

The

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**Televangelist gains UK foothold**

**P**AT ROBERTSON, the US television evangelist who believes that feminism encourages women to kill their children, now owns a British TV station.

On December 31, 1992, Robertson, owner of the long-running cowboy series *Bonanza*, "put in a \$74 million (or a \$68.5 million) bid to take over MTM (Mary Tyler Moore) and its British parent company, TVS," reports the March issue of *American Atheist Newsletter*.

"The deal was consummated in late January, 1993, although no media report could be found on it. That the purchase was made was authenticated by American Atheists' direct call to Robertson's headquarters on February 2, 1993."

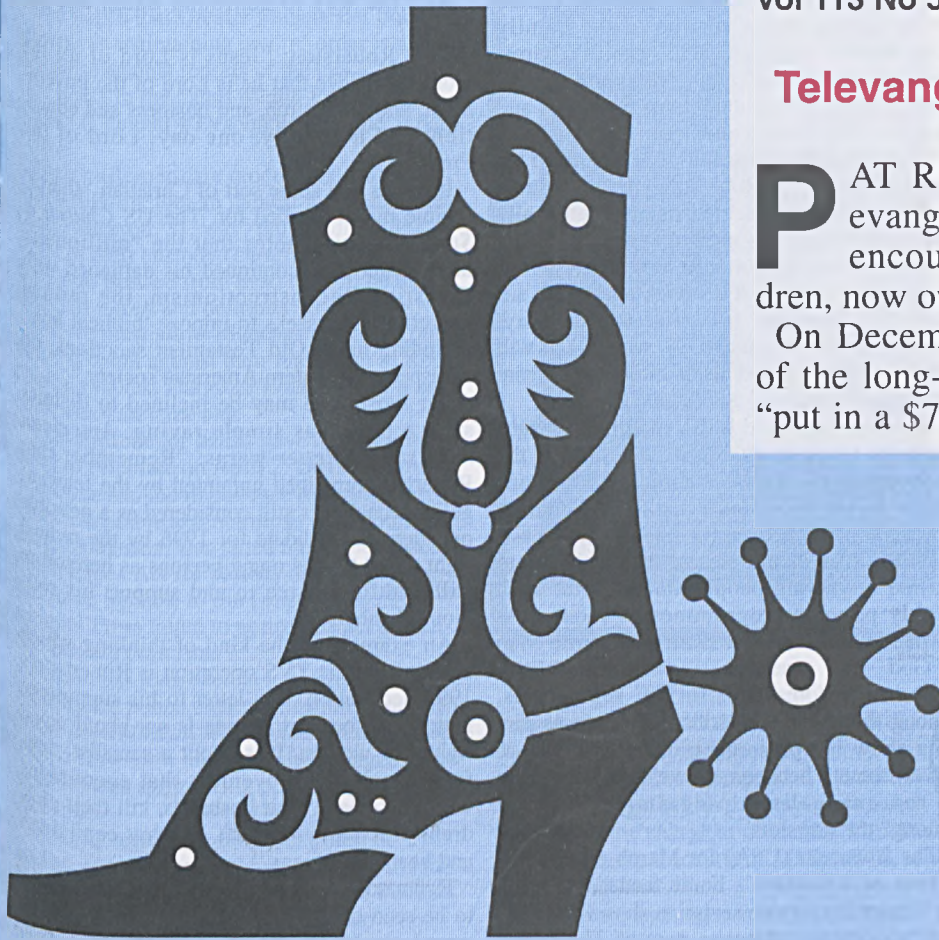
The holders of 25.5 per cent of TVS ordinary shares and 14.1 per cent of TVS preferred shares elected to receive cash instead of new Class B Common Stock which Robertson issued.

This meant that Robertson needed to pay only £7.7 million out of his own pocket.

Before Robertson moved in, Southampton-based TVS failed in its bid to gain the current ITV franchise for the South and South-West.

That went to Meridian, who took over on January 1 – probably, *The Freethinker* under-

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**BONANZA****FOR GOD**

# Televangelist gains UK foothold

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stands, because the TVS bid was too big and there were Government doubts about whether it would be able to sustain the high level of payment it offered for the franchise.

But, although nobody in authority at TVS could be found to talk to *The Freethinker* when we contacted the station on May 4, we do know that Robertson plans to use the TVS production facilities and the library of television shows it owns to enlarge his own pool of programming.

He also wants to make TVS broadcasting studios a launch-pad for new TV channels in Britain and Europe.

Highly popular programmes in the TVS library include the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Lou Grant*, *Bob Newhart Show*, *Remington Steele*, and *Saint Elsewhere*.

Robertson's Family Channel, owned by International Family Entertainment (IFT), is carried in the US by more than 10,000 cable operators and reaches 93 per cent of all cable households. It currently owns the rights to

*Gunsmoke*, *Big Brother Jake*, *The Waltons* and, of course, *Bonanza*.

Robertson also has a stable of radio properties including several stations, the Florida Radio Network, and the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN).

At the end of the deal with TVS, the Christian Broadcasting Network owned 13,763,333 shares (52.40 per cent) of IFT.

Tim Robertson, Pat's son, told the United Press agency that a version of the Family Channel will be put on cable systems in Great Britain on weekends, with programmes aired Fridays from 6pm midnight and Saturdays and Sundays from 7am to midnight.

"But with his acquisition of MTM and TVS Entertainment, Pat Robertson's outreach now is through international television - potentially the most dangerous medium in the world," comments *American Atheist Newsletter*.

However, because TVS does not own a so-called "terrestrial" franchise (unlike, say, Central, Tyne Tees and HTV, who do), it will not be able to project itself into British front rooms uninvited.

Viewers will have to be recruited to subscribe to its cable offerings (an insider at the Independent Television Commission confirmed to *The Freethinker* that Robertson does now hold a UK licence for satellite broadcasting). But that should present few problems to skilled marketing people able to offer such highly popular programmes as those now owned by ex-President Bush's favourite Man of God.

So long as he keeps to ITC regulations, among them a ban on soliciting funds as part of a show but presumably not as part of an advertisement between shows, he will be able to run evangelistic programmes "in and among" the star slots.

*The Humanist* (USA) for March-April gives a taste of Robertson's home tactics, referring to "Pastor Pat's more sectarian shows" appearing "alongside endless re-runs of *The Young Riders* and *Little House on the Prairie*."

This pattern may be transferred in some measure to the UK - but Robertson will have to be wary of the Independent Television Commission when it comes to putting across political ideas: the ITC operates "dipstick" monitoring for "balance" and undertakes to act speedily on complaints from viewers.

Robertson's Christian Coalition can count on the support of a host of US religious right political organisations. The programme of Britain's newest TV station owner insists that:

- The failure of the USSR is simply a plot to lure the United States into cutting its defence budget and pouring billions of dollars into the former Soviet Union.
- Lucifer himself orchestrated the Persian Gulf War as a pretext to establish "the new world order." This order will destroy democracy and Christianity and establish world socialism.
- The plot dates back to Mesopotamia. It has

reared its ugly head before in the forms of the Freemasons, the 18th Century Bavarian Illuminati, and the Rothschild banking interests.

More recently it has been manifested in the Federal Reserve Board, the United Nations, the Trilateral Commission, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the New Age movement.

And the way to confound Satan and his chums?

Says Robertson: "Jesus is Lord of all the world. I believe that he is Lord of the government, and the church, and business and education, and hopefully, one day, Lord of the Press..."

It seems that some sort of Christian "sharia" regime may be called for. The *US Church & State* magazine notes that the "millionaire broadcaster has...continued his dalliance with Christian Reconstructionism, the radical movement that seeks to impose 'biblical law,' including harsh Old Testament sanctions, on all aspects of modern American society."

For those who may be inclined to dismiss such a policy as simple raving, *American Atheist Newsletter* warns: "Remember that Robertson remained untainted by the televangelist debacles, is still considered as a possible presidential candidate for 1996 by the radical right - and that as many persons as heretofore still faithfully listen to and support his religious channel."

An example of the kind of thinking which may inform the TVS operation is Robertson's 1992 declaration, in a letter to his supporters, that: "The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians."

Robertson undoubtedly intended his remarks to be seen only by a select audience, but they were leaked to the media - much to the embarrassment of his close associate George Bush, who, campaigning for re-election with Robertson's support, suspected that the remarks might just turn off female voters and paint Republicans as extremists!

Pat Robertson is still an accepted speaker at Republican events, such as the Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington, DC: on February 19, he shared the podium there with former Vice President Dan Quayle.

Admitting, however, that the following for Robertson fell apart at the end of the last presidential campaign, our US freethought colleagues find it hard to evaluate his current true strength. But as head of the Christian Coalition, he has recently outlined his plans to have ten trained organisers in each of the USA's 175,000 precincts by the end of the decade.

Freethinkers will await his coming to our shores - and airwaves and political life - with nervous interest.

## THE FREETHINKER

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# UP FRONT

with the Editor

## Censor-morons strike again

HOME Secretary Kenneth Clarke has let it be known that he intends to introduce "league tables" of police performance.

One hopes that Greater Manchester bobbies' prowess in maintaining law 'n' order is not measured against reports of the city's Moss Side being in the hands of gun-toting drug-dealers (Channel 4 *Despatches* and the *Sunday Times*).

Their customer-care procedures could do with a tidy-up, too: an inquest jury found that Leon Patterson, 31, was "unlawfully killed" while in their custody (*Observer*, May 2). His body was bruised from head to foot; he had been left naked and delirious for 20 hours.

But we must allow Manchester's finest one thing to count against their relegation in Ken Clarke's tables: *They don't half know a mucky book when they see one!*

This aptitude for letters gave t'Bill something to celebrate on April 2: David Britton, who once had the impudence to satirise former Chief Constable and notorious God-botherer James Anderton, was jailed under the Obscene Publications Act for periods of four months and three months, to run concurrently. The national Press failed to notice this act of militant literary criticism.

Britton has long been at loggerheads with Manchester police over publication of his novel *Lord Horror*, which is based largely on a Lord Haw-Haw character. It is alleged also to contain an unflattering portrait of the saintly Anderton.

Nothing to do with the latter point, of course, but the cops grabbed *Lord Horror* in 1989 and tried to get it burned by the Public Executioner, or whatever it is they do with unwholesome literature at the Old Trafford end of the M62. But, at a Crown Court appeal brought by Britton's Savoy Books in July last year, the order for its destruction was overturned.

The successful appeal, supported by international freedom group Article 19, was led by Geoffrey Robertson QC.

Since the seizure of *Lord Horror*, the Savoy offices – as well as a retail bookshop owned by David Britton – have been the target of simultaneously mounted raids.

Britton's April 2 conviction arose from the sale of "pornographic" material seized during a swoop in August, 1991. (He has a previous conviction for selling world-famous Grove Press editions).

On the same raid, police seized more than 4,000 copies of a *Lord Horror* comic, which, like the novel, is about a Lord Haw-Haw sort of character.

The raid came three days after the initial ruling by a magistrate that the (later exonerated)

The punk incarnation of Peter Pan by "Max" which so terrified Obscene officers of Customs and Excise. They have decided that readers of *The Freethinker* shall be banned from reading of Peter's exploits, lest we afterwards dash out into the streets and frighten the horses with our abominable behaviour.



novel *Lord Horror* was obscene.

The comics, still held by the police, are being dealt with under Section Three of the Obscene Publications Act.

"If past experience is repeated, this means that they will go before the magistrate, who will uphold the charge of obscenity," Michael Butterworth, an associate of Mr Britton's, told *The Freethinker*.

"But we are seeking to have the charges changed and brought under Section Two of the Act, so that the case may be heard before a jury, rather than just a magistrate. David Britton will be leaving Risley prison on June 1 and we will be meeting with lawyers to plan a campaign with this aim."

Further information on this from Michael Butterworth on 061-833 2664.

## Strange Customs

MEANWHILE, Obscene officers of Customs and Excise are in the sights of campaigners from the Comics Creators Guild – artists and writers who in a statement to *The Freethinker* "strongly condemn any action taken by Customs and Excise in seizing imported comics published expressly for the enjoyment of mature

comics readers."

This material is freely available in Europe and the USA and "we believe the citizens of this country have an equal right of access to it."

At present, there is no clear guide regarding the importation of material "for mature readers." And without explicit guidelines on what material Customs and Excise is liable to seize, creators, publishers and retailers of comics cannot freely carry out their trade, without fear of seizure of monthly titles which they import sight unseen.

"We call on HM Government to bring the law by which the Customs and Excise acts in seizing supposedly indecent and obscene material (the Customs Consolidation Act of 1876 and the Customs and Excise Management Act of 1979) in line with the Obscene Publications Act (1959) so that imported comics could not be forfeit unless forfeiture would be justified under the terms of the Obscene Publications Act," says the statement.

As the law relating to imported comics now stands, a Court is not bound to consider either the test of obscenity or the defence that such material is for the public good – valuable checks on extremism which are available when a charge is brought under the Obscene Publications Act.

Whether or not an imported comic is

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with the Editor

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obscene should be judged by the same legal test that applies to all forms of art and literature published in this country, the Guild insists.

Comics Creators Guild Chairman Nicholas J Vince said: "We see it as our duty to speak out against the draconian censorship laws of this country.

"Our interest in the problem has been kindled by a Customs and Excise raid on Gosh Comics, of Great Russell Street, London, late last year. Eight officers spent six hours in the comic shop and seized 574 items."

Leaving aside the question of whether the Government's famed public spending axe shouldn't be swung on Customs and Excise – if it can afford to have so many grown men spend so much time grubbing about among piles of comics – it is noteworthy that many of the items they snatched were later returned.

Even more significant is the fact that among those destroyed was a title published in this country and not imported: *Peter Pank*, a punk version of *Peter Pan*. This action, possible under the law as it stands, is rather like Customs levying an import duty on blankets made in Batley and sold in Birmingham.

"Our campaign aims to persuade the public and the Government that the Customs-related laws should be brought in line with the Obscene Publications Act," said Nicholas Vince.

"This does not mean we wholeheartedly endorse the Act. However, we believe a change in the laws used by Customs is a vital step in the wider debate.

"We intend to bring about change via a publicity campaign, letters from members to their MPs, a petition and any other means available."

A favourite trick of Obscene officers of both the police and Customs and Excise is to hold a publication until its expired dateline makes it useless for sale. They are able to do this because there is no law of "*habeus corpus*" in relation to goods, which can be held until charges are brought and small traders are bankrupted.

The Comics Creators Guild is seeking the support of Article 19, the British Importers Confederation, Liberty and the Campaign Against Censorship in its crusade.

Members expect to draw up a strategy at their annual general meeting on May 27.

Those who "have any relevant experiences to share with us or any information, or helpful advice to offer" should contact The Comics Creators Guild, 4/394 Streatham High Road, London SW16 6HX; telephone 081-677 6737.

And readers who have themselves suffered as a result of censorship in any of its obnoxious forms are urged to contact *The Freethinker* with the full story.

## Challenge censorship

SO YET again, freethinkers are faced with the question of whether *any* censorship is justified. Most would probably agree with D H Lawrence that: "The censor-moron does not really hate anything but the living and growing human consciousness." And Robertson Davies: "I never heard of anyone who was really literate or who ever really loved books who wanted to suppress any of them. Censors only read a book with great difficulty, moving their lips as they puzzle out each syllable, when somebody tells them that the book is unfit to read."

The blue-pencil is not always wielded by the right hand. The Anti-Nazi League and Glasgow Council want to ban the film *Romper Stomper* – no doubt because they suspect that shots of skinheads beating Vietnamese immigrants to Australia would encourage the normally placid and sedate Glaswegians to act likewise.

The Red Hot TV channel has been frozen from our airwaves – to the delight of many otherwise "progressive" feminists. Behind that decision is Heritage Minister Peter Brooke who says its sexual explicitness "offends against good taste and decency."

*Hidden Agenda*, which concerned Whitehall's shoot-on-sight method of dealing with the IRA, was postponed by Channel 4 after the Warrington bombings.

The question to which we must always return is: who decides what is "obscene" or otherwise offensive?

Mrs Whitehouse? Some born-again senior policeman of the Anderton breed? A pillar of the establishment like the BBC's late and pathologically censorious Lord Reith who, it recently turned out, had a "very passionate" 10-year relationship with a young man, as well as committing adultery with at least one woman (*Observer*, March 14). (It isn't the "immorality" which rankles: it's the hypocrisy of such a man devoting his non-banking hours to protecting *our* ears from words like "bloody" and "bum.")

Who is qualified to decide what you and I may or may not read or watch on telly? Politicians like Cecil Parkinson, David Mellor? Intellectual giants like Ken Clarke, John Patten? Why not Father Morrow?

We might not personally relish some of the publications and programmes which such worthies would like to ban (I wouldn't rush to buy *Peter Pank*, the version of *Peter Pan* featuring glue-sniffing and amazingly acrobatic sex in Punkland, which Customs and Excise have seized from Gosh Comics even though it was

not imported).

But we know that, given an inch, the enemies of freethought will always seek to snatch the mile – to suit their own shabby political and religious purposes. *The Freethinker* itself could suddenly be found to be obscene... offensive... even, perish the thought, blasphemous.

Every ban helps to "normalise" the atmosphere of conformity which those in authority find so entirely congenial. Freethinkers, surely, must question everything – challenging censorship, encouraging critical thought.

Allow the "censor-moron" to decide what we can read or see on a single occasion – and it opens one more door into our lives. It helps to legitimise a pattern for even greater interference and control at some time in the future.

## Koresh the Christian

SORRY, but you'll have to wait another month for *The Freethinker* assessment of the events at Waco. Nicolas Walter said much of what we believe, in a very few words, in his letter to *The Guardian*:

"David Koresh was a real Christian, who took religion seriously, believed in heaven and hell, studied the text of the Bible, listened to the word of God, and behaved accordingly. Isn't that what is being recommended by the political and educational authorities in this country?"

Out there in what was to become their Texan funeral-pyre, Koresh and his cultists ("a cult is someone else's religious group which does not agree with mine") had ample time, before the FBI literally sparked their deaths with battering-tanks and illegal gas, to reflect on what the churches had taught them about the Bible being the actual word of God (40 per cent of Americans believe that, according to a recent poll). And they would know what the Book promises (II Peter 3, 10): *And the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up.*

Heaven was at hand, so as the flames crackled, the believers probably never wondered why the FBI rejected the option of ending the siege through, say, an SAS-style surprise assault or by the use of water-cannon. Survivors insist that there was no suicide pact, no blueprint for a breakout, and (according to Waco child care officials: *The Guardian*, April 22) no physical or sex-related trauma on Mount Carmel children. Why, then, couldn't the FBI have simply sat the whole thing out for a few weeks more until the Messiah got peckish?

There is, notes Charles Ward...

# More than one Christianity

SOME years ago, a lecturer in Cambridge, whose name I do not recall, when passing comment on an essay I had written, made a remark which lingered in my mind. "There is no such thing as religion," he said, "only religions."

At first, I felt rather put out of countenance, as not till then had I been told that there was anything amiss with my frequent allusions to "religion." Thinking about it, I came to see how right he was. I was relieved in a way to find that I had not been the victim of a personal idiosyncrasy. Application of the word to all sorts of matters that seem religious is a common practice. Like others, I had given it no more thought than one would to the utterance of any conventional term. But I duly realised that this was no semantic quibble; my attention had been drawn to a fact of some importance.

Nothing defined as "religion," universally acceptable as comprehensively applying to all religions, has ever been produced. What we deem to be religious may refer to modes of thought and behaviour which some religions share, but in none of their six "dimensions" (to follow Ninian Smart) – doctrinal, mythological, ethical, ritual, experiential, social – can a specific factor be regarded as an essential constituent of any.

Much the same could be said concerning attempts to place all manifestations of devotion to a person called "Christ" under a religious umbrella labelled "Christianity." There are a number of Christianities, significantly differing from each other despite superficial similarities. (At all times, including the present, Christians of one persuasion have often strongly disapproved of that term being claimed by those of another). Similarities may be traced to the sharing of a general Christian mythology – the "divine story" of Creation, Providence and Redemption – as well as to employment of the same source-phrases in the scriptures of the Old (Jewish) and New (Christian) Testaments.

Even so, neither the mythology nor the Bible are accorded equal veneration either as wholes or in part by all who call themselves Christian. Opponents of "Christianity" are frequently unaware that they are ridiculing what amounts to a caricature of their own making. In doing so, they are actually undermining their pleas for rationalism, since those who are thus caricatured are well aware that they neither believe nor behave quite in the manner their critics assert that they do, or sometimes go so far as to claim that they should.

When trying to persuade others to abandon superstition, stereotypes are best avoided and basic facts given prominence. For



● The many different religions – and Christianities – popular in Britain were the subject of an in-depth study by *The Economist* on March 13. This splendid cartoon illustrated the point that: "The Church of England is a minority taste, embracing only a fifth of religiously active Britons."

instance, no Christianity of any kind was founded by Christ. The popular notion that Christ is responsible for Christianity is inferred from a false analogy with some other religions and is cultivated by those who have a religious axe to grind, such as gaining credence for his supposed establishment of a Church, inauguration of "the apostolic succession" of bishops and the institution of a sacrament. Texts believed to support such doctrines reflect, not what happened during Jesus's ministry, but later views.

The Christianities which have come (and some of which have gone) since the time of the apostles are all religions about Jesus (who was called the Christ). Not one was a religion he invented. The religion into which he was born was Judaism. He neither professed nor outlined any other.

Shortly after his death, according to Acts, his followers were called Christians, an eponym aptly denoting their sectarian insistence that Jesus had been the predicted Jewish messiah. Their naive beliefs had little in common with the creeds we know. In the absence of tightly-knit organisational unity, variety of religious expression was unavoidable.

Because of the great diversity of beliefs which developed as the number of Christians increased (including ideas concerning Jesus's relationship to "God"), by the

fourth century of our era rivalry between various leaders with vastly different viewpoints was extreme. A power-struggle led to the emergence of Trinitarian theology.

The bland assumption has been made by Christians ever since that these acrimonious deliberations were divinely guided to reach this conclusion and those who are content with it regard this particular tradition as sacrosanct. Religious historians are among the few who have not entirely lost track of the others.

The recent shenanigans concerning ordination of women to the priesthood in the Church of England provide an intriguing contemporary illustration of the centrality given by some Christians to their tradition. The tradition itself could be described as their religion. They will defend it with fanatical fervour, representing as it does the feeling of security associated with what is familiar. Others, no less convinced that "God" is on their side, divert a sensible urge towards progress of some kind to the task of modifying the superstition, deriving from temple worship of bygone times, that there are sacred or occult operations which must be, or can only be effectively, performed by duly-appointed personnel according to established rubrics.

# More than one Christianity

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This is but one of the many strands which, singly or in some combination, are to be found in the Christianities (and, indeed, in other religions). Perhaps the most basic of these is awe, a compound of wonder and ignorance-based fear.

Wonder, when it is allied with curiosity which inhibits fear, can lead to discovery – that is, to science. Long before Jesus, rational thought had bloomed here and there, notably among the Greeks, until swallowed up by encroaching deserts of superstition. Men apparently considered it less strenuous to let fancy roam than to think, and failed to understand that, in each case, resultant stress is in inverse proportion.

First Century Palestine was a melting-pot where theocratic ideas and priestcraft had dominance among the people of that land. A reflective element, typified by the Hebrew prophets Jesus was apparently fond of quoting, had lain for centuries just below the surface – people perceptive enough to wish to make sense of their religion.

Following the death of the pacific, warm-hearted preacher whose shrewd insight into human nature and spiritual values gave hope of a happy and fulfilling life, ideas of

an authoritarian sort took over and began the process which may be described as the submergence of Jesus. Although his teaching and example were not quite forgotten, he came to be presented in idolatrous fashion as a divine being in human form, before whose image worshippers would genuflect, making a religious sign.

Communal life since the dawn of humanity had brought about the emergence of ethical awareness and concepts such as those of punishment and guilt.

Religious people did not invent morality or a sense of guilt. "Sin," however, they did invent, thus allotting to guilt a major religious role. Sin, in its proper meaning, refers to "disobedience to God." One can see how, by crediting their imagined deity with the promulgation of moral laws, they impaired the free development of ethical perception. Religious faith suppresses rationality, or at any rate restricts its operation.

Theologically-induced moral blindness resulted in pogroms, "holy wars," use of torture to induce heretics to recant, the burning of "witches" – all in Christ's name.

What of today? Many Christians have resisted progress towards a more humane society, with regard to issues such as contraception, abortion, homosexuality,

euthanasia. Some have taken part in "Satanic abuse" scare-mongering, sabatarian opposition to new trading laws; want Christian indoctrination in schools; others break up families, or deprive their members of medical aid. A strange myopia prevails concerning matters religious, people with socially dangerous beliefs being given undeserved respect and encouragement to propagate their views.

Of course, all Christians do not behave like this. Worthy ideals have certainly motivated the lives of many believers. But it should not be overlooked that this owes little if anything to (and may be at odds with) the religion professed. The risk is ever present that their own doctrinal constructions, or the restraining efforts of fellow-believers, may stifle or deflect any tolerance, compassion or rational thinking these people exhibit.

The humane teaching (it may have originated in, but is not tied to, a religious setting) *Love your neighbour as yourself* is positive and challenging and, in my view, preferable to the so-called Golden Rule (don't do to others what you wouldn't like done to yourself). These maxims are, of course, complementary. Such morality has always had responsive devotees among atheists and agnostics, who are unencumbered with the qualifying motives found among religious people, such as the desire to gain spiritual merit or heavenly reward, or to "win souls."

Priestly sacramentalism produces instead a guilt-ridden consciousness, to be assuaged through asceticism, ritual and penitential acts, or anaesthetised by a credulous belief in a doctrine of divine redemption.

Some Christianities find authority in the Bible, rather than in a hierarchy or tradition, subtract mystery from ritual and add it to personal insight, thereby turning realisation into divine inspiration. Having feet of clay, this leads many to spend their lives agonising about their salvation, guidance, or grasp of "Ultimate Truth."

Others spend their energies fund-raising for their chosen causes (in some cases, it must be said, with considerable self-interest), or to keep a roof over the heads of the faithful in their hallowed fanes, or in evangelistic efforts, or in persuading themselves that they are on the right lines (the last two are often much the same), or in establishing a respectable status for themselves in a fellowship of kindred minds which they find more or less congenial.

One thing is plain. You cannot "run" a church on simply loving your neighbour as yourself.

But most Christians, as you would expect, find it hard to feel detached about this – until, that is, they detach themselves from their Christianities.

## Religion at AIDS events irks GALHA members

THE Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA) has criticised AIDS organisations for holding public events with an overtly religious content.

In the Spring issue of its journal, *Gay &*

### Way out West

Information (SAE, please) about Cornwall Humanists is now available from "Amber," Short Cross Road, Mount Hawke, Truro TR4 8EA. There will be a meeting on Religion in Schools (George Mepham) at Truro Quaker Meeting House on Monday, June 21 at 7.30pm.

And George will be speaking on the same subject to Devon Humanists at Plymouth Swarthmore Centre, Mutley Plain, on Thursday, June 24 at 7.30pm. Information (SAE) about the Devon Humanists is available from 31 Ringswell Avenue, Exeter EX1 3EF.

*Lesbian Humanist*, Editor George Broadhead says that many non-believers take part in the public events held to commemorate those who have died of AIDS, including the Terrence Higgins Candlelight Vigil, held in May, and the Reach Out and Touch event held in August.

Mr Broadhead says it is regrettable, therefore, that some of these, notably the last two Reach Out and Touch ones, have been marred by the "intrusiveness of religion." The 1992 Reach Out and Touch vigil actually featured a gospel choir singing the praises of Jesus and urging people to stamp on Satan!

Mr Broadhead says that GALHA hopes the organisers of these events, even if believers themselves, would take into account the number of participants who, if not overtly hostile to religion "because of its fundamental homophobia," are at least very uncomfortable with it.

"By all means arrange a separate religious service for those who want one," he urges, "but keep religion out of the main public events."

*Gay & Lesbian Humanist* is obtainable at £6 a year from GALHA, 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth CV8 2HB.

# More opt for right to a 'peaceful' death

SEVENTY-NINE per cent of British people – four per cent more than in 1989 – support the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia for the incurably ill, according to a new opinion poll carried out in April by NOP for the Voluntary Euthanasia Society.

The random statistical survey asked the question:

**Some people say that the law should allow adults to receive medical help to a peaceful death if they suffer from an incurable physical illness that is intolerable to them, provided they have previously requested such help in writing. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with this.**

With 79 per cent of people agreeing, support for voluntary euthanasia is now at an all-time high. Support has grown steadily since the first, similar NOP in 1976 showed only 69 per cent in favour.

That figure grew to 72 per cent in 1985 and 75 per cent in 1989.

With 11 per cent of people answering "don't know" to this year's poll, only 10 per cent disagree.

## Option

VES General secretary John Oliver told *The Freethinker*: "The result is no big surprise. We know that there is a huge feeling among British people that there should be a wider range of options for the dying.

"Hospices do a wonderful job, and palliative care in general is improving dramatically, but there is still a tragic minority who currently face a very distressing end to life.

"Most people would like to have voluntary euthanasia available as a compassionate and humane option if that happened to them. After all, people demand choice – in dying as well as living."

Members of all religious groups surveyed showed a majority in favour of voluntary euthanasia. The highest figure for a religious denomination was the Church of Scotland (85 per cent in favour), with Anglicans at 80 per

## Remembering Edwin

LEEDS Humanists report the death of Edwin Barlow on March 21, aged 63.

Edwin joined the group in 1973 and was chairman for four years. Group members have contributed to the memorial fund which will be given to the Woodland Trust to plant a grove of trees in a public open space in Edwin's memory.

cent.

Interestingly, 73 per cent of Roman Catholics surveyed were in favour, along with 60 per cent of Jews – and 93 per cent of those who said they were "agnostics."

Sex, age, economic class or region made little difference. Regionally, the highest percentage in favour of voluntary euthanasia was in Wales (82 per cent), closely followed by Scotland the South-West (81 per cent). The West Midlands, with 75 per cent, showed the smallest majority in favour of voluntary euthanasia.

NOP interviewed a nationally representative

sample of 2,012 adults in Great Britain between March 31 and April 5, 1993.

The Voluntary Euthanasia Society (13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 5PG) was established in 1935 with the aim of making it legal for adults who are suffering severe distress from an incurable illness to receive medical help to die at their own considered request.

The VES currently has 13,500 members and is the main distributor of advance directives ("living wills") and "let me die" cards.

Further information from John Oliver or Meredith MacArdle on 071-937 7770.

## Secular state a priority, NSS diners are told

THE musician Larry Adler was guest-of-honour at this year's National Secular Society annual dinner. He regaled the diners with entertaining accounts of his life and musical experience and touched on his experiences during the McCarthy period.

Harold Blackham, who had just celebrated his 90th birthday, proposed a toast to the NSS, and Dan O'Hara responded on behalf of the Society.

Harold Blackham opened by saying that: "It's more than half-a-century since I first proposed this toast, when Frank Ridley was the President.

"I remember him saying that under this roof there is more brain power than in the whole of the Vatican, which I thought was rather shocking because it was a deduction from a false premise!

"The great event of the last year has been the relaunch of *The Freethinker*. It is admirable – a complete journalistic layout using modern techniques. It is extremely well-produced and the tone of its contents is different.

"The relaunch coincides with a new opportunity, a change of climate. We have a new and growing constituency. Instead of the old militant atheists, you have people who are indifferent to religion or bored with it and these are an increasing majority of our public, so you've got to cultivate a completely different readership.

"The two targets of the old atheist militant secularist journal were the credibility

of religion and the social privilege which it unjustifiably enjoyed in the country. But the credibility is a false target, because religion never intended to be rational. The God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob is not the god of the philosophers.

"The god of the philosophers begins by eschewing any anthropomorphic ideas. It's a different universe of discourse from the God of Israel. It is a tradition, it is handed down – it has nothing to do with rationality. It is a mistake to think of it in those terms. The real target is the behaviour of religious people, and if they are good human beings, well, that is the best thing you can say about anybody.

"There is now a new constituency, a new public, a new order of journalism, which can be taken advantage of.

"In England we still have an established church, while most modern states are secular in the sense that the state is neutral as regards religion. It is not enforced here but it is sponsored. It has state patronage, the state employs members of the church. It is not only Anglicans, but religion as such – almost no politician dares be anything other than Christian, because it has such public standing. It is this that is the proper target. The state should be fully secular in the modern sense of being neutral. We must redirect our firing at these new targets."

In proposing a toast to the NSS, Harold Blackham said: "Secularism can be completely positive – it is making a go of life as we have it."

# Sex and St Teresa

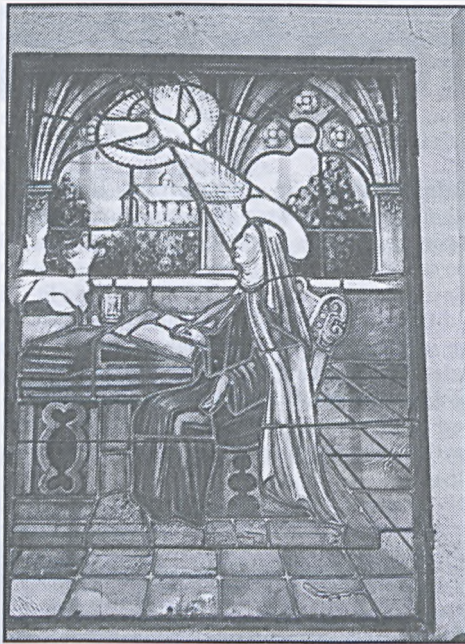
**W**HERE would you expect to find the Synagogue of Santa Maria la Blanca?

Spain, of course: it is one of the two synagogues still standing in Toledo (El Transito is the other), a city which once had no less than ten. Both are fine examples of Moorish craftsmanship, Santa Maria la Blanca, in particular, being more like a mosque than a synagogue – or a church for that matter. Both were converted into churches after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 – hence the name St Mary the White – and are now national monuments; poignant reminders of the awakening from the Christian Dark Ages, when Toledo was prominent in the transmission of Arabic science and Greek philosophy to the rest of Europe. Poignant, too, is Toledo's lovely mosque, built at the same time as the great mosque of Cordoba, now bearing the name Cristo de la Luz.

## Franco

My wife and I recently spent a holiday in Madrid, with visits to the one-time capital Toledo, 45 miles to the south, and to the medieval walled city of Avila, 69 miles to the north west, in the company of, among others, a former Canon of Peterborough Cathedral, a liberal clergyman who, like me, refused to go to Spain during the Franco years; and who, when I asked him what he thought about David Jenkins, the Bishop of Durham, replied: "I engaged him years ago." An interesting companion, you will agree, on trips with so many religious associations.

If you see only one Spanish city outside Madrid, my guide book says, make it Toledo and, though I might find the cities of Andalusia more pleasing, the advice is good. On a steep hill surrounded on three sides by the river Tagus, it hasn't changed much since El Greco painted it – and filled it with his work. There are 16 El Grecos in the sacristy of the cathedral, alongside paintings by Titian, Goya and Van Dyck, and the opulence of this five-aisled basilica is breathtaking; obscene, one might say, in relation to the beggars on its steps. Consider one item alone in the loaded treasury: a 440lb gilded silver monstrance made from more than 5,000 dif-



● *St Teresa as depicted in the convent at Avila where she was a nun.*

ferent parts and pitted with precious stones.

Avila's main religious interest, in contrast, is more austere.

It is the birthplace of Saint Teresa, whose cell may be seen in the Convent of the Incarnation, where she spent 30 years, and whose white statue greets you as you enter through a gate in the wall. It was erected in honour of the Pope's visit in 1982, when she was the first woman to be named Doctor of the Church.

Pilgrims find many shrines to her, and secular visitors can enjoy the little egg-cakes named after her.

As so often with the saints, Teresa (1515-1592) emphasised and no doubt exaggerated her youthful weaknesses. At 15, she tells us, "I began to imitate the fashions, to take delight in being well-dressed, to have great care of my hands, to make use of perfumes and to affect all the vain trimmings which my position in the world allowed." Even after she had entered the Carmelite convent at the age of 20, she confessed that her love of God couldn't "quench" love of her father and friends.

Once she had overcome her love of adornment and other worldly desires, however, she was frequently favoured by God and, as Butler's *Lives of the Saints* puts it, "with that of union, which latter sometimes continued a long time with great increase of joy and love." At times she feared, like some of her mentors, that she might be deluded by the Devil, but she was reassured, and she describes how, in her raptures, she was sometimes

lifted in the air. God seemed "not content with drawing the soul to Himself, but He must needs draw up the very body too, even whilst it is mortal and compounded of so unclean a clay as we have made of it by our sins."

In his *Psychology and Religion*, published in Watts' Library of Science and Culture in 1935, David Forsyth described the "ecstatic vision" as "marked by intense emotional excitement, loss of self-control, and insensibility to external impressions; and it finds frequent verbal expression in references to a divine lover, betrothals, and heavenly or spiritual marriage." The parallels between such mystical experiences and sexual excitement are, he said, "impossible to miss – the intense emotion, the loss of control, the insensibility to external impressions, and the amorous speech. It is eroticism that seeks communion with another." And sexual deprivation is a recognised aid to attaining a mystic state.

## Angel

Teresa is a classic example, with her "spiritual espousals" and "mystical marriage." Moreover, her heart was pierced by an angel "on my left side, in bodily form... He was not large, but small of stature, and most beautiful – his face burning, as if he were one of the highest angels, who seemed to be all of fire... I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron's point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart, and to pierce my very entrails; when he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also, and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain that I could not wish to be rid of it."

My guide book to Avila informs me, too, that: "Melancholy history surrounds the Royal Monastery of St Thomas" and goes on to say that the only son of Ferdinand and Isabella died at the age of 19 and was buried there. Sad enough, but the building has a blacker historical connection. It was the headquarters of the Catholic monarchs' confessor and adviser, Friar Tomas de Torquemada, the first Grand Inquisitor of Spain. And it was he who, in addition to sending thousands of heretics to the stake, was chiefly responsible for the the expulsion of the Jews in the same year that the same King and Queen sent Columbus on his way – in 1492.

Colin McCall

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# Nightmare for freethinkers

**T**HE call from Christian leaders over the Easter period for an end to war and a return to Christian morality will not impress those of us who are acquainted with the history of Christianity from its beginnings to the present time.

Whereas the churches, naturally, prefer peace to war, on their own doorsteps at least, the history books show that they have never been prepared to pay a high price for it.

There is little evidence that religious leaders have ever been willing to surrender any of their power for the sake of that noble cause.

Any church that can sign Concordats with the likes of Napoleon and Hitler, as did the French and German Roman Catholic hierarchies, cares more for its own skin than the well-being of the human race.

The continuing power struggles between church and state have nothing to do with war and peace. Indeed, any priest or parson who decides to take literally the pacifist sentiments of the Sermon on the Mount is regarded as a threat to both institutions.

## Incompetent

It is commonplace for churchmen to organise petitions against Sunday shopping, or against activities that offend their sexual sensibilities, but they know better than to do anything more positive than call for prayers when war raises its ugly face. It is almost as though God can do something about war, but is a complete incompetent when it comes to Sunday shopping.

The Archbishop of Cant, in his Easter message, called for "a new moral order, in which Christian values again underpinned the nation," thus implying that things ain't wot they used to be in great-grandfather's day - a wholly unfounded assumption when we recall that those were the days of the formation of the British Empire in which several peoples were almost wiped out by British invaders.

This most reverend personage went on, courtesy of a compliant media, to say that the Cross was a symbol of the evil that "destroys innocent passers-by and

small children in shopping precincts by terrorism and murder." Thus avoiding any mention of the supplying, by Britain, of weapons of mass destruction to Christian and non-Christian dictators all over the globe, which results in the destruction of many, many more "innocent passers-by and small children."

Meanwhile, the Pope, his "heart swollen with grief," appealed to "men who govern nations, men of goodwill," to "stop the war" in the Balkans. Predictably, the Pope made no mention of the Catholic priests who have been blessing the Croat fighters' guns, or the Orthodox Serbian clergy who are keeping their mouths shut about Serbian atrocities.

Such is the power of religion in Iran, that state and church have fused into a theocracy, and that unhappy alliance threatens to come to fruition in other countries where Islam is rampant, notably in Egypt, Iraq and Libya.

The last two governments have already acknowledged the frightening power of Islam by introducing sweeping new measures to tighten Islamic observances which are designed to ward off the challenge from religious fundamentalists. Amputations and floggings may soon be commonplace in those countries, as they have been in Iran.

As millions have experienced to their cost, the ultimate resolution of state-church power struggles is the theocratic state, where there is almost complete curtailment of freedom of thought and deed; it is the Freethinker's nightmare.

The theocratic state is on a par with Hitler's Germany and Stalin's USSR, where non-religious (or quasi-religious?) ideologies produced the same results.

And lest anyone should think that the "democratic" nations are opposed to the suppression of freedom of thought, let them ponder the fact that the letter of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, and the law of Britain, invests parents with the right to decide the religion of their children and, thereby, subject them to indoctrination by whatever religious organisation they fancy. This is usually their own church, but often another church when the main reason behind it is educational.

In a world where this kind of child abuse is thought of as good practice,

Freethinkers have a long way to go before we get to the entrance of the tunnel, let alone see the light at the other end.

Ernie Crosswell

## 'HUMANISM, THE WAY FORWARD' IS THEME

BRITISH Humanists' annual conference in Wales on October 15-17 will explore Humanist aims and try to develop them into achievable and attractive initiatives.

The conference - at Dyffryn Centre, near Cardiff - will provide a great opportunity "to capitalise on the current growth of the BHA," say the organisers.

Discussion will focus on the role of Humanism in five areas: Personal; inter-personal and pastoral; social and national; global; protective and combative.

The excellent conference facilities at Dyffryn will allow delegates to enjoy a selection of both familiar and novel events and meetings, as well as attendance at all the workshops.

The annual conference always provides an ideal opportunity to get to know fellow Humanists. Creche facilities and rooms adapted for wheelchairs are available.

Non-BHA members are able to attend. Try to book before the end of May. Details from: Annual Conference, British Humanist Association, 14 Lamb's Conduit Passage, London WC1R 4RH.

## Humanist Fork Supper

Saturday, June 12, 1993,  
7.00pm

A social gathering organised by the Humanist Liaison Committee on behalf of the Humanist Movement. A chance to meet fellow Humanists in convivial surroundings and with good food and drink.

*Speakers to be announced*

£5 bookings to be made in advance to:

The British Humanist Association, 14 Lambs Conduit Passage, London WC1R 4RH (071-430 0908)

Conway Hall Humanist Centre  
Red Lion Square, London WC1

# Fivers for freethought

THANK you for an inspiring – a truly Spring-like – March fund total.

Much of your cash will make copies of *The Freethinker* available free-of-charge to people (especially youngsters) who are new not only to the arguments *against* bleak and bloody religion but also to those *for* humanism, secularism and freethought.

On the circulation front, too, things are going well. Last month's front-page pin-up of Father James Morrow proved particularly popular, with one Yorkshire bookshop doubling its order from 10 to 20 copies within 48 hours of his pious features appearing on the shelves.

If you would like copies on sale-or-return, contact Terry Mullins at the address below.

Please keep the contributions coming: every penny strengthens *The Freethinker* fight against superstition and cruelty. Cheques, POs, stamps, cash to: The Fund, G W Foote & Co., 702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL.

Many thanks to:

H M Merrill, F G Petrak, M O Phelps, N H Sinnott and T Whitton, £1 each; M W Gilbert and E Napier, £2 each; N Collins, J B Coward

and R Petterson, £2.50 each; M A Aitchison, S D Kuebart and R V Samuels, £3 each; G A Airey, A R Bailey, R P Bailey, R A Billen, C Blakely, D Y Bye, E Cecil, G F Clarke, I E W Clayton, S Eadie, D Flint, D Game, A E George, L Georgiades, N Gibbard, L Glyn, E F Hammond, E Hillman, D J Holdstock, I C Hyde, A Irving, I S Iverson, G Jamieson, J D Kay, J Lavety, S G Lee, C Lovett, H Madoc-Jones, L Mezaros, L M Moore, A Negus, A W Nunn, T N Risk, A Ruddling, S J Sanders, R J Shiisky, W S Spencer, D Sway, F A Stevenson, F Thompson, L E West, G R Verco, H J Wagerfield and A Whitehead, £5 each; R P Akkermans, B M Clarke, D M Cosgrove, D Harper, H J Jakeman, C M Lamont, G Lewarton, M O Morley, A Oldham, I G Payne, P E Ponting-Barbour, M D Powell, W F Sefton and S Smith, £10 each; I Campbell, £14.40; A Beeson, S M Jaiswal, G L J Lucas and G S Mellor, £15 each; O D'Arcy and S Trent, £16 each; E C Hughes, £17.60; Anonymous, W D Eaton, J E Rupp and C Wilshaw, £20 each; D M Edwards, £25; N Moia, £50.

Total for March: £664.50

## WHAT'S ON

**Birmingham Humanist Group:** Friday, May 21, 8pm: The Humanist View, a discussion, at 16 Leamonsley Road, Lichfield. Contact: Tim Lewis on 0534 257312. Wednesday, May 26, 7pm for 7.45pm, AGM with buffet at 91 Southam Road, Hall Green. Contact: J Denning on 021 777 4953. For full information about Birmingham Humanist Group contact 021 353 1189.

**Brighton and Hove Humanist Group:** 40 Cowper Street, Hove (near Hove Station, bus routes 2a, 5 and 49). Sunday, June 6, 5.30 pm for 6 pm: Public meeting.

**Chiltern Humanists:** 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, May 17, 7.30 pm: Public meeting. Subject: *The Power and Peril of Words*.

**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 Hugh Bowman, 7 Elm Road, Burnside, Glasgow G73 4JR; telephone 041-634 1447.

**Havering and District Humanist Society:** Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Heath Road, Romford. Tuesday, June 1,

8pm: Tim Feakins: *Two Different Views on Learning in the Modern Special Schools*.

**Lewisham Humanist Group:** Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, May 27, 8 pm: Barbara Smoker: *Three Score Years and Ten – Looking Back 70 years*.

**Norwich Humanist Group:** Martineau Hall, 21a Colegate, Norwich. Thursday, May 20, 7.30pm: Public meeting.

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

**Humanist Society of Scotland:** 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, June 3, 7.30pm: Barbara Smoker interviews H J Blackham.

**Sutton Humanist Group:** Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, June 9, 7.45 pm: Peter Heales: *Can There be a Just Society?*

**Tyneside Humanist Group:** Meets 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, tel 0903 239823.



# DOWN TO EARTH

with Bill McIlroy



## Whitehall farce

THAT uproarious farce based on the ordination of women as priests in the Church of England looks like running well into the 21st Century.

The next scene is set in the House of Commons. It may seem odd that MPs, including Roman Catholics, Nonconformists, Jews and assorted unbelievers, should be entitled to debate the General Synod's vote for the ladies' elevation from pew-polishing to priesthood. But that is an Established fact of life.

The action promises to be fast and furious. Those who favour the new measure should be able to see off the High Church traditionalists and the Rock Bottom evangelicals. Nevertheless, the reformers should be on their guard. Opponents of women's ordination include two fearsome dragons on the Tory benches: Lady Olga Maitland and Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman, who are determined to fight the General Synod's decision to the bitter end. And they don't come more bitter than the Lady and the Dame, each of whom has been described by one commentator as "the Word made screeching flesh."

But while Lady Olga and Dame Elaine gird up their formidable loins to do battle with the dark forces of modernism, one of their allies has fled the field and sought refuge in the Vatican camp. Announcing her conversion to Roman Catholicism, Government minister Ann Widdecombe said she had become increasingly disillusioned with the Church of England. The vote in favour of ordaining women as priests was "the last straw." During a 30-minute conversation with Cardinal Hume, she felt "an almost tangible link with the early church" and was impressed by his "attitude of authority and holiness."

Miss Widdecombe may be in for further disillusionment. She will eventually realise that Cardinal Hume's "authority" cuts no ice with large sections of his flock. Only the determinedly self-deluding faithful refuse to admit that a great many Catholics – particularly the young – no longer heed Rome's dictates on education, censorship, divorce, birth control and abortion.

And there is more trouble in the offing. A new organisation, Catholic Women's Ordination, has been formed. Members and supporters have been holding prayer vigils outside Westminster Cathedral "to remember the abilities of women lost to the Roman Catholic Church over the centuries."

Where will it all end? CWO's eventual aim is to open the ordination of women to the

priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church. Although it is unlikely to achieve this noble objective in Miss Widdecombe's lifetime, she and others going over to Rome will come to wonder if they have jumped out of the Anglican frying-pan into the Catholic feminist fire.

## Evolution of a myth

THE "deathbed conversion" industry, which specialised in circulating accounts of notorious unbelievers turning to the Lord in their last hour, has virtually disappeared.

But Christian body-snatchers still occasionally lay claim to some eminent and long-departed individual. For example: Dr M F Perutz recently informed readers of *The Independent* newspaper that "Charles Darwin's discrediting of the biblical story of creation did not prevent him remaining a believing Christian."

Strange, indeed, that Christian are so anxious to include Darwin among their number when it was he who handed their deity the scientific equivalent of a P45. Nevertheless, they persist in doing so, although Darwin's family and close friends frequently debunked the fable that he was "a believing Christian."

Darwin himself scotched the notion in his autobiography. Although once destined for the Anglican priesthood he came to write "...disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but was at last complete ...I felt no distress, and have never since doubted for a single second that my conclusion was correct."

Increasing fame resulted in large numbers of printed sermons, tracts and urgent appeals to repent arriving at Darwin's home in Kent. To one evangelising pest he replied: "I do not believe in the Bible as a divine revelation, and therefore not in Jesus Christ as the Son of God." But despite this and other evidence to the contrary, thick-skinned Christians continued to promulgate the myth of Darwin, "the believing Christian."

## Christian apartheid

THE television critic of a national daily concluded his review of BBC2's *Horizon* programme on the Dead Sea Scrolls with a reference to "the essence of Christian teaching – its emphasis on brotherly love."

No doubt readers were expected to believe that "brotherly love" shown by Crusaders, Inquisitors, witch-hunters, Reformation and counter-Reformation zealots had nothing to do with Christian teaching.

Christian apologists either brazen it out or assume an expression of pained surprise when reminded that for many centuries their religion underpinned vile tyrannies and social evils. And they are adept at extricating their churches from disastrous situations they have been largely responsible for creating.

This is happening at the present time in Northern Ireland, where religious leaders have mounted a damage-limitation exercise.

Of course the reality is that violence which has ravished the Province since 1969 is rooted in Christian apartheid. The extent to which society is religiously segregated is seen in a recent analysis of population trends. Of Belfast's 51 wards, the residents in 35 are at least 90 per cent of one religion. Protestant and Catholic areas are separated by walls up to 20 feet high in order to keep followers of the Prince of Peace from each others' throats.

One of the very few issues on which the Irish clergy have agreed is to keep the faithful on a short leash and well apart. The process of segregation starts in childhood. Less than one per cent of Northern Ireland's children (more than 100 of whom have been killed in the current upsurge of violence) are educated in integrated schools. Young people are actively discouraged from mixing socially with those of a different religion.

In such an atmosphere, the potential for sectarian violence is ever present. Those who have fostered religious indoctrination and segregation are now attempting to obscure their baneful record in a cloud of incense and pious waffle.

The International Humanist and Ethical Union proposes to appoint a full-time

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

in the IHEU head office in Utrecht as from January 1, 1994.

Persons who are interested in this vacancy can ask for detailed information from the IHEU secretariat, Nieuwegracht 69a, 3512 LG Utrecht; telephone \*31 30 312155; fax \*31 30 364169.

Selected applicants must be prepared to come to the IHEU Executive Committee meeting in Berlin in July, 1993, to meet the EC members.

Applications should reach the IHEU secretariat before July 1, 1993

## Blast from the past: Number 5

Mark Twain was the pseudonym of Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835-1910), humourist and freethinker. Author of classics *Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Huckleberry Finn* (1884). *The War Prayer*, from which this extract is edited, was not published until 1923: Twain's daughter, Jean, prevented earlier publication on the grounds that the piece was sacrilegious, exposing as it did the paradox of God being on both sides in war between Christian lands.

IT WAS a time of great and exalting excitement. The country was up in arms, the war was on, in every breast burned the holy fire of patriotism; the drums were beating, the bands playing.

Daily the young marched, gay and fine in their new uniforms, the proud fathers and mothers, sisters and sweethearts cheering them with voices choked with happy emotion.

In the churches, the pastors preached devotion to flag and country and invoked the God of Battles, beseeching His aid. The volunteers were there, their young faces alight with martial dreams. With them sat their dear ones, proud, happy, and envied by the neighbours and friends who had no sons or brothers to send forth to the field of honour, there to win for the flag or, failing, die the noblest of noble deaths. The service proceeded...

### Stranger

None could remember the like of the long prayer for passionate pleading and moving and beautiful language. The burden of its supplication was that an ever-merciful and benignant Father of us all would watch over our noble young soldiers, and aid, comfort, and encourage them in their patriotic work; bless them, shield them in the the day of battle and the hour of peril, bear them in His mighty hand, make them strong and confident, invincible in the bloody onset; help them to crush the foe, grant to them and to their flag and country imperishable honour and glory.

An aged stranger entered and moved with slow and noiseless step up the main aisle, his eyes fixed upon the minister, his long body clothed in a robe that reached to his feet, his head bare, his white hair descending in a frothy cataract to his shoulders, his seamy face unnaturally pale, pale even to ghastliness.

With all eyes following him and wondering, he made his silent way; without pausing, he ascended to the preacher's side and stood there, waiting. With shut lids the preacher, unconscious of his presence, continued his moving prayer, and at last finished it with the words, uttered in

Silent  
prayer  
is a  
killer!

fervent appeal: "Bless our arms, grant us the victory, O Lord our God, Father and Protector of our land and flag."

The stranger touched his arm, motioned him to step aside – which the startled minister did – and took his place. During some moments he surveyed the spellbound audience with solemn eyes, in which burned an uncanny light; then in a deep voice he said: "I come from the Throne – bearing a message from Almighty God!"

The words smote the house with a shock; if the stranger perceived it he gave no attention.

"He has heard the prayer of His servant your shepherd, and will grant it, if such shall be your desire after I, His messenger, shall have explained to you its import... that is to say, its full import. For it is like unto many of the prayers of men, in that it asks for more than he who utters it is aware of – except he pause and think.

"God's servant and yours has prayed his prayer. Has he paused and taken thought? Is it one prayer? No. It is two – one uttered, the other not. Both have reached the ear of Him who heareth all supplications, the spoken and the unspoken. Ponder this. Keep it in mind. If you would beseech a blessing upon yourself, beware lest, without intent, you invoke a curse upon a neighbour at the same time!

"You have heard your servant's prayer – the uttered part of it. I am commis-

sioned by God to put into words the other part of it – that part which the pastor (and also you in your hearts) fervently prayed silently. And ignorantly and unthinkingly? God grant that it was so! You heard these words: 'Grant us the victory, O Lord our God!' That is sufficient. The whole of the uttered prayer is compact into those pregnant words. Elaborations were not necessary. When you have prayed for victory you have prayed for many unmentioned results which follow victory – and must follow it, cannot help but follow it. Upon the listening spirit of God the Father fell also the unspoken part of the prayer. He commandeth me to put it into words. Listen!

### Writhing

"O Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts, go forth to battle – be Thou near them! With them in spirit we also go forth from the sweet peace of our beloved firesides to smite the foe. O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with their little children to wander, unfriended, the wastes of their desolated land in rags and hunger and thirst, sports of the sun flames of summer and the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travail, imploring Thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it. For our sakes who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask it, in the spirit of love of Him who is the Source of Love, and who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are beset and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Amen."

[After a pause]. "Ye have prayed it; if ye still desire it, speak! The Messenger of the Most High waits."

It was believed afterward that the man was a lunatic, because there was no sense in what he said.

# YOU'RE TELLING US!

## Fathers who knew best

WITH reference to the "Jerks for Jesus on the Rampage" article in the April issue of *The Freethinker*, you quote Church Fathers Jerome, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas as saying that a male foetus gets its soul 40 days after conception, a female after 80 days, and that abortion is therefore permitted after that point. Homosexuals are not considered in this matter!

And how did they find out what sex the foetus was? Who discovered the method, and when? How many believed it, and when did it go out of favour?

I have come across this before and assumed it derived from Greek sources. Any further information on this anybody? I assume also that any answers will be infallible.

CYRIL JAMES  
Sheffield

## Books about freethought

BOTH the new feature "Blasts from the Past" and the note regarding the grandchildren of C T Gorham requiring copies of CTG's works prompt me to write to you to point out that the NSS collection of books, which I used to browse through in the days of the Grays Inn office, is still available to the public in London - at the Bishopgate Institute, adjacent to Liverpool Street.

It is open Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 5.30pm. In addition to the NSS collection, indexed in two drawers of filing-cards, they are a good general reference library and also specialise in trade union studies and genealogy.

JOHN DOWDING  
Witham

## Republicanism and secularism

I HOLD strong secular and republican beliefs, but was unaware of any society representing republican feelings until reading the letter in *The Freethinker* (March) in which the address of the Republican Movement was given. I am a member of the National Secular Society and, more recently, of the Republican Movement.

In my experience, religious people often favour a monarchy, while atheists are often republicans. Both belief in a god and belief in a monarch seem to rest not on reasoning but on wishful thinking. The "faith," "belief" and "I just know" of religious people seems to be

very similar to the facile view that our monarchy "makes us the envy of the world." Neither view seems to be based on reasoning, empirical knowledge or facts.

Respecting an unelected Head of State, who might as well be a cardboard cutout for all her subjects are allowed to know of her views, seems as unjustified as worshipping a God who merely lays down the law from a position of unelected total authority.

Religions and monarchies maintain power through distance and mystique, the enemies of reason. Both can be used by self-interested

upset to read in the January issue that you tolerate pornography, as the letter by Jessie Boyd showed. I have now read the letters by Bob Hamilton and Harry Hinchcliffe (March issue) and wish to offer my view.

As I have not watched any pornographic films or videos, I had to do a quick interview of a cross-section of my workmates, and what they told me indicated that porn does nothing to enhance the status of women in men's eyes. If Secularism aims at promoting the happiness and well-being of mankind, it cannot be right to tolerate material which debases half of the human population.

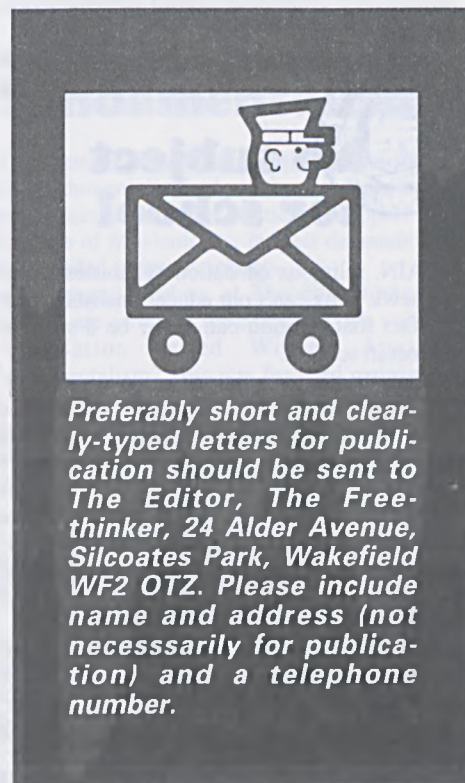
Pornography is another sad item in the catalogue of woes of what it means to be female. There is no doubt that this is a man's world, for the strong always subjugate the weak. It is a rare man who doesn't see women as second class citizens. Whereas a man is seen as important for what he does, a woman's world is measured by how decorative she looks and how she can relate to the opposite sex.

Many women have such an appallingly low opinion of themselves that they will put up with grossly unsatisfactory affairs just to hang on to a man. Some women are left to bring up a child on their own with the man paying not one penny for their upkeep, he being confident in the knowledge that the DSS will pay, thus ensuring that mother and child are kept firmly below the poverty line. Whereas men can often treat their partners with callous indifference, the woman finds her emotions are involved.

"But I love him." The lament falls from so many female mouths. On Simon Bates' *Our Tune*, one woman was sorry her bloke was in prison over Christmas because she had reported him to the police for breaking her jaw and putting her in hospital. The morning TV *Agony Aunt* received a call from a woman whose boyfriend wanted to tie her down and scrub her legs with a Brillo pad.

I have often wondered about the state of mind of the people who take part in porno films. Is it the money? Is it coercion? Love? Do they ever feel self-disgust? Regret? Unclean? Are they sad and twisted? Sick and corrupted? Then some people try to justify the obtaining of pleasure by watching these films. Material that demeans women (and men, too, according to my gay workmate). So it's OK, is it, to watch a woman having sex with two men, one of whom shoves his hand and arm up the woman's anus? Then there were urination and defecation scenes and the one where the man performed cunnilingus on a menstruating woman.

My workmates found this material more of a turn-off.



*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.*

parties. Each legitimises the other, as when the Archbishop of Canterbury anointed our Queen. Secularists want disestablishment of church from state; republicans want disestablishment of monarchy from state.

While not every atheist or secularist will have republican views, I feel there is enough common ground for readers of *The Freethinker* to be reminded that, should they be interested, the Republican Movement can be contacted at Hudson House, Battery Road, Great Yarmouth NR30 3NN.

DAVE HAYWARD  
Coventry

## Horrors of pornography

AS A newcomer to the National Secular Society and to *The Freethinker*, I was a little

# YOU'RE TELLING US!

## From Page 77

Like fox-hunting and fur coat wearing, it's all about freedom of choice (if you haven't been brainwashed along the way) but would the world be a worse place if people didn't fox-hunt, wear fur coats and obtain their pleasures keeping the porn industry viable? No, it would not make the world a worse place, and it might just make it better. But deny a man what he wants and he is liable to become truculent.

Perhaps Mary Whitehouse has done us a disservice. Old, female and Christian – that's three reasons to hate her all in one. As if in a reaction to her campaigns, the breasts-and-pudenda show has proliferated to give the kiss of life to any hopelessly boring drama in an attempt to keep the viewer to remain viewing and the manufacturers not to have wasted thousands on adverts. The BBC then has to do better to keep their ratings up and the viewer doesn't get a minute to go and put the kettle on.

Frankly, the smug, self-satisfied stance of people like Messrs Hamilton and Hinchcliffe gets up my nose. I see pornography as a negative force constructed to keep the female firmly in the subordinate role. I've never known religion do a woman any favours, so there is no need for the NSS to follow suit.

**JACKIE LUMMIS**  
Derbyshire

## No Redeemer without Adam

IN MY opinion (for what it is worth), in our conversations with Christians I think it is unwise to talk of Jesus being a mythical character.

I have read G A Wells' book, and I hold to the opinion that a man named Jesus *really existed*. One might as well say Oliver Cromwell or Julius Caesar never existed. Such nonsense does the cause no good at all and brings that which we stand for into ridicule.

This is how I talk to church people...

Firstly, I have found that the great bulk of CofE persons, especially men, believe in evolution, even though they are regular worshippers.

I say to them: Do you believe Jesus is the Saviour of men, their Redeemer? You also believe in evolution?

As a believer in evolution, you cannot believe in the story of Adam and Eve.

They probably say then: We do not believe in that – it is unscientific.

I then say: If there was no Fall of Man, as evolution proves, what did Jesus save you from?

The Bible says that because Adam sinned,

all became sinners and it needed a Redeemer or Saviour to undo Adam's work!

There seems no useful purpose at all in Jesus coming to the earth in 4BC.

This is a perfect logic. I cannot understand believers in the fact that we have descended from ape-like animals believing also that man needs Redemption, Reconciliation etc.

The Atonement without Adam is meaningless.

I would like readers' comments on my logic. Is it faulty in any way?

Wishing you every success as Editor: I like immensely your new layout of *The Free-thinker*.



## No subject for school

**H F COX**  
Cambridge

AGAIN, religious education syllabuses are in the news. Why can't our educationalists accept the fact that religion can never be a suitable subject in schools.

After all, what is religion?

All religions have been started to satisfy the fantasies of many people. After the start, the clever and cunning began to exploit the gullible – and there is no shortage of gullibles among ordinary people – in order to enhance their own power, prestige and wealth. Religious books are full of parables which can be interpreted according to what one would like to believe.

Different beliefs in the names of different religions and dogmas have taken the lives of millions and millions of innocent people. Sadly, this process is continuing even at the dawn of the 21st Century.

Religions always claim that morality is their monopoly – yet their "morality" has killed countless numbers of people in religious wars. Thousands of women have been burned alive, having been wrongly blamed as witches. Thousands of children have been murdered to appease the so-called gods.

Unwritten moral laws have been with us since our species came into existence. One of the laws of nature is that of survival. Although, according to human nature, good and evil reside side-by-side in each one of us, the evil in us will go to the extent of producing Hitlers. But at some point survival exerts itself and the good in us works. This keeps the balance between good (working through unwritten moral laws) and evil.

In any case, religions came into existence only 5,000 years ago. But human beings have been here for at least one million years. Even animals, birds and insects, too, have their moral laws based on their natural behaviour. (Behaviour for all, including humans, is con-

trolled by the genes). They have never required religions and priests.

What the educationalists should propose is to introduce the subject of moral laws and the laws of nature and human nature, instead of religious education.

**K P SHAH**  
London

## Spirituality: what is it?

I HAVE just watched BBC 2's *Late Show*, which featured the Museum of Religion in Glasgow. It has influenced me to write, inviting readers to participate in a discussion as to the meaning, or even the validity, of the concept of "spirituality" and "soul." In addition, perhaps our Editor could coax someone to produce more detailed articles! [*Good idea, Ron, consider it done.* – Editor]

The programme referred to mainly featured statements by prominent thinkers against a background of the Museum exhibits. One of my clearest impressions that most of the highly educated contributors referred to was "spirituality." In one case, "the Museum represents Man's universal quest for understanding his spirituality through the world's religions."

Mr Gorbachev (presumably an atheist) in his speeches used to refer to "the spiritual life of our nation." A dear friend, 50 years as a minister of the South African Salvation Army, writes that she still gives "help and guidance in the spiritual life of her flock," but after more than four years not even an attempt at elucidation of what that means. Are all these talking about the same thing? Throughout my long life, I have never been conscious of "spiritual." Does this mean a fundamental deficiency? Have I lived at a very low level? What have I missed?

This is a genuine, not a facetious, request for enlightenment.

**RON SMITH**  
Guiseley

## A sorry day for animals

GOD has granted man dominion over the animal kingdom, or so it says in the Bible. It was a sorry day for animals when these words were written.

Ever since, these unfortunate earth inhabitants, whose only crime has been to lag slightly in intelligence compared with some of the human species, have suffered grievously at the hands of "civilised" religious man.

# YOU'RE TELLING US!

← From Page 78

Torture, mutilation and ritual slaughter – all in the name of God, Jaweh, Allah and other assorted figments of the imagination.

Apparently these godheads are appeased by sacrificing innocent life. Moslems and Jews may only eat the meat of ritually-slaughtered animals.

To explain such barbarism, as always, we must search for ulterior motives. Cruelty to animals (and people) has always held considerable attraction for the warped mind. History is strewn with examples of such savageries: from the lion-pits in Roman times, via medieval bear-baiting to modern day bull-fighting and ritual slaughter. Religions have always had an unsavoury interest in blood and sacrifice. It admirably matches their primitive nature. So forget about the Holy Scripture and the pious justifications by the witch doctors: it boils down to undiluted sadism and nothing else.

**TONY AKKERMANS**  
Leeds

## No time for fairy tales

DESPITE Michael Harding's quibble (April issue), there has been no debate between science and astrology. When asked to list the scientists who have taken part, he produces a list of nonentities, mostly astrologers. Science does not waste time on fairy tales.

The supposed evidence from Gauquelin and Fuzeau-Braesch (Michael Harding's famous scientists?) does not merit consideration. Since 15 million living people share the same birthday, a few score of selected athletes and a few pairs of twins are an example of sampling which would send them to the bottom of the class if they were students of statistics.

Astrology has been dead for centuries. All that has revived is its commercial exploitation. Iain Campbell (April letters) is right. There is nothing professional about it except money-making...making money out of ignorance and credulity.

**KARL HEATH**  
Coventry

MICHAEL HARDING says there is a clear relationship between occupation and planetary configuration at the time of birth. I don't think the existence of Welsh miners, Icelandic fishermen, Irish farmers or Scottish crofters has much to do with planetary influence.

In the professions, many follow the career of their parents. What about those millions, like myself, who have had several occupations? Because Gauquelin's data showed that the majority of doctors whom he studied were

born when either Saturn or Mars was either rising or at zenith, astrologers aver that this shows the latter influencing the former.

The vast majority of vehicle drivers involved in accidents are sober at the time. Sobriety must, therefore, be a major cause of road accidents! That's the kind of logic astrologers use.

Twentieth Century science has little to say about astrology for the same reason that it has little to say about alchemy or flat-earthism.

**RAY McDOWELL**  
Co. Antrim

## Women against fundamentalism

LIKE Peter E Newell in his article about fighting fundamentalism (April issue), I am concerned that mainstream politicians support the demands of Moslems etc, in their demands for state-funded religious schools.

How many readers of *The Freethinker*, I wonder, are aware of the existence of a valiant organisation called Women Against Fundamentalism? This was founded mainly by Asian women who resist the concept that they are part of a homogeneous mass, to be herded into multi-cultural (that is, religiously-dominated) ethnic "pens."

They oppose the setting-up of "ghetto" schools, among many other progressive campaigns, including women's right to choose in all areas affecting their personal freedoms.

They have now attracted the support of women of all backgrounds, including indigenous persons like myself. Their quarterly magazine is erudite, challenging and totally outspoken.

Surely WAF is a cause which must attract the warm support of all secular persons, but I have yet to see it mentioned in your publication. May I hope that this letter will rectify this omission, and that interested readers will contact Women Against Fundamentalism at BM Box 2706, London WC1 3XX. WAF needs you!

**JESSIE BOYD**  
Gwent

## Christian cruelties

IS IT a crime to be born of unmarried parents? If the records of the Foundling Hospital, a Christian institution which catered for thousands of these hapless children, are anything to go by, the answer is an unqualified yes.

This institution was self-contained, deriving much of its income from parents involved in the Upstairs, Downstairs sort of illicit relationship, the issue being placed into its "care."

Because the place had its own chapel, the children were brainwashed as a captive audience and were obliged to sing from the school's own hymnbook the following cruel nonsense:

*Wash off my foul offence  
And cleanse me from my sin,  
For I confess my crime and see  
How great my guilt has been.*

*In guilt each part was form'd  
Of all this guilty frame:  
In guilt I was conceived and born,  
The heir of sin and shame.*

Another heartless gem, on similar lines, was:

*Left on the world's bleak waste forlorn  
In sin conceived, to sorrow born,  
By guilt and shame foredoomed to share  
No mother's love, no father's care,  
No guide the devious maze to tread,  
Above no friendly shelter spread.*

This sort of Christian indoctrination pursued the children after the age of 15 years and into their apprenticeships, as the advice given to their prospective employers shows:

*As it is of the greatest moment to breed up children in the fear of God as the best means of keeping them in proper subjection to their masters, mistresses and superiors, and as praying is the most effectual means to promote such fear, and to enforce obedience to the laws of God, you are hereby informed that it is expected of you to take care that this child...aged...says his/her prayers constantly every morning and evening. And you are to endeavour to give him/her a due sense of what they are about, and to this end you must be careful that they repeat their prayers in a slow, serious and solemn manner. And you are further to take care 'hat this child do frequent the publick worship on the Sabbath Day in a sober, pious, orderly manner.*

There we have it – a classic example of "authority" using religion and fear to compel obedience.

Fine for the ruling class of the 18th Century... too bad for those at the bottom of the pile!

Is it any wonder that, having passed through the doors of this institution, I turned out to become a militant atheist?

Thank goodness society has moved on since those days and has adopted a more kindly and tolerant attitude towards its children, who often as not turn out to be worthy citizens in the land of their birth.

**DAVID YEULETT**  
Greenwich

# LAST WORD

by Peter McKenna

*It is a relatively easy game being a freethinker in Britain: it is now time we lived up to the responsibility we owe to our fellow freethinkers who have a much harder time in other countries, says college lecturer and RPA member Peter McKenna. His article seeks to initiate debate on some of the issues and difficulties around Islamic belief and unbelief.*

## Confusing culture with religion

**L**IKE Christianity, Islam became a world religion by force of arms. While the West is now secure in its power and wealth to an extent where it barely needs the religious dogma which underpinned its conquests, in Islamic countries "heretics" and anti-religionists are daily murdered and "sinners" stoned to death.

In the West, freethinkers have been reluctant to take the moral offensive against this particularly submissive religion. Where the Bible has been dissected and exposed as a collection of morally decrepit tracts, the revealed text of Islam has traditionally been spared any such rigour.

Christianity's old adversary has now become a religion apparently of the oppressed. The "sigh of the oppressed creature" speaks volumes about the economic conditions endured by the peoples who have "submitted" to the "will of Allah." And the "opium of the people" is always a supreme means of political control: it is easy for a priesthood to control people who believe that the present life is "nothing but a sport and a diversion." Northern Africa, the Middle East, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia: all these areas know what it is to be conquered and exploited by Christian forces. Yet Islam serves there as a means of control and conformity, of internalised oppression. And the establishment even in the UK is happy to delegate control to the Imams. This ensures that the arrest comes from within and that, because of racism and misguided multiculturalism, no help will come from without. Internationally, the UK will support Moslems in Bosnia and fundamentalists in Afghanistan as revolution against what is perceived as communism. Friendly oppressive regimes maintain Western interests in the Arabian peninsula, yet Islam threatens those same interests when it revolts against US clients in Iran or Palestine.

It is precisely this ideology, internally and externally, that multiculturalism, and

uncritical "respect" for religion, is in danger of serving. The conflating of culture with religion may be a convenient political shorthand for liberals. This leads not only to respect for religious beliefs such as the death sentence for apostates, but also to a recognition of religious leaders as community leaders, to consolidate the internal control of these communities.

One of the ironies of the Salman Rushdie affair – and one which has clearly been intended by religious leaders – is that a book which is so much about the immigrant experience of racism in Britain, by an Indian author who has always been an outspoken voice against establishment racism, has been put beyond the reach of the very people to whom it says most: young Asian Moslems in this country. An immigrant author, an anti-racist, now called a "coffee-coloured, lily-livered freak" by a prominent white convert to Islam, and publically threatened with murder by a sad old white ex-popster convert who in the aftermath of the Sixties found Allah instead of himself. All with impunity, because really the establishment never liked that coffee-coloured bolshie either, and it's his "own people" anyway. The NF need only convert to Islam to legitimise their violent racism.

The other liberal school of thought is that, well, it's not very nice but then he's one of them and they have their own culture, surely he must have known that if he wrote an imaginative novel featuring Mohammed and 12 prostitutes pretending to be his wives they'd be awfully offended. One Rushdie "supporter" even suggests that we might feel differently if Jesus's three Marys had been portrayed as prostitutes (Mary Magdalene a prostitute? The outrage!).

The concerned Rushdie "supporter" is an Irish writer. He does not make any comparisons with the Catholic state's treatment of raped women; nor, apparently, seems aware of much more "offensive" passages in the works of James Joyce. There is one splendid passage in Joyce's *Stephen Hero* where Stephen confronts his mother's belief in the Ascension:

*It's absurd: it's Barnum. He comes into the world God knows how, walks on the water, gets out of his grave and goes up off the Hill of Howth. What drivel is this?*

He goes on to compare JC to a circus stuntman in a local show who calls himself "The Human Ostrich."

Joyce gives an explicit voice to freethought in a way (and this is another irony) that Rushdie does not. Rushdie's work is an imaginative exploration of the notion of revelation, and a fascinating depiction of the imagined inception of a major religion: his artistic mirroring of events around the time of Mohammed includes strands of realism and surrealism – the realist strand has contemporary political opponents of Mahound doubting that he speaks with an angel rather than himself (let's face it, based on experience of life they would, wouldn't they?); and the surrealist strand portrays a pre-Islamic brothel, the anti-Mahound keeper of which has given 12 prostitutes the names of Mahound's wives (they are not Mahound's "wives," contrary to popular belief – he has 12 other women who are merely described as "wives," and are not to be confused, of course, with prostitutes! And his scribe (aptly named Salman) fools him by changing the revealed word (the "Satanic Verses" of the title).

The Rushdie affair is the tip of the iceberg. Infidels continue to be imprisoned and murdered in Algeria, Egypt and Iran. We cannot turn a blind eye, or write these murders off as internal politics.

The demonstrable lie that secularism and atheism are Western ideas is an insult to these victims, and it is perpetuated not only by religious leaders within Islam and Christianity (!), but also by trendy white tokenistic multiculturalists who equate Asian culture with Islam, and do not have the courage or insight of anti-racism to guide them. In doing so they betray youth, women, and all those forced into conformity of thought and behaviour at home and abroad.