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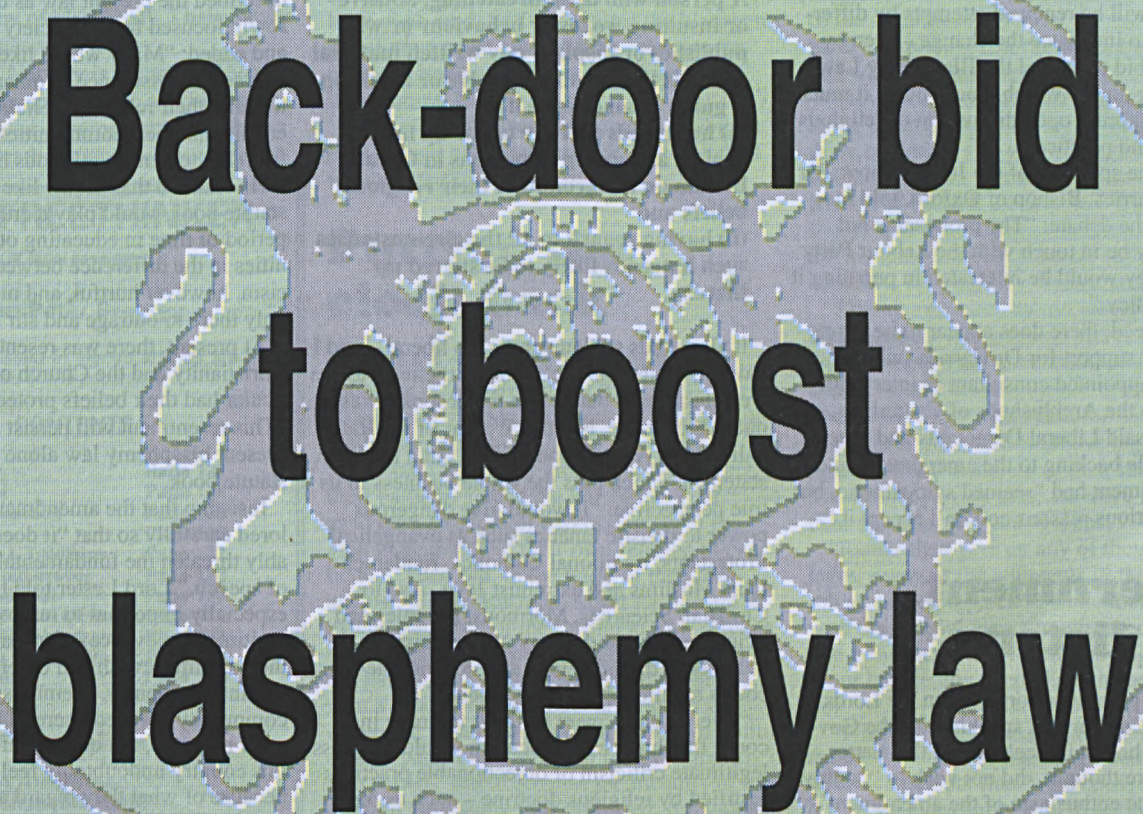
Secular  
Humanist  
monthly

# Free thinker

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

Vol 114 No 8

August 1994



# Back-door bid to boost blasphemy law

**A woman  
writer with a  
price on her  
head - P 125**

**Bill McIlroy:  
Women with  
chutzpah  
- P 131**

**Open letter  
to Gillian  
Shephard  
- P 132**

# UP FRONT

with the Editor

## Blasphemy law by back door

A MOVE which would have strengthened existing laws against so-called blasphemy and incitement to racial hatred by protecting all religions as well as Christianity, and by embracing religious as well as racial groups, was defeated by 96 votes to 25 after a late-night debate in the House of Lords on July 12.

This may be news to you because, as Barbara Smoker points out below, the debate appears to have been ignored by the conventional media.

But that is far from being the end of the matter. There will be renewed attempts by different routes to introduce the change – seen by many as a bid to extend the Blasphemy Laws by the back door – which would make it much easier to suppress open discussion of religious doctrines and practices.

One of the sponsors of the July 12 move, Dr Richard Harries, Bishop of Oxford, told me following the debate: “The proposal is not dead. I may be in touch with the Labour Party to see if they would be interested in pursuing it as party policy.”

And, indeed, there does appear to be strong cross-party support for Dr Harries (who in 1986 was appointed consultant in inter-faith relations to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York). He said Liberal Democrats had given considerable backing to the amendment, and the Government had “seemed sympathetic, but then for various reasons couldn’t accept it.”

## Government will listen

THE latter point was borne out in the Lords debate by Earl Ferrers, speaking for the Government, who, while feeling that the matter needed more thought, did not wish to “unduly dampen” the enthusiasm of the amendment’s supporters.

He said (and one should read between the lines here): “We are certainly prepared to listen to any evidence of a real problem in this area, and in the light of that to consider how best it should be addressed. We have had discussions with religious groups on the subject through the Inner Cities Religious Council; and my right honourable friend the Home Secretary recently discussed it with a group of Muslim leaders. We will continue to use these routes to explore the issues with the care and thoroughness they deserve.”

One of the Bishop of Oxford’s co-sponsors was the Tory Backbench peer Baroness Terry of Southwark, Vice Chancellor of the South Bank University, and another was Lord Lester (Anthony Lester QC), the Liberal Democrat.

The fourth signatory was the Bishop of Southwark, the Rt Rev Roy Williamson who, as Bishop of Bradford (1984-91), was celebrated for his attempts to strengthen links between the considerable Muslim minority and Christians in the diocese.



## Theistic fanatics

THE defeated proposal was put forward as a Clause to be added to the Criminal Justice Bill:

**A person who uses threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour or who publishes or displays any written material which is threatening, abusive or insulting is guilty of an offence if**

**(a) he intends thereby to stir up hatred against any group of persons in Great Britain on the ground of their religious beliefs and**

**(b) having regard to all the circumstances such hatred is likely to be stirred up thereby.**

It all sounds so democratic, so liberal – and I have no doubt that the sponsors themselves are well-meaning – but before the proposal was put to the House, Nicolas Walter, of the Rationalist Press Association, rushed out a media statement which puts the whole business in its true perspective: “It would give dangerous power to theistic fanatics such as evangelical Protestants, traditional Catholics, fundamentalist Muslims and extremist Jews, also to Christian Scientists, Mormons, Moonies and Scientologists, and to any group which believes in divine beings and in using the courts to enforce its convictions.

“Even if cases were difficult to prove in court, the threat of prosecution would suppress legitimate criticism of objectionable practices justified by religious doctrine – such as the doctrine of hell, the indoctrination of the young, the subjection of women, the prevention of birth control, discrimination against homosexuals, torture of animals, mutilation of children, and so on.”

Nicolas Walter hoped that the proposal would be opposed by all supporters of free expression in controversial matters, and: “If there is a genuine need for more legal protection of vulnerable minorities, any new law should be properly discussed and prepared before it is introduced into Parliament.

“A better course would be to abolish all the laws giving specific protection to religion. After all, some religions deserve hatred, and we insist on our right to say so.”

One might add: is it possible to believe that Salman Rushdie (or Dr Taslima Nasreen,

should she reach these shores – see Page 125) would not face legal harassment from fanatics were the amendment to become law?

And who would speak out against such harassment? Those Labour MPs hugely dependent on the Muslim vote who found themselves strangely tongue-tied when *The Satanic Verses* was being Brownshirtedly burned in English streets?

## Minority resentment

IN THE debate, the Bishop of Oxford described the present law as being “too narrowly focused for the society we now enjoy,” and added: “Many would like to offer some degree of reassurance to other faith communities that their religious beliefs also are respected and that their communities are protected from incitement to religious hatred.”

He claimed that “a law like this on the statute book would play a crucial part over a period of time in educating other faith communities in the difference between lawful criticism, however hurtful, and material which is only there to outrage and stir up hatred.”

At present, there was resentment that only Christianity and the Church of England in particular had their beliefs protected by law: “This resentment will persist so long as the present blasphemy law alone remains on the statute book.”

Insisting that the amendment had been tailored carefully so that “it does not unjustifiably threaten the fundamental right to freedom of speech,” Lord Lester told the House: “It is especially important to remove a source of legitimate grievance – for that is what it is – to the Muslim, Jewish and other religious minorities in this country. Members of the Muslim community – I speak here of the decent moderate majority, not of extremists – settled in this country undoubtedly feel affronted because of what they regard as the discriminatory legal position, protecting only Christianity.”

That there are “decent” moderates among Muslims is beyond doubt: what is not open to question, also, is that, as events from Bradford to Bangladesh – via Egypt, the Sudan and the fundamentalists are quite beyond “moderate” control.

Lord McIntosh of Haringey made the point that threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour are *already* illegal, particularly if they are intended to stir up hatred against any persons, and he questioned the necessity for adding the words “on the ground of their religious belief.”

# UP FRONT

with the Editor

From Page 122

## 'Treat' from Lord Sefton

WHEN Lord Sefton said that Lord Lester appeared to want to extend the blasphemy law to other religions, Lord Lester shook his head.

But Lord Sefton went on: "I said it seemed to me that that was what was happening – that the noble Lord was going to leave the law regarding the Church of England alone but was seeking to give the same protection to other religions. If that is not, in practice, extending the law of blasphemy, I have never heard anything nearer to it."

He declared: "Nobody is going to prevent me from standing up in public and saying I detest the very idea of somebody being being condemned to death because he wrote a cer-

tain book which offended a religion which is based on a supernatural myth which I do not recognise. If that is interpreted as preaching hatred against the sect that would do such a thing, so be it; but I shall do it.

"Does anybody in this Chamber think that I am preaching hatred by saying that it is thoroughly detestable for one religious organisation to establish a *fatwa* on those grounds? Will anybody... say that I am wrong? There is more than respect for people's religions. There is respect for people's honesty. I believe in being honest.

"If someone tells me that the religions are succeeding in establishing humanity among men, I point to Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is the classic example of where religions have gone mad. So I am against the blasphemy law. I am against any further protection for religious bodies which are based upon the supernatural."

He went on: "I shall give your Lordships a treat. I shall bring forward a Bill. It will deal with the abolition of blasphemy."

trial discrimination, and so on, should be sufficient without special protection for particular groups. And the Law Lords, finding in favour of a Sikh under that Act, added to the Muslims' understandable grievance and exemplified the truth of the adage *Hard cases make bad law*.

"At a convention on religion, held at the Barbican Centre on June 30 under the auspices of the Commission for Racial Equality, several Muslim speakers complained about this unfairness, and at the end of the proceedings a vote was forced as to whether the CRE should press for a change in the Race Relations Act so as to include religion alongside race, by simply having the words 'or religion' and 'or religious' inserted where appropriate. In view of the selected make-up of the audience, it is hardly surprising that the majority in favour of this was overwhelming.

"However, simultaneous steps were already being taken along other legislative paths to the same outcome. The July 12 amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill was introduced by the Bishop of Oxford, Lord Lester, Baroness Terry, and the Bishop of Southwark, though the instigators of the proposal were, almost certainly, the Islamic religious leaders.

"On this occasion, the proposed new Clause was defeated: but the issue will not go away. Other attempts are to be made under this Bill – and, no doubt, under others – to meet the vociferous Muslim demand for parity with Anglicans, Jews, and Sikhs, in legal protection against strong criticism of their religion. And Muslims are likely to be far more litigious than the other religious groups, I suspect.

"Rather than give up any of their own privileges, many of the adherents of these protected religions are prepared to share their privileges with other religions – though, needless to say, non-believers are not seen as being deserving of, or having any need of, such special protection.

"When (not if, unless we really wake up to the danger and do something about it) any one of these attempts finally succeeds in becoming law, it will inevitably lead to social friction and considerable litigation, resulting in censorship – not least, in defensive self-censorship.

"It will affect satirical writing and broadcasting in general, but particularly specialist journals like *The Freethinker*. We will have to stop writing anything that might be construed as being derogatory of Islam, unless we are prepared to meet exorbitant fines and legal costs and our editors are prepared to risk imprisonment. It will put the clock back more than 100 years, to the time of the imprisonment of the first Editor of this journal, G W Foote.

"But there seems to be a conspiracy of silence in the media about this very real threat: the House of Lords debate was not even mentioned in the national daily press."

## THE FREETHINKER

UK ISSN 0016-0687

Editor: Peter Brearey

Views expressed in signed articles are not necessarily those of the publishers.

### CONTENTS

Up Front:	Page 122
Land of Israel	Page 124
Dr Taslima Nasreen	Page 125
What's On	Page 126
Book review: L T Wilkins	Page 127
New look at old prayer	Page 128
Blat from the past	Page 130
Down to Earth: Bill McIlroy	Page 131
Dear Gillian Shephard	Page 132
You're telling us! Letters	Page 133
Peerless Persian	Page 135
Last Word:	Page 136

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Subscriptions, book orders and Fund donations to The Publisher:

G W Foote & Co (Dept F),  
Bradlaugh House,  
47 Theobald's Road  
London WC1X 8SP

### Annual postal subscription rates

UK: 12 months £10 or £7 (unwaged). Overseas surface mail (including Republic of Ireland) £13. Airmail £20 sterling. Overseas subscribers are requested to obtain sterling drafts from their banks, but if remittance is in foreign currency (including Republic of Ireland), please add the equivalent of £5 sterling or USA \$6 to cover bank charges. Alternatively, send at your own risk currency notes, convertible in the UK, plus bank charges equivalent to USA \$3.

Printed by Yorkshire Web, Barnsley S70 2AS.

## Putting the clock back

BARBARA SMOKER was in little doubt about the ultimate origin of the Lords' move when I asked her to comment as President of the National Secular Society.

She said: "Muslims are stealthily winning their battle to amend the law of this country so as to curb freedom of expression about religion in general and their own religion in particular. Their bid, in the wake of the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie, to get Parliament to extend the reach of the Common Law offence of blasphemy beyond its present protection of the Established Church has failed so far to gain a foothold in the legal process, in spite of its having won favour with a number of politicians – particularly those of the two Opposition parties, who recognise the inequity of one religion only being thus protected. So, indeed, do we in the Secular Humanist movement – though we see the only acceptable solution to be the complete abolition of the blasphemy law.

"Meanwhile, Muslims have further grounds of complaint of discrimination under the law because Islam, which does not comprise a single race or 'ethnic' category, is therefore not protected under the Race Relations Act, while Judaism is accepted as being an ethnic category as well as a religion and has thus been protected by this law from the first; and now (as a result of case law in 1983), Sikhism is likewise recognised as a race as well as a religion and so is able to claim protection that is denied to Islam. Some of us think the Race Relations Act was itself ill-advised, since general laws against violence, incitement to hatred, indus-

B.S.L. 11.9.94

A reply to C R Wason's 'Stepchildren of Abraham' by WILLIAM E WILKERSON

**L**IKE the way C R Wason (*The Freethinker*, July) has presented the history of ancient Israel and agree that a land claim based on a supposed god is without merit.

However, I detect a bias in his presentation. For one thing, he shouldn't write about "Palestine" before 135 AD, when Hadrian first introduced this name, as well as *Aelia Capitolina* for Jerusalem, in order to obliterate the territorial memory of rebellious Jews. Wason could write about the land of Israel or, if he finds this irritating, the land of Canaan, except that the Canaanites disappeared early and the Jews are their only remnant who still speak a Canaanite tongue, Hebrew.

The land in question is not a gift from a god but is the land of Israel because this people placed its stamp on this territory in a most emphatic fashion. Wason's bias shows especially in that he skips Jewish history from about 400 BC to 135 AD. It was precisely this period that saw the flowering of Jewish territorial power and religious and cultural influence. Jews successfully fought the Greek-Syrians in the 2nd Century BC and

# LAND OF ISRAEL NOT 'A GIFT FROM GOD'

battled Rome not only until 135 AD but also until the 7th Century when Parthia collapsed and the Muslim Arabs invaded.

There were still Jews to be massacred in Jerusalem in the First Crusade, near to 1100 AD, and Jews were prominent in Tiberias and Jerusalem in the 1500s. In the 1800s and early 1900s innovative Jewish immigrants attracted Arab immigrants from nearby countries.

It is not true, as Wason claims, that Western Jews, the Ashkenezim, are descended from the 8th Century Turko-Russian Khazars. A knowledgeable Jewish friend tells me that there are no Khazar words in the Yiddish language and Khazars, as non-Jews, could not have contributed the hereditary priestly Cohens and Levys of the Ashkenazi community.

As regards what Wason calls the "legiti-

mate population," meaning, presumably, local Arabs, again a bias is revealed. Many people have invaded the region: Seljuks, Fatimids, Crusaders, Mongols, Mamluks, Armenians, Turks and others, each leaving remnants in the land - that is not its "legitimate population," if we are to interpret this to mean that the present local Arabs are remnants of the ancient Canaanites, Philistines and so forth. They aren't; they even eschewed the term "Palestinian" during the 1920s.

In 1984 Joan Peters' seminal book appeared (*From Time Immemorial*, Harper Row, New York) which showed that during the 1800s and early 1900s Arabs filtered out of the land from the (now called) Lebanon-Syria region, from Egypt, and further afield.

The Jews, though they have returned in nearby Arab lands and from further afield, are the "legitimate population" in the same way as are the (presently) minority Christians in Lebanon (and whose diaspora in the West has flung world far exceeds their number in Lebanon) and the mere 10 per cent Christians in Egypt.

As regards the current Israelis persecuting the "legitimate" Arabs, remember that the local Arabs, plus all the surrounding ones, at the behest of their Allah, have waged religious war against Israel and pre-Israel.

Do you expect the Israelis to turn the other cheek, abandon their national liberation struggle and commit national suicide? Other nations in this situation would have deplored their subdued attackers. It says something about the Israelis that they have done no such thing.

## 'Right to Die' conference

**DISTINGUISHED** speakers from around the world will participate in the World Federation of Right to Die Societies 10th International Conference to be held at the University of Bath, September 7-10. Entitled *Whose Death Is It Anyway - Medical Decisions at the End of Life*, the conference will be hosted by the Voluntary Euthanasia Society of England.

Keynote speakers will include Sir Her-

mann Bondi, former Master of Churchill College, Cambridge, and Dr Kenneth Boyd, Research Secretary, Institute of Medical Ethics. Seminars will be led by international authorities in the field, including: Sir Ludovic Kennedy; Bishop Alastair Haggart, Chairman of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society of Scotland; Derek Humphry, President of the Euthanasia Research and Guidance Organisation, USA. Further details from Meredith MacArdle, VES, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 5PG.

## BOUND TO BE READ!

The bound volume of *The Freethinker* for 1993 is now available

It costs only £15 (including postage) from:

G W Foote & Co, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP

# Victory in Sunday campaign - at last

**THE** religious stranglehold on Sunday (which has lasted 1,000 years, since King Athelstan in 960 AD, according to a badly-bruised Keep Sunday Special Campaign) ended when the Queen gave the Royal Assent to the Sunday Trading Bill.

This means that by the end of August the protection for the special Christian character of Sunday will have been removed at a stroke - and a long-running campaign in

which the National Secular Society and *The Freethinker* have played a leading role will have ended in victory.

All shops under the new law will be allowed to open for six hours on a Sunday between 10am and 6pm.

In addition, large shops in the motor spares, off licence and farm shop categories will be able to open all hours on Sunday together with all small shops (under 3,000 square feet).

# Religious terrorists seek writer's head

## Commentary

US\$180 a year and in which the true immorality of a 2.8 million child labour force excites little comment.

But: "She must die – nothing she can do can change that," Fazul Haq Amini, head of the Front Against Anti-Islamic Activities, has said.

And Professor Golam Azarn, leader of Jamaat-i-Islami, the biggest of Bangladesh's fundamentalist parties, added: "Taslima is immoral. I do not know why the West is taking the risk of antagonising the whole Muslim world for the sake of a lady."

Among those taking that "risk" is *The Times*, which on July 2 ran an editorial on the issue: "Ms Nasreen is certainly awkwardly outspoken. The theme of her novels and other writing is repression in the name of religion, notably of women but also of non-Muslim minorities. But her campaign for education, property rights and greater sexual freedom for women is consonant with the Bangladeshi constitution's guarantees of sexual equality, free speech and religious freedom. These are, as she argues, subjects which Bangladesh must confront if it is to modernise – and which, worldwide, Islam cannot forever evade.

"The authorities first mistake was to ban *Lajja (Shame)*, a novel by Ms Nasreen about the persecution of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh. They were even more foolish to bow to the fundamentalists' argument that her calls for the revision of *Sharia*, the law of Islam, insulted 'religious feelings' and was therefore a crime. The militants' demands grow by being fed. In addition to Ms Nasreen's head, they are now demanding an anti-blasphemy law, censorship of 'anti-Islamic' newspapers and – precisely because Bangladesh's Grameen co-operative bank and the Rural Action Committee are world pioneers in empowering rural women – a ban on aid agencies."

The editorial pointed out that the government "urgently needs an escape route. Ms Nasreen needs a safe conduct out of Bangladesh. Norway has offered to mediate. The government should accept with alacrity."

Some 84.7 per cent of Bangladesh's 122 million people are Muslims, and Dr Nasreen has incurred majority community wrath by defending the rights of the Hindus, who make up only 11.9 per cent of the population.

She has been compelled to move from hideout to hideout.

"We are afraid for her – she is in great danger," said Reaul Karim Kayal, her brother.

"Everywhere we go we are followed. My father's house has been attacked. We are abused. When will we be allowed to live normally again?"

Every Friday after prayers, hostile crowds gather outside the apartment block in central Dhaka where Dr Nasreen lived with her mother and younger sister, chanting: "Hang her, hang her."

Clerics have offered rewards of up to 100,000 taka (£1,600 – a fortune in Bangladesh) for her assassination. Blood money offers of this type are illegal, but the government, nervous of the influence of the Islamic right, has taken no action.

Ms Nasreen, 32, has expressed a wish to live in the United States and the government would doubtless like to find a face-saving way of letting her go.

"They don't know what to do next," said Dr Rojab Ali, Dr Nasreen's father. "The case against her is political. She will be killed if she comes out of hiding. Her life would not be safe in jail."

Dr Ali himself has round-the-clock police protection following threats on his life.

## Odium

The question is – what can freethinkers do to help Dr Nasreen? How can we influence events in a faraway country upon which the dead hand of superstition lies so heavily?

Certainly we have the right to solicit the intervention of Muslims – particularly Bangladeshis – living in this country who seek our backing for their entirely just demands for equal opportunities and freedom from discrimination and racist assault.

And we can underline to the Bangladesh authorities the fact that they are engendering international odium with their now embarrassed but initially overt support for Dr Nasreen's persecutors, and that the brave young women will not be forgotten.

**The address of the Bangladesh High Commission to the UK is 28, Queen's Gate, London SW7. Readers in the United States might like to know that the Bangladesh Embassy is at 2201, Wisconsin Avenue NW, Washington DC 20007.**

According to *The Independent* of May 25, Dr Nasreen has said: "I hold the Koran, the Vedas, the Bible and all such religious texts determining the lives of their followers as out of place and out of time...We have to move beyond these ancient texts if we want progress."

If that doesn't make her "one of our own," with the right to expect that we do not abandon her to the barbarians, then nothing does.

ANGLADESHI author and free-thinker Dr Taslima Nasreen is still in hiding from the fundamentalist Muslims who seek to murder her.

As *The Freethinker* goes to press, they are preparing yet another massive demonstration against the outspoken feminist.

This, despite the fact that street battles between backers and opponents of Dr Nasreen in Dhaka and 20 villages and towns left a manager dead and 300 people injured on June

Dr Nasreen was accused of insulting Islam when she was quoted as saying that the Koran could be revised. She denied making the remark, but said she wanted Islamic law changed to give women equal rights (in a country in which female literates over the age of 15 number 18 per cent of the population, compared with 39.7 per cent of males; in which only 3.2 per cent of the 27.4 million population force is female).

She has been in hiding – probably in a West-German embassy – since June 4, when a court ordered her arrest for blasphemy. Now, the Bangladesh government is regretting its caviness to the fundamentalists – it never expected a world outcry over the case – and is trying to create a formula for getting Dr Nasreen out of the country; the European Union has offered to arrange sanctuary. How safe she would be even outside the Muslim world is, however, a moot point.

## Rushdie

Salman Rushdie – who knows a thing or two about such matters – is rallying support for Dr Nasreen. In an open letter, published on July 2 in newspapers across Europe, he protested against "bigots, lynch-justice and terrorism" and a belief in "one sole truth and one sole punishment (death)."

More than 20 newspapers carried his letter, which he expressed solidarity against censorship.

"You must be tired that people are calling me the 'female Salman Rushdie,'" he wrote. "In reality, it is our enemies who have something in common. They seem to believe in the right to pursue lynch-justice and terrorism."

Dr Nasreen, a physician-turned-writer, faces a two-year prison sentence for blasphemy, if she is found guilty and convicted, but there have been calls in Bangladesh for a law making blasphemy a capital crime.

Outsiders may wonder at the nauseating spectacle of so many people expending so much energy on religious matters in a storm-tossed country where the GNP per capita is

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

**Announcements** are inserted in this column free-of-charge. Voluntary contributions towards the cost of typesetting would be appreciated. Cheques and postal orders, made payable to G W Foote & Co., should be sent with copy to: The Editor, *The Freethinker*, 24 Alder Avenue, Silcoates Park, Wakefield WF2 0TZ.

**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, September 4, 5.30pm for 6pm: Public meeting.

**Central London Humanists:** For details, please contact Cherie Holt on 071 916 3015 or Hilary Leighter on 0895 632096. Thursday, September 29, 7.30pm, Conway Hall: Is there a Humanist solution to the situation in Northern Ireland?

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

**Coventry and Warwickshire Humanist Group:** Saturday, August 13: Three-mile ramble, starting 10am. Contact J Wright on 0203 715099 for details.

**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.

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

**Ealing Humanists:** Details: telephone 081-422 4956.

**Edinburgh Humanist Group:** Programme from secretary, 2 Saville Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 3AD; 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, London WC1. September 9: David Cook, producer of Radio 5's *Out This Week* lesbian and gay current affairs programme.

**Glasgow Humanist Society:** Information regarding meetings and other activities from Hugh Bowman, 7 Elm Road, Burnside, Glasgow G73 4JR; telephone 041-634 1447.

**Havering & District Humanist Society:** HOPWA House, Inskip Drive, Hornchurch. Tuesday, September 6: Kathleen Frith FRCOG DipMedJur: *Medical Ethics*. Tuesday, October 4: Ralph Ison: *John Howard, Prison Reformer - the Man and his Work*. Tuesday, November 1: Dr Michael Kehr: *Prescribing Through the Ages*. Tuesday, December 6: *Report on British Humanist Association Conference and Humanist Thoughts for the Day*. For further information, contact J Condon 0708 473597 or J Baker 0708 458925.

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

**Kent Humanists:** Meet at University of Kent, Seminar Room 11, Rutherford College, Canterbury. Details from Secretary John Payne, telephone 0843 864 645.

**Leeds & District Humanist Group:** Swarthmore Centre, Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Tuesday, October 11: Peter Brearey, Editor of *The Freethinker*. *How Free is our*

*Press?* Tuesday, November 8: Dr J McGuckin, Leeds University Theology Department: *The Dead Sea Scrolls*.

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

**Lewisham Humanist Group:** The Catford Ram, Winslade Way, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, August 25, 8pm: Informal meeting.

**Manchester Humanists:** St Thomas's Centre, Ardwick Green. Public meetings on the second Friday of the month at 7.30pm. September 9: David Wilkinson: *Cosmology and Creation*. October 14: Group discussion on voluntary euthanasia. Information, telephone: 061 432 9045.

**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 WC1X 8SP. Telephone: 071 404 3126.

**Preston and District Humanist Group:** Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Peter Howells, telephone 0257 265276.

**Sheffield Humanist Society:** Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street (adjoining Bank Street), Sheffield. Wednesday, August 10, and Wednesday, September 14, 8pm: Public meetings.

**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, September 14, 8pm: George Mephram: *World Population Prospects*. No meeting in August. Wednesday, October 12, Jim Herrick, Editor of *New Humanist* and of *International Humanist News: International Humanism*. Wednesday, November 9: Ken Cook: *Consciousness - the Philosophical Debate*. Wednesday, December 14: Jean Davies, World Federation of Right to Die Societies: *The Case for Voluntary Euthanasia*. Wednesday, January 11: Hilary Leighter, BHA EC: *Equal Opportunities for Women - a Humanist Concern*.

**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. September 15: *Compassion in World Farming*.

**Ulster Humanist Association:** Meets second Thursday of every month, Regency Hotel, Botanic Avenue, Belfast BT7. Details: 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.

**Get it taped!** The lively one-hour playlet *Atheism on a Soap-box* by Barbara Smoker is available on tape. Based on actuality, the playlet features a "dutiful Evangelical woman"; Ivor, with his Welsh chapel background; an ex-RC atheist feminist; a Secular Humanist teacher; an East End atheist Socialist, and a religious Humanist pedant - all exchanging views at the Tower Hill speakers' pitch. It features a number of people well-known in the Humanist movement, but type-casting has been carefully avoided! Send £1.75 to: NSS, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8SP.

# Cross-cultural communication 'in defence of reason and science'

**Challenges to the Enlightenment** edited by Professor Paul Kurtz for the Academy of Humanism. Prometheus Books, New York. Cloth £22, pp 320 ISBN 0-87975-869-4.  
Review: Professor LESLIE T WILKINS

across the cultural gap is well worth investment.

The ordering of the three sectors may be logical, but there is a disadvantage. It is in the early chapters that the average intelligent layperson will have difficulties in following some of the material. For Chapter 2, a knowledge of philosophical terms (extending beyond dictionary definition) is sometimes required for a full appreciation of the hard-hitting, critical analysis of the "first counter-enlightenment," the "three romantic waves" and the delightful bashings given to critical theory and phenomenological sociology, not to mention ethnomethodology and constructivist-relativistic sociology! However, the context of strange terms is often adequate to convey the essential features of the argument.

Perhaps it is only to be expected that the most controversial materials are in the first sector. But even here (among the philosophers!) there is complete agreement on the necessity for the furtherance of Secular Humanism. Most disagreements may be considered to be at the technical level. For example, Kuhn (*Scientific Revolutions*) and Vahinger (*Philosophy of "as if"*) are seen by Bunge (Professor of Philosophy of Science) as cavorting with the enemy (mysticism) while in a later chapter Kuhn is defended by Jean-Claude Pecker (Professor of Astrophysics). Of course, if one gives Kuhn's term "revolution" a literal meaning the criticism is fully justified – the analogy does not fit historical evidence. But a research worker reading either of these works could see both Kuhn and Vahinger as providing certain endorsement of the acceptable methods of model building.

In all, the philosophers make a good job of defending both science (scientific methods) and "reason," though their background is not rich in experience of the practice of research. Bunge's attacks are on procedures, claimed to be "scientific," but which appeal too strongly to subjective "understanding" and lack the backing of sound theoretical structures. He is right in that scientific work is not to be judged by the scientist's subjective "understanding" of a phenomenon. But the quality of research is not to be seen in the methodology alone. The scientific imagination cannot be discounted.

Kurtz (Ch 1: *Towards a New Enlightenment*) contrasts the disparity between the powers we possess and "the ancient myths and dogmatic

religious systems" upon which we rely for moral guidance. He claims that Humanism provides an authentic alternative and outlines some key features of "a new post-postmodern neo-humanism."

Lavine (Ch 5: *The Case for a New American Pragmatism*) sets out the cross-currents of thinking in contemporary philosophy of science – referring to "the great divide" and claims that what he calls a "new pragmatism" is required to sort out the opposing cognitive structures.

Rorty (Ch 6: *Trotsky and the Wild Orchids*) describes his own intellectual journey through a variety of philosophical perspectives, providing a useful passing viewpoint on many. He argues for detachment of the philosopher from his philosophy, stating that "I do not think that it counts in favour of Dewey's pragmatic view...that he was a social democrat: nor against Heidegger's criticism...that he was a Nazi..." He concludes that we need nothing "more to rely on than the tolerance and decency of fellow human beings."

Grunbaum (Ch 7: *In Defence of Secular Humanism*) points out that moral principles cannot be claimed as the special preserve of any religions. He argues against Kant's view that the realisation of morality requires a God. Whatever is wrong with Western culture, there is no religious remedy. In fact, he says, "the threat of moral anarchy...arises from erosion of the belief in God just because [ital added] the prevailing moral code has been falsely claimed to derive from Him via revelation..."

Edward O Wilson (Professor of Sociobiology: Ch 10: *Scientific Humanism and Religion*) reprints the presentation he made to, and at the request of, the Committee on Human Values of the Roman Catholic Bishops of the United States. He ends with a very disturbing thought. *Maybe the origin of religion is biological*. If so, he says, "no amount of debunking and confrontation will significantly alter the colossi of organised religion," rather he looks for their "humanisation." Your reviewer would hope that religion is not in the genes, but no more than a powerful social invention which, sooner or later, will be seen to have passed its sell-by date. If Wilson is right, then biologically humanity has a built-in self-destruct potential, and fundamentalism is rapidly shortening the fuse!

The next chapter, by a distinguished Professor of Neurophysiology, Yves Galifret, (Ch 11: *Religious dogmatism and Materialist Reductionism versus Humanism*) makes it clear that any tolerance is unlikely to come from official religion. The trend is towards more restricted specification of required beliefs and behavioural constraints. But he goes on to consider radical reductionism as even more dangerous.

# 'In defence of reason and science'

From Page 127

Richard Dawkins (Ch 13: *Viruses of the Mind*) takes the analogy of computer viruses (themselves analogous to the biological species) to discuss how religious beliefs infect otherwise thinking people. The less believable is a proposition, the greater is its challenge to faith; therefore, believing it is a greater, more commendable demonstration of that faith.

The Polish historian Adam Michnik (Ch 14: *The Church and Martyr's State in Poland*) tells the gruesome story of the strategies deployed by the Roman Catholic Church in Poland during and after the end of Communist rule. He asks: "Will the utopia of totalitarian communism be replaced... by a new utopia based on religious or ethnic ideologies - the instruments of a new servitude?"

The next four chapters consider issues in Russia, India, South America and Egypt, and are followed by Professor Antony Flew's contribution (Ch 20) titled *The Terrors of Islam*. Perhaps Professor Wahba of Egypt (Ch 19: *Peace and Progress*) summarises the drift of this volume in his concluding words: "'Believe, obey, fight' was the injunction Mussolini gave to the Italian masses. Today the dogmatist is the fundamentalist, whether Christian, or Moslem or Jewish. The main obstacle against global peace is dogmatism." I can say no more.

## Family affair

IT WAS very much a family affair when Ernie Lewis, a native of Birmingham, was cremated at the city's Lodge Hill Crematorium. There was no minister present, as his sons, Brian and Malcolm, had decided to conduct the ceremony.

Mr Lewis, an 85-year-old widower, was a popular figure in the Moorpool Estate area of Harborne where he lived.

After the Lodge Hill ceremony, relatives friends and neighbours met in Moorpool Hall for a celebration of his life. Brian and Malcolm read extracts from their father's manuscript of reminiscences of old Birmingham. Favourite pieces of classical music were played.

Ernie Lewis died in Selly Oak Hospital following a short illness.

# A new look

THE Oxford English Dictionary (1987) defines a prayer as "a solemn and humble request to God, or to an object of worship, a supplication, petition or thanksgiving, usually expressed in words." I believe that the word "prayer" has two other elements; they are: a statement of orthodox opinion by the author(s) of the prayer, and, also, a collective affirmation of desirable beliefs and behaviour of the adherents of the particular religion.

**Origin of the Lord's Prayer:** The Gospel of St Matthew (6,9-13), recounts that one of the Disciples said to Jesus: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." Jesus replied with the Sermon of the Mount, which became the Lord's Prayer after slight modification. It consisted of seven "petitions." Of these, five also appear in St Luke's Gospel (11,1-4). The Prayer does not feature elsewhere in the New Testament, in the Pauline or Catholic Epistles, or in other writings of John. Some of it is foreshadowed in Jewish prayers. Since the Matthew text includes the Lucan one, this article will be confined to a discussion of the former.

**Summary of the characteristics of God:** In order to understand the Judæo-Christian context of the Lord's Prayer, one needs to

understand the beliefs held at the time of Jesus, and still accepted by many, if not most, orthodox Christians. God has created the Universe; he is omnipotent, omnipresent, and will always have the best of us. Thus, he has created the Universe; he is perfect, good, and defines optimal behaviour in moral and ethical code is internally consistent; he is omniscient; he is worthy of being praised; he has given free will to human beings to do good or evil; he instructs the priesthood, which knows his wishes at all times; he can trust this priesthood to stand his wishes, to carry them out since and not to be influenced in its execution by his wishes by any subjective factors.

**Analysis:** One can now proceed with an analysis of the Lord's Prayer. It is in our mind that the Lord in question was Jesus Christ. As a token of this belief, Christians all over the world recite this prayer daily. Each phrase may be examined separately.

"Our Father" means that God is our father. The word "father" can be used literally to indicate a family relationship between God and ourselves. This interpretation would be unacceptable to Christians because it would put them on an equal footing with Christ, and thus deny his primacy. The term "father" is employed here in a biblical sense, this would mean that Jesus is

## Thanks for nothing?

'If you thank God for the food on your table, you are saying that he put it there. A necessary component of this premise, the other side of the coin, is that if there is no food on your table, God is responsible for that, too. The power to give necessarily includes the power to withhold. When you thank someone for a gift it is because you understand that he or she had the choice of not giving it to you, but chose to do so anyway. Thanking God for your food, then, is the same as saying thank you for not withholding food. You are offering thanks for not being allowed to starve.'

Judith Hayes, *Freethought Today* (USA), May, 1994.



# What an old prayer

by Harold Hillman

and uniquely the Son of God, since persons are Sons of God in a symbolic sense. Thus, this interpretation would also be acceptable to Christians.

There is also some controversy as to whether he is male, female, neither or both. The *Book of the Aramaic* states clearly that he resides in Heaven. This is defined in the *Book of the Aramaic* (1987) as "the expanse in which the moon and stars are seen, which has the appearance of a vast vault or canopy over-arched the Earth...the sky; the firmament." God resides in Heaven, and not on the planets, stars, other galaxies or in space, although presumably he is able to move from wherever he wishes. This phrase contradicts the pantheist view that he is everywhere, and manifests himself every-

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real responsibility. It is difficult to conceive of how people have free will to choose whether or not they sin, when he has decided and knows beforehand whether and how much they will sin.

Although the modern Lord's Prayer talks about forgiving us our sins, St Matthew's Gospel talks about forgiving us our *debts*, as we have cancelled the debts of others. This makes much more sense, as everyone agrees that any human being has the power and the right to forgo a debt owed to him. In Aramaic, "sin" and "debt" are the same word, but there is no agreement that the Sermon of the Mount was given in Aramaic. The idea that God could and does forgive the sins of people implies that he can and does communicate with them, presumably through his priesthood. This requires that in any particular situation there is only one interpretation of good and evil, and that the Church hierarchy agrees what it is.

"As we forgive them that sin against us" states that human beings share the power of forgiveness with God, with which many Christians do not agree.

"Neither lead us into temptation." Once again, people created and controlled by God are tempted by his own creations, and he controls and knows how much they will succumb. If he creates the temptations, he is not all good, and if he can not defeat them, he is not omnipotent. If he is all good, why does he tempt us with evil?

"But deliver us from evil" or "the evil one." Here again, we have the same difficulty. God is asked to deliver us from the evil he creates or tolerates. The difficulty is worse if he has to deliver us from the evil one – the Devil. The Devil appears to represent an independent power, nevertheless created by God, who presumably endows him with free will, as he does human beings. In this context, God has either created evil or is not powerful enough to defeat it.

"For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory" means that God has sovereignty and power, while the glory is the appreciation of these, possessed by people. This may be regarded as a statement of belief in God's omnipotence.

"For ever and ever" is an expression meaning that God's power and moral system are unchangeable, both now and in the future. While his power may not have changed over the last two millennia, there is ample evidence that mankind's understanding and

belief in his theology and morality have changed enormously.

"Amen," like the two latter phrases, is a doxology, confirming that the prayer is true.

**Interpretation in the light of current Christian thinking:** The analysis above leads to the following conclusions:

(a) "Our father" can be read neither literally nor symbolically, because both meanings are incompatible with the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the son of God.

(b) Outside Earth, God's rule prevails, and sentient and conscious beings there obey it.

(c) God is not omnipotent yet, because his will is not being done on Earth at present; or he is combating his own will.

(d) He creates sin, temptation, the human tendency to indebtedness and evil (or the evil one), as well as the human choice to do evil, so he is not all good. He also determines how far human beings succumb to these evils, while knowing beforehand how much they will. He also decides what punishments he inflicts on them for doing what he has permitted them to do or made them do, and he knows beforehand what they intend.

**Suggested modern text of the Lord's Prayer:** "God, who resides in Heaven, you are worthy of great respect. Your rule will be accepted on Earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us food today, and forgive our sins, as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. [or, cancel our debts, as we have cancelled debts owed to us]. Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil, because you have the power, the honour and the glory for ever. This is true."

**Conclusion:** The Lord's Prayer has been shown to contain several affirmations, which are contradictory to the basic tenets of Christianity, of which it is the most important affirmation.

**References:** *Encyclopædia of Religions* (1987), Macmillan, New York; Jeremias J (1964), *The Prayers of Jesus*, SCM Press, London; Lohmeyer E (1965), *The Lord's Prayer*, trans. by Bowden J, Collins, London; Manson T W (1948), *The Teachings of Jesus*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; *New Catholic Encyclopædia* (1967-1979), McGraw-Hill, New York; Oxford English Dictionary (1987), second edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford; Petuchowski J J and Brocke M (1978), *The Lord's Prayer and Jewish Liturgy*, Burns and Oates, London; Scott E F (1951), *The Lord's Prayer: Its Character, Purpose and Interpretation*, Charles Scribner, New York.

# Blast from the past: Number 20

The history of religion is the history of nationally enervating and inevitably bloody divisiveness. Imperial and similarly dictatorial régimes are delighted to exploit situations in which the struggle of superstition against superstition leaves the way open for the efficient exploitation of the whole. R P Dutt (1896-1974), who was the world Communist movement's authority on India, researched the "divide and rule" policy for his 1942 Gollancz book, *Guide to the Problem of India*, from which this month's Blast is edited. The policy was, of course, to ease the way for the greatest division of all: the creation of Islamic Pakistan and, later, Bangladesh. *The Freethinker* is not offering prizes for readers' suggestions of parallel situations in other parts of the world.

IN THE earlier period, the principle of "Divide and Rule" used to be more openly proclaimed than in the more careful later days.

In the early 19th Century a British officer, writing under the name of "Carnaticus" in the *Asiatic Review* of May, 1821, declared that "*Divide et impera* should be the motto of our Indian administration, whether political, civil or military."

Lieutenant-Colonel Coke, Commandant of Moradabad, laid down the principle in the middle of the 19th Century: "Our endeavour should be to uphold in full force the (for us fortunate) separation which exists between the different religions and races, not to endeavour to amalgamate them. *Divide et impera* should be the principle of Indian government."

In 1859 Lord Elphinstone recorded in an official minute: "*Divide et impera* was the old Roman motto, and it should be ours." (Lord Elphinstone, Governor of Bombay, minute of May 14, 1859).

In 1888 Sir John Strachey, leading authority on India, wrote: "The truth plainly is that the existence side-by-side of these hostile creeds is one of the strong points in our political position in India." (Sir John Strachey, *India*, 1888, p. 255.)

## Sinister

In 1910 J Ramsay MacDonald wrote with reference to the foundation of the Muslim League: "The All-India Muslim League was formed on December 30, 1906. The political successes which have rewarded the efforts of the League... have been so signal as to give support to a suspicion that sinister influences have been at work, that the Mohammedan leaders were inspired by certain Anglo-Indian officials, and that these officials pulled wires at Simla and in London and of malice aforethought sowed discord between the Hindu and the Mohammedan communities by showing the Mohammedans special favour. (J R MacDonald, *The Awakening of India*, 1910, pp. 283-4).

Subsequent evidence has become available which has more than confirmed the "suspicion."

In 1926 Lord Olivier, after he had held office as Secretary of State for India, and had had access to all the records, wrote in a letter to *The Times*: "No one with a close acquaintance with Indian affairs will be prepared to deny that on the whole there is a predominant bias in British officialism in India in favour of the Muslim community, partly on the ground of closer sympathy,

# Divide and rule

but more largely as a makeweight against Hindu nationalism." (July 10, 1926).

The evidence for the official policy is thus based on very authoritative statements of leading official representatives.

It is in the modern period, however, that this general policy has been turned into an administrative system. Parallel with the advance of the national struggle and the successive stages of constitutional reforms has gone the process of promoting communal divisions through the peculiar electoral system adopted in connection with the reforms. This new departure was initiated in 1906 - that is, exactly at the time of the first wave of national unrest and advance.

The British Government, in face of the first widespread popular national movement in India, took the responsibility of inaugurating a policy which was indeed destined (in the words of the leading Muslim organ's warning against such a policy a quarter of a century earlier) to "poison the social life of districts and villages and make a hell of India."

A Muslim deputation presented themselves to the Viceroy and demanded separate and privileged representation in any electoral system that might be set up. The Viceroy, Lord Minto, immediately announced his acceptance of the demand. It was subsequently revealed by the Muslim leader, Mohamed Ali, in the course of his Presidential Address to the 1923 National

Congress, that this Muslim deputation was "a command performance" arranged by the Government...

In this way the system of communal electorates and representation was inaugurated, striking at the roots of any democratic electoral system. To imagine a parallel it would be necessary to imagine that in Northern Ireland Catholics and Protestants should be placed on separate electoral registers and given separate representation, so that the members returned should be members not even with any formal obligation to the electorate as a whole but members for the Catholics and members for the Protestants. It would be difficult to imagine a device more calculated to promote separatist communal organisation and antagonism. And, indeed, the organisation of the separate Muslim League dates from December, 1906.

## Elections

The plea has been put forward that such separate electorates and representation were indispensable in order to prevent the Muslims being swamped by the Hindu majority. The falsity of this plea was sufficiently shown in the local government elections in the same period, where these were still conducted on the old basis of joint electorates. Thus in the United Provinces in 1910 the joint electorates, with the Muslims forming but one-seventh part of the population, returned 189 Muslims and 445 Hindus to the District Boards, and 310 Muslims and 562 Hindus to the Municipalities.

The purpose of driving a wedge between the two communities was most sharply shown, not only by the establishment of separate electorates and representation, but by giving specially privileged representation to the Muslims. A most elaborate system of weighting was devised. Thus, to become an elector under the Morley-Minto Reforms, the Muslim had to pay income tax on an income of 3,000 rupees a year, the non-Muslim on an income of 300,000 rupees; or the Muslim graduate was required to have three years' standing, the non-Muslim to have 30 years' standing. The volume of representation showed a similar method of weighting. By this means it was hoped to secure the support of a privileged minority, and to turn the anger of the majority against the privileged minority, instead of against the Government...

Favoured and encouraged by the Government, the dominant reactionary leaders of the Muslim League have played a disruptive role, to block any democratic advance and inflame antagonisms against the National Congress.



# DOWN TO EARTH

with Bill McIlroy



## Women with chutzpah

DR JONATHAN SACKS, Britain's Chief Rabbi, is a worried man. Succeeding the ultra-conservative Lord Jacobovits, he inherited a declining synagogue membership – down 25 per cent in one generation. Resistance to religious rules and social conventions had been stiffening, if suppressed, during the Jacobovits regime. But the wind of change is blowing through the roads and avenues of Golders Green. Now even Jewish women are expressing dissatisfaction with their inferior place in the community. This is reflected in a report reviewing the role of women in British Jewry.

The report is disturbing reading for orthodox Jews. It states that while women have a strong sense of Jewish identity, they wear their religion very lightly. Fewer than a third believe in a special relationship between God and the Jewish people. The report states quite bluntly that "British Jewish women are on average agnostic." Even dietary laws are not strictly observed. "Many women who buy kosher meat for the home adopt quite different standards outside," according to the report.

But the fundamental problem for orthodox Jewry is loss sustained by defections and "marrying out." The report suggests setting up a "singles agency" to encourage marriages within the community. Dr Sacks would like Jews to marry younger. Presumably such measures are intended to increase and multiply the orthodox faithful.

## Breeding like rabbis

THEY do things differently in Israel – at least in the town of Ashod. Two years ago, Rabbi Yitzhak Kaduri was invited by the strictly orthodox owners to perform a blessing ceremony at the opening of their new supermarket. He did so, sitting on a chair.

A few months later four employees became pregnant, as did their replacements. When it was realised that all of them had sat on the chair used by Rabbi Kaduri, that humble item of furniture became the supermarket's chief attraction. Up to a hundred women queue every day to sit on the chair in hope of conceiving. Some light a special candle to increase their chance of giving birth to a son.

One pious lady who desperately wanted a child had been praying at rabbis' graves. Her prayers went unanswered, but three months

after sitting in the "holy chair" she was in an interesting condition. Her doctor pronounced the pregnancy "a miracle."

Now if, after sitting on the chair, the *rabbi* had become pregnant...

## Once more, with feeling...

IT WAS by all accounts a superb opening performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at Glyndebourne. So why the boos and catcalls? Deborah Warner's controversial staging of the opera? Hildegard Bechtler's abstract sets? Neither, according to Glyndebourne's general director.

A section of the audience, mainly in the expensive seats, took offence at a scene in which Don Giovanni offers bread and wine to a statue of the Madonna and then caresses it.

"Disgusted" – actually Mrs M J Holloway on this occasion – wrote from Tunbridge Wells to *The Times*: "Glyndebourne's production of *Don Giovanni* deserved far worse than boos and catcalls." (Ironically, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment was in the pit).

For all their piety, Irish Catholics are not stuffily reverential like the Glyndebourne protestors. Dublin was festooned in the national colours to celebrate Ireland's creditable performance in the World Cup football matches. Even graves of departed fans in Glasnevin Cemetery were decorated. Stranger still, the cemetery's centrepiece, a large statue of the Virgin Mary, sported a green bowler hat and a shamrock rosette!

## Ghost-busted?

THE ease with which the paranormally inclined can be duped is amazing and often amusing. It can also be expensive, as a couple from Canada discovered when they bought Chingle Hall, at Goosnarg, Lancashire, for £420,000 when its true value was £235,000. It is currently valued at £195,000.

Chingle Hall, a moated manor house dating from around 1350, is believed to be the oldest brick-built domestic building in the country. However, antiquated brickwork was not vendor John Bruce's main selling point when Professor Trevor Kirkham and his wife expressed an interest. He assured them that up to 600 ghostly manifestations had been observed by paying guests in a two-year period. What's more, Prince Charles was interested in the unusual goings-on at Chingle Hall.

One of the restless spirits which allegedly roams the rooms and corridors is that of John

Wall, a Catholic martyr. He was hanged, drawn and quartered by fellow-Christians in 1679. But it has been established that John Wall had no connection with the building he is supposed to haunt.

The Kirkhams were persuaded that Chingle Hall and its ghostly residents could become a profitable tourist attraction. But reality proved somewhat different to the sales patter. Chingle Hall did not attract enough spook-seekers and was losing £30,000 a year.

The Kirkhams sued Mr Bruce for misrepresentation and exaggerated claims. Please could they have their money back? Their counsel described them as "gullible and naive." The High Court awarded £71,000 damages.

Over the border in Yorkshire, mystery mongering is being promoted by one of the country's largest colleges. Barnsley College is running a psychic studies course, tutored by Debra Wadsworth, who claims she can communicate with the dead. She asserts that the ability to make contact with those on "the other side" is within most people's reach.

David Eade, Barnsley College Chief Executive, says the college's courses "are relevant to today's needs." Others will take the view that irrational trumpery like spiritualism is totally irrelevant – and that conferring academic respectability on the subject is deplorable.

Miss Wadsworth, who describes herself as a "developing medium," has a spirit guide known as Brother Sefton, a monk during his sojourn in this vale of tears. "I'm not some sort of nut case," she says. We have her word for it.

## Charlie's cant

THE future monarch's expressed wish to be Defender of (religious) Faith rather than Defender of the (Protestant) Faith has alarmed traditionalists and excited ecumenists. But it will be of scant interest to around a third of the population who, as surveys consistently show, adhere to no religious faith. Nor will it bother "indifferentists" who nod in the direction of a deity at weddings and funerals.

Prince Charles may not realise what he is letting himself in for. It is all very well defending the clapped-out Christian faith. But will he feel at ease defending the faith of Allah's murderous worshippers? What of Mormons, Moonies, Jews for Jesus, Children of God, the Jesus Army and even dotted pilgrims on the further shores of fundamentalism? Why, he would even be expected to defend that strange hybrid known as religious humanism!

Rather than being a Defender of Faith, Charles III may need defending from the squabbling and disputatious faithful.

The Editor drops a personal note to Mrs Gillian Shephard on her appointment as Secretary of State for Education in place of John Patten

# Dear Gillian,

May I call you Gillian? I feel in my water that we could become friends.

True, your new salary of £64,749 *per annum* puts you in an economic bracket marginally above that of the Editor of *The Freethinker*, but we are, after all, exactly the same age. And that means that we both flexed our intellectual muscles 30-odd years ago, when it was suddenly OK to say that you were an atheist or a devotee of Indian mysticism or of whatever else seemed to offer swinging liberty from the churchianity of our parents.

All those Maoists who now work for Barclay's Bank or the *Daily Telegraph*! Where did you end up? You became a Tory, but so far as religion is concerned my guess is that you confess agnosticism to friends, while performing occasional pew-service to keep the voters sweet – and, if I am right, that, in the present desperate circumstances, will do for me.

The most significant fact in your favour is that *you are not John Patten*.

Petulantly, he has slunk off to the Backbenches, there to lead – it is devoutly to be wished – an entirely contemplative life.

I am writing, really, to hope that, as you clear Mr Patten's desk drawers, you will not fail to bin the new Model Syllabuses for Religious Education, which were created to his blueprint by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA).

They are inadequate, as the British Humanist Association has said, because they fail to take account of the beliefs of at least one-third of the population.

They are unjust, these syllabuses, because they double-crossingly omit from their aims the knowledge and understanding of ethical tradition and philosophies, including Humanism – an inclusion which had been agreed and recommended by the multi-faith conferences set up to brief SCAA.

As a former teacher, you surely agree that education should serve the needs of all pupils and help them to find their own framework of beliefs and values. It is essential for young people at school to become aware that such values need not be dependent upon faith in God.

Were you to allow these guidelines to be adopted by Local Education Authorities without modification, young people would be deprived of access to a full range of approaches to life. They are therefore seriously flawed on educational grounds – as, indeed, was Mr Patten himself.

You will know that out of every 10 people in Britain, five are various varieties of Christian Protestant and one is a Roman Catholic. *The*

*second biggest group – three people in every 10 – have no religion.* All the other religions together can lay claim to less than the remaining one person in 10: I guess there is a rump fraction of "don't knows."

You may check these important statistics in *Religion, Morality and Politics* by Anthony Heath, Bridget Taylor and Gobor Toka, of Nuffield College, Oxford – and then you may wonder, as do I, why ethical traditions such as Humanism have been excluded from what is, after all, a compulsory subject in our schools.

As my friend Roy Saich pointed out in a recent letter to the Press, our erstwhile Secretary of State for Education seemed to want Religious Education to become the Religious Instruction of our young days.

And this, really, has little to do with education – even with the inclusion of some other "principal religion," it turns teachers into preachers.

As Roy Saich said: "Schools should not be used for religious instruction at tax-payers' expense. To be genuine education, the subject needs to be approached in an open and balanced way and needs to cover belief systems – not just religions as narrowly defined.

"Humanism would provide the vital framework for pupils who are agnostic or atheist, and who need to consider beliefs and morals in a proper non-religious context. Without such a framework, instruction becomes indoctrination."

I am reluctant to mention Europe to one of your political persuasion, but it is a fact that in Holland pupils are able to choose in which tradition – Catholic, Protestant or Humanist – they wish to specialise. You have the power to ditch Pattenism and adopt and adapt the Dutch system. Then we really *could* be friends.

As this issue of *The Freethinker* goes to press, the National Union of Teachers' response to the syllabus has been brought to my attention. This expresses concern that the predominance of Christianity in the syllabuses – should that be syllabi, or something? – will undermine the requirement of the Education Reform Act that the curriculum should be "balanced and broadly based." The NUT believes that it is not the role of schools to impose a particular viewpoint which implies the superiority of any one religion, and it is concerned at the omission of Humanism, Bahai and Rastafarianism from the syllabuses.

One more thing. Compulsory Christian worship in schools. Your husband will have told you that his union – the National Association of Head Teachers – is agin it, as are the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Office for Standards in Education, the Bishop of Ripon

(who chairs the C of E Board of Education) and your former professional colleagues in the Educational Inspectorate.

It's all fully reported in the July issue of *The Freethinker*. Since that number came out, I have seen a letter which Nicolas Walter, of the Rationalist Press Association, sent to *The Times Educational Supplement*, and which nicely sums-up our attitude to the question: "You give qualified editorial support to the official line that teachers should obey the law imposing daily collective worship in state and church schools (*TES*, June 10).

"However, two things should be remembered. A general rule is that it may be a good thing to disobey a bad law, however democratic it seems, especially if it violates conscientious beliefs. And this particular law is all too reminiscent of the Recusancy Acts, which used to impose weekly collective worship on the whole population, and which were widely and rightly disobeyed until they had to be repealed."

Gillian, please don't get me wrong. I do not ask that you exclude all mention of religion from school – else how would youngsters be able to understand what Shakespeare, Chaucer, even Dickens, were on about? Religion has been so much a part of our culture – some would say it has had such a stranglehold on all aspects of our lives – that appreciation of our best painters and poets and sculptors would be impossible without knowledge of what, purportedly, happened to Odin and Mars and Jesus and Bacchus and the rest.

No. What I am saying is that interesting, thought-provoking lessons could be created around all the gods and their colourful doings, but only on the lines of: "Many people BELIEVE that Jesus restored to life a dead man in the following circumstances..." "The Ancient Greeks TAUGHT that Zeus came to earth in the form of a swan and bonked Leda..." "The Muslims HOLD that Mohammed is the prophet of God, whom they call Allah, and..."

See what I mean? Nothing that is incapable of proof should be taught as fact – and certainly there should be no question of school worship of any of these doubtful entities.

I wish you well in your new post, Gillian, and if I am wrong in guessing that you are not a 100 per cent believer in the old superstitions, might I suggest that you discuss the matter with your chum the Prime Minister, who is reputed to be an atheist like

*Yours sincerely,*  
Peter

YOU'RE TELLING US!

## Progressive Catholics

I OBJECT to the Editor's dismissal of the phrase "progressive Catholics" (page 88, June issue) as "the mother of all contradictions in terms."

As Secularists, we do not accept the concept of absolutes, and nothing is less absolute than human characteristics. Every human being is a complex mass of inconsistencies.

At the very least, some Catholics are undeniably more progressive – socially, politically, and even theologically – than others; and in my experience many of them are more progressive in general than many (even most) Secularists.

One of the most progressive people I have ever met is the former priest, Bruce Kent, who has probably done more to combat nuclear war preparations than anyone else in this country and has been in the forefront of other progressive causes – yet still clings to a belief in disembodied spirits.

And what about the Jesuit "liberation theologians," together with Archbishop Romero, who were murdered in Latin America five years ago for their progressive views? One indication of Romero's progressiveness is that the Pope refused to be represented at his funeral.

I would also like to mention my own late sister Paula – alias Sister Mary of St Thomas More – who spent almost 40 years in the Good Shepherd order, devoting her life to maladjusted and sexually abused children, drug addicts, violent offenders, battered women, and deprived single mothers. She also spent one year, while convalescent from a radical mastectomy, in charge of the Vietnam boat-people's camp in Wales – arranging for their lessons in English and vocational training, finding them accommodation, and generally easing their transition into British society. In her spare time she compiled a Vietnamese-English dictionary and phrase book.

She was also one of the key members of her order in bringing it up to the 20th Century. She spent seven years in and out of mental hospitals for deep depression, yet she used to keep me in fits of laughter throughout my weekly visits to her at the Bethlem Royal Hospital. Even while she was in the terminal phase of cancer, she set up a toy-library for the deprived children of Liverpool with money that she had personally begged from Terry Wogan's television appeal.

Her funeral was attended by scores of people she had helped over the years, many travelling hundreds of miles to be there; and I cannot forget the face of the little boy, aged 11, who, having been rejected as incorrigible from every foster-home the civic authorities had placed him with, was convulsed with sobs at Paula's funeral.

I do not pretend to understand how her undoubted intelligence allowed her to remain in the Church to the end – she once said she accepted everything I had written! – but she

died a Catholic nun; and I have never met anyone in the Humanist movement more "progressive" in almost every way other than that.

BARBARA SMOKER  
London SE6

## A bit rich, that, Vicar!

SO the Rev Colin Gibson (July) thinks that Freethinkers are "hectoring, aggressive and angry." A bit rich, that, coming from a man whose fellow believers are hectoring, aggressive and angry enough to shoot people who



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carry out abortions, issue *fatwas* on authors who write what they don't want to hear and who are constantly engaged on a myriad of fronts badgering and bullying people into their own superstitious lifestyles.

I think if Mr Gibson had Freethinkers doorstepping him, had them pass legislation to have his children in state schools indoctrinated into the Humanist lifestance, was asked to pay taxes to have humanist views promulgated in hospitals and prisons and aired on the BBC; if he had to put up with atheists, as atheists, being appointed to the House of Lords, and with countless other gross injustices, he too might be driven to become a mite flushed under his collar.

It is all very well to appear serene, benign and smug when you have managed to orchestrate society to suit your purposes. The Pope and the Bishops in their castles are probably not angry either, but go and talk to the Brazilian slum-dwellers and find out how serene they are under the *diktats* of Rome.

I think that Freethinkers are more than entitled to be angry at the hideous crimes perpe-

trated in the name of religion in the past and the untold unhappiness still being caused by god-pushers today. But if Colin Gibson thinks that this concern has made us bitter and twisted, then I cordially invite him to one of our gatherings when he will find that (although not quite able to match the happy-clappy, Jesus-inspired state of bliss), Freethinkers are managing to put a reasonably brave face on their barren existence.

TONY AKKERMAN  
Leeds

SO there you are, atheist swine! Your atheism, according to the Rev Colin Gibson, could be founded on a wish to pop-off your fathers. This may seem harsh on those of you, doubtless the majority, who are fond of your fathers or who are already fatherless.

For Mr Gibson to posit this nonsense as an explanation for what he perceives to be the "angry tone" of *The Freethinker* is bizarre. You could be "mere *ædipans*," he writes. I can't find "*ædipan*" in any dictionary, so if this is a non-existent word for what actually exists, it is a neat reversal of theology, which is rich in existent words for non-existent entities.

If Mr Gibson finds the tone of *The Freethinker* angry and aggressive, one wonders if he has really read his Old Testament thoroughly. *The Freethinker* reads like Barbara Cartland by comparison.

Please, Your Reverence, none of this old-hat "atheists are deep-down emotionally angry with God" stuff. Save that for the pulpit.

Where anger exists, it invariably stems from observation of the all-too-frequently baneful results of religious belief. Give me the plain-speaking Freethinker any time, rather than the tiresome waffle of so much contemporary religious writing.

RAY McDOWELL  
Co Antrim

## British disease

AS IN most periodicals in this sexually hung-up country, the perpetual British obsession with pornography has made one of its frequent appearances in your correspondence columns.

As usual, excuses are made for the maintenance of the United Kingdom's uniquely strict laws against sexually explicit material, including what the Home Secretary proudly described in April as the strictest video censorship in the world. (This, incidentally, led to the prohibition of the video *Temptation of St Theresa* on the grounds of blasphemy – because the British Board of Film Classification will not allow any combination of Christianity and sexuality).

Ms Boyd refers to two recent crimes. Regarding the Bulger murder, the police clearly stated that videos had nothing to do with it.

## YOU'RE TELLING US!

From Page 133

The Robert Black case is also cited. Ms Boyd fails to make the point that the video recordings she refers to in connection with that are illegal in this country, but not on the Continent. The result is merely to drive underground the insatiable demand by some sections of the Great British public for hard-core videos. *Qui Bono?*

Regarding cause and effect, other European countries where pornography is lawful have fewer sexual assaults and less divorce and single motherhood than the United Kingdom.

By contrast, indecent assault and rape are common though often unreported to the police, in Islamic countries where all sexual material is rigorously suppressed. If she doubts that, Ms Boyd should visit Egypt or Iran and observe the female situation there for herself. Perhaps that would cure her of the British disease of using pornography as a scapegoat for society's ills!

**Coun E GOODMAN**  
Campaign Against Censorship

I AM amused by Michael Hill's remark (July) that if I travelled abroad I would find out how repressed Britain is, then not "write such nonsense" – this, following his anti-homosexual outburst, complaining about being propositioned in Cairo and having seen men there kissing and cuddling etc! Oh well, who's entirely consistent anyway? Not me, I admit!

A G Stephens refers to the exploitation of children in Victorian times – how does this relate to present-day porn, except that, in both cases, profit was and is the driving motive?

This same correspondent asks how I "dare" state that porn was the bullet in Black's gun. What I said was that it is highly probable that such was the case. But I never thought I'd meet with a cry of "how dare" I say something from a fellow non-believer, in the pages of *The Freethinker*. This is usually the language of the outraged zealot.

I agree that porn, very probably, has no anti-social effect on a sane person (however this state of mind is defined; were the thousands who thronged Nazi assemblies, howling like rabid wolves in approval of Hitler's blood-thirsty sentiments, sane in the medical or social sense? Sure, I digress, but no more than those who talk about telephone directories or the cost of bibles in 1875!). It is the effect of salacious videos, in particular, on the not-completely "sane" that worries me.

And I have never used the expression "any fool can see." I don't see this as the philosophy behind the process of linking cause to probable (or possible) effect.

Nor do I, Michael Hill, see the sex act as sick (whether hetero, homo or lesbian). What I do see as sick is wanting to watch others doing it, or performing it for this purpose, for gain or otherwise (your "closed doors" argument, Michael).

**JESSIE BOYD**  
Gwent

## Challenge

I HAVE recently read *The Freethinker* and have found it to be so close to my own way of thinking that I could have written it myself.

It is so vital to challenge religious people in every way possible, which is something I have been doing for some time by writing to local papers. Whenever I see letters proclaiming that we need Christianity to reinstate moral values, I feel duty bound to challenge this. I would urge all Humanists to make known their anti-religious views in this way. Until recently, I felt a bit odd as I seemed to be the only voice in our local circulars opposing religion!

I believe like Karl Heath that religion is an abuse of one's mind and emotions. In her book *Depression – The Way Out Of Your Prison*, Dorothy Rowe implies that this common problem is caused by one's belief system. One of the beliefs many depressed people hold is the belief in a cruel, psychopathic god. The kind of god which you find in the Bible, in other words.

When you stop thinking of religion as being good, you can see it for the system of mind control which it is. My mother was told by nuns when she was three years old that she would rot in Hell. She has shaken this off and is agnostic, but it really makes me wonder why we tolerate such mental cruelty. In any other circumstance you would be called callous, but when faith is the cause, anything goes.

Incidentally, I have subscribed to *The Freethinker* twice over because York Library stocks no Humanist literature but has agreed to put it on the shelf if I supply it. Your magazine really is the voice of sanity. You have much to do because even today Christians air their blinkered views on radio, TV and so on. These self-important guardians of our minds receive a huge amount of broadcasting time and no one is there to challenge their endless stream of drivel.

As you point out, one should tolerate another's faith if it is harmless to others. I have yet to see any evidence that institutionalised Christianity is harmless to others.

Incidentally, I recently read an article on atheism in the *Sunday Times* by Richard Dawkins. He received five replies in all on the letters page, but not one was from a Humanist. They all bemoaned his lack of "spirituality."

So come on all you Rationalists – I want to hear much more from you all. Unless we all make a lot more noise, the worshippers of hellfire and blood sacrifice will continue to hold centre-stage.

The world population is about six billion at present. I have heard various scientists say that the planet cannot sustain more than 10-15 billion, without environmental damage becoming so extreme as to threaten all life on earth. The fact that His Wholesomeness the Pope thinks that a god will deliver us from the catastrophe he is contributing to is proof that religion is out of touch with reality.

It is evidence that the fight against lethal superstition is really only just beginning. It is

one battle that Humanists must win.

**DAVID LEVETT**  
York

## Fighting tyranny

I MUST agree with most of the points made by Bill McIlroy in his June column, particularly on the facade of hypocrisy in commemorating the war dead for only on day of the year, or whenever it is politically expedient.

However, I am afraid that I cannot condone the building of a memorial to people who refused to defend this country against despots like the Kaiser and Hitler.

I suppose lots of young men who went to war were of a peaceful, perhaps pacifist, disposition, but had to lay their principles aside to fight against tyranny and enslavement: turning the other cheek does not work.

If the majority of young men were of the same persuasion as the COs, most of whom were probably motivated by religious teaching anyway, this country would probably have more war dead to commemorate – those who would have died in the concentration camps and gas chambers if we had been overrun.

**ALISTER RANKIN**  
Leven.

I WOULD remind Edna Mathieson that her freedom to express her opinions in *The Freethinker* was won for her by men and women who were NOT conscientious objectors.

**PETER BROWN**  
Glasgow



Thanks, Eric

AS I take out my cheque book to make tardy payment for subscription to *The Freethinker*, plus the Fund, I feel keenly aware of my thinking's indebtedness to Eric Stockton, of the Scottish Humanist. His article (June) on the principle of personal autonomy is masterly. It is a mini-textbook of unanswerable debating points, mighty useful for anyone, like myself, who writes to the papers (nationals) on the basic irrelevance to life of religion.

The conciseness and disarming directness of the case he puts so succinctly reinforces one's (I trust not too prideful) own – I nearly said belief – confidence in the soundness of the freethinker's position. One pities intelligent, educated persons, of some sophistication, who are unable, by social or professional circumstance, to extricate themselves from early conditioning.

The irony is that millions of people who are non-believers, in heart and mind, are afraid of declaring to the world their detachment from the curse of religion. A *Guardian* report tells us that membership of the Presbyterian church in Wales has fallen – from 300,000 to 56,000. A third of the 4,000 churches and chapels in Wales are scheduled to close over the next 20 years. Homes for the not-so-well-off are to be built on the sites. That's progress!

**NOËL RATCLIFFE**  
Buxton

# Tribute to a peerless Persian

by Colin McCall

*Be happy now and don't live on wind.*

*Ah, my Beloved, fill the Cup that clears  
"To-day" of past Regrets and future Fears –  
"To-morrow"? Why, To-morrow I may be  
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n Thousand  
Years.*

I could go on, but these few are sufficient, I hope, to show that Fitzgerald, while admitting that his version was "very unliteral," certainly caught the essence of the original: the uncertainty of life; where did we come from? where do we go?; comparison with a "magic shadow show"; our dusty ending and, of course, love and wine.

As one of his editors, in an undated Medici Society edition of *The Rubaiyat*, JVS Wilkinson of the British Museum, summarised: "The range of moods, the imagery, the phraseology, are parallel at least to those of any representative version of the quatrains."

Fitzgerald was a sceptic and the Persian scepticism appealed to him, as it has done to his great readership over the years.

Since his time we have learnt more about the original Omar, the "tent-maker," and Avery and Heath-Stubbs provide a valuable introduction and appendices for the student.

It wasn't until 1941, for instance, that Omar's date of birth was verified as May 18, 1048, on the basis of a horoscope for him that had long been ignored by scholars. He, as a famous astronomer, must have prepared horoscopes for others, though one of his pupils, Nizam, reported that Omar didn't have "any great belief in astrological predictions," which is very likely true: he was a follower and defender of Avicenna, who wrote a book refuting astrology.

An astronomer who devised a new calendar; a mathematician who demonstrated how to solve cubic equations; exponent of the "Greek Learning"; Omar Khayyam was described in a 12th Century Arabic work as "peerless in his time and without equal in astronomy and philosophy, so that he is proverbial." He was by no means the only Persian who wrote *rubai's*, and we don't know how many of the 235 translated by Avery and Heath-Stubbs are his, but peerless he remains, thanks to Edward Fitzgerald.

Lane 1979; Penguin paperback 1981).

As Peter Avery says in his introduction, Fitzgerald "was clear in his grasp of the often very austere and unconsoling message of many of the *rubai's* he chose to translate. Whether or not Omar Khayyam was the author of all the *rubai's* Fitzgerald took up can be left aside – what matters is Fitzgerald's deep understanding of the mind of a medieval Khurasanian mathematician and philosopher such as we must now show Khayyam to have been."

Take a few comparisons, not for exactness, but for similarity, Avery and Heath-Stubbs first each time.

*Drink wine, you will lie long enough under  
the ground,  
Without companion, friend or comrade.  
Take care you tell no one the hidden secret  
"No lily that withers will bloom again."*

*Oh, come with old Khayyam, and leave the  
Wise  
To talk; one thing is certain, that life flies;  
One thing is certain, and the Rest is Lies;  
The flower that once has blown for ever  
dies.*

*That palace where Bahram took the cup in  
hand  
The antelope has made its couching-place  
and the fox its earth:  
Bahram who hunted the wild ass all his life,  
See how the grave has hunted him down.*

*They say the Lion and the Lizard keep  
The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and  
drank deep:  
And Bahram, that Great Hunter – the  
Wild Ass  
Stamps o'er his Head, and he lies fast  
asleep.*

*Every plain where tulips bloomed  
Was reddened by a prince's blood;  
Every knot of violets springing from the  
earth  
Was a beauty-patch on a darling's cheek.*

*I sometimes think that never blows so red  
The Rose as where some buried Caesar  
bled:  
That every Hyacinth the Garden wears  
Dropt in its Lap from some once lovely  
Head.*

*Don't seek to recall yesterday that is past  
Nor repine for tomorrow which has yet to  
come;  
Don't build your hopes on the past or the  
future,*

HAVE been surrounded by free-thinkers all my life. My parents were members and, later, officers of the Manchester branch of the National Secular Society during the presidency of Chapman Cohen, whose spoken and written influence was all-pervasive. Each new book, argued in his inimitable, logical style, was avidly devoured.

So, too, were the many Watts publications, especially the splendid Thinker's Library. It would be interesting to know, for example, how many copies were sold of Joseph McCabe's *Twelve Years in a Monastery*.

Aside, though, from specifically freethought literature, at least two other books were obligatory reading: Edward Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

The latter caused a sensation when it first appeared. Tillotsons, a newspaper syndicate in whom Hardy had signed a contract, and other periodicals, *Murray's* and *Macmillan's*, all turned down the first portion. Edward Arnold, of *Murray's*, declined to publish "stories where the plot involves frequent and detailed reference to immoral situations" because, while he knew "well enough that these tragedies are being played out every day in our midst," he believed "the less publicity they have the better, and it is quite possible and very desirable to grow up and pass through life without knowledge of them."

Mowbray Morris, editor of *Macmillan's Magazine*, took up Hardy's description of Frome Valley as "succulent" and found it rather too much succulence" in the story. He acknowledged that this made it "entirely modern," but confessed to being "rather too old fashioned" to relish it.

Hardy, however, refused to alter his text and, to add insult to injury, subtitled the book, which appeared in 1891, "*A Pure Woman*," provoking the woman novelist, Mrs Oliphant, to ask how anyone who had "twice fallen from the woman's code of honour and purity" could be called "pure."

The novel ends with the terrible hanging of Tess for the murder of Alec, her seducer, and the equally terrible irony of Hardy's "'Justice' is done, and the President of the Immortals (in Aeschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess." Not only Aeschylean, incidentally, but also Shakespearean, echoing Gloucester's "As flies to wanton boys are we to the Gods. They kill us for their sport."

There have been many attempts to discount Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat*. Many years ago, in a freethinker article, I compared his quatrains with those of a literal translation and maintained that, while producing his own memorable poem, with variants, he had remained essentially true to the tone of his materialistic master.

This has since been confirmed by Peter Avery and John Heath-Stubbs in their version of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (Allen

*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.*

# Anarchism and atheism

FOR over a century, freethinkers and anarchists have enjoyed cordial relations. Both groups are libertarian and distrustful of authority, temporal and spiritual; and both have members covering a spectrum of opinion ranging from individualist to collectivist. But are freethinkers really anarchists or anarchists really freethinkers? And if not, should they be?

These and related questions are dealt with in a special issue on religion by the anarchist quarterly *The Raven* (Spring 1994). Its cover features an image familiar to freethinkers: *The Freethinker* Christmas Number for 1882 and its cartoon of "Moses getting a back view" of God. Another special issue on religion, containing studies on Hindu fundamentalism and state funding of religious schools in Britain, is promised and contributions are invited.

The recent number begins with an anonymous editorial which notes that anarchists who attack both capitalism and religion are called Bakuninists while other anarchists say anticlericalism is either not tactical or there is no "necessary connection" between anarchism and atheism. This issue is immediately addressed by the distinguished freethinker and anarchist Nicolas Walter. After a useful review of anarchists in several countries, he concludes that "there is indeed a strong correlation between anarchism and atheism, but that it is not complete, and it is not necessary. Most anarchists are non-religious or anti-religious – and most take their atheism for granted – but some anarchists are religious."

Tony Gibson has no sympathy for this minority and to his question "should we mock at religion?" gives an emphatic "yes." For, he points out, "I have not noticed that religious

## LAST WORD

by David Tribe

people show the least respect for the opinion of atheists." In designating Marxism-Leninism, Maoism and Nazism as "secular religions," he's on shakier ground. I agree with him – and with Bakunin and Bertrand Russell – that the first two can be so described, but Nazism seems to me to be a political attitude that uses religion – Roman Catholicism, Rosenberg's folk religion or whatever comes to hand – to foster obedience.

In "Anarchist entry for a theological dictionary," Colin Ward outlines various anarchist sects from anarcho-communism to anarcha-feminism and the importance to the overall movement of Godwin, Proudhon (the first to use the label), Bakunin and Kropotkin. He asserts that "the ideal of a self-organising society based on voluntary co-operation rather than coercion is irrepressible." But so is the ideal of a classless society, or religion withering away in the sunlight of science, or the state of utopia, but none of these shows much likelihood of eventuating. Indeed, Ward virtually admits that a Don Quixote tilting at windmills wouldn't become more plausible if he were to reincarnate and tilt at atomic power stations

(my metaphor). For he concedes that anarchists raise issues that "condemn themselves to exile to the fringe of political and social agitation."

Peter Lumsden contributes an interesting short article "Only the atheist can understand religion." He says that both present-day rationalists and theologians "commit the 'naturalistic fallacy'" and Christianity is a means and not an end. He is of course a religious anarchist. Neither of his arguments is properly developed, and I wouldn't have space to refute them if they had been; but they're interesting if not entirely original, for they're really variants on the modernist theme that one should look beneath the catechetical Christ to the anarchistic Jesus of Nazareth. Arthur Boyse in "Boo" seems to agree.

George Walford isn't himself religious. But in "Through religion to anarchism" he argues that atheism and rationalism are needed for convinced anarchists but the apathetic masses need "the power, the emotion and the drive that religion brings to bear" to become aware "that things are wrong in the world and we ought to be doing something about them." That view sounds plausible in the abstract, but in practice I can think of no religion that has brought unsullied socio-political reforms. Motivated religionists are more likely to organise either crusades or prayer-meetings.

The longest piece is Sébastien Faure's "Twelve proofs of the non-existence of god," translated by Walter. In fact, there seem to be 14 proofs: six arguments against the creator-god, four against the governor-god, two against the judge-god and two "capital objections" including the first-cause claim. Freethinkers will find nothing new here, but they're cogently and lucidly argued.

In "Matriline and mother goddess religion," Brian Morris argues against feminists who equate these two anthropological concepts. He says matriline societies are primitive horticultural ones while those with a mother goddess have advanced agriculture, as in the theocratic states of Egypt and Crete. Interesting, but I don't know what it has to do with anarchism.

"Church, state and freedom" is clearly about both religion and anarchism. Its author is Michael Duane, a well-known former comprehensive school headmaster. Claims that church, state, family, school and work all suppress spontaneity and encourage uniformity are superficially attractive until we run into the spittle of little brats who are brought up entirely without discipline or into the shrapnel of some footloose "freedom fighter."

● David Tribe is a former General Secretary of the National Secular Society and a one-time Editor of *The Freethinker*. "Religion," Vol 7 No 1 of *The Raven*, anarchist quarterly, Spring 1994, costs £3, post paid, from Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

## Fighting religious arrogance

THERE are two threats to the well-being of *The Freethinker* – one new; one long-standing.

As Barbara Smoker's comment on Page 123 spells out, superstitionists and their allies in Parliament are seeking to extend the law of blasphemy to a point which would make it extremely difficult – if not impossible – for us to operate effectively. That move must be squashed – and *The Freethinker* must be here to lead the fight.

Which brings us to the second threat. This year's increase in the cover price (to about half the cost of a packet of cigarettes or less than a pint of beer) has contributed to a falling-off in donations to the fund, which is vital to our continued role as leader of the fight against the increasing

arrogance of the religionists.

Please – help us to pull back what the fund has lost over the past few months. Rush cheques, POs, stamps to: G W Foote & Co, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1 8SP.

Many thanks to: H Lyons-Davis, £1; L D Griffiths, T Butterworth, F Hiorth and R W Simmonds, £2 each; P McKenna, £3; Blackpool reader, £4.73; A Negus, C Williams, D Redhead, R Hopkins, G Williams, J F Claydon, Bristol reader, Penzance reader, and W Grahamslaw, £5 each; E A Whitlam, H L Munniksma and I Forbes, £7 each; E J Little, £8; B A Burfoot, D Yeulett, W Johnstone, D L Seynour and P Somers, £10 each; P A Smith, £15; Anonymous, £23.

Total for June: £178.73