for the Kingdom of Heaven takes all comers, provided they can handle the cover charge. (Note: there is no corkage in Heaven.) For those still wishing to be baptised, discounts apply to group bookings of 20 or more.

Upon beholding the vision of Eternal Paradise, you shall give thanks that God has blessed the Life Everlasting with a team of

great landscapers. For many have noted from our brochures how much the Kingdom of Heaven looks like a municipal park, or the front yard of a funeral parlour, or a rural property in the north-eastern United States.

But what you are seeing is real. In Heaven there really are baskets full of fruit and vegetables lying all around the place. There are also lots of waterfalls, usually in the background next to the log cabins. And mooses really do roam around in Heaven, along with lions and zebras and bears. But don't worry. They don't bite. If they did, this would not be Heaven at all, but an open-range zoo.

In Heaven, you shall also notice how all the women wear dresses from 1957 and the men wear polo shirts. This is in strict accordance with Holy Scripture, which tells us: "In Paradise, God has decreed the dress code to be neat casual."

You may also notice just how much Heaven resembles a golf course. But Heaven is not a golf course. It is the ultimate resting place for the souls of the Good and the Kind. That said, Heaven does have some first-rate golf courses that we know you're going to enjoy.

So prepare thyself for Life Everlasting – for we have all felt the touch of the Lord, usually during a critical plot point while watching a soap, which can be very annoying. You'd think He could at least wait for an ad break or a station promo or something.

otherwise) who are mad as heck – we don't believe in hell – and who aren't going to take it any more. What else can account for the phenomenal sales of the unholy trinity's recent books?

"Think of it, at least ten of your hundred closest friends are the 'pissed-off faithless' (PoF) – a sizable cabal at any backyard barbecue, or polling station for that matter.

"If the faithful would just keep their religious beliefs in their own pockets and out of public school classrooms and bedrooms and women's wombs, I doubt much would ever be heard from the unholy trinity or the PoF. What would be the point?

"But in kissing up to the religious right or religious centre or religious left, it's gotten so that politicians will not open their mouths without first crossing themselves or testifying. For the POF, it's particularly nauseating every election cycle as candidates yammer on about their walk with the Lord while they trample all over the truth to cut each other's throats.

"In preparation for the 2008 'holy war', Hillary Clinton hired an evangelical Baptist who has put together her faith-steering committee and sends out a weekly wrap-up sheet, 'Faith, Family and Values'. Can you say 'focus on the family' values? Rest assured, both John Edwards and Barack Obama have their faith-

The 'pissed-off faithless'

(Continued from p1)

based mojo working overtime as well.

"I'm not suggesting there are no politicians with authentic religious bona fides. Jimmy Carter comes to mind. I just think it's interesting that each and every member of the executive and legislative branches of our government is tight with the Lord. Statistically, at least ten percent of them should be atheists. Someone is not being very honest. Could it be they know atheism is the only unforgivable and unelectable political 'sin'?"

I suppose the real question is not, 'Are they really religious?' but is, 'To whom and at what price have they sold their souls?' Until political pandering to the religious and the dishonesty it breeds ends, the unholy trinity has work to do.

"Closer to home, a recent *Capital Times* photograph shows Annette Ziegler, soon to be disciplined for ethical misconduct, placing her hand on a Bible and swearing to uphold the law as a Wisconsin Supreme Court justice. The POF will find this picture disturbing for several reasons. Until Christians see what the PoF sees, the unholy trinity cannot rest.

"Lest I become a boorish bigot, let me add this. It goes without saying that multitudes of the faithful live quiet lives comfortable in the

skin of their beliefs, and that good people are dedicating their lives to the betterment of humanity (locally and globally) under the banner of one religion or another. But if religion disappeared tomorrow, those same good people would still be out there doing what they can because of who they are, not because of where they worship.

"Without religion, though, their motives are above suspicion. Think Mother Teresa, whose religious beliefs concerning birth control exacerbated the suffering she was trying to relieve, assuming a person's suffering and not their soul was her foremost concern.

"Hitchens, Dawkins and Harris are carrying the torch passed onto them by the original unholy trinity of Paine, Jefferson and Madison, whose views on religion and the separation of church and state laid the foundation for the religious freedom of the republic. But they, too, were subjected to the same scorn and ridicule as their unholy 21st-century progeny. So buck up, boys. You're in good company."

Commenting on Hitchens' visit, the *Capital Times* was of the opinion that "his determination to express viewpoints that are so frequently forbidden makes him an essential player in a national debate that is so frequently emptied of meaning by its caution."

"The PoF say, 'Amen, brother! Bring it on!'"

Harris joins Secular Coalition for America

THE Secular Coalition for America, the Congressional lobbying organisation representing the interests of non-theistic Americans, has announced the addition of renowned author Sam Harris to its board of advisors.

The Secular Coalition for America is a coalition of eight national organisations. "Its mission is to increase the visibility and respectability of non-theistic viewpoints in the United States, and to protect and strengthen the secular character of our government as the best guarantee of freedom for all."

Its advisory board is comprised of noted luminaries from the fields of science, medicine, literature, law, business, and entertainment, including author, journalist and literary critic Christopher Hitchens, actress Julia Sweeney, and evolutionary biologist and popular science writer Richard Dawkins.

Perhaps best known for his *New York Times* bestsellers, *Letter to a Christian Nation* and *The End of Faith*, for which he won the 2005 PEN Award for Nonfiction, Harris is also a regular on television and radio programs talking about the danger that religion poses to modern societies.



Sam Harris

A champion of freethought, his provocative essays have appeared in *Newsweek*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Times of London*, *The Boston Globe*, and elsewhere.

Harris commented "Non-theists represent the most highly educated, scientifically literate, and fastest growing denomination in the United States. We are also the least empowered politically. I consider the work of the Secular Coalition for America to be indispensable in addressing what is, at a glance, the

most depressing feature of our political discourse: it is impossible to get elected to high office in this country without professing a god-belief."

"We are pleased to welcome Sam Harris to our board of advisors. We now have an extremely diverse representation reflecting the coming together of non-theistic Americans across a wide spectrum of political and philosophical voices," said Lori Lipman Brown, director of the Secular Coalition for America.

Muslim mob attacks Taslima Nasrin

BANGLADESHI writer Taslima Nasrin, an honorary associate of the National Secular Society, had to be escorted out of the Press Club in Hyderabad, India, by the Indian Police after she was manhandled by angry Muslim protesters last month.

Nasrin escaped unhurt as the organisers pushed back nearly 100 protesters. In the melee, one of the protesters slapped her and told her to go back to her country, according to eyewitnesses.

About 100 people burst into the Press Club in Hyderabad, shouting insults at Taslima Nasrin and ransacking the place, throwing chairs in the air and overturning tables.

The protesters belonged to the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen political party in Andhra Pradesh state. Police detained nearly all the 100 protesters, including the three Muslim lawmakers who led the mob.

Nasrin fled Bangladesh in 1994 when Islamic extremists threatened to kill her after an Indian newspaper quoted her as saying changes must be made to the Koran, to give women more rights.

She has vehemently denied making the comments but still faces death threats from Islamic hard-liners in Bangladesh, where one of her books is banned.

"Our protest is against Taslima Nasrin because of her writings ridiculing Islam. We want the Indian government to send her back to Bangladesh," said Ahmad Pasha Quadri, one of the lawmakers.

Nasrin was in Hyderabad for the launch of her book *Shodh, or Getting Even*, in the local Telegu language.

After fleeing Bangladesh, Nasrin lived in Sweden for several years and eventually moved to India. She has lived in Calcutta for the last two years and has applied for Indian citizenship or permanent residency status.

In 2004, the Bangladeshi government banned her Bengali-language book *Shei Shab Andhakar, or Those Dark Days*, for what it said were objectionable comments about Islam and the Prophet Mohammed.

Religious body should 'pay for Shambo shambles'

WHEN the *Freethinker* went to press last month, we reported that Shambo, the "sacred" Hindu bull, had received a reprieve, but, shortly afterwards, the court ruling was overturned, and the sick animal slaughtered.

The National Secular Society reacted to what it called "the Shambo shambles" by saying that the Hindu temple at the centre of the confrontation should be made to contribute towards the expenses incurred by their belligerence.

The NSS's Executive Director, Keith Porteous Wood said "This confrontation has cost the public purse many tens of thousands of pounds in legal action, and already hard-stretched police time. We call on the public authorities to require the protestors to pay for the time wasted by police and public officials when they were being obstructed in the performance of their duties.

"It was a bad advertisement for the Hindu community for its worshippers to be seen obstructing officials going about their lawful duties, which they were carrying out to protect public health. We are shocked that the Hindu Council UK opposed the cull and accused the Welsh Assembly of being "only interested in commercialism, to make sure Wales maintains its zero TB certificate". The economic and human cost to the people of Wales of losing the zero TB status would have been huge. The protestors obstructing the officials were putting religious dogma before the welfare of the community. The bull posed a potential threat to the health of many thousands of animals and even to people. The religious leaders in charge of the temple should have abided by the same law that everyone else in the country is required to follow."

Mr Porteous Wood added that "this case represents another example of religious bodies trying to put themselves above the law. We do not live in a theocracy, and democratically enacted legislation must be observed and respected by everyone. The Human Rights Act does not give religion complete carte blanche – religious rights are limited by the need to protect public health and public order. In this case, the statutory authorities rightly prevailed, but only after a long and expensive fight

He said the suggestion, supported by the Hindu Council UK, that consideration should be given for the infected bull to be transported to India "would have risked spreading the disease internationally."



The 'sacred' Shambo

OF ALL the important power structures which exist in the world today, the tripartite "Vatican" is the most ancient. There is, first of all, the Roman Catholic Church which, dating back almost 2,000 years, claimed yet again in July to be the only "true Church of Christ" (as Protestant communities lacked "valid sacraments and apostolic succession"), involving at least one billion subjects around the world. Secondly, there is the Holy See ("See" is derived from the Latin word, "sedes" meaning "seat"), one of the most astute diplomatic-political powers in the world today. And, finally, as the third legal part of this "Vatican" structure, there is the actual State of the Vatican City which, situated on the west bank of the Tiber, was established as an independent sovereign community only in 1929 – a tiny territory of 108 acres with a population of about 600. All three entities are ruled over by the Pope, the world's last surviving autocrat (government by one person with absolute powers).

This tripartite Catholic apparatus is excessively centralised – in fact, even its local bishops are, in a sense, no more than branch managers in a multinational corporation who are expected to obey directives from the top without question. And, assisting the papacy in its global control are 179 papal nuncios (or apostolic nuncios) and permanent diplomatic missions, spread around the world, acting as its "eyes and ears" and giving it supra-national status. In the reverse direction, 166 individual nations presently send ambassadors to represent them at the Pope's court.

"Nuncio" is an ecclesiastical term (from the Latin word "nuntius", meaning either a messenger or envoy). With the prime duty of safeguarding the interests of the Pope, in the countries to which they are accredited, nuncios began to appear in the 15th century with the exchange of representatives between various countries and the Pope's court. Of interest to us, formal diplomatic links between England and this regal court were initially established in 1479 when John Shirwood, the Bishop of Durham, was appointed as the first resident ambassador. In fact, Shirwood was the first English ambassador to permanently serve anywhere abroad, making this post the oldest ambassadorial position in today's UK diplomatic service. However, in 1534, with Henry VIII becoming head of the English Church following his matrimonial difficulties with Pope Clement VII, formal diplomatic relations were disrupted until 1914. Then, with the start of the First World War, there were definite advantages in having an envoy accredited to the court of a "neutral" Pope where direct contacts could be made fairly easily with the ambassadors from enemy states.

In many countries, especially Catholic ones, papal nuncios are often automatically recognised as the deans of the diplomatic corps. This privilege for papal envoys was expressly endorsed by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Generally, nuncios enjoy the title of

"Excellency" and have the same special rights as ambassadors. In the past, most papal nuncios were Italian: today, less than half have this nationality. Usually, they have to serve 25 to 30 years in the diplomatic service of the Holy See before their first appointment as a nuncio to a small country. Then, those who make it to the major capitals of the world either have done a very good job elsewhere or have powerful friends back at the Pope's court. All are personally selected by the Pope.

Officially, the main duties of papal nuncios are to send information to the Holy See on the activities of the Roman Catholic congregations in the country to which they are assigned; "to assist (according to the 1983 Code of Canon Law) the bishops by action and counsel" (ie: to supervise them!); "to foster close relationships with the conference of bishops" (ie: to be the behind-the-scenes chairman); and to propose the names of three candidates to the Pope for the filling of every vacant bishop position that arises, with their personal recommendation. Regarding the last duty, this report and recommendation of the papal nuncio is crucial – he is responsible for making sure that the selected priest will be a good bishop and totally loyal to the Pope.

Centrally, at the Holy See/Vatican, according to the Code of Canon Law, the Pope has "the innate and independent right to nominate, send, transfer and recall his own legates (ie: nuncios) to particular Churches in various countries and regions, to states and to public authorities; and the norms of international law are to be observed concerning the sending and recalling of legates appointed to states".

Papal nuncios report (often weekly) to the Vatican's Secretary of State, a position equivalent to being the Prime Minister of the Holy See, who supervises all relations with national states and international organisations. This year, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone became the present Secretary of State: this was a significant development because he shares fully the Pope's conservative theological views, having been his right-hand man at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith when the Pope headed this department of the Curia as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.

This Congregation oversees church doctrine. In 2006, while still at the CDF, Cardinal Bertone was instrumental in developing the policy of refusing to admit "persons with a homosexual inclination" to Catholic seminaries. Also, he led the efforts to debunk Dan Brown's book *The Da Vinci Code*, calling it a "pack of lies" – which only helped to increase global interest in this novel and the subsequent film!

In the UK, Archbishop Faustino Sainz Munoz, 67, from Spain, has been the papal nuncio since 2005. Before coming here, he was in charge of the Roman Catholic permanent mission to the European Union in Brussels for five years, and so much involved in issues such as immigration, bioethics and

Vatican Im

the preparation of the EU draft constitution. A trained lawyer before he joined the Holy See's diplomatic service in 1970, when he was appointed to his present post, the *Tablet* (the British Catholic weekly) reported that "he is a man who believes in the Christian faith asserting itself in the market-place where decisions are taken".

MICHAEL IRWIN, who was medical director of the United Nations in New York before he retired 15 years ago, argues that the Vatican commands far too much respect in the UK

Archbishop Sainz's British base is at the Apostolic Nunciature, situated in a house in Wimbledon, South London. From here, as the official papal representative to the UK, he has the vast Catholic Church machinery inside this country – every cardinal, bishop and humble priest – at his disposal. Moreover, the many national Catholic organisations – of a social, cultural and political nature – will be expected to follow his advice. Thus, Archbishop Sainz has an influence that is far greater than any other diplomat accredited to the Court of St James.

Very important bonds between the Vatican and many EU member states, as well as other countries around the world, are the agreements, known as "concordats", which secure special privileges for the Roman Catholic Church. (Sometimes, in the fairly recent past, these agreements were with the most despicable regimes that have ever existed). As these treaties are signed by ambassadors (papal nuncios) from the Holy See, and not by national cardinals or bishops, these agreements are recognised under international law and thus can override national legislation.

Professor John Swomley, an American theologian, has noted that "a concordat is a pact between the Vatican and a nation-state whereby the Vatican gains certain political and financial benefits in return for support of a policy or arm of the national government. Such a concordat in a nation with numerous Catholics is also helpful in getting their allegiance or in curbing opposition to the government". Concordats help enforce Canon Law, the Vatican version of Sharia.

Last year, Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director of the National Secular Society, commented that concordats "are profoundly undemocratic" as "they are often concluded in secrecy as international treaties without the prior ratification of parliaments, and give high privileges, including financial ones, to the

Imperialism

Roman Catholic Church," and "even if a parliament later wished to reduce these huge privileges they could not be reduced or eliminated legally without the consent of the Vatican, which they would have no reason to give."

One of the greatest benefits from posing as a national government is the manner in which the Holy See – and thus the Roman Catholic Church – has infiltrated into the "UN System". It is a permanent observer at the United Nations, in New York, with access to all UN forums. And, in 2004, it craftily gained all the rights of full UN membership except voting. (At that time, its delegate in New York noted "We have no vote because this is our choice: but the Holy See has the requirements defined by the UN statute to be a member state", implying that one day there would be no impediment to getting full voting rights, equivalent to, say, that of the UK). Then, the Holy See is represented at the major UN Agencies such as WHO, UNESCO, ILO and FAO, as well as the much smaller ones such as the Universal Postal Union and the World Intellectual Property Organisation.

Thus, the Holy See can lobby at important UN events like the 1994 Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo, where its diplomats successfully opposed the

I WATCHED a BBC programme some time ago, entitled *The Power of Prayer*. So, what's wrong with praying to a god to help you out of bad situations? After all, don't some priests recommend that you take your worries to god? But let's look at it in a common-sense way.

First, why would anyone try to corrupt their god? Because if you pray, that's exactly what you do. The word pray means to beg or entreat (though nowadays it includes thanking and praising). Look at all the usual reasons for prayer: it's to ask your god for favours, things you want for yourself; to ask it to solve your problems; to cure illnesses; to prevent people dying; to protect you and yours; or to make you win in games, in business, in war – at the expense of others (if you win, someone must lose).

Look honestly at what this really entails: it amounts to begging for preference or favouritism, or benefits for *your* favourites. It means begging your god to fix it for you, not on merit, but because *you* want it so. This amounts to corruption (just imagine you were inveigling a government minister to fix things for you, grant you personal privileges). Then you have praising and adoring. This is nothing but sheer flattery, and no *super intelligent being* would ever fall for that. After all, it would have to be an egomaniac to enjoy endless grovelling and flattery by hordes of peo-

inclusion of abortion rights language in the final documentation – having used every obstructionist tactic permitted during the meeting, and after the Pope had written beforehand to every head of state around the world. Similarly, WHO has to battle against the Vatican's incorrect statements about the effectiveness of condoms in preventing the transmission of the HIV virus. In fact, many believe that there should be "health warnings" issued about the falsehoods propagated by the Catholic hierarchy!

In addition to representation in the UN system, the Holy See sends its delegates to other major inter-governmental bodies such as the Organisation of American States, the Council of Europe, the European Union, the Organisation of African Unity, and the Arab League. And, in 1971, the Holy See even announced its decision to adhere to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in order to "give its moral support to the principles that form the base of the treaty itself". (Can one imagine a situation where a Pope would want to claim that he had access to an atomic bomb?). In a 2000 speech by a previous Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, it was stated that "the goal of papal representations in international organisations is always the same: to being the leaven of the Gospel to all the complex reality of international relations and to international debates".

I doubt if any regular reader of the

The Power of Prayer?

ple, all telling it how good and mighty it was, all pandering to its ego. Otherwise it would be an insult to its intelligence.

Then there's the tactic of trying to inveigle your god by getting someone with influence to ask for you – for example, his mother or a saint, or a priest.

BILL DAWSON argues that prayer would be tantamount to corruption – if it worked

This is presumably because you think his mother could soften him up, or wait until he's in a good mood, as children do in families when they want something out of the father. How devious! Your all-knowing god would have to be soft in the head to fall for that one. Do you think he wouldn't know what was going on?

Then there's direct *bribery* – offering *inducements* to your god by promising to make sacrifices, or cause yourself suffering, or do extra periods of flattery, or give money – on condition he gives you what you want. Presumably because he likes all of these things

Freethinker likes the Roman Catholic Church. I have forgotten who originally said that this global institution, pursuing both spiritual and political goals, is "like organised crime – it preys on people's weaknesses, generates huge profits for its operators, and is almost impossible to eradicate", but I am sure we would all agree with that comment. And, as Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, noted in these columns last April, this tripartite of "Church of Christ" – Holy See – Vatican City "is a master of propaganda, of double talk, of psychological warfare, of hypocrisy and cruelty ... it has humiliated and demeaned women, insulted and defamed homosexuals, landed its priesthood with the intolerable burden of celibacy, carried out crimes that, even when it is caught red-handed, it denied; and it illegitimately interferes in democratically-elected governments and claims for itself powers that are denied to every other religious body".

Today, "Vatican imperialism" is given much too much respect in this country and there is, most unfortunately, far too little critical examination of its extensive activities in our British society and by our politicians and media. We should do our best to change this deplorable situation as soon as possible, and expose the true features of the tripartite Vatican – which, to paraphrase Sir Bernard Katz (a 1970 Nobel winner for his work on nerve biochemistry), is "the world's largest pyramid scheme".

you're offering – to watch you suffer because he's sadistic, to enjoy the flattery because he loves the prestige, to be grateful that you give money to his agents because he's a bit short of the ready.

All this is corruption in its worst sense. It would be nothing but an insult to the intelligence and integrity of your god – if he existed. If you employed the same tactics towards a high government official today, and if he did as you wanted, it would be labelled as sleaze – a sort of "cash for honours" tactic. Nevertheless, the prayer system of eliminating your worries would be a good idea, for people with no scruples about corrupting their god – *if it worked*. But it doesn't, any more than the antics of a primitive witch-doctor doing a rain dance when his people are short of water.

A few years ago, about a billion members of one religion prayed to their god to save the life of their supreme leader, who was seriously ill: *he was dead within two weeks*. Not very effective, I'd say.



The Church of Science it's absurd – and it ha

L Ron Hubbard reputedly once said at a science fiction convention, “Y’know, we’re all wasting our time writing this hack science fiction! If you want to make a million dollars, you gotta start a religion!” There are disputes as to the exact wording and precisely when Hubbard made the statement, though he may have uttered variations several times before proving the veracity of the claim himself by founding Scientology and collecting a substantial fortune from his devotees.

Today, Scientology keeps raking in the readers at a phenomenal rate – but if anyone tries to make money at its expense, especially through parodies, Scientologists get extremely hot under the collar.

The latest show of Scientology rage came this summer when it was announced that a musical based on Scientology – *Xenu is Loose!* – was to premiere at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival this August.

Writing in the *Scotsman*, Marc Horne said: “Stand by for the Fringe’s first sect scandal. The world’s biggest arts jamboree is facing a boycott over a scathing parody of the Church of Scientology.”

He revealed that drama group Collapsible Theatre would be staging a satirical science-fiction production poking fun at the doctrines of the organisation, which has a host of celebrity adherents, including Tom Cruise and John Travolta.

The spoof drama immediately provoked an angry response from Scientologists, which urged people to stay away. The organisation said it was considering what action to take against the play.

The poster for the musical at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival parodying Scientology

Members of the Oxford-based drama group used material gathered during a year spent investigating the movement to create a play sending up its methods and mythology.

“The more we looked into it, the more we saw potential for an exposé show,” said director Stewart Pringle. “Instead of putting together a straight satire we decided to create a kitsch rock’n’roll musical based on the science-fiction mythology on which Scientology is based.

“We hope to open people’s eyes about Scientology and the sophisticated and complex psychological techniques it uses to recruit people and keep them within the organisation. In our opinion it is a cult.”

Scientologists routinely advertise free personality, IQ and aptitude tests at their bases and at stalls and events across the UK. Those whose tests produce “negative” results are invited to read books by Hubbard and attend courses expounding his philosophy of Dianetics.

“Past experience shows that Scientologists don’t take kindly to criticism at all,” said Pringle. “If they plan to picket us then so be it.”

The play chronicles the adventures of an all-American high school student who battles intergalactic overlords after embracing Scientology.

It is a pastiche of Hubbard’s sci-fi epic *Battlefield Earth*, which received a critical mauling after it was filmed in 2000, starring John Travolta.

Church of Scientology spokeswoman Janet Kenyon Laveau claimed the play’s authors were misinformed about Scientology and advised people not to attend the play during its Edinburgh run. She said people interested in learning about Scientology should instead read Hubbard’s work online or in a library.

“We would advise people to find out for yourself from the horse’s mouth, not from some kooks,” she said.

The organisation’s UK spokeswoman felt the dramatists had deliberately tried to mix the doctrines of Scientology with fictional work written by its creator.

“L Ron Hubbard was also a

science fiction writer. It is a cheap parlour trick to try to liken the philosophy of Scientology to that work. There is nothing in the theology or philosophy of Scientology about belief in aliens,” she said.

In the past, Scientologists have picketed critics as well as taking legal action against detractors.

Last month, millions watched as BBC reporter John Sweeney, by his own admission, “lost the plot” and bellowed “like an exploding tomato” in one confrontation with senior Scientologist Tommy Davis.

Sweeney’s attempt to investigate the organisation had been shadowed by Scientologists filming their own counter-documentary.

Last year, the New York Theatre Workshop staged *A Very Merry Unauthorized Children’s Scientology Pageant* for the holiday season. In it, a jubilant cast of children celebrated the controversial Church of Scientology in uplifting pageantry and song. The actual teachings of Scientology were explained and dissected against the candy-coloured backdrop of a traditional nativity play.

The large ensemble cast of 8-12 year-olds told the story of L Ron Hubbard’s meteoric rise from struggling science-fiction writer to supreme leader of a highly profitable New Age religious empire. *Variety* magazine said: “The artless innocence of a children’s holiday pageant provides the deceptively benign backdrop for this deeply probing and ultimately disturbing query into the history of guru L Ron Hubbard ... It provocatively juxtaposes innocent revelry and weighty content ... You will laugh till it hurts!”

While it is clearly easy to lampoon the ridiculous tenets of Scientology, the reality of being ensnared in this cult is far from funny, as Florida resident Fred W Hill, 35, a member of the First Coast Freethought Society, reveals in the following article, reproduced with his permission.

The night they put their sights on me, I made a great target. It was 1984, when I was 21 and had recently dropped out of San Jose State University due to a deepening depression, crippling social anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and confusion as to what to do with my life.

It had been another gruelling day at my dead-end job at the Brothers’ Pizza Galley, and I was relaxing in the small apartment I shared with my alcoholic mother, when I heard the knock at the door. I opened the door to find

entology: It's funny, hates being parodied

two nicely dressed young men whom I had never seen before standing in front of me.

They asked if they could just take a few minutes of my time to tell me about a questionnaire they were passing out. "Well, sure," I warily but politely responded, inviting them in. They handed me some papers, which, as they explained, contained questions designed to illicit responses from which a unique personality profile could be made. I could answer the questions at my leisure, and then call the number provided for information on how to receive a free evaluation. Admittedly I was very intrigued and it didn't seem I had anything to lose. So I agreed. Unbeknownst to me, I had just had my first encounter with Scientologists.

Before then I had never heard of either Scientology or of its founder, L Ron Hubbard. So when I visited the little building for that evaluation, the name of the organization meant nothing to me. Oh, yes, it was explained to me, this is a group dedicated to helping people better their lives, through "proven, scientific methods" which will enable them to overcome negative mental blocks that prevent them from achieving their full potential.

The woman who evaluated my profile was very pleasant. It wasn't exactly news to me when she explained to me that my profile indicated I had several psychological handicaps that were obviously weighing me down. We can help you, she assured me, all through the teachings of L Ron Hubbard, all outlined in his book, *Dianetics*, which, she insisted, I urgently needed to read. But if I really wanted to improve my life, it was absolutely necessary that I sign up for the courses of study in Dianetics offered at this branch of Scientology. At this point they were emphasizing the "science" of Hubbard's teachings and making no reference to the religious aspects. Somehow, it all seemed very reasonable to me. I knew I was going nowhere in my current situation. I wanted to change. I wanted to overcome my shyness, to make more friends, to find love. Scientology seemed a means. I got out my chequebook and spent about three hundred dollars on books and courses. I was vulnerable, I had some extra cash and they were reeling me in with finesse.

And so for the next two months I attended the course, several hours one night a week. It was a friendly atmosphere and I got to know a very attractive young woman and actually worked up the nerve to ask her to go out with me to a concert – the first time I'd ever asked

any woman out on anything even resembling a date. More shockingly, she said "yes". I was elated. And the instructors told me I exhibited great potential and thought I'd be ideal for a job with the group – as their Communications Officer. Very flattering. The prospect of taking the job filled me with some anxiety but I thought at the least I would give it a try, that it could be a great opportunity and would at least look better on a resume than "cook" if I ever hoped to find better job prospects. Yes, things seemed to be looking up for me.

Even so, there were aspects that troubled me. I was irritated by constant efforts to get me to buy more books, buy very expensive tapes of L Ron Hubbard's lecture series, pay high tuition fees for more classes. Do they think I'm made out of money, I wondered. Moreover, my primary task as Communications Officer, I discovered, was to pester other members of the church, as I had learned Scientology was, to write letters to potential recruits, to get more fresh blood. Everyday I had to ensure more letters went out than the day before. I had to meet ever rising quotas. I quickly came to hate it. I was also growing increasingly suspicious of how they all seemed to think that L Ron Hubbard had the answers to everything.

And I noticed that despite all the vaunted claims for how Scientology would improve people's lives, make them better, happier people, several adherents I came to know who had been Scientologists for decades didn't seem all that much happier or well-adjusted than neophytes or "gentiles".

Everything came to a head the day I got my first pay cheque. It was much smaller than I had anticipated for the full-time hours I had put in. I protested, stating I could not live on such meagre pay, that I had car payments, rent and other bills I had to pay. I was reminded that Scientology is a religious organization and could not afford to pay much. (Oh, but I silently countered, too polite to say it out loud, so all those exorbitant prices for the books, tapes and classes must be going to help L Ron Hubbard live like a king with his mansions and yachts, which by then I knew all about) You should sell your car, they suggested, and move in with



Fred W Hill, who escaped the clutches of Scientology

other Scientologists, become closer with the group.

Externally, I acquiesced; internally, I stewed. The fog was finally lifting. They were trying to suck me in completely, to render me economically and emotionally dependent on them. And while they claimed to be neutral regarding the existence of God, it was now clear to me that I was expected to revere L Ron Hubbard and not to question his wisdom.

Yes, don't worry about life, L Ron has already done the hard thinking for you, you just have to pay for the honour of receiving gradual glimpses of his oh-so-benevolent insights. Yes, gradual, because you have to receive his wisdom in stages – it's too much for any mind less gifted than his to take in all at once. This was the gist of what I was gleaned from my education in Scientology.

As of yet, I was not familiar with the term "freethinker", but still I disliked this obvious attempt to reign in my thinking. I may have been looking for some sort of guidance, but I loathed overbearing authority. I had already rejected the Bible as an infallible source of wisdom and, despite my terrible youthful naivety and self-doubts, I had just enough sense to realize that Scientology was just another flimflam, like all other religions. I was ready to take the hook out of my mouth and swim free.

However, I feared confronting them. I didn't want to argue with them. I didn't want to discuss with them why I wanted to leave. I just wanted to leave. And so I told them I was going out for lunch, drove off and never went back.

Conveniently, my mother and I left our old apartment that same week to move in with her new husband. Later, I found out members of the church did go to the apartment looking for me, but they never found my forwarding address.

Since then, I have learned much more about Mr Hubbard and his adherents – enough to become convinced that Hubbard was a greedy, manipulative megalomaniac who cynically contrived Scientology for no other purpose than to make himself fabulously wealthy and obtain a flock of potentially dangerous sycophants to sing his praises, feed his ego and do anything to silence any critics.

Needless to say, celebrity endorsements of the wonderfulness of Hubbard's teachings have swayed me not at all. I was not quite yet the avowed freethinker I am now, but I was at least far enough along to break free of L. Ron's sick but growing cult without having incurred too much damage.

Of course, Hubbard was not the first nor the last to pull this trick. The founding of new religions or variants of old religions has been one of the recurring events of human history. David Sloan Wilson, in his book *Darwin's Cathedral* (University of Chicago Press, 2002) has argued that humans have an evolutionary disposition for religion, though obviously if that's true the

(Continued on p10)

disposition is not quite universal.

But then, in ages past, outspoken religious sceptics have typically been eliminated from the gene pool, meaning they seldom had opportunity to pass on their scepticism by either nature or nurture.

These days, Hubbard's fanatics don't have the option of exterminating their critics, but have done their best to litigate and otherwise harass them into silence, a specific tactic devised by Hubbard and called the "Fair Game Law". After knowledge of the policy came to light and attracted much adverse attention, Hubbard publicly revoked the policy, presumably with a knowing wink to his followers.

In the wake of recent publicity Scientology has garnered due to the outburst of celebrity Hubbard devotee Tom Cruise against psychiatry and Isaac Hayes, termination of his long association with the irreverent cartoon series *South Park* as the voice of Chef, over an episode he considered insulting to his particular faith – though he didn't seem to mind when other religions received their equally deserving skewering, I now revisit the subject to describe some of the specific tactics and loonier beliefs of Scientologists.

Aside from sales of his pseudo-science "sacred" text, *Dianetics*, Hubbard and his church have primarily earned income by means of bait and switch fraud, a scheme by which one product is offered cheaply only as a lure to an attempt to sell a much more expensive item. With Scientology, the lure is a supposedly scientific means to improve one's overall mental state without expensive drugs or psychotherapy. Once the inductees, referred to as "pre-clears" have gone through some relatively inexpensive initial "processing", run essentially as a class, they learn that to really reap the benefits of Scientology they must undergo deeper and more expensive one-on-one "auditing", similar in some aspects to mainstream therapy, though the auditors have no licensed training. The process is defined by Scientology itself as "a very unique form of personal counseling which helps an individual look at his own existence and improve his ability to confront what he is and where he is."

More extensive auditing uses an electronic device called an E-meter, which essentially measures tension, much like a lie-detector, and the auditee is "cleared" to move on to the next level when the provocative questions posed by the auditor elicit no perceptible emotional reaction. The E-meter is subject to the same limitations as a lie-detector device, which a calm liar can easily pass while an honest but nervous person will fail.

Of course, the more naturally nervous the auditee, the more profit the church will bring in through hundreds of hours of auditing. Further, the auditor takes notes of each session, and despite assurances by the Church of Scientology that these notes are kept in strict confidentiality, defectors have claimed that the notes have been used as a means to blackmail

Scientology

(Continued from p9)



**Founder of the cult of Scientology,
L Ron Hubbard**

or otherwise intimidate them.

Fortunately, during my brief tenure with the Scientologists, I didn't have any dirty secrets to reveal that they can hold over my head if so inclined.

At any rate, members who stay the course, and pay up thousands of dollars for the privilege, may eventually achieve the rank of OT III, that is an "Operating Thetan, Third Level", at which point they are qualified to learn that 75 million years ago, Xenu, the ruler of a galactic confederacy, solved an overpopulation problem by bringing billions of his subjects to Earth to be destroyed by H-bombs detonated in volcanoes, but which survived in the form of spirits. They are referred to as thetans and currently inhabit the bodies of living humans, causing the various ailments that inflict us.

Maryam Namazie to speak in London

MARYAM Namazie, chosen as the National Secular Society's Secularist of the Year, 2005, will be the keynote speaker at this year's Annual Reunion of Kindred Humanist Societies.

The subject of her address will be Apostates, ex-Muslims and the challenge to political Islam.

The event, at the Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL, takes place on September 30 at 2.30pm.

Refreshments will be provided, and pianist Esther Williams, will perform.

Representatives of groups such as the British Humanist Association, the National Secular Society and the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association will be present at the gathering.

All members, friends and secularists are welcome to attend.

Naturally, to eradicate these bothersome ghosts in our bodily machines requires even more expensive auditing treatments. This very interesting detail was exposed by various former high-ranking Scientologists who arrived at the appropriate level to be clued in as to what it was all about and suddenly had an attack of rationality that precipitated a split from Mr. Hubbard's money-generating venture.

If asked about Xenu, Church of Scientology members typically express total ignorance on the subject, though high-ranking defectors have noted that they were taught that learning of the tyrannical alien and the sinister spectres dwelling within us was far too dangerous for any but those who had gone through the most extensive auditing and risen far up in the ranks of the church to cope with it.

Of course. The notion that most people who might fall for Scientology's claims to be a viable alternative to psychiatric treatment, which the church deems evil and harmful, would be less inclined to check them out if they heard about Xenu right off the bat doesn't enter into the church leaders' fears at all. Oddly, learning about Xenu and the thousands of thetans supposedly inhabiting my body hasn't caused my head to explode or reduced me to a quivering mass of fleshy pulp, despite my utter failure to ever be "cleared". They just don't make thetans like they used to, I suppose.

At best, none of this is much more outlandish than the more widely accepted non-sense of mainstream Christianity, Mormonism, Islam, Hinduism, etc.

Hubbard mixed his wild notions of science fantasy, psychology, history and religion in a way that yielded him far greater riches than he could have earned solely as a hack sci-fi writer, and he did it by claiming it was all real.

I would like to think that exposure of the Xenu story will ultimately cause Hubbard's religion, which continues to flourish over 20 years since he died – or, as announced by Scientology on the occasion, "discarded the body" to do "higher level spiritual research, unencumbered by mortal confines" – to decline and eventually fade away, despite all its celebrity endorsements.

However, as noted by Mark Twain in 1902, when commenting on assurances of the wise that Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science movement was just a "fleeting craze that would soon perish", and which nevertheless persists to this day, over a century later, "...such a thing as a serious and painstaking and fairly competent inquiry into the claims of a religion or political dogma is a rare occurrence."

One can hope that in the twenty-first century of the common era reason will hold more sway, but odds are there will yet be more inspired swindlers concocting religions out of their fevered imaginations in order to swell their own earthly possessions while promising heavenly delights they can never deliver.

IMAGINE how it would be if humans laid eggs like birds and reptiles. Think of the implications for the aesthetics and mechanics of reproduction.

Christians have always hated sex and vaginal birth, apart from when they were excusing it as a gift from God. If God really designed human anatomy and physiology, rather than its being a product of evolution, then he was remarkably lacking in foresight. Could he not have foreseen the subjugation of women by men on the grounds of them being "unclean"? Could he not have invented a better system than sex and menstruation and vaginal birth, being, as they are, all mixed up with excretory functions? We can understand Nature being economical by doubling up on the combined functions of the urogenital tract – but is God so limited in resources, materials and imagination?

Sex, though great fun, is also completely ridiculous. It is an obvious means of transmission of infecting organisms, and requires elaborate hygienic precautions if it is not to be distasteful.

I once heard a creationist extolling the size and shape of bananas as an obvious proof of the existence of God, as they are so eminently suitable for the human mouth. Similarly the penis and vagina are designed for each other, but did it not occur to God, having dispensed penises and freewill to men, that they would also use them unproductively in the alternative human orifices? – which would then necessitate him having to smite them all for committing abominations before the Lord?

Human menstruation could have been minimised just like human oestrus. Likewise sex could have been avoided by mass virgin births. True, we would all be clones, but it would save arguments about which baby belonged to which parent.

The advantages of sexual chromosomal mix-

In Praise of Eggs

ing of male and female DNA could be retained by a more voluntary process of inoculation of already laid female eggs with male Y-chromosomes, perhaps by merely rubbing them with a special sperm-producing male finger. Think of it – no more uncontrollable male sexual urges resulting in rape; babies when you want them and not otherwise. No more overpopulation, starving, abused or enslaved children.

**Human reproduction?
God should go back to the
drawing board, says
REG LE SUEUR**

If women laid sizeable eggs like hens do, there would be no more obstetrics problems, or subsequent gynaecological ones like incontinence; no stretch marks and lax tummies. Sagging breasts could be avoided by reducing the urgency of lactation if the mother's egg was reasonably large, with a built-in store of nutrition for the developing embryo. Instead of a large infant having to be damagingly extracted from the mother, reasonably small-sized babies would hatch out, and as long as you did not lose them in a moment of absent-mindedness (which could have been eliminated anyway by natural selection), they could then be conveniently stored, perhaps on a top shelf out of the way of pets, and early weaning accomplished by feeding them more conveniently by sucking from a specially adapted milk pro-

ducing maternal finger-tip. The babies could be designed to produce only enough warning noises to remind mother to feed and change them, and play with them – rather than hours of pointless wailing all day and night. Changing could also be reduced if babies did not wastefully produce liquid urine and high residue faeces – but instead produced only dry uric acid like birds, who thus conserve water.

One disadvantage of the above scheme would be that a woman produced a baby every month regularly if all the eggs developed anyway, whether male fertilised or not. However, as in the case of hens' eggs, this could easily be circumvented by the mere expedient of recycling them by eating them. This might require certain adjustments in one's aesthetic and moral attitudes – though of course God could easily have built in the required software when designing humans. After all, some mothers eat their own placentas as a sort of hippie gesture – fried with onions I believe. One cannot really call it cannibalism, any more than contraception can be called abortion.

Having one human digit discretely modified as a kind of proto-penis for fertilising the egg by touch, or, in the case of the mother, a substitute for a lactating breast, with all its inconvenience and discomfort, is not without its imitators in the animal kingdom. There is, I believe a species of octopus in which one of the arms develops into a kind of swimming penis, becomes detached from the body, and swims off on its own in search of female octopuses to impregnate.

We don't have to go quite that far; I am not advocating flying human penises – that might get a bit out of hand, and also cause anguish to hay-fever sufferers if they happened to be allergic to air-borne sperm, like pollen.

So there we are; just another way God could have done it.

God 'tags' aubergines

LAST month saw an outbreak of religious imagery in Delaware County in the US when two separate eggplants were found to contain the word "GOD", and the outlines of angels.

Felicia Teske was preparing fried eggplant (or aubergine) for dinner on August 12. According to *Action News*, on slicing the vegetable she noticed that the seeds contained in one slice appeared to spell out the word "GOD". Her husband Paul took one look at the "divine" slice and promptly alerted the local media. Felicia told *Action News* that she recently had family members pass away and it was comforting that "GOD" appeared.

The Teskes said they were now considering selling the eggplant on eBay.

Two days later, Delaware resident and delicatessen worker Vincenza Martino sliced open a white eggplant and saw angels formed

out of seeds.

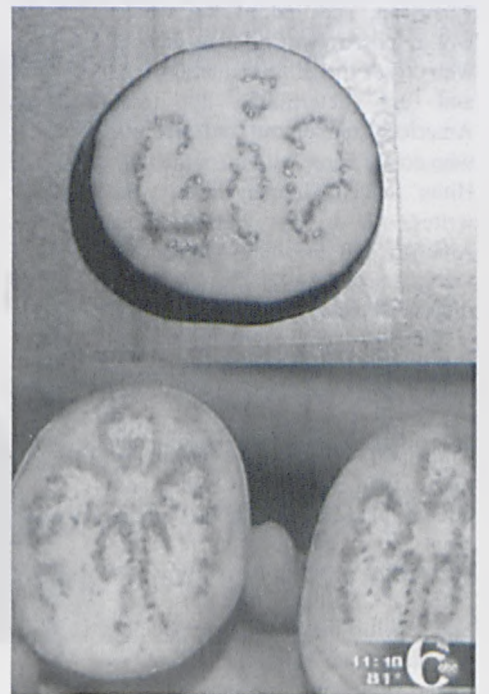
Martino, who had just seen the report about the Teske's eggplant, declared: "I feel blessed to be here ... God is sending me a sign."

She gave a bit of the eggplant to a customer whose wife was "very sick in hospital." The man cried as he left.

Vinny's Deli, where Martino works, is adorned with pictures of Pope Benedict XVI, and past pontiffs. Martino says she works seven mornings a week, and can't make it to church. But she says the deli is like her holy place.

"God is here, like he's in the church," Martino said. "A lot of bad things happen in this country, and we have to believe, and pray. God is here to help everybody."

Martino didn't say what she plans to do with the remainder of the eggplant.



Christian zealots are a threat to the world

CHRIS Hedges is a card-carrying Christian. As a child, he tells us, "I prayed and sang hymns every Sunday, went to Bible school, listened to my father preach the weekly sermon, and attended seminary at Harvard Divinity School to be a preacher myself". He graduated from the seminary, but was not ordained, and instead became a news reporter. But while his father was a Christian preacher, he was not a biblical literalist. What Chris was taught was that "The Bible was not the literal word of God ... It was a book written by a series of ancient writers, certainly fallible and at times at odds with each other, who asked the right questions and struggled with the mystery and transcendence of human existence. We took the Bible seriously and therefore could not take it literally".

His perspective has never changed. In most Christians that is not a good thing. The Christian Right's perspective has not changed since the heyday of Tomás de Torquemada. In Hedges' case, it means that he is still able to recognize that "There is enough hatred, bigotry and lust for violence in the pages of the Bible to satisfy anyone bent on justifying cruelty and violence. Religion, as Richard H Niebuhr said, is a good thing for good people and a bad thing for bad people".

He is aware that "the writers of Genesis ... believed the earth was flat with water above and below it. They wrote that God created light on the first day and the sun on the fourth day". He does not point out that, without the sun, earth would receive no light, presumably because anyone who needs that pointed out is probably unteachable.

Most of Hedges' book is about the threat to the freedom of every American, and indeed the whole world, posed by Christian zealots who do see the Bible as literal truth, and are determined to treat American moderates and liberals who do not agree with them the way Hitler treated German Jews. He writes, "I do not believe that America will inevitably become a fascist state or that the Christian right is the Nazi Party.

"But I do believe that the radical Christian Right is a sworn and potent enemy of the open society. Its ideology bears within it the tenets of Christian fascism ... The attacks by this movement on the rights and beliefs of Muslims, Jews, immigrants, gays, lesbians, women, scholars, scientists, those they dismiss as 'nominal Christians', and those they brand with the curse of 'secular humanists', are an attack on all of us, on our values, our freedoms and ulti-

mately our democracy. Tolerance is a virtue, but tolerance coupled with passivity is a vice."

American Fascists is not biographical. The names Buchanan, Coulter, Limbaugh and Buckley do not appear in its index, and, since it is geographically limited, neither do such foreign theofascists as Northern Ireland's Paisley and Canada's Manning and Day. Robertson, Falwell and Dobson have more index entries than America's fascist-in-chief, George W Bush, but that tinpot Hitler is not totally ignored.

WILLIAM HARWOOD reviews
***American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America*, Chris Hedges, Free Press, Simon & Schuster, 2006, ISBN 0-7432-8443-7, 272 pp, hc, \$25**

Hedges writes, "The Bush administration has steadily diverted billions of dollars of taxpayer money from secular and governmental social-service organizations to faith-based organizations bankrolling churches and organizations that seek to dismantle American democracy and create a theocratic state ... The wall between church and state is being disassembled. These groups can and usually do discriminate by refusing to hire gays and lesbians,

people of other faiths and those who do not embrace their strict version of Christianity".

Hedges reports how thoroughly America's Constitution was overthrown by the Christian Right's rigging of the Electoral College votes in Ohio in 2004. "The Diebold machines recorded high turnouts – 124 percent in one of the precincts – where Bush won overwhelming victories and low voter turnouts in districts that went for Democrat Senator John Kerry ... Touch-screen machines in Youngstown were registering 'George W Bush' when people pressed 'John F Kerry' during the entire day". In other words, George W Bush is not now and never has been the legally elected President of the United States.

"The drive to ban same-sex marriages in the 2004 election was just a step in a campaign to strip gays and lesbians of civil rights." Since the gay minority tends to support the First Amendment that prohibits the imposition of Christian Right or any other theocracy on the American people, depriving them of equality under the law is a recognizable step toward depriving all dissenters from the theofascists' totalitarian agenda of basic human rights. As Hedges points out, "Democracy is not, as these Christo-fascists claim, the enemy of faith. Democracy keeps religious faith in the private sphere, ensuring that all believers have an equal measure of protection and practice mutual tolerance. Democracy sets no religious ideal. It simply ensures coexistence."

And coexistence with persons who refuse to grant blind, unquestioning obedience to the theo-fascists' hatred of the human race is precisely what the Christian Right does *not* want. As Hedges recognizes, "Debate with the Christian Right is useless. We cannot reach this movement. It does not want a dialogue ... It is not mollified because John Kerry prays or Jimmy Carter teaches Sunday school. Naïve attempts to reach out to the movement, to assure them that ... we, too, care about moral values are doomed. This movement is bent on our destruction".

But the strongest warning of what the Christian Right is trying to do, and why they must be stopped *now*, is made in a quotation from theologian James Luther Adams, "Repeatedly ... I heard anti-Nazis say, 'If only 1,000 of us in the late twenties had combined in heroic resistance, we could have stopped Hitler'." The current American Hitlers can still be stopped – but not by taking the attitude that if we ignore them they will go away.



With God on their side, George W Bush and his neo-con cohorts are bent on our destruction

Multiculturalism: bogus, inconsistent and dangerous

JON Gower Davies is a former Labour councillor, academic and communicant Anglican. He has also written a timely, scholarly and devastating critique of multiculturalism in Britain. Published by the Social Affairs Unit, this is a book that will cheer and challenge genuine freethinkers. So, before some shrill individual starts screeching about “racism” or “bigotry” can I just say at the outset: “Calm down, dear!” – Jon Gower Davies is neither racist, nor bigoted. His quarrel is not with the presence of ethnic minorities or minority religions in Britain, but the way that self-selected leaders and spokesmen from immigrant groups have profited at the expense of the public purse by denigrating indigenous history and institutions, while stoking up ill-founded resentments, unreasonable demands and a culture of endless complaint.

Davies identifies multiculturalism as the progeny of Lord Parekh’s report into the future of multi-ethnic Britain, originally published in 2000, the culmination of a two-year commission funded by the notorious Runnymede Trust (it was they who unilaterally extended the definition of the term “racist” to describe anyone who disagrees with, or resists, incessant Muslim demands). But in spite of pouring scorn on the Parekh Report, this is no cut-and-paste rant from the *Daily Express*. On the contrary, Davies is remarkably restrained, possessed of a dry wit, and he references well-chosen literary sources from Daniel Defoe to the Gettysburg Address to advance his case. Like an enthusiastic professor, he takes us on a brisk but thorough field-trip around our military and imperial history (the good, as well as the bad), the Act of Settlement and the role of the Church of England, an admiring chapter on India’s history since independence, as well as, inevitably, a chapter on Islam.

The thrust of his argument is that multiculturalism is bogus, inconsistent and dangerous. Nowhere is this more cogently argued than in the section “Nation State: Do the British exist?” in which we see how the British people, at once, are dismissed as not really existing at all in any meaningful, cohesive way, as a nation, while at the same time being held responsible for every evil in the world, past and present! Evidently, the multicultur-

dangerous

turalists want their chip-on-the-shoulder – and to eat it. And don’t go thinking that our parents and grandparents bravely standing up to Hitler counts in our favour, either. As one multiculturalist conference in Bristol, 2006, dismissively put it: “they were just the fascists who won”.

DIESEL BALAAM reviews
Bonfires On The Ice – The Multicultural Harrying of Britain by Jon Gower Davies, HC, 176 pages, published by the Social Affairs Unit (July 2007) ISBN-10: 1904863213 ISBN-13: 978-1904863212

“Multiculturalists ... find allies in the purely secular critics of the role of religion in Britain” Davies asserts, taking us all to task for our witting, or unwitting, complicity. This is not without justification. Like multiculturalists, but for different reasons, secularists seek the uncoupling of the English Church from the English State, usually with little understanding of why they were coupled, under the Crown, in the first place. The guiding principle here must be “Do not break what you cannot mend” and Davies constructs a cogent, if not wholly convincing, argument, for at least understanding how, through centuries of struggle, Britain has slowly (painfully slowly) evolved into the modern miracle it is today – stable, democratic, able to manage decision making, freedom of expression and dissent, while at the same time providing more prosaic

necessities like pavements and tap water. We meddle with its foundational institutions – or allow others to do so – at our peril, Davies warns.

Happily, though, he believes that the high watermark of multiculturalism is behind us. In the wake of the July 7th bombings, it evidently dawned on the more able and honest of the political class that the purposeful dissolution of our nation state, the handover of legal jurisdiction and our border controls to a supra-national European bureaucracy, and the naive assumption that immigrants are all as amiable, tolerant and generous as their British hosts, was hopelessly optimistic. Here was the disastrous consequence of our mismanaged post-war immigration policies writ large in bloodied flesh. Holland, Germany and France had already ditched their failed multicultural policies by the time Trevor Phillips, chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, famously executed his own U-turn, publicly calling for “the end of multiculturalism” and referring to our society “becoming more divided by race and religion” creating “deeper division and inequality”.

As Davies concludes, the multicultural Titanic, extravagant, way off-course and forging ahead far too quickly, has already collided with the iceberg of Islamic terror its policies did so much to facilitate. For the moment, British multiculturalists, only slightly chastened, are still partying on board ship, whilst freethinkers (among whom we must now count, or co-opt, Jon Gower Davies), get buffeted in the lifeboats escaping the long night of this ill-fated social experiment. No prizes for guessing who’ll still be afloat in the morning, though.

UK in the grip of irrational thinking

PROF Richard Dawkins, best known for his swingeing attacks on religion, last month turned his guns on “new age” alternative therapies, describing them as based on “irrational superstition”.

In a Channel 4 investigation, *The Enemies of Reason*, Prof Dawkins says that alternative remedies constitute little more than a “money-spinning, multi-million pound industry that impoverishes our culture and throws up new age gurus who exhort us to run away from reality”.

The 66-year-old scientist investigated a range of gurus and therapists, including faith healers, psychic mediums, angel therapists, “aura photographers”, astrologers, Tarot card readers and water diviners, and concluded that Britain is gripped by “an epidemic of superstitious thinking”.

He says “there are two ways of looking at the world – through faith and superstition, or through the rigours of logic, observation and evidence, through reason. Yet today reason has a battle on its hands.”

Jonathan Edwards

GREAT news that Jonathan Edwards, the retired world record holding triple jumper and multiple Olympic medal winner, has recently made the biggest leap of his life – out from the constraining contradictions of Christian belief and into the rational world (*Freethinker* August cover story). Let's hope Jonathan broadcasts his new-found atheism far and wide, so that he will be both an exemplary role model for aspiring young athletes and an ambassador for reason.

GRAHAM NEWBERY
Southampton

Socialism

READERS of the *Freethinker* may have noticed a series of adverts running on TV lately, encouraging us to see Weetabix as not just a breakfast cereal, but something to be enjoyed throughout the day. Slosh on some yoghurt, flaked almonds and dried apricots and – hey presto! – it's a wholesome snack worthy of Jamie Oliver.

Sorry, but I'm not convinced. Weetabix is – always has been and always will be – a bog-standard, unexciting fall-back food to be dunked in milk and gulped down when you're late for work. My kitchen surfaces are made out of something similar.

The correspondence on these pages following the publication of my essay *How Socialism Became A Poisoned Chalice For Freethinkers* (*FT* May) has so far been similarly unconvincing. First of all, I was taken to task by Steven Johnston of the Socialist Party of Great Britain (*FT* June). For him, socialism is a rather joyless hard-nosed "science" and he is evidently content to sit in the Marxist equivalent of a monk's hole waiting until the conditions for "pure" socialism materialise. This could be a somewhat profligate waste of a life, I fear.

At least the Dave and Deidre Sparts of the SWP-Respect Party are prepared to engage in the "struggle" on the ground. One occasionally runs into these bedraggled specimens on picket duty outside the Conway Hall, but I'm completely at a loss to explain these people. For a start, where do they find those clothes? Do they cover themselves in glue and run through the nearest Sue Ryder charity shop? Someone who can't even organise their own appearance can hardly be trusted with the wholesale reorganisation of society, surely?

At the opposite end of the socialist spectrum, W K Harper (*FT* August), correctly asserted that socialism pre-dates the Communist Manifesto of 1848 and believes it will survive the collapse of the Communist experiment circa 1990. However, for him (or her), socialism is just some kind of nebulous amiability, a timeless human desire for a free world in which people behave decently towards one another, overcoming need and want. This is an admirable mission statement, but it is hardly exclusive to socialists – I'm sure most Conservatives, Roman Catholics and even Muslims would concur with it. The problem

lies in the lack of detail – other people's concepts of freedom, decency, or need, don't always coincide with your own.

From Hitler to Stalin, Pinochet to Pol Pot, Saddam to Slobodan, the 20th century was littered with idealists who believed they could create some utopian never-never land – the only obstacle to this aim being those rotten Jews/ intellectuals/ apostates/ trade unionists/ Kurds/ Coptics/ homosexuals, etc. For all these "visionaries", most of them socialists of one kind or another, the view was eventually obscured by the body count.

So, regrettably, freethinkers must conclude that socialism is like Weetabix: no matter how many cherries or how much honey and cocoa powder you pour on top of it, in the end it's still just the same crumbling, unpalatable soggy mess.

DIESEL BALAAM
London

Islam

DR Davies' letter (*Points of View*, August) almost says what I suspect most sceptics think, namely that people are afraid of Islam. Of course Professor Radford is.

What is unforgivable is that people who think about politics and religion, and understand the size of the problem, not least that, as Marx put it, religion is the opium of the masses, continue to imagine that writing letters on this matter to MPs and to each other via the *Freethinker* and *New Humanist*, will produce change. Even the odd stinging piece by a fine journalist for the *Sunday Times*.

These activities don't make an 'a'porth of difference. Nor will Jonathan Edwards' leap of faith. Only political action will. Like? The only one available that I can see is boycott of all elections. If the major political parties are scared of the big issues – EU, Convention on Human Rights, Islam, religion in general – why encourage them in their funk?

Incidentally, I am well read in Islamic matters, have lived long in different parts of the *dar ul islam* and applaud the admission of fear of Islam. Quite simply, the West is going to be screwed up by Islam for more than the fifteen years promised by the latest head of security. And you either DO something or you chat.

KEITH BELL
Wrexham

Homeopathy

LET me quote from Martin Gardner's *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*: "Homeopathic remedies are administered in inconceivably small doses. Compounds are frequently diluted to one decillionth of a single grain. Such dilution is like letting a drop of medicine fall into the Pacific, mixing thoroughly, then taking a spoonful" (p 188).

Additional investigation in the 55 years since Gardner wrote that has only confirmed that his condemnation of homeopathy, naturopathy, osteopathy and chiropractic are at best placebo-effect delusions was totally accurate. He also wrote that "allopathy is a homeopathic term for

orthodox medicine".

In other words, to push the Big Lie that doctors are not doctors, call them by some other name. Unteachables who think that gullible credulity in pseudomedical fraud has "not yet filtered through" to the educated should give serious consideration to a brain transplant.

WILLIAM HARWOOD, PH.D
Canada

Hell

THE Rev Richard Turnbull's view that 95 percent of Britons will go to Hell unless they accept the Gospel of Jesus (*Freethinker*, July) is vile. As a practising Catholic I stress that the Roman Catholic Church which consists of the majority of the world's Christians does not believe that all non-Christians inevitably go to Hell. Vatican II states that all who do not know Jesus but aspire to show love and goodness will gain salvation.

The late Pope John Paul II in his encyclical "Christ The Redeemer of Man" writes that all men without exception have been redeemed by Jesus. A few years before his death the Pope said that one did not have to be a Catholic to enter Heaven. Pope Benedict XVI believes that all who do not have an acknowledged relationship to Jesus but so love to their fellow human beings will be saved.

The Rev Richard Turnbull's view that all who do not know Jesus are condemned to the pit of fire and brimstone is morally obnoxious, for it means all who died in the genocidal conflicts of the 20th century, including those who died at the hands of the Nazis are damned if they do not accept Jesus.

A God decreeing such everlasting vengeance on all non-Christians is a God of eternal hate, not love.

ANDREW HARVEY
Carlisle

Argument from number

I TIRE of the Argument from Number, when people speak of "several thousand attending Mass" (Dan O'Hara, "Poles apart", *Points of View*, August).

Talk to your typical Catholic (or, for that matter, C of E attendee or apologist) of average or low intelligence, and they will not be able to hold a decent conversation about the more interesting and challenging aspects of the religion they claim to adhere to. Can, then, those people of average or low intelligence, who don't have the advantage of Dan's academic mind, assert truthfully that they are Catholics, or even Christians at all?

My experience of people who claim to have some religion is that they are a bit like me with music. I don't like music: I just like the noise it makes (to paraphrase one of the great conductors, but I forget who). So it is with faith – and here, for once, I am deliberately using that word I hate so much, but am using it because it is just that, faith, that makes them cleave to the bosom of their chosen religion (or, more likely, the one that was chosen for them).

How many Christians know whether

Thomas Aquinas was an Italian theologian or somebody off of the telly? If they've heard of Martin Luther at all they probably think he's the black guy who once proclaimed loudly that he was dreaming.

No, your average faith follower merely pays lip service. This is why I distrust censuses that claim that 70-odd per cent of British people are Christian (or whatever the meaningless claim was). First, you have to define your terms. What is a Christian, in light of my remarks above? For that matter – and more specifically – what is a Catholic?

Can your average worshipper tell the difference between a Catholic and an Anglican, other than to say the services are a bit camper here than there, perhaps? If, therefore, we are going to look at this scientifically, I think we have to state first just what we mean by a Christian, and then, and only then, pursue the argument about how many people fit that description. If the definition is found wanting, then so will be the argument.

ANDY ARMITAGE
West Wales

DAN O'Hara is delighted at the sight of Polish immigrants celebrating Mass in a former Methodist chapel in Ealing Broadway. Even in these ecumenical times, there are many Christians (Northern Ireland is full of them) who would be appalled at this celebration of Popery in a former Wesleyan establishment.

Which of the thousand and one varieties of superstition does Mr O'Hara recommend? As for the number of secularists in Britain being dwarfed by the number of Catholics in one London borough, since when has there been a correlation between truth and majority opinion?

By the way, the phrase "thousand and one varieties of religious superstition" I have taken from a Mr Daniel O'Hara writing in the *Freethinker* (May 1988, p77).

RAY McDOWELL
Co Antrim

Religion in public spaces

ACCORDING to an article in the May edition of the *Freethinker*, Glasgow City Council's "inter-faith liaison officer" – whatever that may be – one Tom Harrigan, wishes to ensure that "people ... are able to follow their faith", and wishes that Muslims not be inconvenienced in their wish to pray five times a day by the lack of specific facilities."

I am surprised to learn that it is thought to be a responsibility of a town or city council, in this particular case that of Glasgow, to ensure that those who wish to pray are in no way inconvenienced in the fulfilment of their wish. That is an entirely private matter, and in most towns and cities there is a plethora of churches, chapels, synagogues, temples, mosques and other religious institutions established for the express purpose of catering for people of a variety of superstitionist proclivities.

Glasgow has a responsibility to its citizens to provide civic space for recreational, cultural and social activities. These facilities typically

take the form of libraries, museums, parks, gardens, city squares and open spaces, which provide neutral, common ground, secular public space, open to all.

The appropriation of public space by or for special interest groups, for their exclusive use, would be a seriously retrograde step. That a city such as Glasgow, with its history and traditions, with its sense of civic pride, should appear to be contemplating such a course of action, is shocking. Let the City Fathers think on the Scottish Enlightenment, and meditate.

D HARROP
Sheffield

Jerusalem

IN HIS letter published by you in August, Robert Tee states that "Jerusalem" is unacceptable as England's anthem because of its sectarian religious lyrics. So also is the anthem used by England at Commonwealth Games – ie *Land of Hope and Glory*.

In addition to mentioning "god" it anachronistically calls for the expansion of the British Empire. The unofficial anthem "Rule Britannia" has similarly outdated imperialist sentiments and also refers to Britain, not England.

Similarly at most sporting events the English team improperly uses the United Kingdom National Anthem. A possible alternative, *Hearts of Oak* (official march of the Royal Navy) has warlike words suitable only for England football supporters: "we'll fight and we'll conquer again and again"

That leaves the peaceable ever-popular 16th century song representing Englishness, namely *Greensleeves*. It is dedicated to a prostitute. (Green was the colour worn by such women at that time, so that their dresses would not show grass stains.) It would be a suitable anthem for mercenary, promiscuous England!

EDWARD GOODMAN
Surrey

We are our own 'gods'

SEEING the "blessing" "May your God go with you" with which Dave Allen used to end his inimitable TV series quoted in last week's *New Statesman* made me reflect that, as no doubt Allen himself would have agreed, our true god, namely ourselves) always *does* go with us. For, whether we realise it or no, each of us necessarily finds himself at the centre of his world – both in its private and public acts – and the limits of that world must necessarily coincide with the limits of our personal knowledge and experience and sentiment. Whatever finds itself outside the area illuminated by our awareness does not for us exist. For what knowledge or experience or sentiment outside that which is personal to us can we possibly possess?

Moreover, at our demise, this self-created world, along with its only begetter, will absolutely cease to be (other, of course, than in the shape of other people's memories or our works). Hence it may be said that we exercise the power of life and death over our world, that we are in effect its living Gael, and that, as

aforsaid, with death, that world and its God alike are extinguished or, as Shakespeare puts it, "melted into air, into thin air."

ALBERT ADLER
London

Horrific imagery

MOST of us in the West were horrified by the news item last month concerning multiple public hangings in Iran, at which children were among the lookers-on and graphic photographs were taken for publication.

On second thoughts, it occurred to me that this was not far removed from my own childhood convent-school experience, constantly confronted by effigies and pictures of a half-naked, blood-streaked man, a crown of thorns piercing his head, who was nailed to a cross to die in torment.

On third thoughts, I realised there is a difference: while the Iranian victims were real people, the Christian scapegoat is mere fiction.

BARBARA SMOKER
Bromley

The Freethinker

Founded in 1881 by G W Foote
UK ISSN 0016-0687
Editor Barry Duke

Views expressed in the magazine are not necessarily those of the publishers.

Letters, subscriptions, book orders and fund donations to the publisher:

Freethinker/G W Foote & Co Ltd
P O Box 234
Brighton BN1 4XD
Tel: 01273 680531

E-mail: fteditor@aol.com

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

Annual postal subscription rates

12 months: UK £15.00 or £10.00 unwaged. Overseas surface mail (including Republic of Ireland) £18.00 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 £5.00 sterling or USA \$8.00 to cover bank charges. Alternatively, send at your own risk currency notes, convertible in the UK, plus bank charges equivalent to USA \$3.00

Special trial subscription for readers' friends and contacts: £5.00 for six months. Send name and address of recipient with £5.00 cheque or postal order made payable to G W Foote and Company to the *Freethinker*, PO Box 234, Brighton, BN1 4XD.

Printed by Derek Hattersley & Son
Sheffield



Events & Contacts

Birmingham Humanists: Information: Tova Jones pn 021454 4692 or see www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk. Friends Meeting House, Bristol Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham. Saturday, Sept 15, 10.30 am. Day Conference, *Conflicts in Education*. Cost (including buffet lunch and light refreshments) £12.00.

Blackpool & Fylde Humanist Group: Information: John and Kath Wayland, 13 Elms Avenue, Lytham FY8 5PW. Tel: 01253 736397

Brighton & Hove Humanist Society: Information on 01273 227549/461404. Website: <http://homepage.nflworld.com/robert.stovold/humanist.html>. The Farm Tavern, Farm Road, Hove. Tuesday, October 2, 7.30pm. Colin Swinburn: *Is Speech Still Free?*.

Bromley Humanists: Meetings on the second Tuesday of the month, 8 pm, at Friends Meeting House, Ravensbourne Road, Bromley. Information: 01959 574691. Website: www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com

Central London Humanist Group: Contact Jemma Hooper, 75a Ridgmount Gardens, London WC1E 7AX. E-mail: rupert@clarity4words.co.uk Tel: 02075804564.

Chiltern Humanists: Information and programme: 01494 771851.

Cornwall Humanists: Information: Patricia Adams, Sappho, Church Road, Lelant, St Ives, Cornwall TR26 3LA. Tel: 01736 754895.

Cotswold Humanists: Information: Philip Howell, 2 Cleavelands Close, Cheltenham GL50 4PZ. Tel. 01242 528743.

Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists: Information: Tel. 01926 858450. Roy Saich, 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth, CV8 2HB.

Derbyshire Secularists: Meet at 7.00pm, the third Wednesday of every month at the Multifaith Centre, University of Derby. Full details on website www.secularderby.org

Devon Humanists: Information: Roger McCallister, Tel: 01626 864046. E-mail: info@devonhumanists.org.uk Website: www.devonhumanists.org.uk

Ealing Humanists: Information: Secretary Alex Hill Tel. 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.

Essex Humanists: Programme available, Details: 01268 785295.

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA): Information: 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth CV8 2HB. Tel. 01926 858450.

Greater Manchester Humanist Group: Information: June Kamel 01925 824844. Monthly meetings (second Wednesday) Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester.

Hampstead Humanist Society: Information: N1 Barnes, 10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 0HP. Website: <http://hampstead.humanists.net>

Harrow Humanist Society. Meetings at 8pm every second Wednesday of the month (except July and August) at HAVS Lodge, 64 Pinner Road, Harrow. Our next meeting on September 12 will be a showing on video of the recent *Panorama* programme on Scientology, followed by a discussion: *When does a cult become a religion?* Further information from the Secretary on 0208 863 2977.

Havering & District Humanist Society: Information: Jean Condon 01708 473597. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgores Crescent, Gidea Park. Thursday, September 6, 8pm. Dr Michael Kehr: *Reminiscences of a GP*.

Humanism for Inquirers: www.humanists.freereserve.co.uk

Humanist Association Dorset: Information and programme from Jane Bannister. Tel: 01202 428506.

Humanist Society of Scotland: 272 Bath Street, Glasgow, G2 4JR, 0870 874 9002. Secretary: secretary@humanism-scotland.org.uk. Information and events: info@humanism-scotland.org.uk or visit www.humanism-scotland.org.uk. Media: media@humanism-scotland.org.uk. Education: education@humanism-scotland.org.uk. Local Scottish Groups:

Aberdeen Group: 07010 704778, aberdeen@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

Dundee Group: 07017 404778, dundee@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

Edinburgh Group: 07010 704775, edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk

Glasgow Group: 07010 704776, glasgow@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

Highland Group: 07017 404779, highland@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

Perth Group: 07017 404776, perth@humanism-scotland.org.uk

Humanist Society of West Yorkshire: Information: Robert Tee on 0113 2577009.

Isle of Man Freethinkers: Information: Muriel Garland, 01624 664796. E-mail: murielgarland@clara.co.uk. Website: www.iomfreethinkers.co.uk

Isle of Wight Humanist Group. Information: David Broughton on 01983 755526 or e-mail davidb67@clara.co.uk

Leicester Secular Society: Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB. Tel. 0116 262 2250. Full programme of events on website: www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk

Lewisham Humanist Group: Information: Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. Website: www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com. The Goose, Rushey Green, Catford. Thursday, Sept 20, 8pm. Susan Aldridge: *Are We All Addicted to Something?*

Lynn Humanists, W Norfolk and Fens. Tel: 07811870215.

Mid-Wales Humanists: Information: Howard Kinberley 01982 551736

Northanths Secular & Humanist Society: For information contact Maggie Atkins on 01933 381782.

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

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

North London Humanist Group: Monthly meetings. Information: Linda Wilkinson, 0208 882 0124.

North Yorkshire Humanist Group: Secretary: Charles Anderson. 01904 766480. Meets second Monday of the month, 7.30pm. Priory Street Centre, York.

Norwich Humanist Group: Information: Vincent G Chainey, Le Chene, 4 Mill Street, Bradenham, Thetford IP25 7PN. Tel. 01362 820982.

Pink Trangle Trust: Registered Charity promoting humanism and obtaining justice. PTT 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth, CV8 2HB. www.pinktriangle.org.uk

Reigate & District Humanist Group: Information: Roy Adderley on 01342 323882.

Sheffield Humanist Society: Information: 0114 2309754. Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street, Sheffield. Wednesday, Sept 5, 8pm. *Why I am a Non-Believer*. Speakers to be announced.

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

South Place Ethical Society. Weekly talks/meetings, Sundays 11am and 3pm at Conway Hall Library, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Tel: 0207242 8037/4. E-mail: library@ethicalsoc.org.uk. Monthly programmes on request.

Somerset: Details of South Somerset Humanists' meetings in Yeovil from Edward Gwinnell on 01935 473263 or e-mail edward@egwinnell.orange-home.co.uk

Suffolk Humanists: 5 Hadleigh Road, Elmsett, Suffolk IP7 6ND. Tel: 01473 658828. mail@suffolkhumanists.org.uk

www.suffolkhumanists.org.uk

Sutton Humanist Group: Information: 0208 773 0631. Website: www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com. E-Mail: BrackenKemish@ukgateway.net.

Welsh Marches Humanist Group: Information: 01568 770282. Website: www.wmhumanists.co.uk. E-mail: rocheforts@tiscali.co.uk. Meetings on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at Ludlow, October to June.

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

Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern Ireland. Information: Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: 028 9267 7264. E-mail: brianmcclinton@btinternet.com

website: www.nirelandhumanists.net

Please send your listings and events notices to:

Listings, the *Freethinker*, PO BOX 234, Brighton, BN1 4XD

Notices must be received by the 15th of the month preceding publication.