

The

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Freethinker

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

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SIX COUNTIES SELL-OUT

**Taxes fund
fundamentalists**
- see Page 157

**Moral crusaders
under fire**
- see Page 159

**Swastika and
crucifix**
- see Page 155

UP FRONT

with the Editor

Six counties sell-out

THE Orangemen are right. A many-faceted deal *has* been struck behind their backs, and a united Ireland will emerge from the ceasefire. It won't come next Thursday week: the monster of religious hatred and bloody fanaticism which has served the divide-and-rulers so well from the Plantation on must be handled with circumspection. But now, who can doubt that unity will come, as the Republic's Prime Minister, Albert Reynolds, has hinted, within "a generation" (*The Observer*, September 18)?

The immediate problem is to keep the lid on Orange fury until a *fait accompli* formula for British withdrawal can be concocted.

Bearing in mind that we endure rule by the mendacious – we know that the British Government lied about its talks with the IRA until forced by the media to come clean in November, 1993 – and informed by decades of close contact with politicians, I believe that John Major's seemingly macho insistence on the word "permanent" being added to the IRA's announcement of a "complete ceasefire" is part of the con and is destined for the same shredder as "back to basics" and "yob culture."

It is likely that his people warned the IRA that a fuss would be made about this point – to give Prods the impression that the UK was being tough with the terrorists and to placate the rag-bag of Unionist MPs on which Major relies to prop-up his majority from time-to-time (the vote on Maastricht springs at once to mind).

Likewise, the decision, announced on October 1, to return the Parachute Regiment (responsible for the Bloody Sunday deaths of 13 at the 1972 Derry civil rights march) to the 12,000-strong Northern Ireland garrison is probably part of this time-buying scam: "Look – far from giving in to the IRA, we're sending the Paras back in." This move, too, and the reasons for it will have been signalled in advance to Sinn Féin. (Who is to say, anyway, that the Paras are not going in *just in case the Protestants get out of hand?*)

But why reward centuries of frantic loyalty to the Crown with such a humiliating sell-out?

Answer: the six county hive-off from nine county Ulster isn't profitable any more. In fact, its being in the UK costs taxpayers around £4,000,000,000 a year in subsidies and military costs (*The Guardian*, January 31). An economist chum suggests the figure may be nearer £10 billion, but, even at the lower estimate, it is a lot of money for a

Government which is slashing spending on health, roads and education in its anxiety to reduce the tax bills of its friends.

Once, the six counties were worth hanging on to. Belfast had the largest shipbuilding unit in the world; today, it is no more. The artificial fibres giants long ago reduced to a fragment Ulster's linen industry.

Also, John Bull, in these days of Exocets and Scud missiles and worse, doesn't need a strategically-placed Ireland at his back door, as he did when a Napoleon, a Kaiser, a Hitler or a Stalin might have sneaked in by the rear entrance.

Historically, too, the British had to prevent the emergence of a truly independent Ireland, which would have set a poor example to the rest of the Empire; the Empire has gone the way of the shipbuilding and the linen.

And the United States, with 40-50 million voters of Irish extraction, is insisting on the mess being cleared up – witness the star treatment enjoyed Stateside by Gerry Adams, the new statesman – and when did Britain last fail to jump at the crack of Uncle Sam's whip?

The desire to quit Ireland is influenced, too, by property owners here – notably in London – who are weary of the actuality and the threat of Semtex.

Above all, the multi-nationals who really run things (the Republic alone has 1,000 foreign-owned plants) regard the Border and the bombs as unacceptable impedimenta to thorough exploitation of the island as a whole.

Business people on both sides of the Border pursue common ambitions on questions like energy, tourism and economic co-operation. Money talks – and it says things which infuriate the Paisleys: "For the last three years we have been keen to encourage economic development between North and South. Companies from both sides of the Border have said: 'Why didn't we do this 10 years ago?'"

(Nigel Smith, Director of the CBI in Northern Ireland, *The Observer*, October 2).

We told you so!

NONE OF this will surprise regular readers of *The Freethinker*, which presciently editorialised in March, 1985: "Northern Ireland and its Protestant minority will be abandoned by a future British Government that decides it is too costly to maintain a toehold on what was John Bull's Other Island. Future generations of Protestants, free from the siege mentality on which religious divisiveness thrives, can become a force for progress and reform as they were until the early days of the last century...The independence of Ireland will be complete only when the people decide to establish a secular Republic and to conduct

their lives free from interference by church or clergy."

True, the poison of religious hatred, bigotry and mindless flag-waving has been injected deep into the viscera of the people, and its toxicity is too strong to be eliminated overnight. But we must hope that a younger generation will learn to live with the unavoidable, just as other Lost Tribes – the Boers, the Israeli Jews, the Poor Whites of the American South – are having to do.

The scientific journal *Nature* (October 28, 1993) has a plan which would help to effect this: "The present British and Irish governments are co-operating fruitfully on immediate and even some distant problems. But in case immediate solutions are beyond reach, they need a recipe for the more distant future. Because community separation is reinforced by sectarian education, should that not be abolished in Northern Ireland – even if that means abolishing sectarian education in the rest of the United Kingdom? And why not build on an imaginative scheme by the University of Ulster to build a new campus in Belfast in part of a no-man's land separating the two communities by integrating all of Ireland's universities into a single system? Then at least there would emerge a nucleus of graduates persuaded that there is more to Irish life than its divisions. And there are many other institutions that could be denationalised in this way."

Excellent. And, at the other end of the age range, perhaps American money could fund non-sectarian pre-school nurseries across Ireland, with a similar aim? There was never any shortage of Noraid cash for the IRA: why should it be lacking for such a positive project?

IT IS vital to realise that the Republic itself is changing, slowly, in ways which are threatening its old image as a priest-ridden theocracy, which was so useful to the Northern Orange bigots.

Only 56 per cent of those aged between 18 and 25 now go to Mass each week and the number of religious personnel dropped by nearly a third between 1970 and 1986. As Rebecca Fowler commented in the *Sunday Times* (March 28, 1993): "It is beginning to look as though the sun might be setting on the last great European jewel in the Holy Roman Church."

Fowler reported: "In Dublin last summer they were wearing T-shirts that read: 'Wear a condom. Just in Casey.' In Galway last week the clients of the Waterfront pub were blatantly trooping down to the men's toilets to view a new condom vending machine...Down the road, the city's first abortion helpline has been running for three months." The injection



Turn to Page 167

Swastika and crucifix against enlightenment

BY FASCISM I have always understood any right wing nationalist ideology or movement with an authoritarian and hierarchical structure, fundamentally opposed to democracy and liberalism. At first thought, this places it firmly in the political arena and the connection with religion is not immediately obvious – the more so since the two main exponents of the movement in recent times, Mussolini and Hitler, certainly to begin with, had little time for organised religion and merely used the existing structures to their advantage.

Some quotes by Hitler are frighteningly anti-religious and rationalistic in tone: "The dogma

F A Ridley, a former President of the National Secular Society and one-time Editor of *The Freethinker*, died on March 27 at the age of 97. As Walter Kendall wrote in a Tribune obituary: "Hitler knew his merits – the Gestapo placed him, along with Arthur Koestler and Bertrand Russell, on its 'death list' for Britain." Frank Ridley had der Führer's measure, too – as is clear from our old colleague's *Fascism Down the Ages: From Cæsar to Hitler*. The book (ISBN 0 9511508 2 0) has been reissued by Romer Publications, 170 Brick Lane, London E1 RU, from whom it is available at £4.95.

Review: TONY AKKERMANS

of Christianity gets worn away before the advances of science... Gradually the myths crumble. All that is left is to prove that in nature there is no frontier between the organic and the inorganic. When understanding of the universe has become widespread, when the majority of men know that the stars are not sources of light, but worlds, perhaps inhabited worlds like ours, then the Christian doctrine will be convicted of absurdity... The man who lives in communion with nature necessarily finds himself in opposition to the churches and that's why they're heading for ruin – for science is bound to win." (*Hitler's Table Talk* pp 59-61).

So, when I first came across Frank Ridley's book, I was curious to find out why this redoubtable rationalist and fervent anti-religionist would want to write a whole book about a political movement. The first nine chapters didn't get me much nearer the answer. They appear to be a rehearsal of his earlier work, *Julian the Apostate and the Rise of Christianity*.

For those interested in the early history of Christianity, there is much to savour – for it rapidly becomes clear that Ridley, thanks to his immense reading, is an authority on the period and painstaking in his analysis of how the Christian authoritarian bulwark was erected on the usual pillars of enslavement: fear, ignorance, superstition and violence. At one point, he tantalisingly relates that, but for one critical piece of misfortune befalling his pagan hero, Julian, in the form of a Persian lance during his campaign of 363, the supposedly inevitable triumph of Christianity would have been nipped in the bud. In consequence, modern Europe would have acknowledged Apollo or Odin and not Jesus Christ. Visions of John Selwyn Gummer deserting the temple of Odin to worship at the shrine of Thor!

Progressing to the Middle Ages, Ridley recounts how Torquemada, a Dominican monk and confidant of Catholic monarchs Isabella and Ferdinand, was given a free hand to terrorise those who refused to be baptised – as a result of which, 170,000 Jews were forced to

flee Spain and an estimated 8,800 heretics were burned at the stake.

Next he relates how the founder of the Jesuits, Ignatius Loyola, used the same technique as adopted later by Hitler: the ceaseless reiteration of the supremacy of the will as against the reason. Hitler's famous phrase in which he compared the German nation to a somnambulist walking under the guidance of the will is the near equivalent of Loyola's exhortation to the Jesuits to practise obedience "like a corpse, like a stick in the hand of an old man." The book is richly endowed with striking insights – such as Julius Cæsar, that ancient Mussolini, discovering that one cannot sit on bayonets (javelins) indefinitely.

About the distortions and omissions in the history of the Christian religion, Ridley makes the observation: "Unfortunately history, in particular the history of great events of epochal significance, is usually written by interested parties." And: "Human history, then as now, is largely a recoil from one extreme to the opposite."

In among much Roman Empire anecdote comes the first definition of Fascism: "The essence of a Fascistic system or the authoritarian State at all times and places is that it cannot trust the people or take them into confidence, as it does not express the will of the people or respond to any deep-seated enthusiasm or emotion. From this it follows that it must either disarm the people or reduce them to such a state of complete and spineless apathy that they lose all manliness and all desire to rebel against the system that enslaves them."

Such a definition could only have come from the idealistic perspective of a utopian Socialist. There was little evidence in pre-war Germany of the enslavement of the people. In a 1933 plebiscite, 96 per cent of voters went to the polls and 90 per cent voted for Hitler to take on the mantle of President and Chancellor as well as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, when his intentions by then were becoming widely known. There is a Fascistic streak in

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CONTENTS

| | |
|------------------------------|----------|
| Up Front: | Page 154 |
| Book review: Tony Akkermans | Page 155 |
| Taxpayers fund Bible studies | Page 157 |
| What's On | Page 158 |
| GALHA conference report | Page 159 |
| Hell's below | Page 160 |
| Saintly way with heretics | Page 162 |
| Down to Earth: Bill McIlroy | Page 163 |
| You're telling us! Letters | Page 164 |
| Last Word: | Page 168 |

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Swastika and crucifix

• From Page 155

many people and it is as well to be aware of it.

Ridley is on firmer ground when, much later in the book, he acknowledges that for Fascism to flourish the seed must be sown in fertile soil: "Just as the Fascism of Hitler strove by every means in its power to attach itself to the superstitions and prejudices of the masses, for example Neo Paganism, anti-Semitism and so forth, so the totalitarian state of the antiquity of which Aurelian was the original founder, also fed upon and encouraged the delusions of the masses. Similarly the State sought to turn them to its own advantage."

From this point onwards, I found the book much more digestible and interesting. What stands out particularly is Ridley's deep understanding of the ability of the Roman Catholic Church, contrary to popular belief, to subtly move with the times and tide. He argues that it would be as rash to assume that the RC church will founder in the heavy seas that accompany the crises of the 20th Century as it would have been in earlier centuries – when the great discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo and Darwin should have buried its doctrines below the weight of science forever.

He makes the telling point that as the antithesis of Darwinism in its dogmatic creed and

world outlook, the Roman Catholic Church is in fact a splendid example of Darwinian evolution in action, in that its will to survive is equalled only by its supreme efficiency in locating and following a path that leads to a happy escape. Far from being the monolithic unyielding rock of unchanging truth, the Vatican is a model example of Machiavellian opportunism.

How true this is was demonstrated again recently when, 50 years on, the Vatican finally acknowledged its unsavoury role in its dealings with the German and Italian Fascists. Had he lived to witness it, Frank Ridley would have been entitled to yet another "I told you so." Having collected the expected kudos for this gallant feat of expiation, similar to what it asks its followers to perform in the confession box, the RC Church is now free to commit its next act of authoritarian suppression with impunity.

In the course of the book, Ridley remorselessly exposes the inextricable link between Catholicism and Fascism through the ages. He defines Fascism as a species of political Catholicism and Catholicism as ecclesiastical Fascism. The two crosses, the pagan swastika and the Christian cross, marching together in defence of all gods against the creed of enlightenment.

The common enemy of both systems is

human evolution and its interpreter, human thought. The first law of Catholicism and Fascism is the "Law against dangerous thoughts." How ready the Vatican still is to drag civilisation back to the Middle Ages was demonstrated yet again in 1953 when, in a *concordat* with Franco, the Catholic faith was given the status of sole official religion of Spain. Its dogmas and rites acquired the protection of the Criminal Law against any kind of hostile criticism and all forms of non-Catholic religion were forbidden to proselytise or to hold public meetings.

In Franco's Spain as recently as the 1970s the ghost of Torquemada was on the loose once more. The Inquisition and its *autos da fé* were only just around the corner. A measure of the type of people who used to uphold that régime can be gauged from a remark by Blas Pinar, leader of the Francoesque *Fuerza Nueva*: "We are not a violent party. Every time you see someone carrying a bicycle chain does not mean he is a member of *Fuerza Nueva*. It could be a bicycle chain manufacturer on his way home."

The atrocities committed by the Fascist Catholic *Ustashi* in Yugoslavia during the Second World War are a direct cause of the current problems in that unfortunate country.

My earlier misconception about the author's intentions could have been readily prevented had the book been given a more appropriate title. *Roman Catholicism and Fascism – the Unholy Alliance* would have been more to the point.

As a Socialist, Ridley is clear that Catholicism and Socialism are mutually exclusive. This was also the opinion of Pope Pius XI: "Religious Socialism, Christian Socialism, are expressions implying a contradiction in terms. No one can be at the same time a sincere Catholic and a true Socialist." Not much comfort there for some Labour MPs – particularly when the maker of this statement has the small matter of infallibility in his favour!

Despite his strong awareness of the almost limitless capacity of vested interest religion to find a way of clinging on to its power-base, Ridley remains optimistic about the long-term outlook: "If the successive crises of earlier ages cut down the superabundant foliage that grew in tropical luxuriance on the tree of the supernatural, the crisis of today tracks the very origins of religious belief to their source in the diseased roots of human society and then proceeds to make an end of them altogether. Christianity, particularly most rooted in the dark unconscious of the past, is threatened today with extinction and with relegation to the museum of prehistoric curiosities and its passing would of necessity drag down the institutions which have grown up in its shadow."

It is a pity that, despite his great age, Frank Ridley did not live to see this come about. Whether some of us will be more fortunate in our lifetimes remains to be seen.

No tax funds for atheism!

THE fund has enjoyed a welcome – and necessary – boost this month. Obviously, more readers are realising that every pound contributed is an atheistical blow for reason against Christian, Islamic and Jewish superstition.

It is only the generosity of our readers which keeps *The Freethinker* going: unlike obscurantist Bible colleges – see page 157 – we cannot expect the taxpayer to underwrite our activities.

A bigger fund total would allow us to produce a bigger 'paper' – once again, much material has had to be held over – and to promote and advertise it. Think of the effect of, say, a doubled circulation of *The Freethinker*!

The fact that so many readers are contributing to the letters pages is proof that the 'paper is a *living* part of Freethought life. What we need now is a shared conviction that the journal should be made available to a wider audience – and that desire can be translated into cash terms.

Please send cheques, POs, stamps to: G W Foote & Co., Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP.

Many thanks to: T Liddle and D Probert, £1 each; M Carter, V Gibson, G Goldsmith, A Gore, J Hayward, M Hasan, F Hoare, J Hutton and W Stirling, £2 each; D Pickett, £2.50; D J Bye, C Holt, Hussain and F McKay, £3 each; A McQuaid, £4; C Ablethorpe, F Albers, J Aldam, R A Cobb, A Fonseca, W Grant, D Hartley, W Hill, H Hinchliffe, H Jack, J Lippitt, H Madoc-Jones, H Middleton, J Patterson, C Pinel, J Radford, P Rogers, P Fell, M Smith and K Wootton, £5 each; S Anderson, £7; G Airey, T Bowen, M Ewing, M Frazer, E Gwinnell, R Hale, A Hawkins, E Haslam, M Irvine, P Mottram, A Negus, I Morris, F Pidgeon, F Seward, J Spence, D N Towers and A Varlet, £10 each; M Kirby, £11; P Lancaster and J Wright, £15 each; I Chandler, M Powell, M Roskolowska and C Wilshaw, £20 each; O D'Arcy, £40; C Darroch and D Harper, £50 each.

Total for August £576.50

Taxpayers fund the fundamentalists

USE of taxpayers' money to fund the teaching of evangelical Christianity has been exposed by the authoritative *Times Higher Education Supplement*.

The journal points out (July 15) that only months after the Government placed a strict limit on numbers in publicly-funded universities and colleges, it "designated theological degree courses at two private Bible colleges run by small religious sects."

Their students are receiving mandatory awards from this September.

Mattersey Hall, located near Doncaster and owned and controlled by the Assemblies of God, part of the Pentecostal movement, will admit more than 100 students this year to read for a degree in Biblical Theology. The course has been validated by Sheffield University and was designated by John Patten, then Secretary of State for Education, in April.

Another Pentecostal college, Cheshire-based Elim Bible College, received designated status in March for the degree of Theology and Christian Ministry, which has been validated by the Open University. Nineteen students who have already completed diploma and certificate courses at the college will complete one more year to earn the degree.

The *Times Higher Education Supplement* reveals: "Elim will have 16 British students in the third year and around 80 per cent of the students at Mattersey Hall will be British. These will be entitled to £840 towards tuition fees (£2,325), means-tested maintenance grants worth up to £2,000 (board and lodging costs £1,695), and student loans of £1,000 per year repayable only after the students reach an annual income of £12 000 a year."

A further five per cent of Mattersey Hall students will come from Europe and be entitled to the basic £840 grant.

Mattersey Hall says it has no "denomina-

tional hurdle," and entry is based either on academic qualifications (two A-levels) or a 2,500 word essay. But the college has a particular focus, comments the *Times Higher Education Supplement*.

"We are charismatic, fundamental, evangelical, pentecostal; very low church, with an emphasis on Bible teaching," according to Richard Davis, the college bursar.

He said the new degree had been tailor-made by tutors and meant "we will be able to concentrate on the things we want to teach: the Old and New Testament, the fundamental teachings of the Pentecostal church."

Last year, an Open University-validated degree course at Newbold College, a Seventh Day Adventist institution in Berkshire, which has long been affiliated to Michigan-based Andrews University, was given designated status by the now sacked Education Secretary. In all, 15 private theological colleges have courses which have been designated individually.

'Teach children to think for themselves'

ROY CHAPMAN, Chairman of the Headmasters' Conference – the public schools "trade union" – and Head of Malvern College, had his 15 minutes of fame last month when the media homed in on his attack on the family, the Church and politicians for leaving a moral vacuum in society.

His outburst was the theme of a lengthy comment which Nicolas Walter, of the Rationalist Press Association, made on BBC Radio 4's *Sunday* programme on September 25 – a statement which came "like a breath of fresh air among all that freethinker" to at least one reader of *The programme* and which brought the programme a shoal of appreciative letters – some of them read out in the October 2 edition.

Nicolas Walter said: "Everyone who's been at school knows that teachers can talk a lot of nonsense, but the Chairman of the Headmasters' Conference talked even more than usual last week. Roy Chapman may know about teaching his subject and running his school, but he doesn't seem to know much about the place of the educa-

tion system in this country today.

"It's nonsense to say that independent schools can give a moral lead to society, when they are based on privilege over and isolation from the general community. Most of my family went to independent schools, but it wasn't a moral choice – it was a matter of getting a better academic education, which may well be an immoral choice.

Contradiction

"It's nonsense to say that independent schools can give a moral code to their pupils, when their ethos is so artificial and irrelevant, and when most people get morality from parents and friends, anyway, rather than from teachers. I wouldn't care to describe in public the moral lessons I learnt at my independent schools.

"And it's nonsense to say that religion is the basis of morality, when there is no necessary connection between the two and a frequent contradiction between them. The churches can't give a moral lead, whatever the Bishop of Wakefield may think,

because churchmen aren't any more moral than anyone else. Every study shows that non-religious people are just as moral as religious people, and the latest study shows that more than a third of the population have no religion.

"There is a moral vacuum, but there are many complex reasons for it. One is that people in authority try to fill it with hot air. The only cure is a proper education, which tries to tell the truth about religion and morality as about everything else, and a real shift in social thought and behaviour.

"Roy Chapman talked sense about one thing – the rotten role models offered to young people. But the fault lies not so much with the models themselves as with the media who set them up and knock them down, and with the whole cultural and political system which demands that we need leaders and idols and heroes and villains. Churches and schools are just as harmful here as any other institution. Children should be taught not to need to be taught, but to think for themselves, and should learn that our only reliable models are our own best selves."

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

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, November 6, 5.30pm for 6pm: John White: *Onward 'Broadly Christian' Soldiers.*

Central London Humanists: For details, please contact Cherie Holt on 071 916 3015 or Hilary Leighter on 0895 632096.

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, October 17, 7.30pm: Public meeting: *Nature or Nurture - the Origins of Deviant Behaviour.*

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 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.*

Havering & District Humanist Society: HOPWA House, Inskip Drive, Hornchurch. 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.

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

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). October 16, 6.30pm: Wilf Dixon, the Stalin Society: *The Truth About Stalin.* October 23, 6.30pm: Bernard Hynes: *The Fascist Threat in Europe.* October 30, 6.30pm: Ellis Hillman: *F A Ridley - Writer and Secularist.* November 6, 6.30pm: David Ould (Anti-Slavery Society): *Why is There still Slavery in 1994?*

Lewisham Humanist Group: Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, October 27, 8pm: Public meeting on Humanist Group Activities.

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.

Norwich Humanist Group: Martineau Hall, 21a Colegate, Norwich, 7.30pm. October 20: *The Work of the Samaritans.* November 17: BHA Conference, 1994. Cliff Johnson leads discussion of *Family Values.*

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, October 12, 8pm: Dan J Bye: *Pornography - a Closer Look.*

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1 (telephone 071-831 7723). List of events obtainable from above address. Winter Evening Class 1994. Tuesdays, 6-30pm to 8.30pm, November 8 until December 13 (inclusive). Subject: *The Bible - an Introduction for Unbelievers.* Tutor: Daniel O'Hara.

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, October 12, Jim Herrick, Editor of *New Humanist* and of *International Humanist News: International Humanism.* Wednesday, November 9: Ken Cook: *Consciousness - the Philosophical Debate.* Wednesday, December 14: Jean Davies, World Federation of Right to Die Societies: *The Case for Voluntary Euthanasia.* Wednesday, January 11: Hilary Leighter, BHA EC: *Equal 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.

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. Info: 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

Criminologist slams the 'moral crusaders'

by George Broadhead

READING University sociology lecturer and criminologist Dr Bill Thompson delivered a swingeing attack on "moral crusaders" – identified as fundamentalist Christians, sections of the feminist movement, tabloid journalists and the police Obscene Publications Squad – when he addressed the annual gathering of the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association, held at Southsea in September.

He said the "crusaders" were intent on maintaining "a single, sexually-correct standard which everyone has to follow and endure."

Such people tried to panic the public into believing that child abuse and child pornography were endemic in this country and were linked to sexually adventurous and different

groups, including gays.

Dr Thompson declared: "The need to protect innocent children is being used to attack any kind of sexual pluralism."

This had led to the closure of sex shops, the introduction of the Obscene and Indecent Displays Act, and the video nasties scare.

He concluded by advising lesbians and gays not to go for ghettoisation in the manner of "Queer Nation," but to ally themselves with other groups which were also being targeted by the "moral crusaders."

He described GALHA as a role model for this, acting as it did as a link between the lesbian and gay community and the Humanist movement, and drawing the attention of

Humanists to lesbian and gay rights issues.

Dr Thompson said the lesbian and gay community, and GALHA in particular, should try to demonstrate to the public at large that there were different kinds of moral standards to those of Judæo-Christianity "which have kept people in tutelage and superstition for a considerable time."

The gathering passed two resolutions, including one welcoming the recent supportive statement on homosexuality and bisexuality from the Board of the International Humanist and Ethical Union and another condemning specific instances of "homophobia" in the Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church and the US Christian Evangelist movement.

Proposed by Terry Sanderson and seconded by Keith Porteous Wood, the latter motion also condemned "the hostility directed against lesbian and gays by Islamic fundamentalists worldwide, and the vicious human rights abuses perpetrated against them by Islamic states like Iran."

● GALHA has written to Amnesty International, noting that, according to estimates provided by exiled Iranians, "since 1980, some 4,000 lesbians and gay men have been beheaded, stoned or burned to death in Iran simply because of their sexual orientation." Calling on Amnesty to launch "a major protest campaign on this issue," the GALHA letter adds "...it seems that the mere act of two men lying naked together 'without necessity' is a crime punishable by up to 99 lashes; and one man kissing another, even if it is 'without lust,' merits 60 lashes."

OBITUARY

A HUMANIST memorial ceremony for ice-skater John Curry took place in Conway Hall, London, on September 11. Friends and family of the Olympic champion, who died of AIDS-related illness in April, heard moving tributes to his grace, skill and courage. The ceremony included

extracts from music to which Curry skated when he won Olympic Gold in 1976, and Amelia Carrington, of the Vienna Festival Ballet, danced the mazurka and the prelude from Tchaikovsky's *Les Sylphides*. David Turner, of the British Humanist Association, officiated, and among those paying tribute were actor Alan Bates, singer Millicent Martin, and former champion ice-skater Courtney Jones.

A FOUNDER member and former Chairman of the Leeds and District Humanist Group, David Spencer, has died. David was one of the small group which set up the West Yorkshire Officers' Service in 1987, and he conducted a number of Humanist funerals before ill-health intervened. He also addressed local Humanists on his work as genito-urinary consultant at St Luke's Hospital, Bradford. His Humanist funeral ceremony at Scholemoor Crematorium, Bradford, was conducted by Bob Tee.

SIR Karl Raimund Popper (1902-1994), the philosopher (and Honorary Associate of the Rationalist Press Association), has died. A brief assessment of his work is being prepared by David Tribe, former President of the National Secular Society, which we hope to publish in the next issue of *The Freethinker*.

Skeptical students' new programme

LONDON Student Skeptics' Autumn Term programme includes: Monday, October 17: Dr Harold Hillman, University of Surrey, on "Honesty in biological and medical research?" Monday, October 31: Dr Brian Kaplan, Harley Street, on "The case for holistic/natural medicine."

Monday, November 14: Dr Richard Wiseman, University of Hertfordshire, on "Parapsychology – a skeptical perspective."

Monday, November 28: Alan Bradley, London Student Skeptics: "Report on the 6th European Skeptics Conference in Ostend." Monday, December 12: Dr John Foreman, University College London, on "The Benveniste experiment."

All meetings will be in room 3D, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1, and will start at 7.30pm. The room has been booked from 7.00pm to avoid interrupting speakers.

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A B Lever reports on an in-depth investigation to Hell

WELL, here I am again, Neil. Last time I saw you, I told you about my research into Heaven and I promised I'd look into Hell for you so that you'll know what's likely to happen to you if you carry on with all that freethinking of yours. I'm sorry to have been such a time, but it's taken me longer than I thought. There are whole books written about it, you know. And many of them by eye-witnesses.

There's a lot about Hell in St John's Revelations – or the Apocalypse as it's properly called. But there are other bits about it elsewhere in the Bible. Moses, David and Jonah knew all about it. Jonah, in fact, thought he was in Hell when he was in the fish's belly. There's quite a lot about it in the Psalms as well – and the Gospels. And there's some good advice in Proverbs. For example, it says in one place that if you beat a child with a rod you'll save it from Hell. So I suppose every parent ought to give their children a whack now and again...

Well, it may conflict with EC laws, Neil, but that's what it says.

But the details about Hell don't just appear in the Bible. The librarian told me there was much more about Hell in some of the other Apocalypses. Several saints were given a vision of it and they all wrote it down. Peter, Paul, Thomas, Stephen, Zephaniah and the Virgin Mary. And *she* saw her visions in several different languages.

What I did was to put all the references together and build up a composite picture of the place. And the first thing I must tell you is that you qualify for it on two grounds. Unbelievers are on the list and so are blasphemers. So that's double qualification and I shouldn't be surprised if you don't get double punishment...

No you don't get double chips with it! And that makes it a treble qualification. Mockers are on the list as well.

I must say when I'd completed my list of those who are going to spend their lives in Hell – well, their deaths really – I was surprised at some of the categories. There are many I'd have expected to find – like murderers, fornicators, heathens, liars, whoremongers and Christians who don't keep to the rules. You have to worship the Trinity as well to escape Hell; you have to keep the Commandments, believe in the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection, and you mustn't deny that the bread and wine at the Communion Service are the actual

body and blood of Jesus. So it struck me that there'll be a lot of the clergy there.

I certainly wasn't surprised to find that the scribes and Pharisees went to Hell. Nor the whole of Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin. Jesus warned them often enough.

But I'll tell you what did surprise me. Nuns who slay their children go to Hell. And I didn't know they have children, let alone slay them. Women who plait their hair and go to church just to ensnare men go there; so do those who weren't virgins when they married; *and* those who call other people fools. Then there are those who lie-in on a Sunday, those who don't stand up when the vicar comes into the room, those who walk about bareheaded – and the uncircumcised. I don't mind telling you since I read all that I've put my name down for the operation, I'm up at six every Sunday, I jump up whenever I see the vicar and I always wear a woolly hat. And I don't care if people *do* call me Compo. We'll see who's laughing when we're all dead.

Money-lenders

Another category that really surprised me was money-lenders. And that had to include bank managers, I thought. Now mine's a decent chap and I was a bit worried about him – whether he knew the risk he was running by staying in the job and lending money. So I arranged for an interview to tell him. Well, he listened to all I had to say and he thanked me for bringing it to his attention and said that we all had our burdens to bear but he'd give it careful thought and good afternoon. I haven't heard from him since, though I saw on my bank statement this morning that he's charged me eight quid for the interview.

Well, enough of who's going there. I expect you're dying to know what it's like...

You might well say "Fire away!" but I wish you wouldn't be so flippant, Neil. I've spent the best part of a fortnight looking up these references largely for your benefit and you might take it seriously. You won't get the chance to change your mind once you're in Hell. St Paul says that there are angels down there especially trained to prevent you from even asking for mercy, let alone getting it. And to show you how awful it is – Moses had a vision of it and, from what I could make out, died shortly afterwards. I can only think it was the shock. Even Paul sighed when he saw it. And he was pretty tough – living with all those thorns in his flesh.

Anyway – first of all Hell, like Heaven, is a definite place. There are gates to it, St John keeps the keys. There are different sections there. In one there's a lake of boiling pitch, in another a lake of fire and in a third a lake of blood and that's come from the tormented souls. It's in this one, by the way, that bankers and money-lenders are tortured. They have to stand on their knees in it. I explained all this to my chap and I could tell he was worried because he kept scratching his head. I'm sure you'll see the queer looks and looking towards the door.

There's also a bottomless pit there and another one underneath it. I suppose there's some kind of reserve. And you need to think you'll escape because of it, but it's full up when your turn comes. Paul says that even after wicked souls have been thrown in for 500 years, the bottom won't be covered. And it says in Proverbs that it can never be full. So that gives you some idea of its size. And, in any case, even if souls are thrown in there for a million years, Isaiah says it enlarges automatically to cater for them.

Then there's another section there of ice and snow. Not many people know about that. But it's so cold there that seven suns wouldn't thaw it out. And to make it worse you're stripped naked when you're thrown in there – so you'll probably get chilblains where you've never been before.

And to come back to those people who don't stand up when the vicar comes in the Virgin Mary's Apocalypse says there are fiery seats there reserved for them. I bet they'll stand up then all right.

You see, that's the point, Neil. It's not just the pits and the fire and the ice and the snow, but there's tormenting going on all the time. In the first place, some people

Neil Blewitt

HELL'S

LOW

Anyway, that's about it, Neil. It's down to you. I saw in Cruden's Concordance his own view of Hell and he really sums it all up neatly. He says there is nothing there but grief, sadness, vexation, rage and despair and the gnashing of teeth; and the New Testament makes it all clear so that even the most carnal man shall know and be terrified.

But having said all that, there are one or two things I don't understand.

I'm going to see the vicar to find out if he knows any more than I do. I shouldn't think he does. Last time I heard him speak on the subject he said much the same as old Cruden in another part of his Concordance – that Hell is merely separation from God. But David in one of his Psalms says that God is in Hell as well as in Heaven, so I don't know how the vicar will square that one. And David should know better than he does because God delivered him from Hell. He said so. Though I must confess I don't know what he was doing there in the first place. Except that he did more than his share of sinning in his time.

I want to ask about that bit in Revelations where it says Death sits on a horse with Hell following behind. And there's an odd piece in Isaiah. He says

beds will be too short to sleep on there. But that's not much of a punishment unless it's for very minor sins. I know there must be beds there because David said so as well as Isaiah.

And the other thing I want to mention is about the animals and the angels who do all the tormenting. I mean – what have they done that they deserve to be in a place like that? A worm can't sin. It can't lend money and it can't be expected to stand up when it sees a vicar. And I don't see a worm getting itself circumcised. And what about the angels? Perhaps they work on a shift system with those in Heaven. But that doesn't explain the animals.

Are there any points you want me to raise with him for you?...What's that?

I don't know myself how people gnash their teeth if they go to Hell without any. Perhaps dentures are provided. But I don't remember reading anything about it. Anyway, I'll ask the vicar.

Oh, and while I'm there I'll tell him about St Paul's vision of Hell where he saw a place specially reserved for priests and deacons and bishops. I wonder if he knows about that? I might ask him what they have to do to qualify.

But I'll keep standing while I do...



● Music to A B Lever's ears – demonic trumpets from a medieval illustration.

Heaven to stand in the lakes up to their
to it does, others up to their navels or necks
depending on the sins they've committed.
there are suspended over the lakes by
a lake for feet, their ears, their tongues and
and pen their eyebrows. But while they're
wink and hanging up they're being tor-
stand as I said. Some are devoured by
ll the birds, others by serpents, worms and
wards, and none of these creatures ever
wounds. So it's going on all around the
ad. And you can't die from your
towards even – because the torment has to
on for ever. The pieces that are eaten
here grow again, I suppose. Just like
pose us. You'll understand that. You know
needs I mean – the giant whose body cov-
ts nine acres. The vultures kept devour-
ve his liver but as fast as they did it grew
tom. I know that's only Greek mytholo-
Prove those chaps on the fiery seats find their
ives and pieces have to keep growing so
ny can their torture can go on forever.
or a and there are always angels about, just
ses to give you more torments. They
hat's cut off your lips with red-hot razors;
le knee chase you with red-hot forks; they
hat out your entrails with red-hot hooks –
-pronged ones too; and then they tie
ed up in red-hot chains. Other people get
ll passed on a spit over a fierce fire – and as
ever as one bit of your body's done so it
eaten by a wild beast. And those peo-
ple in the ice and snow don't get away
ys it either. They have to gnash their
hem like the rest of them and they have
or hands and feet cut off and their bod-
devoured by two-headed worms two
It's long.
and all in the Bible and the Apocalypses.
ig on body can say they weren't warned.
e present of all you, now.

Saintly way with heretics

THE *Troublesome Offspring of Cardinal Guzman* by Louis de Bernières (Minerva, £5.99) is the first novel I have read (I don't read many) which mentions the National Secular Society. Only briefly, about half way through, where a hospital doctor "felt a glow of *schadenfreude* [malicious pleasure] at having the Cardinal at his mercy, because he [the doctor] had been educated in a convent, and consequently was now a leading figure in the National Secular Society."

Quite a light-hearted quip, you'll agree, and very different from the scathing treatment of religion in this bizarre book set in South America.

Just three pages further on, Louis de Bernières begins a chapter "Of the New Albigensian Crusade": "In all times and all places the principal attraction of religions has lain in their licence to do evil; that this is so is amply demonstrated by the fact that as soon as a faith loses its militant aggressiveness, the number of its followers diminishes...In the holy books of the world may be found precedents and even injunctions to delight the heart of the Devil, and both sides of any dispute find ample fuel for their fires within the mazes of contradiction that can be found therein."

Leading this crusade is a monsignor, whose inadequacy turns to fanatical ferocity, who believes he is the agent of God, and who has "formed a formidable acquaintance with the writings of St Thomas

by Colin McCall

Aquinas," particularly, in the author's words, "the arguments in favour of the extirpation of heretics and heresy," which "today are discreetly left out of all the anthologies."

The monsignor knew that "to burn a heretic was an act of love, since this spared the victim the flames of hell hereafter, and he was one of the few Catholic historians who neither glossed over the activities of the Dominican Inquisition, nor experienced a retrospective shame on its account."

"Brothers, throughout our sacred land there is a plague," he tells his followers. "This plague is a plague of disbelief that imperils the health of Church and State...Tonight we watch and pray. Tomorrow we march. The blessing of God be upon you all." And so the bloody crusade begins.

It's fiction, of course, and extravagant fiction at that, with ghosts, a levitating priest and an army of tame jaguars. It's erotic, tender and sweet, brutal and disgusting; certainly not a book for the squeamish reader, but saved by its humour and common sense.

One of the ghosts is of St Thomas himself, glad to return to earth to alleviate "the boredom of death." He is appalled at the murderous cruelty of the crusaders and, when reminded of his own words on heresy, the saint wearily says he has "revised" that

passage; and he appears no more.

Whatever one thinks of this rollicking novel, it is useful to be reminded of the "other side" of St Thomas Aquinas, the side that is "discreetly" overlooked.

When Father Copleston's *Aquinas* appeared in the Pelican philosophy series in 1955, it was described as "An introduction to the ideas of the medieval thinker whose influence is greater today than it was during the Middle Ages." A decade later Anthony Kenny called Aquinas "one of the half dozen greatest philosophers of the western world."

But Bertrand Russell found "little of the true philosophic spirit in Aquinas...He is not engaged in an inquiry, the result of which it is impossible to know in advance. Before he begins to philosophise, he already knows the truth; it is declared in the Catholic faith."

Forgers

Kenny retorted that, in *Principia Mathematica*, Russell took hundreds of pages to prove that two and two make four, which was something he had believed all his life. But that doesn't invalidate the criticism. Aquinas had to fit the philosophy of Aristotle into a dogmatic faith. In the process, he made Aristotle say many things he never said, as is acknowledged by the French Thomist exponent Etienne Gilson. Or, as Copleston rather quaintly puts it, "the divergencies between the two men are sometimes concealed or obscured by Aquinas' 'charitable' interpretations."

Gilson and Copleston can both be numbered among the "discreet." In Gilson's many studies, "there is hardly a mention of hell or the Inquisition," noted Walter Kaufmann in his *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* (Faber 1958).

Kaufmann remedies this deficiency. Aquinas specifically says that heretics must be "shut off from the world by death." And he argues it as rigorously as any other question. It was a much more serious sin to corrupt faith than to forge money. "Hence if forgers of money or other malefactors are straightway justly put to death by secular princes, with much more justice can heretics, immediately upon conviction, be not only excommunicated but also put to death." The Church is merciful but, if the heretic stubbornly refuses to be converted, he is handed over to the secular court "to be exterminated from the world by death."

The similarity of this with the tenth book of Plato's *Laws* is staggering, Kaufmann adds, "but what was there the musing of an old man without authority has here become the accepted practice of an enormously powerful church which rules over the lives and thoughts of millions."

It was a passage that certainly needed revision.

Cairo outcome welcome — up to a point

by Nicolas Walter

HUMANISTS welcome the programme of action issued by the International Conference on Population and Development [see Up Front, *The Freethinker*, September issue].

We are particularly pleased by the agreement on the equality and empowerment of women, the provision of family planning services, the education of the young, and above all the recognition of individual choice in sexual and family matters.

However, Humanists are concerned by the attempts of the Vatican and some Muslim countries to impose their dogmatic views on the rest of the world, especially their refusal to accept the right to safe abortion as a last resort and forms of sexual relationships other than conventional marriage.

We are also concerned at Vatican moves to create a union between monotheists — Christians, Muslims and Jews — against the rest, and Catholic and Muslim threats of a "future war" between "the religious and the materialists."

We are anyway unclear why the Vatican, any more than any other religious organisation, should have governmental status in the international community, especially if its main role is to obstruct urgent work which is essential to the majority of the population of the world.

Humanists urge all concerned individuals and groups to work together to increase the power of everyone in every country to limit their numbers according to the method they prefer and to live their lives in the way they wish, free from religious or political fanatics.



DOWN TO EARTH

with Bill McIlroy



Setback for Adams PR - and Equity

IT IS an accepted truth in libertarian circles that any act of censorship backfires and promotes whatever it is intended to suppress. There are plenty of examples to prove this contention, as Mrs Whitehouse will aver. However, there are exceptions, when freedom of speech actually inflicts damage on a cause. On such occasions the over-enthusiastic advocate puts one foot in his mouth and shoots himself through the other.

The Rev Ian Paisley is a case in point. For 25 years, his less-than-mellifluous voice has assailed the ears of the nation. Even within the confines of a broadcasting studio he bangs on as though addressing an Orangemen's rally. Instead of winning support for the cause he holds dear, his bellicose rantings have set millions of British teeth on edge.

Could it possibly be that giving Ian Paisley freedom of the airwaves was a dastardly anti-Protestant plot hatched by perfidious London officials in cahoot with Sinn Féin, Dublin and the Vatican?

On the other hand, although the BBC and independent broadcasting companies were forbidden to transmit his voice until the ban was lifted last month, Gerry Adams had nothing to complain about. Listeners may not have heard the Sinn Féin president's voice. But his words came over loud and clear, prefaced by an announcement that "due to Government restrictions" they would be read by an actor.

Rather than being "starved of the oxygen of publicity," as Margaret Thatcher put it when the broadcasting ban was imposed in 1988, Sinn Féin and the IRA were handed a public relations coup on a salver.

This Whitehall farce had a six-year run. No one begrudged a member of the under-employed acting profession his fee - which seems to have varied between £80 and £160 - for repeating someone else's words. But Gerry Adams would himself have spoken them free of charge.

And it is the Irish who are supposed to be mad!

A rite load of...

THERE has, of late, been a movement to create demand for more ritual in our lives. But even the most fervent ritualist will jib at some

of the ceremonies proposed by Lorna St Aubyn in her *Rituals for Everyday Living* (Piatkus, £7.99). Subtitled *Special ways of marking important events in your life*, this compilation ranges far and wide beyond everyday ceremonies which come under the colloquial heading of "hatch, match and despatch."

Lorna St Aubyn suggests more than 40 rituals which, according to the blurb, "you can follow, or adapt to suit your own unique occasion." One of life's "unique occasions" listed is the unpleasant experience of being burgled. There is no mention of a simple action like informing the police or your insurance company. Instead, for each stolen item, "draw or write on a card as accurate a description as you can...Tell them, collectively or individually, what you feel about them...Really mourn them, which can be in words or through a chant or just by communicating with them in silence."

Should the stolen items be recovered, "be sure to welcome them back with as much ceremony as you used to mourn their loss."

The second part of the ritual includes eliminating all traces of the burglars, including fingerprints. The police, if called, may regard this a not helpful to their inquiries. And in future when leaving home "you might like to mentally place the sign of the cross encircled on your front door." Non-ritualists will consider a locksmith's services a more effective deterrent.

Lorna St Aubyn even outlines a ritual for leaving an organisation. Regrettably, lack of space rules out a detailed description of this fascinating ceremony. Suffice to say it requires two chairs, a wastepaper basket and a pile of different coloured balls of wool.

I'm off now to perform a regeneration ritual. In involves replenishing the compost heap in my garden with dead material which will return as fruit and flowers next year.

Not very holy matrimony

AFTER Lorna St Aubyn's bewildering rigmarole, it was quite a relief to read the Hansard account of the Marriage Bill debate in the House of Commons. Moved by Gyles Brandereth (Conservative, City of Chester), its purpose is to give couples a wider choice of venues for marriage ceremonies.

Welcoming the Bill, which was passed at Third Reading and has gone to Another Place, Harry Cohen (Labour, Leyton) referred to a recent survey. It showed that while a church was the first choice for their wedding by couples with definite religious beliefs, more than half of those interviewed preferred to be mar-

ried elsewhere. Gardens, stately homes and hotels topped the list.

Thirty-five per cent of brides and 48 per cent of bridegrooms questioned had no religious beliefs. But as register offices are often "very mundane places without character," many unbelieving couples preferred a more impressive setting for the ceremony. One lady said of her church wedding: "It was everything I wanted. I just shut my mind when it came to the religious bits."

Hard faces

FIFTY people recently attended a pathetic little ceremony in a burial ground situated on the coast of County Galway. Its hundreds of graves contain bodies of which virtually no records have been kept. They are those of babies who, not having been baptised, were denied religious rites and burial in a churchyard.

At last Mary Salmon persuaded a priest to bless the plot where, 60 years ago, her husband buried their stillborn twins. No doubt there are other parents still living who underwent additional distress through being denied permission to bury their children in the family grave.

Clerical authorities may not now insist on unbaptised babies being buried outside the churchyard wall. But hard-faced bishops and priests still put the rules of their church above human welfare. Pontification about contraception and related matters comes ill from celibates with no experience of parenthood (with the obvious exception of the former Bishop of Galway).

Plus ça change...

"THE good old days" school of child welfare is still with us, though perhaps not so blatant as a century ago. The *Sheffield Independent* for October 18, 1894, reported the following interesting exchange at a meeting of the Board of Guardians Children's Home Committee:

The minutes of the Children's Home Committee included a recommendation to purchase 144 toothbrushes for the use of the children

Mr Jethro Chambers: I object, I think it is going a little too far.

Mr W Clark: I also object. I do not think we can spend ratepayers' money like that. I had no toothbrushes when I was a boy.

Mr Jethro Chambers: I never bought one in my life.

The gross of toothbrushes will be purchased. Mr Chambers asked if any kid gloves were to be ordered.

YOU'RE TELLING US!

Lord Lester replies on blasphemy

THANK you for sending me a copy of the *The Freethinker* for August, 1994. It is completely wrong to treat my work in the House of Lords as a backhand bid to boost blasphemy law. On the contrary, I attempted unsuccessfully to abolish the offence of blasphemy in line with the majority opinion of the Law Commission and when I failed sought to create a very narrow offence of deliberately stirring up religious hatred as a means of making the reform of the blasphemy law more likely in the future.

I am sorry that you so misunderstood my efforts.

LORD LESTER QC
House of Lords

I AM delighted to see that *The Freethinker* is now drawing attention to the dangers of the rising tide of Islam.

Now that the poor old Church of England is tearing itself to pieces through its own clergy's pronouncements, perhaps it is time to notice that Islam is replacing it as a repressive and autocratic system similar to that operated over past centuries by Christianity, whether of the Catholic or Protestant or Orthodox variety – although there are still the wilder evangelical sects based in America to watch out for!

Returning to the Muslim pressure-for-blasphemy-law blackmail, I think I am correct in believing that there is neither an anti-blasphemy law nor an Established State Church in that irritatingly hard-headed country, my native land, Scotland! Well, we're not so polite and hypocritical up there as the English, and sometimes forget that a spoonful of sugar makes the message go down better.

M IRVINE
Boston

MULTI-FAITH involves a range of issues, and I shall briefly deal with only two. Bertrand Russell in one of his books took a logical approach and said either one is true or none is true. The Theosophical Society seems to regard all religions as true.

Gods and unicorns have much in common: books, films and paintings about them exist, but they have no real existence other than as social inventions. They thus exist due to opinion, not fact. How, then, can the British legal system give support to mere opinion, if a proposed law protecting all faiths is passed by the Government? Also, how is it that the existence of the monarchy and the legal system is justified by something which does not exist – that is, the Christian God?

And, as a PS, Prince Charles supports the Oxford Islamic Society – but in a strict Islamic state he would have his head cut off for marital infidelity!

R AWBERY
Reading

Slaves of ignorance

DAVID LEVETT'S fulsome praise of *The Freethinker* (August) was, of course, well founded. (The subject of his panegyric also merits being well-funded. Over to well-heeled readers!).

However, one must take him up on one point. He chastises Humanists who he claims failed to respond with Letters to the Editor following an article in the *Sunday Times* by Richard Dawkins on atheism. We must assume he is too modest to mention the letter he wrote to the Editor of that distinguished journal. Others may well have "written in" with their observations, but landed in the shredder, along with with the hundreds which made a bid that week for publication. (*The Guardian* has some 400 a day!). Appearing in "Letters" is like getting into the Pool of Bethesda (see Bible: all Freethinkers should have one).

So-called authoritative "names," like Dawkins, are invited to air unpopular views by the broadsheets in order to establish the newspapers' "liberal broadmindedness." (I don't know Rupert Murdoch's views on religion: one suspects he is a member of the Mammonite sect). However, the tiddlers of the thinking world, such as the humbler "free" ones, even if they be given Pentecostal tongues, are regarded by cautious editors as "not safe." Their readers – circulation fodder – must be protected from "unbelievers." It is to be recalled that those Pentecostal disciples were suspected by their hearers of being inebriated (see Bible again).

"Ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free." The Saatchis (can we afford them?) couldn't have put it better. Pity vast numbers of people choose to be the slaves of Ignorance!

NOËL RATCLIFFE
Buxton

Change of view

IN *The Freethinker* (May, p71), I reported my "conversion," after reading William Farmer's book on "The Synoptic Problem," to the old Griesbach hypothesis, namely the view that the Gospel of Matthew is the oldest of those in the Christian canon, and that Mark was an epitome of Matthew and Luke. Newspaper reports of Enoch Powell's new book, in which he argues that Jesus was stoned to death, suggest that he also considers Matthew the earliest Gospel.

Further study has caused me to abandon this hypothesis, which Farmer had revived with great plausibility. The arguments against

Farmer's thesis set out by C M Tuckett in his detailed study *The Revival of the Griesbach Hypothesis* (Cambridge, 1983) now seems to me persuasive. Tuckett accepts the more usual view that Mark is the earliest of the Canonical Gospels, and that his work was used independently by Matthew and Luke, each of whom

also incorporated sayings of Jesus derived from a now lost collection known as "Q."

Another more recent study which is of the greatest interest to those struggling with the problem of Christian origins is a highly readable work by the American New Testament scholar Burton Mack, entitled *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (Element Books, 1993).

In this work, Mack offers a reconstruction of the lost sayings-source used by Matthew and Luke, and argues that the original Jesus of Nazareth was an itinerant Cynic philosopher of a type not uncommon in the Hellenistic world of the time, and whose connections with Judaism, if any, were very tenuous. Only after many radical changes and syncretistic additions to the Jesus-traditions did anything like the Messianic figure of the narrative Gospels (composed between about 75 and 120 CE) emerge.

Mack's highly unorthodox view of Jesus, before he was transformed almost out of all recognition by the early Christian theologians who were responsible for the documents which became the "New Testament," is both plausible and compelling.

DANIEL O'HARA
London EC2

Very biological!

"MAYBE the origin of religion is biological" is a quote used by Professor Wilkins when reviewing *Challenges to the Enlightenment*. (August). Certainly biological for most reptiles – they need an hour or two worshipping in the sun before they get on with their daily activity. How our cats and dogs adore a sunny spot. So many humans spend a lot of money, accept inconvenience and risks to observe the worship of the sun in distant parts. Are there any religions, past or present, that have no element of sunshine in them to revere?

The above quote was really concerned about the origin of religion being in the genes, but that solution is just as simple. Right through nature there is a great irrationality, an essential part of the many genetic codes and the survival factors. "Not to reason why," just respond to all the genetic drives, all the marvellous programmes that build elaborate nests, migrate etc., and particularly to respond to the drive to compete.

Developing humans would have been no exception. All things have a wonderful brain or its equivalent, but for some reason the human brain developed beyond the need to deal with daily life.

It is easier to follow the further development of this enlarging brain if one separates its "concrete" achievements – memory, learning-skills, building bridges etc. – from the "abstract," that is, thoughts and ideas. Some people are very clever but they have no sense.

Next allow for the effect of communication on development, that is the possibility of

YOU'RE TELLING US!

From Page 164

expounding useful information but daft ideas as well. The inherent irrationality would know no bounds. Attempts to explain the wonders of the Earth and the Universe, most likely in animistic terms. The inherent competitive drive, linked with power-seeking, would have added a further fanciful, even dishonest, dimension to these primitive explanations. Very biological!

This development would have been a very long process with "civilisation" taking comparatively no time at all. Our modern facilities, concrete and abstract, in the hands of a still "Stone Age" brain! The "social inventions" (quote) are fine, but they are only on the surface. Every baby has to start from the scratch of the genetic base, each baby a fresh dip into the genetic pool, wide open to Richard Dawkin's "viruses." More biological opportunities, not only for religions but also, alas, for many other irrationalities as well.

JIM LITTLE
Bristol

The Conchies

IN your August issue, Alister Rankin and Peter Brown object to the Commemorative Stone to conscientious objectors in Tavistock Square.

I would remind them of the key words from the inscription which Edna Mathieson quotes in the July issue: "Their foresight and courage give us hope." If there had been enough men and women with foresight and sufficient influence, on both sides (and there were objectors to war in Germany – for example, Albert Einstein in 1914), neither world war need have happened.

The greater destructiveness of today's weapons, especially nuclear weapons, makes it imperative to bring an end to war immediately before war destroys human civilisation.

Humanists, who will realise that religion has been, and still is, the prime mover in many wars, should find no difficulty in accepting this – and joining those working towards this objective.

(Dr) DOUGLAS HOLDSTOCK
Woking

IN their denunciation of the Conscientious Objectors' Commemorative Stone, Alister Rankin and Peter Brown (August) have overlooked a number of points:

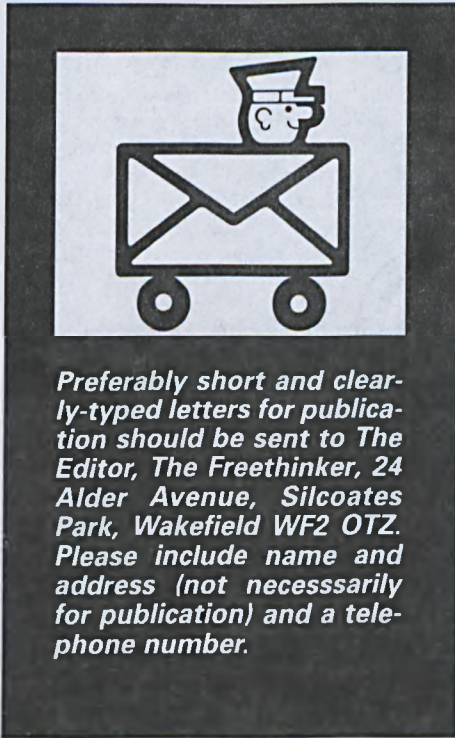
The Stone commemorates men and women who refused to fight for the Kaiser or Hitler – for example, Franz Jagerstatter, who was beheaded in Berlin in 1943, equally with those who refused to fight against such régimes. It also commemorates those who refused to fight for the Emperors of Rome, for Napoleon, Stalin, Franco, Salazar, Ceausescu, Galtieri, Pinochet, Saddam, Khomeini and many more.

Taking up arms against a particular régime is not necessarily synonymous with defending the victims of that régime. Thousands of civilians, including children, the elderly and sick, not only in Germany but also in occupied

countries, were killed by the Allies in the Second World War, while many conscientious objectors were involved in assisting Jewish refugees before the war and relieving the starvation effects of the Allied blockade of occupied countries during the war.

Although a number of COs were religiously motivated, others were not, including such notable Humanists as Fenner Brockway and Bertrand Russell.

Conscription – the badge of the slave – is incompatible with freedom of thought. Freedom is not "won" by taking away the freedom to live of another conscript slave wearing



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

a different uniform, much less by taking that freedom from his or her spouse, child or parent. Freedom is an inalienable right that is maintained by its exercise, and if there is any nobler freedom worth exercising than the right to refuse to kill, it is the right to refuse someone else's order to kill.

Any reader wishing to know more about the Commemorative Stone or the continuing evil of conscription in most of Europe and Latin America, as well as other parts of the world, is welcome to write to me c/o the Peace Pledge Union, 6 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0CDX.

WILLIAM HETHERINGTON
CO Commemoration Appeal

Religion and the BBC

THE BBC Religious Programmes Department is very interested in hearing the opinions of its "non-faith" audience about the Department's output. Given that the Department claims to be relevant to all viewers, it is important to know

whether it actually achieves this.

Religious Programmes divide between worship and factual programmes and we would like to hear thoughts and feelings about both. In one obvious sense, it may be the factual programmes such as *Heart of the Matter* and *Everyman* that invite more comment as these programmes are not necessarily explicitly religious but aim to explore human experience in the widest sense. We would be interested to hear how successfully it is felt that they do this. Is there a sense in which those with faith enjoy something of a "monopoly on morality" or perhaps are considered to operate from a "higher morality"?

We would like to hear any comment about either end of the Department's output. Could any correspondence be addressed to: Nikki Stockley, *Everyman*, BBC Broadcasting House, Manchester M60 1SJ.

NIKKI STOCKLEY
Manchester

Incredible!

IN THE *Daily Telegraph* of September 9, their Religious Affairs Correspondent, Clifford Longley, wrote that the Pope believes that the bullet which entered his body when he was the subject of an assassination attempt in 1981 was miraculously deflected on its course through his body by the intervention of the Virgin Mary, thus missing vital organs.

Isn't it utterly incredible what these Christians will believe? If this is what the Chief Man accepts, the imagination boggles at what some of the lesser fry accept!

S J MACE
Swanage

More on porn

TO BE told what my views are, and then to be told that I am a creep for holding those views, seems to be a bit unreasonable. For the benefit of your readers who, like Brenda Able, seem to have misunderstood, may I once again clarify the position on pornography?

NONE of your correspondents has tried to justify paedophilia. NONE has tried to justify rape. NONE has tried to justify the display of cruelty. NONE has suggested that porn should be viewed by children. And so on.

The debate has been about sexually explicit material for adult consumption. Violence exists in all kinds of different types of video, be it cowboy film, domestic drama, spy film, etc. Because *Terminator 2* contains violent scenes does not mean that science fiction videos should be made illegal. Nor does it mean that those people who enjoy *Star Trek* are an avid market for violence in videos.

The attempt to link violence and sexual explicitness is a common ploy and should be

YOU'RE TELLING US!

From Page 165

recognised for the fraud that it is.

Once again Jessie Boyd expresses an apparently unshakeable disbelief that sexually explicit videos could substitute for the real thing for some possibly unbalanced members of society. In her view such material can only ever cause those individuals to commit atrocities. Both points of view actually have exactly the same merit. That is, neither is substantiated with any evidence (to my knowledge). Both therefore are potentially true and will remain so until any evidence shows otherwise.

Which brings me to my final point. The current pornography debate in *The Freethinker* seems to have come full circle. The need for comparative evidence seems to be ignored by your anti-porn correspondents. Surely this is the case with believers in religion? Any attempt to arrive at a conclusion backed by comparative evidence is attacked or ignored. Belief is the overriding principle.

Which (in my view) is exactly why the Freethought movement should be fighting the anti-porn lobby.

BOB HAMILTON
Portsmouth



I FEEL I must point out that Brenda Able (September) is confused in the definition she gives to hard core pornography.

On soft porn, she is basically correct in that the magazines on sale in newsagents' depict full body exposure of females in various and, at times, acrobatic poses; no males are involved, or, if one does creep in, never with an erection. A few years ago, these magazines did transgress more into the realm of what transpires as hard core, but, due to a few prosecutions, developed into its present form showing full female genitalia without highlighting any sexual activity.

This so-called soft porn is bought mostly by males for masturbatory purposes and surely it must be rather degrading for them, having to resort to this form of sexual satisfaction.

Now, hard core, as accepted and defended by most people, depicts all forms of explicit sexual activity which is pleasurable to the participants, or portrayed as such, and includes oral, queening, masturbation, vibrators, group sex, round the world, golden showers etc., etc., but not SM bondage to death, snuff, torture, bestiality and kiddy porn, as Brenda Able describes, which are all criminal offences, and, as such, photographs and films taken during activity of this sort can be and have been used to obtain convictions.

It is interesting that the so-called "snuff" movies quoted by Brenda, which are supposed to show females being sexually tortured to death, were the subject of an extensive investigation by the FBI in America. None could be found, nor could anyone who had actually seen one, nor could any evidence at all of anyone having been involved in making such a film.

I have said many times that I can see no reason why sexuality should not be fully portrayed on films etc., the same as any other

human activity – perhaps more so, as it is the mechanism which ensures the continuation of the human race.

R A COBB
Leicestershire

BRENDA Able has a valid point when she says that porn traders are interested in profit rather than liberation (September). Equally important, especially in view of the population explosion, is Vivien Gibson's reminder that the sexual instinct has no need of artificial stimulation. I must also applaud Jessie Boyd for recognising that the cause of Women Against Fundamentalism is far more important than defending the the porn industry.

Feminists Against Censorship would do better to forget about "dirty pictures" and concentrate their minds on the Official Secrets Act, the purpose of which is to prevent us from knowing what our Government is doing (supposedly) on our behalf, such as getting us involved in wars to defend their interests.

ERNIE CROSSWELL
Slough

Snag to Malthus

IN the Up Front section (September), discussing the Cairo International Conference on Population, you write that "...we are talking measures aimed at slowing our lemmingesque plunge (*sic*) towards an insupportable world population."

Ever since Malthus wrote *An Essay on the Principle of Population* people have been claiming that the world is, or is about to become "over-populated" - ie, one that cannot be sustained by assumed production levels - and that "something has to be done" about stopping this.

The teensy-weensy snag with all these secular apocalyptic predictions is that, rather like those religious declarations that "The End is Nigh," the "End" has shown a marked disinclination to arrive!

Much to the chagrin of the doomsayers - and utterly contrary to Malthus' predictions - *the increase in the production of food has outstripped the increase in the population*. By some 30-40 per cent since 1950 as UN figures show.

Where famines have occurred, closer analysis shows that, far from "over-population" being the cause, they are more likely to have been the result of (a) war, where the cultivation of crops is often one of the first things to go; (b) having the local equivalent of Al Capone as the President; (c) the implementation of disastrous Marxist collectivisation. Or some combination of all three.

Environmentalism - with a capital E, as opposed to "caring for the environment" - has become, since the final and inevitable failure of Communism, the world's leading "secular religion"; it is often irrational, fraudulent and deeply authoritarian and just as surely fits the

description of one of Richard Dawkins' "viruses" as any superstitious religion.

NIGEL MEEK
Bromley

After religion

I SUPPORT most of the concepts expressed by Richard Dawkins in his several books. However, I feel that as regards religious indoctrination he somewhat misses the point.

Animals such as insects have their behaviour 100 per cent under genetic control. However, the complex human lifestyle requires that children - although having many basic instincts - must also spend several years learning essential skills from other humans. They are - as Dawkins states - programmed to believe what adults tell them.

Several years ago, I saw a series of films about the major world religions. My impression was that none had very much to do with a God Their main emphasis lay in teaching a practical lifestyle. The God element was an addition by those seeking power to control by emphasising a selection of widespread supernatural beliefs.

I later read an article that emphasised this point. The author pointed out that religions are also subject to natural selection. Of the many religious sects, those that survive and expand are the ones that offer a code for practical living.

By all means deny the existence of a God - but remember the old adage about not throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Those who lose their established culture tend also to lose their pride in being human. We must not destroy existing beliefs unless we can offer a sound replacement.

The common Humanist argument that we should live by reason ignores the fact that reason is useless without a sound base of cultural experience. Competent cultures cannot be created overnight. They must be constructed from the best elements of the past hundreds of years.

We should also remember that babies learn at their mother's breast that food and comfort come by magic. It is easy - when older - to seek again a magical solution when reason - far too often - fails to solve a serious problem.

Some of the strongest American churches are those which include a wide range of emotional comfort and social support with their message of a supernatural force. What large-scale support do Humanists offer in this direction? How much is the increasing rejection of secular attitudes due to its failure to include a supportive emotional content?

R G SILSON
Hertfordshire

SURELY the final and irrefutable argument against the theory of a kindly and loving God is the very existence of the rabies virus?

DAVID YEULETT
Greenwich

YOU'RE TELLING US!

From Page 166

Star Trek

BOTH your correspondents on *Star Trek* morality (September) imply that non-intervention in other people's affairs is the height of humanitarianism. Admittedly such intervention is sometimes used as a justification for colonialism and suchlike evils; but if we see someone being raped, should we not intervene? And if a whole country is being raped by systems such as a apartheid or Nazism, should we not do likewise?

It is really not helpful for Keith Ackermann to use the pejorative phrase "scientific racist" to describe a "social Darwinist." Darwinism is neither morally admirable nor despicable; it merely explains to many people how we have evolved.

EDWARD GWINNELL
Somerset

Karl Heath's morality

THE definition of morality given by Karl Heath (September) – "right' is that which sustains and promotes the continuance of society, and 'wrong' is that which endangers it" – appears to allow for the possibility of a value-free morality in which any given society or state of social development can claim some sort of moral justification by virtue of mere survival. I would understand Karl Heath's phrase "morality is biological" to be exemplified by this type of hypothetical case.

At the same time, Heath points out that "society requires compromises and rules of conduct," which appears to suggest a considered approach to the formulation of social norms and rules of right – or, following Heath, appropriate – behaviour. However, his argument seems to imply that morality, compromises, rules of conduct, if they are to lead to the achieving of a "right" end, can legitimately be adjusted or reformulated as perceptions of desirable social ends change, or as social and political realities change. A suitable activity for the "politician priests," we might think.

As for the unfortunate Christian Anthony Freeman, he believed his ethical precepts to be prescribed by divine command, but came to enlightenment and realised that there is no supernatural authority to either postulate or enforce them. Deprivation of a father figure who lays down the rules and commands obedience he experiences as a lack, for some obscure reason we need not examine.

Those of us who fail to understand the force of the argument which claims a necessary connection between the authenticity of a set of moral values and a supernatural figure said to prescribe them may nevertheless want to have the ethical values we subscribe to antecedently to our social practise. Rational, humane values; values we do not discard if we find that social

end results are not justifiable by them.

It is, of course, open to Karl Heath to use the word "morality" in whatever way he wishes, but there is no unanimity about what way that should be.

D HARROP
Sheffield

Pope and politics

DR Raymond Challinor (September) himself very well answers his own questions to me. The Christian Democratic parties re-emerged in Europe in 1944-45 in the wake of the abominable activities of the Vatican, which he recounts, in Yugoslavia (though its activities elsewhere were only less egregious). And the United States' agreement with the Pope, per Myron Taylor, which he also mentions, played a part in all this. And it is not, I think, rash to postulate that there would have been, over the years, other agreements between the Pope and the United States and other governments which have never seen the light of day.

So where, in the light of Dr Challinor's clarification of his views of this matter, is the difference between us?

But as to his first specific question, I commend to him again what Joseph McCabe says in *The Papacy in Modern Politics* in the chapter on Italy, especially as regards the general election of 1948. And what he says in the same work on "Driving America into War" is very relevant.

As to his second question, McCabe's chapter on Italy, again, provides the answer as regards that country. He says less about post-war France in the relevant chapter. As it happens, the much less effective Christian Democratic Party there (*Mouvement Républicain Populaire*) proved to be short-lived – effectively disappearing in 1958. So strong was

France's Secularist culture that this party dare not even use the name "Christian," as McCabe had already noted in the article "France, Religion in," in his *A Rationalist Encyclopædia* (1948). And since the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) was set up, following the Allied occupation, only in 1949, he does not attempt to describe current developments there. No one, however, would dispute that the fundamental objectives of all these parties was the same, whatever the country.

Be it said that the Vatican has never been concerned to preserve the capitalist economic system *as such* – successive Popes having criticised liberal capitalism. Rather it has sought in all countries *political* arrangements favourable to itself. And it has favoured "Christian" corporatism as the economic system agreeable to that, and as analogous to the economic system of the Catholic Middle Ages.

Whether or not F A Ridley had a greater knowledge than McCabe of world politics is arguable. I do not see that it matters because, again, I see no *fundamental* (as distinct from *detailed*) difference of view between them as regards the Vatican's *essential* political objectives – that is, to preserve and extend its power.

I agree that secrets of the Second World War which were not known in McCabe's time (he died in 1955) have since emerged. That is true of Yugoslavia, though I think it is a weakness of his book that he does not deal with what was already known about that country when he wrote it in 1951.

I may conclude by observing that the Croatian Catholic Fascist Ustasha movement was still active – sometimes using violence – in Australia when I left that country in 1978. On Ante Pavelic's death (in Spain) in 1959, a Solemn Requiem Mass for the repose of his soul was said in St Christopher's (Catholic) Co-Cathedral in Canberra.

R J M TOLHURST
Chelmsford

UP FRONT

with the Editor

From Page 154

of Ulster's Protestants into the Republic will surely speed its move away from the Vatican.

Anyway, whatever their fears of Popery, many Protestants must be feeling sick enough to turn from Britain the betrayer. The loyal hound proves that he is willing to toil for his master, to die for him (World War I battlefields, especially, imbued more than a fair share of Northern Irish blood) – and then suddenly... a boot in the face. Another unpleasant comparison which springs to mind is with those Nottinghamshire miners who worked loyally during the Thatcher coal strike... and then saw their pits axed along with those of the colliers who supported Arthur Scargill.

Perhaps it will not be lost on some Northern Protestants, also, that their God has forsaken them, leaving the field to the Nationalists, succumbing to "blasphemous Masses... beads, holy water, holy smoke and stinks" (© I Paisley).

Perhaps some will bow to the inevitable and embrace and begin to shape a new Ireland and help spend the American and EC resources which will be poured in to replace the £4 billion British subvention!

Not, as I say, that they will have much choice. The Brits *will* pull out. They don't need Northern Ireland any more – and even if they did, the Americans and the multi-nationals wouldn't let them have it.

Purge the sin of pride!

LOOKING back over the various classes and talks I have run or given for the Secularist and Humanist movement, I see a whole section of the audience who are consumed by the sin of PRIDE. These are people who were atheists from birth. They never believed in anything but evolution, astro-physics and rational philosophical discourse. If they had a previous life, they look back on it with embarrassment and on those who still adhere to religion with an ill-disguised contempt.

For them, every believer is a willing dupe, an unreconstructed woolly thinker and an unwinnable addict of "the opium of the people." They could not be unwitting dupes, reconstructable woolly thinkers, people searching for "the soul of a soul-less condition." In essence such a position and attitude is defeatist: it presupposes that the religious "mind" is unassailable by secular argument.

But of course it isn't – or most of us wouldn't be in this movement.

What we all need to remember is that we all come to Secularism in our own way and in our own time. Sometimes we may be lucky enough to be introduced to a critique of religion by someone we know and whose opinions we have come to trust; but this must be the exception.

LAST WORD

by Michael E Howgate

I assume that for most of us it was a lonely journey sparked off by some long-forgotten incident which guided our first faltering foot on to the trail.

It all started for me in my second year at Saint Bede's Grammar School in Bradford. A bright young history teacher, Father Pathe (who became headmaster of that same school), decided to make his history lessons interesting and relevant. For a month we were to look at history in the making. The idea was simple. We were to pick a current news story which had just broken and follow it over the subsequent weeks. Each member of the class was to bring in relevant newspaper cuttings from the Catholic weeklies and national

dailies. We were all enthusiastic.

Unfortunately for Father Pathe, his idea was overtaken by history. The "Bay of Pigs" invasion of Castro's Cuba occurred that week. It became our chosen topic. We all brought in the usual run of clippings from *Universe*, *Catholic Herald*, *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Mirror*, *News Chronicle* and so on. They all ran the same story with variations: Freedom and Christianity were being welcomed back to a benighted Cuba by a grateful population. The only discordant voice was that of the *Daily Worker*, which was proclaiming the defeat of the invading forces by local militias.

As the days passed, it became obvious that "history" was on the side of the *Daily Worker*. The Catholic masses of Cuba had not welcomed the CIA-backed exiles – they had driven them ignominiously into the sea. Then, as the fourth week of our exercise loomed, with its promised assessment, discussion and debate, the experiment was aborted on the orders of the then Head, Mgr. Vincent Sweeney. It was back to the safety of the Dark Ages with Saint Columba and the Venerable Bede for our history class.

Pint

But the lesson was not forgotten by 2B – myself in particular.

By the following year, I was no longer an altar boy. It probably had more to do with the abandonment of Latin than my "history" lesson. The esoteric sounding *Dominus vobiscum...et cum spiritu tuo* had been replaced by the banal *The Lord be with you...and with your spirit*. How boring and embarrassing those responses became.

By the time I was 17, I was an unbeliever who had discovered that the envelope my parents gave me to drop into the offertory plate contained just enough for a pint each for my brother and myself. And, yes, my father has forgiven me that bit of petty thievery.

Nineteen – and university saw me a confirmed "militant" atheist and budding Marxist. After all, 1968 was on the horizon. And, yes, I had nothing but scorn for religiously inclined students, even of the "liberation theology" variety.

Now, why do I bother re-telling such an obvious tale?

The question facing us as we approach the millennium, the year 2000, is – how do we interest and recruit the hundreds, if not thousands, of young people who will be forced on to the path of knowledge as a reaction to the increasing output of banal religious pap? The worst attitude we can adopt is one of self-satisfied superiority.

● Edited from a speech made by Mike Howgate, founder of "APE" and London Student Skeptics, at the 1994 Annual Dinner of the National Secular Society.

BEDTIME HORROR STORY

ENTERPRISING colleagues at *Freethought Today* (US) have issued a leaflet which travelling freethinkers are able to stuff inside those Gideon Bibles which God-bothers cause to be left in hotel bedrooms.

Under the headline **GIDEON EXPOSED!**, the sticky-backed flyer says:

The Gideon Society placed this Bible for your edification. Just who was Gideon? One would assume that he was a person of exemplary character and great worth to have a worldwide society named after him. Here are some of Gideon's accomplishments:

- *Gideon slaughtered thousands in battle by plotting with the "Lord" to use treachery.*
- *Gideon murdered thousands more for worshipping "false Gods."*
- *Gideon tortured and killed still more for daring to taunt him.*
- *Gideon plundered the bodies of his victims (to fashion a jewelled priestly vestment).*
- *Gideon fathered an offspring who killed 69 of his stepbrothers.*

Read the Bible for yourself. You will find the story of Gideon in Judges, chapters 6-9. The tale of Gideon is just one of many horror stories in the Bible, a book that glorifies behaviour you abhor. Millions of people have been hoodwinked by what their clergy and leaders have told them of the Bible. Make up your own mind about the Bible – read it for yourself.

The leaflet concludes by giving the address of *Freethought Today*, which is PO Box 750, Madison, WI 53701, USA, from where subscription details are available.