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FREETHOUGHT

RATIONALISM

SECULARISM

FOUR IN ONE

HUMANISM

Bradlaugh House Humanist Centre opens in London on June 21

UP FRONT



with the Editor

Behind the bike sheds

WHY do so many MPs whose careers flourished under Margaret Thatcher look like grubby provincial solicitors who've been caught with their fingers in the till?

Could it be that Baroness Pergau's personnel-selection skills were on a par with her gift of political prophecy (1987: "Anyone who thinks that the ANC is going to run the government in South Africa is living in Cloud Cuckoo Land")?

Not that I'm complaining: being able to look at a chap and know at once that he is lying or is wholly cynical or is drunk, or is some statesmanlike mixture of the three, is useful in a democracy. I mention it merely to emphasise how different from the common herd of politicians is John Patten, Secretary of State for Education.

Patten is more dangerous than any liar or cynic or inebriate: he is a zealot for Roman Catholicism – see those eyes, ever scanning for sin – and he sincerely believes that the bad things he does are good. Take his draft guidelines on sex education in schools, to come into effect in September. He holds that it is entirely moral to force teachers "to make sure that pupils' parents are told if they are having under-age sex and the guidelines leave the door open for a test case to be brought before the courts" (*The Independent*, May 7).

Under-age sex is wrong *per se*. It is a good and Christian thing to grass-up those who practise it, Patten reasons. But how do the teacher-sneaks find out about pubescent peccadilloes? From kids who come to them seeking advice on contraception, AIDS, pregnancy, of course.

And when the youngsters discover that teachers tell? They will simply stop confiding in Sir and Miss. They will also carry on with their sexual activities – and sexually-transmitted diseases and teenage pregnancies will continue to result from their ignorance.

See what I mean about John Patten being dangerous? Small wonder that there would be few tears shed in the Department of Health were he to be appointed to some more appropriate post, say Our Man in the Vatican.

Patten was intensely agitated when the story about kids from a Leeds school asking questions about oral sex and protein-rich Mars bar parties hit the front pages, and he is insisting that teachers should deal with such cheeky pupils' questions *outside* class, so long as they have consulted parents.

Doug McAvoy, General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, put that bit of nonsense into perspective: "The idea that not answering a question from a precocious child in front of the class will confine that informa-

tion to that child is ludicrous. The rest of the class will hardly be able to wait to find out the answer – behind the bike shed" (*The Guardian*, May 7).

Happily, Patten's *diktat* that teachers should not give advice on contraception to children under 16 without parental consent will be ignored by many teachers. The same issue of *The Guardian* quoted David Hart, of the National Association of Head Teachers: "Most schools will continue to deliver sex education lessons and give individual advice to pupils as they have always done, even if it means ignoring aspects of the Department's advice."

Mind you, if Patten does drag some hapless teacher before the courts for failing to tell parents that their son or daughter is involved in under-age sex – that is, that he or she has sought contraceptive advice – it could at least clear-up the present uncertain state of affairs.

The ruling in a case brought by the Blessed Victoria Gillick in 1985 gave doctors and nurses the right to give confidential advice to under-16s without telling their parents, but teachers were not covered. There is always the chance that a court case would blow up in Patten's face, with the ruling being extended to cover *all* educational professionals.

Law must be scrapped

JOHN PATTEN'S insistence on daily Christian worship in schools has been described as "dogmatic and impractical" by the National Association of Head Teachers (*The Guardian*, April 22).

Patten has said that he would not hesitate to use his powers (a nice *auto da fé*?; the introduction of an Educational Inquisition?) to enforce the law on daily assemblies "of a broadly Christian character" which inspectors have found is being neglected by 85 per cent of local authority schools. He also issued a circular to ensure that religious education will be predominantly Christian in content.

But the Heads say in a letter to Patten that parents who do nothing to promote religious belief in their children should not expect schools to do it for them. They dismiss the claim that more emphasis on collective worship and religious education would raise moral standards and underpin social values, pointing out that in France and the USA religion has no place in state schools.

Collective worship was not possible every day because of inadequate accommodation or inexperienced staff, while to make all schools follow Christian worship regardless of the community pupils were drawn from was "dogmatic and insensitive."

Association General Secretary David Hart said: "There is a very real risk that the Gov-

ernment's requirements cannot be met and the law relating to religious education and collective worship will fall into further disrepute."

The answer is to scrap the law altogether, and that ought to be the aim of Secular Humanism's next big campaign. But it will be a long, bloody battle. I see from the *Covenanter and Warwickshire Humanist* that an Access Opinion Poll says that two out of three MPs support Christian teaching and daily worship in schools: 96 per cent of Conservative MPs give their backing to maintaining the law which requires a daily act of worship, and 31 per cent of Labour MPs support it.

F A Ridley was right

LABOUR movement historian Dr Raymond Challinor has raised an interesting sidelight of F A Ridley.

My old friend writes from Whitley Bay: "Nobody appears to have mentioned what I would regard as one of his greatest contributions. It arose out of a controversy he had with the Rev Joseph McCabe. McCabe argued, quite correctly, that the Roman Catholic Church had been an important buttress of fascism. The Holy See had signed a concordat with Mussolini. The Pope had blessed Italian soldiers going to fight for Franco in Spain. Therefore, McCabe did not believe the Catholic Church could undergo such a drastic transformation and, instead of being a pillar of authoritarian dictatorship, assume a democratic mantle.

"F A Ridley, on the other hand, from his deep understanding of the Catholic Church, knew that on many previous occasions it had done somersaults. He thought that the deeply felt urge for survival, coupled to its desire to protect its immense wealth, would outweigh all other considerations. Most Italian industrialists and bankers had openly backed Mussolini's dictatorship. To preserve their powers and privileges, they needed a complete change of image. President Roosevelt helped to facilitate this: he sent Myrom Taylor, a magnate of the American steel industry, who had emerged victorious from bruising battles with the trade unions, as his personal envoy to the Vatican.

"In many articles, F A Ridley drew attention to the significance of Roosevelt's move. He argued that Rome would provide the pivot for the protection of not only Italian capitalism but also capitalism throughout Western Europe.

"Have you not thought that it might be more than coincidence that in 1944-1945 Christian Democratic parties began to sprout up all over the Continent?"

Dream becomes a nightmare

GOVIND N DEODHEKAR (pictured) sees parallels between the Indian Independence experience and the present situation in former Yugoslavia – and notes that while religion plays a part in the current Balkan conflict, it is not the only cause of bloodshed. A former left-wing activist in India, Mr Deodhekar came to the UK in 1951. He is a one-time Chairman of G W Foote & Co., publisher of *The Freethinker*, and was until recently Treasurer of the National Secular Society.



ethnic territorial group within the seceding unit to secede must be suppressed, denounced, even demonised. This, in my view, is a pernicious doctrine and is usually quite impractical and must lead to violence if the secession from the secessionist unit has enough will and military capability.

A somewhat parallel situation from the Indian experience would be instructive here. Under British tutelage, pre-Independence India was a Federal State under the Act of 1935. After the Allied victory in World War II, as Independence approached, the Muslim League demand for secession (Pakistan) became more and more insistent.

The Muslim League Ministry of Bengal engineered the Great Killing of Calcutta – a Muslim riot and Hindu counter-riot resulting in the death of some 4,000-5,000 people in five or six days. Further waves of riots broke out in Northern and Western India and partition became inevitable in the minds of the Congress leaders.

During negotiations conducted by Lord Mountbatten, Mr Jinnah, the Muslim League leader, demanded that the two states of the Punjab and Bengal, both of which had about 55 per cent Muslims, must remain intact and join Pakistan. This would have put the non-Muslim majority areas of East Punjab and West Bengal at the mercy of the Muslim League and could not possibly be accepted by the Indian National Congress. Lord Mountbatten is reported to have said to Jinnah that if he wanted Muslim majority areas to secede from India, he must logically accept that non-Muslim majority areas of the Punjab and Bengal must be allowed to secede to India.

Let me, then, enunciate what I would, for simplicity, call the Mountbatten doctrine: *When a federation disintegrates, its constituent seceding units must accept that territories within their boundaries, inhabited by dominant nationalities of the earlier federation, have also got the right to secede from the secessionist state.*

In the case of Yugoslavia, the experience of the Serbs under the Croatian World War II régime is of supreme relevance. The Croatian fascist (Ustasha) regime massacred Serb men, women and children,

burned down Orthodox churches with the congregations inside them. The aim of the régime was to expel a third of the Serbs, massacre a third and convert a third to the Roman Catholic faith. The Roman Church in Croatia was fully supportive of this régime. The Croats were the originators of what is now called "ethnic cleansing," and the Bosnian Muslims were junior partners in these atrocities. By the end of the war, according to one estimate, 350,000 Serbs were killed, 300,000 were expelled and 250,000 were forced to embrace Catholicism.

Compared with the Ustasha terror, the violence from Muslims in pre-Independence India was comparatively of a much lower order because the Muslims had no state power and there was the fear and actuality of counter-violence from the non-Muslims.

If the Congress leaders and Lord Mountbatten could not accept East Punjab and West Bengal going into the hands of Pakistan, how can Europe, the USA and the UNO countenance the passing of Serb areas into the hands of Croats and Muslims? And yet this still remains the stated aim of the West and the UNO. They hope to pressurise the Bosnian Serbs into a Bosnian Federation of three autonomous regions for Bosnian Croats, Muslims and Serbs and to marry this Federation into a Confederation with the State of Croatia!

On the background of the Serb experience of the Croatian Ustasha régime. I see no reason why the rest of the world should oppose Bosnian Serbs forming a separate state and joining Serbia if they wished to do so.

When the Bosnian legislature declared secession, the three groups were so matched that any two combining could out-vote the third (Serbs 35 per cent, Croats 20 per cent, Muslims 40 per cent, approximately). The Muslims chose to ally themselves with the Croats, their wartime senior partners. And yet European diplomats knew that the Croatian leader, Trudjman, intended to carve-up Bosnia, sharing it with the Serbs. In other words, the Croats were going to stab the Muslims in the back and create

AS THE Communist systems began to collapse in Eastern Europe and later in the Soviet Union itself, it was inevitable that even the moderate Yugoslav Communist structure should begin to creak and then come apart at the seams.

Given time and patience and international encouragement, a negotiated settlement might have been possible. However, under pressure from its own desire to dominate European affairs, and also due to pressure from half-a-million Croatian immigrants within its borders, Germany took the reckless step of pushing the EC into a declaration welcoming secession of its constituent units from Federal Yugoslavia, making armed conflict inevitable. At one stage, Germany even announced its readiness to unilaterally recognise the secessionist states.

While encouraging secession, Europe, the USA and the United Nations have been committed to the doctrine that when a federation disintegrates, its constituent units must be kept intact and any attempt by an

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Star backing for euthanasia video

ACTOR Tom Conti presents a new educational video from the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, which aims to meet the growing demand for information on one of today's crucial ethical issues – the right to die.

Voluntary Euthanasia – The Facts is an up-to-date look at the topic, cutting through the many confusions and misunderstandings surrounding it. There is also a section on advance directives, or Living Wills, which are rapidly becoming more popular.

Medicine, law, philosophy, ethics – and the feelings of ordinary people – are all part of the

debate. These are explored in straightforward manner. Together with an outline of what is permitted today, the video looks at the reasons why many people believe that there should be a wider choice of options at the end of life.

There is also a look at the two most common arguments against voluntary euthanasia.

The 26-minute film is priced at only £10 a copy, including post and packing. And with a growing number of students – from GCSE level through to postgraduates – studying the topic of voluntary euthanasia, there is also a free information pack with the video for all educational institutions.

Presenter Tom Conti starred in Brian Clark's

ground-breaking play *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* about a paralysed man who wanted to die.

Further information from Meredith MacArdle on 071-937 7770, or order from VES, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 5PG.

● Meanwhile, *The Guardian* reports that 10 out of 10 doctors have been asked by patients to hasten their death – and a third have complied with the request, according to a survey published on May 20.

It shows that many doctors want the law on euthanasia to be changed to reflect Dutch law where the procedure does not attract criminal prosecution if it is in line with patient wishes.

If active euthanasia was legal, half of the doctors say that they would be prepared to do it. The survey distinguishes between passive euthanasia, where a patient is allowed to die through inaction, and active euthanasia, where doctors take positive steps to hasten death.

The survey has been carried out by Dr Patricia Tate and colleagues, from the East Barnet Health Centre, Cambridge. It involved 312 GPs and consultants.

Of 273 doctors who chose to answer the question, 163 said that they had been asked by a patient to accelerate their death. Of these, 124 had been asked for active euthanasia.

Prepared

Of those who had been asked for active euthanasia, 119 were prepared to say whether they complied or not. In all, 38 had taken active steps to end a patient's life, which represents 32 per cent of those who were asked or 12 per cent of those who completed the questionnaire. The survey, published in the *British Medical Journal*, says that 276 doctors out of 303 who answered said they would be prepared to consider passive euthanasia. If active euthanasia were legal, 147 of 307 doctors said they would consider using it.

Dr Tate says: "A sizeable proportion of doctors are asked by patients to hasten their deaths – 60 per cent in this study. Patients have the right to decline treatment and it is therefore not surprising that 91 per cent of the doctors in our study were willing to practise passive euthanasia. In contrast, taking active steps to end a patient's life is both illegal and against the recommendations of the BMA. Despite this, 32 per cent of doctors who had faced a request for active euthanasia reported that they had complied with such a request."

Dr Tate adds: "Our results suggest considerable support among general practitioners and hospital consultants for changes in the law on euthanasia. The taboo nature of the subject and the legal and religious prohibitions prevent adequate education about euthanasia during medical training. It is important, therefore, that euthanasia should be discussed more openly and effectively."

Dream becomes a nightmare

From Page 83

and control a Croatian Bosnia! That is why they attacked the Eastern part of Mostar in May, 1993, and were responsible for atrocities against the Muslims.

The West did not talk of imposing sanctions against Croatia, while they have inflicted severe suffering on Serbian civilians by imposing sanctions on Serbia. At the root of this lies the fact that the Croats are Roman Catholics. The natural presence of Roman Catholics in Western Europe and America has inhibited the UNO from holding the balance evenly between the Serbs and the Croats, thus damaging its own moral authority.

With the right-wing in Russia taking up cudgels on behalf of their Orthodox Serb co-religionists, the complications which could arise are obvious. The gains to the world from the end of the Cold War could be seriously eroded if realistic and even-handed policies are not adopted by the West and the UNO.

Lest it be thought that I condone the "ethnic cleansing" carried out by the Serbs, I must add that all three sides have carried out transgressions of human rights, each according to his military ability. With the Ustasha background, the Serbs perhaps feel that in the North Balkan area, you get rid of the other groups – or they get rid of you! It may well be that as soon as they declared the independence of Croatia, the Croats were the first to start repressive measures against their Serbian minority. Confidence and mutual trust in these communities cannot be restored while the civil war rages.

Hostility between the three groups is, I believe, not a matter of religion alone. All three are ethnically "South Slavs" and speak the same Serbo-Croat language. The Croats fancy themselves, I suspect, as superior beings of West European culture, partners, albeit junior, in the Imperial milieu of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and because of their religious ties with the Roman Catholic Church, the sole possessor

of Truth. They probably think of their Serb brothers as rough mountain-dwellers following a schismatic church. In reality, the Croats may only have been underlings under their Imperial masters.

The Bosnian Muslims probably collaborated with the pre-Kemalist Imperial Turkey in subjugating the Christian subjects. These ancient animosities gave way to feelings of South Slav unity between the two World wars, only to be destroyed by the vicious barbarity of the Ustasha Croats. The short period of co-existence under the charismatic Communist leader Tito was to end when the Communist dreams collapsed. In the re-adjustment of their life as separate polities, they needed time, patience and help from their sophisticated European neighbours. What they have received is precipitate action, especially from Germany.

And, finally, a few words about the Bosnian Muslims. They have lost much because they chose the wrong friends. They have had hostility from the Serbs and betrayal by the Croats. At worst, they may get no state at all, with Bosnia being divided between the Croats and the Serbs. At best, as seems likely at present, they will get a Muslim majority state federated with Croat-Bosnia and confederated with Croatia. In either case, they will have a choice. They could turn embittered and rigid fundamentalists – or they could pioneer a new interpretation of an Islam which is non-confrontationist, modern and forward-looking.

● For further reference to the Ustasha régime, see: *The Freethinker*, November 1993; *New Zealand Rationalist*, April, 1992; *New Statesman & Society*, May 7, 1993; *Eastern Approaches* by Fitzroy Maclean (Penguin); *The Fourth Reich* by Linklater, Hilton and Ascherson (Hodder & Stoughton, 1984); *Behind the Black Curtain* by H W Crittenden; *Ravens Wolves* by Monica Farrel; *The Martyrdom of the Serbs* by M Tomich; *Freedom's Foe* by A Piggott.

Personal autonomy in matters of life and death

by Eric Stockton
Editor of the
Scottish Humanist

WE OWE it largely to the feminists that personal autonomy has become a live ethical issue. The feminist claim is that men have explicitly, and tacitly, imposed upon women the status of non-autonomous objects – sexually, reproductively, domestically *usable chattels*. Women who have not submitted to these uses in marriage or concubinage have often either had to retreat from the world into monasticism or to make their sexual usefulness marketable by prostitution, to sell their domestic usefulness in the drudgery of “domestic service.” They have often been cast as “carers” with the “living for others” ethos that this stereotyping entails. This subordinating of the female identity has led in turn to a reactive counter-tyranny exercised by women – the heavy mother, the interfering mother-in-law, the manipulative “power behind the throne,” the megalomaniac politician even. A famous remark of a populist theologian of a generation or two ago – C S Lewis – might be remembered in our reflections upon personal autonomy. He wrote of some unidentified person of distorted femininity: “She’s the sort of woman who lives for others – you can always tell the others by their hunted expression.”

Follies

The feminists have a strong case for asserting that women have, usually if not always, been objects in the sense that they are not seen as human ends but as men’s means to this or that male-determined end. The impact of the feminist case has been diluted, as is the impact of many a good case, by crass overstatement and runaway trivialisation, but these human follies weaken only the impact, not the justice, of that case.

There is perhaps no need to labour the traditional scriptural angle on this. We all know about the legendary creation of Eve as Adam’s needed helpmate, her almost immediately becoming the scapegoat for sin (the sin of trying symbolically to undertake ethical inquiry rather than simply accepting the imposed will of a male god). We are familiar with the chattel status of wives in the Decalogue – equating them with farm animals and depicting them, like animals, as objects of the neighbours’ covetousness. And so on! Of course, men can be relegated to the status of objects just as easily, if not so numer-

ously. Slavery in its various forms is obviously a case in point. So is militarism. In much more gentle ways, the subservience of priest to bishop, to archbishop, to cardinal, to pontiff is clearly a case of using the junior clergy as mere things – megaphones – for their seniors. The politician’s obedience to the party whip is simply a submission to being used as an object – a rubber stamp vote.

These things are all rather obvious, but there are more insidious ways of turning people into objects – ways that seem at first sight to be laudable in the extreme.

Medical care is a case in point. It begins as, and indeed very largely is, a laudable effort to alleviate human suffering. The doctors and nurses are commended for their efforts to heal people and it is no retreat from this commendation to say that the patient is also an object, an entity that challenges the medical and nursing skills of those involved. A person being treated is also a problem being addressed and, so long as the patient is seen primarily as a person – only secondarily as a technical challenge – then all well and good. But some element of cool technical challenge is necessary, very often, in the patient’s interest. It is easy to imagine a casualty doctor receiving the victim of some horribly sadistic assault; if the victim is seen too emotionally as a person, then the doctor’s human feelings may be so overpowering as to make effective clinical judgment somewhat elusive. The victim’s best interest might be better served by a modicum of “forget feelings, how can we get this problem solved?”

But, as is so often the case, the higher the technology the easier it is to downplay the human personal aspect. With advanced life-support facilities available, such that a patient can be kept almost indefinitely in the persistent vegetative state, it is very easy simply to see the challenge “how can we keep this body ticking?” and to forget that the body was once a functioning person and never again can be one. We can now *inflict* life, in a narrowly physiological sense of the word “life,” upon an ex-person, a once-person, whose consciousness and faculty of choice, and the dignity that goes with these things, are no more. There is fortunately an ethos of humanist common sense emerging in respect of the persistent vegetative state – and the strident fuss made by the “pro-life” party tends to be overridden both by the

courts and by public opinion. To refuse to “switch off” is neither more nor less “playing God” than to decide to do so. *Playing God* is a vacuous phrase – even supposing that there is a god to be “played.”

Matters are more serious when voluntary euthanasia is a practical issue for non-vegetative patients. In this area there is a largely unsuspected potential for manipulating people as objects – a potential that is at least as disturbing as the technician’s temptation to view a terminally-ill person as rather like an old car that he wishes to keep on the road – just to satisfy an ambition to show that he can do it. This subtle, and largely unsuspected, potential for manipulating people as objects arises in an activity that is often thought to be the very epitome of the moral ideal. I refer to the work of the hospices.

Anyone who argues for *voluntary* euthanasia must logically support the provision of hospices. The word *voluntary* is void unless the individual terminal patient has a right to allow death to come naturally, just as he has a right to procure death, and if the right to choose life be exercised then the patient deserves every comfort and support during the terminal stages, however prolonged they may be. That is what hospices are for; they are staffed by people who derive satisfaction from performing this service for their fellows who desire it. Hospice staff, and their lay helpers, are generally moved by the highest moral concerns and we should all be glad that there are such people.

Challenge

But the operative phrase is *their fellows who desire it*. Just as it is wrong to undermine the voluntary aspect of voluntary euthanasia, so it is also wrong – an equal denial of personal autonomy, an equal objectification of the person – to use terminally-ill people just to show how “pro-life” one is. Hospice staff can fall easily into the self-indulgent error of seeing themselves as “living for others” when in fact what they may be doing is using the terminally-ill to show how caring they are. This is just like the technician seeing the terminal patient as a technical challenge – keep the old banger on the road somehow! It is not always possible to determine clearly who is living for whom; it is possible that the terminally-ill are being kept alive for the technical and moral gratification of others. The concept of personal autonomy is one that should never be lost sight of in life and death situations especially. The truly freethinking person is an autonomous person neither intruding upon others nor being intruded upon by them.

WHAT'S ON...WHAT'S ON...WHAT'S ON

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Birmingham Humanist Group: For information about Birmingham Humanist Group activities contact Adrian Bailey on 021 353 1189.

Blackpool & Fylde Humanist Group: For details, please contact Secretary D Baxter. Telephone: 0253 726112.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group: 40 Cowper Street, Hove (near Hove Station, bus routes 2a, 5 and 49). Sunday, July 3, 4.30: Tea party followed by annual general meeting

Crawley, West Sussex: Charles Stewart is working to establish a Humanist group for the area. Interested readers should contact him at 50 Boswell Road, Tilgate, Crawley RH10 5AZ. Telephone: 0293 511270.

Central London Humanists: For details, please contact Cherie Holt on 071 916 3015 or Hilary Lighter on 0895 632096. Thursday, June 30, 7.30pm, Conway Hall: Dan Carroll leads discussion on *The Environment: Friend or Foe?*

Cornwall Humanists: Contact: B Mercer, "Amber," Short Cross Road, Mount Hawke, Truro TR4 8EA. Telephone: 0209 890690.

Coventry and Warwickshire Humanist Group: Waverley Day Centre, 65 Waverley Road Kenilworth. Monday, June 20, 7.30 pm: *Public meeting. Subject: The Revival of Racism.*

Devon Humanists: For details, please contact: C Mountain, "Little Gables," Burgmanns Hill, Lympstone, Exmouth EX8 5HN; 0395 265529.

Ealing Humanists: Meetings at Friends' Meeting House, 17 Woodville Road, Ealing W5, 8pm. Thursday, June 30: Jim Mather: *Trade Unionism, Past, Present, and ?* Details: telephone 081-422 4956.

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.

Hasving & District Humanist Society: HOPWA House, Inskip Drive, Hornchurch. Tuesday, June 7, 8pm: Public meeting: Alan Shell: *Funerals as Seen Through the Eye of a Humanist Officiant.* Tuesday, July 5: Everyone bring a Press clipping to speak about! *Friday*, August 5, 8pm, at HOPWA House: Robin Squire, MP for Hornchurch and Under Secretary of State at the Department for Education, will speak on his work with the Department. For further information, contact J Condon 0708 473597 or J Baker 0708 458925.

Humanist Society of Scotland: Details from the secretary: George Rodger, 17 Howburn Place, Aberdeen AB1 2XT (telephone: 0224 573034). The new Convenor of the Humanist Society of Scotland is Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire; telephone: 0563 26710.

Kent Humanists: Meets at University of Kent, Seminar Room 11, Rutherford College, Canterbury. Sunday, June 5, 2.30pm: John White, BHA: *Education.* Details from Secretary John Payne, telephone 0843 864 645.

Leeds & District Humanist Group: Swarthmore Centre, Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Tuesday, July 12: Summer Garden Party.

Leicester Secular Society: Details from the Secretary, Lyn Hurst, Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB (telephone 0533 622250).

Lewisham Humanist Group: Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, June 30, 8pm: David Seymour: *Is Humanism Sexy Enough?* Saturday, July 16, 1pm to 6pm: Humanist stall at Lewisham People's Day, Mountfield Park, Station Road, London SE6.

Manchester Humanists: St Thomas's Centre, Ardwick Green. Public meetings on the second Friday of the month at 7.30pm. Information, telephone: 061-432 9045. June 10: Dorothy Greaves: *The Rochdale Pioneers.*

National Secular Society: Individual membership costs £4 per annum. Special rates for organisations wishing to affiliate. Details from the Secretary, Terry Mullins, National Secular Society, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobalds Road, London WC1. Telephone: 071 404 3126. Also available: list of Freethought, Secularist, Humanist, Rationalist literature; please send SAE with request. Please note special subscription rate for unwaged readers of *The Freethinker*: (students, pensioners, unemployed people etc.) £7 a year, including post.

Norwich Humanist Group: Martineau Hall, 21a Colegate, Norwich. Thursday, June 16, 7.30pm: Open Meeting.

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

Sheffield Humanist Society: Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street (adjoining Bank Street), Sheffield. Wednesday, June 8, 8pm: Ahmed Gurnah: *Education for Black People.* July 13, 8pm: Peter Jackson: *An Eyewitness Account of the South African Elections.*

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1 (telephone 071-831 7723). List of events obtainable from above address.

Stockport Secular Group: Details of activities from the Secretary, Carl Pinel, 85 Hall Street, Offerton, Stockport SK1 4DE. Telephone: 061 480 0732.

Sutton Humanist Group: Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, June 8: Yvonne Bracken: *Philosophy for Children.* Wednesday, July 13: Susan Dorrell: *Trading with the Third World.* Annual Garden Party: Sunday, July 3, 2.30pm to 5pm: 15 Manor Road, Cheam. Wednesday, September 14: George Mephram: *World Population Prospects.*

Tyneside Humanist Group: Meets on third Thursday of each month (except August), starting 6.45pm in the Literary and Philosophical Society building, Westgate Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Ulster Humanist Association: Meets second Thursday of every month, Regency Hotel, Botanic Avenue, Belfast BT7. For details write to the Secretary, Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE.

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

Only part of the way with Flew

***Atheistic Humanism* by Antony Flew. Prometheus Books. £25.50. Review: COLIN MCCALL**

after the obligatory glance at Paley, Flew turns to the Angelic Doctor and his famous "Five Ways."

In the fifth of these in his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas starts from what he calls "the guidelines of nature," where an "orderliness of actions to an end is observed in all bodies obeying natural laws." Then, without giving any reason, he asserts: "Nothing, however, that lacks awareness tends to a goal except under the direction of someone with awareness and understanding." And he instances an arrow requiring an archer.

From this, as Flew says, Aquinas leaps in one bound to his desired conclusion: "Everything in nature, therefore, is directed to its goal by someone with understanding, and this we call 'God.'"

Begging

It really does constitute, in Flew's words, "a most gigantic begging of the question, and a begging of it in defiance of the available evidence actually offered in support of the conclusion thus illicitly attained." Of course an arrow needs an archer if it is to be shot, but not all phenomena are "archer substitutes."

Flew also reminds us that Aquinas had no conception of a process for which there was a First Cause. "On the contrary: the First Mover, First Cause, and other prime destinations to which these Five Ways are to lead are all at the apex of hierarchies, rather than at the beginning of a temporal series. The argument is not that a process must have a start, but that a hierarchy must have a summit."

Flew then deals with the two related questions: why is it thought that the universe needs a sustaining cause, without which it would "collapse into non-existence"; and why is it thought that every hierarchy must have, not just a top term but a realisation of the "mostest"?

Aquinas' argument for this last idea was based on a "gradation observed in things": some things were more good, more true, more noble, which he regarded as "varying approximations to a superlative, for example, things are hotter and hotter the nearer they approach what is hottest." But, Flew says, the premise is false. There is not an absolute hottest and "we are not licensed to draw even the interim conclusion, 'Something therefore is the truest and best and most noble of things.'"

Aquinas, however, goes on to make additional assertions, most notably that "the truest things are things most fully in being," making "goodness" and "reality" convertible terms.

These few examples will, I hope, indicate my appreciation of Antony Flew's religious criticisms. Now I must take issue with him on racism.

First, the very term "race." Humans, as Steve Jones says in *The Language of the Genes* (Flamingo, 1994), are "a rather homogeneous species, perhaps because they have evolved so recently." The overall genetic difference between Africans and Europeans, for example, is "not much greater than that between different countries within Europe or within Africa. Individuals – not nations and not races – are the main repository of human variation for functional genes. A race, as defined by skin colour, is no more a biological entity than is a nation, whose identity depends only on a brief shared history."

In contrast, Jones points out that the genetic differences between the orang-utan of Borneo and that of Sumatra, just a few miles apart, are 10 times greater than the difference between any pair of human groups, probably because the apes "have been evolving independently on the two islands for so long." It is misleading, and biologically unsound, to use the term race in connection with *Homo sapiens*.

My other criticism concerns Flew's use of IQs. Whatever may be meant by "intelligence," it is not "measurable" by humanly-designed tests. No such claim was made by Alfred Binet who, in 1905, published the first intelligence test. He used it as a diagnostic instrument, not as a measure of "fixed" or "innate" characteristic. Indeed, to those who asserted that the intelligence of an individual is a fixed quantity that cannot be augmented, Binet said: "We must protest and react against this brutal pessimism."

And we still must. We can cite the example of Japan, where, over the past 20 years, the average IQ score of children has risen to more than 10 points higher than that of Americans. As Jones remarks: "Not even the most radical hereditarian claims that this is due to a sudden burst of genetic change in Japan. Instead, the schools are getting better.."

Or, to take a case known to me, we can ask how does one test the "intelligence" of an early teenager who has little or no academic ability, but who can take an automobile engine apart and put it back together again – something quite beyond my capabilities?

So, I suppose it may be said that I go along with Antony Flew as an atheist but not as a geneticist.

ANTONY FLEW divides his book into four parts, the first of which is a philosophical exposition of atheism, to which I will devote most of my attention. The second part, "Defending Knowledge and Responsibility," disposes of the charge that a naturalistic world outlook presupposes values for which it cannot itself make room, and criticises sociologists of belief who "refute themselves" by refusing to admit that there is such a thing as objective knowledge. Part three is a criticism of communism, to my way of thinking, by adherence to a market economy. And I feel that one chapter in part four, "Three Concepts of Racism," cannot be allowed to pass without comment.

First, though, religion, where the primary problem, as Charles Bradlaugh insisted, is one of definition. I'm sure, for instance, that David Jenkins thinks of God in very different terms from, say, Ian Paisley, or John Gummer, before or after he took the path to Rome.

We need, in Antony Flew's words, "to look at the long familiar words of standard definitions with fresh and very foreign eyes, ready to notice any incongruities in the various elements that are here combined."

He starts with the first sentence of the first of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, which invokes the "one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts or passions; of infinite power, wisdom and goodness, the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible."

Following "the natural order of progress from the lesser to the greater," Flew considers if there is "any kind of initiating and sustaining cause of all things; whether that hypothesised cause is personal and, if so, is it endowed with infinite power and wisdom." Only then "should we pursue the question whether this Creator is 'perfectly good' in any human understanding of goodness."

If there is "no good evidencing reason" for believing in such a Being, then the reasonable response is not "an agnostic suspension of belief but more or less contemptuous dismissal." And, as the book's title indicates, Flew's position is unequivocally atheistic.

It is "high time and overtime," he says, to approach with scepticism what is still the most common and persuasive argument for a Creator – that of Design. And

Row flares as Rome fixes eyes firmly on the past

by Peter Brearey

THE Anglican pantomime over the issue of women's ordination, which provided us with so many hours of innocent amusement, is about to be replaced by Roman Catholic fun-and-games which promise to be equally entertaining to non-superstitionists.

In the Roman version of the show, however, we may see *liberals* voting with their feet in protest at the between-the-lines chastisement of uppity women in their sect's new Catechism, the first for 400 years, which by the time this number of *The Freethinker* appears will have been issued in an English edition of half-a-million.

Media reports suggest that so-called "progressive" Catholics (surely the mother of all contradictions in terms) are outraged by the English text of their church's official new Cat-

echism, which rejects inclusive language for men and women and reverts to the sternest orthodoxy on divorce, contraception and artificial insemination.

The 68-page statement of RC belief - ordered by Pope John Paul II in 1985 and prepared by a commission of 12 Cardinals - literally lays down the law on Catholic belief about God, the Sacraments and morality.

It was issued in French in 1992 - but the English translation was delayed for 18 months after a liberal version by an American priest, the Rev Douglas Clark, was binned by the Vatican Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith.

The Catechism according to Clark referred

to "brothers and sisters" and "people" rather than "brethren" and "men." Rome - with a Pope who is determined to die with his and his church's feet planted firmly in the 16th Century - ordered a new version by his friend and Australian ally Archbishop D'Arcy of Hobart, a leading reactionary.

But Catholics "fear the new text will be used by conservatives to attack the progressive teaching of religion which has been widely adopted in Catholic and non-Catholic schools," according to a story in *The Guardian* (May 24).

"This is part of a project to impose very conservative orthodoxy on the whole church which no bishop is going to be able to resist," said Adrian Hastings, professor of theology at Leeds University.

While the first English translation did not have the word "man" in its prologue, the Vaticanised text uses the word eight times in the first few sentences, it is reliably reported (this issue of *The Freethinker* went to press before copies became generally available).

Archbishop D'Arcy told the Roman Catholic *Tablet* (May 20): "The brief I was given was inclusivism was not to be a rigid principle of translation." He said that in the first draft a lot of language was taboo, and I think that you are translating an original you must not treat anything as taboo."

But Ianthe Pratt, co-ordinator of the Catholic Womens' Network, has fired an early salvo across the bishops' bows, describing the changes as "absolutely horrifying, part of a plan to push women back into the ghetto." Maybe this is a kickback from political correctness, but that is like condemning wine because some people drink too much. It is very alienating to young women to be referred to as if they were failed men."

The Catechism is said to insist that divorcees who contract new unions are "in a situation of public and permanent adultery." Contraception in marriage is anathematised as "intrinsically evil," with no acknowledgement that the prohibition is disregarded by most Catholics. Artificial insemination within marriage is condemned as "gravely immoral."

The Catholic Primate of Ireland, Cardinal Daly, has defended the re-insertion of exclusive language in the text. He said the word "man" was used in place of the Latin *homo*, the French *homme* and their Spanish and Italian equivalents, all of which were understood as including both genders.

"Systematically to replace the term 'man' by alternative phrases can create difficulties of style, and can cause problems about expressing philosophical and theological truths concerning the human nature shared by men and women equally."

Fundamentalists on rampage

SUSPECTED Muslim gunmen killed two schoolgirls at a bus stop near Algiers in what looked like part of a campaign against women who do not follow strict Islamic dress code.

The Algerian news agency APS said that Razika Meloudjemi, aged 18, was killed instantly. Naima Kar Ali, aged 19, died of her wounds in hospital after being shot in Boudouaou, 20 miles east of the capital, Reuter reported from Paris on March 31.

Islamic fundamentalists have threatened to kill unveiled women who do not wear either a headscarf or full-length Muslim dress, covering arms and legs. A schoolgirl aged 17 dressed in Western fashion was gunned down in the Blida area, 30 miles south of Algiers, in April. A veiled girl in her company was not attacked.

At least 29 women, two of them foreigners, have been killed in a campaign blamed on armed Muslim militants. Overall, more than 3,200 people have been killed since January, 1992, when the authorities cancelled a general election which fundamentalists were expected to win.

The leader of the staunchly anti-fundamentalist Rally for Culture and Democracy, Said Saadi, has disclosed that an armed resistance to the Islamists is already taking shape.

BATTLE lines are being drawn on global population policy, with women's health advocates on one side and the Pope and Muslim fundamentalists on the other, Reuter reported from Washington on April 2.

"They are on the rampage," Adrienne

Germain said, referring to the Vatican hierarchy.

Ms Germain was a United States delegate to a three-week conference at the UN headquarters in New York which was drawing up a document which sets out international policy on development and population until the year 2050. The document will be debated at a UN conference on population in Cairo in September.

Ms Germain, who is affiliated to the International Women's Health Coalition, said the Vatican has contacted Muslim fundamentalist leaders to join forces against the liberalisation of contraception, abortion rights and other women's health issues.

"It's quite clear that the Vatican has aligned with Algeria and Libya," she said. "Both groups would really prefer that women stay home, barefoot and pregnant."

In March, the Pope met Nafis Sadik, head of the UN Population Fund, and told her that international organisations, such as the UN, should focus on economic development, rather than reproductive rights, if they want to make life better for the world's poor.

This is diametrically opposed to the US position, set out by Tim Wirth, the State Department's counsellor who deals with global affairs, speaking at the end of March.

"I believe that sustainable development cannot be realised without the full engagement and complete empowerment of women," he said. To achieve this, he added, women needed "a full range of primary and reproductive health care services."

BRADLAUGH HOUSE SPECIAL

FOUR IN ONE



The background to the creation of Bradlaugh House is described by BARBARA SMOKER (pictured), President of the National Secular Society, who also outlines the aims of the organisations which share the new, long-dreamed-of Humanist Centre

CHRISTENDOM has its Three in One – the doctrine of the Trinity, adopted in 325 AD in order to unite its squabbling factions. And, though an utterly meaningless formula, it worked.

The Humanist movement in this country has now launched Four in One: not a meaningless formula, but a down-to-earth development that brings the four separate national Humanist organisations together in a single location.

Almost three decades ago, South Place Ethical Society (SPES) set up a Development Committee, on which I served under the chairmanship of Dr Peter Draper, to look into the feasibility of developing a Humanist Centre in London, by building upwards on the Conway Hall site – probably on the flat roof to the north of the library, which had been intended for that expansion when the building was first designed in the late 1920s. The SPES General Secretary, Dr Douglas Gibson, proposed that the words “Humanist Centre” be added to the name of Conway Hall. Though somewhat premature, this was agreed, and the full name was incorporated in the illuminated sign at the back of the building, in Theobald’s Road. However, the Development Committee came up against practical problems – such as securing light from the flats built after the Hall, and, most important, the involvement of so much expenditure.

The plans for physically developing the building therefore fell into abeyance, and with them the dream of a true Humanist Centre. Then, about six years ago, very different redevelopment plans for Conway Hall were mooted – not expansion, but contraction. The idea was to make money by building a small, more modern, Hall on a third of the site and relinquishing the other two-thirds for a prestigious office block. I was the SPES Honorary Representative” at the time, and strongly opposed the plan, but I found myself in a small minority of the active membership. Detailed architectural designs were commissioned, and our dear old Hall was saved only by the collapse of the central London property market.

Some of us had never lost sight of the idea of a Humanist Centre, and when the adjacent building, 47 Theobald’s Road (to the north-east of the Hall), fell vacant, this seemed to offer an opportunity for horizontal expansion. At the same time, it would make the rather awkward L-shaped site almost rectangular, by filling in the angle of the L and would thus increase the value of the total site by considerably more than the value of the acquisition. However, SPES had little capital apart from

the value of the existing Hall, and the majority of its Trustees were unwilling to take out a mortgage on it for the purchase of the next-door property.

Meanwhile, the British Humanist Association and Rationalist Press Association had both moved into the unit on the south-east corner of the Conway Hall complex (14-15 Lamb’s Conduit Passage), so that three of the four national Humanist organisations were now in the same location. But the BHA and RPA staffs became increasingly dissatisfied with the condition of “the shack,” as their

accommodation was generally known. Would one or other of them consider buying 47 Theobald’s Road? No. They both had most of their capital tied up in their previous premises, and the time for selling valuable property is still not ripe; so, like SPES, they shied away from the proposal.

That left only the National Secular Society (together with G W Foote & Co – publisher of *The Freethinker*), as a prospective buyer in the

◀ Turn to Page 90

Foot, Bondi will open new national Humanist Centre

FORMER Labour Leader the Rt Hon Michael Foot, an Honorary Associate of the National Secular Society, has agreed to join the eminent scientist and mathematician Professor Sir Hermann Bondi in officially opening Bradlaugh House, the new Humanist Centre.

The opening of the Centre is an exciting advance for British Humanism. A single site for all the national Humanist organisations in this country has for the first time been established in central London.

The shared headquarters of the British Humanist Association, the National Secular Society, the Rationalist Press Association, and the South Place Ethical Society is now at Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald’s Road, London WC1. This is next to Conway Hall, and the two buildings will together provide offices and meeting rooms for the whole Humanist movement.

As Nicolas Walter and Barbara Smoker record in this issue of *The Freethinker*, the national humanist organisations have different origins and different emphases, but they co-operate closely for the common

cause of advancing a positive alternative to supernatural religion, and this task will be made much easier in one building.

The new Humanist Centre will be formally opened at noon on Tuesday, June 21 – which is not only the Summer Solstice but also International Humanist Day. The main speakers will be Sir Hermann Bondi and Michael Foot, and representatives of the Humanist organisations will be present.

There will be an informal social beginning at 6.30 that evening for members and sympathisers (admission free by ticket available in advance).

For further information and tickets (SAE, please) contact:

- BHA: Jean Woodman: telephone 071-430 0908
- NSS: Terry Mullins: telephone 071-404 3126
- RPA: Jim Herrick and Nicolas Walter: telephone 071-430 1371
- SPES: Nina Khare: telephone 071- 831 7723

The full address of the new headquarters is: Humanist Centre, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald’s Road, London WC1X 8SP.

BRADLAUGH HOUSE SPECIAL

From Page 89

Humanist movement for this uniquely suitable building. There was the added inducement for the NSS-GWF conglomerate that it alone in the whole movement was now situated at a distance from the other three, and its office premises in Holloway Road were hardly ideal. As for the financial aspect, those existing premises were of no great value, and most of the NSS-GWF capital was easily accessible. However, to spend anything like the asking price on the vacant building would, it was decided, have left insufficient working capital; so my dream of a Humanist Centre was shattered once more.

A couple of years later, we heard that number 47 had been put into receivership, so a considerably lower cash purchase offer might well be successful. Supported by our former Treasurer, G N Deodhekar ("Dev"), I put the proposal towards the end of last year to the NSS Council of Management, which agreed that the NSS should make an offer for the freehold of the vacant building. Our present Treasurer, David Williams, relished the challenge of securing it at the lowest possible price, and he was given negotiating powers within a ceiling well below the original asking price. He carried out the negotiations to such good effect that the eventual purchase price was well below even the low ceiling we had set. He then volunteered to "commission" the building, and within a few weeks all four of the organisations were installed – four because, though NSS-GWF count as one, SPES took up office accommodation in the building for its Secretary, Treasurer and voluntary workers, so as to release its library from the clutter of doubling as an office, as well as to gain the advantage of sharing facilities with the other organisations.

Separate offices were amicably allotted to each of them, and they are to share the reception area and receptionist, a joint telephone switchboard (with separate direct lines), a large ground-floor meeting-room, an open-plan office above with electronic equipment, and, in the basement, storage space and kitchen. We look forward to the sharing also of ideas and activities. The Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association share a little of the storage space, too.

The occupants of the building have suffered considerable noise, dust, and inconvenience, from interior structural work – particularly the cutting through of a communicating door in the party-wall between Conway Hall and Bradlaugh House. This door symbolically, as well as functionally, marries the two buildings. The door lies behind the small tobacconist's shop that at present divides the two Theobald's Road entrances. But the shop is leased from SPES, and next time the lease falls due some of us will urge that we turn it into a Humanist bookshop, or, perhaps, a grand entrance to both buildings.

The Humanist Centre will then be complete. The co-operative endeavours that it makes possible are already beginning to be seen, and

FOUR IN ONE

will, we trust, develop. But don't talk to me of mergers. The separateness and uniqueness of each of the organisations in the Humanist movement is something positive, not something to be deplored.

South Place Ethical Society

SPES, the oldest of the four, dates from 1793, but only gradually evolved away from religion during the 19th Century. It is a cultural, educational, social organisation, whose long life is largely due to its owning its own premises. Its monthly journal, the *Ethical Record*, mainly comprises summaries of its lectures, of which there are about 80 a year.

A "university" for self-education and a forum for the public debate of philosophical and other issues, its strong ethos of free speech and assembly makes Conway Hall available to a wide range of other groups, so that it has become one of the most important general meeting places in London, especially for controversial causes. SPES also provides a series of Sunday evening chamber music concerts, dating from 1887, which is not only the longest series of concerts in the world but also has a very high reputation for excellence.

National Secular Society

The NSS, founded in 1866, is generally regarded as the most militant organisation in the movement. During its first 100 years, the NSS tended to attract self-educated, thinking people of a working-class background, while (broadly speaking) the Ethicist and Rationalist wings of the movement were more middle-class and academic. Although this distinction has now almost disappeared and there is a considerable overlap of members among all

four of the major organisations in the Humanist movement, the NSS proudly retains its blunter, functional character, and continues to act as a sort of "trade union" for non-believers in the face of persistent religious advantages under the law.

Since its inception, the NSS has worked for the promotion of freethought, civil liberties, and independent rational ethics. If it had nothing else to its credit than having pioneered the birth-control movement, that alone would merit the support of all socially-concerned people of secular outlook.

But it has also campaigned, and still campaigns, on a wide range of social issues, including the rights of oppressed minorities; race and sex equality; legal abortion; voluntary euthanasia; freedom for the arts; the phasing-out of subsidised sectarian schools; repeal of the religious clauses in the Education Act; animal welfare; universal affirmation in place of the oath; repeal of the blasphemy laws and Sunday observance laws; an end to ecclesiastical exemption from most taxation and from planning and other statutes; abolition of prison and hospital chaplaincies at public expense; and fair time for non-religious views on radio and television.

Members of the Society receive a regular bulletin; but a further modest annual subscription is required to receive its associated monthly *The Freethinker* – which, since 1881, has given topmost value in the field of progressive journalism.

Rationalist Press Association

The RPA, dating from 1899, is the chief publishing wing of the movement. Committed to the principle of the primacy of reason, it has members all over the world, and its publications included the *Thinker's Library*, which pioneered popular reprints of seminal works.

Its main contribution today is publication of the quarterly journal, the *New Humanist*. Like the NSS, it also campaigns on topical freethought issues through the written word.

British Humanist Association

When the BHA was founded in 1965, it was virtually just a change of name for the Ethical Union, which had dated from the 1890s. Concerned mainly with moral questions from a non-religious standpoint, it has recently concentrated largely on the issues of religious education and medical ethics.

It publishes pamphlets on various aspects of its work, as well as its regular *Humanist News*. It also holds training sessions for aspiring officiants of Humanist ceremonies, for which all four organisations supply officiants, and also as a clearing-house for many of them.

No, we don't want to merge – but at the opening ceremony on June 21 we will drink in co-operation – and to Four in One!

BRADLAUGH HOUSE SPECIAL

New centre marks 'end of the beginning' of struggle for secularism

Divergence and convergence

by Nicolas Walter

THE British freethought movement has always consisted mainly of isolated individuals, but for two centuries it has been represented by a small number of separate organisations. The move of the main national organisations into a single building in central London marks a significant stage in a long development.

During the early 19th Century militant opposition to organised religion by radical freethinkers, especially Richard Carlile, began a tradition of permanent campaigning and publishing organisations. The publishing business was continued by James Watson, Austin Holyoake and Charles Watts; the campaigning work was continued by G J Holyoake, who began forming Secular Societies in 1851, and Charles Bradlaugh, who founded the National Secular Society in 1866.

For a time the two traditions were very close, but in 1877 the personal quarrel between Bradlaugh and Watts over the issue of Malthusian propaganda led to a permanent split. Bradlaugh kept the NSS and the *National Reformer*, but Watts kept the publishing business, founded the British Secular Union, and took over the *Secular Review*. Bradlaugh won his battle to take a seat in Parliament, and since his death in 1891 he has been remembered as the greatest figure in the freethought movement. He was succeeded as President of the NSS by G W Foote, the *National Reformer* was succeeded by *The Freethinker*, and Secularism took permanent form.

Rationalism

The BSU lasted only a few years, but the idea of a rival movement lasted longer. Watts was succeeded by his son, Charles A Watts, who continued the publishing business and also started a series of papers and organisations to express moderate opposition to organised religion. An annual publication lasted from 1884 to 1980; a monthly magazine lasted from 1885 to 1976 and still appears as the quarterly *New Humanist*. In 1899 he began an organisation which in 1909 became the Rationalist Press Association, and Rationalism took permanent form.

A quite different tradition of freethought is represented by the South Place Ethical Society. This began in 1793 as a Universalist and then a Unitarian church, moved to South Place in 1824, and shifted under W J Fox and Moncure Conway from Theism to

Humanism. In 1888 under Stanton Coit it became an Ethical Society.

The Ethical movement had been founded in 1876 in the United States by radical Jews and Christians who replaced supernaturalist Theism with naturalist Ethicism and began a movement in the no-man's-land between radical reform of, and moderate opposition to, organised religion. The first Ethical Society in Britain was formed in 1886, and lasted until 1900. Coit left South Place in 1891, started several other Ethical Societies, and founded an Ethical Church in 1909. In 1896 he formed a Union of Ethical Societies, which became the Ethical Union in 1920, and Ethicism took permanent form.

SPES didn't join the Ethical Union, but its chapel was the main meeting-place of the Ethical movement, and this was continued and reinforced when it moved to Red Lion Square in 1929. Indeed, for 65 years the physical focus of the whole freethought movement has been at Conway Hall.

The process of divergence lasted for nearly a century, and the process of convergence has lasted for nearly another century. Although there have been both personal and ideological differences between (and within) the organisations, there have been good relations most of the time. These have been represented by a growing overlap not only in attitudes and activities but also in membership and leadership, and by various attempts to foster co-operation and even unification. From 1899 an Annual Reunion has been organised by South Place, first involving Ethical and Positivist organisations, then the RPA, and then also the NSS. From 1950 to 1963 a Humanist Council represented the EU, SPES and RPA, and then also the NSS.

But after the Second World War there was a more serious attempt to bring all freethinkers together under the rubric of Humanism, led by Coit's successor, Harold Blackham, who symbolically sold the Ethical Church to buy more suitable premises. The EU and RPA tried unsuccessfully in 1957 and successfully in 1963 to form a British Humanist Association as an umbrella organisation for the whole movement. Almost all local Secular, Rationalist and Ethical societies became Humanist groups. But the NSS and SPES stayed outside the BHA, and the RPA withdrew in 1966, so in 1967 the Ethical Union became the British Humanist Association. On an international

level, the old World Union of Freethinkers was virtually superseded by the new International Humanist and Ethical Union in 1952. On a national level, the Humanist Liaison Committee was formed in 1976 and revived in 1984.

For a quarter of a century the British freethought movement has been divided into four tendencies represented by four national organisations – Secularism through the NSS (with *The Freethinker*), concentrating on militant campaigning; Rationalism through the RPA (with the *New Humanist*), concentrating on publishing and moderate campaigning; Ethicism through SPES (with the *Ethical Record*), concentrating on meetings; and Humanism through the BHA (with *Humanist News*), concentrating on moderate campaigning and local activities. But the tendencies have been slowly but surely converging, and this process has at last taken a definite form – not repeating the attempt at formal unification, but preferring an attempt at informal union.

Distinct

In 1990 the BHA rented premises from SPES in Lamb's Conduit Passage, next to Conway Hall, and the RPA rented part of them from the BHA. Meanwhile, SPES considered but rejected plans to rebuild or redevelop Conway Hall, and also a plan to purchase a vacant property in Theobald's Road next to Conway Hall; in 1993, however, the NSS considered and accepted the latter plan. At the beginning of 1994 the property was purchased, named Bradlaugh House, converted for our use, and occupied by all four organisations. The organisations are formally distinct, the staff are separately employed, the publications are independently produced; but we are all working together, sharing not only space but also facilities and expenses and ideas. After many years, the freethought movement is moving in one direction, though its constituent parts are moving in their own ways at their own speed.

This is not the beginning of the end of the long campaign for a secular society; but it is perhaps the end of the beginning.

● Nicolas Walter, who has been the manager of the RPA since 1975, is also the Honorary Representative of SPES and a Vice-President of the NSS.

Bradlaugh never be ab

THE GREATEST ENEMY OF GOD
AND HIS TRUTH
NOW LIVING AMONGST MEN

THAT'S how the Conservatives branded Charles Bradlaugh – in large capitals – on posters addressed to the Christian electors of Northampton during the General Election of 1880. Some 10,000 anti-Bradlaugh leaflets were printed and privately posted to each elector. On the Sunday before the poll, Anglican and Roman Catholic clergy denounced the atheist, and one vicar told his parishioners that Jesus would say “Well done” if they voted against the founder of the National Secular Society.

Bradlaugh was elected, along with his fellow Liberal, Henry Labouchere, but the opposition continued. One Church of England priest declared: “This admission of an Atheist into the Parliament of a Christian Country, has shattered my political creed, and almost wrecked all my former views upon Liberalism and Conservatism.” And at the Church Congress of 1881, both the Archbishop of York and the Bishop of Manchester referred to “the terrible immoral influence that accompanied the preaching of Atheism and Secularism in these later days.”

Moreover, in the words of Bradlaugh's American biographer, Walter L Arnstein, the Roman Catholic Church under Cardinal Manning “played a much more significant part than its numerical strength warranted.”

Manning was a frequent visitor to the House of Commons, where he had considerable influence on Roman Catholic MPs, and particularly on the Irish Nationalists. He also corresponded with Liberal and Conservative leaders, and he attacked Bradlaugh in the *Nineteenth Century* which, despite its editorial policy of being

The new Humanist Centre at 47 Theobald's Road – owned by the National Secular Society and shared with the British Humanist Association, the Rationalist Press Association and South Place Ethical Society – has been named Bradlaugh House. Here, former NSS general secretary and one-time Editor of *The Freethinker* COLIN McCANN sketches the life of the great man himself.

“absolutely impartial and non-sectarian,” refused Bradlaugh the right of reply.

He replied instead, in his own *National Reformer*, and in a penny pamphlet, *A Cardinal's Broken Oath*, in the form of an open letter to Henry Edward, Cardinal-Archbishop of Westminster. And it is worth looking at these half-dozen pages, as an example of Bradlaugh's debating skill.

He began: “Three times your Eminence has personally and publicly interfered and used the weight of your ecclesiastical position against me in the Parliamentary struggle in which I am engaged, although you are neither voter in the borough for which I am returned, nor even co-citizen in the state to which I belong.”

Illegal

In protesting against Bradlaugh being allowed to sit in the House of Commons, “to which the vote of a free constituency had duly returned me,” Manning was told, “you blundered alike in your law and in your history”; and was accordingly corrected.

Then Bradlaugh played his master stroke. Under a statute from the reign of George IV, Manning was liable to indictment as a “member of a society of the Church of Rome,” residing here “without police challenge by the merciful forbearance of the community.” And yet, Bradlaugh continued,

“you parade in political contest your position...and have the audacity to meet outlawry and legal penalty against me...other castigation followed on the Cardinal's “innuendoes” and vicious insinuations on his visit to Northampton, “in the state” and “defiance of the law,” seeking to weaken the confidence of my constituents. Then Bradlaugh turned to the “broken oath” of the pamphlet's title. “Is it the oath which stirs you?” he asked. “Your nervousness on swearing comes very late in life. When you took orders as a deacon in the English Church, in presence of your bishop you swore ‘so help me, God,’ that you were free from your ‘heart abhor, detest and abhorrence’ and with your hand on the ‘holy Gospels’ you declared ‘that no foreign prince, prelate, state, or potentate hath, or ought to have, any jurisdiction, power, superiority, pre-eminence, or authority, ecclesiastical or spiritual, within this realm.’”

Manning, who had written about “whom no oath can bind,” had broken his own oath when he joined the Church of Rome.

Bradlaugh didn't particularly mind what he objected to was interference in the political struggle. “As a prince-prelate of the Church of Rome you have no right to meddle with the question of the English Parliamentary oath.”

Manning was finally told: “Your Majesty has been the foe of liberty throughout the world, and I am honoured by your personal assault. But you presume too much.”

HOUSE SPECIAL

Ideas must be allowed to die

Given the alternative of repenting or leaving home, Bradlaugh chose the latter. He lived for a time with Richard Carlile and soon became an atheist.

After some years' service in the army, he resumed his legal studies, and began to speak and write for the freethought movement, often using the pseudonym Iconoclast. By 1859 he was President of the London Secular Society and Editor of *The Investigator*. In 1861 he founded the *National Reformer* and, in 1866, the National Secular Society. He remained Editor of the paper until his death and President of the society until 1890.

Unsurpassed as an orator, he could attract audiences of thousands – as many as 30,000 in Trafalgar Square and in the North of England. Indeed, his great crime, for many, was his popularisation of freethought among the working classes. But he was far from being a demagogue in the usual sense. He believed the Roman Catholic Church to be “the persistent and unvarying foe of all progress, social, political, and religious” but, he said, “my weapons against this Church are limited to the weapons which I think fair and just against myself.” He opposed the expulsion of the Jesuits from France, not only as impolitic but also as inconsistent with freethought principles, saying: “If we cannot win with reason, I will not try to win with force” – a very different attitude to that of Manning & Co.

A cultivated, (self-)educated man, Bradlaugh spoke and read several languages and was a deep student of philosophy, especially of Spinoza, whom he particularly admired. Above all, he was an outstanding amateur lawyer, whose ability and learning were acknowledged by the Lord Chief Justice. It has been argued that Bradlaugh was too good a lawyer, too ready to turn to litigation, and certainly his law-suits, even when successful, proved financially expensive. “But what am I to do?” he asked. “If when I am libelled I take no notice, the world believes the libel. If I sue I have to pay about one hundred pounds costs for the

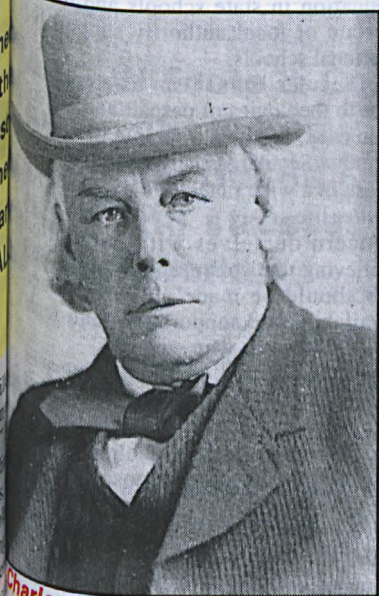
privilege, and gain the smallest coin the country knows as a recompense.”

Outstanding, of course, was the great struggle to enter the House of Commons, to which he was first elected in 1880, but in which he was not allowed to sit until 1886, apart, that is, from a nine-month spell in 1880-81, while challenged by a legal writ. To start with, he asked to be allowed to affirm but, when that was refused, he stated explicitly in letters to the Speaker, the Attorney General and *The Times*, that he was prepared to take the oath and regard it as binding, though the words were meaningless (he even administered it to himself once). But the House, considerably influenced by the clerical opposition, refused, until the advent of a new Speaker Sir Arthur Wellesley Peel, when the junior Member for Northampton was finally allowed to take his seat. Labouchere, it may be noted, shared Bradlaugh's view of the oath, calling it “an utterly unmeaning form...just the same superstitious incantation as the trash of any Mumbo-Jumbo among African savages.”

Expulsion

In 1888 Bradlaugh promoted the Act allowing any MP who wished to do so to affirm and, in 1891, the House expunged the record of his forcible expulsion from Parliament by messengers and policemen. But he was then too ill to understand, and he died two days later. Five thousand mourners crowded Waterloo Station in London, for the funeral at Brookwood Cemetery. Sixteen MPs were there and Gladstone sent a wreath.

When Walter Arnstein wrote *The Bradlaugh Case* 30 years ago, he called it “a successful story tinged with sorrow, even with tragedy... Yet it remains a story that involves ideas and principles by no means dead, ideas and principles no more irrelevant to the present day than those expounded in John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*.” Ideas and principles, I might add, that must never be allowed to die.



Charles Bradlaugh

difference of the age when, in this free land, you so recklessly exhibit as acorns in an election contest the outward shell of the authority the Vatican claims, and shall never again exercise, in Britain.”

never replied and, possibly on the grounds that he had returned from Rome, ceased to write on the subject in the monthly press, though his opposition to Bradlaugh and the Affirmation continued. Eventually, victory went to Bradlaugh, though at the cost of his health. Who was this man so feared by the

Charles Bradlaugh was born on September 12, 1833, in the village of Hoxton, later to become a part of London. He left school at the age of 11 and became office boy to a coal merchant and then clerk to a coal merchant. He read avidly, and was attracted by the religious orators at Bonner's Fields. Religious troubles came early. As a conscientious Sunday school teacher, he confronted the minister about a contradiction between the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Bible. The Rev John Parker suspended Bradlaugh and reported him to his father.

To new readers

by The Editor

READ alongside each other, two quotations – both, as it happens, from the USA – express what the Secular Humanism of *The Freethinker* means to me.

The first, from the illustrious Freethought writer and orator Colonel Robert G Ingersoll, is surely the perfect rejoinder to those who accuse us of being simple iconoclasts:

"The destroyer of weeds, thistles and thorns is a benefactor whether he soweth grain or not."

The second is from *Affirmations of Humanism*, a statement of principles which, appropriately for what is almost a prose-poem, is issued on parchment by the Buffalo-based Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism:

"We believe in optimism rather than pessimism, hope rather than despair, learning in the place of dogma, truth instead of ignorance, joy rather than guilt or sin, tolerance in the place of fear, love instead of hatred, compassion over selfishness, beauty instead of ugliness, and reason rather than blind faith or irrationality. We believe in the fullest realisation of the best and noblest that we are capable of as human beings."

So – it is our duty to root out and destroy superstition and its accompanying absurdities and cruelties...but we do have much to offer in its place.

Our Secular Humanism affirms that this life is the only one of which we have any knowledge and that human effort should be directed wholly towards its improvement, untrammelled by fears of hell or hopes of heaven.

We see that supernaturalism is based upon ignorance – be it chanted by tribal shamans, imposed by village mullahs or abstrused into hard covers by Oxbridge theologians – and we expose and assail it as the historic enemy of progress.

As existing readers of *The Freethinker* well know, we believe that progress is possible only on the basis of equal freedom of speech and publication; that the free criticism of institutions and ideas is essential to a civilised state.

Affirming that morality is social in origin

All in the best of causes

and application, Secularism seeks to spread education, to encourage the fraternity of all peoples as a means of advancing universal peace, to further common cultural interests and to develop the happiness and well-being, the freedom and dignity, of humanity.

Secular Humanism promotes a concept of nature and history which fits with the facts of experience and with the progress of science and criticism – in opposition to traditional beliefs and practices which prevent or interfere with free inquiry: again, we dispute all claims for supernatural interpretations, which obscure the realities and pervert the reasonable ideals of life.

We are committed to the application of reason and science to our attempts at understanding the universe and to the solving of human problems.

We believe that scientific discovery and technology can contribute to the betterment of life; traditionally, the organisations of British Humanism have attracted – and still attract – those eminent in the sciences.

And, at the same time, as active campaigners for literary and artistic freedom, we number among our supporters impressive numbers of artists, writers, poets and people from the media and entertainment.

Opposed to the hereditary principle in government, we believe in an open and pluralistic society and that democracy is the best guarantee of protecting human rights.

Secular Humanists are committed to the separation of church and state – total disestablishment – and work for the abolition of all privileges granted to religious organisations.

We are concerned with securing justice and fairness in society and with eliminating discrimination and intolerance. I observe in the daily work and social activity of our movement the practical expression of our policy of opposing and overcoming divisive parochial loyalties based on race, religion, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, ethnicity.

We want to protect and enhance the earth, to

preserve it for future generations, and to avoid inflicting needless suffering on other species – and, again, I know from personal experience that very many Secular Humanists are deeply committed to "green" activity, ranging from simple recycling of resources to hands-on participation in animal welfare projects.

We believe in enjoying life here and now and in developing our creative talents to their fullest.

Mature adults should, we insist, be allowed to fulfill their aspirations, to express their sexual preferences, to exercise reproductive freedom, to have access to comprehensive and informed healthcare, and to die with dignity.

We are especially concerned with the general and moral education of our children – and inevitably, this involves our opposition to religious education in state schools and to any form of state or local authority support for denominational schools.

We see Secular Humanism as a realistic alternative to theologies of despair and ideologies of violence, and this principle has meant in practice that Secularists have been – and are – to the fore in a wide range of movements for a freer, better life.

We concern ourselves with population issues, believing that contraceptive advice and materials should be made universally and freely available. We support safe and legal abortion for all women who seek it.

There is a long record of Secular Humanism campaigning for the legalisation of the compassionate process of voluntary euthanasia.

Secular Humanists demand abolition of the blasphemy laws, and many oppose all other forms of censorship.

As I have implied, animal welfare is high on our agenda, along with prison reform and the prohibition of corporal and capital punishments.

We seek universal affirmation in place of the oath.

And recent reforms the Sunday trading laws were the result of a long battle – not yet entirely won – in which Secular Humanists and *The Freethinker* have played a leading role.

As in the case of Sunday trading, many of the reforms we seek are well on the way to being realised – at least, in the United Kingdom. But there is still a long way to go, and if you would like to take part in the continuing struggle:

● Join the National Secular Society. The annual subscription to the NSS is £4 a year for individuals (organisations may affiliate at special rates) and applications should be made to the General Secretary, Terry Mullins, at Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP.

● Become a regular reader of *The Freethinker*. It costs only £10 a year (£7 a year for pensioners, unemployed people, students and others who are "unwaged").

Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to G W Foote & Co, and in both cases, additional donations would be put to very good use in what has been described, famously, as "the best of causes."

Where there's a will...

Legacies left to the National Secular Society Limited are legally secure, and the following form of wording is all that is necessary:

I hereby give and bequeath (here insert particulars of legacy) to the National Secular Society Limited for all or any of its purposes.

BRADLAUGH HOUSE SPECIAL

The Freethinker yesterday and today

Let thought be free

As G W Foote & Co, publishers of *The Freethinker*, move into the new Humanist Centre in Theobald's Road, JIM HERRICK outlines the history of the journal – and stresses its continuing importance in today's world

THE FREETHINKER announced its forceful direction from the very beginning. G W Foote, its first Editor, wrote in the first issue:

The Freethinker is an anti-Christian organ, and must therefore be chiefly aggressive. It will wage relentless war against Superstition in general, and against Christian Superstition in particular. It will do its best to employ the resources of Science, Scholarship, Philosophy and Ethics against the claims of the Bible as a Divine Revelation; and it will not scruple to employ for the same purpose any weapons of ridicule or sarcasm that may be borrowed from the armoury of Common Sense. (May 1881)

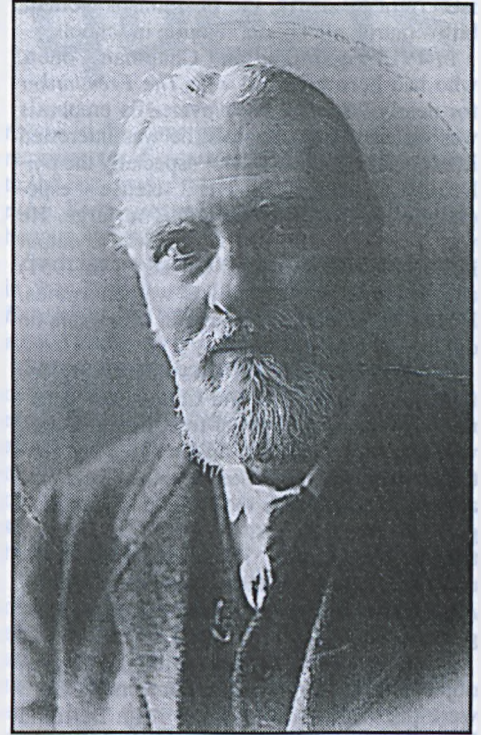
The *Freethinker* was born at a particular historical moment, which influenced its form and content. There had been a range of freethought journals from Southwell's ferocious *Oracle of Reason* (f. 1841) to Bradlaugh's sober and detailed *National Reformer* (f. 1860). In 1881 the 19th Century freethought giant – Bradlaugh – was undergoing his struggle to enter Parliament. This mighty conflict arrested the attention of the nation and Foote hoped to capitalise on the public interest in freethought ideas.

G W Foote, who, in my opinion, was the greatest writer of *The Freethinker* Editors, was a young man (b. 1850) who came from Plymouth to London and worked in libraries and the Hall of Science and was involved with several small freethought papers. He was a

man of wide interests, and his particular literary interests influenced his somewhat rhetorical style. His pre-*Freethinker* writing was moderate and literary, engaged in an intellectual battle with religion. His transformation into a trenchant campaigner against religion came about because: "I went through the Bradlaugh struggle."

He was prepared for his own struggle: the early *Freethinker* included reports of meetings, lampoons against evangelicals, quotations from freethought writers, correspondence between freethinkers and clerics, and the famous two columns – Acid Drops and Sugar Plums. Acid Drops used a news item to highlight the absurdity of religion, while Sugar Plums brought some good news about the spread of freethought. There were also the Profane Jokes – Victorian humour is very different from ours and we would not find them very funny today.

His penchant for satire and sarcasm brought trouble – something which he seemed to invite. The Bible cartoons which he published regularly were very mild by today's standards, but they brought trouble indeed. Two famous cartoons are "Moses Getting a Back View of God" – in which a pair of divine baggy trousers are displayed, and "Divine Illumination" – in which God lights a pipe. Foote was prosecuted for blasphemy in a private prosecution in which two actions were brought. He was tried before Lord North, a Catholic bigot. At first the jury failed to agree, but in a retrial



● George William Foote, first Editor of *The Freethinker*.

he was found guilty and sentenced to 12 months imprisonment.

His comment on the sentence is famous: "I thank you, my Lord; it is worthy of your creed." The other prosecution, brought while Foote was in gaol, was held before the much more reasonable Lord Coleridge and was dropped after the jury failed to reach a decision.

The effect on Foote was enormous – he went through much hardship in prison, and at first was only allowed the Bible as reading matter. Perhaps this confirmed his belief that "Searching the Scriptures was the best cure for believing the Scriptures." The experience of prison marked him for life and must have sustained his anger and indignation at the injustices of religion. It meant that *The Freethinker* campaigned against the blasphemy laws up to today.

Nearly 10 years later, when he was elected as President of the National Secular Society, Foote wrote that, "the heroic period of Freethought is well-nigh over" (February 23, 1890). In a sense he was right: society was changing and as freethinkers moved into the 20th Century religious belief diminished and science, anthropology, sociology and so on, brought in rational explanations for the universe, humankind and religion.

This did not mean that *The Freethinker* has nothing to say. On the contrary, the counter-

BRADLAUGH HOUSE SPECIAL

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theological arguments went on, as did the comments on current events such as freedom of speech, religious support of warfare, atheists' right to affirm, the position of women, birth control, cremation, religion in schools.

In 1915 Foote died and Chapman Cohen, who had been involved with *The Freethinker* for nearly 20 years, took over. His emphasis was different from Foote's; he was interested in expounding philosophy – especially the philosophy of materialism – and science – especially evolution – to the public at large. He was a prolific and lucid writer, whose output in *The Freethinker* (until he retired in 1951) and in books and pamphlets was enormous. He had great tenacity, though in later years he did tend to repeat himself.

The First World War was depressing for freethinkers and Foote and Cohen were determined to retain the right of free speech. Cohen was approached by two military-looking gentlemen who wanted to see the subscribers' list and asked whether he took care that it did not get into enemy hands. He refused a sight of the list and said that "if the Emperor of Germany sent along twopence half-penny for *The Freethinker*, it would be posted to the address given."

The paper gave support to conscientious objectors although neither Foote nor Cohen were pacifists – a long letter from Bertrand Russell on the subject was published. Speaking pessimistically of the future in the midst of war, Cohen wrote: "We are forcibly reminded that after all we may have overestimated the solidity of our civilisation." Such a damper on the idea of progress has continued throughout the 20th Century. It is more difficult to hold an optimistic view about the progress of humanity now than at the beginning of the century.

An important legal case took place at this period. Foote had set up Secular Society Ltd, as an appropriate body to receive donations and legacies. In 1914-15 the bequest of Mr C Bowman to the Society was challenged on the grounds that its irreligion made the Society unlawful. In court and in an Appeal to the House of Lords it was established that it is not illegal to deny the truth of religion, and the *Church Times* – no less – wrote that "England is no longer in law, as it has ceased to be in fact, a Christian country." Something which the likes of Olga Maitland and Caroline Cox would argue with even today.

There is no space to follow through the history of *The Freethinker* in the 20th Century. Two Editors who followed Cohen should be mentioned. F A Ridley, who has just died aged 97, was equally involved with Socialist activities and he broke the tradition that *The Freethinker* was not political, and wrote some strong editorials on international issues from the Socialist viewpoint. (Both Foote and Cohen were more or less liberal individualists). William McIlroy had three stints as Editor, and offered zest and brio combined with a thorough command of the current scene.

There would have been many surprises for

the early freethinkers if they were to look at the current situation. Many of them would be surprised that religion has proved so persistent in the face of so many intellectual arguments against it. This shows that it is not rational thought that keeps the churches alive but emotion, habit, and the desire for power. There were "modern" Christians in Foote's day, but what would he have made of the team of leading Christians questioning the Virgin birth, the incarnation, the resurrection, even the existence of God as anything other than a metaphor which we may live through and by? But side-by-side with these liberals, are the evangelicals and fundamentalists who against all the historical and scientific evidence, hold fast to an inerrant Bible. It is the task of *The Freethinker* today to continue its counter-theological battles. They have not been won.

Shaw complained as early 1908 that "Bible-smashing is tedious to people who have smashed their Bibles." We now have the situation where many people – especially younger people – do not know their Bibles at all. Perhaps their very ignorance shields them from the worst aspect of religion. But Shaw had a point: if we were to read *The Freethinker* for a period of 20 or more years (*Freethinker* readers are very loyal) we would certainly see the same arguments surfacing again and again. But what changes are the issues and the context within which they appear. Would Foote have expected a modern issue of *The Freethinker* to need to have a front-page article on the way evangelicals have inserted Satan into the problem of child abuse, thus causing the

spread of pernicious myths and unnecessary hardship for children and parents?

Many of the targets of freethought remain: the House of Lords, the monarchy, religion in education, the bias of the media, the religious conflict (Ireland, Yugoslavia). Some things are new: the march of Islam, the genocide in various parts of the world. *The Freethinker* is needed to provide an independent voice on these issues.

Freethought is not Utopian: we do not substitute heaven on earth for heaven in the sky. Freethinkers are not revolutionaries: we see that overturning everything in one fell swoop will not make things better. We are reformers in religious and social matters. Above all, we need freedom of thought so that all ideas may be heard. C G L Du Cann wrote in 1940 of a book about Oscar Wilde that he was a freethinker in the best sense: "He could and did think new thoughts. His mind was free as Ariel's." There can never be too many such free minds. And then to put the thought into action, we need, in Danton's famous words, quoted by Foote in a letter from gaol: *De l'audace, et encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace.*

● A former Editor of *The Freethinker*, JIM HERRICK edits *New Humanist and International Humanist News*. His *Vision and Realism* tells the inspiring story of the first 100 years of *The Freethinker*. It is obtainable at £3, including postage, from the National Secular Society, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP.



AND
SO
TO
JAIL

This cartoon, Divine Illumination, helped to put G W Foote in the slammer for 12 months. The full caption reads: "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light."

– Genesis i., 3.

Humanism keynote of Starship space quests

ARTHUR CHAPPELL has long been interested in the Humanist philosophy in *Star Trek*. He was surprised by recent criticisms of the show in *The Freethinker*, especially accusations that *Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry was guilty of militarism, racism and fascism. Chappell says: "Fascism in particular seems an odd accusation when the 'Patterns of Force' episode has the Starship *Enterprise* crew foiling an attempt to recreate Nazism on another world - a powerful attack on irrationalism and hate-mongering."

FEW people know how deeply Humanistic *Star Trek* really is. It is essentially a science fiction vision of mankind Humanising a dangerous and exciting universe.

Take the multi-racial crew: Chekov, a Russian navigator (in a series made at the height of the Cold War); Sulu, the Japanese helmsman; a Scottish engineer. One episode, "Plato's Stepchildren," was banned for decades for showing Uhuru (the black female Communications Officer, whose name is Swahili for "Freedom") and Captain Kirk sharing an interracial kiss.

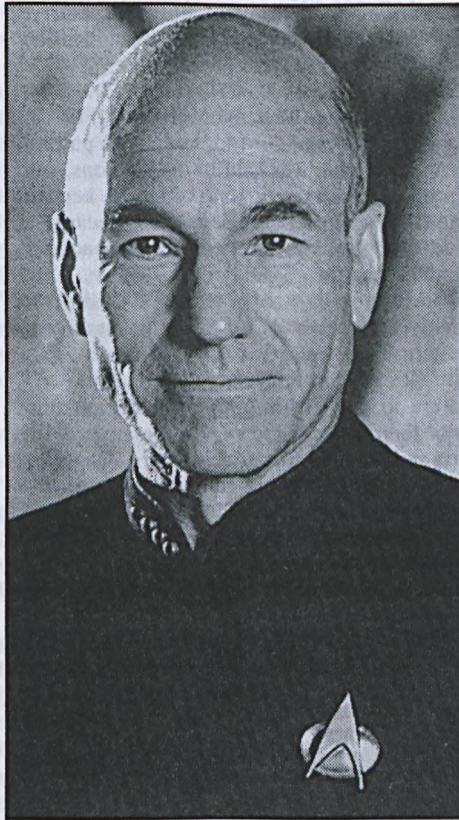
Even less racist, the *Enterprise* has a real alien (the Vulcan, Spock) as Chief Science Officer. In *Star Trek*, Earth's racism has been abolished.

Some accuse the programme of stereotypical racism as the villains usually represent a "race," such as the Klingons and the Romulans. In fact, Klingons are depicted as highly individualistic, aggressive warriors, disliked but respected, in accord with the Prime Directive principle of not harming other cultures and races. In *The Next Generation* stories, the Klingons have freely joined the Space Federation, while retaining their warrior beliefs.

To accuse Roddenberry of racism in creating Klingons is like accusing Jews of being Jewish for eating kosher food. All races and cultures have their own distinctive identities and traditions.

In "The Balance of Terror," a member of the *Enterprise* crew hears that the fierce Romulans are distant relatives of Vulcans and turns his hate towards Spock - only to be admonished for his racism by Kirk. Lieutenant Stiles had lost relatives in a previous battle with the Romulans, but he learns in the end.

The relationship between the Captain, the Science Officer and the Medical Officer (McCoy), is central to *Star Trek*. Kirk muses



● Patrick Stewart as Captain Jean-Luc Picard in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, shown on BBC 2 Wednesdays.

on his feelings, impulses and intuitions, often to the point of being a bore. Spock is cold and logical, sometimes appearing inhumane to those disagreeing with his difficult life-or-death decisions, until they see that he was right (cf. "The Galileo Seven"). McCoy, a true Humanist-Humanitarian, and possibly the most Roddenberry-like of the regular characters, mediates between the two men, setting life above all else.

Militarism in *Star Trek*? With its crew being disciplined like navy personnel, this criticism seems reasonable - at a glance. There are captains, admirals, fleets of (Star)ships, strategic space battles, war-gaming, and courts martial. But the *Enterprise* crew often break the rules. Scottie holds drinking contests; Uhuru smuggles pets on board, as in the delightful "Trouble with Tribbles" episode. In this, Scottie fights with the Klingons despite Kirk's orders. To the Captain's horror, and our chuckles, Scottie explains that he only started fighting after hearing his beloved Starship insulted, even though the Captain has been called awful

names in the same pre-fight argument. Scottie recreates the discussion for his Captain, down to the last insult both to Captain and to *Enterprise*. Kirk is upset that it wasn't a fight in his honour, rather than the *Enterprise's*.

Such irreverence for leadership is common in *Star Trek*. In the third film, Kirk steals the *Enterprise*, but is later forgiven for doing it in a good cause: try that in the navy!

Some might see heel-clicking, saluting, order-giving and instant, unquestioning obedience. I see instead the arguments over what actions are to be taken, and constant breaking of the Captain's orders, albeit without any lack of respect for his essential leadership. There is stress on the importance of team work in a human society.

The *Enterprise* is primarily a scientific research vessel, and its crew of 500 is interested in peace and pacifism. The deadly phasers are mainly used to stun, rather than to kill, though they do kill as a last resort (instantly and totally erasing the victims: humane self-defence?).

Without Kirk present, McCoy and Spock fall out, as McCoy sees the Vulcan's logic as ruthlessly utilitarian, forgetting that Spock has saved his life many times. Spock, whose mother is human, having learned to suppress emotion in favour of pure logical thinking, represents pure objectivity, though his human side often peeps through in his wry humorous asides. This intensifies the running love-hate working relationship he has with McCoy. This is based on McCoy, like the viewer, sensing that Spock is more human, and more envious of human feeling, than he ever admits.

This is taken further in *The Next Generation*, where Data, an android, tries to be human, with his only feeling being a profound sense of regret that he isn't a person. Data is not a new Spock. Data is Pinnocchio, the wooden boy who wants to be real. He's more tragicomic than Spock; Data has pathos.

This idea of "being human," spreading human knowledge, wisdom, and exploring human attitudes as well as encountering bug-eyed monsters and new technologies permeates *Star Trek*.

Science fiction rarely had any interest in people up to the 1960s. In *Star Trek's* "Return to Tomorrow," the advantages of being humanoid are fully explored. Bodiless aliens borrow human bodies in order to build themselves robot-selves which can then be used as artificial but insensitive bodies. The aliens grow to like their host human bodies too much, and face the horror of having to part with the unaccustomed ability to see, love,

ST creator's 'distaste for gods'

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feel, eat, and touch. They have to be forced into returning the borrowed live bodies to the rightful owners.

The most important part of *Star Trek's* philosophy is the Prime Directive: never to interfere in alien cultures and customs. This creates all kinds of dilemmas. In "A Private Little War," a brave parable on the then ongoing Vietnam conflict, Kirk learns that the Klingons are smuggling arms to one of two tribes on a small planet, creating a military imbalance. Kirk's solution: arm the other tribe but not to superior force, merely an equal one (a comment on the nuclear arms race?). The tribes fail to see this gambit for what it is, and try to take the *Enterprise* crew's superior phasers.

The Prime Directive dictates that balancing the sides must go on. This is one of *Star Trek's* bleakest episodes, but one of great humanity. The plot could easily have been written to wipe out the Klingons and the hostile army, for the sake of a victorious militaristic ending, but Kirk comes to know that he shouldn't. Moral: the human answer isn't always a happy one.

Humanistic philosophy in what ought to have been formula space opera seems extraordinary, all the more so considering the back-

biting political financial squabbles which Roddenberry endured with the programme's sponsors and studio politicians.

The credit for *Star Trek's* moral integrity lies entirely with him. He was very questioning, a trait inherited from his cynical father, a Los Angeles cop, as Roddenberry would also be before becoming a writer. His mother was a Baptist who took him to Church regularly, while his father told him that he ought to be "damned careful of what the preachers say!"

Biographer James Van Hise adds (*The Man Who Created Star Trek*, Pioneer Books, 1992): "At about the age of 14, he started paying attention to what was said in the sermons, and he came to the conclusion, which he kept to himself, that it was nonsense. He became a good deal more interested in the deacon's daughter than the gospel."

Roddenberry wrote many TV shows, notably *Have Gun Will Travel*, an intelligent Western-based detective story. The hero, Paladin, (Richard Boone) quotes philosophy and prefers to outwit his opponents rather than shoot them. Roddenberry was unhappy with what remained a formula Western. The plot often involved bringing religion into the stories. Roddenberry regretted that one episode of *Have Gun* featured a pastor who commented heavily on blood atonement and Christian Salvation.

Roddenberry had no wish to compromise his own beliefs again. Asked to do a series set on an 1860s Mississippi riverboat but with no reference whatsoever to negroes, Roddenberry argued for realism and racial rights, and lost a potentially lucrative assignment. His hard-headed, uncompromising approach earned him a reputation for being difficult to work with – without which, *Star Trek* would have been a very different programme.

Star Trek gave Roddenberry a vehicle for exploring delicate moral situations in a thoughtful way. Many episodes were criticised for being "too cerebral," but Roddenberry insisted that his audience was not as dumb as his sponsors imagined. In "The Devil in the Dark," the typical bug-eyed monster gains sympathy when we learn why it kills people: it's a mother protecting her eggs. Such "humanising of the monster" often put Roddenberry in conflict with studio watchdogs, who wanted safe-formula programmes which would need less supervisory interference.

Roddenberry was asked to put a padre in the regular cast in order to explain Christian values to aliens. He wisely put his foot down: "How could you have a chaplain if you've got that many people of different and alien beliefs on your ship? With as many planets as we were visiting, every person on the ship would have to be a chaplain!" (Van Hise).

Roddenberry's distaste for gods comes across frequently in *Star Trek*. In "The Squire Of Gothos," Kirk meets a god who wants human playthings. Kirk realises the immaturity of the Squire, whose parents arrive and punish him for being a tormenting child. The mature parents have no interest in human affairs and release Kirk safely. Roddenberry's message is clear: gods cannot take up an interest in human affairs without causing more problems than they solve.

Only one episode spoils the anti-religious trend. In "Bread and Circuses," the crew finds a world order modelled on Nero's Rome, where gladiatorial combat to the death is a televised event. The simple plot is complicated by occasional references to a group of dissenters who worship a rival god to the planet's Caesar. We are led to believe that this god is the Sun, until, in a final plot twist, we learn that it is "the Son." Yes, that one – although, mercifully, he doesn't appear. We learn only of a cult surrounding him. Kirk murmurs that he'd like to witness that part of history repeating itself.

Roddenberry is careful, however, to keep the "religious" side of this episode in Roman-Christian history discreet. He was, of course, a passionate Humanist, occasionally contributing interviews and articles to Humanist journals, and receiving many fitting tributes in them on his death. "Bread and Circuses" was written as an imaginative idea, a parallel history story, not as a creed.

...to be concluded
next month

FT AT THE FOREFRONT

AS Nicolas Walter suggests elsewhere in this issue, the opening of Bradlaugh House is not the beginning of the end of the long campaign for a secular society; but it is perhaps the end of the beginning.

In other words, Freethinkers, Secularists, Humanists, Rationalists now share a firm base from which to conduct their concerted assault on irrationalism in all its forms. As Jim Herrick says in his article: "Many of the targets of freethought remain: the House of Lords, the monarchy, religion in education, the bias of the media, the religious conflict...the march of Islam, the genocide in various parts of the world."

The Freethinker will be at the forefront of this campaign – so long as our readers continue to help with the ever-increasing costs of production and distribution.

The present-level of giving to the fund is an absolute necessity if we are merely to stand still. If *The Freethinker* is actually to make progress – and that is the plan – readers' giving must seriously increase. Please send cheques, postal orders, stamps to: G W Foote & Co., Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP.

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Total for April: £ 334.50.



DOWN TO EARTH

with Bill McIlroy



Memorial to those who said 'no' to war

THOUGH of a peaceable disposition, I am not a pacifist. Nevertheless, I felt in the best of company at a mainly pacifist gathering in Tavistock Square, London, last month. The occasion was the unveiling of a Commemorative Stone, probably the first of its kind in the world. It honours those who refused to be conscripted for military service.

The unveiling ceremony, performed by the eminent composer, Sir Michael Tippett, was the culmination of an 18-year campaign by Edna Mathieson. Her uncle, Joseph Brett, a working-class Londoner and conscientious objector, suffered much for his principles during and after the 1914-18 war.

Towns and villages throughout the British Isles have their memorials – often in the form of a Christian cross – to those who died in two world wars. They are the focus for Remembrance Day parades and services when uniformed organisations, local civic and church dignitaries are on display.

No doubt the sadness of survivors, relatives and friends of the dead is genuine enough on such occasions. But official solemnity is as artificial as the poppy wreaths. Humbug is the name of the Establishment game.

Ostentatious remembrance of the dead is an effective method of detracting attention from exploitation and neglect of the living.

Those who survived the 1914-18 war returned from the carnage to a Britain where the "rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate" ethos still flourished. "Our brave boys" were patronised and hailed as heroes on Remembrance Day. But they were kept firmly in their inferior place on the other 364 days of the year, expected to be properly grateful for a menial job or a means-tested handout.

The Tavistock Square ceremony was a dignified affair. The same cannot be said of Government plans to mark the 50th anniversary of D-Day, which have bordered on the farcical.

Mindful of Margaret Thatcher's successful exploitation of the Falkland episode, John Major and the flag-wavers' party were preparing to climb aboard the D-Day bandwagon. As it turned out, Captain Mainwaring and the Warmington-on-Sea Home Guard were less accident-prone than the present Government.

Proposals to mark the anniversary of a wartime operation in which 37,000 died included a jamboree in Hyde Park, a spam fritter fry-in and sandcastle competitions. Veterans' organisations were incensed and Dame Vera Lynn's threat to boycott the proceedings sent the Government back to the drawing-board.

Critics who claim that a memorial to conscientious objectors is an insult to those who chose or, in most cases, were compelled to fight, are remarkably unimaginative. Braying politicians, brasshats and saloon bar patriots denounce as cowards those who stick to their pacifist principles, even when the chips are down. In fact it requires courage of a very high order to make a stand against xenophobia and jingoism when a country is in the grip of war fever.

Brutish and blighted

HAVING spent most of his long life in Glasgow, John Taylor Caldwell is generally regarded as being entirely Scottish. In fact, when he was three, the family moved to Belfast, which he describes as being, in 1915, "a trim little city of a quarter-of-a-million inhabitants." But a trim appearance belied the poisonous social reality of Ireland's second city, as is clear from Caldwell's new book, *Severely Dealt With* (£5.95 from Northern Herald Books, 5 Close Lea, Rastrick, Brighouse HD6 3AR; ISBN 0 952 3167 0 6).

John Taylor Caldwell spent 10 years away from his native land. His account of a boyhood in the harsh, brutish Belfast of the 1920s is both compelling and uncomfortable. The atmosphere of the place, blighted by poverty, insecurity, snobbery and religious intolerance, is captured in grim detail.

The author relates an incident which was by no means unusual. A Catholic family in the depressed working-class area where he lived were evicted from their home by Protestant neighbours. This outrage did not occur during "troubles," nor was it carried out surreptitiously in the dead of night. Men, women and children assembled outside the victims' house as though waiting for a wedding party to emerge. After windows were smashed, furniture was piled in the street and set alight. It was all very casual. There was not a policeman to be seen.

"I don't think I prayed that night," John Caldwell writes. "God had remained silent; so did I." It is unlikely that he prayed much again.

Young Caldwell was a survivor, physically and psychologically. He did not succumb to any of the killer diseases that struck down thousands in their youth, nor was he seriously affected by the Christian virus. Back in Glasgow, he worked in a cinema and tried his hand at writing. He was to become one of the city's best known polemicists and political agitators.

Severely Dealt With is not all gloom and despair. Time and again the author's optimism and gentle humour come to the fore. John Taylor Caldwell concludes with the promise of a further volume which readers will anticipate with keen interest.

Thanks for nothing, God

THE honour due to a Christian minority who opposed the apartheid régime in South Africa does not entitle apologists for their creed to rewrite history.

And it is an historical fact that for more than 40 years the churches' theological justification of and support for the Nationalist racial segregation and discrimination programme was almost unanimous.

During the years of Nationalist rule, black Christians dared not set foot in most "white" churches. Christian institutions enthusiastically promoted apartheid – not only as a political doctrine but also as God's plan for South Africa.

A typical example of how apartheid was accorded religious endorsement is found in the manifesto of the Institution for Christian National Education: "Native education should be based on the principles of trusteeship, non-equality and segregation; the aim should be to inculcate the white man's view of life... The Coloured man must be educated according to Christian National principles... only when he has been Christianised can he and will he be truly happy against his own heathen and all kinds of foreign ideologies."

Nelson Mandela's conclusion of his presidential oath with the words "so help me God" was entirely inappropriate. Surrounded by representatives of various religious faiths, he may have felt obliged to nod in the direction of a deity. However, it was not the help of a superhuman force but human endeavour in South Africa and further afield that resulted in Mandela's release from Robben Island and the ANC's electoral victory.

Broadcasting history was made in 1955 when Mrs Margaret Knight, lecturer in psychology at Aberdeen University, was allowed, in two talks, to propose a Scientific Humanist conception of morality. Her subsequent book took its title from the talks: *Morals Without Religion*. There was uproar in the Press and among the great and the good in general, but Mrs Knight began to write for *The Free-thinker* and she joined the National Secular Society, remaining a member until her death 10 years ago. This month's Blast is edited from her *Christianity: The Debit Account*, which suggested "that the conversion of Europe to Christianity was one of the greatest disasters of history."

IF ONE reads the Gospels with a fresh mind, one gets a picture of the founder of Christianity that is quite startlingly different from the traditional "gentle Jesus..." Any hint of criticism, any demand that he should produce evidence for his claims, was liable to provoke a torrent of wrath and denunciation. Most of Chapter 23 of St Matthew's Gospel, for example, is not, as we are encouraged to regard it, a lofty and dignified rebuke: it is what on any other lips would be described as a stream of invective. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which, indeed, appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness...Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" This can hardly be called loving one's enemies...

Clerics frequently refer to "the Christian message" of love and human brotherhood. But there is nothing exclusively Christian about this message; it is basic to modern Humanism, as it was to the pre-Christian Humanism of China, Greece and Rome. In the 6th Century BC Confucius propounded the Golden Rule, and Lao-Tzu enjoined his followers to "requite injuries with good deeds..."

The hideous doctrine of eternal torment after death has probably caused more terror and misery, more cruelty and more violation of natural human sympathy, than any religious belief in the history of mankind. Yet this doctrine was unambiguously taught by Jesus. "The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt.Ch.14)...

The Roman Catholic Church still teaches the doctrine of eternal punishment, but the current tendency among Protestants is to say that Jesus's pronouncements on this subject were "symbolic." But no one has yet answered the question why, if Jesus did not intend his statements about hell to be taken literally, he made them in a form that ensured that they would be taken literally. Why...did he deliberately mislead his hear-

Absurdities do lead to atrocities

ers? If he was God, he must surely have been able to foresee what disastrous results would follow.

No other religion has such a bloodstained record as Christianity. During the ages of faith the Church argued...that any degree of cruelty towards sinners and heretics was justified, if there was a chance that it could save them, or others, from the eternal torments of hell. Thus, in the name of the religion of love, hundreds of thousands of people were not merely killed but atrociously tortured in ways that make the gas chambers of Belsen seem humane...

One of the most persistent fallacies about the Christian Church is that it kept learning alive during the Dark and Middle Ages. What the Church did was to keep learning alive in the monasteries, while preventing the spread of knowledge outside them. To quote W H Lecky, "The period of Catholic ascendancy was on the whole one of the most deplorable in the history of the human mind...The spirit that shrinks from enquiry as sinful and deems a state of doubt a state of guilt, is the most enduring disease that can afflict the mind of man. Not till the education of Europe passed from the monasteries to the universities, not till Mohammedan science, and classical free thought, and industrial independence broke the sceptre of the Church, did the intellectual revival of Europe begin"...

Jesus believed that the Last Judgment was at hand: [his] moral teaching was

therefore directed mainly towards getting believers into heaven: he showed little concern for the affairs of this world. Later, the Church ceased to believe that the end of the world was imminent but it still held that this life was no more than a momentary prelude to eternity, and of little importance except as a preparation for the life to come. Thus throughout most of its history the Church...has encouraged its members to regard suffering and misery as part of the inscrutable decrees of Providence: to be patient under wrong and oppression; to accept evil instead of resisting it: all in the certainty that things would be put right in the next world. To a privileged minority this attitude has obvious advantages, in that it helps to keep the unprivileged majority resigned to their lot, but it has retarded human progress for centuries. The emancipation of slaves and of women, and factory reform in the 19th Century are three progressive struggles which the laity waged themselves with little or no support from the clergy.

The negro slave trade - a far more inhumane practice than slavery in the ancient world - was initiated, carried on and defended by Christian men in Christian countries. To quote H A L Fisher, "It is a terrible commentary on Christian civilisation that the longest period of slave-raiding known to history was initiated by the action of Spain and Portugal, France, Holland and Britain, after the Christian faith had for more than a thousand years been the established religion of Europe..."

Many of the leading abolitionists were unbelievers - Condorcet and other leading figures of the Revolution in France, Abraham Lincoln in America, Fox and Pitt in Great Britain. Christians like William Wilberforce who actively opposed the slave trade were far from typical: with the honourable exception of the Quakers, the attitude of most of the Churches towards abolition was in America actively hostile, and in Britain (to use Wilberforce's own words) "shamefully lukewarm".

The indictment against Christianity is formidable...the crucial fact, surely, is that, as Voltaire remarked, men who believe absurdities will commit atrocities. One of the best ways to improve men's behaviour is to enlighten their minds: and today, against the strong opposition of the Church and the Establishment, Scientific Humanism is attempting to do just that.

YOU'RE TELLING US!

Intolerance of the Mullahs

LAST week I was speaking on the telephone to a Hindu friend who happened to be able to read Urdu, and does in fact read some Urdu magazines and papers published in Britain. Quite casually, he mentioned to me a few bits of what is going on.

Apparently, a Mr Anwar Sheikh from Cardiff has written a book entitled *Eternity* which has enraged mosque leaders all over Britain. Because Mr Sheikh is a Muslim, various Mullahs have denounced him as an apostate. Some say he should be ignored, while others say he should be boycotted, or that he is worthy of assassination under Islamic Law, and so on.

Ever since the Salman Rushdie episode, it seems to have become fashionable among mosque leaders to utter such veiled (or open) threats. Some Muslims have had the courage to write letters to the Urdu press opposing this intolerant trend, but I am not sure whether that will curb the threats from the Mullahs to any Muslim who dares to offer a different theological or philosophical interpretation of Islam.

My friend also mentioned that the Urdu press carried news of a very disturbing event in Pakistan. It appears that some Pakistani Christians are under trial for blasphemy in Pakistan and that the principal accused was assassinated as he emerged from the court. The Koranic view that Jesus was not God, or that he was not resurrected, is obviously much nearer a rational view, but as Christians hold the contrary view, are they to be prosecuted for blasphemy or assassinated? Has the event been correctly reported and, if so, how is it that neither the national nor the Christian press here have reported this event, which has far-reaching implications?

JYOTI ANKOLA
London

Establishing the facts

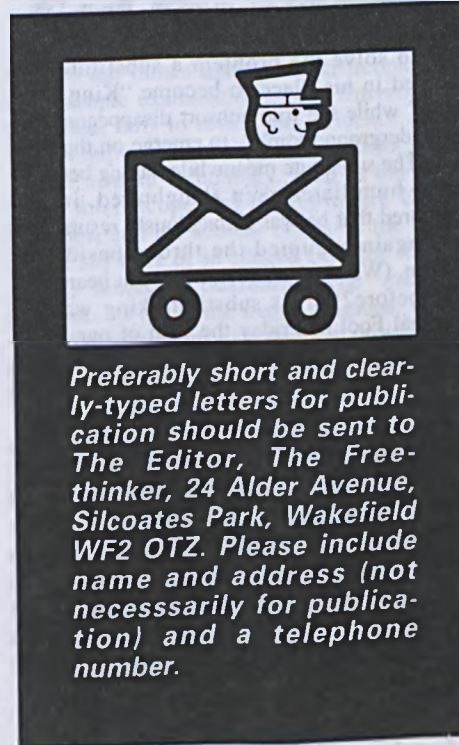
WHILE much of what Professor Stephen Haseler says in Last Word (May) is admirable, he is mistaken on some points.

Disestablishment, alas, is not "now clearly on the agenda." It used to be in the days when the Liberal Party alternated in government, and it was Lloyd George who secured the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church of England in Wales in 1920 (Gladstone has disestablished and disendowed the Church of Ireland in 1871). But after about the first-mentioned date, with the long decline of the Liberal Party, disestablishment went off the agenda. The ruling Labour Party was never particularly interested in the matter.

Margaret Thatcher was *not* a Methodist when Prime Minister. She became an Anglo-Catholic after her marriage to Denis who (despite his divorce) is of that persuasion.

Should he come to the throne, Prince Charles will not necessarily reign as Charles III (to Jacobites, there has already *been* a Charles III – known to others as Bonnie Prince Charlie or the Young Pretender), for a sovereign may choose to use one of his or her other names as the regnal name. Thus, Kings Edward VII and George VI were never familiarly known by those names – they were both "Bertie" to their intimates.

The most odious aspects of the Church of England's establishment are twofold. Firstly, its financial privileges (despite its current fraudulent moaning about impoverishment), whereby all taxpayers are obliged to support it, since its revenues are guaranteed by the



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Crown. Disestablishment must be accompanied by disendowment if the people are fully to benefit from it.

Secondly, the fact that its laws – unlike those of other denominations in England – are a part of the law of the land, and are thus enforced by the ordinary courts. That is so even though, since the Toleration Act of 1689, non-Anglicans have gradually been exempted from many of them.

Naturally, the Church of England likes to conceal its privileges as much as it can get away with doing so.

A thorough exposé of church establishment (including that of the Church of Scotland) and all its attendant evils is badly needed.

R J M TOLHURST
Chelmsford

FOLLOWING on from Professor Haseler's Last Word, how is it possible for a country like Britain, which has signed the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, to have a State Church?

The existence of a State Church, paid for by

the taxpayer, implies that we have no religious freedom. Also, the imposition of the State in imposing compulsory religious worship and study in schools, with a mainly Christian bias, again implies lack of religious freedom.

The State Church brand of religion is very narrow, being English Protestant in form. The existence of such state-imposed religion is obviously a violent act, and is also a cause in some part of the violence we see in Northern Ireland.

Britain should become a modern state, and an essential component of such a state is a Secular Constitution.

Does Britain have an "opt-out" from its obligations under the Universal Bill of Human Rights?

Humanists should take the matter of state-imposed religion to the European Court and perhaps a United Nations type of court to remedy this state of affairs.

R AWBERY
Reading

Ludicrous comparison

I AM reluctant to continue the circumcision correspondence but some of D S Lee's criticisms of my last letter are so preposterous that they require an answer. It is utterly absurd to compare amputation of "ears, noses, toes...breasts" etc., with circumcision.

Does Mr Lee really think it is reasonable to compare major surgery to remove useful bodily parts with the trifling snipping off of a superfluous little piece of skin? It is Mr Lee who is being ridiculous with such a ludicrous comparison.

As for the "aesthetic advantages" of foreskins, this is very much a matter of opinion, the prevailing opinion being one of indifference. When an opinion is expressed, in my experience it tends to be in favour of circumcision. Lack of time and space prevent me going into detail but I can assure Mr Lee that medically necessitated circumcisions are much more common than he realises, that surgeons are not being over-hasty, and that mere trimming is frequently unsatisfactory and can even make things worse if tight scar tissue develops. The only "sensitive nerve-endings" being sacrificed are pain-receptors. The nerves involved in orgasm are not present in the foreskin and absence of a foreskin makes no difference to quality of orgasm or ease of achieving one – I should know.

The foreskin almost certainly evolved to protect the glans when our ape-like ancestors roamed naked through long grass and prickly bushes (pardon the pun) but nowadays even naturalists do not encounter such conditions. Accordingly, the advantages of a foreskin have gone but the disadvantages remain.

What Mr Lee should be objecting to is not the carrying out of the operation for non-medi-

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cal reasons but rather the cruelty and harm of it being done by unqualified persons under unhygienic conditions and with no anaesthesia. I have no objection to an infant being circumcised with local anaesthetic by a competent surgeon in a hospital, even if it's just for religious reasons, as no harm and possibly some benefit result. I object vehemently to an older lad, in terror of what's about to happen, being held down and cut by a shaman with whatever piece of broken glass comes to hand and being subjected to social ostracism should he squeal. This is exactly what goes on in many parts of the world and certainly merits the condemnation of all decent and rational people.

STEPHEN MORETON
Warrington

Cut off point

PLEASE spare us any further dissertations by Mr S Moreton on his and other foreskins. Quite put me off my breakfast!

R A COBB
Rutland

Origins of religion

BILL McILROY (March) almost "resisted the temptation not to mention that this year Good Friday falls on April Fool Day," but it seems only right to explain why its falling upon this particular day was singularly appropriate.

When religion began, it was based upon the worship of the Moon Goddess, who in the many cultures of the Middle East had a counterpart on earth in the Sacred Queen who annually took as consort a youth.

Each year was counted in months of 28 days; thus the year was 13 months long, ending not at Midwinter but at the start of Spring. When, during the Neolithic Age, at the end of each year the Sacred King (consort) was ritually slaughtered, his body was drained of blood to fructify the crops. Then his body was either cut into pieces, corresponding to the number of fields, each of which had one piece ploughed under, or it was ritually eaten by the Queen's College of Priestesses. As the ritual slaughter was enacted during the 13th month, it gave rise to the belief of 13 being unlucky (for some, as the bingo callers still announce).

The Goddess was worshipped as a triad: the waxing moon as maiden, Athene; the full as nymph, Aphrodite; the waning as crone, Hera. Women were linked with her because the menstrual cycle corresponds with the 28-day month. Her representative on earth's main function was to encourage rain to fall. Oak and ash trees attract lightning and so the Queen acquired sceptres of ash wood. The mistletoe

growing on the oak, because the seeds resemble sperm, was sacred to a religion which depended upon agriculture, with its cycles of sowing, fructifying and reaping, plus animal husbandry. She also acquired the orb, originally fallen from above during a thunderstorm – what we would regard as a meteorite, and she wore a cloak made from goatskins as the she-goat is very prolific. This cloak, or aegis, being the symbol of her authority, she sometimes allowed her consort to wear and sit in judgement over his fellow men.

Eventually there arose kings unwilling to face death at the end of the year, so their reign was extended to two years initially and later to a Great Year (100 lunations; slightly under eight years) and eventually to the Greater Year of 19 years. But each year the king had to die, and to solve the problem a substitute was elected in his place to become "King for a Day," while the true consort disappeared into an underground tomb – to emerge on the third day. The substitute meanwhile having been ritually humiliated then slaughtered, it now appeared that he was miraculously resurrected and again occupied the throne beside the Queen. (Where, I wonder, have you heard that one before?). This substitute king was the original Fool of Friday the 13th of our April. He was a scapegoat, taking away the year's bad luck, and bringing a new beginning to his people.

The ritual humiliation included scourging, being struck in the face, and having a thorny crown forced over his head, before being set upon by the priestesses who were "high" on an hallucinogenic mushroom (psilocybe), the so-called Ambrosia of the Gods.

It is reckoned that the study of the beehive, the perfect state, where the Queen after her favoured drone has impregnated her, kills him, prompted the idea for the Sacred King's annual slaughter. Honey is the other food for the goddesses and later for the Olympian gods.

Simultaneously with the "rebirth" of the King, a procession by torchlight, enacted by shepherds bore a New Year Child to the city or settlement. This child, born to a priestess, was ritually "lost" for the shepherds to find and present. This reminds us of Pharaoh's daughter, who would have been if not the Sacred Queen then one of her priestesses. She gave birth to Moses, hid him the bulrushes – then fortuitously "found" him again and presented him at court.

In fact, I do believe that Moses was the Messiah of the prophecy, since in being the son of a high priest he was automatically titled a Son of the Goddess, until such times arose that the rule of women was superseded by the worship of male deities and the scribes re-wrote history to fit the new religious dogma. Aphrodite became the Father; Athene became the Son; a nonsensical Holy Ghost was invented to fill the gap left by Hera.

This revolution in religious thought took place around 1500 BC to 1200 BC, promoted by the introduction of iron weapons. As the worship of the Moon and stars must take place at night, the new ideas converted Colleges of

Priestesses to witches and saw night itself as evil, with all things bad to taking place under the cover of darkness.

The myth of Christ's birth, life and death more properly belongs to a thousand and more years before his reputed birthdate and crucifixion – to a time when a scapegoat's ritual death for the good of his people, a death to which he surrendered willingly, was understood by everyone then living, not to the Israel of AD whatever, when the sole remaining vestige of human sacrifice had become a token small piece of foreskin, and the idea of human sacrifice was abhorrent to the population. They understood execution for committing some crime against religion or the Roman state, but not deliberately going along to get yourself killed in order to confer a nebulous benefit upon your race.

The above information is easily obtained from the two-volume Penguin Classic edition of Robert Graves' *The Greek Myths*.

When today's exponents of Women's Liberation howl about the way in which women have been suppressed and downtrodden by men for generations, they should not forget the thousands of years when women were in the ascendant and terrorised man from approximately 7000 BC to 1250 BC – far, far longer than man has held women under his thumb!

A G STEPHENS
Bradford

Striking!

A FEW years ago, York Minster was hit by lightning, causing partial damage. At the time, many of the faithful said this demonstrated their God's wrath at Church of England apostasy. A few weeks ago in America, a church was reduced to rubble when hit by a tornado, and at least 17 of the worshippers were killed. Reaction to the event, so far as I am aware, has been total silence from the faithful. Very odd of God!

RAY McDOWELL
Co. Antrim

Differing on gayness

IN THE February, 1994, issue of *The Free-thinker*, George Broadhead of the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association complains that a government circular relating to education "makes no provision for objective teaching about homosexuality." George obviously thinks that objective teaching about the topic will lead to an accepting view of homosexuality. I beg to differ.

In the appendix and notes to his essay "Why Homosexuality is Abnormal," in *The Monist*, April, 1984, the philosopher Michael Levin devastatingly analyses the work of pro-gay researchers Bell and Weinberg and demonstrates

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that their research contains facts utterly damning of male homosexuality. There is ample evidence that gay sexual behaviour is typically promiscuous, anonymous, impersonal, compulsive, shallow and irresponsible. For example, in a survey of San Francisco gays, 75 per cent of respondents claimed to have had more than 100 casual sexual partners. Furthermore, the close, stable coupling that occurs among a small minority of gays does not bear a favourable comparison with heterosexual close coupling. So much for gay "marriages."

Do the facts point to characteristic maladjustment and dysfunction among gays? The evidence, properly analysed, shows that the unhappiness of gays does not necessarily stem from the way they are treated by society, but can stem from their own sexual behaviour. Humanists committed to the ideal of our "Happy Humanist" symbol should be seriously asking how this "alternative lifestyle" can reliably lead to happiness, given the evidence. Readers are surely aware that, even among heterosexuals, promiscuous, compulsive behaviour cannot characterise a happy, harmonious personality. Blaming the unhappiness of gays on a homophobic society has become a knee-jerk reaction among Humanists. We need to look dispassionately at gays' own behaviour for possible causes of their problems.

Criticism of gays frequently comes from religion. Anti-religious Humanism has predictably sided with the gays but has been too much influenced by the very manipulative gay and feminist lobbies. Humanists who are responsible, critical thinkers will ask if these lobbies will candidly deal with the objective evidence. Should we trust a mindset, bent in the very beginning by the need for self-justification, that says male homosexuality is "good" and therefore no scientific evidence could possibly show that it has bad consequences? Apparently not: when Levin was in Australia on a public lecture tour he was harassed by bigots intent on silencing him. I am scandalised that Secular Humanism, a purveyor of "rational" morality, offers male homosexual behaviour as an acceptable alternative model for our children who aspire to adult happiness. Insofar as any children can be misled into such behaviour, are we condemning them to an adult lifestyle that would be intrinsically unhappy no matter how much society tolerates male homosexuality? Humanists are so absorbed by the unreason of religion that they do not readily see the unreason in their own backyard.

JOHN SNOWDEN
Tarragindi

Deadly religion

THE most deadly thing about organised religion is that it disapproves of birth control and the regulation of populations. The degradation of our planet by our by-products of civilisation has slipped from the headlines but there is no need to stress here how vital it is to us all to

keep our waste to a minimum.

One person produces one unit of waste. Two people produce twice that quantity. The argument for keeping a sharp eye on population policy is unquestionable. In order not to increase global toxification there is a case to be made out for devising a formula which equates the standard of living of an area (and hence its volume of waste) with population. I repeat, the idea of population control has got to be grappled with. Nothing else is as important.

ALAN MASON
Leominster

God the elusive

LET us not mince matters! Microscopic and macroscopic examination of the Universe, as presented, fails to reveal any evidence of an alleged Supreme Controller of its affairs.

With modern technology, such as the electronic microscope and the 6.0-metre USSR telescope, and the keenest brains on the lookout for any trace of an alleged God, the silence on this subject is deafening. The "sacred" scriptures of all of the major religions, when subjected to rigorous examination, prove to be riddled with contradictions and absurdities, often not worth the paper they are written on.

With the onslaught of modern scientific enquiry into this matter, one can only conclude that the alleged God is a past master in hiding himself from the scrutineers. Radio astronomy is also silent on the subject - despite the claim of the Psalmist (139.8) that it is impossible to avoid his presence in both Heaven and Hell! The reality of life is that we are on our own, confronted by a hostile environment - with no Big Brother in the sky.

DAVID YEULETT
Greenwich

Star Trek

MY central point about *Star Trek*, that the series provides moral justification for the *status quo* under the guise of championing liberal values, can still be seen in the newest spin-off series, *Deep Space Nine*.

This is set upon a sort of cosmic Rumania; a world that was formerly a satellite of a large militaristic empire (the "Cardassian Empire"), a metaphor for the Soviet Union, but which has now withdrawn from its former satellites and allowed the "Federation" (a metaphor for the USA) to move in. The similarity is inescapable; the inference is that the newly-independent ex-Warsaw Pact nations need the presence of the US or its proxies (The West) to protect them from the likelihood of the return of "The Commies."

That the people of these nations do not swallow this can be seen in the results of the elections in those countries in that part of the world that have held them: the former Communists, under their new name of Social-Democrats, Democratic Socialists, Democratic

Left, etc, have all returned to power, not under their old slogan of "Workers of the World Unite" but under their new slogan of "We Told You So."

I should like also to reply to Eric Yaffey (April issue). Kirk claimed to be showing the hippies in "The Way to Eden" extreme tolerance. Richard M Nixon said in his election addresses that too much tolerance had hitherto been shown to their counterparts. The inference was that the violence experienced by Civil Rights and anti-war campaigners up to that point had been their own fault. Anyone who had been outside the Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1968 would have seen the true picture.

KEITH ACKERMANN
Tilbury

Pornography

WRITING about Robert Black, convicted of the sexual torture and murder of three little girls and facing questioning in respect of many other unsolved similar crimes, John Mullin (*The Guardian*) stated that Black had been caught showing a pornographic video to a 13-year-old. A stock of hard-core porn from Scandinavia, on a child-abuse theme, had been discovered in Black's room.

We also recall the place of horrific videos in the lives of the kiddy killers of James Bulger. And in the recent past, two schoolgirls, abducted in the Cardiff area, were subjected to horrific sexual abuse while being forced to watch porn videos. But no such facts impress David Webb, of the National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Act (NCROPA), whose movement, he reports in *The Freethinker* May issue, defends what he calls "poor, innocuous 'pornography.'"

In his article (my reply to which is necessarily curtailed by considerations of space) David Webb implies, in his closing paragraph, that porn videos etc could only be seen as possibly harmful to children if seen by children. But such cases as those I cite prove that porn panders to, ignites, inflames and impels the libidinous, salacious and often lethally menacing appetites of twisted persons.

Of course, without pornography Black was a potential social menace (due to his sad history and, possibly, unfortunate inherited tendencies). But it is highly probable that porn was the bullet in the gun of his perverted, sadistic lust. If a clampdown on the availability of such material is submitting to "absurdly broad and disproportionate considerations regarding children," well, dammit, I plead guilty to harbouring such concerns.

As for Britain being, as David Webb claims, "uniquely sexually repressed," has he never walked through Hyde Park on a summer's day? It will be tragic if the Secular cause is hijacked by the pro-porn lobby. Surely a regard for cause and effect must be part of any Rationalist philosophy?

JESSIE BOYD
Gwent

Our woman in Havana

WESTERN perceptions of Cuba are too often misconceived, misguided and based on second-hand, erroneous thinking.

For 38 years this small country of 10 million people has been subjected to sustained interference in its internal affairs by United States governments, particularly through continued US Navy occupation of a military base at Guantanamo on the island.

The US embargo has severely damaged Cuba's economy – and British governments, although supporting some trade with Cuba, have politically aligned themselves with this US policy. Even now their ban on trade with Cuba is being intensified and there is harassment of Cuban commercial shipping by their navy and coastguards. In 1990, the US government funded a television station, TVMARTI, to beam American propaganda into Cuba.

So I would like to tell you, readers of *The Freethinker*, my experience on a recent study tour of Cuba.

We were a party of 18 people of different age groups and backgrounds. We were all very impressed with Cuba's progress (what they could have done if there had been free trade – the mind boggles!) and disapproved most vehemently of the USA's embargo of goods including very essential medical supplies.

The group learned a lot from discussions with university students about just how and why the revolution is working for them. Considering that Cuba is often described as a "Third World" country, we were very impressed with the island. We visited schools, hospitals and a university, and we saw ordinary citizens who, although poor by European standards, at least are not hungry. Most foods are rationed and the diet is very plain.

Pencils

Children were well-dressed and all those of school age were in nice school uniforms, but they are short of books, computers and everyday essentials like pens and pencils. Everybody has opportunity for a university education, which is free, and illiteracy has been virtually eradicated – in fact, hundreds of "Third World" students come to Cuba at no cost to themselves.

Research establishments have been created and have no reason to envy research facilities of this kind in the rest of the world. We saw how, through the use of science and the pharmaceutical industry, it is possible to create key resources for the country, not only to meet Cuba's needs but also to earn major revenue.

Cuba now must develop its tourist industry. We in the study group found all of the hotels

LAST WORD

Blackpool and Fylde Humanist Group member DOROTHY BLACKWOOD reports on a recent trip to Cuba, which prompted her to write to President Bill Clinton, urging a resumption of US trade with the beautiful but economically beleaguered island. Soap, pens, toothpaste, construction-tools and books are among the many necessities in short supply, thanks to the American blockade – but still the Cubans send doctors abroad to help even less well-off countries.

excellent, on a par with hotels here in the West. Cubans are out to "sell" fresh air, the sea and their island's natural beauty – but they will not trade away their ideals and culture. They realise that they need outside assistance to go forward with this project and Spain is the country where managerial skills are being sought.

Cuba is a beautiful country and entirely unspoiled. The roads are traffic-free, which is due, of course, to the lack of oil, and one felt quite safe walking and travelling around in Havana and other towns.

The hospital we visited in Havana was certainly very impressive and we learned there that all medical and dental services are free. We talked quite freely to the superintendent and were shown a video of the workings of the hospital's operating theatres and other facilities. It was comparable to hospitals in the West. It is ten storeys high and two of the floors have been allocated to private patients, mainly from South America, a decision not taken lightly but considered essential for maintaining the high standards they have achieved for their own people.

Despite being a poor country, with the added burden of the US blockade of much-needed medical supplies, Cuba has sent more doctors

abroad – and especially to Africa, Asia and South America – than the World Health Organisation!

Infant mortality, which once stood at 60 per 1,000 births, has fallen dramatically to 1.7 per thousand, – nearly the same as in the USA. Recently, Cuba has provided free medical treatment to more than 6,000 children and 1,000 adults suffering from the effects of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. Life-expectancy has risen from 57 years in 1958 to 74 years today. Cuba's health system is the envy of the "Third World," and even of many more developed countries.

Large-scale international tourism was never planned for Cuba. All the former private clubs and beaches were for the benefit of the people, but, due to the collapse of the Soviet bloc, and since the country must live off its own natural resources, tourism is now very much on the agenda. Prior to the revolution, tourism in Cuba was associated with gambling, drugs and prostitution – but this is not the way the modern Cuba intends to go.

Cuba's main crop of sugar had a disastrous year in 1993 due to heavy rain and very bad storms. This has affected the economy again. It was most enlightening to see the students returning from a spell of duty helping to gather in the cane.

Boycott

As to religion, which will be of interest to Freethinkers, it is not taught in schools and I did not see any priest or anything pertaining to religion. Although I am not sure whether church-going is popular, I do not think it is.

The United States Congress recently passed the Torricella Act, which imposes a boycott on companies which trade with Cuba – including those outside the USA. The European Parliament strongly opposes this and considers the Act is contrary to International Law, and calls for the US Congress to repeal it. Pressure is being exerted by groups in America and some medical supplies are managing to get through via Mexico, but no government has the right to unilaterally intervene in another state's affairs and undertake acts of economic coercion against it.

If any readers intend to go to Cuba, now is a good time to see a beautiful, unspoiled country. If you decide to make the trip please take with you pens, paper, notebooks, English language books, soap, toiletries, carpentry and construction tools. I do assure you that Cubans will be very grateful for your help in this way.