

The

£1

Secular
Humanist
monthly

Free thinker

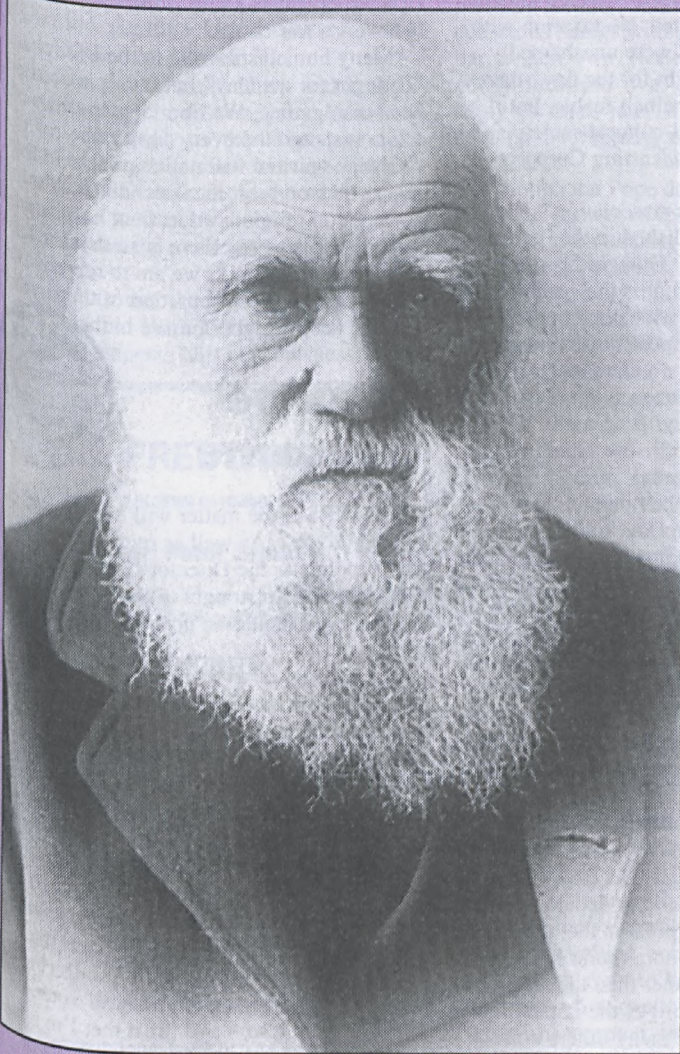
Founded by G W Foote in 1881

Vol 115 No 5

May 1995

Darwin and Christianity's 'damnable doctrine'

Colin McCall on the evolution
of a deathbed myth – Page 69



Photograph: Hulton Deutsch Collection

**Smoker on
the Pope's
time-warped
encyclical
– Page 67**

**Deodhekar
on 'a kind of
madness'
in Pakistan
– centre pages**

**Today gag
stays as BBC
bows to
myth-mongers
– Page 66**

UP FRONT

with The Editor

Sound - and the fury signifies much

NATIONAL Secular Society President Barbara Smoker found the *mots justes* to sum-up the BBC decision to preserve its ban on atheists speaking on "Thought for the Day" when she told the *Sunday Times*: "Since its present title is obviously inappropriate, I suggest a change to 'Superstition of the Day.'"

She chose the ST to receive her modest proposal because one of born-again Murdoch's journalists had described the seeming loss of bottle by the Rev Ernest Rea, Head of BBC Religious Broadcasting, as "sound."

When it was further announced that Mrs Parker-Bowles' friend was to deliver a Royal "Thought," Miss Smoker dashed off another communication, this one to *The Guardian*: "If the Prince of Wales were to lose his faith in God and be open enough to admit it publicly, he would apparently not only forfeit the throne, he would also forfeit the right to contribute to Radio 4's 'Thought for the Day.'"

Well, you have to laugh sometimes, don't you?

Feeble excuses

AROUND Christmas time, some of us dared to hope that, after a widely-publicised internal review, Mr Rea's masters might permit a relaxation of the rule which restricts the prime-time "Thought" to superstitionists from Christian, Jewish, Sikh, Muslim and similar backgrounds.

And there was a review. But (I guess) that remnant of the Establishment which still values religion as a tool of *control* in society stepped in and shook its head.

Rea announced on April 13: "The brief of 'Thought for the Day' is to have a different perspective on the daily news agenda. If it is a secular viewpoint, what is to distinguish it from the 115 minutes preceding it?"

How's that for feeble? The old guard is grubbing around at the bottom of the excuses barrel; one more push, and we could win this point.

On April 14, *The Guardian* published an editorial which was broadly sympathetic to our attempts to gain wireless time, pointing out in answer to Rea that there is "...a strong moral dimension to agnosticism, if only

because the rejection of one set of values is usually associated with the need to construct something else in its place. History is littered with wars of religion, but when did agnosticism ever send anyone into battle?"

The piece concluded: "Polls indicate that about a third of the population are broadly agnostic or atheistic. Nearly all of them pay the BBC's licence fee yet are denied having their thoughts represented. No taxation without representation. If it were unashamedly called 'Religious thought for the day,' there might be some excuse, albeit feeble, but it isn't. We live in a multi-cultural society and it is time the British Broadcasting Corporation admitted it."

The Rationalist Press Association's Nicolas Walter had a letter published in the paper on April 19, which said: "'Thought for the Day' is not only 30 years old; it is the successor of 'Lift Up Your Hearts,' which began more than 50 years ago to impose covert religious propaganda on a captive audience. Nor is it the only religious slot on early morning Radio 4; just before the 'Today' programme there is 'Prayer for the Day,' for listeners who want overt religious propaganda.

"It is good to widen the range of contributors to 'Thought for the Day' to include non-Christian religions; but it should be remembered that these are followed by only three per cent of the population, and 10 times as many people have no religion. It is nonsense to say that the rest of the 'Today' programme, or other news and current affairs broadcasting, is secularist or humanist; there is a wide difference between the mere absence of religion and the development of positive naturalistic ideas about the world and our place in it... We don't ask for special treatment, only a fair hearing."

National Secular Society Secretary Terry Mullins joined *The Guardian* debate on the same day: "The whole point is that there is no chance at present of a moral point being heard in this important slot other than the religious view. With at least a third of the population non-religious, and with many others non-Christian, it is a disgrace that about £10 million in licence-payers' money goes to support propaganda for the enormously wealthy Anglican, Catholic and non-Conformist Churches."

And in the same issue of the paper Phillip Rowland, of the Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists, broadened the discussion: "For many years the British Humanist Association and local humanist groups have campaigned for equal representation in the media for humanists, be they atheists or agnostics. Coverage has often been denied on the grounds that there can be no morality without religion, or that we are an anti-religious pressure group.

"On the contrary, humanists have a lot to

say about morality and about the issues which face the vast majority of people in this country who are not religious or only pay lip-service to Christianity. We are also working towards an end to compulsory religious worship in schools and towards providing non-religious pastoral services, for instance, weddings and funerals, as well as humanist chaplains' in hospitals and prisons, to give non-believers a fair choice.

"Many humanists wrote to the BBC about 'Thought for the Day,' but our opinions have been disregarded. We find the opposition of religionists around every corner; the Christian-spirited will not consent to us having a voice on most local standing advisory councils on religious education; hospital and prison chaplains say there is no demand for secular counselling. If we are to represent the large non-religious proportion of the population we need a higher profile in the media."

Let's be tiresome

OF COURSE, the matter will not, cannot, be allowed to rest. As well as remaking the above points to the Director General of the BBC (and do go straight to the organ-grinder), we should be pressurising our MPs heavily.

Old colleagues who know about these things tell me that First Division civil servants are working on the assumption that the General Election will be held in the autumn of 1996 - which means that MPs of all parties just now will be unusually sensitive to the point made by Messrs Mullins and Walter that around one-third of the electorate is non-religious.

Whatever their personal views, they will pass on to the BBC our disquiet over the Corporation's daily dose myth-mongering - only to be able to assure you, dear voter, that they have done so - and (trust me; I'm a former PR man) a score or so of letters from MPs will have people inside the Corporation running around like scalded cocks, looking for placatory answers, right up to the top.

Bureaucracies, as Lance-Corporal Jones might have said, don't like it up 'em - the in this instance being tiresome, boat-rocking questions from outside the organisation which annoy bosses by interfering with luncheon plans and golf dates.

I believe that in the end, the unfortunate Bro Rea will be blamed for an "error of judgement" - nobody ever said that the Lord's work would be easy, Ernie - and if the pressure has been strong enough, persistent enough, the gag will be loosened, after a decent interval.



A matter of life and death

BARBARA SMOKER sees the Pope's latest encyclical as 'an authoritarian attempt to perpetuate the most injurious doctrines of the most harmful of all historical institutions'

A MEETING of the College of Cardinals in 1991 requested the Pope to formalise the Church's teaching on bio-ethics, particularly in the light of developments in embryo research. The result, after an inexplicable four years in the writing (for there is really little new in the document, apart from some unusually colourful phraseology), is *Evangelium Vitæ* ("The Gospel of Life" – or Diatribe Against Good Sense), which was published on March 30.

This, John Paul II's eleventh – and probably last – encyclical is described by *Newsweek*, with tacit approval, as the "signature statement" of his reign. Its main message is denunciation of those who uphold the right to contraception, as well as legal abortion, voluntary euthanasia, and the medical use of foetal tissue and embryos.

It is obvious that the Pope has no insight as to the principle behind the right to life. All rights must depend on consciousness – and,

indeed, on the level of consciousness. The reason that human beings – and animals, too – deserve our moral consideration is that they are capable of experiencing pain and pleasure, misery and happiness; they have a sense of personal identity; and they can recognise other conscious beings with plans and purposes similar to their own. None of this is applicable to newly fertilised ova. It is true that it could apply to them later if they were allowed to develop; but morality depends on actuality, not potential.

Although the Pope does not claim infallibility for the content of the encyclical, in practice it is held to be binding on the world's one billion Roman Catholics, and also seeks to influence the rest of the world. Cardinal Basil Hume insists that "No Roman Catholic is free to dissent at all." This is implicit in the encyclical's key declaration by the Pope, as follows:

Therefore, by the authority which Christ conferred on Peter and his successors and in communion with the Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, I confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral.

Though chiefly concerned with the Church's teaching on abortion and euthanasia, the encyclical also denounces artificial birth control and *in vitro* fertilisation. Only on the issues of war and capital punishment does it soften the stand that the Church has traditionally taken; but whereas the Pope states that the death penalty could be morally legitimate "in extreme circumstances," there is no such let-out for abortion: "direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as an end or as a means, always constitutes a grave moral disorder." This indicates retention of the Church's traditional distinction between killing the "innocent" or "guilty." Since a newly fertilised egg cannot be guilty of anything apart from original sin, it has a greater right to life than a mature person convicted of a capital crime. However, the Pope's disapproval in general of the death penalty will probably necessitate a change in the recently revised Catechism.

In the past – as John Paul admits, and sees as a paradox – it has mostly been those on the side of legal abortion and euthanasia who have opposed war and the death penalty; his conversion to express disapproval of warfare and capital punishment enables him to set himself up as global defender of the "culture of life." However, there is a medieval ring to the metaphor of a battle between the primal forces of life and death.

The evening following publication of the encyclical, I was paired with the Editor of the *Catholic Herald* to discuss it on the London News/Talk radio programme. Neither of us had actually read it – but that hardly mattered,

since it clearly reiterated every reactionary statement that John Paul had previously made on the practices of contraception, abortion, IVF, embryo experimentation and euthanasia.

On April 2, Radio 4's "Sunday" got Cardinal Winning to speak on behalf of the encyclical, and a young Catholic woman named Claudia to oppose him. She began in a rather diffident, respectful way; then the Cardinal made the mistake of addressing her in the patronising manner in which cardinals have always been wont to speak to members of the laity – especially young people of little public status, and especially women. Claudia was provoked to reply with the same patronising phraseology, and this gave her the confidence to voice her views uncompromisingly. In fact, she wiped the floor with His Eminence, and, I am sure, had half the listening public cheering her on.

This has been the subject of continuing correspondence on "Sunday," with a surprising preponderance of support for the young woman; though one correspondent did upbraid the BBC for not having chosen a more mature person to reply to the Cardinal. But who could be a more appropriate commentator on the Church's attacks on contraception and abortion than a young woman of child-bearing age? I would merely ask her why she is still in the Church. Before long, indeed, she may let it go – though there is something to be said, perhaps, for staying inside a totalitarian institution while disobeying it and fighting it from within.

In fact, nothing has so weakened papal authority over the past 27 years as the widespread flouting by married Catholic couples (at least in developed countries) of the ban on all artificial birth control, as confirmed in Paul VI's encyclical, *Humanae Vitæ*. The long delay before that encyclical was published had led the Catholic laity to expect a lifting of the ban on (specifically) the non-mechanical method of the Pill, and many of them had jumped the gun – only to be told in 1968 that they now had to give up the Pill to which they had become accustomed. This was seen as a counsel of perfection, and it became commonplace for married Church members to disobey the ban, with many progressive priests conniving at their disobedience. And once you disobey a Pope in one matter, you can no longer regard him as infallible. It is then but a small step to pick and choose among his edicts in general. This was the climate in which the present Pope took office; and, though not for want of trying, he has failed conspicuously to regain the lost authority.

However, the loss of authority he has suffered is, in a strange way, poetic justice: not only, throughout his 16-and-a-half-year reign,

THE FREETHINKER

UK ISSN 0016-0687

Editor: Peter Brearey

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

CONTENTS

Up Front:	Page 66
Pope's latest encyclical	Page 67
Darwin's deathbed	Page 69
Molloy pamphlet	Page 71
Whither Pakistan?	Page 72
What's On	Page 74
Down to Earth: Bill McIlroy	Page 75
You're telling us! Letters	Page 76
Last Word:	Page 80

Editor's address:

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

Subscriptions, book orders and Fund
donations to The Publisher:

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

Annual postal subscription rates

UK: 12 months £10 or £7 (unwaged). Overseas surface mail (including Republic of Ireland) £13. Airmail £20 sterling. Overseas subscribers are requested to obtain sterling drafts from their banks, but if remittance is in foreign currency (including Republic of Ireland), please add the equivalent of £5 sterling or USA \$8 to cover bank charges. Alternatively, send at your own risk currency notes, convertible in the UK, plus bank charges equivalent to USA \$3.

Printed by Yorkshire Web, Barnsley S70 2AS.

A matter of life and death

From Page 67

has he quoted approvingly from *Humanae Vitae* in his speeches and several encyclicals, "apostolic exhortations," and other messages to his Church, but also – as I have only just discovered (from reviews of Tad Szulc's recent biography) – much of that 1968 document had actually been drafted by him.

Three decades ago, when Paul VI was wracked with indecision about sanctioning the Pill, he invited leading prelates from different countries to advise him on it, so as to avoid a subsequent conservative backlash. Karol Wojtyla, Archbishop of Cracow, claimed to be a celibate expert on human sexuality, having already established an institute devoted to sexual ethics and written a book on sexuality – including physiological details of orgasm! So he was ready with copious reactionary advice to the Vatican. This was necessarily in writing, since the Polish government of the day restricted foreign travel; but for that very reason the text was all the more easily accessible to Pope Paul for direct plagiarism in his agonised encyclical, of which he always seemed rather ashamed.

In the papal election of October, 1978, Karol's uncompromising stand on sexual matters, the role of women, and "family values," may well have given him the vital votes of die-hard members of the College of Cardinals, while his left-of-centre reputation in the economic sphere would have made him acceptable to the more progressive cardinals. Only Poland could produce such a conjunction in one man.

During the papal visit to London in 1982, I wrote him a letter pointing out that in this country more than a third of all abortion operations are, disproportionately, carried out on Catholic women – mostly young, single, Catholic women, who are reluctant to take contraceptive precautions, since that would indicate an unforgivable prior readiness to "sin" rather than mere human frailty. Needless to say, I never received a reply, and have no means of knowing whether he ever read my letter; but in the new encyclical he specifically denies that the prohibition of contraceptive facilities leads to more abortion. Indeed, he sees the two as "fruits of the same tree" or, to vary the metaphor, "a seamless garment." Fruit-tree or shirt, he denounces it as "a veritable culture of death."

To women who have already had recourse to abortion, he says, with cruel paternalistic "compassion," that God will respond with mercy to their humble and honest repentance, and then "you will come to understand that nothing is definitively lost and you will also be able to ask forgiveness of your child, who is now living in the Lord." What could be more calculated to create feelings of guilt? (On second thoughts, it would have been worse a few decades ago, when mothers were told that the soul of the necessarily unbaptised foetus was in Limbo, not Heaven; and worse still a few cen-

turies before that, when it would have been consigned to Hell for all eternity).

The whole gamut of Catholic bio-ethics, from embryology to euthanasia, turns on the doctrine of an immortal soul. At one time, theologians laid down a particular week in the pregnancy when the soul entered the foetus (a few weeks later for female fetuses than for males!), but modern theologians admit they have no knowledge of the actual timing; so, to be on the safe side, it has been assumed that ensoulment takes place at the moment of fertilisation of the human ovum – and most Catholics, including the Pope, now seem to regard this as fact. It is expressed in the favourite statement of all "pro-lifers" repeated yet again in this encyclical: "Life begins at conception."

That is, of course, a biological nonsense, as there is no beginning for any individual life. The unfertilised egg is a living entity, and was present in the mother when she herself was a foetus. Similarly, the spermatozoon is a living entity. When the two come together, that is an

During the papal visit to London in 1982, I wrote him a letter pointing out that in this country more than a third of all abortion operations are, disproportionately, carried out on Catholic women – mostly young, single, Catholic women, who are reluctant to take contraceptive precautions, since that would indicate an unforgivable prior readiness to "sin" rather than mere human frailty. Needless to say, I never received a reply.

important stage in the life cycle, but no more than that. Another favourite pro-life phrase is "The embryo is human." Of course it is human – it is not a non-human embryo, such as that of a chicken – but that is not to say that it is a human being, any more than a human fingernail is a human being.

It is impossible to point to a particular moment when a human being develops, since development is a gradual process. By analogy, at what moment does a boy become a man? Nobody really believes that it suddenly happens, say, on his 18th birthday, except for particular arbitrary legal purposes. However, this is not to say that a small boy should be given the same responsibilities as a mature man; only that such gradual change requires flexibility.

However, even the dictum "Life begins at conception" fails to explain the Catholic prohibition on artificial means of birth control. That seems to hinge on the anti-sex attitude that sexual pleasure can be justified only if it entails a chance of conception, thus enabling God to bring another soul into being. All other sexual activity is "dirty," presumably because the reproductive organs are so close to the organs

of excretion – a puzzling error made by the Creator!

On basic principles, it might be supposed that the technology of artificial insemination which has already produced many thousands of "test-tube" babies that would otherwise never have existed, would meet with the Pope's approval; for it is surely "pro-life" if anything is. However, it, too, is "morally wrong" in his eyes, for three reasons: firstly, because it is "unnatural" (it's a wonder that the Church allows the faithful an unnatural love-tive or aspirin); secondly, because the semen is generally obtained by means of masturbation – another dirty, unpaid-for pleasure; and thirdly, because the practice of producing half-a-dozen fertilised ova at one time entails the destruction of those that prove to be surplus, or, worse, their preservation for medical research. IVF is therefore acceptable only when the semen is that of the husband and has been obtained during coitus with his wife – for which freedom is allowable, provided it has been specially perforated! More important, no extra ova may be fertilised so as to save the mother from repeated operations, as all fertilised ova must be implanted in her womb, even if known to be defective, and even if resulting in life-threatening multiple births.

At the other extreme of the individual life, the Pope strongly denounces voluntary euthanasia, though repeating the principle that pain-killing drugs may be used even when they will shorten life, provided the intention is to relieve pain, not to cause death. (This principle of motive becomes mere casuistry in practice, but that is the Church all over.) The encyclical also reiterates Pius XII's 1957 declaration that "extraordinary" or "aggressive" treatments which prolong life need not be accepted, but does not give detailed examples, though medical practice has changed greatly since 1957, and some treatments that were seen as extraordinary have become quite ordinary.

Though there are a few mitigant things in the encyclical, in the main it is an authoritative attempt to perpetuate the most injurious traditions of the most harmful of all historical institutions, and it is sad that it has been received sycophantically by the media.

The serious papers in this country, apart from the *Independent* (with its bold headline "Standing firm in his time warp"), treat it with far too much respect. Perhaps the best of the other dailies was the *Daily Telegraph*, which published a balanced article by Clifford Longley and a leader which was sound on contraception and abortion, though reactionary on euthanasia.

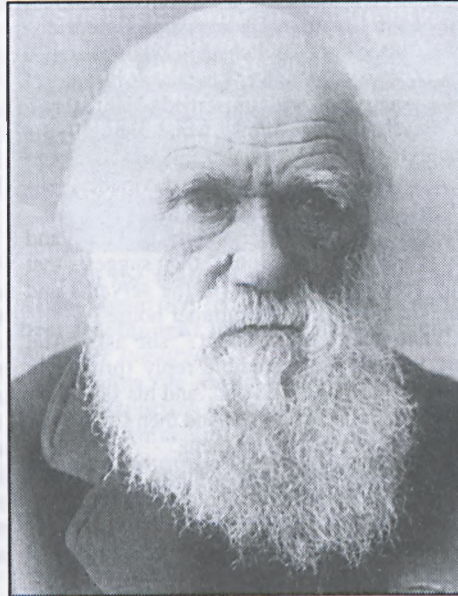
Even the American international journal *Newsweek*, chose a fan of the Pope's (Kenneth L. Woodward) to write on the encyclical: "The 'Gospel of Life', John Paul II has sealed the papacy with a comprehensive and insistent vision," and "...the issues the 'Gospel of Life' addresses are too volatile, too political – to be ignored." For the sake of humanity, the encyclical must be "ignored" – with the disdain it deserves.

Are reports of Darwin's deathbed conversion true?

FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY

The Darwin Legend by James Moore. Hodder and Stoughton. ISBN 0340 642 432. Pbk only. £6.99.

Review: COLIN McCALL



● **Charles Darwin: "I am not in the least afraid to die."**

"For centuries, religious busybodies have not only prayed for, but preyed upon famous free-thinkers." He mentions that Spinoza, Voltaire, Paine, Laplace, Emma Martin, Emile Littré, T H Huxley, Luther Burbank and Bertrand Russell are all "rumoured to have seen the light before they died."

The Pioneer Press publication *Infidel Deathbeds* by G W Foote, expanded by A D McLaren, exposed many of the myths.

And I deliberately say *myths*. If I have a fault to find with James Moore, it is his preference for the term "legend" in the present case. He is just that little bit too generous to the woman behind the main story, Lady Hope. He regards her as having put "a grotesque gloss on real historical events," a conclusion only reached, mind you, after "many years and miles of shoe leather to come up with the right evidence." Certainly he brings her to life.

She was born Elizabeth Reid Cotton on December 9, 1842, in Tasmania, eldest child of Captain (later General Sir) Arthur Cotton, of the Royal Engineers, and Elizabeth Learmouth, from a local landowning family.

The young Elizabeth married twice: in 1877 to Admiral Sir James Hope, who died in 1881, and in 1893 to a philanthropist, T Anthony Denny, who died in 1909.

She wrote extensively under the name Lady Hope on evangelistic and temperance matters,

often with "personal anecdotes reminiscent of the Darwin story." She "grew up in the four corners of the Empire," emigrated to the United States in 1913, and was sailing back in 1922 when she died in Australia. But it is her years in England that concern us here.

About 1870, the general and his family settled in Dorking, and he and his daughter "set out to evangelise the district."

Being Anglicans, says Moore, "they targeted working-class families who would not attend the parish church. Sunday school sessions led to weekday meetings for children in rented rooms, which led in turn to home visits with mothers for Bible reading and prayer. The fathers were usually in the pubs. These 'dens of iniquity' with their 'poisonous miasma' were attacked in 1873 by Elizabeth and the general. They offered a wholesome alternative: a 'coffee-room,' where the men would renounce smoking, card-playing, billiards, and bad language in exchange for simple nourishment, spiritual and physical."

The coffee-room was apparently successful, and soon Elizabeth was "spreading the good news around the country under Moody and Sankey's banner." By July, 1875, when the Americans' first mission ended, Elizabeth had "become an accredited evangelical activist...close to Moody and his family."

Having married the admiral in 1877, she continued her ministry as Lady Hope of Carriden, preaching, praying and reading the Bible with "drunkards, the destitute and the dying."

She particularly favoured the Kentish hop-growing villages within a few miles of Downe, where Darwin lived in Down Cottage.

Enter, now, James Fegan, whose mission was tent preaching and rescuing street urchins. Each summer he would take his boys to camp in Kent.

In the summer of 1880, he brought 67 boys from Deptford who, before they returned, sang a few hymns on Darwin's lawn and earned sixpence each. In the autumn, Fegan asked for the use of the old schoolroom from Darwin, who replied: "You have more right to it than we have, for your services have done more for the village in a few months than all our efforts for many years. We have never been able to reclaim a drunkard, but through your services I do not think there is one drunkard left in the village."

In July, 1881, Fegan collapsed from heat-stroke and went away to convalesce. During his three-month absence "it is likely that Lady Hope was his fill-in," says Moore. "She left a detailed, anecdotal account of tent evangelism among the Kent hop-pickers and the setting-up of a 'coffee tent' for these migrants in the region where 'our friend' Fegan worked."

She also reported meeting Darwin in autumn,

➤ **Turn to Page 70**

CHARLES DARWIN died of a heart attack on April 19, 1882, in the presence of his wife Emma, his daughters Henrietta and Bessy, and his son Francis. "I am not in the least afraid to die," whispered the author of *The Origin of Species*.

In May, 1882, a week after Darwin's burial at Westminster Abbey, "a Leeds merchant-turned-Gloucester squire" was on holiday with his wife and their four children in Tenby, South Wales. He attended Sunday services in the parish church and wrote in his diary for May 7: "We are perfectly charmed with the old parish church, its services and clergymen. Mr Huntingdon, who is almost inspired it seemed to us. In the morning he preached on the text 'In my Father's house are many mansions'; in the evening, 'This is life eternal to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent.' He spoke of Darwin as one of the greatest thinkers who had in his last utterances confessed his true faith. His words amazed and delighted us."

"We may assume, I think, that by 'true faith' Mr Huntingdon meant Christianity. That same year, Thomas Cooper (1805-92), a freethinker who had turned Christian, received a letter from the nephew of the late John Eadie, referring in turn to a letter from Darwin "in which he says he can with confidence look to Calvary."

Cooper commented (in 1885): "I do not know when Charles Darwin told Professor Eadie that he 'could with confidence look to Calvary' - or what he really meant by it." Nor can anyone else. No letter to or from Eadie is preserved in the Darwin archive.

Then, in January, 1887, Charles Dedúchson, a journalist on the *Toronto Mail*, wrote to T H Huxley asking if there was any truth in an assertion by the Presbyterian Rev John Mutch that "Mr Darwin, when on his death-bed, calmly whined for a minister and renouncing evolution, sought safety in the blood of the Saviour."

After consulting Francis Darwin, Huxley readily replied that it was "totally false and without foundation."

These are the first three instances of "over a hundred occurrences...in manuscript and print" tracked down by James Moore in *The Darwin Legend*, of Christian attempts to claim Darwin as one of them. They were still trying to do so in 1993, when Moore prepared his book for publication in America. And no doubt they will continue, especially in the United States. Moore is the author, with Adrian Desmond, of the definitive biography of Darwin and, whenever he lectures or broadcasts on the subject in North America, he is invariably asked about Darwin's "deathbed conversion."

This will come as no surprise to readers of *The Freethinker* because, in Moore's words:

FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY

From Page 69

1881, but the story "did not appear in print for *thirty-four years*" (my italics).

James Moore speculates on its spread by word-of-mouth among English evangelicals and their American co-religionists. It "could easily have spun out to reach Rev John Mutch in Toronto by 1887. Maybe Fegan repeated it when in 1884 he first took some of his boys to a settlement home in Toronto. Maybe Moody himself repeated it." And so on.

Whatever the case, Moore continues, "there is no doubt that Lady Hope was making discreet (!) comments about Darwin to her religious friends long before the story was published."

Long before? The example given is dated 1907, when Sir Robert Anderson, Scotland Yard detective and Lady Hope confidant, wrote in an anti-evolutionary book, "a friend of mine who was much with Darwin during his last illness assures me that he expressed the greatest reverence for the Scriptures and bore testimony to their value."

It was at a conference in Massachusetts in August, 1915, that Lady Hope introduced herself as "a friend of Charles Darwin" and, a fortnight later, the Baptist magazine *Watchman-Examiner* carried her story under the title "Darwin and Christianity," which James Moore reproduces.

"It was on one of those glorious autumn afternoons, that we sometimes enjoy in England, when I was asked to go in and sit with the well known Professor, Charles

Darwin," she begins.

She notes Darwin's "fine presence," his "noble forehead and fine features" as he sat up in bed in his purple dressing gown, holding – wait for it – "an open Bible, which he was always studying."

"What are you reading now?" asks this conceited woman as "I seated myself by his bedside."

"Hebrews' he answered – 'still Hebrews, The Royal Book I call it. Isn't it grand?'"

The story grows more preposterous. At mention of the Creation, Darwin shows great distress, "his fingers twitched nervously, and a look of agony came over his face as he said: 'I was a young man with unformed ideas. I threw out queries, suggestions, wondering all the time over everything: and to my astonishment the ideas took like wildfire. People made a religion of them.'"

He talks about "the holiness of God" and "the grandeur of this Book," then suggests that Lady Hope should speak to the servants and some neighbours in his summer house.

"What shall I speak about?" she asks. And there follows the incredible reply (printed in capitals) "CHRIST JESUS...and his salvation. Is not that the best theme? And then I want you to sing some hymns with them."

Need I go further? James Moore does. While pointing out definite falsehoods and acknowledging that "This amazing account bears all the hallmarks of Lady Hope's anecdotal imagination," he cannot dismiss it as "pure invention." It contains "startling elements of authenticity," he says.

The view from the bedroom, for example; Darwin's dressing gown which had a "reddish brown or purple tint"; the fact that there was a summer house. Of course, he immediately adds, "some of this inside information was scattered about the *Life and Letters* and in other publications that had appeared by 1915. The more intimate tidbits might have been winkled out of members of the Darwin household, such as Parslow or Mrs Sales, both involved in Fegan's mission in the 1880s."

But Moore can't see why Lady Hope should have gone to the trouble of collecting all these details, "committing them to an otherwise hazy memory, and concocting a story around them that is so modest, relatively speaking, in its claims." And it is not a "deathbed conversion"; though clearly there would be no need for a deathbed conversion if Darwin were already as far gone as the story suggests.

Moore, however, detects a "ring of truth in it," and thinks that "A 'Lady' who had helped in the village, who ministered in the homes of the elderly and the ill, might well have received an invitation to call on" Darwin. After all, "he welcomed other guests – Aveling, Büchner, and Brodie Innes" and, in Moore's view, "Lady Hope had more status than any of these men."

Let that pass. There is still one seemingly insuperable problem. The members of Darwin's family, without exception, complete-

ly denied the story.

Francis told T H Huxley in 1887 that it was "false and without any kind of foundation" called it "a work of imagination" (1915), "fabrication" (1917) and declared it "quite untrue" (1918). He affirmed that his father was an agnostic. Henrietta insisted that Lady Hope was "not present during his last illness, or any illness"; that Darwin "never recanted any of his scientific views"; and that "The whole story has no foundation whatever." Leonard Darwin dismissed it as a "hallucination" (1930) and "purely fictitious" (1931). Moreover, Moore's researches reveal that Francis "tackled Lady Hope at least five times" and once publicly accused her of falsehood. He also probably wrote the 'very angry letter' it was said, 'distress her very much' and made her stop publishing the story."

We switch now to *The Humanist* which in 1960 and 1965, printed articles by Pat Sloan who, though he never discovered her identity, argued that "Lady Hope may at some time have visited" Down House. Moore sets out to support this, searching the meteorological records for "one of those glorious autumn afternoons" when Francis Darwin was not present, and before James Fegan, the evangelist returned after his three-month absence mentioned earlier, as even he pronounced the story a "fabrication" (would he be likely, therefore, to have helped spread it in Toronto, as Moore ed?)

Moore concludes that Lady Hope could have called on Darwin "in the immediate aftermath of a visit by Edward Aveling and Ludwig Büchner. "He did not instigate the attack on visit to Down House...By contrast he did invite Lady Hope to call (*according to her private accounts*) and was found reading the Bible" (my italics). And he may have done it to "mollify" his wife, Emma, who was concerned about her husband's unbelief.

Does it matter? The answer is *no*; though while differing from his conclusion, I am full of admiration for Moore's detective work.

Much more important are Darwin's own beliefs, and for these we must turn to his *Autobiography*, which was only published in full in 1958, by his granddaughter, Nora Barlow.

There he describes how "disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but was at last complete. The rate was so slow that I felt no distress, and have never since doubted even for a single second that my conclusion was correct."

Then comes the complete answer to Lady Hope and her many followers: "I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to profess Christianity to be true; for if so the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my Father, Brother and almost all my best friends will be everlastingly punished."

"And this is a damnable doctrine."
So, again expressing my admiration for James Moore's revealing work, I have to add that he is too charitable to Hope.

Scots have new-look journal

SCOTTISH Humanists have a new-look journal, *Humanism Scotland*, and a new Editor.

Jane Fox takes the chair of the quarterly, which is obtainable at £5 a year from 11A, Strathkinness High Road, St Andrews KY16 9UA (cheques payable to Humanist Society of Scotland).

Eric Stockton, who made such a success of *The Scottish Humanist*, continues to write for the magazine, which also has contributions from Sandy Edwards, Nigel Bruce, Frank Neville, John Watson and others.

The Spring issue has a major article on Taslima Nasrin by Sanal Edamaruku, which illustrates that, while the main emphasis will be on the gratifyingly large amount of Humanist activity taking place North of the Border, Jane Fox is by no means parochial in her editorial outlook.

Humanist origins in their social setting

Foundations of Modern Humanism by Wm McIlroy. Sheffield Humanist Society, 117 Springvale Road, Walkley, Sheffield S6 3NT. £1 (inc. post) or 75p from bookshops. ISBN 0 9525644 0 8.

Review: COLIN McCALL

denying the truth of revelation, and Peter Annet (regarded by J M Robertson as the first freethought lecturer) for his journal *The Free Inquirer*.

Bill notes the major social upheavals of the half-century between 1780 and 1830, land enclosure and the industrial revolution, and quotes Lecky's indictment of the Church of England as "the most servile and efficient agent of tyranny."

The Church was rewarded for its support of the *status quo* with the Million Act of 1818, "a time of dreadful poverty, illiteracy

and disease among working people," when "Parliament voted one million pounds...to build churches in the new towns. Sheffield got four of them."

The irreligion of the radical movement which developed during the last quarter of the 18th Century, epitomised in the writings of Thomas Paine, gave way to the anti-religion of 19th Century radicals like Henry Hetherington and Richard Carlile, two more editors who suffered imprisonment. To quote J M Robertson again, "it is significant that poor men were persecuted for freethinking, while the better-placed went free."

Bill McIlroy relates the freethought/humanist movement to its social setting: "The first three decades of the 1800s were punctuated by riots, demonstrations and agitation for reform. The law was despised, its officers corrupt and the military hated. Pressure for change resulted in the Reform Act of 1832." But the growing middle classes alone were enfranchised.

Chartism spearheaded the campaign in the 1840s and, after its collapse, "it was the freethought movement that kept the radical flame alight." And there was a remarkable spread of secular societies.

The National Secular Society was founded in 1866 under the presidency of Charles Bradlaugh who, with Annie Besant, also helped to pioneer the birth control movement. And, as Bill says, "Clean water and control of fertility have done more to enhance the quality of life in just over a century than Christianity has done in nearly two thousand years."

This pamphlet is, as I have said, based on a lecture to the Sheffield Humanist Society, and it is informed with local references. A gravestone in Sheffield General Cemetery records that Margaret Green, before she died in 1869 at the age of 45, had buried 10 of her children, aged between six days and seven years.

In 1795, the Sheffield Constitutional Society published a sixpenny edition of Paine's *Rights of Man*; in 1822, a collection was taken on behalf of Richard Carlile; a Hall of Science was opened in 1841 with George Jacob Holyoake in charge, but his stay "was curtailed when he was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment for blasphemy" (the subject of John Osborne's television play, *A Subject of Scandal and Concern*), and so on.

It is clear that Bill McIlroy has done a great deal of research in the city where he now lives and this, integrated with the national history, makes his little essay an enlightening read.

AS A former Editor of *The Freethinker* and General Secretary of the National Secular Society, Bill McIlroy is well fitted to talk and write about the *Foundations of Modern Humanism*. He is steeped in the history of freethought and secularism, from which the modern humanist movement has developed, and he has marshalled his material cogently and clearly in this little pamphlet, based on a lecture given to the Sheffield Humanist Society in February.

There are, of course, problems with the word *humanism*: it does not, in itself, imply unbelief, so a definition is necessary. Here it is used as "an umbrella term for those who, however they may describe themselves, reject religious beliefs."

Closest unbelief has always been possible – and safe (perhaps the most notable Victorian example is that of Charles Darwin). Publication is a very different matter, and Bill draws attention to two 18th Century publicists who were pilloried and imprisoned: Jacob Ilive for his 1753 pamphlet

Why does God get all the cash?

The Bible is very clear about proportional giving: people should pay a tithe, a tenth of their income. So said Father Peter Walker, of St James, Colchester, in response to the news that "the loss of £800 million from the funds of the Church Commissioners had done 'more than any other single act to destroy the parish system of the national Church,' the Commons Select Committee on Social Security said in its report yesterday" (*Daily Telegraph*, April 21).

As may be imagined, there was not a dry eye in *The Freethinker* office when we learned that some parishes could go the way of the shipyards, and scores of priests join thatched-roof miserably in the dole queues, as a result of what the Committee called the "unbelievable naivety" of the Church's financial bosses. But in between sobs we couldn't help noticing that Father Walker's congregation of only 165 actually pays the Diocese of Chelmsford around £29,000 a year.

That is more – far, far more – than all of Britain's atheists contribute to the fund which is vital to the survival of their journal, *The Freethinker*.

And that *is* sad.

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

Many thanks to: G McGhee, £2; G R Gourlay, M Hami and F A Stevenson, £3 each; H Bowman, S Dane, E W Clayton, T Cornish, F Dent, L Glyn, M D Gough, D Higgs, G R Hopcyn, M Kerr, R Lee, R Leveridges, T Ong, S Ward, R V Samuels, L Smith and R Stubbs, £5 each; L Georgiades, £8; Anonymous, A Benakis, D Bye, A M Clifford-Winters, A Downs, W Johnson, H J Jakeman, C Lovett, A Martin, B Peacock and P Ponting Barber £10 each; M Hill, £12; P L Cohen, W D Eaton, I C Hyde, G L Lucas and M O Morley, £15 each; I Campbell and Edinburgh Humanist Group, £20 each; Anonymous and B Aubrey, £35 each.

Total for March: £411.

As 'a kind of no Karachi, what no

THE case of the Pakistani Christian boy of 13, Salamat Masih, sentenced to death for blasphemy and then acquitted on appeal, following international pressure, perhaps justifies a look at Pakistan in retrospect – why it was created and where it is going.

In the pre-Independence days – before August, 1947 – the primary complaint of the Muslims was that they would not be secure in a United India, where they would be a minority of about 25 per cent of the population. And in order to *prove* that they would be insecure, a large number of disturbances were started, primarily by Muslims, in areas where they were in a substantial minority! Where they were a very small minority, they suffered no harm from the Hindus. Conversely, where the Hindus were in a small minority, in Sindh and the Frontier Province, they were not at risk from the Muslims either.

A few years before Partition, there was not a great deal of support for the Pakistan idea among the Muslims in their majority areas. In fact, there was a pro-unity Congress Muslim ministry in the Frontier Province during the negotiations.

As Independence grew nearer, the cry of "Islam in danger!" grew louder, and the Pakistan slogan gained more support among the Muslims. But it was the Great Killing of Calcutta, organised by the Muslim League Government in Bengal in August, 1946, followed by Hindu riots in Bihar and UP, and Muslim riots in East Bengal, that broke the Congress will to resist the Partition of India.

It is arguable that it was the Urdu-speaking Muslims of UP and Bihar, and other Muslims from Bengal and Bombay, who under the obdurate leadership of Mr Jinnah (a Gujurati Muslim) forced Partition.

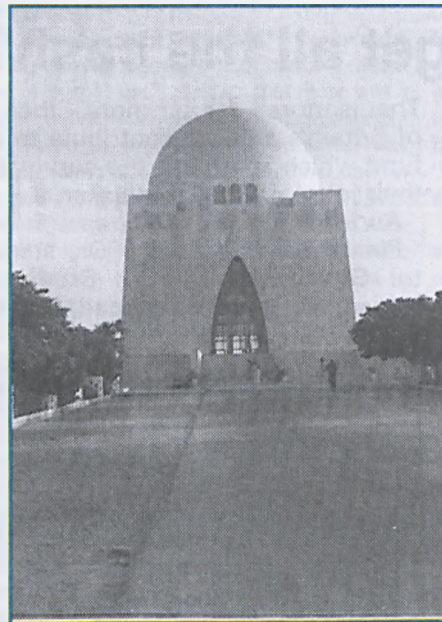
Once the demand for Pakistan was conceded, it was Mr Jinnah's hope that it would be an ordinary secular democratic state, albeit with a large Muslim majority. In his address to the Constituent Assembly in Karachi on August 11, 1947, he said:

You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any other religion or caste or creed – that has

nothing to do with the business of the State... We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one State... You will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State.

It is paradoxical that such a statement should have come from someone who had made religion the basis of his two-nation theory and enforced an unwieldy Partition on a formerly united sub-continent.

The vast mass of Muslims, especially in West Punjab, were swayed by a different idea from Mr Jinnah's. In the State of the Pure (*Pak* = Pure), there was no room for Hindus and Sikhs. Large-scale massacres and an exodus of Hindus and Sikhs started from West Punjab, and retaliatory actions



● **The tomb of Mohammed Ali Jinnah in Karachi – a place of pilgrimage for Muslims. But for how long if the Shia founder of Pakistan is judged to be non-Islamic by the Sunnis? (Photo: Sikh Pilgrimage to Pakistan)**

against Muslims in East Punjab produced similar massacres and an exodus of Muslims in the other direction.

The efforts of Mahatma Gandhi and Bengali Muslim leaders prevented a disaster in East Pakistan (East Bengal West Bengal, but a trickle of Hindus always persisted from East to West. Pockets of Hindus survive in Sindh.

The mullahs and the Islamic organisation *Jamaat-e-Islami* were constantly pushing to give an Islamic character to the Pakistani state and society. In 1953-54, they turned their attention to the Ahmediya, a heterodox sect who believed that their leader, Ghulam Ahmed, had a fresh revelation in the 19th Century. This is intolerable to the orthodox because Mohammed is to them a "Seal of the Prophets." Riots against the Ahmediya followed, with increasing pressure until finally they were declared non-Muslims in the Legislature. Their position corresponded somewhat to the Bahai of Iran.

The population of East Pakistan (East Bengal) was, in fact, slightly larger than that of West Pakistan. In spite of this, the Pakistani establishment – controlling centres, from 1,000 miles away – gave an inferior status to the Bengali language. A language based vocabulary with its West Bengali neighbour, was anathema to the Arabic/Persian oriented West Pakistanis.

The Bengali Muslims won the elections in 1970-71 and by rights should have formed the Government of Pakistan. They were therefore suppressed and the Pakistani establishment let loose a reign of terror in East Pakistan. Bengali resistance received support from India, a war ensued – and Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign state in 1971. Pakistan had thus alienated and, in effect, expelled more than half of its own population.

A breakdown by language in Pakistan would be approximately: Punjabi, 60 per cent; Baluchi, four per cent; Urdu, six per cent; Sindhi, 18 per cent; Pushtu, 12 per cent. Failing to learn from the Bengali experience, the establishment gives Urdu a prior status, hoping it will unify the country.

In reality, the Pushtuns have always shown strong support for an autonomous

Madness' engulfs Next for Pakistan?

The writer, GOVIND N DEODHEKAR, was a left-wing activist in pre-independence India. For many years he has been a leading member of the British Freethought movement and is a member of the Council of the National Secular Society and a Director of G W Foote & Co, publisher of *The Freethinker*. Deodhekar recently returned to London from a fact-finding trip to the sub-continent.

Baluchistan, sometimes talking about seceding to join Afghanistan. The *Jiye Sindh* (Live Sindh!) movement for autonomy has been kept from dead. The Baluchis have never accepted accession to Pakistan, claiming the principal ruler in Baluchistan, the Khan of Kalat, was coerced by the Pakistan army into submission. Armed resistance has broken out from time-to-time and repression of the army has ensued. The torment of the Baluchi people has received no attention from the international media – not even the *New York Times*.

In the meantime, the Urdu-speaking Muslims are also restless. Concentrated in the north-west and its environs, they are demanding a separate area there for themselves. The Baluchis, naturally, are hostile to the demand: they do not want to see their principal city, Karachi, swamped by Urdu-speakers, being taken over from Sindh.

Shia and Sunni

Recently, there has been news of another conflict – that between the Sunni majority and the Shia minority. Mosques have been attacked by gunmen, and worshippers killed in the spot, suggesting that the mosques are centres of power rather than of holiness in the eyes of the militant Muslims. It is not clear which side started attacks on mosques, but it is clear that, in the long run, the Shia minority will suffer the greater number of casualties. Saudi Arabia and Iran are suspected of supporting the Sunni and the Shia, respectively.

The Shia are the partisans of Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, who became the fourth Caliph, or representative of the Prophet. The Sunnis contend that Ali was the legitimate successor and that the first three Khalifas were usurpers. The Sunni respect Ali, but

maintain that the first three were appointed legitimately.

The Shia are a minority all over the sub-continent but they dominate the city of Lucknow. Large numbers claim descent from, or close association with, the last Nawab of Oudh. In pre-Independence India, this Shia élite claimed and exercised the right to organise processions in the city denouncing the first three Khalifas. This denunciation was called *Tabarra*.

The Sunni minority of Lucknow, being of a poorer class – probably weavers – were content to reply by reciting the *Madhe Saheba*, the verse of which, in translation, was:

For us, O Spirit of Islam, our concern is only with thee. We wish to venerate the names of Abubakr, Umar, Usman and Ali. We don't wish to conquer the Throne of Rum [Eastern Rome; Constantinople]. We don't wish to conquer Shaam [Syria]. We wish to venerate the name of the True God in all corners of the earth.

The history was all wrong, Syria and Constantinople having fallen to the Muslims long back. But I think this restrained and rather dignified rejoinder saved many lives, though many heads were broken.

No such restraint seems to be necessary in Karachi today, where both sides have guns which have spilled over from the US support to the Afghan *Mujahideen* groups.

An extremist among the extremist Sunni militants is reported to have agitated for the Shia to be declared non-Muslims, like the Ahmediya. Presumably, the logic of such a stand would be: if those who disrespect the Prophet cannot be termed Muslims, by extension those who disrespect the first three Khalifas also cannot be Muslims.

Such a stand is wildly impractical to the point of absurdity, of course, but the implications are also strange and confusing.

It would mean that Iran and its Ayatollahs are not Muslims and that Pakistan itself was founded by a non-Muslim – as Mr Mohammed Ali Jinnah was a Shia! Even Dr Kalim Siddiqui, a founder of the self-styled Muslim Parliament here in the UK would be cast out as a Shia. A spectacular case of the biter bit!

The commonality of Muslims, Shia or Sunni, are far more united than the hatreds of the extremists would suggest.

But back to Karachi, where a kind of madness has now descended. All sorts of armed rivals are killing each other in surprise attacks. Drug gang *versus* drug gang; Shia *versus* Sunni; Government supporters *versus* opposition ones; Sindhi *versus* Urdu speakers. Even the Urdu speakers (still referred to as *Muhajirins*: refugees from India) are split into two embittered factions who take pot-shots at each other.

I asked a Pakistani acquaintance how people carried on in the middle of all this. He said that the trick was to stand still when the shooting broke out. If you move, you are dead. If you stand still, you have a better chance of staying alive because the gangs may be content to shoot at their specific targets.

As for the Christians, most, if not all, of them are descendants of Scheduled Caste (so-called "Untouchable") Hindus who tried to escape to India at Partition. The egalitarianism of the Muslims did not stretch to the point of cleaning their own streets and WCs, so the Hindu sanitary workers were forcibly detained. They embraced Christianity, seeing in it a safer shield than Hinduism. Perhaps, after 45 years and with education, they are thought of as having become "uppity" and the treatment of young Salamat Masih and his family (see *The Freethinker*, March and April) is a symptom of this resentment.

That a modern state should have mandatory death sentences for "insulting" God, the Koran or the Prophet is bad enough. That the prosecuting lawyer should have stamped angrily from the court because he failed to get a conviction

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

Birmingham Humanist Group: For information about Group activities contact Adrian Bailey on 0121 353 1189. Wednesday, May 17, 7.30 for 8pm, AGM at Martineau Centre, Balden Road, Harborne. Monday, June 5, 7.30 for 8pm, Martineau Hall, Balden Road, Harborne: Jane Wynne Willson: *International Humanism*.

Blackpool & Fylde Humanist Group: For details, please contact Secretary D Baxter. Telephone: 01253 726112.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group: 40 Cowper Street, Hove (near Hove Station, bus routes 2a, 5 and 49). Sunday, June 4, 5.30pm for 6pm: George Mephem: *The Arms Trade*.

Bristol Humanists: For details, please contact John Smith on 01225 752260 or Margaret Dearnaley on 01275 393305.

Central London Humanists: For details, please contact Cherie Holt on 0171 916 3015 or Hilary Leighter on 01895 632096.

Chiltern Humanists: Details of group from 01296 623730.

Cornwall Humanists: Contact: B Mercer, "Amber," Short Cross Road, Mount Hawke, Truro TR4 8EA. Telephone: 01209 890690.

Cotswold Humanists: For details, please contact Philip Howell, 2 Cleavelands Close, Cheltenham GL50 4PZ. Telephone: 01242 528743.

Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists: Waverley Day Centre, 65 Waverley Road, Kenilworth: Monday, May 15, 7.30pm: Public meeting: *Humanist Morality - Should Humanists Take a Stance on Specific Moral Issues?* Information: telephone 01926 58450.

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: 01293 511270.

Devon Humanists: For details, please contact: C Mountain, "Little Gables," Burgmanns Hill, Lympstone, Exmouth EX8 5HN; 01395 265529.

Ealing Humanists: Friends Meeting House, 17 Woodville Road, Ealing W5. Meetings start at 8pm. Details: telephone Derek Hill 0181-422 4956 or Charles Rudd 0181-904 6599.

Edinburgh Humanist Group: Programme from secretary, 2 Saville Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 3AD; 0131 667 8389.

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA): Information from 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth CV8 2HD; telephone 01926 58450. Monthly meetings (second Friday, 7.30pm) at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Hampstead Humanist Society: Information and programme of meetings from NIBarnes, 10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 0HP.

Havering & District Humanist Society: HOPWA House, Inskip Drive, Hornchurch. Tuesday, June 6, 8pm: Ralph Ison: *Darwin - the Man Who Changed a Ladder Into a Bush*. For further information, contact J Condon 01708 473597 or J Baker 0708 458925.

Humanist Society of Scotland: Secretary: George Rodger, 17 Howburn Place, Aberdeen AB1 2XT (telephone: 01224 573034). Convener: Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire; telephone: 01563 526710.

Humanist Society of Scotland, Glasgow Group: Information regarding meetings and other activities from Hugh Bowman, 7 Elm Road, Burnside, Glasgow G73 4JR; telephone 0141 634 1447.

Kent Humanists: Information from M Rogers, secretary, 2 Lyndhurst Road, Broadstairs CT10 1DD; telephone 01843 864506.

Leeds & District Humanist Group: Swarthmore Centre, Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Meetings at 7.30pm. Tuesday,

May 9: Wendy Formby: *The Feminist Movement Today*.

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

Lewisham Humanist Group: Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, May 25, 8pm: David Porter: *Sex, Humanity and New Technology*.

Manchester: Greater Manchester Humanist Group: Information: 0161 432 9045. Meetings begin at 7.30pm, St Thomas' Centre, Ardwick Green. May 12: Arthur Chappell: *Do Humanists Dream of Electric Sheep?*

Norwich Humanist Group: Martineau Hall, 21a Colegate, Norwich: Thursday, May 18, 7.30pm: AGM followed by social evening. Information about group from Brian Snoad on 01603 455101.

Preston and District Humanist Group: Information regarding meetings and other activities is obtainable from Peter Howells, telephone 01257 265276.

Sheffield Humanist Society: Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street (adjoining Bank Street), Sheffield. Wednesday, June 7, 8pm: Public meeting.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1 (telephone 0171-831 7723). List of events obtainable from above address.

Stockport Secular Group: Details of activities from the Secretary, Carl Pinel, 85 Hall Street, Offerton, Stockport SK1 4DE. Telephone: 0161 480 0732.

Sutton Humanist Group: Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Meetings 7.30pm for 8pm. Wednesday, May 10: Debbie Chay, Lecturer in Constitutional Law: *Charter 88 - a Bill of Rights*. Wednesday, June 14: Peter Heales: *David Hume - a Key Figure in the Development of Humanism*.

Teesside Humanist Group: Friends Meeting House, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees. Meetings second Wednesday of each month. Wednesday, May 10: Discussion of statement of beliefs. Contact J Cole on 01642 559418 or R Wood 01740 650861 or write to J Cole, 94 High Street, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees.

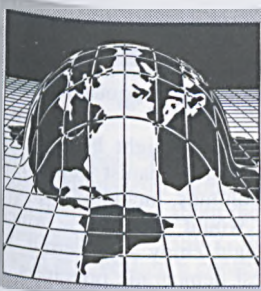
Tyneside Humanist Group: Meets on third Thursday of each month (except August), starting 6.45pm in the Literary and Philosophical Society building, Westgate Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. June 22: Harry Clark: *Environment Issues*. July 20: David Boulton, Sea of Faith: *Humanism in the Churches*.

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: Info: Mike Sargent, 01903 239823.

HUMANIST ANTHOLOGY

Attractively produced, updated edition of Margaret Knight's fascinating work, revised by Jim Herrick with a preface by Edward Blishen. Rationalist Press Association. £7.50, plus £1 postage, from RPA, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP. A "most acceptable introduction to the Humanist tradition" - Colin McCall, *The Freethinker*.



DOWN TO EARTH

with Bill McIlroy



Marriage without religion

LAST month saw a modest but significant advance in the secularisation of British society. The Marriage Act 1994, the outcome of a Private Member's Bill introduced by Conservative MP Gyles Brandreth, was implemented – and through it the churches have lost an important social advantage.

Non-religious wedding ceremonies can now take place in buildings other than a register office. While the Marriage Act 1836 authorised marriages without a religious service, civic facilities have traditionally been, to say the least, somewhat lacking in charm and character. Deliberately or otherwise – most likely the former – register offices were located in seedy and unsuitable buildings.

In the past, many atheistically or agnostically inclined couples have gone through the religious motions in church because of family pressure and lack of suitable surroundings for the fashion parade. All that will now change. Owners of buildings ranging from the National Railway Museum at York to the Royal Pavilion at Brighton are applying for licences confirm-

ing eligibility as marriage venues. *Under new guidelines, such buildings must have no religious connections and ceremonies must be strictly secular in content.*

With christenings going out of fashion and now the provision of attractive facilities for non-religious marriage ceremonies, the clergy are fast becoming an irrelevancy in social life. True, religion still has a central role at most funerals. Let us hope that it is a symbolic one.

New Life - old tosh

THE Easter special issue of *New Life* ("The Newspaper That Celebrates the Work of Christianity") scarcely mentioned that business of the empty tomb. But it reported another resurrection – that of a six-year-old Chinese boy.

Eighteen hours after his "death," the boy's mother wrapped him in a blanket and took him to church. After much prayer, "the child began to cry loudly. He was calling for his mother. She fell on her knees and thanked the Lord for his great miracle."

This ought to be good news for Virginia Bottomley and hundreds of patients in our children's hospitals. But, unfortunately, the Lord appears to perform his great miracles

only on unnamed patients in far-away places. And does it not seem odd to believers that the Almighty miracle worker is also the supposed creator of all things, including malignant tumours, viruses and germs?

New Life also reported how two English women – again unnamed – were miraculously cured of cancer after receiving handkerchiefs which had been prayed over by the Bishop of West Malaysia. "It's a joy to hear that both of them are healed," he enthused.

Known to his flock as Bishop John, he spoke of another "miracle healing" after praying over a Chinese woman whose doctors "gave her a maximum of three days to live." But after a few hours of prayer "she got up from her bed...and was discharged on the third day having fully recovered."

New Life concluded its report with the sad announcement that "Bishop John died recently from a heart attack."

Watch this space for news of his miraculous recovery.

Not-so-good Friday for the thirsty

FRIDAY evening, and one is enjoying a glass or three at a favourite watering-hole. All of a sudden comes the landlord's doom-laden announcement: "Last orders at the bar, please." Last orders at the bar? But it's only twenty-past-ten! Perhaps the bar clock has stopped. Then the awful truth dawns. It is Good Friday. Sunday opening hours apply.

No doubt the Government was compelled to placate the religious Right and the puritanical Left in order to ensure safe passage of the Sunday Trading Act 1994. But will it take another 40 years, as in the case of Sunday shopping, before the remaining petty restrictions are swept away? Will the Keep Sunday Special Campaign rename itself the Keep Good Friday Special Campaign?

Perhaps it is time to revive the estimable Ancient Order of Froth Blowers which was very active in the 1920s. In addition to raising large sums for charity, Froth Blowers fought the good fight against licensing justices, religious prodnoses and assorted pussyfoots who endeavour to restrict other people's pleasure.

Unveiled threats in Toyland

MUSLIM men prefer their women to be obedient and dowdy. Even English female converts cover themselves from head to foot with dull drapery in deference to their Islamic lords and masters. Any hint of colour indicates a weakness for that bugaboo known as "Western life style."

Now it appears that Kuwait's religious leaders have been getting worked up over little girls, particularly one known as Barbie. Actually she is a doll – that's not a politically incorrect expression, by the way – approximately 12 inches in height, a favourite to generations of children. Sounds innocent enough, but sex-obsessed mullahs have issued a *fatwa* against her.

A representative of the Islamic *Sharia* has denounced Barbie as a "she-devil." The servants of Allah are in a sweat

over the doll's polished finger nails and "shameful clothing," not to mention "the voluptuous fullness of the lips and blonde styling of the hair."

Demanding a ban on sales of the "she-devil" doll, the Islamic spokesman said: "Our children must be protected from this evil Western style of living."

This preoccupation with Western ways can become a tragic obsession. For example, in Turkey last month, two sisters, aged 20 and 21, were shot dead by their brother. He was "shamed by their Western life style and felt that his honour as the older brother was tainted."

In fact it is the "family and honour" zealots, not Barbie dolls, from whom young people, particularly girls, need protection in Islam-dominated societies.

YOU'RE TELLING US!

Humanism's way forward

IN the March issue of *The Freethinker*, Frank Holmes drew attention to the unorganised but substantial minority of unbelievers in Britain. In an earlier issue of the *New Humanist*, Nicolas Walter also raised the same topic.

The question is – how can we approach this vast number and provide some organisation so that their existence is at least recognised by society at large, and some provision made for their minimum needs for birth, marriage and death?

During the last couple of years, I have given some thought to this question and here is my suggestion...

One of our organisations – perhaps the National Secular Society – should set up a Register of Non-religious Citizens. Non-religious people would then be invited to write in on the following lines: "I [name] being a British [or EC or Commonwealth] citizen of 18 years or more, resident in Britain, confirm that I am not a follower of any religion, faith or cult, and wish to be included in the Register of Non-religious Citizens."

A small fee of, say, £5 or £10 towards printing, postage, publicity and administration costs would be required – for the simple reason that the greater the response, the greater the drain on the resources of the initiating organisation. It could be suggested that a voluntary donation in addition to the registration fee would be appreciated.

This would be a once-in-a-lifetime step for non-religious persons. They would not be joining an ordinary sort of organisation with AGMs, resolutions, election of officers and the like. In acknowledgement of their request, they would be issued with a well-printed certificate by the Registrar of Non-religious Citizens, which they could preserve like any other serious document – birth certificate, marriage certificate and so on.

It should be made clear in the original invitation that the Register would not be used for commercial purposes, although some people might not resent a latter approach to attend a meeting or to join one of our organisations, unless of course they ticked a box to indicate that they wished for no further communications.

My suggestion differs from that of Frank Holmes in one important respect. He seems to suggest that our present Humanist organisations should unite in some way and that this would enhance the value in the media of any Humanist viewpoint because of the large number of non-religious persons associated with it.

There is, of course, a case for "rationalising" some of our organisations and keeping some separate. This is an entirely different matter. Our separate organisations often represent a separate approach or a separate mood. A movement heavily pressurised into unification by rank-and-file pressure could splinter when serious differences of strategy or personal

antipathies arose, as is shown by history.

In any case, whether our organisations united by merger, by federation or even by confederation, the majority of organised Humanists assembled in general meetings would nearly always adopt a "liberal," "progressive," "left-of-centre" position on controversial issues. But the Register of Non-religious Citizens must be able to attract all non-religious persons, whatever their views on any given controversial topic.

The Register, if it attracted large numbers, would reduce the influence of religious and dogmatic organisations and hence indirectly support Freethought, but it must be open to all who have no religion.

G N DEODHEKAR
London N3

MR FRANK Holmes will be comforted to know that all the objectives he sets out for a new corporate organisation for Humanism are included in the five-year strategic plan *Making Humanism Happen*, which is to be launched at the forthcoming AGM of the British Humanist Association.

The plan relies on five aims: the promotion of Humanism in clear and comprehensible terms to an ever-widening audience; the recognition of Humanism both through achieving equal status with religions across the whole of public life and through the achievement of moral authority and influence; the implementation of Humanism through practical and pastoral activities, the organisation of Humanism through the BHA (and allies!) and participation in Humanism by those who recognise that Humanism requires personal responsibility and commitment.

Each aim will be delivered by a number of practical objectives to be achieved within an agreed time. The emphasis is very much on getting down to business.

There is something for all "tendencies" in the plan, and scope for all who care about the future of organised Humanism to support it through involvement with the many projects to be developed, or through financial support.

If this plan receives the support of the national Humanist organisations, it will have the effect of drawing us together in a practical and potentially very successful common purpose.

We may then find that we have become a single organisation in all but name. Then we can go forward on the strength of shared success, and avoid the debilitating bickering over obscure "theological" differences which might result if we were simply to try to amalgamate now.

Mr Holmes, and any others who would like a copy of the plan, have only to drop a line to the BHA at Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP, enclosing an A4 or A5 self-addressed envelope with 19p stamp.

RICHARD PATERSON
Vice-Chairman, BHA

FOR the Humanist cause, *publicity* is the vital need. The best publicity is to be attacked, preferably, in the media and elsewhere, by

prominent members of the various religious bodies.

Editors, who otherwise might be cautious about normally allowing Humanist views to be expressed in their columns, including the correspondence ones, would be freed – which they, personally, might enjoy – to permit, in accordance with best democratic principles, a response to the attack from an "authorised" representative. (NB: Humanists are very rightly suspicious or chary about *organisation* – it leads to hierarchy: bishops and things, and power bases; all potentially deadly to free free-thinking).

The greatest difficulty with this "representative" idea is: who appoints him or her? What authority? Frank Holmes touches on this dilemma. Some *ad hoc* combination of HQ Humanist bodies to authorise the epistolary representatives to act without further control, since response to the attacks we have in mind would need to be immediate in terms of deadlines? Issues soon go cold in newspapers.

The essential qualifications for these reps would be, first, to have appeared in *The Freethinker* letters columns – that is, to be known. Then the following: adequate education; proven talent in the use of words; a good debater; able to provoke without malice; a sense of humour (to show we're human!); the intelligence which commands the respect of the intelligent; absolute confidence in the Cause, while avoiding the "fundamentalist" *sic* of pride.

They should not necessarily respect the opponent's point of view (a difficult one, this: his view, for you, is untenable, but you don't have to say so); they do not have to avoid displaying utter contempt for such churchpersons John Gummer, Ann Widdicombe and the Dean of York; be prepared to help kill the world-shaming dominance of the Pope, but don't balk at the risk of being crucified: it could be useful to the cause, and people like martyrs (see an incident *circa* AD33); have good feelings for former Bishop Dr Jenkins who probably doesn't believe (full stop); support the government in any steps it takes (and enforces) to ban religious practices on any part of the body (designed by God!) using surgery; oppose the humiliation, by men claiming religious authority, of half a Belief's membership; co-operate in the preparation of a world-reviving secular New Testament, thus giving hope of a really civilised Third Millennium.

And remember *The Freethinker* in your will.
NOËL RATCLIFFE
Buxton

ONE of the characteristics of the wider Humanist movement in Britain is the lack of any detectable consensus among the ordinary members with respect to important policy decisions. I believe that this defect is an important reason for our lack of growth, and the response to Frank Holmes' proposals for a wider and more coherent movement is a very good example of a typical policy debate in *The Freethinker*.

YOU'RE TELLING US!

◀ From Page 76

Debates about the general direction which British Humanism should take are different in kind from debates about the origin of the word "homophobia." Policy debates should be aimed at revealing a consensus, which in turn should lead to some kind of action, change of direction, or possibly a rational defence of the *status quo*. My impression of the prevailing opinion within British Humanism – it can only be an impression, these issues are not usually given conference time or magazine space – is that radical change, whether structural or in attitudes, is regarded as self-evidently impractical and hence not worthy of serious debate.

I agree with Peter Rodgers' comment in the April issue. "If that's what the various bodies want, so be it." But it would be nice to see clear evidence of a consensus because silence does not necessarily mean agreement with the *status quo*. I should like to see a serious, academically respectable, analysis of the development of national Humanist organisations in different countries in Europe.

I know that Humanists tend to be individualistic – but if they are too individualistic to agree about anything, they should not be arguing for an open democratic society in which decision-making is based on a well-informed consensus. For those who hold that a large and effective movement will come about by natural evolution, I would ask them to produce some evidence that this is happening or is likely to happen.

JOHN CLUNAS
Aberdeen

AS A relatively young (34) atheist who was rapidly becoming disillusioned with the tone of the majority of letters and articles in *The Freethinker*, I was delighted to see that someone is trying to raise the level of debate above the Humanist equivalent of how many angels can dance on the head of a pin.

I too fail to see the need for three or four separate organisations and would welcome a merger. I would also like to make two further suggestions. As well as a regular, national and accessible magazine, I would like to see, and would be happy to contribute to, an Atheists' Handbook. The handbook could contain addresses and telephone numbers such as that of the BHA Ceremonies Line mentioned in the last issue of *The Freethinker*, along with information on the world's religions, arguments for atheism, quotes and references from Humanist writers and thinkers, contradictions in the Bible and any other facts or figures that would be of use to committed atheists/Humanists as well as the curious or those, such as teachers, needing more information to pass on to others.

My second suggestion is inspired by a copy of 1963 annual report of the National Secular Society thrown out by my parents when they moved. The text mentions how the NSS, the BHA and the Rationalist Press Association were moving into the same building and would be working more closely together in future. What a good idea, I wonder what happened to

it? But it was the NSS badge on the cover that made me think that we have no way of proclaiming our atheism in the way that Christians have the Cross or Jews the Star of David. The badge was a simple poppy or pansy encircled by the words National Secular Society. Could we not re-adopt this badge and wear it to help show how many of us there are out there? There would also be the chance of raising some much-needed cash. No doubt I will be attacked by iconoclasts but I have no problem with wearing my atheism on my lapel.

Incidentally, if any older members know if the NSS logo, or something similar, was ever



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.

produced as a lapel badge perhaps they could contact me. I would be happy to buy a badge if it were for sale.

BEN HAYES
London SE19

FRANK Holmes rightly observes that many erstwhile churchgoers have lost faith in religion, and have more or less embraced a secular viewpoint.

He goes on to wonder why these people have not gone on to flock to join the Humanist movement. I think I can offer three good reasons:

1 Many of these ex-churchgoers feel badly let down and disillusioned on the realisation that they have been conned (often for many years) by the false claims of their respective religions, and are thus extremely reluctant and wary of joining any other organisation for fear of being conned again.

2 After discarding religion, many no doubt will adopt the atheist viewpoint, which is not necessarily in agreement with the Humanist life-stance.

3 The British Humanist Association membership fees and costs of its publications are

also considerations which have to be taken into account.

How the BHA will address the above, "Heaven" knows!

DAVID YEULETT
Greenwich

Christian Humanism

MAY I define my position as a Christian-Humanist?

In his 1992 Easter Day Sermon, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, said: "Belief in the resurrection is not an appendage to the Christian faith: it is the Christian faith"; and the then Bishop of Salisbury, the Right Rev John Baker, said that ministers who do not believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ should resign. "If you don't believe," he told them, "you have no business representing the Christian church."

Christianity is too great and valuable an ethic to depend any longer on belief in the supernatural and in the existence of a god up there, outside ourselves; some mysterious entity, all-seeing, all-knowing, all-powerful and most merciful, able, if he so wished, to end at a stroke wars and famine, cruelty and suffering, but preferring for his own inscrutable reasons to sit on his hands.

Sooner or later, such notions will be given no more credence than we give to the gods of the ancients, who in their day were believed in, prayed to, conciliated, propitiated and called in aid in times of crisis, with no evidence that it ever materialised.

But Christianity, propounded by a genius of immense power and brilliance, and of unbelievable courage, must continue to be taught, but on a humanist basis, ignoring the fabulous hyperbole, such as in biblical times the miracles, which tend to be attributed in one form or another to any very great man.

The best text for such teaching is the beautiful literature of the Gospels themselves, accepting that much of it is myth and fable.

[Dr] J G BOURNE
Salisbury

What's in a name?

WHY not clarify and simplify the purpose of Humanism? Or even call it Atheism (so as everyone will know what it's all about).

Humanism should exist for the purpose of upholding the right to worship NO GOD, anywhere in the world, and to help and protect those whose lives might be endangered by these views.

It should promote non-religious education and work to abolish blasphemy laws, worldwide. Nothing more. Political or other views

◀ Turn to Page 78

YOU'RE TELLING US!

From Page 77

should be irrelevant. We are all different; we are freethinkers. . .

Some of us might be gay, some not, and some of us might dislike homosexuality altogether. Some support capital punishment, while others find it repulsive. I, for instance, am a veggie, but I wouldn't expect every Humanist to be sympathetic to my cause, nor would I expect every veggie to become a Humanist.

Let's leave our differences behind; other pressure groups can cater for our other tastes and views. The common denominator is: we are all atheists (or, at least, agnostics). Let's forget our regional and national differences. Let's grow internationally; let's unite, and grow stronger.

JEAN WATSON
Muirhead

Homophobia

IN HIS book, *Society and the Healthy Homosexual* (1975), American psychologist Dr George Weinberg coined the term "homophobia," which he defined as an *irrational* fear, revulsion and hatred of homosexuals resulting in prejudiced antagonism towards and *mistreatment* of them [my italics]. Etymological pedantry aside, it is the irrationality and mistreatment which characterises genuine homophobes – some of whom, I'm sorry to see, still infest your correspondence columns from time to time.

ANTONY GREY
London NW2

I AM obliged to your correspondents for pointing out that "homosexual" is derived from a Greek word meaning "same" and not from a Latin word meaning "human." But not many people know this, so I would still maintain that "homophobia" is inappropriate because it is misleading. After all, "homo" is very familiar as the generic term for our own species.

Incidentally, I have the 1982 edition of the Concise Oxford Dictionary, and this could easily confuse the ignorant. Having defined "homosexual," it concludes "(from homo + sexual)."

I really should not have been guilty of the error because I once read some Latin (hence the Cicero quotation, and a little Greek. The Greek word was not new to me.

I am unhappy, however, at being subjected to the charge of pedantry. The meanings of words are so important, especially in disputed areas, and we must try to be as accurate as possible, so that we know what we are talking about.

As for my "ironic" use of the word "friends," I certainly did not intend it to be so interpreted. It is friendship that sustains civilisation and we should cultivate it wherever we can. I wish it was easier to be more friendly with my homosexual friends, but it is difficult, because most of them become hostile to me when I express my objection to homosexuality on health and

social grounds. They go on to tell me I am prejudiced, whereas I have thought the matter out very carefully. . .

I will not pursue this subject any further, as it does not seem a very appropriate concern for a publication that deals mainly with Humanism and religion, and has no special interest in homosexuality.

ARTHUR ATKINSON
Middlesex

Matter of fact

I REJECT on my own behalf S J Gula's assertion (April letters) that atheism is a matter of faith. So far as I am concerned, my atheism is a matter of fact. I can surely make the statement: *I am unaware of any evidence for the existence of God and therefore have no reason to believe in God.* And I am entitled to categorically claim that, without evidence to the contrary, there is no God.

Every logical thought has led me to the conclusion that there isn't a God. The only truth, for any one of us, is in that which we experience and understand. It is surely arrogant and insulting to assume that our own truth is the only truth and all others must accept it. This is the intolerance of all religion which has led to such misery over the centuries.

Truly our only way forward is to be tolerant of everyone's truth and to hold on to our own so long as it is not contradicted by evidence and does not prevent others seeking their own truth. Therefore I reject S J Gula's assertion that I should think as he does and that the only truth is his truth.

ALAN R BAILEY
Southend

BY THE same token, S J Gula must be agnostic about little green men at the ends of rainbows and the pink elephants of drunks' imaginations. OK, logically I must be agnostic about these, as about God. So in practice I behave as though atheist, but in theory I grant the possibility of His existence along with Drunks' Pink Elephants (why shouldn't they also have capitals?)

Z FINKELSTEIN
Liverpool

A specious comparison

CONNAIRE Kensit draws a specious comparison between food rationing and baby rationing (March letters). The two are not the same thing at all: different logic is at work. Likewise, when petrol is in short supply, rationing fuel is a distinct issue from rationing vehicles.

Even during wartime, Britain did not restrict reproduction. Only the most violent, totalitarian régimes have ever done so – which ought to set alarm-bells ringing.

Contrary to Kensit's impression of my argument, the principle and enforcement of "rationing" are inseparable. He says of China that "there is some 'brutality' [why the snigger-quotes?] in their administration of anything," as though that were an excuse, when in fact that is exactly my point: there is an ideological continuity between the Tiannemen Square massacre and the one-child policy.

Modern famine is largely a political problem: population levels have not been a significant factor. Scarcity stems from economic mismanagement, corruption, war, and meddling by the IMF and World Bank.

If anything needs rationing, it is State interference.

It is not because there are too many of them that the poor are starving. It is a breathtaking obscenity to blame them for their plight, when they are so clearly the victims of the policies of the same governments that are asked to control population.

Doesn't Kensit ever wonder why those countries with the highest incidence of starvation often have relatively low population density, while the wealthiest countries are those with the greatest population density?

To the extent that there is now, or may be in the future, a problem with population, its cure lies not in reducing freedom, but in extending it. Particularly at the expense of our current masters.

DAN J BYE
Rotherham

Lord love us?

IF there is a Creator, one wonders why s/he programmed the cosmic computer for the emergence of viruses and pathogenic bacteria – even favouring them by making them resistant to previously effective antibiotics. A form of population control, along with earthquakes and other natural disasters? A source of the suffering deemed necessary for spiritual growth?

One could imagine happier manifestations of the Love with which the Almighty is credited.

VIVIEN GIBSON
Ealing

Freethinkers and drugs

AS FREETHINKERS we should allow expression of free thinking that we do not agree with ourselves. However, I would have expected such a controversial article as that in the March issue advocating the legalisation of "soft" and "hard" drugs to be highlighted by the Editor as being a view that I expect most freethinkers, and certainly most "Humanists," would completely disagree with. [It was clearly marked: DISCUSSION – Editor].

This article, given such prominence, will

YOU'RE TELLING US!

From Page 78

lead new and casual readers to believe that this view is common among supporters of *The Freethinker*.

Obviously, alcohol misuse will lead to ruined lives – including affecting the lives of those associated with the victim. This seems a poor excuse and argument for letting loose even more powerful drugs.

Most Humanists do not believe that there is any place in “the good life” for drugs of any sort, other than for medicinal use.

DON LANGDOWN
Orpington

NO HONEST person denies that the legal drugs tobacco and alcohol should be banned because of the huge number of people they kill, but this does not excuse the banned drugs.

Users have been telling us for decades that they are harmless. I was in New York City in the 1970s when one of the main claimants of this lie appeared on TV. He admitted that he was wrong and told of the case of one of his brilliant women students who used to be able to work out intricate calculus in her head. Now, after years of drug use, she couldn't even do basic maths.

Taking drugs is like drink-driving. The drunk “knows” that alcohol doesn't affect his driving, that being relaxed after a few drinks he is actually a “better” driver.

Alcohol, like drugs, affects the brain, which is what you use to understand what you are doing and what is going on around you. If your yardstick, your brain, is out of kilter, then your assumptions cannot be trusted.

Why are drugs banned if they do not harm people? There is no mysterious conspiracy.

The only saving grace of the legal drugs tobacco and alcohol is that they are cheap, even in quantity. This means that women don't have to become prostitutes to pay for their habit. Also, heterosexual men don't have to sell their bodies to other men, as they do in places like Amsterdam, to pay for their habit.

A friend at work was at court last week as a juror in the case of a “Yardie” who, like many others, was committing crime to supply his £300-a-day habit. Others turn pusher to supply their habit.

The reason that UK deaths from illegal substances are so low is that many end up in the gutter, their minds gone from years of drug abuse, and when they die no one cares. A doctor puts it down to pneumonia or natural causes, the sort of things which many who sleep rough die of...

I've seen dope addicts “consuming drugs for both pleasure and enlightenment.” The gutter or a dirty alley leaning against a dustbin is a funny place to pursue such interests. Of course, many start off at home but end up at the latter places. Others end up screaming day and night in an asylum.

MICHAEL HILL
London SE19

ers. Drug-takers have done nothing wrong. They are prosecuted, as were witches, because ignorant, superstitious people judged their actions “wicked.”

Instead of being destroyed by coca, the Inca Empire was built on it; while a third of the population in some towns took opium, the British Empire rose to its zenith. And Aldous Huxley and Andrew Weil would say that humans do have an innate “drive” to seek psychoactive experiences. Intolerant people with a desire to control others seek to channel this drive into religions.

JOHN MARKS
Liverpool

Respect for animals

IN ANSWER to Heather Evans (April), Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* does not advocate anything; he describes how nature acts through the mechanism of gene selection – that is, how nature is, not some of us would like it to be. To stretch the word “brotherhood” across the species boundary is going far beyond the dictionary definition of the word.

If we could communicate with “a race of superbeings” to the extent of arguing a case, then that in itself would be our best argument against exploitation. However, the situation is

not parallel – the forebears of farm animals would have been hunted by predators and would, sooner or later, have been killed and eaten. Our intervention by domestication has not worsened their lot, provided we observe good welfare practices.

Incidentally, I used the word “specist” as I cam across it in Animal Rights literature; if “speciesist” is better English, I am quite happy to use that.

ROBERT TEE
Pudsey

Easter message

I READ Robert Sinclair's Easter message (April) more than once, trying to decide whether it was meant to be taken seriously. I do not see how anyone who has read Prof G A Wells' four books on Jesus (*The Jesus of the Early Christians, The Historical Evidence for Jesus, Did Jesus Exist? and Who Was Jesus?*) can continue to believe in the sort of individual portrayed in the Gospels and apparently accepted by Mr Sinclair as a historical figure.

It would be interesting to see the “evidence” to support this fanciful account of a Jesus who was both the leader of the Essenes and the boss of a gang of armed zealots.

DEREK ROBERTS
Mitchem

What next for Pakistan?

From Page 73

and a death sentence against a boy of 13 speaks eloquently about the religious poison that has eaten into the hearts of many in Pakistan. All honour, therefore, to the two women, Asma Jehangir and Hina Jilani, for their bravery in defending the Christian accused.

Incidentally, despite her election as Prime Minister, contrary to Muslim tradition, Benazir Bhutto has been unable to get any change in the bizarre legal procedure whereby a woman accusing a man of rape has to produce four witnesses – and if she fails to do so is then herself put in jail for adultery or fornication. The Muslim storm blows hardest against women!

So...the State of Pakistan was formed to provide security for Muslims. It was then, in 1947, expected to be like any other democracy, but it has gone on to establish Islamic rule.

It has expelled most “pagans” (Hindus and Sikhs); rattled the Kitabiya, who have a higher status than idol-worshippers (the Kitabiya

being the Christians, followers of a book); persecuted heretical Muslims (the Ahmediya); isolated schismatic Muslims (the Shia). Pakistan has oppressed the Bengali Muslims and Hindus and the entirely Muslim Baluch. *It has destroyed any semblance of justification it had for its creation.*

Whither Pakistan? It will survive with the Punjabi-Pathan army in command. There is no question of dissolving Pakistan and its joining the Indian Federation as four states. But will some province like Baluchistan or Sind try to secede as Bangladesh did? Neither has the population or military strength to withstand the army.

Will the country just muddle along, then, with numerous conflicts like those we are seeing in Karachi? Or will the Muslim mass-mind open up with a blinding flash to the realities of the 21st Century?

Or could some wise and strong leaders propose and carry out a reversal of all policies and achieve a very loose confederation of South Asian states to include India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka?

PETER Danning (April) is unfair to drug-tak-

Marxism as a 'scientific theory'

WHEN I wrote that "Fascism was already discredited" (November) when Karl Popper published *The Open Society* in 1945, I meant that Hitler and Mussolini were discredited in their own countries and their politics of personal dictatorship, racial supremacy, police and corporate state, concentration camps etc., was discredited among the bulk of intellectuals everywhere. This remains true today.

J H Morten can produce little evidence to support his assertion that Fascism "has with some success been attempting to make a comeback (December). Nazi groups in Germany – and their equivalents elsewhere – are fragmented outfits supported by local anti-Semitism and hostility to "guest" workers, with minuscule chances of coming to power nationally (though all bets are off if Germany should experience an economic collapse similar to that of the 1920s). In Britain the only remotely credible Fascist leader has been Sir Oswald Mosley with an East End constituency and some aristocratic sympathisers (Cliveden set, Windsors, a number of Mitfords, etc). Colin Jordan and his even more insignificant successors have had only nuisance value. However reactionary and insensitive the Tory Government, "one cannot say it is fascist."

In 1945, and for some years after Stalin died in 1953, Marxism was not discredited either in the Soviet Union or among many left-wing intellectuals in the West. Despite the former's recent rush to a "market" economy of the sort that gave capitalism a bad name at the time Marx was writing, and the boom of penitent breast-beating from the latter, Morten says only Stalinism has been discredited.

This view is elaborated by C R Wason, who "would cheerfully trust my life to the truth of Dialectical Materialism" and "would swear to Historical Materialism" (January). Together with "the Economics of Capitalism," these form the essence of Marxism. But, alas, "the great weakness of the Communist Party of Great Britain has always been its fear and hatred of Marxism."

Perhaps I'm ill-informed, but I thought all Communist parties round the world had been liquidated or renamed. No matter. The claim I

LAST WORD

by David Tribe

wish to address is that Marxism is "a scientific theory." I agree with Wason that it's complex and "never the work of a single individual." Indeed, Marx is generally said to have drawn eclectically from German philosophy, French politics and British economics; and I would detect six strands in his voluminous writings: humanistic ethics (early), dialectical materialism, historical determinism economic interpretation of history, "scientific" socialism and revolutionary communism. At the outset it should be noted that Marx received an academic training in philosophy and law, studied economics and history privately, and was financially supported by journalism and private patronage. He was never a "scientist" as such.

It would be easy to argue that while there is an academic discipline called "the philosophy of science" there's no "science of philosophy." Or that history, politics and economics are arts rather than sciences. Instead I'll assume that Marxism contains a number of philosophies that may be consonant with science and scientific hypotheses that are potentially verifiable or falsifiable, and ask to what extent they've been verified or falsified.

Wason's account of "matter" – or mass-energy – is generally accepted, and science would be impossible without such an assumption. If there is a spirit world, we can't describe it or experiment on it and so know nothing about it. But this account is of materialism, not dialectical materialism. For several years Marxist intellectuals have been embarrassed by the dialectic and tried to ignore it, though historical determinism appears to

depend on it. Invented by the ancient Greeks, the dialectic was a pedagogic or disputing resolving tool which combined a thesis with its contrary antithesis to create a synthesis. The idealist German philosopher Hegel postulated a mystical cosmic force, the Absolute, wielding this tool in the world so as to effect the negation of the negation, the unity of opposites and the passage of quantity into quality (new forms). As distinct from the ageless, changeless, once-for-all creationist deity of the Old Testament, "the Absolute is becoming."

Marx laid hold of this grandiose apparatus, but said it was operated by material, not immaterial, forces. These he identified as modes of production in the hands of social-economic classes, so that history became a study of economics or class struggle.

While this interpretation of history may be more plausible than a dynastic one, Marx proclaimed it as a scientific law. And not just a descriptive law to understand the past and interpret the present, but a predictive and prescriptive one to foretell and determine the future: ultimately, a communist economy and a classless society. At that convenient stage (for Marx), the dialectic would cease to operate and the economic Absolute stop becoming.

In the "soft" sciences, laws tend to have at best a descriptive value. They're only broadly and fallibly predictive and never prescriptive. Even as description they need to have consistent categorisation. But with Marx, his heirs and successors for ever, any observation can be a thesis, an antithesis or a synthesis according to the observer's mental state or the current party line. Here Popper's principle comes into play. As an attempt to understand the present, Marxist dialectical materialism and historical determinism are like Christian identification of the "last days" before the Second Coming: so vague as to be unfalsifiable and thus unscientific.

But critics of Marxism are fortunate in that it has made predictions which are verifiable and falsifiable. A few of these are: the revolution can occur only in an advanced capitalist country like Germany, not a backward peasant society like Czarist Russia; even without a proletarian revolution, capitalism will disintegrate through its own internal inconsistencies after an initial dictatorship of the proletariat following the revolution, the state and its accompanying police and bureaucratic apparatus, together with social opiates like religion, will gradually wither away; once "scientific" socialism is established, it will inevitably proceed to communism and couldn't revert to capitalism.

What can we say of a theory so wrong in its practical consequences? Oh yes, I know the answer. After decades of hailing Soviet socialism and incipient communism, the dwindling faithful now say it was state capitalism all the time!

Established church for Russia?

A PACKAGE of changes to the 1990 Russian Law on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations is being considered by President Boris Yeltsin.

Legal experts and minority religious groups say parts of the new law are so vague that they could open the door to persecution of non-Orthodox religions. One section would make it

illegal to "insult citizen's feelings and beliefs" while another would require all religions to submit a formal doctrinal statement to the Government.

Meanwhile, the ultra-nationalist Liberal Democratic Party, which is allied to the Orthodox Church, is campaigning for the abolition of church-state separation and wants Orthodoxy established as the state religion.