

COL

£1

The

Freethinker

Secular Humanist monthly

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

Vol 114 No 9

September 1994

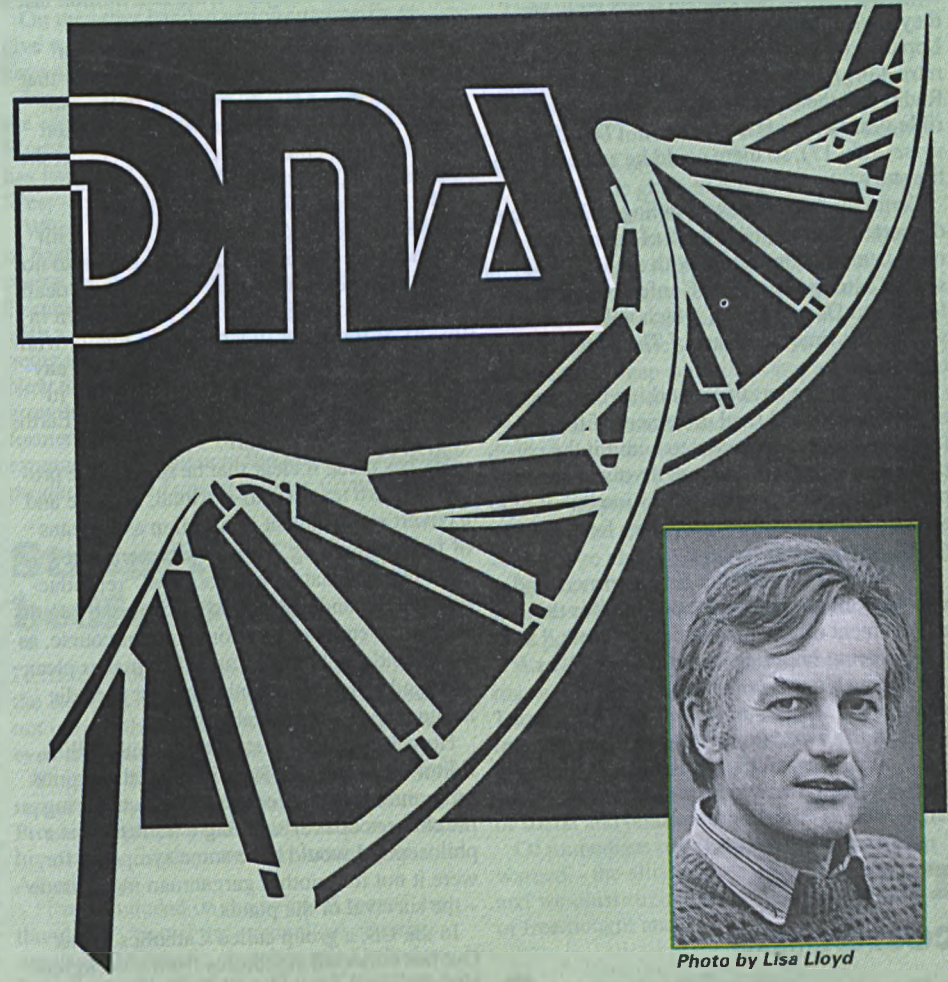


Photo by Lisa Lloyd

The Richard Dawkins interview

TV HALF-MILLION HEAR OF RABIES AND RELIGION

anar-

selfs

al ag-

esting

stand

rational-

is and

anar-

perly

refute

esting

y vari-

should

to the

yse in

s. But

argues

ed for

masses

drive

aware

nd we

hem-

ct, but

at has

orms.

ely to

igs.

ture's

god,

i to be

reator-

l, two

objec-

Free-

2, but

gion.

s who

ots. He

rticul-

oddes

ocratic

but I

ism.

about

hor is

mpre-

s that

ll sup-

rmity

to the

entire-

nel of

retary

i one-

gion,

rtely,

Free-

treat.

UP FRONT

with the Editor



Desperation in the last ditch?

RUMOUR suggests that the Holy Father may soon join his predecessors around the Heavenly Throne (I wouldn't be seen dead with that unsavoury crew, but *chacun à son goût*, as they say). It seems that Cardinal Aloisio Lorscheider was forced by Vatican heavies to retract his recent announcement on Brazilian Radio that the Pope had been "struck by a terrible illness, cancer of the bone" (*The Universe*, July 17), so there could be something in the story.

Certainly there is now a feeling of last-ditch desperation about the doings of John Paul, most lately in connection with the UN-sponsored Cairo International Conference on Population and Development, which will be under way by the time this issue of *The Freethinker* appears.

Feverishly, he has been working to undermine the proposed final document of the conference, which is expected to commit the participants (162 countries were involved in preparatory talks) to the proposition that limited population growth is necessary for sustained economic growth.

It also declares that "the empowerment and autonomy of women" are essential "for the achievement of sustainable development," as well as being important ends in themselves.

As a *The Guardian* report (August 20) explained: "To put it another way, the governments of the world are set to approve a solemn and binding text which commits them to promoting equality between the sexes on practical, as well as ethical, grounds."

Talking condoms

WE ARE here talking condoms, the Pill, the coil – we are talking measures aimed at slowing our lemminglike plunge towards an insupportable world population.

The number of human beings on the planet has risen from one billion in 1800 to three billion in 1960 to 5.7 billion today – and we are heading for a UN-projected 10 billion within the next 20 years. The UN conference is discussing proposals aimed at stabilising the population at 7.2 billion by the year 2050 (*The Independent*, August 15).

According to Timothy Worth, the US representative at the Cairo conference, unless overpopulation is checked, it "will overwhelm all our political institutions, it will destroy the environment around us and erode any opportunities that we have to provide quality of life to

the people in the world" (*The Age*, Melbourne, July 30).

President Clinton wants the Cairo conference to aim for family planning to be made available to every woman in the world who wants it by 2000. And even our own Government, not noted for compassion or for far-sightedness, has announced a big increase in spending on population programmes within the foreign aid budget – from £32 million last year to £100 million over the next two.

Gordon Bilney, Australia's Minister for Development Co-operation, said recently that giving access to family planning to the estimated 300 million women who do not want more children could reduce by 30 per cent the deaths of children under five and women.

But the Pope, hugely obsessed with all things sexual, is apparently able to live with the fact of millions of babies being born to no other prospect than an early and a horrid death – anything so long as he does not go down in history as the Vicar of Christ who finally withdrew the priests from the bedroom. And, anyway, since the poor are certain of a place in Heaven, after their short, brutish stay on Earth, why get over-emotional?

He has made it clear that he regards the proposed Cairo text as anti-spiritual, anti-life and a covert endorsement of abortion as a means of family planning. Vatican representatives have insisted that its promotion of "reproductive health" and even "safe motherhood" could be used to endorse abortion. And, of course, as the recently-published Catechism makes clear, any kind of family planning except periodic abstinence is "intrinsically evil."

However, as RC priest Father Paul Collins, Editor of Australia's Radio National religious programme, said recently (neatly scuppering his chances of ever securing a mitre): "It is a philosophy I would have some sympathy for, were it not for another gargantuan moral issue – the survival of the planet."

In the US, a group called Catholics Speak Out has collected signatures from co-religionists all over the world, and as *The Freethinker* went to press was planning to publish an open letter to Pope John Paul in the *New York Times*.

This says that "because of the human pain caused by the Vatican opposition to contraception, because such opposition severely worsens our global crisis of population and resources and because the majority of good Catholics, after long and prayerful reflection, have rejected it, we say to you simply: on the issue of contraception, you are wrong" (quoted in *The Age*, July 30).

Faced with such open revolt within the ranks – and loaded with the generally unspoken but patent contempt of much of the West – John Paul, at the fag-end of his 16-year pontificate, has sought allies elsewhere.

Sinister line-up

A SINISTER line-up between the Vatican and fundamentalist Islam, which has its own reasons for opposing the conference, is on the cards. *The Guardian* (August 20) reports: "The Holy See appears to have reached an agreement with Iran. The Papal envoy in Tehran saw the Deputy Foreign Minister and President's brother, Mohammad Hashemi Rafsanjani, on August 1 and obtained from him a promise of collaboration... if the Iranians were to side openly with the Vatican, they would contribute something far more significant, and explosive, than the reservations of a handful of Third World administrations – the hostility to the conference and its declaration of millions of fundamentalists across the Muslim world."

Muslim clergymen at the al-Azhar university in Cairo and the World Muslim League in the holy city of Mecca have backed the anti-conference campaign, saying they believe the current agenda is an attempt by the UN to foist a Western-style bill of sexual rights on the Muslim world.

Mana bin Jahani, the Secretary General of the International Muslim Youth organisation, said in a radical Dubai newspaper on August 19 that it was the duty of Muslims to ensure the failure of the conference.

The Muslim clerics have identified clauses in the UN conference agenda which they say condone sex outside marriage, abortion and homosexuality.

The agenda speaks of the right of "couples and individuals" to have access to contraceptive devices information and counselling on family planning. It also calls on governments to help adolescents to deal in a positive and responsible way with their sexuality. But the document makes no mention of the question of being married before such help is available.

Muslim League officials say such ideas are "repulsive" to Muslims. They warn the UN against any attempts to mount political or economic pressure on Muslim nations to adopt such values for their own societies.

Other matters on the UN agenda directly conflict with Muslim Dark Age dogma.

One speaks of a minimum age for marriage – but, in the Muslim world, girl children can marry at the onset of puberty.

Another talks of the need to ensure gender equality, and that would negate certain Muslim laws on inheritance and in other legal areas.

There is a call for an end to coercion in marriage. Among Muslims, many marriages are arranged between families with minimal input from the couple most closely concerned in the matter.

➔ Turn to Page 139

13-9-94

UP FRONT

with the Editor

From Page 138

The Muslims have learned quickly from their new allies. Militant Fahmi Hudweida was quoted by *The Guardian* as seeing the UN conference as an attempt to rob Muslims of their "secret weapon, the population bomb." And that is the very same weapon which has served the Roman Catholic Church so well over the generations, and whose efficacy in creating and maintaining a universal mass power base is the real reason for the Vatican's frantic opposition to family planning. The Vatican says that just distribution of the Earth's resources to lift the poor from misery is the most powerful moderator of population growth (see Cardinal Daly, *Catholic Times*, August 7), thus admitting that there are too many people in the world. I heard a CAFOD – Catholic Aid – worker banging out this line on BBC Radio 4 the other morning – and who can quarrel with such a reasonable view?

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 138
Religion in schools	Page 140
Taslima Nasreen	Page 141
What's On	Page 142
Book review: M Yaffey	Page 143
Dawkins TV interview	Page 144
Blast from the past	Page 146
Down to Earth: Bill McLroy	Page 147
You're telling us! Letters	Page 148
Last Word:	Page 152

Editor's address:

24 Alder Avenue,
Silcoates Park,
Wakefield, WF2 0TZ.

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 \$8 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.

Well, yes, except that, as Rome well knows, "just distribution" is extremely unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future – and certainly not in time to ameliorate the crisis with which the Cairo conference is concerning itself.

Sadly, production in the real world is for profit – else why not stop curtailing the food-growing activities of European farmers and give all surplus produce to the poor folk?

On the other hand, a serious campaign to give women control of their bodies would have almost immediate benefits.

Incidentally, the Catholic view that raising the economic status of people in the Third World would result in smaller families – as has happened, I am happy to admit, in the West – begs an important question.

When – due perhaps to a miraculous change of heart in the worlds of trade, finance, commerce, industry – every family in Brazil and Bombay and Burundi has a three-bed semi with a Volvo in the garage and 1.7 children being cared for by the *au pair*, how will those New Suburbanites restrain the population growth which the Church admits caused their former misery? By prayer? Or, following our example, by recourse to the useful and reliable products of the London Rubber Company plc?

Strange bedfellows

IT SEEMS that, when its back is to the wall, the Roman Church is willing to get into bed not only with Muslims but also with the once even more accursed Protestant evangelicals.

That splendid US magazine *Church & State* reports (May, 1994) that in a 1993 speech Protestant televangelist Pat Robertson outlined his strategy for theocratic government in America.

"I'm convinced on the political scene," he thundered, "that if the evangelical churches, the Roman Catholic churches, the Orthodox Jewish people, all of us will work together, we can elect anybody to any office at any level – school boards, state legislatures, city councils, mayors, governors, House of Representatives, Senators... The Bible says when the righteous are in authority the people rejoice..."

Robertson took another step toward that goal in March when he and a large number of evangelical leaders signed a joint statement with... wait for it... Cardinal John O'Connor and other traditionalist Roman Catholics on political and religious issues.

In the manifesto, called *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium*, these two religious camps agreed to contend "against all that opposes Christ and his cause."

For careful observers, says *Church & State*, the manifesto raised concerns. In addition to

finding areas of agreement on theological issues, the signers of the Third Millennium document also agreed to work together on political issues.

To this group, the constitutional principle of church-state separation is not a wholesome protection of both religion and individual liberty, but rather a legal distortion that "stifles the necessary role of religion in American life."

The group wants parochial and other private religious schools to be underwritten with tax funds. Public schools (state schools in the UK) should "transmit to coming generations our cultural heritage, which is inseparable from the formative influence of religion, especially Judaism and Christianity."

"In short, the goals of the Third Millennium coalition are identical to those long touted by the moral majoritarians of both the Protestant and the Catholic Right," says *Church & State*. "The signers want a religiously oriented public school system, a tax-funded parochial school system and a church-state wall so low that theocrats can leap across and impose their religious traditions on others at will. The manifesto is not so much an advance in interfaith dialogue as a thinly-veiled political campaign, albeit one styled in fancy intellectual and theological trappings."

In essence, document signers – as in the case of the Pope and the Ayatollahs – are agreeing to ignore (or compromise) deep differences of religious belief in order to press ahead with their political agenda.

We could argue over whether these once impossible-to-imagine alliances – Vatican and Tehran; militant Prod televangelist and Cardinal – are symptoms of fear in the face of a rising tide of rationality which threatens to engulf superstition – or of a macho assertion of social and political virility.

Of immediate concern is that we have been warned – the alliances are a fact and a threat – and we must strengthen and deploy the forces of freethought and humanism accordingly.

Correction

LAST month, I carelessly described David Tribe as a former General Secretary of the National Secular Society and a one-time Editor of *The Freethinker*. In fact, David is a former *President* of the NSS and a one-time Editor of *The Freethinker*; during much of his distinguished presidency, the General Secretary was Bill McLroy: a formidable duo!

Although he now lives in Australia, David Tribe is always happy to put his vast knowledge of the freethought movement and its history at my disposal – as, indeed, is Bill McLroy who, although no longer a member of the NSS, unstintingly volunteers his time to *The Freethinker* and to the Sheffield Humanist Society, of which he is Press Officer.

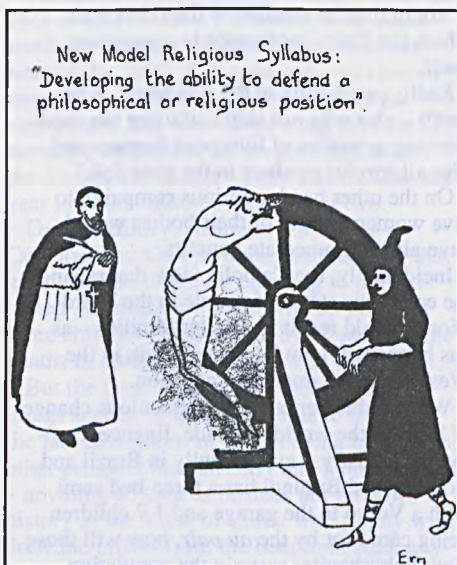
Government stands firm on superstition in school

DESPITE the recent sacking of Secretary of State John Patten, the Department for Education is determined on a policy of "no change" in the areas of religious education and compulsory daily collective worship.

This is made clear in a letter (August 12) to Mr Roy Saich, secretary of Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists, sent on behalf of the new Education Minister, Mrs Gillian Shephard.

It says: "The detailed content of RE in county schools continues to be decided locally. Local agreed syllabuses are not designed to instruct pupils in a particular religion, urging a particular belief on them. Rather, the law is designed to ensure that all pupils are offered a thorough knowledge of Christianity – important to a proper understanding of the country's Christian heritage – and also knowledge of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain.

"RE concerns the development of children's knowledge, understanding and awareness of religious beliefs and practices; the encouragement of respect for those holding different beliefs; and the development of the ability to make reasoned and informed judgements about religious and moral issues. Since humanism is not a religion, it should not be taught in RE lessons as if it were. It is possible, however, for RE to include teaching about non-theistic ways of life, such as humanism and the moral values associated with them. I can assure you that Ministers do value the contribution that humanists make to moral education.



"The Government has no plans to change the legal requirement to provide daily collective worship for all pupils. It makes a vital contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development, and helps to develop a school's community spirit. The law on collective worship is designed to offer pupils from a variety of backgrounds the opportunity to participate in a single act of collective worship, wherever possible. It allows for a school to tailor the content of worship to its own particular needs, provided that the majority of acts of worship over a term are wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character. A headteacher may seek a "determination" to lift the requirement for broadly Christian worship where he or she

judges that to be inappropriate for some or all of the pupils in a school.

"Guidance for schools on the withdrawal of pupils from RE and collective worship is contained in Circular 1/94, published by the Department in January 1994. All maintained schools are required to include in their annual prospectus information about parents' rights to withdraw their children from RE and collective worship, either in whole or part, and details of any alternative provision for pupils who are withdrawn."

On August 20, Mr Saich replied to Mrs Shephard: "Unfortunately from what you say, the position of the one-in-three pupils in our county schools who come from non-religious backgrounds is unclear to us. We would be grateful if you would clarify it.

"Your letter says RE concerns 'the development of the ability to make reasoned and informed judgments about religious and moral issues.' However, you reject our view that RE needs to properly cover ethical belief systems not just religions as narrowly defined.

"How, without a proper non-religious philosophical framework, can pupils who are agnostic or atheist make 'reasoned and informed judgements about religious and moral issues'?"

"Your reply seems to confirm our fear that the Government's policy for Religious Education is to ignore the needs of the one-third of pupils from non-religious backgrounds. If this is not the case, perhaps you can specify what foundations are to be provided for them to build their own personal philosophies of life."

BRIEFLY...BRIEFLY...BRIEFLY...

RELIGION is a form of mental aberration. I think it is extraordinary that educated people should believe in some strange, supernatural being and an afterlife. There is no purpose in life; it is a chemical accident.— Professor Bernard Knight, Professor of Forensic Pathology, who has been prominent in the Gloucester "House of Horrors" murder inquiry, speaking on BBC Radio 4, August 7.

BURGLAR John Hanscombe, 36, carried a Bible with his name in for luck – and was nabbed when he left it in a house in Brisbane, Australia.— *The Sun*, July 15.

WOUNDED rail worker Darren Fleming ran into a mosque after being hit by a bottle...and was thrown out for wearing shoes. Dazed and bleeding badly from his head, he was forced to drive to the nearest police sta-

tion, where concerned cops rushed the 26-year-old BR engineer to hospital. "The men praying in the mosque could see I was hurt. But they just kept pointing to my feet and pushing me away," said Darren, of Halifax, Yorkshire, who was injured when youngsters playing in the street threw a bottle at his BR van.— *Daily Star*, June 2.

NUNS have broken their vow of silence to haggle with would-be buyers after putting their convent up for sale in Chichester, Sussex.— *The Sun*, April 25.

A **LABOUR** council is spending £100,000 so a community centre can have a separate entrance for Muslim women. It says the women do not like using the existing doorway because they pass groups of men... Tories at Radford, Nottingham, have branded the plan "barmy." Councillor Stu-

art Thompson said: "It's apartheid in reverse." But Labour member Sue Scott said: "You have to accept Muslims' culture."— *The Sun*, July 15.

UNLUCKY Mario Stenna, 35, was killed when a bolt of lightning struck the crucifix hung around his neck as he was sheltering under a tree near Bolzano, Italy.— *Daily Star*, July 16.

WITH the theme of *Positive Atheism for a Positive Future*, a World Atheist Congress will be held at The Atheist Centre, Vijayawada, India, on January 6, 7 and 8, 1996. Further details from Lavanam, The Atheist Centre, Benz Circle, Vijayawada 520010, Andhra Pradesh, India; telephone: + 91 866 472330.

Secularists, Humanists rally to Taslima Nasreen

DEATH-THREAT AUTHOR ESCAPES TO SWEDEN

AUTHOR and freethinker Dr Taslima Nasreen escaped from her native Bangladesh early in August and is now in Sweden, where she has pledged to continue her fight against "fundamentalist insanity" which she says is "spreading darkness in the world."

Dr Nasreen was quoted in *The Times* (August 19) as saying she would return to Bangladesh when things had cooled down and would not change her attitudes or writings.

As reported in the August issue of *The Free-thinker*, death threats have been made against Dr Nasreen for allegedly insulting Islam. She had been in hiding for two months before appearing in the Bangladesh High Court, which granted her bail.

A week later she was spirited out of her country to Sweden, from where *The Times* reports: "Looking calm and in good humour, Dr Nasreen appeared in Stockholm to receive the Kurt Tucholsky prize. The prize, worth around £12,000, is awarded by the Swedish PEN club, which invited her to Sweden. It is given annually to a writer living in exile. Salman Rushdie was a winner in 1992.

Darkness

"She thanked the Swedish government for helping her to leave Bangladesh and said: 'The prize confirms me in my resolve to fight for my ideals. I wish to continue my fight against fundamentalists, who are spreading darkness in many parts of the world.

"I know the fundamentalists want to silence me because I want women to come into their own as free and equal members of society and also because I want human life to be guided by reason and science and not by superstition and ignorance."

After it had become known that Dr Nasreen had escaped, in Dhaka, the Bangladeshi capital, several hundred people gathered at a rally, shouting: "She must be hanged for insulting Islam. Wherever you go, Nasreen, death will follow you."

Previous similar rallies attracted thousands of people. One activist told *The Times* on August 18: "We must keep Nasreen's death well ringing."

The writer, who is working on a new novel, said she plans to visit Norway and France and other countries to which she has been invited, and the National Secular Society has said it would be pleased to see her in the UK.

NSS President Barbara Smoker wrote to Dr Nasreen on August 20, pointing out that her statement to *The Times* against superstition and ignorance "exactly describes the aim of this organisation for the past 128 years, and I

am writing on behalf of our members and supporters to congratulate you on your courageous stand and to convey our best wishes for the future."

Miss Smoker told the writer: "We intend to hold a public meeting of support for you shortly in London in association with Women Against Fundamentalism and other campaigning bodies. This will probably take place on October 18 at Conway Hall, which is the British Humanist Centre and adjoins our own premises.

"A similar meeting was held in the same hall five years ago in support of Salman Rushdie, when celebrities of stage and screen read out the 'offending' passages from *The Satanic Verses*.

"Needless to say, we would be delighted if it were possible for you to come here for that occasion, but we would certainly not wish to jeopardise your personal safety... Our very best wishes for your continued campaign and, of course, for your personal safety and survival in the face of the horrifying fundamentalist threats against you."

The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), in Toronto for its annual board meeting, also pledged to do everything in its power to help Taslima Nasreen and her supporters, noting that "the persecution of Ms Nasreen began after she criticised religious intolerance and mistreatment of women, and declared herself a Humanist atheist. The 31-year-old author went into hiding when Muslim militants called for her murder and a Bangladeshi court ordered her arrest for 'blasphemy'."

IHEU, which has 97 member organisations in 35 countries representing five million members, promotes non-theistic morality and defends the rights of the non-religious. In a resolution passed unanimously by its Board, the IHEU called on the Bangladeshi government to uphold freedom of speech, to provide protection for Taslima Nasreen and to prosecute those who have called for her murder.

Following the meeting, IHEU Co-President Professor Paul Kurtz said: "On behalf of the millions of people who share Taslima Nasreen's Humanist beliefs, we pledge to do everything in our power to protect her and all others who have the courage to speak their conscience."

The IHEU is in contact with Dr Nasreen and has arranged talks between her and representa-

tives of countries considering giving her asylum.

Spokesman Matt Cherry said: "As part of a wide-ranging campaign to protect the rights of critics of religion in Bangladesh, the IHEU will use its consultative status at the United Nations, UNESCO and other international bodies, to urge the government of Bangladesh to uphold the freedom of speech and the right to freedom of and from religion."

The IHEU resolution said in full: "The International Humanist and Ethical Union expresses its grave concern about the treatment of writers and editors in Bangladesh. The harassment and persecution of the Humanist author Taslima Nasreen and of newspaper editors who have supported her cause, is an attempt to suppress the right to question and criticise religious belief and practice. These persecutions violate fundamental human rights, including the rights to freedom of belief and expression.

Conscience

"The world Humanist community is deeply concerned about the safety of Taslima Nasreen in the face of the demands by fundamentalists for her arrest and public hanging. We urge the Government of Bangladesh not to sacrifice basic human rights to appease fanatic and fundamentalist forces. We call upon the Bangladeshi Government to withdraw the arrest warrant issued against Taslima Nasreen, to provide her with protection against possible attack, and to prosecute those individuals and groups that have called for her murder.

"The International Humanist and Ethical Union also urges that the ban on the novel *Lajja (Shame)* be withdrawn and that the freedom of the author to speak on the basis of her conscience be upheld. Tolerance of minority opinions, and the freedom to express these views, are fundamental democratic principles. The IHEU calls upon the Bangladeshi Government to defend the democratic principles of Bangladesh and to uphold the basic freedom of Taslima Nasreen and others who question the authority of religion."

Messages of support and encouragement may be sent to Dr Taslima Nasreen, C/o Swedish PEN Club, PO Box 3159, S11134 Stockholm, Sweden.

The address of the Bangladesh High Commission to the UK is 28 Queen's Gate, London SW7.

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, October 2, 5.30pm for 6pm: Beatrice Clarke discusses 150 years of Australian Secularism.

Central London Humanists: For details, please contact Cherie Holt on 071 916 3015 or Hilary Lighter 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 Humanists: Waverley Day Centre, 65 Waverley Road, Kenilworth: Monday, September 19, 7.30pm: Annual General Meeting.

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

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

Ealing Humanists: Friends Meeting House, 17 Woodville Road, Ealing W5. Meetings start at 8pm. Thursday, September 29: Maire Steadman: *Was Shakespeare a Humanist?* Thursday October 27: Pastor Colin Dye: *The Pentecost Movement*. Thursday, November 24: The Rev Martin Shipperlee OSB: *Why all Humanists are Really Catholics at Heart!* Details: telephone 081-422 4956 or 081-573 1235.

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. October 14, 7.30 pm: *Gay Times* art critic Emmanuel Cooper talks about his book *The Sexual Perspective*.

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, 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. October 14: Group discussion on voluntary euthanasia. Information, telephone: 061 432 9045.

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, September 14, 8pm: Peter Brearey, Editor of *The Freethinker*. *Secularism versus Religious Dogma*.

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 Mepham: *World Population Prospects*. 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 Lighter, BHA EC: *Equal Opportunitires 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.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Annual General Meeting

2.15pm, Saturday, October 29, 1994

The Library, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1

All members are invited to attend

Scourge of the Holy Joes

NELLY MOIA is a head teacher in Luxembourg, where she says almost everyone reads the clerical-paper every day for its small-ads, and everyone has to support the Catholic Church through state taxes.

In 1988 she resigned in disgust from the National Working Party on Lay Moral Education, after much constructive work in assembling course materials. She was protesting against the Bill to abolish the right to abstain from religious and lay moral instruction in schools.

An active writer of polemical articles and letters, she has in the last three years written these books under the Polyprint imprint, which are concerned with theses of humanist morality: *For Animals* (1992), *For Women* (1993) and now *Against the Holy Joes* (*Geint d'Pafen* in Luxembourgish). Writing in all three national languages, for a mainly European readership, she is coolly professional in French, militant in German, positive and relaxed in Luxembourgish. There is also some English, a spot of Italian, and a sprinkling of Latin. With caustic cartoons, and some fascinating photographs, it sparkles with personali-

The first section is a collection of items about the people of Luxembourg and their

***Geint d'Pafen* by Nelly Moia, Polyprint, Luxembourg, 1994, Pb 367 pp., illustrated, 1,500 Lux Frs. Review: MICHAEL YAFFEY**

church, revealing the church-state link, and reprinting the solemn correspondence by which the church responded to Moia's request to be out of it. The second is about religion in schools, including the results of a questionnaire in which 131 children gave judgement on the value of Christian Doctrine.

Contempt

Next come short collections called simply "Women," "Today," "Antipoperies" in which she writes: "The three monotheistic, patriarchal cultures – Jewish, Christian and Islamic – share a deeply rooted contempt for women; women should never forget that." There is a passionate demand for the adequate limitation of human breeding, with a bitter attack on the Lemming Pope, illustrated with pictures of eight different kinds of lemmings and a discussion of the moral climate in his home country, Poland.

"Out of History" includes succinct accounts of key episodes such as Darwin's conversion to unbelief, Baden-Powell's creation of Scouts and Guides independent of Church control, and the Church's role in wartime Yugoslavia. Nelly Moia concludes: "The Church can only

be reactionary; it is so by its nature. Catholicism for instance is undemocratic through and through."

The rest is a mercurial miscellany. In a radio interview she speaks of the Church's total lack of compassion in the matter of euthanasia, and contrasts Buddha to Christ in the matter of animals. She writes to President Mitterand about neo-clericalism on French TV, and to President Clinton about his pity for the loneliness of atheists: "With a little help from my friends, I've managed. Haven't you any friends, Mr President?" There are aphorisms (in various languages) from Diderot, Schopenhauer, Jefferson, Lichtenberg, Mynarek, Cavanna, Deschner, and many others deserving to be better known to the British public.

As a person, the real Moia emerges best, perhaps, in "Marionette with Heart" – her own review of a book by Karlheinz Deschner. In her own words: "Angry remonstrance against what is contrary to reason yet purports to be the truth, and angry compassion."

Also in this review comes my own favourite passage: "So, the most important moral question goes: Is commiseration teachable? And: What is fellow-feeling actually, where do we get it from, when did it crop up in the prehistory of humanity? And: Why is there complete silence about this overwhelmingly important theme? Where are the essays, the observations, the books, the research findings on empathy and compassion?"

To get this book, somehow send 1,500 Lux. francs, or 3,000 francs for all three, to Nelly Moia, 7-9 Place Churchill, 4056 Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg. Sadly, the books are not available through *The Freethinker*.

MP with a message

FORMER Labour MP Arthur Palmer died in Brighton on August 14.

Older freethinkers will remember him for his message to the National Secular Society on the occasion of its centenary in 1966: "Congratulations to the National Secular Society on its centenary.

"The country still needs public policies based on reason and calm assessment of facts, designed to promote human happiness.

"Also, freedom of thought, speech and writing still require champions to come forward in their defence. I'm glad you continue to flourish."

Remembering Holyoake

The Holyoake Commemorative Lecture will be delivered by Professor Sir Hermann Bondi, President of the British Humanist Association, at the Holyoake House, Hanover Street, Manchester at 7.30pm on November 25.

Hermann's subject will be *Seeking a Meaningful and Worthwhile Life: Aspects of Human Education*. Tickets cost £1.50. Details from Manchester Humanists on 061 432 9045.

Humanists support 'heroic crusade'

THE International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), in Toronto for its annual meeting, condemned the New Brunswick Provincial Government for denying its citizens their abortion rights, reports MATT CHERRY.

The resolution was passed in support of leading humanist Henry Morgentaler, who has been refused a licence to open an abortion clinic in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

IHEU re-affirmed its support for a woman's right to abortion and expressed its dismay that the Provincial Government was contravening the Canadian Supreme Court's "Morgentaler Decision" of 1988. This historic decision was gained by Dr. Morgentaler after years of fighting restrictive abortion laws, during which he was put on trial four times and served a prison

term, despite always being acquitted by juries.

IHEU, which promotes non-theistic morality, has 97 member organisations in 35 countries representing five million members. It has consultative status with the United Nations, UNESCO and UNICEF.

In recognition of Dr Morgentaler's courageous and pioneering work for abortion rights, IHEU presented him with the International Distinguished Humanist Award in 1988.

IHEU Co-President Jane Wynne Willson commented: "Thanks to Henry Morgentaler's heroic moral crusade for the right to abortion, most Canadian women now have access to safe abortion clinics. Reactionary, male politicians must not be allowed to deny the women of New Brunswick their right to control their own bodies."

Religion peddles a

SHEENA McDONALD introduced Dawkins with the comment that a godless universe is still a shocking idea in most parts of the world: "But one English zoologist crusades for his vision of a world of truth, a world without religion, which he says is the enemy of truth, a world which understands the true meaning of life."

She referred to Dawkins' vision of a world free of lies: "...not the little lies that we protect ourselves with, but what you would see as the big lie, which is that God or some omnipotent creator made and oversees the world. Now, a lot of people are looking for meaning in the world, a lot of them find it through faith. So what's attractive about your godless world, what's beautiful - why would anyone want to live in your world?"

Dawkins said it was an "immensely exciting experience to be in the world, to be born in the world, born in the universe, and look around you and realise that before you die you have the opportunity of understanding an immense amount about that world and about that universe and about life and about why we're here...it would be such a shame to blow it and end your life not having understood what there is to understand."

He went on: "...suppose you look at an animal such as a human or a hedgehog or a bat, and you really want to understand how it works. The scientific way...would be to treat it rather as an engineer would treat a machine. So if an engineer was handed this television camera - and I suppose it was a Martian engineer, who had no knowledge of what it was for - that engineer would get a screwdriver out, take it to bits, examine the bits, test the bits, perhaps try to work out a circuit diagram, would dissect it down, and work out what this thing did, what it was good for, how it works, would explain the functioning of the whole machine in terms of the bits, in terms of the parts, the interactions of the parts, the very complicated interactions of the parts.

"Then the engineer would probably want to know how it came to be where it was: what's the history of it - was it put together in a factory, was it sort of suddenly just gelled together spontaneously, how did it come to be where it is, what's its history?"

"Now those are the sorts of questions that a scientist would ask about a bat or a hedgehog or a human, and we've got a long way to go. But a great deal of progress has been made. We really do understand a lot about how we and rats and pigeons work.

"I've spoken only of the mechanism of a

living thing. There's a whole other set of questions about the history of living things, because each living thing comes into the world through being born or hatched, so you have to ask: where did it get its structure from? It got it largely from its genes. Where do the genes come from? From the parents, the grand-parents, the great-grand-parents. You go on back through the history, back through countless generations of history, through fish ancestors, through worm-like ancestors, through protozoa-like ancestors, to bacteria-like ancestors."

At this point, Sheena McDonald interjected: "But the end point of this process would simply be an understanding of the physical world."

Dawkins: "What else is there?"

In response to further questions, Dawkins went on: "A creator who created the universe or set up the laws of physics so that life would evolve or who actually supervised the evolution of life...would have to be some sort of super-intelligence, some sort of megamind. That mega-mind would have had to be present right at the start of the universe.

"The whole message of evolution is that complexity and intelligence and all the things that would go with being a creative force come late...as a consequence of hundreds of millions of years of natural selection.

"There was no intelligence early on in the universe. Intelligence arose; it's arisen here, maybe it's arisen on lots of other planets in the universe. Maybe somewhere in some other galaxy there is a super-intelligence so colossal that from our point of view it would be a God. But it cannot have been the sort of God that we need to explain the origin of the universe, because it cannot have been there that early."

McDonald: "So religion is peddling a fundamental untruth?"

Dawkins: "Well, I think it is, yes."

McDonald: "And there is no possibility of there being something beyond our knowing...?"

Dawkins: "No, that's quite different. I think there's every possibility that there might be something beyond our knowing. All I've said is that I don't think there is any intelligence or any creativity or any purposiveness before the first few hundred million years that the universe has been in existence. So I don't think it's helpful to equate that which we don't yet understand with God in any sense that is already understood in the existing religions..."

When Sheena McDonald put to Dawkins the point that "not everybody's life is good, and religion brings them comfort," he

replied: "There are all sorts of things that would be comforting. I expect an injection of morphine would be comforting - it might be more comforting, for all I know. But that's not something that's comforting is not that it's true."

McDonald: "You have rejected religion and you have written about and positioned your own answers to the fundamental questions of life, which are - very crudely - that we are hedgehogs and bats and trees and genes, driven by genetic and non-genetic replicators. Now...what does that mean?"

Dawkins: "Replicators are things that make copies of themselves made. It's a very powerful - it's hard to realise what a powerful thing it was when the first self-replicating entity came into the world.

"Nowadays, the most important self-replicating entities we know are DNA molecules. The original ones probably weren't DNA molecules, but they did something similar. Once you've got self-replicating entities, things that make copies of themselves, you get a population of them."

McDonald: "In that very raw description, what makes us - what makes us us? We are more than collections of inherited genes, each fighting to make its way by the way of the fittest."

Dawkins: "Yes. If you ask me, as a scientist, to say how do I react to the idea of being a vehicle for DNA? It doesn't sound very romantic, does it, it doesn't sound the sort of vision of life that a poet would have, and I'm quite happy, quite ready to admit that I'm not thinking about science I'm thinking in very different ways. It is a very good insight to say we are vehicles for our genes. We are hosts for DNA parasites which are genes. Those are insights which help us understand an aspect of life.

"But it's emotive to say, that's all that to it, we might as well give up going to Shakespeare plays and give up listening to music and things, because that's not what you do with it, that's an entirely different subject."

McDonald: "Let's talk about listening to music and going to Shakespeare plays. You coined a word to describe all these various activities which are not genetically replicating process."

Dawkins: "Yes, there are cultural entities which replicate in something like the same way as DNA does. The spread of the habit of wearing a baseball hat backwards is something that has spread around the world like an epidemic, it's like a small epidemic. You could actually do epidemics."

fundamental untruth

TELEVISION audience of around 600,000 heard the spread of religion likened to the dissemination of rabies and of the AIDS virus when Dr Richard (*The Selfish Gene*) Dawkins interviewed by Sheena McDonald in the popular Channel 4 series *The Vision Thing* on August 15. *The Freethinker* is in, too...

the reverse baseball hat. It rises to a peak, and I sincerely hope it will soon...

wearing a reverse baseball hat – as far as there is no good reason for that. One reason because one sees one's friends do it, and that's all. So it's like a measles epidemic, it really spreads from brain to brain to brain.

Dawkins had agreed that he would put voting intentions into that bracket, and he asked: "What about facing the fact that praying to Allah five times a day?"

McDonald: "Well, that's a better example. It spreads, on the whole, in a horizontal way like a measles epidemic. It spreads in a horizontal way down the generations.

That kind of thing, I think, spreads down the generations because children at that age are very vulnerable to suggestion. They tend to believe what they're told, and there are very good reasons for that. It is easy to give a Darwinian explanation why children should be equipped with brains that listen to what adults tell them. After all, they have to learn a language, and learn a lot else besides – why wouldn't they believe it if they are told that they have to pray in a certain

way if they're told that not only do they have to behave in such a way, but when they are told it is their duty to pass on the same way to their children...once you've got the recipe, that really is a recipe for the spread on and on down the generations. It doesn't matter how silly the original instruction is if you tell it with sufficient conviction to sufficiently young and gullible children so that when they grow up they pass it on to their children, then it will pass on and it will spread, and that could be the explanation."

McDonald: "But religion is a very successful meme. I mean, in your own structures of culture that survive – the ones with the most selfish and successful genes presumably have some merit. Now if religion is a meme which has survived over thousands of years, is it not possible that it has some intrinsic merit in that?"

Dawkins: "Yes, there is merit in it. If you

ask the question, why does any replicating entity survive over the years and the generations, it is because it has merit.

"But merit to a replicator just means that it's good at replicating. The rabies virus has considerable merit, and the AIDS virus has enormous merit. These things spread very successfully, and natural selection has built into them extremely effective methods of spreading.

"In the case of rabies virus, it causes its victims to foam at the mouth, and the virus is actually spread in saliva. It causes them to bite and to become aggressive, so they tend to bite other animals, and the saliva gets into them and it gets passed on. This is a very, very successful virus, it has very considerable merit. It also makes them wander far and wide, so they tend to spread the virus over a very great distance.

"In a way, the whole message of the meme and gene idea is that merit is defined as goodness at getting itself spread around, getting itself passed on, goodness at self-replication. That's of course very different from merit as we humans might judge it."

McDonald: "You've chosen an analogy there for religion which a lot of them would find rather hurtful – that it's like an AIDS virus, like a rabies virus."

Dawkins: "I think it's a very good analogy; I'm sorry if it's hurtful. I'm trying to explain why these things spread; and I think it's like a chain letter, and it is the same kind of stick and carrot. It's not, probably, deliberately thought out. I could write out on a piece of paper, 'Make two copies of this paper and pass them to friends.' I could give it to you. You would read it and make two copies and pass them, and they make two copies, and it becomes four copies, eight copies, 16 copies. Pretty soon the whole world would be knee-deep in these papers.

"But of course there has to be some sort of inducement, so I would have to add something like this: 'If you do not make two copies of this bit of paper and pass it on, you will have bad luck, or you will go to hell, or some dreadful misfortune will befall you.' And I think that if we start with a chain letter and then say, well, the chain letter principle is too simple in itself, but if we then sort of

build upon the chain letter principle and look upon more and more sophisticated inducements to pass on the message, we shall have a successful explanation."

The "sophisticated inducements" could include the B Minor Mass and the St Matthew Passion, said Dawkins: "I mean, they're pretty good stuff, they're very, very sophisticated and very, very beautiful – stained glass windows, Chartres Cathedral, they work, and no wonder they work. I mean, they're beautifully done, beautifully crafted.

"But I think what you're asking is: does the success of religion down the centuries imply that there must be some truth in its claims? I don't think that is necessary at all, because I think that there are plenty of other good explanations which do a better job."

McDonald: "Does it exasperate you that people find more pleasure and inspiration in Chartres or Beethoven or indeed great mosques than they do in the anatomy of the lizard?"

Dawkins: "No, not at all...I think they are very, very great experiences, and scientific understanding is on a par with them."

McDonald: "And, yet, these great artistic achievements have been impelled by untruths"

Dawkins: "Just think how much greater they would have been if they had been impelled by truth."

As the programme neared its end, Dawkins said: "I've tried to convey the excitement, the exhilaration of getting inside your head before you die as complete a picture of the world and the universe in which you live as possible.

"You have it in your power to make inside your head a pretty good model of the universe in which you live. It's going to be temporary, you're going to die, but it would be the best way you could spend your time in the universe, to understand why you're there and place as accurate a model of the universe as you can inside your head..."

Asked how one prepared for death in a world without God, Dawkins replied: "You prepare for it by facing up to the truth, which is that life is what we have, and so we had better live our life to the full while we have it, because there is nothing after it...we ought to use our brief time in the sunlight to maximum effect by trying to understand things and get as full a vision of the world and life as our brains allow us to..."

● Richard Dawkins' 1992 Voltaire Lecture *Viruses of the Mind* is obtainable from the British Humanist Association, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP at £2, plus 19p postage.

Blast from the past: Number 21

The media is making much of the allegedly Christian origins of British Labourism following the election of yet another superstitionist – Tony Blair – to the party's top job. However, as Bill McIlroy notes on the page opposite, not all the Socialist pioneers were believers – Robert Blatchford (1851-1943) being an important case in point. This month's Blast is edited from Blatchford's *God and My Neighbour*, published by the Clarion Press in 1903.

CHRISTIANITY as a religion must, I am told, stand or fall with the claims that Christ was divine, and that He rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven...

Christians are fond of saying that the Resurrection is one of the best attested facts in history. I hold that the evidence for the Resurrection would not be listened to in a court of law, and is quite inadmissible in a court of cool and impartial reason...

We should demand stronger evidence in support of a thing alleged to have happened 1,000 years ago than we should demand in support of a fact alleged to have happened yesterday. The Resurrection is alleged to have happened 18 centuries ago.

We should demand stronger evidence in support of an alleged fact which was outside human experience than we should demand in support of a fact common to human experience. The incarnation of a God in human form, the resurrection of a man or a God from the dead, are facts outside human experience...

We should demand stronger evidence in support of an alleged fact when many persons were known to have strong political, sentimental, or mercenary motives for proving the fact alleged, than we should demand when no serious interest would be affected by a decision for or against the fact alleged. There are millions of men and women known to have strong motives – sentimental, political, or mercenary – for proving the verity of the Resurrection...

We are asked to believe that the all-powerful external God, the God who created 20 millions of suns, came down to earth, was born of a woman, was crucified, was dead, was laid in a tomb for three days, and then came to life again, and ascended into Heaven.

What is the nature of the evidence produced in support of this tremendous miracle? Is there any man or woman alive who has seen God? No. Is there any man or woman alive who has seen Christ? No. No historian claims that any God has been seen on earth for nearly 19 centuries...

There is no reason why God should have come down to earth, to be born of a woman, and die on the cross. He could have convinced and won over mankind without any such act. He has not convinced nor won over mankind by that act. Not one-third of mankind are professing Christians to-day, and of those not one in ten is a true Christian and a true believer.

The Resurrection, therefore, seems to have been unreasonable, unnecessary, and futile. It is also contrary to science and to human experience...

The common idea...is the idea that the Gospels

INADMISSIBLE EVIDENCE

were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were contemporaries of Christ; and that the Gospels were written and circulated during the lives of the authors...

There is no evidence, outside the New Testament, that any of the Apostles ever existed. We know nothing about Paul, Peter, John, Mark, Luke, or Matthew, except what is told in the New Testament. Outside the Testament there is not a word of historical evidence of the divinity of Christ, of the virgin birth, of the Resurrection or Ascension.

Therefore it is obvious that, before we can be expected to believe the tremendous story of the Resurrection, we must be shown overwhelming evidence of the authenticity of the Scriptures...Suppose the case to come before a judge. Let us try to imagine what would happen:

COUNSEL: M'lud, may it please your ludship. It is stated by Paul of Tarsus that he and others worked miracles.

JUDGE: Do you intend to call Paul of Tarsus?

COUNSEL: No, m'lud. He is dead.

JUDGE: Did he make a proper sworn deposition?

COUNSEL: No, m'lud. But some of his letters are extant, and I propose to put them in.

JUDGE: Are these letters affidavits? Are they witnessed and attested?

COUNSEL: No, m'lud.

JUDGE: Are they signed?

COUNSEL: No, m'lud.

JUDGE: Are they in the handwriting of this Paul of Tarsus?

COUNSEL: No, m'lud. They are copies; the originals are lost.

JUDGE: Who was Paul of Tarsus?

COUNSEL: M'lud, he was the apostle to the Gentiles.

JUDGE: You intend to call some of these Gentiles?

COUNSEL: No, m'lud. There are none living.

JUDGE: But you don't mean to say – how long has this shadowy witness, Paul of Tarsus, been dead?

COUNSEL: Not two thousand years, m'lud.

JUDGE: Thousand years dead? Can you bring evidence to prove that he was ever alive?

COUNSEL: Circumstantial, m'lud.

JUDGE: I cannot allow you to read the alleged statements of a hypothetical witness who is acknowledged to have been dead for nearly two thousand years. I cannot admit the alleged letters of Paul as evidence.

COUNSEL: I shall show that the act of resurrection was witnessed by one Mary Magdalene, by a Roman soldier...

JUDGE: What is the soldier's name?

COUNSEL: I don't know, m'lud.

JUDGE: Call him.

COUNSEL: He is dead, m'lud.

JUDGE: Deposition?

COUNSEL: No, m'lud.

JUDGE: Strike out his evidence. Call Mary Magdalene.

COUNSEL: She is dead, m'lud. But I shall show that she told the disciples...

JUDGE: What she told the disciples is not evidence.

COUNSEL: Well, m'lud, I shall give the statements of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Matthew states very plainly that...

JUDGE: Of course you intend to call Matthew?

COUNSEL: No, m'lud. He is – he is dead.

JUDGE: It seems to me that to prove this resurrection you will have to perform a great many more. Are Mark and John dead, also?

COUNSEL: Yes, m'lud.

JUDGE: Who were they?

COUNSEL: I – I don't know, m'lud.

JUDGE: These statements of theirs, to which you allude; are they in their own handwriting?

COUNSEL: May it please your ludship, they did not write them. The statements are not given as their own statements, but only as statements

"according to them." The statements are really copies of translations of copies of translations of statements supposed to be based upon what

someone told Matthew, and...

JUDGE: Who copied and translated, and re-copied and re-translated this hearsay evidence?

COUNSEL: I do not know, m'lud.

JUDGE: Were the copies seen and revised by the authors? Did they correct the proofs?

COUNSEL: I don't know, m'lud

JUDGE: Don't know? Why?

COUNSEL: There is no evidence that the documents had ever been heard of until long after the authors were dead.

JUDGE: I never heard of such a case. I cannot allow you to quote these papers. They are not evidence. Have you any witnesses?

COUNSEL: No, m'lud.



DOWN TO EARTH

with Bill McIlroy



Time to count those spoons?

JUST as the Militant Tendency slips into the background, the Pious Tendency in the Labour Party comes to the fore.

It seems oddish, even perverse, that Labour leader Tony Blair and some members of the Shadow Cabinet are making a public show of their Christian faith. Religion is not a vote winner in Britain. The churches and their front organisations have campaigned against social reforms promoted by the left and centre; surveys reveal widespread indifference and even hostility to religion; the menace of fundamentalism is increasingly being recognised.

And there is always that healthy suspicion of political and religious enthusiasm, neatly defined by Conor Cruise O'Brien as "people's irresistible inclination to count the spoons when they hear a politician going on about how religious he is" (*The Independent*, July 22).

Two factors have stimulated the current rash of religious fervour in Labour circles. First, the emotional impact of John Smith's death and the publicity spin-off which did the Christian Socialist Movement no harm at all. Secondly, being seen to be on the side of the angels is a shrewd tactical move by a Labour leadership out to capture the moral high ground (not a particularly difficult operation after 15 years of Conservative rule).

Tony Blair's proclamation of faith has revived assertions that Christianity inspired the Labour movement. Religious apologists have no qualms about distorting historical fact. They brazenly claim credit for reforms which were achieved in the teeth of fierce opposition by the Christian churches.

Certainly there were individual Christians who bravely supported the Labour movement in its early days. But they were exceptional. True to form, the main body of Christianity denounced organised labour as it did those who campaigned for the 1832 Reform Act and other reforming measures. Though it was to be expected that the established Anglican church would be "the most servile and efficient agent of tyranny" (Lecky), it should not be forgotten that the Methodists were "the bitterest foes of freedom" (Cobbett).

While Christian supporters of reforms were castigated by the clergy and churches, life was even more difficult for "infidels,"

as atheists, agnostics and freethinkers were generally known. Nevertheless, they played a crucial role in keeping radicalism alive during the years between the collapse of Chartism in the late 1840s and the rise of the trade unions in the 1880s and 1890s. Unbelievers were often key figures in co-operatives, workers' institutes and movements for a proper education system.

Of course, it would be possible to match name-for-name religious believers and irreligious unbelievers who inspired and influenced the Labour movement.

One of the most influential unbelievers was Robert Blatchford, Editor of *The Clarion* and author of *Merrie England*. He was also the author of *God and My Neighbour*, described by Nicolas Walter as "one of the most effective works of atheist propaganda published in this country" (*New Statesman and Society*, August 26).

Robert Blatchford left readers in no doubt about his rejection of Christianity. "The greatest curse of humanity is ignorance," he wrote. "The only remedy is knowledge. Religion, being based on fixed authority, is naturally opposed to knowledge."

One trusts it is not politically incorrect to say "Amen" to that.

Charity begins on Monday

THE crusade to keep Sunday gloomy has been singularly unsuccessful of late. Sabbatarianism may expect to be let down by ungodly politicians and media commentators. But when the Almighty turns a deaf ear to their supplications (prayer marathons were a feature of the recent campaign against Sunday shopping) it is hardly surprising that champions of "our Lord and his day" should feel down in the mouth.

But every cloud has a silver lining and news of an uplifting triumph for Sunday observers is to hand. Oddly enough, it was effected not by the Lord's Day Observance Society or the Keep Sunday Special Campaign but by Christian Aid.

The charity's Belfast branch refused to accept its share of the takings at a Fun Run to help victims of the civil war in Rwanda. They would not accept tainted money, however worthy the cause. The Fun Run was held on a Sunday and a Christian Aid spokesman explained: "People have to live by their principles."

Victims of war, famine and disease will no doubt appreciate the Belfast Sunday

observers' strict adherence to their religious principles.

Ad... nauseam

A FURTHER example of Christian charitable-ness comes from the other side of the religious divide.

The *Catholic Times* has withdrawn advertisements for UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund) following protests by "pro-lifers." The advertisement moved Birmingham reader A Gerard to complain that "a so-called Catholic newspaper should accept blood money from such an organisation is disgusting." Donations and bequests to UNICEF "are used for the most part to supply abortion machines and family planning aid to third world countries."

The *CT* Editor added a placatory note: "UNICEF devotes a very tiny proportion of its resources to contraception, not abortion... On the other hand, I have seen the vast amount of good work it has done."

UNICEF has been involved in health, education and welfare programmes for children in more than 100 countries. It has been particularly concerned for those in areas of military conflict, and for victims of child abuse in South Asia and Latin America.

But good work or no, Una Hopkins, writing from County Mayo in church-ridden Ireland, declared that UNICEF is "guilty as accused." Its offences include sponsorship of the 1987 conference on Better Health for Women and Children Through Family Planning. Una Hopkins recalled how *Humanae Vitae* decreed that "sterilisation... and all artificial contraceptives" are forbidden by the Roman Catholic Church.

Dr Peggy Norris, of the pro-life-at-any-price lobby, weighed in. "UNICEF is involved in population control programmes," she wrote, referring to its association with organisations like the International Planned Parenthood Federation and The Population Council. She added: "I feel Catholic newspapers should not give UNICEF advertising space."

Dr Norris urged the faithful to donate money to Catholic organisations and missions. She assured Roman Catholics: "Our Church is the biggest provider of health care worldwide." In fact it is probably the biggest cause of mental ill-health worldwide, not least among the thousands of young people who have been sexually abused by priests.

A final word from the Editor of the *Catholic Times*: "The advertisement will not appear again."

YOU'RE TELLING US!

Cruelty and rascality

ALLUDING to Bill McIlroy's review of *The Cruelties of Atheism* by Dr Peter Masters ("Down to Earth," July), it is not the first time during my long membership of the National Secular Society that a crude and vulgar publication attacking Atheism has emanated from the Christian fold.

Echoing the words of a previous Editor of *The Freethinker*, such malignancy by a professional Christian is worthy of his creed. Why should one resort to Atheism when a religion alleged to be such a power for good should have so easily accommodated itself to every form of cruelty and rascality? When it came to burning, flaying alive, torturing on the rack, the Inquisition needed no resource to Atheism. In every country, we have records of religious cruelty and of pious rascals who have figured in the financial world and pious criminals who fill our prisons; it was not necessary to adopt Atheism. Even in Croatia in the Second World War, Catholic priests murdered members of the Serb population when they refused to be converted to Roman Catholicism and one Franciscan monk was the Commandant of the notorious Jasenovac concentration camp. Even God had an "angelic atom bomb" when 185,000 soldiers died in a single night (2 Kings XIX 35).

I deny that *any* opinion is entitled to respect. An opinion concerning the most "sacred" subject being no more deserving of respect than an opinion concerning the equator. Overall, why should one have any reverence for a falsehood? The fact that heretics are no longer burnt, as Tony Benn relates, is a compliment to Atheism that it has taken such a great part in humanising religion.

Throughout its history, Christianity has never been able to manufacture an ethic to control the activities of mankind.

As for the letter from the Rev Colin Gibson (July), it is obvious that when the opinions and feelings of others, such as Atheists, do not run identical to his own, they are assailed with the utmost ferocity by ridicule, sarcasm and abuse. When his own are attacked, he demands gentleness and consideration.

The Atheist is then solemnly reminded that he is dealing with a sacred subject and has no right to outrage people's feelings by attacking religious beliefs. The Christian Church even has a "blasphemy curtain" as a back-up. The suggestion by Mr Gibson that believers are stupid, gullible or pathetic is not the message of *The Freethinker* and can be dismissed as a mere parsonic aside. Being stupid, gullible or pathetic is widespread in society among all manner of people.

The fight espoused by *The Freethinker* is in the World of Ideas, one of its principal axioms being the denial of authority in matters of opinion. For well nigh 2,000 years, society has been dominated by religious thought forms, enforced by religious institutions and the State

and it is really an uphill fight to extricate oneself from the mire of superstitions and dogma.

JOHN H CHARLES
Devon

Land of Israel

I WOULD like to thank Mr Wilkerson for his friendly criticism of my article (page 124, August), and to reply to one or two points he raises.

I do not think I have any anti-Jewish bias. I have had more Jewish than Arab friends, and have been treated with friendliness when travelling in Israel. However, when I need a name to define the area between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean I use the word Palestine, because Israel means either the Northern kingdom during the dual monarchy, which excludes Jerusalem and the country south of it, or the modern state of Israel, which has existed only during the last 50 years. I think it would be misleading to say that the Crusaders fought in Israel, and incorrect to say that they fought in Canaan. Palestine as a name is well established. Actually, Israel has a slight priority, for a tribe called Israel is mentioned in an Egyptian inscription of 1224, and the Philistines probably occupied the coastal area in 1193. I did not mention the Maccabees because they do not affect the Children of Abraham argument, and also because their tradition was continued by the early Christians and so is better included in the history of the Roman period.

I ought to have suggested that there was a Jewish element among the Khazars. They must have learned their new religion from immigrants, and many Jews were among the scholars who fled from the Arab conquest of Khoresm; they obtained leading positions among the Khazars. Eisler suggested that their edition of Josephus contained information not available in the Western text. They may have provided the Cohens and Levis. They may have represented a pre-exilic tradition which was less opposed to foreign marriages. But Jewish genes are not likely to have made an enormous contribution in a Khazar horde.

Of course ancient Israelites are a negligible element in modern Palestine. So are the ancient Greeks in modern Greece (or should I really call it Hellas?), or the ancient British in modern England. Physical inheritance has very little importance in history.

Finally, I said that the Land of Israel was not a gift from God. Is it really a defence to say that it was won by armed robbery?

C R WASON
Bridgwater

RPA and the world

THE letter from Robin Wood of the Humanist

Society of Scotland (July) includes the statement that all four of the London-based humanist organisations are "English."

This may be largely true of the British Humanist Association, the National Secular Society, and the South Place Ethical Society, whose titles have national or local connotations, like the Humanist organisations in Scotland and Ireland (North or South), but it is not equally true of the Rationalist Press Association.

Although we have English headquarters and use the English language, throughout the century of our existence we have been a consciously international organisation. A large proportion of our members and supporters have always come not only from all over the British Isles but also from other English speaking countries and indeed from the rest of the world. Our Honorary Associates have included Zola, Haeckel, Lombroso, Branford Clemenceau, Malinowski, Darrow, Dewey, Pavlov, Freud, Einstein, Chandrasekhar, Monod and Conor Cruise O'Brien, and we have always taken an active part in the international freethought movement. At the moment about a quarter of our mailing-list is overseas and we take very seriously our commitment to thinkers of all lands.

NICOLAS WALTER
Managing Director
Rationalist Press Association

Vatican's iron fist

I WOULD be grateful if your correspondent J M Tolhurst (page 119, July), who is critical of what I wrote about the views of F A Ridley and Joseph McCabe on the Roman Catholic Church at the end of the Second World War would answer two questions:

First, where did McCabe state that the United States would depend on the Vatican to play a decisive part in the maintenance of European capitalism after 1945?

Second, in accomplishing this objective where does McCabe provide an analysis of the key role of the Christian Democratic parties of France, Germany and Italy?

I have re-read Joseph McCabe's *The Pope in Politics* without finding any evidence for what Tolhurst claims.

It may well be that, as he says, McCabe's knowledge of Catholicism was greater than F A Ridley's. But Ridley's advantage was that he possessed a greater knowledge of world politics and therefore could more clearly see developments in perspective. Secrets of the Second World War that have subsequently emerged acquire fresh significance in terms of Ridley's approach.

For example, one of the most barbaric régimes was that of the Ustashi in Croatia. Mass murder, rapes, torture were commonplace. Its leader, Ante Pavelic, had habits that

From Page 148

hardly pleasant. By his desk in his government office, there was a wastepaper basket containing the eyes of Serbs he had slaughtered, presumably to give him further inspiration. Yet, in 1945, when the Yugoslavian government asked for his extradition from Austria as a war criminal – actually giving the number and name of the street in Innsbruck where Pavelic was hiding – the Allies refused to extradite. Instead, they allowed him to go to the protective wing of the Vatican. Of course, Pavelic was only one of many war criminals treated in this manner. The big question was: why did the rulers of the West let a world behave in this way? Is it that they have a soft spot for mass murderers? In my opinion, the explanation is quite simple. The United States used the agreement between Taylor had reached with the Pope both to spirit away these monsters of depravity as well as providing a new image for the discredited Italian ruling class. Referring to the post-1945 Italian situation, Professor Gianfranco Poggi wrote: "the only strategy for the defence of the middle and upper-class interests threatened by the potentially subversive claims of the underprivileged is again, have seemed to be the Church's initiative in gathering the 'forces of order' and a Catholic Party." From his own experience, he went on to describe the iron fist hidden beneath the velvet glove – secret Catholic emergency action units" (*gruppi di punta*), an elite body of men, designed for military operations at the Church's command. Not only was Mussolini hated but also the system extended to the businessmen who, for years, had waxed fat from fascism. The traditional Italian parties, tainted by association with *Il Duce*, stood discredited. So the Roman Catholic Church came along and, with help from the United States and Britain, helped to restore the Old Order a lifeline.

(Dr) RAYMOND CHALLINOR
Whitley Bay

Star Trek solemnity

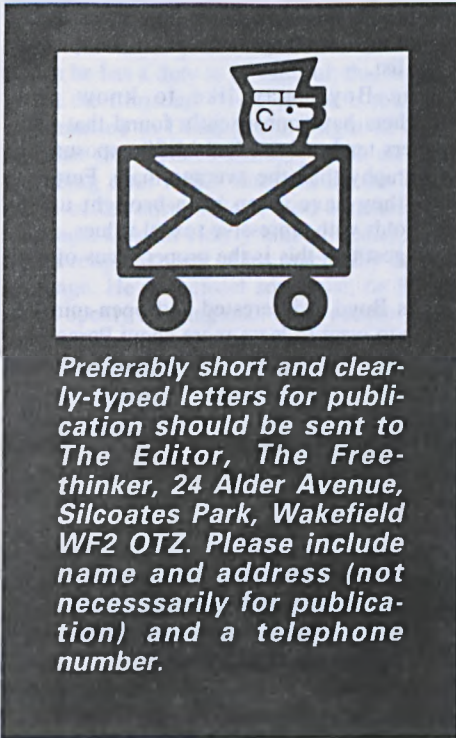
SUPPOSE it is possible to become too solemn on the subject of *Star Trek*, which is, after all, a popular series meant only to entertain. But Arthur Chappell's article (June) seems to me to be off-track, or *Trek!* Words and deeds don't agree in *Star Trek*. Astronauts have a directive not to interfere with other planets' development, but in fact they do it all the time. This is rather neatly revealed in the few words that preface Mr Chappell's article: "the 'Patterns of Force' episode has the *Enterprise* crew foiling an attempt to re-introduce Nazism on another world." If this isn't a reference I don't know what is – and there are other similar episodes. This is the outsider insisting what's right and what's wrong, presenting itself as rescuing the intervened from

oppression and doing them a good turn; the excuse of imperialism everywhere. It is imperialism as it sees itself – romanticised, sanitised, the "good guys" against a tyranny.

All too reminiscent of the US régime when it bombed Libya, invaded Panama, undermined (and mined) Nicaragua, applied sanctions against Cuba, and is even now rattling the sabre against a "rogue régime" in North Korea?

Perhaps this is taking too seriously a popular and enjoyable programme. Most people will watch it without going too deeply into the whys and wherefores. But it's hard to find those impeccable humanist credentials!

ELSIE KARBACZ
West Mersea



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

MIGHT I be permitted one last comment on *Star Trek*?

In the episode "The Apple," Kirk discovers an actually-existing Utopia; the climate is pleasant, food grows on all the trees, and all the inhabitants are perpetually young and beautiful. This is all possible because the planet's previous inhabitants created a huge subterranean computer called WAAL, which can manipulate natural phenomena, including the climate, botanical cycles, etc. But WAAL perceives the *Enterprise* crewmen as a threat, and turns the planet's phenomena against them; one crewman is killed by poisonous thorns shot out of a plant (another is saved by Spock who takes the thorns meant for him: fortunately his alien blood chemistry saves him), another is killed by lightning, yet another-steps on a rock that explodes like a landmine.

Eventually, Kirk orders WAAL to be destroyed; he calls up a phaser bombardment which destroys WAAL. This causes acute distress to the planet's inhabitants, who explain

that WAAL had put the fruit on the trees and regulated the climate: their protestations are brushed aside by Kirk who tells them that it will do them good to have to overcome their difficulties by themselves and that only in this way is progress possible. He does not seem to think that the people's condition might represent the height of progress on that world. Also, he leaves unsaid that most people are unable to overcome difficulties but are overcome by them; witness the large number of people impoverished by the policy of rolling back the welfare state created in 1948. But those people who advocate such policies would dismiss them as "lazy," "unfit," "holding back the entrepreneurial."

If we assume that Kirk speaks for Roddenberry, then from this episode we can see that although he was an atheist, he was not a humanitarian. He was a "Social Darwinist," that is, a scientific racist.

KEITH ACKERMANN
Tilbury

Pornography and power

IN the continuing debate on pornography, as a mother and a teacher I wish to make a number of points.

Should some Hegelian...Leftie...Rightie...Centristie, whatever, wish to defend porn, he, rarely she, would ignore the difference between soft and hard porn.

Soft porn as a general rule does not involve cruelty, uninformed consent, SM bondage leading to death, snuff, torture, bestiality, kiddy porn etc.

Soft porn is provided on top shelves in newsagents' to the general public at their own charge and at taxpayers' expense to chaps inside. These chaps may or may not have done GBH/ABH/AA/pussy-bashing, etc. These persons are senior males, the usual consumers of porn.

There is no need to be concerned about soft porn, though some think it is insulting to women and increases their subordination. Women should be used to this by now.

Hard core porn is harmful as being intrinsically evil. Just because male religion hijacked morality in the past does not mean that there is no such thing as evil. A definition of hard core porn is as follows: it is cruel to persons forced to view it, imitate it, take part in its practices. See who is in power and who does the coercing.

The persons in power in a domestic situation or a renting situation are usually males. Consider the type of porn which might encourage a senior male, such as Ian Brady, a reader of de Sade, the divine Marquis, and into SM. SM practices might include killing, torturing, forcibly fucking, male or female, gay or straight, child or adult, against such a person's informed consent.

Turn to Page 150

YOU'RE TELLING US!

From Page 149

Consider the paedophile propaganda that viewing kiddy porn and sex with an adult are liberating experiences for a child; also in their terms a child has a right to say "No." It might be a bit difficult for the child to say "No." It would be extra difficult if the child could not speak or if the child were in the tourist centres of the East.

How is it that *The Freethinker* is so inequitable in dealing with children's rights and women's rights and Eastern tourist service trades people's rights?

Can it be that when senior males commit domestic violence (fucking kids or females in an SM perspective because they are stronger physically or have the tenancy in their name etc.) it is a private matter and only a "domestic" after all? Did not Brady and other sadistic killers have stocks of porn? Even literary clever porn can be hard.

Would you say that the abuse of under-age persons by slightly older, but still under-16, persons might be increased by the viewing of hard core? I know that this happens, as a teacher.

In my view, writers so far in *The Freethinker* have conflated soft porn and hard porn. Hard porn, and hard core rap, and similar forms, are all about the inequitable relations of power. They are not about liberty – unless you mean the liberty of killers, paedophiles, renters of under-age boys, persons testing positive who wish to spread their ailment and cruelty-men generally. Many such persons are quite well off; with computers, modems and CB, they could cover their tracks pretty well. When the police search the houses of certain killers, they would not find really hard stuff. This is on "pirate" or computer and would have been disposed of.

In *The Freethinker*, thought is supposed to be a bit free. Well, whose thought is free? Murderers' thoughts? The thoughts of rented lads aged 13 who may be testing positive and certainly smell a little bit? Battered co-habitees' thoughts?

This is not to deny that the Bible is one of the nastiest, most porno in an SM perspective, books ever written, but to deny its validity does not mean that evil cannot exist, unless one agrees with the theoretical perspective of de Sade.

In de Sade's philosophical tale *The Philosopher in the Boudoir*, a nasty old man is trying hard to seduce a reluctant girl. He tells her that there no such thing as morality, as in all the world's cultures throughout time, some practice, no matter how horrible, is OK. The old man was trying to justify his own villainy, just like de Sade.

How about getting in some strong porn and doing an analysis – but do the analysis from the victim's side? I think that those who make any trade in SM, animal and kiddy porn, and put these into practice, should get a life sen-

tence.

Also, do you really think that these traders are interested in liberation and not in cash?

BRENDA ABLE
Croydon

LEAVING aside the question of whether or not the effect of pornography is degrading and dangerous, I would have thought the sexual instinct to be demanding enough not to be in need of artificial titillation. But perhaps not in all?

VIVIEN GIBSON
Ealing

THERE are many things I would rather the "not-completely sane" did not get hold of: matches, guns, knives, cars, children, chainsaws, the Bible, nuclear weapons etc. I doubt that "salacious videos" would come very high on this list.

Jessie Boyd may like to know that researchers have consistently found that sex-offenders tend to have had LESS exposure to pornography than the average male. Furthermore, they have often been brought up in households with repressive sexual values.

I suggest that this is the proper focus of our concern.

If Ms Boyd is interested and open-minded enough to want to learn more about Pornography Effects Studies, she could worse than read *Bad Girls and Dirty Pictures: the Challenge to Reclaim Feminism* edited by Alison Assiter and Avendon Carol (London, Pluto Press, 1993: ISBN 0745305245), which contains an excellent in-depth analysis and discussion of the research.

Assiter and Carol are activists in Feminists Against Censorship, which can be contacted at BM Box 207, London WC1X 3XX.

Ms Boyd's sexual preferences are her own business. Equally, if some people enjoy being filmed having sex, that is THEIR own business. Ms Boyd may well consider such practices to be "sick," but as long as all parties involved are consenting, there are no grounds for demanding that they be made illegal.

DAN J BYE
Rotherham

COUN E GOODMAN in his defence of pornography (August) starts by referring to the UK's "uniquely strict laws against sexually explicit material," but later on negates the "uniquely" by referring to Islamic countries where all sexual material is suppressed.

On the Bulger murder, he refers to the police "clearly stating" that videos had no connection with it. Obviously, the judge had a different view, but his comments were dismissed by a previous correspondent (Dan J Bye, July) as "bizarre and irrelevant." Is it credible that two such young boys could have conceived of, and carried out, with such calculated determination, an act of infant torture and murder without having been subjected to some potent external influence?

As neither myself nor, I am sure, any of your other correspondents, believes this to have

been supernatural in origin, can it be so difficult to see it as motivated by porn/horror material?

As for the videos so enjoyed by convicted killer Robert Black, what difference does it make that such material is illegal in Britain when Coun E Goodman and others desire its legality?

Mr Goodman claims that other European countries where pornography is lawful have fewer sexual assaults, less divorce and single-motherhood than we do. But he doesn't quote his sources for such a sweeping assertion. Each European nation is a differing society, with a variety of factors at work, and probably varied methods of compiling and presenting statistics. In any case, there are lies, damned lies and official statistics. I find it difficult to imagine couples deciding to hold on to an unsatisfactory relationship because they can obtain vicarious pleasure from porn videos (some relationship!).

Equally, my mental scenario capacity is overstretched by trying to relate either female chastity or enhanced knowledge of contraception to access to such material.

But the truly mountainous problem is believing that the unbalanced, violent pervert will be restrained, and not triggered into action, by the material.

I find no difficulty in agreeing with Coun E Goodman about the lamentable conditions for women in Islamic countries. I am, after all, a supporter of Women Against Fundamentalism. Their plight, however, does not seem to me to be relevant to my view on hard porn. I do not, however, see this as a "scapegoat" for society's ills – just as another buy militating against the psychological health of some vulnerable members, or the safety of others.

JESSIE BOYD
Gwent



Time for a change

EDITORIAL policy stands in dire need of overhaul. There's far too much ill-tempered sniping at the religious. They are eccentric people and their beliefs are irrational – we know! So – please – stop using every issue as a soapbox for preaching at the converted.

Nowadays – given the rise of religious fundamentalism and the proliferation of new-fangled cults – sober analysis of religious phenomena rather than mickey-taking may be more relevant.

All religious movements – from Islamic fundamentalism to the Branch Davidians – reflect the psychopathology of the ruling elite. On matters of belief, Ayatollah Khomeini and David Koresh were worlds apart. What they had in common was a compulsion to sacrifice (literally) their followers. The Iran-Iraq war gave Khomeini *carte blanche* to indulge in an orgy of human sacrifice. The mass self-

YOU'RE TELLING US!

From Page 150

Muslim faith (to name only three among many more).

There is, however, a softer, weaker sense of "defend" in this connection and, being the sort of chap he is, one must suppose that this is the sense in which the Prince means to be taken. He could mean that the right to adhere to one's faith must be defended and that no one faith should be deemed superior to others. This, after all, is probably what most people think.

What is not always faced is that such a tolerant multi-faith attitude implies that since any faith is acceptable so no faith need be accepted. To defend the right to adhere to a faith (rather than to defend the obligation to adhere to THE faith) implies an equal right to be agnostic, atheist, humanist or whatever other secularist term you prefer.

Charles Windsor evidently thinks that a marriage that has in practice ended is not one to which he has a duty to be faithful; this is clearly not the Christian view – which is that he is still married to Diana "in the sight of God," and that the declared adultery is no different for being after rather than during the active phase of the still-existent, God-authenticated, marriage. Charles clearly take a secular rather than a religious view of his practically defunct marriage. He is a closet secularist; he should admit openly to being one. Most people would like him just as much if he did and many of us would respect him more for doing it.

What is more, on his view of marriage as defined by his relevant actions, he is no fit person to head the Church of England, as defined by its relevant doctrine.

ERIC STOCKTON
Orkney

God and Space

WITH reference to Charles Ward's article on Space (July), there is a lot to be said on this subject in connection with Christianity.

I came upon one Duane T Grish of the Institute for Creation Research (or Rubbish, as I have come to call it) while on holiday in California in 1989.

A letter of his in a local paper wondered why there were all these heavy metals in the Universe when scientists say we came from stars which are almost all hydrogen and helium.

Despite being a PhD, the man had no knowledge of Space whatsoever. As any amateur astronomer knows, stars like our Sun build up heavy elements via nuclear fusion (through heat and gravity).

When there is too much, which smothers the star, it blows the lot off as a nova and from the debris (recently detected around other nearby stars) planets can form.

Grish believes that the Earth is only 6,000 years old, ignoring the fossil evidence other than to criticise it. While there are obvious proofs that this is nonsense, the best proofs are in Space.

The Bible tells us that almost as an afterthought, the rest of the Universe was made on the fourth day.

This was written when people believed that stars were holes in a black bowl showing the fires of Hell beyond.

Now we know different. Now we can see various radiations (light, radio and so on) from stars so far away that they have taken millions of years to reach us, and from collections of stars (galaxies) a thousand times further showing us that the Universe has been in evidence for some 10 to 20 thousand million years.

Our star, the Sun, is a very insignificant speck among a million, million, million, million other stars.

Why would God make such a colossal thing as the Universe as a backdrop for Earth?

And if it took him six days just to make one puny planet and its effects, leaving him so exhausted that he needed to rest on the seventh day (some say ever since), how long would it take him and his obviously inferior angels to make the whole Universe?

God used to live in the clouds, and this was believable to the people of the day – but when we travelled above the clouds we were told that God is everywhere!

This has become totally unbelievable, considering the size of the Universe and its complexity. Infinity has taken on a whole new meaning.

To exist in the Universe, you have to be made of the so-limited materials of the Universe, so cannot be God. If an infinitely powerful God existed, it (not he) would exist outside our Universe, perhaps capable of destroying it in the blink of an eye but never able to be part of it or to enter it. We would never know of the existence of such a being and could never know of it.

MICHAEL HILL
Neufchâtel-en-Bray

... of Branch Davidians at Waco represented the apotheosis of Koresh's apocalyptic delusions. Death worship – that's what fundamentalist movements and new cults are all about.

... institutionalised death worship – that's the water lurking behind much religion-inspired rage.

... say it again: if Humanism wants to combat the death-worshipping obsession, we had better jettison the knee-jerk sniping and swiping at the religious in general and direct our attacks at religious leaders. Too many brainwash their followers into believing that martyrdom is the noblest of ethical and spiritual ideals.

... Besides, many lukewarm rank-and-file members are potential Humanists. Why not a series of articles at them? I will be more than happy to do the writing.

JOHN DOHENY
London N8

When the flag is waved...

... arguments of Peter Brown and Alister MacIntyre (August), denigrating conscientious objection to the war with Hitler, depend upon a history beginning in 1939.

... However, up to that time, Hitler had much support from countries, including Britain (which he subsequently turned upon) as a bastion against Communism – a system which had weakened their capitalist economies.

... Obviously, COs in all countries, including Germany, were too few in number to influence events, but if one has fundamental principles, they cannot "lay" them "aside" when a flag is waved.

... Had I read history in my youth, I would not have become a CO before I volunteered, and I would not have had a year of afterwards.

... I doubt Peter and Alister wish all Germans to become COs?

ERNIE CROSSWELL
Slough

Princely muddle

... There is some muddle over "Defender of the Faith." Charles wants to opt for "Defender of the Faith" and this raises serious issues which he must judge. His phrase can be taken two ways, one of which is untenable – the other is very right and proper in the modern world – if its implications are grasped and acted upon.

... There is a strong, hard sense of the word "defend," as in "defend the truth of" in advocacy in debate or in a court of law. Clearly, one can, in this sense, defend, say, the Jewish faith AND the Jewish faith AND the

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, Lon-
don WC1X 8SP*

Christian Humanist unfrocked

ANTHONY FREEMAN, late Vicar of St Mark's Church, Staplefield, Sussex, was dismissed by the Bishop of Chichester on July 27 because he had written a book in which he declared that he did not believe in the existence of an "all-powerful interventionist God" or the after-life.

The book, *God in Us*, was published by the Christian SCM Press in September, 1993, a slim volume of less than 100 pages.

He describes how he lost his faith in traditional Christianity and now finds no evidence of a God "out there." To some extent, he reflects the views of the "Sea of Faith" followers, but, whereas Don Cupitt appears disingenuous, shifty and word-quibbling, Freeman is painfully honest.

Remain

He seems to be arguing with himself. There are three pages – 78 to 80 – in which he asks himself what course he should take. He decides to remain in the Church because he loves it. That option has now been taken from him.

He calls himself a Christian Humanist. Perhaps, one day, he will realise that, logically, he has not simply rejected traditional Christianity but Christianity as a whole.

From the Christian point-of-view, one has to agree with the Bishop: Christianity depends

LAST WORD

by Karl Heath

crucially on crucifixion, resurrection, salvation and faith.

Freeman's adherence to a residual Christianity arises from a misunderstanding about the nature of morality – the oft-repeated question: "Without God, how would you know the difference between right and wrong?" We have no such problem. Morality is biological, evolutionary and material in origin. Our species is social and could not have survived in any other way. Since society requires compromises and rules of conduct, "right" is that which sustains and promotes the continuance of society, and "wrong" is that which endangers it.

There is no morality specific to Christianity, so Freeman does not need Christianity.

There is a curious coincidence in his book. On page 32, he writes: "The Church responded by shifting the emphasis from the birth of Jesus to the death of Jesus." Two months before his book was published, in my July,

1993, article in *The Freethinker*, "Christianity is Evil," I wrote: "The politician priests... changed the emphasis from the life of Jesus to the death of Jesus."

Anthony Freeman is to be commended for his honest self-analysis, and he deserves our good wishes for his future career, whatever that may be.

● After Mr Freeman's sacking was announced, George Broadhead issued a Press statement on behalf of Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists, pointing out that the controversy surrounding the event threatened to "muddy the intellectual waters between faith groups and secular organisations."

The statement added: "The Sea of Faith movement, of which Anthony Freeman is a vociferous member, has chosen to describe itself as a 'Christian Humanist' group, but the real Humanists will be keen to disassociate themselves from this. The Sea of Faith movement occupies itself with redefining religious language to the extent that its adherents cannot even agree on a definition of God."

Denying

"Humanism, whose supporters are atheists or agnostics, is a rational secular outlook which considers contemporary moral issues from a non-religious standpoint. There is no overlap with a group of clergy who choose to remain in their positions of influence within the Anglican Church, while publicly denying the truth of the words they use in religious ceremonies."

"In a recent article in *New Statesman & Society*, Sea of Faith members described Humanism as a dead movement. On the contrary it is alive and kicking and provides the real alternative for those who seek to live a fulfilled and happy life without religion."

All together now?

THE Vatican... militant Islam... fundamentalist Protestantism: newly united they stand, on the main anti-humanity issues at least (see page 138 for the gory details), and *The Freethinker* must not fail to take advantage of their offering a bigger if even more threatening target.

Every donation to the fund enables us to direct copies of freethought's voice to where they are most needed: straight into the hands of reason's enemies; to people we have identified as potential supporters; to decision-makers at local, national and international level; to those, particularly in the ethnic minorities, who may be groping for an alternative to superstition.

Please send cheques, POs, stamps to G W Foote & Co., Bradlaugh

House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP.

Many thanks to: N Ball and D G Mitchell, £1 each; B J Van der Sloot, T Golding, J F Chadwick and A Nicholls, £2 each; P C Williamson, £3; R Tee, A W Brigin, P Payne, I G Payne, E M Stone, J C Fogg, R Wood, P Proctor, C M G Wilson, J E Dyke, R Bell, D J Williams, H Madoc-Jones and J McDonald, £5 each; M Hill and H N Feather, £7 each; R Meighan, J B Burman, O Thompson, H D Clifton, M J Fuller, S M Jaiswal, R Lewis and A Glaiser, £10 each; R L Dublon, D Eaton and Lewisham Humanist Group, £15 each; F N Fish, £20; N Ratcliff, £25.

Total for July: £267

Skeptics in conference

THE Sixth European Skeptics Conference will be held at Ostend, Belgium, from September 23 to 25. The theme is *Science, Pseudoscience and the Environment*.

As well as a banquet, skeptical demonstrations and workshops, there will be lectures from international authorities on "The Ecology Movement and Rationality," "Electromog," "The Influence of Politics and Power on Science," "Paranormal Communication and 'Earth Rays'" (provisional list).

There's still time to register, if you hurry. Details from Mike Howgate, 71 Hoppers Road, London N21 3LP.