

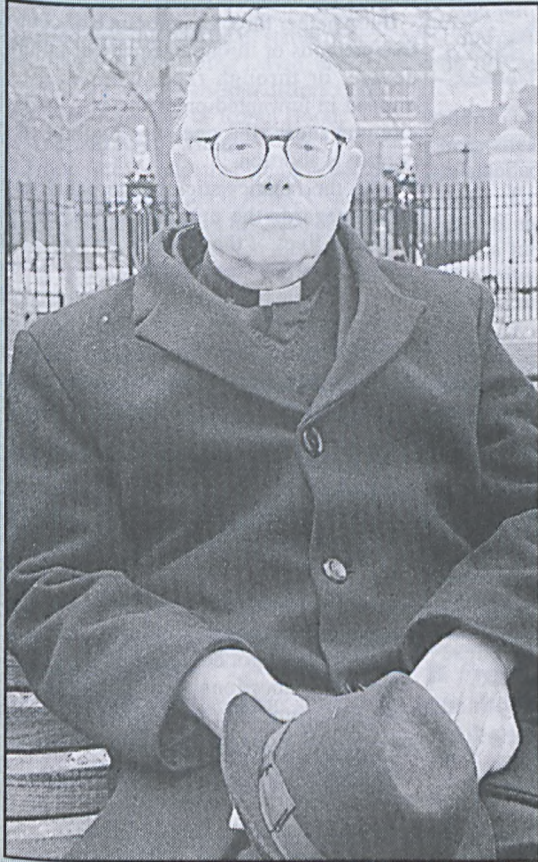
Secular  
Humanist  
monthly

# Free thinker

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

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## Jerks for Jesus on rampage

**A**RSON, intimidation, emotional blackmail, street violence – even a killing. Christian anti-abortion forces – Jerks for Jesus, as they are known in the USA – have been guilty of all these in their campaign against recognition of a woman’s right to control her own body.

Roman Catholics and their weird bedfellows of the Protestant fundamentalist right have confined their worst excesses to the United States – so far.

But they are already beginning to export to the UK the stunning viciousness of their fight to uphold an archaic papal doctrine which operates behind the smokescreen of the “right to life.”

There are limits to this “right,” however. “Abortion doctors should be put on trial and punished, like at Nuremburg,” said Californian campaigner Wendy Wright. “Yes, I do mean hanged.”

And Father James Morrow, the Scottish activist who in 1990 received a three-month suspended sentence for assaulting the pregnant manager of an abortion clinic, admitted that “in principle” he accepts capital punishment and “just wars.”

● *God speaks to Morrow? Father James Morrow, who is thought never to have given birth, believes women are not necessarily the best judges on abortion: “They don’t know how they are going to feel in future.”*

*(Picture: Piers Cavendish, Impact)*

# FATHER KNOWS BEST!

● Turn to Page 50



# Jerks for Jesus on rampage

← From Page 49

Wendy Wright helps to run a paramilitary style camp for Operation Rescue's volunteers, where they are taught how to intercept women on their way to clinics and persuade, frighten or humiliate them into changing their minds. They can trace car number plates, jam phones, seal off buildings, break police lines. And they are coming to Britain in the autumn.

Keith Tucci, Operation Rescue's executive director, scorns rival group Rescue America, whose leader, Don Treshman, was arrested after a demonstration at the International Planned Parenthood Federation in Regent's Park: "Rescue America? That's just one or two people... We're a national organisation... I'm coming to Britain in the fall, probably in September... We're going to meet with church groups there and organise resistance to the holocaust."

After the killing of Dr David Gunn during a Florida anti-abortion blockade in March, clinics there have installed surveillance cameras. They employ armed guards and wear bullet-

proof vests.

Staff receive death threats. "Wanted" posters for clinic doctors are issued. There is interference with patients, videotaping of clinic workers' homes and families, pickets, arson attacks. There were 200 acts of violence against US clinics during 1992. One hero broke into a school and stuck pictures of aborted foetuses in all the children's lockers.

As for what might happen here, Father Morrow has warned: "There is a higher law than Queen and country... *Thou shalt not kill...* I prefer to be at home than in prison, but... whatever the Lord happens to arrange, I'll go along with it."

After 16 demonstrators (12 of them Americans, Russians and Puerto Ricans) had blocked the paths of tearful women patients at a Birmingham clinic on April 3, Don Treshman made it clear that he regards British anti-abortionists as a feeble bunch, but a new breed of British militants "will be trained in US organisational methods and taught what to do at demonstrations."

At the demo, eight people were arrested – including Morrow, whose other claim to fame is that he wants to prosecute the doctor who tended Hillsborough victim Tony Bland.

Victoria Merrin, from the targeted clinic, said some patients had been turned away, but had since had their operations rescheduled.

She added: "The protesters... have left several patients very upset. But in the long term they have achieved nothing. It is hard enough for these women making up their minds to go through the ordeal of an abortion. These demonstrators have made it more traumatic."

Insiders at the International Planned Parenthood Federation note that only a tiny part (perhaps one per cent) of their time and resources is taken up in abortion-related activity: the rest is concerned with giving advice on HIV-AIDS, sexually-transmitted diseases and contraception.

But this is in itself enough to spark the ire of Morrow, who, says the *Independent on Sunday*, "seems to think that a woman's destiny lies mainly in a bovine state of permanent reproduction."

And therein lies the root of the Church's opposition to abortion and contraception. Women were to be child-raisers and domestics for men. To maintain their inferior status, church and state banned them from the available methods of birth control.

The struggle of women for control over their own bodies through contraception saw Charles Bradlaugh, Annie Besant and our own National Secular Society playing the leading role in Britain.

But papal decrees still forbid RC women to resort to these methods. They are told to rely on the unreliable "rhythm" system. However, more than two-thirds of married Catholic women practise the banned methods, according to a US National Fertility Study, so it may be that current anti-abortion terrorism masks

acceptance of defeat on the family planning front with a desperate battle at what must be the final frontier.

The demand for abortion rights is not advanced because women prefer abortions: "We spend much our time trying to prevent abortion by advising on contraception," an officer of the International Planned Parenthood Federation told *The Freethinker* (she also noted that middle-class males were leading the demonstrations).

But whether through ignorance of contraceptive methods or through accidental failure of a device, or through rape, women are often trapped in unwanted pregnancies. Under these circumstances, the one sure method of birth control is abortion.

Still, the fanatics stick to the papal doctrine which regards the unborn as "sacred" lives, while the lives of the mothers are expendable.

Why? Do they fear that if women gain control over their bodies, they will go on to fight for full control over their minds and lives – and shed the superstitions, fears, and prejudices pumped into them over centuries of patriarchal rule to keep them in subjection, mere receptacles for producing babies?

When Pope Paul VI said in 1972 that the church stand against abortion "has not changed and will never change," he was lying. Infallibly, of course!

Church Fathers Jerome, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas believed that a male foetus received its soul 40 days after conception, and a female foetus got hers after 80 days.

To them, abortions were permissible for a male foetus until the 40th day after conception and until the 80th day for a female foetus!

**In 1140 Pope Gratian announced: "He is not a murderer who brings about an abortion before the soul is in the body."**

Over the centuries, infallible minds were changed more often than socks, but in 1930, Pius XI in his infamous encyclical on Christian Marriage denounced all abortion as murder, and in 1972 Paul VI confirmed that woman has no right to abortion – even to save her life. That is still Vatican policy.

The Church damned the notion of women's sexual equality, and her sexual needs, as evil to make it easier to force them to accept status as chattels, childbearers, and household drudges. Indeed, the reporter who interviewed Morrow for the *Independent on Sunday* concluded that His Reverence believes that babies "solve unemployment by taking women out of the workforce."

So why are some women out there behind the Jerks for Jesus? Chapman Cohen, a great Editor of *The Freethinker*, had the answer: "...Christianity not only makes men and women servile, it has the supreme art of teaching them to love their chains."

Peter Brearey

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### CONTENTS

Up Front:	Page 51
Bright literary star	Page 53
Salute to HJB	Page 54
'Stone bonking barmy'	Page 55
Need for green scepticism	Page 56
What's On	Page 58
Down to Earth: Bill McIlroy	Page 59
Blast from the past	Page 60
You're telling us! Letters	Page 61
Last Word	Page 64

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# UP FRONT

with the Editor

## We told you so!

FLEET Street (as was) blew cool last month over a story which has profound implications for every Christian, every Moslem, every Jew.

A 15-year study of archaeological evidence has concluded that the historical status of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, King David, and King Solomon in all his wisdom differs in no noticeable way from that of Robin Hood, William Tell and King Arthur.

When a dog bites a man that is not news, but when a man bites a dog that is news, Charles Anderson Dana laid down in his *New York Sun*, 1882. Plainly, a story which kicks religion's very legs out from under it falls into the ho-hum, dog-bites-man category, so far as our hacks are concerned.

A happy exception is *The Independent on Sunday* archaeology correspondent David Keys who, on March 28, reported that the study — by Professor Thomas Thompson, one of the world's foremost authorities on biblical archaeology — says that the first 10 books of the Old Testament "are almost certainly fiction, written between 500 and 1,500 years after the events they purport to describe."

Professor Thompson's claims, outlined in a new book, *The Early History of the Israelite People*, are being taken seriously by scholars, says David Keys.

Freethinkers have for generations stressed the mythological nature of the OT's stories — and therefore the (to say the least) shaky foundations of the Christian and Moslem beliefs which were built upon them.

But here we have somebody respectable making similar points, so the British Museum's leading expert on the archaeology of the Holy Land, Jonathan Tubbs, takes the matter seriously enough to tell David Keys: "Professor Thompson may well be right in many of his arguments. His book is a work of tremendous scholarship. He has been meticulous in his research, and brave in expressing what many of us have thought intuitively for a long time but have been reticent in saying."

Professor Thompson — just sacked from Milwaukee's Marquette University — says there is a complete absence of archaeological and historical evidence for many events portrayed in the Bible.



POOR  
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RUSH

■ *From bullrush to bum's rush! Poor old Moses never existed, according to Professor Thomas Thompson (see my first story), and for saying so he has been told that his contract will not be renewed at the Jesuit-run Marquette University in Milwaukee.*

■ *A University spokesman said: "When it comes to giving a long-term commitment to a member of faculty staff, we want to be sure that the person's teaching reflects, as appropriate, the Catholic nature of the institution."*

■ *Thompson, a practising Catholic, has now been appointed Professor of Old Testament Studies at Copenhagen University.*

■ *My illustration, The Finger of God, appeared in The Freethinker 111 years ago with the captions, from Exodus: "And the Lord said unto Moses...I will write upon these tables...Two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God."*

Promised Land never took place.

David Keys writes: "Excavations have found no trace of a settled population around Judea and Jerusalem during the 10th century BC, when the Kingdom of David and Solomon was supposed to have flourished. A community that could have supported a kingdom did not form in Judea until at least a century later, Professor Thompson said. Jerusalem did not become a large and politically influential city until about 650 BC."

Professor Thompson insists: "It is out of the question that Saul, David, and Solomon, as described as kings in the Bible, could have existed. I think the biblical accounts are won-

derful stories, invented at the time when Jerusalem was part of the Persian Empire in the 5th Century BC."

The Israelite nation, he believes, was a creation of the Persian Empire and was formed around 450 BC. But the people who were moved to Jerusalem at that time were not the descendants of those who had been deported from the city after the Babylonian capture in 586 BC. They were descendants of Syrian, Philistine, Phoenician, Judean, and other peoples who had also been forcibly deported to Babylon.

## Promises, promises

THE inevitable conclusion, he argues, is that the Israelite exile in Egypt, the Exodus and the Israelite conquest of the

# UP FRONT

with the Editor

## From Page 51

The first temple to Yahweh in Jerusalem was built at the instigation of the Persians, also in 450 BC — 500 years after the date suggested by the Bible. Before then, the main centre for the worship of Yahweh was in Samaria but, according to Professor Thompson, the religion had been in decline for several centuries. The Persian motive was to build up Jerusalem, with its newly-planted population, as a city of regional importance and to reduce Samaria's standing. It was the Persian empire's practice to build temples to important regional deities.

The question posed for me by the article is: how much intellectual pounding of this sort will the credulous take before they throw in the theological towel?

Lots, lots more, it seems, for David Keys reports: "Professor Thompson's thesis was taken calmly...by leading spokesmen for Judaism. Rabbi Stephen Howard, chairman of the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues Rabbinic Conference, said: 'The Bible was written to explore the human relationship with God, not primarily as a history book. It is the wisdom, not the historicity, of the Bible which is of prime importance.'

"Rabbi Julian Jacobs, a member of Chief Rabbi's cabinet, said: 'The Bible, being of divine origin, can stand on its own feet and does not require supportive evidence.'

"But the book — which is published by E J Brill in Leiden, the Netherlands — will offend some religious groups. The Reverend Clive Calver, general director of the Evangelical Alliance, which claims 1.2 million supporters, said it was the beginning of 'a new phase in attacks upon the authenticity of scripture.'"

We can but hope...

## Smoker on Sunday

TALKING of stories which fail to inspire the media...

National Secular Society President Barbara Smoker revealed in last month's *Freethinker* how fundamentalist Moslems block reasoned debate of religion in some universities. Her report was sent to all the major media outlets — which, almost uniformly, didn't want to know. Could it be that journalists are as nervous as MPs of criticising certain ideas and actions, however obnoxious, lest they be tarred with the "racist" brush?

To its credit, Radio Four's *Sunday* religious programme did take up the story. Barbara was given but little time and she had to share the spot with a Moslem who quite failed to address the matter in hand. But she is adept at combat in restricted spaces and made useful

points about the blasphemy laws and denominational schools (new readers start here: she is agin both).

The programme sparked a number of letters to Barbara — and one to the *Sunday* programme from Daniel O'Hara: "I write to protest against Alison Hilliard's description of Barbara Smoker as a 'self-appointed scourge of Christianity...' on your programme today. I have never heard you describe Mary Whitehouse as a 'self-appointed busybody' nor even David Koresh as a 'self-appointed Messiah,' though unlike those two persons Barbara Smoker is not the founder of the organisation, the National Secular Society, which she heads. The NSS was founded by Charles Bradlaugh in 1866, and Ms Smoker is the eighth President of the Society. Furthermore, she submits herself to re-election every year at the Society's AGM: I doubt if such can be said of Mrs Whitehouse or Mr Koresh.

"The description of anyone as 'self-appointed' suggests an upstart, an egotist concerned only with promoting his or her own personal views. In the case of Ms Smoker, the description is not only gratuitously insulting, it is also inaccurate. The principles of secularism are both long-established and rationally based. It is not a cranky view of a bizarre sect. Your insinuations to the contrary are not appreciated by the many thoughtful secularists who listen to your programme."

## In a class of their own?

BARBARA'S recent warnings, on the wireless and elsewhere, about Moslem determination to acquire state-financed denominational schools, were underlined in *The Guardian* on March 23.

The article revealed that there are 1,875 Church of England voluntary-aided schools; 1,817 schools which receive taxpayers' money to teach the Roman Catholic view of things; 17 Jewish and four Methodist state-aided establishments. Such schools receive 85 per cent of their building costs from the Government and all running costs from the local authority. Naturally, the Moslems, with 250,000 schoolchildren in the UK, want to hit this kind of paydirt — and fast. They do have 28 private schools, with 2,500 pupils, but they have no voluntary-aided schools, yet. They are also unhappy about their children having Christianity forced upon them in the classroom.

In its predictably sympathetic piece, *The Guardian* reported Dr Syed Pasha, secretary of the UK Moslems' National Education Council, as seeking a situation in which Islam is taught to Moslem children in state schools

by state-funded Moslem teachers.

In fact, Education Secretary John Patten is currently considering if the Islamia Primary School in Brent should receive state funding. The establishment operates sex-segregated PE lessons, but it does teach Darwin's theory of evolution.

"But we present it as a theory, not a fact — because it's not true," Principal Dr Azam Baig told *The Independent on Sunday* (April 4). "The Lord created man and his wife, and we came from there..."

Back in *The Guardian* article, Moeen Yaseen, of the Moslem Education Forum, was quoted, too: "There are a lot of good things in British society but there is a moral and spiritual vacuum because it is a secular society...Moslem schools are at the forefront in alerting the nation about the path it must take."

Moeen doesn't say if this "path" meanders along Lumb Lane, Bradford, where Asians have displaced whites and West Indians as the principal drugs-dealers and pimps (BBC Panorama, *Underclass in Purdah*, March 29), but he does add: "Part of the British establishment hoodwinks itself into thinking this is a white, Anglo-Saxon, Christian country. It will be a long-term battle to remove the inequalities."

But it *needn't* be "a long-term battle" to remove religious inequalities in schools. All we need to do is to scrap the entire concept of the state-funded denominational school and expunge religious education from the curriculum. Keeping religion in its proper place — chapel, church, mosque, synagogue, museum, mental hospital — would put all youngsters on an equal footing at school.

## We saw it coming

DAVID TRIBE predicted, back in 1970: "Already there are signs that some Moslems are restive and are asking pointedly why, if there are maintained Catholic schools and Anglican schools and Methodist schools and Jewish schools, there are no maintained Islamic schools. If this argument proves irresistible, and they and other Oriental religious schools were to be established, at once we would have the concomitant establishment of racial and colour segregation on the American or South African pattern." *The Cost of Church Schools*, National Secular Society, 1970.

There is sad irony in the fact that, as, slowly and painfully, the USA and even South Africa move towards integration, certain of our own minorities are actually demanding educational apartheid.

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# Bright literary star of freethought

ONE can hardly overestimate *The City of Dreadful Night*, wrote Herman Melville, "massive and mighty as it is – its gloom and its sublimity. The confronting sphinx and angel – where shall we go to match them?"

Inevitably, when we think of James Thomson (BV) we think of his greatest poem but, in *Places of the Mind*, another Scottish poet, Tom Leonard, reminds us that BV contributed prose and poetry to secularist publications for more than 20 years "and many would hold his memory as that of the movement's brightest if not only literary star."

James Thomson was born in Port Glasgow in 1834, the first son of a dressmaker and a merchant seaman. The family moved to London in 1840 and, when his mother died in 1843, James was taken into the Caledonian Asylum, a London Scottish orphanage.

He later entered the Royal Military Asylum, Chelsea, on an army training course, and he was a garrison schoolmaster's assistant in Ballincollig, Ireland, when he met and became friends with Private Charles Bradlaugh of the 7th Dragoon Guards. Their friendship lasted for 25 years, and Thomson's first published poem appeared in the *Investigator*, "the only British journal that advocates atheism," on which Bradlaugh worked and which he later edited.

Bradlaugh was then, in 1858, writing as "Iconoclast" and, to distinguish him from his namesake, author of *The Seasons*, Thomson took as his pseudonym Bysshe Vanolis – Bysshe as a tribute to Shelley and Vanolis an anagram of the name of the German poet Novalis (itself a pseudonym). *Investigator* readers would have approved the reference to Shelley, Tom Leonard remarks, but hardly that to the somewhat mystical Novalis.

Not content with teaching others, the army schoolmaster taught himself German, to which he later added French and Italian (primarily to read Dante in the original), and published many translations from all three languages for the benefit of his freethought readers.

Whether the army discovered his association with Bradlaugh or considered him too much of an upstart, or whether he had been charged more than once for drinking offences, is not clear, but Thomson was court-martialled and "discharged with disgrace" a few weeks short of his 28th birthday.

He moved in with the Bradlaugh family, above the offices of Samuel Levenson, a lawyer to whom Bradlaugh was articled. A few weeks later Thomson joined the firm as a clerk.

He also began weekly contributions to Bradlaugh's *National Reformer*: among the poetry an elegy for Elizabeth Barrett Browning and some translations from Heine; in prose, an essay on "The Established Church: its Real as Distinct from its Apparent Strength," which argued that a true Christian

**Places of the Mind: The Life and Work of James Thomson (BV) by Tom Leonard, Jonathan Cape, £23.00. Review: Colin McCall.**



must believe in the truth of the Bible, and asked: "How many of such are there? I have known perhaps half-a-dozen."

So, as Tom Leonard says, "he began the criticism which in a few years' time was to become the basis for regular biting satire," such as "The Story of a Famous Old Jewish Firm," with God the Father as managing director (reprinted by G W Foote in *Satires and Profanities*).

Thomson acknowledged that the *National Reformer* gave him the opportunity to write "what I like how I like; and I know not another periodical in Britain which would give me the same liberty or license."

There is no doubt that he owed a great deal to Bradlaugh, but Thomson was a great literary asset. A list of references to 14 articles published between September, 1865, and December, 1867, takes up no less than 42 lines in Tom Leonard's notes.

An 1874 essay on Walt Whitman, "indisputably the greatest native voice yet heard from America," spread over six issues, and was followed by a withering eight-part criticism of John Stuart Mill's unwillingness to declare his unbelief. Thomson could "understand a heretic keeping quiet, who does not set himself up as a teacher or leader...But I do not understand how one who believes in the improvability of mankind, and the manifold harmfulness of religion, a Liberal leader and teacher, a man of intellect, public spirit, and intense moral convictions, can conceal his heresy rather than 'risk the loss of his means of subsistence.'"

It was also in 1874, between March 22 and May 17, that the *National Reformer* carried *The City of Dreadful Night*. It is, as the title implies, a deeply pessimistic work, written "not for the hopeful young, Or those who deem their happiness of worth," nor for "pious spirits with a God above them To sanctify and glorify and love them," but one for whom "faith and hope are dead, and who would die."

"There may or may not be beings superior to us," Thomson wrote in one of his notebooks. "But I cannot think so ill of any possible supreme being as to accuse him of the guilt and folly of the voluntary creation of such a world and of such lives as ours. I cannot accuse a possible Devil of this, much less a possible God."

But not all was misery. Thomson enjoyed many things in life – literature, music, conver-

sation and walking among them. And after a business trip to America, he told friends: "When travelling about I always find myself immensely better than when confined to one place. With money I should never have a home, but be always going to and fro on the earth..." Unfortunately, money was always scarce.

In 1875, Thomson started writing for *Cope's Tobacco Plant* where, again, he was given plenty of space to display his wide-ranging literary interests as well as his critical faculties. A splendid example of the latter was a review of a Burns biography by John Shairp, who was Principal of St Andrews University and Professor of Poetry at Oxford, but wrote "with the stark dogmatic narrowness of some provincial Calvinist"; who "might be one of those Auld Light ministers whom Burns scarified...continually sermonising on the great hearted poet as a Sunday-school teacher might lecture his class on a life which was an awful warning."

Poor, homeless and alcoholic, imprisoned for 14 days in Pentonville, James Thomson became a pitiable figure towards the end. He died on June 4, 1882, and was buried in the same grave as Austin Holyoake, whose secular burial service was read at the graveside. And in a farewell oration, Theodore Wright spoke of "the contrast between the tone of many of his poems and the merry mood which was habitual with him in society."

It is appropriate that Durer's etching "Melencolia" should overshadow Thomson's picture on the jacket of *Places of the Mind*, but freethinkers will find this a celebratory as well as a sympathetic biography of BV.

## ATHEISM, FREETHOUGHT, POLITICS, HISTORY

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## HJB enters his tenth decade

HAROLD Blackham was 90 on March 31. From his "retirement" retreat overlooking the Wye valley, he is still working, more than full-time, as writer, lecturer, charity organiser and much besides.

He is at his typewriter by 7 o'clock every morning, often working on his *magnum opus* – *The Upshot of History* (an ambitious study that revalues our Western cultural tradition).

He is known mainly as the progenitor of modern humanism in this country, as an activist in progressive causes, and as a compassionate counsellor.

In 1944 he founded a quarterly of humanistic philosophy, *The Plain View*, and in 1971 the *Journal of Moral Education*, which acquired an international reputation.

Harold Blackham has authored or edited an astonishingly wide range of publications. To name but a few: *Living as a Humanist*, *Objections to Humanism*, *Six Existential Thinkers*, *The Human Tradition* (arguably his best, opines Barbara Smoker), *Political Discipline in a Free Society*, *Religion in a Modern Society*, the Pelican Special *Humanism and The Fable as Literature*. For Bantam, he compiled an anthology of Existentialist writings, the paperback edition of which sold 150,000 to the US college market.

As with his publications, HJB's contributions to the humanist and freethought movement are too numerous to detail, but mention must be made of his visits to Holland and the USA to canvass support for an international federation of humanist organisations. At a conference in Amsterdam in 1952, the International Humanist and Ethical Union was formed, with consultative status in UNESCO. HJB organised its next Congress, held in London in 1957.

Nine years later, the Ethical Union (of which he had been Chairman) changed its name to the British Humanist Association – and HJB, who had long felt that ethics alone was too narrow for the basis of a cultural movement, had seen a dream come true.

Much earlier in his freethought career, with Bradlaugh Bonner – grandson of Charles Bradlaugh – he organised two London congresses of the World Union of Freethinkers. This former Doncaster Grammar School Divinity master remains a keen member of the National Secular Society and a *Freethinker* contributor.

*A conversation dreamed-up by university lecturer MICHAEL YAFFEY, part of whose work is teaching computer techniques to post-graduate students*



## Religion is RAMmed home

**Editor:** What has a computer buff to say to *The Freethinker*?

**Yaffey:** People often say that the human mind is like a computer.

**Editor:** But a computer can only do what it is programmed to do. Can it be a free thinker? Can you, after working with computers for years, be a free thinker?

**Yaffey:** I've worked with computers, and with people, and with cows. They all have a kind of mind. But only people have religions. I'd say that if you have only worked with people, it is you who are limited, not me.

**Editor:** In what way is a computer like a human brain?

**Yaffey:** It has two kinds of memory: ROM, which is fixed in place and its contents can't be altered by the user, and RAM, which can store anything. By putting various programs and data into the RAM you can make a computer behave in many different ways.

**Editor:** Are you suggesting that humans have ROM and RAM?

**Yaffey:** Yes. Some automatic responses seem to be fixed in us, wired in place in the womb, and then there is the fore-brain which can store all sorts of lifetime experiences and different people behave in different ways accordingly. When a newborn baby cries for food, that's ROM, but when an adult kneels before Allah, that's RAM. There may be more than two levels in the structure of the brain, of course, because of the various steps in evolution of the brain. Actually there are more than two types of memory in a computer, if you want to be accurate about it.

**Editor:** So a human can learn to be a theist or an atheist, like a computer is programmed to be a word-processor or a database?

**Yaffey:** I don't think so. It's true that humans, like computers, have a high ratio of RAM to ROM and so can adopt many different behaviours. But you have to remember that computers are not mammals.

**Editor:** Are you seriously saying that if computers were mammals they would tend to be religious?

**Yaffey:** Yes. If computers had to depend on loving parents for their survival, they would have dependency patterns built in to their ROM like a human baby does. Then you would get a kind of infantile behaviour in the adult computer. It would be difficult to program a computer to go against its built-in ROM commands. It would always act as though it had a protector, some great computer in the sky, to give it orders.

**Editor:** Couldn't you just switch off that command?

**Yaffey:** The ROM can only work reliably, through the infancy period, if it can't be by-passed. If you could switch off the dependency in the new-born, you'd get something like autism. So not many would survive.

**Editor:** That makes you an electronic Freudian, I think.

**Yaffey:** The ROM is always a pain, but it's not all bad. It has seen us through a difficult evolution.

**Editor:** But if you are right about mammalian theism, why are cows not religious too? Don't answer that – we'll leave it for another time.

It's not only the Christian and Moslem fundamentalists who are

# 'STONE BONKING BARMY'

discovers Colin McCall

ON FEBRUARY 24, Barnet Council turned down a plan for an eruv. A what? You may well ask! It's certainly the first time I've heard the word, though I'm told there are quite a number in the United States: the White House, for instance, stands in one.

It's an area set up for Orthodox Jews of the United Synagogue to mitigate the restrictions imposed on them by the faith they avow.

The seventh day, you will recall, is the day on which the Lord rested after his six-day labours to create the world and all that dwells therein. So Jews have to keep it holy and do no manner of work etc.

And, as the *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Knowledge* recounts: "With Philo, Aristobulus and the Talmudic writers the Sabbath acquired a mystical quality, so great was the value placed on its strict observance."

The Jewish law even prohibits the carrying of objects out-of-doors on Saturdays, a prohibition extending to handkerchiefs and house keys - which prompts the questions:

*Don't Orthodox Jews ever have colds on the Sabbath? Do they always leave someone at home when they go to the synagogue, a servant perhaps or an au pair, so they don't have to lock the door when they leave?*

Walking sticks, too, are banned, and no prams or push-chairs can be pushed, which is hard lines on Orthodox mothers and elderly people.

But, with typical religious deviousness, those who want an eruv cite these self-imposed restrictions pitifully. Isn't it sad to deprive mums with babes and disabled Jews of the chance to join in the collective worship? That's how the case is put and how responsibility for the deprivation is shifted on to the opponent's shoulders.

So what do Barnet's Orthodox Jews want? They want a six square mile eruv with an 11-mile perimeter, which is formed in some places by housing fences, for long stretches of the M1 motorway and a section of the London Underground Northern Line. But in the south of the borough, where roads cause gaps in the boundary, these would be "symbolically closed" by a large number of telegraph-type poles (85 according to *The Guardian*; 110 says *The Independent*) linked by wire.

In its application for an eruv (in which it is supported by the Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks) the United Synagogue is following the American example.

Barry Freundel, Rabbi of Keshet Israel Synagogue in Georgetown, Washington DC, was responsible for setting up the Phillip

Rabinowitz Memorial eruv, which includes the whole of Capitol Hill; and he is reported to have "been to the fore in the construction of tens of eruvs across the US" (*The Guardian*, February 24, 1993).

Freundel, who has offered to help the Barnet eruv committee, argues that "once it is in place people will see that it's harmless." He says, too, that there are other communities in Britain that want their own eruvs."

But "communities" is a misleading word in this context. It isn't communities that want the eruvs - it's a minority Jewish sect that wants communities to set up eruvs purely for that sect's benefit: to relieve it from the Talmudic injunctions it accepts. And it's clear that Barnet isn't the only place which the sect has in its sights.

We may be sure that the argument will always be the same. First the emotional angle: that mothers with infants who can't walk can't go out on the Sabbath because they can't carry their children, and disabled grandparents can't attend the synagogue because their wheelchairs can't be pushed. Then follows the contention that an eruv doesn't interfere with anybody because it's "invisible." To which one might respond - why not leave it invisible and let Jews imagine it's there?

One might. But one might then be accused of anti-semitism, such is the wildly extravagant use of that term today. Indeed, Rabbi Alan Kimche, of the Barnet eruv faction, has even accused his "Jewish" opponents of having "absorbed an anti-semitic way of thinking."

I put the word "Jewish" in inverted commas because this is also loosely used.

Chapman Cohen [Editor of *The Freethinker*, 1915-51] maintained that it could only accurately be applied to a believer in Judaism (which, incidentally, loses 4,000 adherents every year in this country alone), but the idea of distinctiveness may linger on after the notion of a chosen people has been discarded.

And since Hitler, who stole the chosen race myth and turned it against its originators (as well as persecuting freethinkers, gypsies and political opponents, we often forget), the "Jewish" question has been an understandably delicate topic.

Linguistic accuracy cannot be expected in such a highly-charged atmosphere, but the labelling "anti-semitic" of anyone opposing, say, Israel's policy towards the Arabs must be strongly resisted.

It could, in fact, be more accurately applied to that very policy, the Arabs being one of the semitic-speaking peoples.

But back to the eruv. Here, there is no

unanimity among the various Jewish sects. The Reform and Hasidic groups are against it. Councillor Frank Davis, who is a Governor of the University of Tel Aviv, describes the idea as "stone bonking barmy." And a member of the Reform Synagogue, Ruth Elliott, opposes it as fundamentalist.

"If you draw a line in which Jews can do certain things," she says, "what's to stop other religious groups demanding similar rights?" And she adds that many non-Jews have been afraid to voice their opposition because they didn't want to be accused of anti-semitism (*The Guardian*, February 24, 1993).

Well, for the time being the Barnet fundamentalists have lost. But they intend to fight on. And other communities should be on guard against what has aptly been called an attempt to turn a public domain into a private one.

## Over to you, Mrs Gillick

PROVIDING teenagers with sex education and access to contraception does not encourage promiscuity.

That's the conclusion of Dr Janet B Hardy, Professor Emeritus of Paediatrics at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, who has studied the question for 20 years.

With Dr Laurie Schwab Zabin, she has written *Adolescent Pregnancy in an Urban Environment*, which was summarised in the November 15, 1992, issue of *Obstetrics and Gynaecology News*.

The two researchers reported a 30 per cent drop in the pregnancy rate for two target schools in a two-year programme involving 2,000 inner-city students in Baltimore schools.

They were given teaching and counselling by Hopkins nurses and social workers, with free access to family planning services.

It was found that participation in the programme postponed sexual activity, for those who had not begun it, by an average of seven months.

Eric Stockton argues

# THE NECESSITY FOR GREEN SCEPTICISM



I AM a Green – by which I mean that I think that the big fact of contemporary human life is that the planet is becoming incapable of sustaining the continuation of our species at anything like an acceptable level of well-being for very much longer (in historical terms) unless we change our ways.

It is of no use embracing the customary political ideals of freedom, social justice, national liberation, a better life for all and so on unless we take care of our earth – the only home we have, the only place where ideals can be realised.

When principles reside largely or wholly in the mind, rather than in verifiable reality, there is little or no reason, outside of the minds of the principled people concerned, to act in one way rather than in another.

“Principles” are often no more than pre-packaged excuses for attitudes that people wish to take anyway. You can often, when pressed, dress up almost anything as “socialism” or “conservatism” or “nationalism” or “liberalism” or “Christianity” or whatever. The relevant “principles” reside in the mind (mostly) and their application is validated in the mind (mostly). Persuasion and presentation usually count for more in ideology than does demonstrable objective truth.

The Green Principle is rather different – not that Greens, in the Party or in the pressure groups, are less prone to bend their principles to match their actions, and not that such people are above advocating compulsions and constraints upon all of us merely because these compulsions and constraints seem Green to them.

## Wreck

The difference is that, since the Green Principle is that we really do foul and wreck the nest unless we take purposeful action to avoid doing so, there can be objective reasons for thinking some actions to be Green and some not to be. There is an element of factual verification potentially present in Green projects because the environment is actually there and we may, or may not, in fact be demonstrably damaging it when we take this or that action.

The key word in that last sentence is “demonstrably.” Green policies can be based on fact, and informed assessment of the likely factual consequences of fact, and we simply must admit that things are not as simple as they may seem to be in “the eye of faith” or in instant good intentions.

The old religions, in the end, were only required to make you feel good and feeling good comes from “faith” contrived for the

purpose. The new Green thing, to be of any use at all, demands that you actually do good, or avoid doing harm, to the planet and that requires actual verifiable knowledge – a much more elusive commodity than designer faith or subjective “revelation.” Green ideals without scientifically informed basis for action are worse than useless. Subjective romanticism is the curse of the Green movements.

Green romanticism is a well-known phenomenon. “The Planet” is only the latest of the long line of cuddly toys of the mind that the decent and comfortable middle classes use to help them sleep of nights. They’ve tried “god” and “progress” and the illusory political potency of something that used to be called “the working class.” But The Planet... my, there’s a thing to gush over. You can even make a god(dess) of it, called Gaia.

What is needed is good science not a good free-floating conscience.

## Thermodynamics

“Recycling” is a trusted warmer of the Green heart. It “stands to reason” (a phrase which usually means that it does nothing of the sort but that it sits on dogma) that materials should be recovered and used again and again.

A knowledge of the Second Law of Thermodynamics (which ought to be part of the core curriculum) makes us pause.

One statement of this Law is that there is a spontaneous tendency for material order to become material disorder and that the reverse process is never spontaneous but can only be accomplished, if at all, by the input of energy in an appropriate manner.

A stone, allowed to do so, will fall and break a glass object, but there is no “if allowed to do so” about the glass object mending itself while the stone rises back to its original position. Perhaps the glass object can be mended and the stone raised up but only if energy is spent doing so.

Objects, once usable, becoming scrap is a spontaneous process; the reverse transformation – scrap changing itself to usable objects – is not; it can only be accomplished by appropriate energy input. Our bits of broken glass need heat energy to melt them to remake the usable glass object.

Recycling sounds fine and thrifty, but if it consumes very valuable energy – and generates undesirable carbon dioxide or dangerous radiation or objectionable waste to boot – only to produce less valuable usable objects then there is no Green mileage in it. “Believing in” recycling in general is not good enough: we have to show that it is good Green sense in particular instances. Sometimes it is and sometimes it is not.

Again, we are supposed to be glad that fast-food suppliers are thinking of using bio-degradable cutlery. This feels better, to a Green romantic, than the thought of rubbish dumps full of stable discarded plastic knives, forks and spoons. But if the bio-degradation turns the plastic into carbon dioxide then we would be just as wise to burn it and wiser still not to let it degrade but make it keep its carbon atoms “locked up out of harm” as, for millions of years, they had been locked up as natural petroleum or coal or whatever. Bio-degradation is not self-evidently a truly Green fate for plastic waste.

Yet again, we have the attractive idea of low-energy light bulbs. The ordinary filament lamp dissipates, as heat, by far the greater part of the electricity it consumes; the low-energy bulb converts the electrical input mostly into light. Is this not self-evidently good? Yes, of course it is *if* the bulb is outside in a porch or coal shed or suchlike place. In such circumstances the conventional filament bulb simply dissipates heat uselessly into the air while the low-energy bulb does not. But indoors, the heat from the ordinary light bulb warms the room and so saves on other heat use.

If the light bulb is near the ceiling, its heat is no good to people at floor level. But if there is another storey above, then the ceiling light below may not be so wasteful of heat. Perhaps we should use low-energy bulbs in top floors and attics as well as outside.

## Tungsten

Electric motors are relatively efficient energy users so perhaps a fan, near the ceiling, forcing warm air downwards (the rising of hot air is a spontaneous process that can be reversed only by energy input – Second Law) might make the use of old-fashioned tungsten lights a little Greener in rooms like ours.

In rooms with poor natural light in countries where the climate is warm the use of tungsten lamps converts electricity to a lot of heat which is worse than useless. It actually makes such a room in such a climate needlessly uncomfortable. You would need more powerful air-conditioning plant if you used tungsten bulbs in such a case.

The ideas I have set out may well be arguable; I do not claim that they are the last word. That is not the point; far from it. I merely suggest that Green practice can be factually based and that specific investigation of any projected Green reform must be put in hand to validate that reform to make it more than merely seeming to be Green at first sight.



# Getting down to basics

FUNDAMENTALISTS of the Christian, Jewish and Islamic persuasions are once again uppermost in the thoughts of our *Freethinker* writers. And rightly so. All around us, intolerance and hate have grabbed the initiative (have you, too, shuddered at the terrifying expressions on the faces of the anti-abortion demonstrators?).

In the face of unreason's assault, the continued existence of *The Freethinker* is vital to the defence of our liberties – and the paper relies on your money to keep it going.

Please rush contributions to: *The Freethinker* Fund, G W Foote and Co, 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL.

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Total for February: £448.

## Rational argument the key to fighting fundamentalism

by Peter E Newell

THE fatwa against Salman Rushdie and the increasing intolerance of Moslem fundamentalists, as for example described by Barbara Smoker in last month's *Freethinker*, are disturbing and sinister phenomena in Britain (and elsewhere) today.

About 40 years ago, when I listened to speakers on the platforms of the National Secular Society and the Socialist Party of Great Britain in Hyde Park, on Clapham Common and at Kingston (Jim Barker?), one would hear people in the audience say: "They're wasting their time; religion is dying." And, indeed, it did seem that way.

In Britain, at least, this is true of the majority. They are not looking for "pie in the sky when they die," but, to a large degree, are more prepared to strive for a better world and life for themselves in the only world they really know about.

But, today, with the ever-increasing crises, insecurity, unemployment, alienation and general chaos of present society, fundamentalist religions and beliefs – both Christian and non-Christian – seem to be on the increase, at least

among a sizeable and vocal minority.

Christian fundamentalists are bad enough; but Moslem fundamentalists are, if that is possible, even worse.

Besides believing in a non-existent Allah, they have no concept of "live and let live."

Unfortunately, as Barbara Smoker observes, such intolerant and anti-democratic behaviour may be combated, not so much by rational argument, but by equally intolerant action by nationalistic racists and fascists like the British National Party or, as in France, the xenophobic Front Nationale.

Sadly, but inevitably, politicians in "mainstream" parties such as the Labour Party, particularly where MPs have, say, sizeable minorities of Moslems, will merely pander to them, and support their demands for sectarian, religious (ie Moslem) schools.

Combating the anti-democratic beliefs and activities of religious fundamentalists can only be carried out by people using rational, materialist, arguments.

It's not easy; it never has been, but it is the only way.

## Dr Who triumphs again

*THE DAEMONS*, a recently rebroadcast Jon Pertwee era *Doctor Who* story, possibly represents something of a triumph over religious censorship.

The Satanic theme to the tale, and in particular a final scene where a church is blown up by the self-destructing forces of evil, originally led to a storm of angry complaints to the *Radio Times*.

For several years the 1971 five-part story was believed to be lost after the BBC wiped all but one of the tapes as a supposed economy measure.

However, a US *Dr Who* fan had kept an edited copy made on one of the first Betamax video recorders. The BBC also found it had a full black-and-white version on cinefilm made for the African market.

After more than 40 hours' work, which included recolouring some scenes by hand, video experts at the BBC combined both versions and produced the fully restored series just broadcast.

No storm of controversy in the *Radio Times* letters pages was noted this time round. (Source: *New Scientist* August 29, 1992).

HUGH THOMAS

# Sunday shopping 'muddle' comes under attack

RAY Powell's Shops (Amendment) Bill has emerged from Committee as a Parliamentary muddle which fails to meet public demand for Sunday shopping, says the Shopping Hours Reform Council.

"Even as amended, this Bill cannot possibly provide the popular, practical and permanent solution required to settle the Sunday shopping question," Roger Boaden, Director of the Council, told *The Freethinker*.

"This Bill has more in common with the muddles and inconsistencies of the 1950 Shops Act than the needs of consumers at the end of the 20th Century.

"It has little to do with what people want to do and already do on Sunday. Why, in 1993, should people be denied the opportunity to do food shopping on Sunday but be able to use a DIY store?"

The Bill would produce a tangle of bureaucracy for retailers and local authorities.

"It has moved away from its original principles and become nothing more than an unenforceable quagmire of inconsistency, com-

promise and red tape," said Mr Boaden.

Newsagents, which have legally opened since 1950, will have to register with councils to open on Sunday, and some garden centres face Sunday closure.

"Mr Powell has conceded he cannot stop people shopping on Sunday, but he has failed utterly to produce a workable solution," added Mr Boaden.

"There is no future with this Bill. The Government must now bring forward its White Paper on the three options as soon as possible.

"Only then will MPs have an opportunity to debate all three options. Only the Shopping Hours Reform Council proposal will achieve a Parliamentary majority for a solution that will meet public demand."

## Warning signs

EVANGELICAL Christianity is growing fast, with 300 new churches springing up last year, according to Challenge 2000, which aims to establish an evangelical presence in every town and village. Many members believe the millennium will bring miraculous "signs and wonders" heralding the Second Coming of Christ. — *Daily Telegraph*, March 29.

## WHAT'S ON

**Birmingham Humanist Group:** Martineau Centre, Balden Road, Harborne. Wednesday, April 21, 7.30pm. Rabbi Norman Solomon: *Anti-Semitism*.

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group:** 40 Cowper Street, Hove (near Hove Station, bus routes 2a, 5 and 49). Sunday, May 2, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. John Hart: *Spiritual Patternism*.

**Chiltern Humanists:** Friends Meeting House, Berkhamsted. Tuesday, May 11, 7.45pm. Cedric Hetherington: *The Future of the Monarchy*. Tuesday, June 8, 7.45pm, The Library, High Street, Wendover. Daniel O'Hara: *My Road to Humanism*.

**Coventry and Warwickshire Humanist Group:** Waverley Day Centre, 65 Waverley Road Kenilworth. Monday, April 19, 7.30 pm. Public meeting: *A Tribute to Two American Humanists - R G Ingersoll and Isaac Asimov*.

**Edinburgh Humanist Group:** Programme of forum meetings obtainable from the secretary, 2 Saville Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 3AD; telephone 031-667 8389.

**Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA):** Information from 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth CV8 2HD; telephone 0926 58450. Monthly meetings (second Friday, 7.30pm) at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1.

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

**Lewisham Humanist Group:** Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, April 29, 8 pm. David Porter: *The Use of Theology*.

**Norwich Humanist Group:** Martineau Hall, 21a

Colegate, Norwich. Thursday, May 20, 7.30pm: Annual General Meeting.

**Preston and District Humanist Group:** Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Georgina Coupland, telephone 0772 796829.

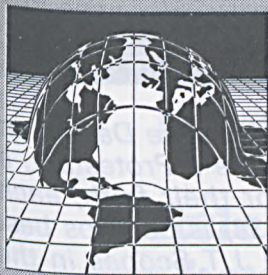
**Humanist Society of Scotland:** Annual Conference, Saturday, April 24, Cowane Centre, Stirling, 9.30am to 5pm. Guest speaker: Willis Packard, Editor, *The Times Educational Supplement* (Scotland): *Aspects of Religious Education and Denominational Schools*. Details: Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire.

**South Place Ethical Society:** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1 (telephone 071-831 7723). List of events celebrating the bicentenary of SPES obtainable from above address. Thursday evenings, 7.30pm. April 29: Sir Alan Cottrell: *Limits to Physical Explanation*. May 13: Michael Foot: *H G Wells and the Humanists*.

**Sutton Humanist Group:** Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, May 12, 7.45 pm. David Crispin: *Religious Education in a Changing World*.

**Tyneside Humanist Group:** Meetings on third Thursday of each month (except August and December), starting 6.45pm in the Literary and Philosophical Society building, Westgate Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. May 20: Speaker from Voluntary Euthanasia Society. July 15: Amnesty International.

**Worthing Humanist Group:** Heene Community Centre, Heene Road, Worthing. Public meetings, last Sunday of the month at 5.30pm. Information from Mike Sargent, group secretary, telephone 0903 239823.



# DOWN TO EARTH

with Bill McIlroy



## Cruelty drives the 'pro-lifers'

WRONG-HEADED and insensitive they may be, but the chief characteristic of "pro-life" zealots is cruelty. Hardly surprising, since first and foremost they serve a cruel and vengeful deity and, if pressed, justify their actions by reference to the Bible.

We are accustomed to pro-lifers' demonstrations at abortion clinics, where they harass staff and patients. But their behaviour during the last days of Tony Bland's life caused even the Roman Catholic authorities to distance themselves from the pro-life-at-any-price ghoul.

Tony Bland was 18 when he received horrific injuries in the Hillsborough tragedy. He was in a persistent vegetative state for four years, cared for at Airedale Hospital, near Keighley. Dr Jim Howe, who withdrew treatment, said it would be "grotesque and futile" to keep him alive when there was no hope of improvement. Tony's parents, Barbara and Allan Bland, agreed; so did the Law Lords whose ruling enabled Dr Howe to discontinue artificial feeding.

After the decision, the pro-lifers mounted pickets and distributed leaflets outside the hospital, showing no consideration for the feelings of the Bland family and the nursing staff. The Roman Catholic Bishop of Leeds described their slogans as "unsuitable and wounding." A spokesman for the diocese said: "The dignity with which Tony Bland's parents have suffered the loss of their son and the devoted care which he received as a hospital patient have earned the respect of the whole community."

Tony died nine days after treatment was discontinued. But the Blands' grief did not end with the death and funeral of their son. Father James Morrow, a "pro-life" freak from Braemar, Aberdeenshire, applied for permission to bring a private prosecution for murder against Dr Howe. He was unsuccessful, but threatened to prolong the Blands' ordeal by taking the case to the European Court of Human Rights. And he asserted they would suffer remorse in this life and perhaps worse in the next for consenting to the "murder" of their son.

While choosing names like LIFE, CARE and HOPE for their organisations, pro-lifers' first duty is not to humanity but to a figment of their warped imagination.

Claiming that "God himself breathed into man the breath of life," a writer in an evangelical journal asserts: "*Outside judicial processes* (my italics) to deliberately take

away this life is murder." No doubt the "judicial processes" proviso accounts for pro-lifers' enthusiastic advocacy of capital punishment.

Opponents of euthanasia remain curiously silent about those who, on religious grounds, cause their own death by refusing blood transfusions. During the pro-lifers' vile campaign to prevent Tony Bland being allowed to die, a healthy 28-year-old Jehovah's Witness bled to death in another hospital. Yvonne Leighton had undergone a simple operation after the birth of her second child. She haemorrhaged heavily and three times doctors explained the consequences of not having a transfusion. She rejected their advice, and her family, all Jehovah's Witnesses, watched as she bled to death. The Witnesses even sent a lawyer to ensure that a transfusion was not carried out by the distraught staff.

We have yet to hear criticism by the "pro-life" lobby of a religious sect that encourages its members to die needlessly.

## A family favourite

RELIGIOUS leaders, Right-wing politicians and assorted moralisers had a field day following the murder of a Liverpool child, James Bulger. Crimes of violence against children inevitably provoke clamour for a return to Christian virtues and Victorian values (not that the young were much valued in Victorian Britain, where infanticide was a common and covertly accepted method of disposing of unwanted children).

Lord Coggan, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, complained that "we are faced with fourth generation paganism...where parents and grandparents have no Christian roots whatsoever, where the Bible is a closed book and where knowledge of the Ten Commandments is non-existent." Knees jerking under their cassocks, the present Archbishop of Canterbury and the Roman Catholic Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster called on the Government to set up a Royal Commission on the family.

Hand-wringing moralisers of every hue posit "the family" as the keystone of personal morality and national greatness. Needless to say, they do not approve every form of family life. Unmarried couples living together, for whatever reason and no matter how stable their relationship, are not regarded as a "proper" family. The one-parent family is a favourite target for moralisers' criticism and abuse. Government Minister Peter Lilley, a

Patron of the Conservative Christian Fellowship, was accorded an ecstatic ovation at last year's Party conference for his derisive comments about unmarried mothers.

It is frequently implied, or even stated, that unmarried parents are less caring and responsible than those whose union is blessed by the Church and legalised by the State. In fact, there is often more warmth and love in such families than in many of unquestioned conformity.

It is politically expedient to blame crime and anti-social behaviour on divorce, working mothers, lack of parental control and a falling away of religious faith. There are far more relevant factors, like unemployment, homelessness and social deprivation which have blighted the lives of millions since the Party of the Family, led by the Mother of the Nation, came to power in 1979. And "family" moralisers tend to overlook another awkward fact. It is undeniable that the family life of many of the most evil villains in the annals of crime was of pristine correctness and respectability. John Reginald Christie, of Rillington Place infamy, is a case in point.

The Public Record Office has just released papers relating to the trial of Christie's tenant, Timothy Evans, whose execution was one of the most notorious miscarriages of justice in British judicial history. He was found guilty in 1950 of murdering his baby daughter and accused of murdering his wife. Timothy Evans claimed that Christie was the killer. But shortly before the execution a senior officer in the criminal justice department submitted an influential memorandum to the Home Secretary. In it he asserted that Evans "has been leading a careless and improvident life" - rather like the unmarried mothers criticised by Mr Lilley for getting pregnant to qualify for a council flat.

John Reginald Christie, by contrast, was a respectable citizen, the product of a large "golden age" family. His father was a stern Victorian businessman, churchgoer and founder of the local Conservative Association. Young John attended Sunday School, sang in the church choir, joined the Boy Scouts and became an assistant Scoutmaster.

It was from this background of a "proper" family life and a religious upbringing that Christie embarked on a career of crime that culminated in the horror of murder and necrophilia. For three years after Evans was executed, Christie was found guilty of murdering his own wife. Police discovered three other bodies and two skeletons in or near the house which Christie shared with the Evans family. Like Evans's wife and baby daughter, all had been strangled. Christie was executed and Timothy Evans was eventually granted a posthumous pardon.

## Blast from the past: Number 4

*Edited from a talk Why I Am An Agnostic given by Clarence Darrow in 1929 in Columbus, Ohio. On the platform with him were a Protestant, a Catholic and a Jew who presented the reasons for their faith, each speaker being allowed 30 minutes. Darrow (1857-1938) is perhaps best known in this country as the lawyer who defended J T Scopes in the "Monkey Trial" which concerned the right to teach evolution in American schools. He was known as a libertarian lawyer and a doughty fighter for freethought.*

AN AGNOSTIC is a doubter. The word is generally applied to those who doubt the verity of accepted religious creeds or faiths. Everyone is an Agnostic as to the beliefs or creeds they do not accept. In a popular way, in the Western world an Agnostic is one who doubts or disbelieves the main tenets of the Christian faith.

I would say that belief in at least three tenets is necessary to the faith of a Christian: a belief in God, a belief in immortality and a belief in a supernatural book. Various Christian sects require much more.

Since man ceased to worship openly an anthropomorphic God and talked vaguely and not intelligently about some Force in the Universe, higher than man, that is responsible for the existence of man and the universe, he cannot be said to believe in God.

To believe in a thing, an image of the thing must be stamped on the mind. No such image comes, or can come, with the idea of a God who is described as a Force.

Man has always speculated on the origin of the universe, including himself. I feel, with Herbert Spencer, that whether the universe had an origin and – if it had – what that origin is will never be known by man.

### Matter

The Christian says that the universe could not make itself; that there must have been some higher power to call it into being.

But to say that God made the universe gives no explanation of the beginning of things. The question immediately arises: Who made God? Did he always exist or was there some power back of that? Did he create matter out of nothing or is his existence co-extensive with matter?

The problem is still there. What is the origin of it all? Man can only wonder and doubt and guess.

As to the existence of the soul, all people may believe or disbelieve. Everyone knows the origin of the physical human being. But if there is a soul, what is it and where did it come from and where does it go? Can anyone who is guided by reason possibly imagine a soul independent of the body, or the place of its residence, or the character of it, or anything concerning it?

## Ass's tale makes a monkey of us all

If man is justified in any belief or disbelief on any subject, he is warranted in the disbelief in a soul. Not one scrap of evidence exists to prove any such impossible thing.

Many Christians base the belief in a soul and God upon the Bible. The 66 books which make up the Bible were written by many people at different times and they contain all sorts of contradictory concepts of life and morals and the origin of things.

Between the first and the last, nearly a thousand years intervened; a longer time than has passed since the discovery of America by Columbus.

Theologians assert that the proof of Divine inspiration of the Bible rested in miracles and prophecies. But a miracle means a violation of a natural law, and there can be no proof imagined that could be sufficient to show the violation of a natural law. No man has told so consistent a story as nature.

Primitive and even civilised people have grown so accustomed to believing in miracles that they often attribute the simplest manifestation of nature to agencies of which they know nothing. They do this when belief is utterly inconsistent with knowledge and logic.

As to prophecies, intelligent writers gave them up long ago. In all prophecies, facts are made to suit the prophecy, or the prophecy was made after the facts, or the events have no relation to the prophecy.

Can any rational person believe that the Bible is anything but a human document?

We know that the books in it were written by human beings who had no knowledge of science, little knowledge of life and were influenced by the barbarous morality of primitive times and were grossly ignorant of most things that men know today.

Does anyone believe, for instance, that, on account of Adam and Eve, the whole human race was doomed to hell? Or that men were only saved through God's son dying for them and that unless human beings believed this silly, impossible and wicked story they were doomed to hell? Can anyone call this scheme of creation and damnation moral? It defies every principle of morality, as man conceives morality.

Do intelligent people believe that the various languages spoken on earth came from the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel? Human languages were dispersed all over the face of the earth long before that time. Evidence of civilisations are in existence now that were old long before the date that romancers fix for the building of the Tower and even before the date claimed for the Flood.

What of the tale of Balaam's ass speaking to him, probably in Hebrew? Is it true, or is it a fable? Many asses have spoken and doubtless some in Hebrew, but they have not been that breed of asses! Is salvation to depend on a belief in a monstrosity like this?

### Sickness

Above all the rest, would any human today believe that a child was born without a father? Or that sickness means the possession of the body by devils? Or that a dead person can come to life? Superstition is everywhere prevalent in the world. It has been so from the beginning and most likely will be so unto the end.

The reasons for Agnosticism and scepticism are abundant and compelling. The truth is that the origin of what we call civilisation is not due to religion but to scepticism. As man doubted the primitive conceptions about religion, and no longer accepted the literal, miraculous teachings of ancient books, he set himself to understand nature.

The fear of God is not the beginning of wisdom. The fear of God is the death of wisdom. Scepticism and doubt lead to study and investigation, which is the beginning of wisdom.

# YOU'RE TELLING US!

## 'Little or no harm'

I HOPE *The Freethinker* is not joining forces with the child sex abuse industry (Up Front, March).

Of course sexual behaviour between an adult and child is wrong. But, even so, it is often harmless and should be dealt with calmly. Your attack on Roman Catholic priests hardly seems helpful in this respect.

*New Statesman and Society* published an article of mine on the subject, "Speak of the wolf - see his tail," in their issue of August 21 last. The article refers, among many other aspects, to research by the German police, and by Dutch university researcher Dr Theo Sandfort. Both sets of findings concluded that little or no harm usually was done by these irregular inter-generational affairs. The principal cause of harm, when it occurs, is the angry reaction of parents, police and social workers. Victims can become victims because they find that they are expected to be so.

It should be remembered, also, that the age of consent varies down to 12 in our neighbouring countries. The issue is more complex than shotgun assessments allow.

The very distinguished American researcher, Dr John Money, Director of the Psychohormonal Research Unit of the John Hopkins University, wrote that no proper study of paediatric sexological health is made anywhere. He also said: "One must accept that paedophilia exists in nature's overall scheme...and, with enlightenment, formulate a policy of what to do."

Yes, priests, like all other people, are wrong to involve children in illegal relationships, but this should not be made into an argument for secularism.

EDWARD BARRIE  
London

## Better be a sceptic

HUGH Thomas, commenting upon the statistical disparity between professed "belief in God" and actual religious practice - the one being a majority trait and the other a minority one - has perhaps missed an important possibility.

To believe when there is no real God may be calculated to do no harm to the believer; to deny God, if there be one, is to risk His wrath. To express belief is perhaps seen as a "fail-safe" device.

A little more thought, than the average respondent to the young lady with the clipboard is prepared to give, shows that this supposed "fail-safe" ploy is perhaps a high-risk

strategy.

If there be no God, then to feign belief is to open the door to all sorts of intellectual corruption. (I often think that the most harmful words in the Bible are those of the First Commandment). Supposing that there is indeed a God then He would be pretty angry at being taken for a sucker by people pretending to believe in Him merely on an expedient bet-hedging basis. I guess an honest sceptic would fare better on any J-Day there may be.

ERIC STOCKTON  
Orkney



**Preferably short and clearly-typed letters for publication should be sent to The Editor, The Freethinker, 24 Alder Avenue, Silcoates Park, Wakefield WF2 0TZ. Please include name and address (not necessarily for publication) and a telephone number.**

## Blessed Sunday!

TO those who still cherish our blessed English Sunday, imagine the country town of Hexham where neither repair centre nor shop is open, and a young family are stranded in their car after the exhaust has fallen off.

After a flurry of 'phone calls to motorists' suppliers by the folks back home in Durham, a replacement part is found just before midday closing.

Some hours later, after much sweat and toil, the family resumes the journey to Scotland - and open shops.

Truly, the Sunday opening issue is no trivial matter.

D REDHEAD  
Houghton-le-Spring

## Seeing more stars...

I AM afraid Karl Heath would not do too well in one of my philosophy classes. He claims that he has never heard of any debate on the subject of astrology, and then gives the date when he believed it ended. Ignorance of something is no argument against its existence, though it should prohibit one from writing about it.

For those who would like to make up their own minds on the current state of astrology - and to answer Heath's plea for evidence - then Michel Gauquelin's *Written in the Stars* (Aquarian Press 1988) should be the starting point. The title is dreadful, but the content compelling. Dr Percy Seymour's *Astrology: the Evidence of Science* (Arkana Books 1991) gives a good overview of the subject and the current state of play. For those with a high level of mathematical competence, there is Dr Theodor Landscheidt's *Sun, Earth, Man* (Urania Trust 1989), whose predictive work on climate cycles is based on astrology and scores a 90 per cent accuracy rating, confirmed by the SES Centre in Boulder.

Eysenck & Nias' *Astrology: Science or Superstition* (Temple Smith 1982) explores the pros and cons, Professor Roberts' *The Message of Astrology* (Aquarian Press 1990) suggests a possible model, and Anthony West's *Case for Astrology* (Penguin Books 1992) gives a good introduction for the general reader. It also gives a clear account of how members of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation for Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), a group of American scientists, went as far to rig data sets in order to nullify pro-astrology findings. They were exposed by their own chairman, who was subsequently fired. The piece makes informative reading for those who believe that science is neutral. An academic appraisal of this can also be found in Dr Patrick Curry's *Research on the Mars Effect* (*The Zetetic Scholar*, no. 9 1982).

Such fraud aside, no re-analysis has failed to break the Gauquelin data, which has now withstood over 30 years of often hostile inspection. It confirms that there are clear Planetary relationships between the moment of birth and both occupations and character traits. Odds against chance can be as high as five million-to-one. It is unlikely that any conventional research into, for instance, occupational psychology can remotely match these figures.

However, this almost pales into insignificance with the recent publication of Suzel Fuzeau-Braesch's research into twins, published in *Personality and Individual Difference* (Vol 13 No 40, October 1992).

# YOU'RE TELLING US!

## From Page 61

This research was conducted by the Department of Biology and Physiology at the Universite de Paris-Sud. It concludes that the moment of birth was the deciding factor in determining character difference in the twins. The odds against chance were higher than a billion-to-one.

While the above may make interesting reading, it may also confirm one of your correspondent's suggestions that there may be less in astrology than some astrologers believe. S/he might well be right, but we are still left with far more to think about than many of us would like to accept.

If Suzel Fuzeau-Braesch's research into twins is replicated with anything like the original odds, it should be one of science's most profound discoveries, meriting a conference of its own to discuss the implications. However, I suspect that if it does replicate, we shall hear little about it. As Heath so rightly implies, 20th Century science has little to say about astrology, but if it ignores such discoveries this is hardly a point in its favour.

**MICHAEL HARDING**  
Association of  
Professional Astrologers

## Doing it for cash?

MICHAEL Harding, in his letter printed in the February issue of *The Freethinker*, describes himself as being a member, I presume, of the Association of Professional Astrologers.

By "Professional" does he mean that membership of the Association is limited to those with professional qualifications in astrology like, for example, the professional engineering institutions restrict their membership to professionally qualified engineers?

If so, where do they obtain their professional qualifications and what are they? I suspect, however, that he means they do the job for money, and this, it seems to me, is what astrology is all about. "Professional" does sound grand however.

**IAIN CAMPBELL**  
Germany

## Enforce the law

AS THIS is my first letter under the new editorship, may I start by warmly congratulating Peter Brearey on the excellent start he has made. May I also thank my old friend and sparring partner Bill McIlroy for the tremendous work he put in when occupying the edi-

torial chair (or rack).

I would like to comment on two quite different points.

May I suggest to the authors of recent letters on pornography that the matter cannot properly be discussed simply in terms of "pornography," as though that term had a clear meaning. In a recent book, containing four chapters on this topic, I identified five distinct types of pornography each with its own moral context. Readers may obtain the book, *The Sex Code: Morals for Moderns* (Weidenfeld), from Humanist Book Service, 15 Basset Street, Camberne TR14 8SW (price £10.50 including p & p).

Next, may I express profound sympathy with Barbara Smoker for what she went through with the Moslem fundamentalists. She says "something must be done to nip in the bud this upsurge of fanatical Islam in Britain," but doesn't tell us what she has in mind.

One thing we should do is insist (by writing to MPs etc.) that the laws against such things as incitement to murder and breach of public order are rigorously enforced. Humanists haven't always been too keen on the rule of law. In this instance it could be our salvation.

**FRANCIS BENNION**  
Oxford

## Pray - but don't prey

I FOUND the report on the behaviour of Moslem Fundamentalists of great interest and very disturbing. (*The Freethinker*, March). It seems that our Moslem friends will accept a convert who has read the Koran in translation but reject any criticism based on the same source.

It is obvious to me that the confrontation with Islam is only in its early stages yet, and if we are not very careful we could see Islam take the place of Communism as the number one folk devil of our society.

If this happens, the informed criticism of secular and Christian liberals could be drowned out in a semi-racist anti-Moslem clamour.

Just as fascists were able to exploit the Establishment-engendered witchhunt against Communism, today's racial bigots would welcome a hate campaign against Islam.

Anti-Communism was very useful to Western Capitalist society. It was used to funnel public funds into the pockets of the arms manufacturers and resist legitimate demands for wage increases. Hysterical anti-Communism also enabled the State Capitalist Ruling Class in the USSR to deny human rights and consolidate their power.

We have already seen an outburst of public indignation against the Moslem rulers of Iran

and Iraq. What most of the media never mentioned was the fact that Western arms manufacturers sold the arms with which Tehran, and later Iraq, threatened Western interests.

Does all this mean we are to sit back and let a minority within Islam, the Shi-ites, destroy free speech on the campus and censor non-Moslem writings? By no means. But we must recognise that all British Moslems are not hate-filled bigots. It is the same within Christianity: there are the liberal non-fanatical majority, most of the Anglicans, Free Churchers and Catholics, and a fundamentalist and intolerant minority. You can never get rid of hatred and bigotry using the same blanket condemnations, and ill-informed generalisations, as the religious extremists use.

The problem is not in the existence of religion but in its use by minorities seeking to impose their world-view on the rest of us. I subscribe to the concept of a live-and-let-live society. There must always be room for minorities and the free exchange of ideas.

It is the undemocratic and illiberal behaviour of the bigot minority within both Islam and Christian circles I oppose. As a Socialist speaker once replied to a clergyman debating opponent who asked if he objected to him praying for him: "I don't mind if you pray for me as long as you don't prey on me."

**ROBERT J TAYLOR**  
South Shields

## Hawking and God

I SAID, in my February article, that I didn't know whether Stephen Hawking believes in God or not. Now I do: he doesn't.

In the first chapter of their biography, *Stephen Hawking: a Life in Science* (Penguin), Michael White and John Gribbin recount how the film actress Shirley MacLaine asked the professor if he believed that there was a God who created the universe and guides His creation. The answer was an unequivocal "No."

Later (page 285) the biographers say that: "Through his work, Hawking's early agnosticism had become more overtly atheistic, and with his no-boundary theory he had effectively dispensed with the notion of God altogether."

**COLIN McCALL**  
Hertfordshire

## Regards to McIlroy

CONGRATULATIONS on *The Freethinker's* new look.

Turn to Page 63

# YOU'RE TELLING US!

## From Page 62

As you assume editorship, I wish you a long and happy association with the publication.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State [8120 Fenton Street, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910] has come to rely on *The Freethinker* to keep us apprised of developments affecting church-state relations in England. Your reports are an important contribution to our efforts to monitor church-state developments around the world.

Again I offer my congratulations and ask that you extend my regards to former Editor Bill McIlroy for his years of fine service. Please do not hesitate to call on Americans United if we can ever be of assistance in any of your endeavours.

**ROBERT BOSTON**  
Assistant Director of  
Communications

## Howls against religion

I READ with interest the item written by Bill McIlroy entitled "No sallies in blind alleys" in your February issue.

It was a rejoinder to the article I wrote in *The Inquirer* about A N Wilson's *Against Religion*. This makes the third comment I have received from BHA or NSS members on this article, and none, except orally, from Unitarians. As a regular contributor to its columns for more than 30 years, I can only say - keep on reading it and responding, and put the Unitarians to shame on this score if nothing else.

Now to the main points. Mr McIlroy states that I am careful not to tangle with Wilson but take a swipe at the NSS, which has "howled" against religion, and "denigrates all religious practices quoting examples from the long distant past."

Yes that's what I said and I stick to it. I find my contention proved, if you will permit me to say so, from the columns of the February *Freethinker*. The whole is a "howl" against religion in all its manifestations, which is presumably what your readership requires; in these circumstances what I said should surely be taken as a compliment.

While there are no quotes from the long distant past, what I do see in the columns are pictures/drawings of two of the "Archbishops" of the NSS - Charles Bradlaugh and Chapman Cohen. I have to say that it was Chapman Cohen's pamphlets (yes, I have read them!) that I had in mind when mentioning "examples from the long distant past." The quote from his works published in 1923 confirms my impression, which I trust is wrong, that you still rely

too much on his writings in the 1990s as your intellectual basis.

In the opening paragraph, Bill McIlroy cites Eric Stockton as asserting that many liberal religionists "are tedious windbags who cannot even decide on which fence to sit," and concludes that "we decline either to sit on the fence or to meander in the blind alley of watered-down superstition."

Yes, good, that sums me up, and I am glad that it does. As a tedious windbag who refuses to respond to unanswerable questions in terms of black and white, I decline to lend support to those who are absolutely certain of what they believe, be they religious fundamentalists or atheists.

Perhaps because these are opposite ends of the spectrum, they have close similarities in outlook if not belief. I refuse to be converted to either, and be required to opt for either as right and the other wrong. The 20th Century has surely seen too many people who are sure, even with the best intentions, they are right. Let's have more assertive open-mindedness about religion, and not open-and-shut cases.

I could write much more but feel I have trespassed too far already on the tolerance of your readership with my "tedious windbagery."

**ALAN RUSTON**  
Watford

## A truer history

'KILL myths, not men. Ancient and recent history shows that people who have been indoctrinated to believe in religious absurdities will commit atrocities, especially when enticed by charlatanic myth workers. The remedy surely lies in teaching a truer history of life, evolution-wise, based on humanitarian ethics. E. Wakefield, Mansfield, Notts.'

No apologies for repeating the above, as it appeared on Teletext-on-Four Letters, February 23 to 24, as I think *Freethinker* readers will agree it applies to many individual and collective outrages taking place today.

**E WAKEFIELD**  
Mansfield

## All in the mind...

RECENT debate among bishops sitting in General Synod of the Church of England was no better, or no worse, than the debates in meetings of Chambers of Commerce or trade unions or political parties on any controversial subject.

The behaviour of the bishops was the same as any other human beings in similar situa-

tions. That proves that God did not interfere, nor did he give any guidance to any bishop.

That further proves that there is no God except in the imagination of those who want to believe in the existence of God.

So, it also proves that the Church of England - and, for that matter, all other religious organisations are man-made in the same way as Chambers of Commerce, trade unions, political parties etc.

Why, then, is special recognition given to religious organisations the world over? It is time that logic and reason prevailed and that this special recognition was withdrawn.

**K P SHAH**  
London

## Pornography

CONSIDERATIONS of space inhibit a detailed response to every assertion contained in the [March issue] letters of Bob Hamilton and Harry Hinchcliffe, but, firstly, Harry, no - I do *not* feel inclined to reconsider my opposition to pornography.

I must admit to some surprise on reading Bob Hamilton's view that the occupation of suites of offices confers respectability upon porn merchants. By this token, the (I'm sure) more sumptuous premises of arms dealers must evoke the respect of all "right-minded" persons.

Regarding the somewhat ambiguous figures invoked by your correspondents, it's trite but true to say that there are lies, damned lies - and subjective statistics.

To say that access to pornography would reduce sexual abuse and other crimes of violence is about as convincing as to contend that saturation exposure to sadistic videos would produce a gentler, more caring society, Harry Hinchcliffe.

Finally, Bob Hamilton says that a thousand-fold increase in pornography, coupled with a one per cent increase in sexual crimes, is not necessarily a reason to oppose pornography, any more than the death of pedestrians from high-speed car accidents is necessarily a justification for opposing the sale of such cars.

Well, Bob, I *do* oppose the sale of such cars.  
**JESSIE BOYD**  
Gwent

## God's little joke?

WAS it a prank on the part of the Almighty which made the Bishop of Gloucester resign so soon after the Secretary of State for Education's assertion of the need for a stronger dose of religion in schools?

**FRED WESTWOOD**  
Oldham

# LAST WORD

by Colin Challen

**A**T LONG last, the Church of England is to advertise on television.

If all goes well with the ordination of women, perhaps it won't be long before we have the God Blend couple – two smug-looking dog-collared lovers – keeping viewers guessing whether there's an interloping Bishop in the bedroom while they fondle each other's Bibles.

Or, better still, the Turin Shroud will be shown to be Daz resistant.

Whatever happens, God-as-seen-on-TV will enter a new marketing phase – and not before time. The life-cycle of religion's main product has reached the point where only serious revamping will do.

People have come to expect businesses on earth to become "customer orientated," leaner and fitter, less monolithic and so on, so why not God too? A new image is needed. God needs a director of marketing.

The marketing dictum is that one should identify and then satisfy your customers' needs profitably. God knows this of course, but His marketing strategy has gone somewhat awry.

In marketing, the 'four p's' are all-important: Product, Place, Promotion and Price. Let's have a look at God's.

**PRODUCT:** The original "salzy" flavour of God has gone sour – locusts, floods and plague are no longer the sensations they once were. Now that we have outgrown these "flavours of the month," we need something with a touch of sophistication.

What's more, nobody really believes in the warranty of satisfaction, except perhaps for a few people who also sincerely believe that if you aren't happy with a packet of crisps the manufacturer will send a fresh packet through the post. A bit off the point, perhaps, but it bears thinking about.

**PLACE:** God's distribution network has been falling to pieces for centuries. The last modernisation took place probably no later than the 14th Century, well before a rogue manager, Henry VIII, took off on his own and became, as it were, self-employed.

Customers now don't even know what the original purpose of some churches is, either confusing them for a branch of B&Q, or, as in the case of Westminster Cathedral, a brass-rubbing centre.

**PROMOTION:** God's message worked best when persuasive techniques were less regulated. Death threats, torture and expropriation of land and chattels always worked a treat.

Also, the product's health warnings were

You're  
never  
alone  
with a  
dogma

helpfully printed only in Latin, and jealously guarded by the salesforce. The salesforce, of course, could often be found supping at the table of their main rival (Satan plc) – having, more often than not, a wild time. They would then exaggerate their sales conversions in order to boost their commission.

**PRICE:** Uncertainty about price has been a problem. A long-standing tradition of extortion has had to give way to voluntary contributions, leading to an incalculable loss of income. This has left some very high overheads looking sinfully extravagant. Pay-As-You-Pray meters on pews could be one solution, at least for a week. Also, selling time-shares in Heaven on the never-never might work.

In response to God's declining market share, mergers and takeovers have been mooted. But this would be like mixing lard with kerosene and calling it communion wine.

Believers have strong brand-loyalty, but may not swallow such a gag. No, what God needs now is a SWOT analysis, which means looking at God's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

**S**trengths: All-powerful, all-knowing, infinitely merciful.

**W**eaknesses: Intangible, obsessed with death, bad father.

**O**pportunities: New markets available every six working days.

**T**hreats: Black holes, Bishop of Durham, entropy, reason.

God's marketing director's first problem is to convince God that he has a problem at all – it's always the same with people who think they know everything, but infinitely worse

with God.

Logically, no problems really do exist, because God, being all-knowing, knows before a problem happens what the solution is. Nevertheless, noting IBM's recent difficulties, which arose despite their huge computing power, it would be, let's say, playing it safe to assume that God does indeed have a marketing problem.

The marketing director's next task may be less insurmountable than the first. This is to obtain an authentic copy of God's Corporate Mission Statement. No enterprise worth its salt can do without one these days, but getting one from God is not as easy as it sounds.

Sometimes, mission statements appear in staff newsletters, but in a very hand-me-down form. It might appear in an instruction manual, but, as any owner of a Japanese camera knows, these tomes suffer terribly in translation. The Good Book is no exception.

So, we cannot be precisely sure what God's objectives are, and without that knowledge it is difficult to set targets.

The Papal Division has got round this by taking a degree of autonomy for itself, and has employed as its corporate motto "You've got to copulate to accumulate." This has worked particularly well in a market where people don't tend to care very much for the small print.

Further exhaustive market research needs to be conducted if any advertising campaign is to succeed. "Targeting," "segmentation" and "niche markets" are the Holy Grail of business. If God is once again to become a household name, the advertising must address the households of today. Hence, a few minutes of contemplative silence may produce some catchy phrases, such as:

● Buy two, get one free with the Holy Trinity!

● The Holy Original.

● I Can't Believe It's Not God!

● Blessed Are The Poor – With Interest Free Credit!

● You Can't Get Quicker Than A Jehovah's Witness!

● I Bet He Drinks Communion Wine!

● There's No Taste Like Being Stoned™

Oops! The last one might lead to some misunderstanding. Still, the reader will surely have grasped the importance of short, snappy phrases – no long, boring and platitudinous sermons here.

Another question we must address sooner or later is what to tell the customer when he or she finds that there's nothing in the packaging.

That's a difficult one. Over to you, Saatchi & Saatchi...