

Colindale

The Freethinker

secular humanist monthly

founded 1881

Vol. 111 No. 3

MARCH 1991

40p

VOICES FOR PEACE SILENCED BY GULF WAR CENSORSHIP

ARTICLE 19, the International Centre on Censorship, has published a report entitled *Stop Press: the Gulf War and Censorship*, in which it documents incidents of censorship relating to the Gulf war. The report contains an analysis of restrictions on press and broadcasting freedom in Britain, the United States and France. Incidents of censorship in eleven other countries, including Israel, Egypt and Pakistan are documented.

Introducing the report, Frances D'Souza, director of ARTICLE 19, said: "While it is not possible to gather an exhaustive list of censorship incidents, it is hoped that by drawing together incidents from a wide geographical area, a true picture of the restrictions on reporting, and therefore on the public's right to know, will emerge.

"There have clearly been attempts on all sides in the conflict to control the quality and amount of information provided to the public.

"It is precisely in times of emergency that there needs to be a redoubled commitment to the free flow of information in order to ensure accountability and that human rights are not violated.

"Despite the undoubted need for security to protect life, the right to know should also be strongly protected."

The report quotes many examples of restrictions imposed and self-imposed during the Gulf war.

The BBC decided to withdraw certain programmes on the grounds of taste, sensitivity and inappropriateness to the situation. Consequently a showing of "Carry on up the Khyber" was cancelled. "Carry on Cowboy" was shown instead.

A list of "sensitive" songs was sent to the smaller BBC stations. They included "Killing me Softly", "Imagine" and "Everybody Wants to Rule the World".

BBC Wales refused to broadcast a speech calling for peace which Fr Owen Hardwicke was to have given in the "Morning Message" slot.

During the war, reports by journalists broadcasting from Baghdad were prefaced with a warning that they had been compiled under Iraqi censorship restrictions. But there was no indication that reports from other sources were also censored.

The US Government took unprecedented steps to control the dissemination of information about the war. Journalists charge that the real purpose of rules issued by the Defence Department was to limit their ability to report anything other than military information.

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, a media watchdog group, claim that in the five months since the US sent troops to the Gulf, only 29 minutes out of 2,855 minutes of news coverage on television networks dealt with opposition by American people to the Gulf build-up.

ARTICLE 19 argues that restriction of information "must be justified and imposed only if strictly necessary. Restrictions have to be demonstrated to be necessary to protect life and not just to 'win the war at home'.

"Without effective international guidelines, governments are too willing to impose blanket restrictions on access to information."



The Freethinker

UK ISSN 0016-0687

Editor: WILLIAM McILROY

The Freethinker was founded in 1881 by George William Foote and is published mid-monthly. The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Publishers or Editor.

Articles, Reviews, News Reports, Obituaries, Letters and Announcements should be sent by the 18th of the preceding month to the Editor at 117 Springvale Road, Walkley, Sheffield S6 3NT (telephone 0742-685731). Unsolicited reviews should not be submitted.

Vol 111 No 3 CONTENTS March 1991

VOICES FOR PEACE SILENCED BY GULF WAR CENSORSHIP	33
NEWS AND NOTES	34
A "Natural" Mistake; The Telecharlatan; False Friends; Sunday Silliness; What's Sauce for the Goose ...; Light Relief; Deadly Religion	
THE CHAPLAINS' CASH CRISIS	37
Denis Cobell	
THE TREE OF LIES	38
Janet McCrickard	
DR ALLBUTT'S <i>THE WIFE'S HANDBOOK</i>	40
Ellen Winsor	
BELIEF IN PRAYER	41
Verna Metcalfe	
BOOK REVIEWS	42
Science versus Religion	
Reviewer: Colin McCall	
Ethics in the Sanctuary	
Reviewer: Karl Heath	
BIGOTS SHOW THEIR CLAUSE	45
Terry Sanderson	
MISCELLANEOUS	
Archbishop Withdraws Comic Relief Support, 44;	
From Slave Trading to Sainthood, 44; Arranged	
Marriage Recipe for Disaster, 48; Abigail Will	
Not Pledge "Duty to God", 48	

Postal subscriptions, book orders and donations to the Freethinker Fund should be sent to:

G. W. FOOTE & COMPANY,
702 HOLLOWAY ROAD, LONDON N19 3NL
(Telephone: 071-272 1266)

ANNUAL POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

United Kingdom: twelve months £5. Overseas surface mail (including Republic of Ireland) £5.60; USA: twelve months, \$12. Overseas subscribers are requested to obtain sterling drafts from their banks, but if remittance is in foreign currency (including Republic of Ireland), please add the equivalent of £5 sterling or USA \$8 to cover bank charges. Alternatively, send at your own risk currency notes, convertible in the UK, plus bank charges equivalent to USA \$3 total \$15.

Printed by F. Bristow and Co., London

NEWS

A "NATURAL" MISTAKE

The recent BBC Television programme, "Catholics and Sex", greatly upset some of the breeding faithful. Christine Hudson, who describes herself as a Natural Family Planning teacher, complained in the *Catholic Herald* that the programme was "heavily-biased, anti-*Humanae Vitae*" (Pope Paul VI's anti-birth control encyclical which caused thousands of couples to quietly defect from Rome).

Christine Hudson expresses a viewpoint on what she perceives to be her God's will on the matter of procreation. She asserts that as God has created us "he must love and care for us. We believe that before we were born he knew us." She does not attempt to explain why, throughout all these centuries, an all-powerful God who loves and cares for us condemned countless millions to short, hungry and disease-afflicted lives. Nor does she explain why, if he knows us before we are born, he does nothing about his mistakes — defective foetuses which become monstrously deformed babies.

Why should God send a family a baby he didn't intend them to have, the "natural" family planner enquires. God cannot make a mistake, she asserts, so it follows that practical steps to prevent conception are "the very definition of sin and is why the Pope calls contraception intrinsically evil." But Holy Mother Church (or rather the all-male, celibate hierarchy) "knows that as human beings we are weak and to have 15-20 children in our present secular society is very hard ... so while maintaining that couples have a reasonable number of children (four to six) does allow recourse to NFP."

Natural Family Planning was pioneered by a Catholic couple, Evelyn and James Billings. It is commonly known as the Billings Method and, according to Christine Hudson, "works in with the rhythms of fertility and infertility of the wife's monthly cycle, as designed by God."

However, the Great Designer often cocks it up. Not long ago England's premier lay Catholic, the Duke of Norfolk, revealed that he and his wife went in for "natural" family planning. "It didn't bloody work", he declared. And claims for the Billings Method of fertility control are somewhat dented by the fact that Evelyn and James Billings have nine children.

AND NOTES

THE TELECHARLATAN

Religious groups will be able to buy advertising time on satellite television from next January and on ITV and Channel Four from 1993. One of the first to reach the European screens is likely to be Inspirational Satellite Network, run by the Morris Cerullo World Evangelism organisation.

Morris Cerullo is one of the slickest and most ambitious of America's televangelists. Last year he put in a bid of 52 million dollars for the Heritage USA complex, created by Jim Bakker who is now behind bars.

In a message to the godly and the gullible, Cerullo says: "God would not let me stand by and watch Satan destroy the investments and prayers of thousands of Christians." He then invites investing and prayerful Christians to throw good money after bad: "Rush me your gift which equals one day's or one week's income."

Morris Cerullo can certainly tell a tall tale, like the story of his youthful encounter with God himself.

"When I was 15 years old, God showed me a life-changing vision; I found myself in the heavens with millions of people of every nationality and colour, stretching out as far as I could see.

"While in the presence of God, my eyes were drawn downward towards my feet where footprints had been left in the clouds. What I saw and heard through those footprints forever changed my destiny.

"Beloved, I saw a vision of hell! The horrible flames of a literal hell which will never be quenched. God was asking me, 'Morris, will you give Me your life?' I said 'Yes' to God's miraculous call. As I stood stunned by the sight I was seeing, I suddenly felt compelled to place my feet into the footprints; they were precisely my size!"

Morris Cerullo aims to recruit a billion followers by the year 2000. His son David is being groomed to take over the family business.

The East Anglian Daily Times recently carried an interesting announcement, viz: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty resigns."

SUNDAY SILLINESS

From Matlock, in Derbyshire, comes yet another example of how Christian busybodies endeavour to impose their standards on the community at large.

When a religious group cancelled its long-term Sunday booking of the town's Imperial Rooms, the local council rented the building to traders. A number of Christians protested against what they regarded as a double iniquity — encouraging Sabbath breaking and doing so in a building that was once a Methodist Church.

Councillors have ruled that Sunday trading can continue in this popular tourist area. But in order to avoid breaching the 1950 Shops Act, they have restricted the range of goods that are sold. Under the ludicrous Sunday trading laws, swimsuits can be legally sold at the Imperial Rooms on 18 Sundays of the year. But the sale of other clothing is prohibited.

Church-owned gift shops and clubs do a brisk trade throughout the year. The "keep Sunday special" brigade should put their own house in order instead of poking their pious noses into other Sunday traders' business.

FALSE FRIENDS

Is there anything more damaging to family life than homelessness? Yet there has been little, if any, reaction by the religious "friends of the family" to an announcement last month that has dire consequences for thousands. The Council of Mortgage Lenders revealed that a thousand homes are now being repossessed *every week* because mortgagees cannot keep up their payments. This situation has resulted from policies pursued by the "party of the family" which has been in Government for the last twelve years.

In Britain, as in the United States, there is a close affinity between fundamental Christianity and Right-wing politics. Propaganda emanating from moral majority-style organisations is heavily larded with expressions of anxiety for the quality of family life and children's welfare which are allegedly threatened by horrors ranging from sex education to Sunday trading. But there has been a deafening silence over what Simon Keyes assistant director of the housing charity, Shelter, has described as "the government's lethal cocktail of escalating unemployment and sky-high interest rates ... a sure-fire recipe for homelessness."

Even the most sycophantic supporters of the

Government — with the exception of the rottweiler Right — haven't the gall to suggest that families are losing their homes through fecklessness and irresponsibility. Few will disagree with Simon Keyes who says that 44,000 borrowers lost their homes last year "tragically illustrates that those who were egged on by hype and subsidies to buy their own homes over the last decade are now victims. The ideological obsession with home ownership, at the expense of investment in affordable houses to rent, has failed."

WHAT'S SAUCE FOR THE GOOSE...

The Prophet's bully-boys have nothing to learn from the Saviour's when it comes to suppressing freedom of expression and the right to worship whichever deity, if any, that takes your fancy. Islamic intolerance of other faiths meant that during the Gulf war any Christian ceremony or observance had to be decidedly low-key. But as Christianity itself has been a byword for intolerance during many centuries, it is hard to work up a lather of sympathy over the humbling of the followers of Jesus.

One Christian service that was banned by the Saudi Arabian authorities was to have been held for the 4th Armoured Brigade which is led by Brigadier Christopher Hammerbeck, a Roman Catholic. A spokesman at the Allied Joint Information Office said the "sensitivities" of the host nation had to be considered.

Brian Fitzgerald, commercial manager of the Roman Catholic weekly *Universe*, published in Manchester, was understandably annoyed when forced to abandon his plan to send a thousand copies of the paper to British troops. He said: "We're carrying messages of support and promises of prayers from concerned families." But prayers to The One Above on whose behalf *The Universe* operates "would offend the Saudis", declared a representative of the Army's North-West press office.

The Ministry of Defence decreed: "Nothing of a religious nature can be sent to the troops." Which put *The Universe* and the Bible in the same category as *Playboy* and *Naughty Nymphos*.

The first part of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* was published in 1791. Commemorative events will take place in London, Portsmouth, Lewes, Manchester and Norwich. Details are obtainable from the honorary secretary of the Thomas Paine Society, 43 Wellington Gardens, Selsey, West Sussex, PO20 0RF, telephone 0243-605730.

LIGHT RELIEF

Callers at the lavatory attached to the Auto Supply Store in the small Texas town of Progreso, undergo a "moving" experience — but not normally of the kind associated with such places. Over a thousand visitors a day are entering the humble loo to gaze in wonderment at an image of the Virgin Mary, who seems to turn up in the oddest places. One pious lady, overcome by religious emotion rather than bodily relief, left in tears.

Mr Trevine, proprietor of the store, said he first noticed the image at the beginning of December. He concluded that the Virgin Mary's appearance in such surroundings was God's way of showing how people are neglecting their faith.

The facial features are rather vague, but the fertile imaginings of faithful observers have added to the image. Some have seen an ear-ring, others a flower and an angel.

Church officials are trying to parry questions about the image on the loo floor. Irreverent sceptics are trying to keep a straight face.

DEADLY RELIGION

An extreme form of child abuse is being practiced by a group of American Christian fundamentalists in Philadelphia. Four children have already died because their parents believe that prayer rather than medical treatment will cure measles. They belong to either the Faith Tabernacle Congregation or the First Century Gospel Church.

City officials have obtained orders compelling parents whose children are infected to take them to hospital. Dr Mark Joffe, medical director of the city's Children's Hospital, said: "Now that the parents have been legally forced to bring their children to hospital, there is an overwhelming likelihood they will recover."

Dr Robert Ross, deputy health commissioner, described the situation as "a public health nightmare".

He said: "It has been extremely frustrating to know there were children sitting at home who could have been saved and yet we knew nothing about them."

An eight-year-old boy's parents who belong to another branch of the Faith Tabernacle Congregation are being prosecuted following his death from an untreated ear infection.

The Chaplains' Cash Crisis

DENIS COBELL

I have been employed in the National Health Service for many years and have from time to time protested about the appointment of hospital chaplains. So it was gratifying to read a renewed call in *The Freethinker* recently for the abolition of paying chaplaincy fees from NHS funds.

It was also pleasing to hear the Rev Adrian Rhodes, secretary of the National Association of Hospital Chaplains, voice his fears on Radio Four's *Sunday* programme that financial stringency in the NHS might cause the disappearance of his fraternity. I wrote to Mr Rhodes: "As a humanist and a secularist I was somewhat heartened to hear that some health authorities and hospitals are considering cutting out the services of chaplains in order to save money. I see no reason why churches and religious groups should not pay for chaplains if they wish to provide them."

I also referred to some chaplains' practice of holding services in the wards, thus imposing Christian views on patients who are confined to bed.

A couple of years ago I questioned the appointment of a new chaplain at a London teaching hospital, suggesting that his role was akin to that of a counsellor. He politely replied: "I am appointed as chaplain, not as a counsellor, either Anglican or any other brand. There are other people trained to be counsellors. I am a clergyman even if I answer to a variety of titles..."

"At a time when support for institutional forms of religion is declining, there remains a strong inherent religious feeling which surfaces when episodes occur to break the usual rhythm and flow of life. Being admitted to hospital is just one such episode. Thus, people are genuinely glad to see me as I go round the wards. They do most of the talking, I don't. I sit and listen, and what I hear them say is that they are searching for meaning — meaning in life generally, and trying to make sense of pain and illness which they are undergoing. I have no answers, but I have a system of belief which enables me to share their problems."

This reply is typical of so many clerical responses today — rather in the manner of a feather pillow; if you hit it, one way or another, the shape refuses to change. Thus, the chaplain is not a counsellor; but he does all the listening — just like a counsellor. He has no answers — but a "system of belief". Of course there is no answer to the question of chaplains' fees being paid out of hospital funds!

A lot of the religious nonsense in hospitals is purely historical. Nowadays the only use a patient's religion is to hospital staff is when that patient dies. Needless to say this is a situation health carers seek to avoid, sometimes despite a person's desire for voluntary euthanasia.

Surely it is time for chaplains to become honorary volunteers. I recall an acquaintance of no particular religious affiliation who inadvertently allowed himself to be listed as C of E on admission to hospital. He had been baptised into the Anglican faith six decades earlier and was therefore not surprised to receive a visit from a C of E chaplain. Indeed he was pleased that the church was playing a part in promoting welfare of the community, although the evangelising efforts, he felt, would not encourage him in the profession of religious belief. Imagine his amazement when I informed him that chaplains are paid for out of hospital funds. After leaving hospital he was less kindly disposed to such proselytising activity at the expense of the majority of people who never darken a church door.

Four governors of a Roman Catholic school in Richmond, Surrey, have been sacked by church authorities for supporting the appointment of a divorcee as headteacher. Hans Formella, the school deputy head, was backed by the local education authority and parents on the ruling body of St. Osmund's Primary School when he applied for the headship. Church authorities intervened when they discovered that Mr Formella was divorced and had remarried in a registry office.

Councillors in Slough, Buckinghamshire, have donated £1,000 to St. Andrew's Shared Church to restore the church organ. This is £250 more than their grant to the British Amateur Gymnastics Association to host a reception for the European Gymnastics Union.

Salvatore Schillaci, Italy's World Cup hero, is having a run of bad luck, not having scored a goal since November. He was suspended for one match for threatening to have another player shot after they clashed on the pitch. Schillaci is now considering making a pilgrimage to Lourdes.

The Tree of Lies

JANET McCRICKARD

According to Christian doctrine, our first parents, Adam and Eve, lived in a blissful, “unfallen” state, enjoying a perfect rapport both with God and Nature. The disobedience of the ancestral couple introduced the curse of death, along with pain, unhappiness and so forth, forcing God to set in motion “salvation history”, a complicated, four-thousand-year-long series of machinations, culminating in the sacrifice of his son. The latter is supposed to have cancelled death and the primordial sin of Adam. Obviously the transgression of Adam and Eve is the foundation event of salvation history. It actually makes the Christian religion necessary, so that the rest of theology stands or falls by it. Thus one would imagine that the doctrine would be sewn up quite tightly and would at least correspond to the details of the Eden story in the Bible.

Not a bit of it. The Genesis account radically differs from and actually contradicts Christian belief. As most Christians are not closely acquainted with the Bible, never having read it for themselves and preferring to listen only to sanitised selections obtained at second-hand via the clergy, they are unaware of the discrepancies.

The primal sin is one of disobedience — of the choice of evil over good. God (or rather “the gods”, which is the actual Hebrew term used in Genesis) specifically forbade Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. But if they didn’t have this knowledge, how could they know whether it was good (right) to obey God and not eat, or evil (wrong) to go ahead and tuck in? Being forbidden has neither meaning nor moral force for creatures incapable of moral judgement or choice.

The Christian answer to this is that it wasn’t Adam’s and Eve’s business to think or judge whether it was right or wrong to obey God. They simply obeyed God naturally, because they were unfallen. In that case, why was it they disobeyed and had to be punished? If it was because the Devil put the idea into their minds, then they were still blameless. They could not yet judge that the Devil was evil. For all they knew, Satan might have been another and equal or good God. They might have had a moral duty to obey him too — it was all the same to them.

Given that the primal pair had no concept of sin or disobedience, since they were ignorant of good and evil, we are forced to ask what was the point of God testing or tempting them by deliberately putting

forbidden fruit so obviously and accessibly in their environment, instead of sensibly planting the tree elsewhere, out of harm’s way? How is it possible to test, tempt or try an amoral person, innocent of the understanding of good and evil? God seems not to have trusted the products of his own mind and hands — creatures who in their pristine state were entirely good, since they were made by a god whose mind and hands were supremely free from all taint of evil. His suspicious testing of them indicates his mistrust, and his withholding of moral knowledge later proves to have been motivated by fear.

The Genesis text implies that the Tree of Life (ie of immortality) was also forbidden. After Adam and Eve eat the fruit of knowledge, God complains that they have become like him, and that in case they also eat the fruit of immortality and live forever, he is obliged to expel them (Genesis ch. 3 v. 22). The text is quite clear; the expulsion from Eden is precisely to stop this dire event from happening. Plainly, God is frightened of Adam and Eve. He fears that, now they have acquired godlike knowledge, they may complete the job of becoming immortal, and hence equal to him. This motif of humans gaining supernatural power and threatening the gods themselves is an expression of priestly anxiety, found not only in pagan mythologies of the ancient Near East, but also in many other cultures worldwide. The priests who transmit “God’s will” to the people naturally fear that the laity will take power for themselves and topple priestly rule — competition with “God” equals a challenge to priestly power.

According to Christian theology, however, Adam and Eve already *were* immortal, and according to the same tradition it was eating of the forbidden fruit which deprived them of that immortality. Christians declare that it was precisely this “Fall” which brought death into the world. Yet it is quite clear from the text itself that God had no intention in the first place that Adam and Eve should be immortal, since he prevented them from eating the fruit of immortality. If they were already deathless, this would have had no meaning.

God also told Adam and Eve a lie. He said that on the very day they ate the fruit of knowledge, they would die. The tempting serpent contradicted him, and by a practical test Eve discovered that the fruit did not cause death — the Devil (“the Father of Lies”) had told the truth, and God had not (Genesis ch. 2 v. 17, and ch. 3 vs. 1-6). Evidently,

...fear for his own status and safety had driven the Christian god into bluff and deception. We do not find Christians giving much attention to these particular verses. Nor do they readily admit to the fact that there were two forbidden trees. If the Tree of Immortality was not in fact forbidden, this shows a tremendous oversight on the part of God. Presumably he would have been in an even worse pickle if Adam and Eve had gone for that one first, and then eaten the forbidden fruit. (Why did they sit about the garden for all that time and not get around to eating from the Tree of Life, which stood next to the forbidden tree?) It appears to have been pure luck that they did not achieve immortality first and give their creator an even bigger problem. By the end of the third chapter of Genesis, God is almost mopping his brow with relief. Why is it that this almighty God has such a narrow squeak?

There are further problems. According to Pauline theology, it appears that only the "born again" are able to distinguish properly between good and evil, everyone else having been deceived by Satan. But wait a moment. The awareness of good and evil, which is common to all humanity, is that very knowledge obtained by our first parents by eating the forbidden fruit. Now either this is true or false knowledge. If, as Christians claim, our moral sense is distorted and depraved, then the knowledge obtained by Adam and Eve was false and God had created a tree of lies in Eden. Then too, it is hard to see why, if the knowledge of good and evil was forbidden to us and God did not want us to have it, we should be given it all over again by the "Holy Spirit", following on Christ's sacrifice. Does God want us to have this knowledge, or does he not? And exactly the same goes for immortality. In Genesis, he clearly intends that the original couple should have neither.

Christians refuse to admit that their fundamental doctrines were developed at a time when the old biblical myths were no longer understood. Key Christian beliefs are based on a complete misunderstanding of the belief-system of the ancient world. The key to the book of Genesis is not found in the writings of theologians, but in the vanished pagan cultures of the Near East. From such sources the Israelite priestly scribes borrowed freely, but rewriting and inverting well-known pagan motifs in a deliberate propaganda exercise. The woman Eve, for example, is a parody of former mother-goddesses, among whose attributes were miraculous gift-giving trees bearing sacred fruit, oracular wisdom-disclosing serpents, and the power to give birth without recourse to a male partner. The Judeo-Christian reworking of this personification of

natural forces makes her an evil woman whose independent reasoning and choice brings about all the misery in the world. The matriarchal goddess becomes a mortal woman, born of a male without female assistance and dominated by her husband.

On the occasions when I have pointed out to Christians the discrepancies in their own actual claims about the Genesis legend, they usually resort to one of two escape routes. The first I call the OIK tactic ("Only Initiates Know"). As one woman explained: "Look, you are in no position to interpret the Bible because you haven't been born again, and you haven't got the Holy Spirit. It's only the Holy Spirit who can reveal the true meaning of scripture, and you have to be completely yielded first." ("Yielded" means accepting biblical infallibility.)

The other is the Reason-equals-Sin approach. As another evangelical woman told me: "You know, Janet, your problem is that you read and think too much. It's this intellectual pride that stands between you and God. Until you repent of your worship of human reason and submit to God's word, you'll never understand anything about the Bible."

And it is this that gives the clue to the actual Christian interpretation of Genesis. Original sin is not sexual knowledge, but independent rational thought. I will leave the last word with the author of *Atheism: the Case Against God*, George H. Smith: "The biblical antagonism to reason is one of its most striking features. The Bible is a paradigm of *misology* — the hatred of reason. This attitude permeates the Bible, beginning with the book of Genesis. Adam and Eve [man]... acquired knowledge, and Christianity views this defiant act as the source of man's inherent evil."

THE FREETHINKER

Volume 110, 1990

Bound in dark blue hard covers with title and date.
Price £9.50 plus £1.10 postage.

G.W. Foote & Co., 702, Holloway Road,
London N19 3NL

ATHEISM, FREETHOUGHT, POLITICS, HISTORY

Books, pamphlets, and back issues of
"The Freethinker"

For full list write to:
G. W. Foote & Co., 702 Holloway Road,
London N19 3NL

Dr Allbutt's *The Wife's Handbook*

ELLEN WINSOR

This article, the second in a series on Birth Control Tracts of the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century, concerns Henry Arthur Allbutt's *The Wife's Handbook*. Despite considerable hostility by the medical profession and moralists, Dr Allbutt's pamphlet became a best-seller and ran to over fifty editions.

Dr H.A. Allbutt (1846-1904) was a Leeds physician and a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh. In 1886 he first published a sixpenny pamphlet entitled *The Wife's Handbook: how a woman should order herself during pregnancy, in the lying-room, and after delivery. With hints on the management of the baby and on other matters of importance, necessary to be known by married women*. The copy which the present writer has to hand is the 16th edition of 1891, published by R. Forder, 28 Stonecutter Street, London. It is 59 pages long, plus some ten pages of advertisements, and is bound in buff wrappers. Other secularist publishers who issued the pamphlet from time to time include W.J. Ramsey and George Standring.

It is likely that Allbutt's original purpose was to provide knowledge of hygiene and information on pre-natal care and the management of the baby; but he included a short four-page chapter entitled "How to Prevent Conception." It seems that the precise contents of the chapter varied from edition to edition and there is cross reference to the advertisements included in the pamphlet. Comments in this article refer to the edition mentioned above.

In an introduction, Dr Allbutt states his purpose in writing the pamphlet:

This little work was undertaken at the suggestion of several friends who have always had sympathetic hearts for the suffering of women and children, and who advised me to write a book which could be understood by most women, and at a price (sixpence) which would ensure it a place in even the poorest household.

The survey of birth control techniques was the best and most accurate available at the time. The relevant chapter refers to coughing and the safe period, both considered unreliable; withdrawal "hurtful to the nervous system of many people"; syringing, using various patented devices with spermicides added to the water; the sponge, preferably soaked in a solution of quinine; the "letter" or sheath; the Mesinga diaphragm, which, it

seems, is mentioned for the first time in an English birth control tract; and finally, the use of Rendell's Soluble Pessaries which contained quinine.

As a cautionary note, Allbutt adds that he does not recommend the taking of arsenic and other drugs in small doses to lessen male sexual activity. He warns that this may have disastrous effects on health. The inclusion of such advice tells us something of the state of the population's medical knowledge at the time, as well as the risks individuals were willing to run to limit the size of their families.

The ten pages of advertisements included in the pamphlet effectively supplement the section of text dealing with technique. These are illustrated and include such awesome pieces of equipment as E. Lambert & Son's Introducer for Rendell's "Soluble Pessaries". There is also mention of Malthusian Sheaths, Quinine Pessaries and other devices.

When the pamphlet was published, the Leeds Vigilance Association for enforcing the Criminal Law Amendment Act and the Protection of Girls began a campaign against it. Complaints were made to the various medical societies of which Allbutt was a member. The General Medical Council sent a copy to the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, which deprived Allbutt of the Licence and Membership of the College. In May 1887, the GMC's English Branch Council set up a committee of inquiry. This found the booklet offensive and Allbutt was summoned to a GMC meeting. He was found guilty of publishing *The Wife's Handbook* "at so low a price as to bring the work within the reach of the youth of both sexes." Allbutt's name was erased from the Medical Register. He took the case to the High Court, but without success. The *British Medical Journal* explained where the problem lay with remarkable frankness:

Injury is done to the medical profession by one of its members publishing in a cheap and popular form information which, however legitimate in its proper place, may be used for the worst purposes ... It is probable ... that Mr H.A. Allbutt might have ventilated his views without let or hindrance from professional authority had he been content to address them to medical men instead of to the public.

In fairness, it should be stated that Allbutt was spreading medical knowledge in a populist form and this had always been disapproved of by the medical profession. What is more, devices carrying a trademark were being promoted and recommended

for the use of the general public by a medical practitioner.

Allbutt campaigned unsuccessfully against his persecutors. He also continued to use the titles MRCPE and LSA on the cover of his pamphlet and to practise, though unregistered. In the 1891 edition of *The Wife's Handbook* he continues to refer to himself by the title of Doctor and to give details of his consultation times at 24 Park Square, Leeds. In 1895 he was fined £5 with two guineas costs in

consequence.

If there was any compensation for Dr Allbutt, and those associated with him, it was that the publicity ensured that *The Wife's Handbook* became one of the most, if not the most, popular works containing birth control information ever published in Britain. By 1931 the 51st edition (504th thousand) was being advertised, although some of its advice was seriously out of date. The pamphlet was also translated into many foreign languages.

Belief in Prayer

VERNA METCALFE

Why do people pray to God? No doubt on the whole they find it comforting, but if they do it habitually they must discover from experience that even urgent requests often appear to be ignored. Perhaps they attribute this to God's superior purposes. But why do they require no evidence at all that his purposes are superior?

People who are not brainwashed into the idea of the absolute righteousness of God can see only too clearly that there is no conceivable way in which, for instance, an utterly miserable, fever-racked child is serving a higher purpose by his suffering. And even if, in some convoluted way, he were, no perfect being could use such atrocious means to achieve a final "good".

According to orthodox Christianity, however, the cruelty and callousness of the Deity goes far beyond this. All human beings, it is alleged, are born with the "stain" of original sin — whatever that may mean — because of an act of very understandable disobedience by our remote ancestors. Civilised people would consider it unjust and unreasonable to treat another human being badly because of something done, for instance, by a great-great grandfather a hundred years ago. Not so, the Deity! "All have sinned" (ie, presumably, carry the stain of original sin, the sin of Adam and Eve) says the scripture, "and come short of the glory of God." If that is inevitably true of all of us, we can hardly be held accountable for it. Only the Creator could possibly be accountable in such a case; but of course he denies it and throws the blame back on us.

Yet this is not the end of the story; having told human beings they are inevitably sinners, he then says that unless, in some way, they "appropriate" the blood sacrifices of Jesus, they will be tortured for ever. The sheer evil of this belief has bedevilled Christianity through the centuries and has been responsible for its role as persecutor and its love affair with suffering. "Heretics" have been savagely tormented and burned to death, saints have been honoured for repulsive extremes of asceticism. It might be pertinent to mention here that I myself

It has long seemed strange to me that Christians who profess a belief in the power of prayer and describe their God as both almighty and all-loving, cannot recognise that, if this were indeed the case, it would then follow that a perfectly reasonable request to the deity could be expected to receive either a positive response or a proper explanation for a negative one. A normally decent parent who had the power to help, would certainly do one of these two things. But the "Heavenly Father", true to form, often does neither.

In fact the characteristics that secular humanists respect (not worship) such as fairness, compassion and understanding, can scarcely be attributed to the Christian God. It is quite clear that an almighty creator of a world like this and a religion like Christianity could not have these characteristics. The manner in which critical judgement is totally suspended by believers in evaluating their God's behaviour is extraordinary. The natural world is cruel and callous as well as wonderful and beautiful; babies are choked to death by diphtheria; mothers die in childbirth; earthquakes crush and mutilate thousands. Furthermore, according to believers, the creator not only designed these things, but tells his servants that all the suffering is part of his inscrutable will and is ultimately for the best. For whose best? For his own? What monumental and monstrous selfishness! For ours? Impossible!

(continued on page 46)

BOOKS

SCIENCE VERSUS RELIGION, by Tad S. Clements.
Prometheus Books, £15.95 and \$24.95

This is not, as might be thought, an updating of John W Draper's *Conflict between Science and Religion* or A.D. White's *Warfare of Science with Theology*. Tad S. Clements is an emeritus professor of philosophy, not a historian, and this is a philosophical work which asks the fundamental question, are scientific and religious ways of knowing compatible; can they, as White surprisingly suggested, "go hand in hand".

Clements believes not. He acknowledges, of course, that one person can hold both scientific and religious beliefs, but that is a problem for the psychologist, and Clements only touches upon it. His concern is with the logic of the case, to demonstrate that "there are essential differences between these two human activities — fundamental attitudinal, methodological, linguistic and doctrinal differences — that presuppose and entail profound incompatibilities, which probably defy any logical compromise or resolution".

Inevitably, in a philosophical work of this kind, things move slowly at first, with consideration of conceptual difficulties and "the actual or possible ways that even the possibility" of incompatibility can be denied. Thereafter, it is wide ranging, though controlled, and finely reasoned.

Particularly welcome is the emphasis on the commonsense aspect of science. Although it is in many ways highly abstract and technical, says Clements, "many of its basic presuppositions do not differ in essential ways from those of common sense".

One of these is a belief in the reality of matter. However more sophisticated that of the scientists may be, they "share our almost universal belief in the reality of an objective (ie, not subject- or knower-dependent) something (matter or matter-energy) that exists in varied forms and is involved in diverse spatiotemporal causal processes". Moreover, that material reality is quantitative and "operates in a uniform consistent manner", certainly at the macroscopic level.

This, Clements says, must be qualified in several ways (scientists are reluctant to make ontological claims, are aware of the pitfalls of induction et al) but "it seems warranted to say that scientists and

FREETHINKER

ordinary human beings generally presuppose that change is real, that changes are for the most part orderly, and that the orderliness is due to causes operating in fairly uniform ways". And, he adds, "if this is the essence of 'determinism' then science and common sense tend to presuppose determinism".

Presumptions these may be, but they make sense of our experience, enable us to cope with the natural world and "are logically integral to the rest of the fabric of modern science (a fabric that has predictability, testability, corrigibility and accountability built into it)". They are therefore justified pragmatically and logically.

Turning to religion, Clements deals first with the circularity of the affirmation "I believe in the reality of God because I have faith (belief) in the reality of God" and its various permutations. Then he considers the appeal to tradition, the mistaken assumption of "a direct correlation between antiquity and reliability". Miracles and prophecies duly come under his scrutiny.

A moral touch here. What relevance can the horrendous "miracles" of, say, the Book of Exodus have on the conception of a loving God? The same question may be asked about a miracle-performing saviour who issues the threat of eternal damnation. But then, what sort of morality — or indeed rationality — is exemplified by the innocent son dying for the sins of others?

Rationality, as we know, is not a prominent feature among religious thinkers who, in Clements' words "talk about questionable, unknown, obscure, unobservable, apparently gratuitously assumed dimensions (such as heaven and hell), entities (such as angels, devils, gods, free wills, and souls), processes and occurrences (such as miracles, providential acts, demonic possessions, and teleological processes) and 'historical' persons (such as Krishna, Zeus, and Jesus)".

The very statement "God is in heaven" involves "hopeless conceptual confusions" when explication is attempted. What is the meaning of the word "in" for a start? And contrast the superficially similar sentences "Jones is a loving father" and "God is a loving father", the former testable, the latter merely putative, like so many religious utterances.

As for the religious attempt to explain the problem of pain, that it is essential in order to make pleasure meaningful, Hume's refutation stands: degrees of pleasure, greater or lesser pleasure would

REVIEWS

serve as well. And if evil is really necessary in order to recognise or appreciate good, "then evil would appear to be a necessary ingredient in heaven for good to be manifest there".

However the theologian may argue otherwise, religious belief rests ultimately upon faith, and some Christian doctrines like the Trinity go even beyond faith, if faith means either believing or trusting something. A necessary condition for believing or trusting anything is "the meaningfulness (ie, the intelligibility) of what one is supposed to believe or trust". Of course, as Clements says, one can utter the three-in-one formulae, but that doesn't make them intelligible.

Alas, though, in a time of great danger which calls out for intelligent, scientific, humanistic thinking, the world's religions still hold enormous sway, and Tad Clements is far from optimistic that we can achieve the necessary "radical change in orientation and commitment". But we have to work for it because "the alternative is almost too frightening to contemplate".

COLIN McCALL

ETHICS IN THE SANCTUARY, by Margaret P. Battin.
Yale University Press, £18.95

This turgid book with a meaningless title cannot be recommended. Its subject matter — the practices of various religious groups — is of moderate interest. It examines the Jehovah's Witnesses' refusal of blood transfusion; Christian Scientists' refusal of medical treatment; the Moonies' high pressure conversion techniques; the Children of God's recruitment by "flirty fishing" (conversion by prostitution); the snake handling and strychnine drinking of the Pentecostal Holiness churches of Appalachia. The latter rely on Mark, Ch. 16 v. 18. The Witnesses rely on the Old Testament. It would be unwise to follow all biblical injunctions, such as Exodus, Ch. 22 v. 18, Numbers, Ch. 31 v. 17-18, Deuteronomy, Ch. 22 v. 23-28, or Matthew, Ch. 18 v. 8-9. As for the injunction in Ezekiel, Ch. 4 v. 12-15, it is only necessary to recall the advice of Voltaire that anyone who admires Ezekiel should be compelled to dine with him.

One chapter, at greater length than the subject

merits, considers the ethics of confessional secrets. Interestingly, it suggests that the Roman Catholic confessional may originally have been intended for the priesthood rather than the laity, so that ecclesiastical scandals could be concealed. This reminds me of story in Chevalier's novel, *Clochemerle*, about the two elderly parish priests who, tempering the rigours of celibacy with the discreet assistance of their respective housekeepers, yet contrived to avert the consequences of mortal sin by regularly confessing to each other.

So what is wrong with the book? First, the ugly and grating language. When I read on the dust cover the words "it critiques the ordinary accepted practices" I thought the author might not be to blame. "Critique" as a verb, however, re-appears throughout the book. Abuse of language is coupled with the jargon of sociology. Some years ago, in a *Freethinker* article entitled "Bad Language", I quoted a sociology lecturer at Reading University who, having received a substantial Government grant for a report on British eating habits, discovered that they normally consisted of "three structured food-events characterised by increasing desiccation and geometrification of form through the day." In other words, from sloppy cornflakes in milk to fish-fingers.

When Auguste Comte rightly proposed sociology as a science, he did not anticipate that it would fall into the hands of professional charlatans who would debase it into a pseudo-science, concealing shallowness with invented jargon. The physical sciences are obliged to devise new terms for newly-discovered phenomena or processes for which no words exist in language. The pseudo-sociologists, however, try to create an appearance of science by inventing strange new jargon for items already named by simple words in everyday language. Like Professor Battin, they write "paradigm" when they could use "example". They are fond of "parameters" but invariably misuse the word as meaning "limits" or "terms of reference" because they have never troubled to consult a dictionary. Professor Battin, who is fond of "conceptualisation", can write a sentence like: "I will examine these methodological issues in a sustained 'nested' way ... with an additional general principle that permits the consolidation of specific analyses of individual practices."

The perils of invented jargon are illustrated by the countless references throughout the book to "O-Levels". British readers, if they missed the first reference on page 43, will be mystified, wondering how our national examinations have got into this

book. On page 43 the author reveals that she has invented the term to describe basic religious doctrines. But why?

The most serious objection to this book is the distinction made between "professional ethics" — informed, elitist and superior — and "ordinary ethics", the moral judgments of ordinary everyday folk. The author clearly believes that there are people specially qualified to make moral judgments, not the priests of old, but the new breed of psychiatrists, counsellors and the like. Before attempting moral judgment, we lesser mortals should consult the specialist professionals, those purporting to be qualified in "legal ethics" for the law, "business ethics" for corporate practice, "bio-ethics" for medicine. Professor Battin sets herself up as an expert in "ecclesia-ethics".

I regard with considerable distaste all those who presume to claim moral superiority and set

themselves up to advise the lesser breeds. I am glad that we are hearing less about the aberration known as "pastoral humanism", since the notion of the pastor's flock as "sheep" is inconsistent with the humanist view of human beings. And I regard with equal distaste to self-appointed "counsellors" who spring up after every disaster, purporting to advise the relatives of the victims about how to grieve.

Ethics in the Sanctuary reeks of self-satisfaction and professional superiority. Its author is a professor at Utah University. The dust cover describes it as "ground-breaking" and "sound scholarship" and commends its "exemplary philosophical scholarship". The book bears the imprimatur of Yale University Press. All I can say is that this casts a sad light upon what passes for scholarship in the academic world of the United States.

KARL HEATH

Archbishop Withdraws Comic Relief Support

Archbishop Thomas Winning of Glasgow has taken umbrage over Comic Relief and withdrawn his support for this year's fund-raising drive. He is annoyed because grants were made last year to organisations which promote health education and birth control programmes.

Some of the money previously raised by Comic Relief was donated to the Family Guidance Association of Ethiopia. A teenage health programme also received financial assistance. Grants were allocated by the British-based International Planned Parenthood Federation. The IPPF has long been on Catholic and "pro-life" organisations' hate list.

Fr Noel Barry, Archbishop Winning's secretary, confirmed that the Scottish Roman Catholic leader would not be supporting Comic Relief. Instead he urged the faithful to support church charities like CAFOD "who recognise the dignity, human rights and educational needs of people in the Third World." Financing artificial family planning programmes was "tragic".

Although some Catholic parishes and organisations may reconsider their sponsorship of events on Red Nose day, when most of Comic Relief's money is raised, the English and Welsh Bishops' Conference is not withdrawing its support. And CAFOD's communications officer described Comic Relief as "an excellent initiative". To single out one or two grants for criticism is "a distortion".

From Slave Trading to Sainthood

The life of a woman who cleared the canonisation hurdle was described by the Pope at the ceremony in St. Peter's, Rome, as an example of how one could be a saint in everyday life. But the elevation to sainthood of Canadian-born Marguerite d'Youville has angered the country's black and Indian citizens.

Marguerite d'Youville founded the Sisters of Charity (known as the Grey Nuns), an order which is still active in many parts of the world. However, her reputation for charitable works is tarnished by her ownership of and trading in slaves.

Franz Voltaire, director of the Asian Caribbean and Afro Canadian Information Centre, said: "Our ancestors were her slaves. It is hard to think of her as a saint."

Historian Marcel Trudel said Marguerite d'Youville inherited a number of slaves from her husband. She bought and sold others, once advertising an 11-year-old boy for sale in the Montreal public market. Slaves worked her two farms and a hospital.

Mr Trudel says that as slavery was legal at the time, there is no reason why Marguerite d'Youville should not be canonised. Others will take the view that the saintly Marguerite should have condemned an iniquitous law rather than taking advantage of it.

For centuries the Catholic Church and Protestant missionary societies owned slaves. George Whitefield, the Methodist leader, ran his South American plantation on slave labour. He bequeathed some of his human property to the exceedingly pious, chapel-building Countess of Huntingdon.

Bigots Show Their Clause

TERRY SANDERSON

"There must be no discrimination because of a defendant's race, nationality, standing in the community or any other reason" as far as the administration of justice is concerned, said the Government in its introduction to the White Paper on the Criminal Justice Bill. Noble words — and, indeed, in any democracy worth its salt all men must be equal before the law.

Unfortunately these grand sentiments turned out to be hollow cant. When it was published, the Criminal Justice Bill discriminated quite disgracefully against one minority in the community — homosexuals. In the by now notorious Section 25 of the Bill it was proposed that several consenting homosexual activities should be upgraded to the status of "serious offences" which could result in heavier fines and even imprisonment.

Of the five gay offences included in Clause 25, three of them — indecency, procuration and solicitation — almost invariably involve consensual, victimless behaviour (not even necessarily sex acts) between men.

The gay community were quick to recognise the horrendous implications of this proposed new legislation: overnight minor gay sexual misdemeanours would become serious sex crimes, attracting punitive prison terms for persistent offenders. A large-scale campaign was launched and the Government eventually bowed to pressure and agreed to several amendments. At the time of writing it is not clear how much difference these amendments will make to the ultimate effect of the law, but the campaign continues.

This new attempt to recriminalise consenting homosexual acts is seen as part of a general increase in intolerance of gay people in this country and spearheaded by a Government apparently still manipulated by Right-wing religious pressure groups. Recent events have pointed out quite clearly that, contrary to popular opinion, the 1967 Sexual Offences Act did not "legalise homosexuality." Indeed, according to Home Office figures uncovered by gay activist Peter Tatchell, 102 gay men were imprisoned in 1989 (the last year for which figures are available) for consenting homosexual activity, more than in the 1950s when homosexuality was completely illegal. The distinguished human rights barrister Peter Ashman says of the Criminal Justice Bill: "It gives carte blanche to the judiciary. It is possible to imagine that in certain parts of the country judges might consider that sex in a public

lavatory constituted a serious sexual offence." Whereas at the moment men caught in such activities are generally fined, it is possible that they will be imprisoned.

Many people in the gay community see the Bill as the Government's seal of approval on the police's recent crackdown on gay sex. From 1988 to 1989 there was a 51 per cent increase in the number of convictions for gay sex, soliciting and procuring.

Peter Tatchell estimates that if Clause 25 is not radically amended, within five years 10,000 gay and bisexual men will face the prospect of tougher sentences for consenting behaviour. That's 10,000 lives blighted or even totally ruined because the people charged happened to want to love someone of the same sex.

The human rights implications of Clause 25 are too terrible to contemplate. The persecution in which the police are presently engaged will escalate alarmingly; their self-appointed role as the nation's moral enforcers will be given new impetus. If they have a mind to they can stand up at the Magistrates Court and object to licences being granted to gay pubs and clubs on the grounds that such establishments would be procuring men to have sex together. And, because of the personal advertisements they carry, gay magazines could be persecuted on the same basis. And gay men who appear in court and do not have the "correct" attitudes to their "crimes" (that is to say, if they have a positive view of their sexuality instead of a shameful and contrite one) could end up being subjected to aversion therapy and other cruel "treatments" — as happened in the 1950s.

As with Clause 28 exactly two years earlier, the Government maintains that it does not intend with this new legislation to discriminate specifically against homosexuals. This is patently untrue.

This Government must not be allowed to turn the clock back to the days when homosexuals were utter pariahs and outcasts. In the years since the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, homosexuals have shown themselves to be simply regular members of society, with all the virtues and vices shared by everyone else. They must not be demonised once again. The totally unnecessary misery that such persecution engenders has no place in a civilized country.

At a meeting in London on 4 March, the Humanist Peace Council voted to affiliate to the National Peace Council.

(Belief in Prayer)

know of several people whose childhood was blighted by fear of hell. Christianity is not a religion to turn to for consolation, unless one looks at it with tunnel vision.

Yet some Christians apparently find no difficulty in believing that there is a loving God who hears and answers prayer. Other would-be believers are not so lucky. They write letters to the religious press reporting that when they attempt to pray they feel they are talking to thin air. I have read numbers of letters, looking for help in establishing a sense of the reality of God. The replies given tend to recommend techniques of auto-suggestion, but to me far and away the most plausible explanation for these feelings is, that there indeed, is no one there.

Nevertheless, there is an inclination to attach a certain amount of blame to doubt, and atheists are often accused of "hardening their hearts" against acceptance of "The Truth". Doesn't it occur to the faithful who level such accusations, that if God did exist the person to convince unbelievers of his reality is God himself? So if he exists, why doesn't he do this? Christians may reply that faith in God is a virtue, but they do not explain how believing in something which does not seem to be true is virtuous (and even they don't claim that any belief whatsoever is virtuous, only those they specify). Furthermore, belief as a feeling of conviction is not under the conscious control of the individual; so, being involuntary, how can it be virtuous? Finally, what is blameworthy about refusing to accept completely unsubstantiated assertions, instead of reasoned argument?

Christians, especially preachers, often refer to money or status or sex as "gods" for some people. In the case of atheists, however, Christians seem to think that science has become more elevated still, set above criticism like an object of worship (which would be an extremely unscientific attitude to adopt). In fact, respect for science and the scientific method is no more equivalent to worship than the respect one would accord to the investigations and conclusions of an honest detective who had discovered what appeared to be overwhelming evidence in a case, but was prepared to revise his ideas if contradictory evidence came to light. Scientific method, nevertheless, has to be the most satisfactory way of ascertaining the nature of the world and the universe, even though its conclusions are always to some extent provisional because, if properly pursued, it takes account of all the known observations and experiments, formulating hypotheses

which are openly presented for discussion, corroboration or falsification by others (except where political or commercial secrecy intervenes).

As a result of scientific investigation a picture of the evolution of the universe, the solar system and of living things is beginning to take shape which is both fascinating and coherent (despite certain areas of controversy). Different religions, on the other hand, make jumbled and contradictory assertions about these matters, based only on their separate "revelations".

In the sphere of biological evolution, the idea of natural selection acting on accidental change may not meet the human desire for "ultimate purpose". But it is astonishing and marvellous to contemplate, besides providing a far more satisfactory explanation of the existence of widespread and capricious suffering than the idea of deliberate creation. Who could imagine an almighty and benign Creator intentionally devising the common cold, let alone rabies, or tape worms or plagues of locusts? It is clear that the whole economy of the natural world operates by over-production and the death of multitudes of immature offspring (including human offspring, unless measures of birth control on the one hand, and death control on the other, have successfully intervened).

Although atheism is not a creed in any sense, since it merely involves disbelieving in something which clearly cannot be the case (the many discordant religious ideas themselves give the lie to their veracity — they can't all be true), quite a number of atheists, for reasons that are emotional as well as rational, subscribe to certain political creeds (eg Marxism, Anarchism, etc). On the other hand, one is hardly espousing a creed by considering, as most atheists do, along with large numbers of fellow human beings, that a lot of the findings of science are likely to approximate to the truth, providing one recognises that these findings are open to revision and modification in the light of new evidence.

Roman Catholic authorities in Canada are bracing themselves for a major scandal which is certain to inflict serious damage on the church. The Ontario Provincial Police have filed 149 charges against 19 members and former members of the Brothers of the Christian Schools who ran St. Joseph's Training School for boys. Charges include gross indecency, indecent assault, sodomy and assault causing grievous bodily harm. The alleged offences took place during the period 1941 to 1972.

Freethinker Fund

An evangelical weekly has announced that the New English Orchestra is seeking to recruit "up to 60 brass-playing Christians for a performance of "A Festival of Trumpets." It should not be too difficult; Christians are adept at blowing their trumpet and no doubt will do so with greater vigour during the Decade of Evangelism. In the opinion of one friendly religious critic, *The Freethinker* "functions as the still, small voice that says 'bosh.'" It is important that its and other voices for rationalism are not drowned in the surge of pious evangelical cackle.

For nearly 110 years *The Freethinker* has been speaking out against Christian bosh, whether it emanates from Rome, Canterbury or the barmy Jesus Army. And in defiance of the "racist" slur, it has warned against the Islamic menace. Donations to the Fund enable *The Freethinker* to meet its financial commitments. The first list of contributors for 1991 is given below.

N. Barr, K.S. Clair, J.E. Dyke, R.S. Eagle, H.G. Easton, V. Gibson, A.J. Hoyle, G.W. Knight, M.V. Lea, G. Miller, P.T. Murray and W. Turner, £1 each; E. Crosswell, £1.60; A.M. Ashton, F. Evans, O. Kaplan von Lang, J. Theobald and I Young, £2 each; J. Marsh, £2.40; R.C. Baxter and M. O'Brien, £2.50 each; R.J. Beale, R.J. Orr, A.V. Perries and M. Perkins, £3 each; P. Prince, £4.40; J. Ainsworth, D. Baker, R.D. Birrell, R. Brown, C.M. Burnside, M.J. Carr, B. Cattermole, B.M. Chatfield, R. Chessman, B. Everest, J.K. Evers, D. Flint, O. Ford, K.R. Gill, C.R. Glaser, W.C. Hall, R.G. Hayne, A.P. Hodges, C. Honeywell, W. Horrocks, J.M. Joseph, J. Lippitt, J. Lloyd-Lewis, H. Madoc-Jones, T.E. Mapp, V. Mitchell, A.W. Nunn, P. O'Hara, F.T. Pamphilon, J. Rapley, A. Stern, G. Strange, H. Taylor, N. Toon, M.F. Villiers-Stuart, G. Walker, A. Woods and P.D. Wrightson, £5 each; A. Negus, £6; C.L.S. Howard, £7.50; J. Hazelhurst, £8; D. Bressan, £9.40; D. Baxter, J.T. Morrison, V.S. Petheram, S.J. Sanders and K.R. Wrightson, £10 each; J. Bleeker, £14; B. Aubrey, P. Barbour, A.C. Charles and I.A. Williams, £15 each; Anonymous, £19; F.B. Edwards, G.L.J. Lucas and J.E. Rupp, £20 each; Anonymous and W. Donovan, £25 each; W. Scott, £50; J. Dahlby \$17; H.G. Shapiro, \$20.

Total for January: £571.30 and \$37.

Newspaper reports are always required by *The Freethinker*. The source and date should be clearly marked and the clippings sent without delay to The Editor, *The Freethinker*, 117 Spring-vale Road, Walkley, Sheffield, S6 3NT.

EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. New Venture Theatre Club, Bedford Place (off Western Road), Brighton. Sunday, 7 April, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. George Mephram: Why Humanists Should be Concerned About Animal Rights.

Edinburgh Humanist Group. Programme of forum meetings obtainable from the Secretary, 2 Savile Terrace, Edinburgh, EH9 3AD, telephone 031 667 8389.

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Meetings on the second Friday of the month at 7.30 pm.

Glasgow Humanist Society. Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Mrs Marguerite Morrow, 32 Pollock Road, Glasgow, G61 2NJ, telephone 041-942 0129.

The Humanist Society of Scotland. The Cowane Centre, Stirling. Saturday, 20 April, 10 am - 5 pm. Annual Conference. Speaker: Nigel Dower (Aberdeen University). Subject: International Ethics. Details obtainable from Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock KA3 2JD, telephone 0563-26710.

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, London SE6. Thursday, 28 March, 8 pm. David Porter: A Personal Odyssey Through Religion, Psychology and Astrology.

Norwich Humanist Group. Martineau Hall, 21a Colegate, Norwich. Thursday, 18 April, 7.30 pm. Neil Blewitt: The History of *The Freethinker* (founded 1881).

Preston and District Humanist Group. Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Georgina Coupland, telephone (0772) 769829.

Sutton Humanist Group. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, 10 April 7.30 pm for 8 pm. John Dodwell: The Developing Role of the United Nations.

National Secular Society

ANNUAL DINNER

Speakers include

BARRY MORSE
COLIN McCALL
BARBARA SMOKER

The Bonnington Hotel, London
(Southampton Row,
near Holborn Underground)

Saturday, 13 April, 6.30 pm for 7 pm

Tickets £17.50. Vegetarians catered for
(advance notice essential)

NSS, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL,
telephone 01-272 1266

Arranged Marriage Recipe for Disaster

"If the children who have grown up here are Westernised, parents should leave their children to find their own way", declared Mohammed Latif, president of Middlesborough Islamic Society, after the trial of 24-year-old Talib Hussain for the horrific murder of his wife, Nusrat.

"Families should not force their children into marriages, they are going to spoil their lives", Mr Latif added.

Teesside Crown Court heard how Talib Hussain tied his 21-year-old wife to a bed, doused her with paraffin and set her on fire. She died from asphyxia and burns.

The Hussains' marriage was arranged four years ago and took place in Pakistan. Under Islamic law he had first claim on her as she was his father's brother's daughter. Islamic marriages are often based on property and cousins marry in order to keep land and other assets in the family. If marriages are between people of unequal social position, usually it is the husband who is poorer as women are not so highly regarded in Islamic countries.

Dowries are exchanged, but the abuse of the practice has become so serious that the Government

of India has passed a law making it illegal for either party to demand a dowry. This law is aimed at ending "dowry deaths" — the killing of brides by husbands who wanted their dowry but not marriage. In New Delhi alone, it is estimated that 690 such killings took place in one year.

Before committing what Mr Justice Waite described as "a planned and violent murder", Hussain took out three insurance policies on his wife and stood to gain £171,000. He was jailed for life.

Advising parents not to push their sons and daughters into a marriage they do not wish, the president of Middlesborough Islamic Society said less than a quarter of such marriages work. Arranged marriages between a man who grew up in an Islamic country and a girl brought up in Britain are faced with difficulties.

"Here girls are free to do what they want", Mr Latif added.

"He will not understand the freedom she has grown up with.

"If a woman is divorced, people think she is not a good wife. In British law a woman can divorce her husband. But not in our Islamic law. And that comes first."

Abigail Will Not Pledge "Duty to God"

Ten-year-old Abigail Wright has been barred from joining the Perranporth, Cornwall, Girl Guides. Although keen to join the Guides, Abigail would not promise "I will do my best to do my duty to God." She was asked to stand aside as other girls were enrolled.

Abigail said: "I told the Guider I was not sure about a God and was not happy about making a promise I could not keep."

Abigail's parents are members of the British Humanist Association. Her mother, Mrs Sarah Wright, said: "It is rather incredible that ten-year-olds are supposed to have a definite opinion about this since a great many adults express doubts.

"Abigail asked me whether she should make a promise if she could not keep it. It would be naive to say she has not been influenced by us, but she asks questions and we answer them.

"If Abigail said she wanted to make the promise

it would have been fine by us."

Marjorie Hayter, general secretary of the Girl Guides' Association, said the promise is fundamental to the organisation.

"A ten-year-old girl will have one idea of duty to God which may change. We are talking about a God of a personal nature which is not necessarily the Christian God", said Miss Hayter.

After protests at county and national level were rejected, an appeal was made to Princess Margaret, president of the Girl Guides. A secretary replied that the Princess hoped Abigail would change her mind.

Letters of support for Abigail's stand have been received from Guides, parents — and clergymen.

Here is a lesson for adult unbelievers who do not exercise their right to affirm in court and in other ways to the Christian line. They should take a leaf out of Abigail Wright's book.