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Free thinker

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

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January 1996

Abortion reformers see-in the New Year with new demands



● The cartoon logo of the Abortion Law Reform Association's new campaign.

A NEW Year – and a new initiative from the Abortion Law Reform Association. The Campaign for Choice has been launched with a mailing to every MP, seeking all-party backing for changes to the 1967 Abortion Act.

ALRA is demanding that abortion become available as a right – not at the discretion of doctors with individual views and prejudices.

The Association has been working since 1936 to enshrine in law and in practice a woman's right to safe, free and legal abortion based on her own informed choice.

The 1967 Abortion Act was a huge step forward – but it did not go far

enough, in ALRA's view and that of *The Freethinker*.

To give women a genuine right to choose on abortion, the ALRA campaign proposes five major changes to the 1967 Abortion Act:

- Abortion on request in the first three months of pregnancy.
- And then only one doctor's approval up to 24 weeks.
- A duty on doctors to declare their conscientious objection.
- Inclusion of Northern Ireland in amended legislation.
- A duty on the NHS to provide abortion services.



The Freethinker

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

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

CONTENTS

Up Front	Page 2
Down to Earth: Colin McCall	Page 3
On Blindness: Colin McCall	Page 4
Antidote to Superstition	Page 5
Women's Right to Abortion	Page 6
Right-wing Christianity	Page 7
Poor Old Judas: Neil Blewitt	Page 8
Nicolas Walter at Oxford	Page 10
Why They Invented Jesus	Page 11
Call for ban on Islamic group	Page 12
You're Telling Us! Letters	Page 13
What's On	Page 16

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Up Front

The greatest 'miracle'

KNOWING what we know of the vagaries of the human body, we suppose that the remarkable thing would be if the odd prayer for a miracle cure for this or that horrid affliction was not "answered."

A proportion of those who seek faith-healing will likewise be "cured," no thanks to the fools or charlatans who pocket the sufferers' fees, and so will some of those who trust in "New Age" remedies or charabanc trips to Lourdes. Believing this, we were delighted to read a contribution in the *Sunday Telegraph* of December 10 from famed medical writer Dr James Le Fanu.

Dr Le Fanu gave the example of a man who was found to have a tumour of the pancreas. He declined treatment, which would only have been palliative, and resolved to live out his last few months in Italy. A Japanese doctor suggested that the patient should try a macrobiotic diet, which involved cutting out meat and dairy products in favour of beans, lentils and so forth. He began to feel a lot better and lived on for almost 10 years.

Dr Le Fanu: "It is tempting to think the macrobiotic diet did the trick, but this cannot be the case. The 'spontaneous regression' of cancer is always coincidental to, rather than a consequence of, any alternative treatment being taken at the time, and it is never possible to replicate the amazing cures attributed to them... It is important to be fastidious about such pseudo-explanations because they distract attention from just how remarkable is the phenomenon of spontaneous regression, with its implication that the body must have some means of eradicating malignant growths. Find out why it happens, or how these self-healing properties could be harnessed, and who knows what benefits might result?"

From an analysis of all the reported cases of spontaneous regression of cancer, Dr G B Challis, of the University of Calgary, observed that the phenomenon had been noted in virtually every type of cancer and at every stage.

He described the case of one woman with cancer of the rectum, in whom it was found at operation that her pelvis was "so extensively invaded with cancer that only a palliative excision could be attempted." She lived on for 17 years, and an autopsy reported "no detectable tumour tissue present."

And why did it happen? Dr Le Fanu: "The straight answer is that nobody knows, but the favoured explanation is that some event, perhaps the trauma of an operation, or an infection, stimulates the production of antibodies that destroy the cancer. Theoretically then, stimulating the immune system in some non-specific way might be beneficial in cancer, and this has subsequently been demonstrated, particu-

larly in treating the skin cancer melanoma...

"Cancer specialists have taken considerable pride in the very high cure rate – almost 100 per cent – of the childhood cancer neuroblastoma, with anti-cancer drugs. Recently, however, it has emerged that when such cancers are left alone, they often shrink to a fraction of their original size, at which point they can be removed with a simple operation."

It seems that spontaneous regression may also occur in non-malignant conditions, such as an enlarged prostate and the narrowing of the coronary arteries in heart disease: around a third of men with prostatic symptoms of obstruction of urinary flow will improve without surgery over a five-year period, and in a further 50 per cent their symptoms will get no worse.

"Similarly, a recent study has shown that patients with coronary arteries sufficiently narrowed to warrant treatment will simply widen of their own accord, thus restoring blood flow to the heart muscles," said Dr Le Fanu.

He concluded: "Anyone witnessing spontaneous regression of cancer cannot help but be moved by what appears to be an almost miraculous event. But in a sense, it is just one instance, albeit a remarkable one, of an even greater miracle – the hidden and mysterious ways in which the body sustains and heals itself."

Beat that, Morris Cerrullo!

Situation vacant

THE *Methodist Recorder* for December 7 carried an advertisement for a Qualified Youth Worker at Leith Methodist Church, Edinburgh. Those interested in the £14, 963 post were urged to apply to John Knox (it's true!) at 41 Summerside Place.

So what's wrong with that? Well, this is a "two year appointment initially funded by BBC Children in Need," and we can't help wondering how many atheistic, Islamic, Jewish and other non-Christian contributors to the annual TV and wireless campaign approve of their cash going to church initiatives.

Crossed wires

IT'S not that we mind people celebrating Christmas – even Freethinkers have been known to take the odd cocktail to mark the Winter Solstice. But, really, it is possible to get carried away, as *Judoka!* (official magazine of the British Judo Council) reports in its December-January issue: "One of the largest departmental stores in Tokyo decided to surpass itself with its Christmas decorations. It did indeed, for above the main entrance was a giant effigy of Santa Claus – nailed to a cross!"

Non-fiction

MURDER is the most brutal form of censorship. – Harold Pinter on the execution in Nigeria of fellow-playwright Ken Saro-Wiwa.

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Down to Earth

with Colin McCall

Enemy of the people

PRINCE Charles is only the latest in a long line of royal adulterers, and his love life is of less importance (except to the women involved) than his interference in public affairs. As his wife said in that notorious broadcast, being a king might be "a little more suffocating" and "bring enormous limitations to him"; which might not be a bad thing.

Surely, though, the time has come to consider putting the whole Royal Family out to grass.

As Richard Carlile wrote in 1831: "Neither kings, nor priests, nor lords, are useful to a people... They are the profligate consumers of a nation's wealth, a prey upon her strength, a chain to her neck, so many mill stones to her heels... and bad examples to her manners."

Nothing is more degrading than the way the media toady towards royalty. Radio 4 plays the misleadingly called "National" Anthem on the birthday and "official" birthday of the Queen, and on the birthdays of the Duke of Edinburgh and the Prince of Wales. Palace reporters adopt obsequious tones when describing royal occasions - whether it be Sunday morning church at Sandringham or a race meeting at Ascot.

A perfectly ordinary woman, who has to go to the lavatory as we do, is set upon another throne and becomes "Her Majesty," with her family dubbed "Royal Highnesses." Thank goodness there are cartoonists like Steve Bell of *The Guardian* and the puppeteers of *Spitting Image* who will have none of this hypocrisy. They are in good company. In her biography, *Mrs Jordan's Profession*, Claire Tomalin reproduces cartoons by James Gilray and others on the Duke of Clarence, later William IV, and his actress mistress, who bore him 10 children. A chamber pot was known as a "jordan" and Gilray made picturesque use of the symbol in cartoons that were displayed in print-shop windows and widely circulated.

In the *Panorama* interview, Diana called the occupants of the Palace her "enemy"; in fact they are the enemy of the people and, as Carlile said, the "profligate consumers of a nation's wealth."

Christian Christie

LINFORD Christie is a great athlete: he is not a biologist, so his views on evolution are not significant in themselves. When he says he doesn't believe in evolution - "it is only Darwin's theory" - he is speaking as a Christian fundamentalist; he is also making a fundamental error.

Evolution is *not* Darwin's theory; evolution

is a long and fully established fact. Darwin's theory concerns the *modus operandi* of evolution, which he conceived to be natural selection. The title of his historic work is *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*.

Do you see the distinction, Linford?

The end is nigh - again

IN CASE it passed you by, I have to tell you that television evangelism is here in Britain - although you have to get up pretty early to see it: 4-7am on the satellite Christian Channel Europe. And a cable company, Ark 2, has canvassed more than a thousand churches appealing for money and prayers, presumably in that order, for a launch next April.

Madeleine Bunting reports that it wants "to draw in an audience offering them a Christian perspective" (*The Guardian*, November 18, 1995). Libby Purves will present a chat show, Auberon Waugh a political programme, and Christian sports stars (Linford Christie?) will "regularly offer thoughts on combining body and soul."

But the telly evangelist "star" is likely to be Colin Dye, pastor of the Kensington Temple in Notting Hill, London, who says: "Europe is coming into a spiritual renewal and we are reclaiming it for biblical Christianity, which is the only hope for a hurting world. We could well be in the last days. The survival of the planet is now at stake."

The second millennium is coming and, as they did a thousand years ago, Christians are looking towards Armageddon. What excuses will they make when they wake up on January 1, 2001?

Father, organise yourself!

SO, despite the Pope's last minute instruction to the Irish people to say "no" to the proposed divorce law, the referendum went the other way. Just. And its opponents are seeking legal means to reverse the decision. So much for democracy!

But the writing is on the wall. It is in the rural areas that the Roman Catholic Church retains its hold, especially over the women. In Dublin its power is on the wane.

More and more men and women are refusing to allow ostensibly celibate priests to dictate their lives, especially when the religious fathers seem increasingly unable to organise their own. In the delightful comic novel *Clochemerle*, by Gabriel Chevallier (1934), an innocent young priest is appalled to discover

that the village priest's sexual needs were regularly met by his housekeeper. Jimmy McGovern's film *Priests*, recently shown on British TV, deals more seriously with the same subject and, additionally, makes the younger man homosexual. A third, retiring priest hits the right note, declaring his to have been a wasted life.

'Streetwise' Christianity

WRITING to the *Daily Mail* (November 30 1995), Mrs Judy Studd, of Milton Keynes, describes herself as "a 50-year-old rocker who grew up on the music of the Beatles." She "adored their music" and still does, but she holds them responsible for ushering in the "permissive era."

As "a streetwise Christian," she believes in "good old-fashioned family values" and informs us that, although her 16-year-old twin son and daughter like pop groups, "Jesus is still their hero." Not only that: she forecasts that "he always will be."

And she ends her featured letter with the appeal: "Let's teach tomorrow's generation love, care and compassion instead of selfishness, greed, jealousy and pride."

Indeed yes, Mrs Studd, but to do that thoroughly you have to dispose of your "jealous" God.

Michael Howard - right for once

WHETHER the Home Secretary realises it or not, he has the full support of freethinkers in his opposition to a European law protecting religions. In contrast, well-meaning groups like the Council for Racial Equality have taken a mistaken stand in support of such a Bill.

Of course we oppose discrimination on religious grounds, but to introduce a law against "incitement to religious hatred," as some politicians have suggested, would be highly dangerous.

It would lead to the banning of books like Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and possibly mean the demise of this magazine.

Moreover, it would not solve the problem. Silencing written or spoken attacks on religion would not prevent discrimination in employment, such as British Muslims have allegedly encountered. The issues are separate, as Michael Howard recognises in what he calls his pragmatic approach.

He does not want a law which would interfere with the freedom of speech and literature. Nor do we.

Grasping for reality

BRYAN MAGEE has done a great deal to popularise philosophy through his radio and television programmes and subsequent books, *Modern British Philosophy*, *Men of Ideas*, *The Great Philosophers*. He has also written a full-length study of Schopenhauer, a philosopher he considers to be underrated in the English-speaking world. Magee describes himself as an empirical realist, but he also believes that "some sort of transcendental idealism is inescapable."

By this he means that "reality" must forever remain beyond our grasp. Our conception of the world is based on the senses we possess, and that conception could or would be very different if our senses were different: if, for example, we were endowed with the radar-like sense of bats.

It is an "illusion," then, that we have direct access to physical objects, "that we are in immediate context with them," an illusion which he particularly attributes to our sense of sight; and the letters that comprise this fascinating little book (188 pages) result from his attempt to discover how different the world is for those who are deprived of that sense.

The "visual world" is there, even though blind people cannot see it; was there, indeed, before sighted animals came into existence. Magee presumes that there must be "whole dimensions of reality, into which a sensory apparatus different from any that any of us possess would plug us." Our "relationship...to those unapprehended dimensions of reality" might, he suggests, "be similar to the relationship of the congenitally blind to the visual world."

Martin Milligan was born in the Gorbals in 1923 and, although not congenitally blind, lost his sight at the age of 18 months, with no memory of seeing. He was fortunate to be educated alongside sighted people, and became a strong advocate for that policy. In Britain, Magee says, the campaign to integrate visually-handicapped children into mainstream education owes more to Martin Milligan than to any other individual.

Although he had a distinguished academic career at the University of Edinburgh and at Balliol College, Oxford, Milligan, as a Marxist and blind activist, was unable to get a universi-

On Blindness: Letters between Bryan Magee and Martin Milligan. Oxford University Press. £16.99.

Review: COLIN McCALL

ty post until 1959 at Leeds. He rose to become Head of Philosophy and Dean of the Faculty of Arts, posts which he held until shortly before his death.

This came suddenly, and cut short the correspondence between him and Magee, who ends *On Blindness* with a letter to the reader.

The discussion didn't quite go the way Magee expected. From the start, Milligan refused to accept that lack of sight fundamentally affected his conception of the world. He didn't remember a time when he was "totally baffled by such words as 'see,' 'light' and 'dark.'" No doubt there was such a time, but "I suppose I must have begun to catch on when my parents and others claimed to see things without touching or listening which I could find out by touching and listening *only*" (his italics).

Continual contact with sighted people, and their use of terms like "seeing," "light" and "darkness" enabled him to appreciate that sight was a sense. There was really no difficulty in principle or in practice, in a person with some senses, able to communicate and reason, "recognising that others may have more or fewer senses than he or she has."

Provided they share a common language, Milligan continues "a person with fewer senses than others might *know* many things...which have not first been in that person's own senses, though they would have to have been in *somebody's* senses" (his italics).

Replying to Magee's further insistence that Milligan overestimates his capacity to know what seeing is like, the latter detects an "isolationist view," which he contests. While granting that sighted people are "constantly aware of patterns of colours of which we can never be directly aware, and that you perceive much beauty and ugliness that we miss," Milligan emphasises that "we live in the same world as you, that what divides us is far less than what we have in common, and that we therefore can and ought to share life with you, as fully partic-

ipating members of all-embracing human communities" (cf Marx: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it").

Milligan argues that the difference in experience between a sighted civil servant in London and a sighted peasant in Tibet is greater than that between the civil servant and a colleague who is blind.

And, regarding sense perception, Milligan finds that there is "generally a very good fit" between the judgements he makes on the basis of his non-visual experience and those made by sighted people on the basis of sight, "except only that like many blind people I find that some estimates of distance made on the basis of sight are not very accurate."

Visual terms, he points out, often bear non-visual concepts, as in "I could see the force of the argument," but even when they are used literally, "their conventional meanings can be grasped fully and unattenuated by born-blind people."

"Why should it not be so?" he asks, "we can all of us think quite clearly about classes of objects none of whose members have ever been experienced or could be experienced," for instance, material objects existing before any sentient creature existed.

Words are the great conveyors of information: "The conveying of conceptual meanings and of propositions picturing with more or less accuracy how objects...are related to one another is their chief role," and words "can play that role for blind people just as for everyone else, since propositional pictures are not sensory images of any kind but thought pictures."

Magee sometimes sounds like a religionist, reflecting on "what pathetic little creatures we are, and how limited and contingent the physical apparatus is..." though he expressly denies that there is anything supernatural, spiritual or other-worldly, "still less anything occult" in his idealistic position.

Martin Milligan's sudden illness and death left the correspondence unfinished, so Bryan Magee restates his own case direct to the reader, and in the process he acknowledges the fallibility of his idealism.

It is impossible, he concedes, "for us to take into account considerations that we cannot even conceptualize: so the best we can do is make the most we can of the materials we have."

Precisely. Of course, as he says, today's knowledge will seem small to observers living a thousand years hence. But it is pointless to speculate on what we cannot conceptualise. Nor should we talk of "visual" and "non-visual" worlds. It is one world perceived in various ways.

The only "reality" that we can contemplate and discuss is the world as we apprehend it through the senses, nervous system and the brain, and as scientific discoveries open it up to us. The philosopher must work co-operatively with science, as Roy Wood Sellars says. "He must accept his facts in large measure from special investigators who are masters of technique and of relevant methods of verification."

That, I am sure, would be Martin Milligan's position. It is certainly mine.

National Secular Society PUBLIC MEETING

A Secular Peace in Bosnia?

Speakers:

Branka Magas, author of *The Destruction of Yugoslavia*, and Melanie McDonagh, *Evening Standard* leader writer and regular visitor to former Yugoslavia

Friday January 26 at 7.30pm

Small Hall Conway Hall Red Lion Square London WC1

Guide to a life free of superstition

IS IT just wishful thinking – or is there an accelerating trend in the number of books questioning the validity of religion and superstition? In *The Freethinker* last July, Professor Leslie Wilkins reviewed *The Final Superstition* by Joseph Daleiden, and from what he tells us about it it sounds a very similar treat to the work that has been caressing my sceptical nerve-ends these last few weeks. It has taken me that long to get through because a book like *Blind Faith* cannot be read in one sitting. At least, not by me it can't.

It contains so much common sense, so much powerful argument that after every page or so I was forced to let the book rest in my lap to sit in contemplation of yet another telling phrase or a point so well made that I wished to commit it to memory or jot it down (until I realised that I was in danger of copying out the book in its entirety). *Blind Faith*, too, is by a non-philosopher, non-academic American. Chester Dolan is a (now retired) teacher of English and this, as well as his American down-to-earth, no-nonsense approach, accounts for his extreme clarity of expression free from the obfuscation so commonly encountered in works of this kind. Dolan employs just the right mixture of seriousness and humour, sprinkled with elements of satire and sarcasm, almost unavoidable when rational minds are discussing the more preposterous aspects of religious convictions.

Jolt

His style is reminiscent of an editorial in *The Freethinker*: hard hitting where necessary; elsewhere more indulgent in the "you've got to laugh at them" mode.

Obviously writing with a religion ridden American public in mind, Chester Dolan prepares his readers for a jolt to their sensibilities. He is clearly concerned that his book will be cast aside, if not thrown with great force, once his blasphemous intentions become apparent to the reader. He invites his readers to stay the course, give the argument a chance and suspend judgement until he is through with them. And what argument there is! If I could have a retrospective wish fulfilled, it would be to have had as a neighbour in my troubled youth the kindly old man, pictured on the inside cover, to whom I could have turned for help in taking on the daunting mass of dogma rained against a recalcitrant 16-year-old by the establishment forces of home, church, school and state. Armed with his knowledge, I would of course still not have made many converts.

Blind Faith: Confronting Contemporary Religion by Chester Dolan. Prometheus Books (UK). ISBN 0-87975-931-3. £24 cloth.

Review: TONY AKKERMANS



Bigots are not known for their readiness to change their minds. But at least I would have been much better placed to refute their tired old clichés and poorly constructed logic and I could have forced them to fall back time and again on their trusty last defence position "I believe because I believe." Or "it is true because I tell you it is true."

If there is one book of all the freethought books I have read, and there are many, then this is the one that I would like to see elevated to prescribed reading for all children in school. It should be placed on top of every Gideon's Bible in hotel bedrooms and be given to *Desert Island Discs* castaways along with Shakespeare and the Bible.

Although its general lucidity and absence of abstruse argument lends itself particularly to the new student of secularism, there is much to appeal to the dyed-in-the-wool atheist as well. I certainly picked up a lot of new insights and have added quite a few new barbs to my armoury in the daily battle against superstition.

Trying to do this book justice in a 1000-word review has been an exercise in mental torture. I was going to include a number of examples of particularly well-made observations, but there are so many nuggets begging for inclusion that it is like picking up some survivors of a shipwreck and leaving others to drown.

Reading a book of this kind is particularly gratifying for freethinkers who have little

opportunity for testing their views elsewhere. Atheists, although born into that condition, are rarely taught atheism. It leads a very shadowy existence; it is rarely found in the home, not in school, not in the media. It has to come from within. Building up the atheist edifice is a long and tortuous process, unlike the acquisition of a religion which can take place virtually overnight following an encounter between the persuasive and the gullible. Believers therefore miss out on the considerable pleasure of having their independently-hatched perceptions confirmed by others. It is the equivalent of the ready meal in the fast food restaurant versus the finely tuned home-made recipe.

So I am enjoying a delightful meeting of minds, an experience as pleasurable as that described by Bertrand Russell on first meeting Joseph Conrad, when on pages 254-5 there is a bit of a shock; my new found hero is an anti-abortionist. He even uses the proliferator's mislabelling of abortion as "baby killing." Somebody who talks consummate good sense on all other 315 pages of the book deserves to be taken seriously. So down the book goes once again and I am rethinking my whole position on abortion. I emerge with my views largely intact, but with an even stronger conviction that abortion must always be a last resort measure and should be eradicated as nearly as possible by a barrage of sex education and wide availability of contraception.

Guru

On every other topic, I remain at one with my new found guru. For Dolan, the religion of non-religionists is a call for nonconformity, for reason and for true love of one's fellow man. Any sermon or religious precept that has nothing to offer in the way of social welfare or peace for mankind deals with mysticism, not religion. The only religion that will serve mankind operates in nursing homes, prisons, mental institutions and in the streets of ghettos, not in magnificent cathedrals. It demands study and reflection, not worship. It is a total and unrestricted development of ethics, not pageantry.

Blind Faith should find a place on every freethinker's bookshelf. No other book of my acquaintance sets about the sophistry and deceptions of religious doctrine with such devastating effect – and for those who are still in the process of establishing their personal philosophy it is an inimitable layman's guide to a lifestyle free of superstition.

Women's right to abortion

A CAMPAIGN for Choice has been launched by the Abortion Law Reform Association – with a mailing to all MPs seeking their support for changes to the 1967 Abortion Act.

Along with other groups in the Pro-Choice Alliance, ALRA is calling for abortion on request in the first three months of pregnancy and easier access to NHS abortion services.

Under the existing law, women have to get the approval of two doctors for an abortion – and they are often unnecessarily delayed or refused. More than half of all health authorities in England and Wales do not treat abortion as a priority health need, and many women are forced to pay for their abortions.

ALRA is campaigning for abortion to be available as a right, not at the discretion of doctors with individual views and prejudices.

The Association has been working since 1936 to enshrine in law and in practice a woman's right to safe, free and legal abortion based upon her own informed choice. The 1967 Abortion Act was a huge step forward – but it did not go far enough, in ALRA's view.

For example, the power to decide whether a woman is entitled to abortion rests with her doctors, ALRA points out: "This cannot be right – nobody knows better than the woman herself when and if she is ready for motherhood. Doctors are burdened with a responsibility for which they are neither adequately trained nor necessarily suited."

Doctors have immense power of discretion when "permitting" abortion: some of them interpret the law liberally, others very strictly. Not only is this unfair, but also it leads to doctors abusing their power by indulging their personal opinions even prejudices, ALRA insists.

And by requiring two doctors to certify that a woman has legal grounds prior to termination, the law builds in delay.

There is no statutory obligation for health authorities to provide abortion care. About six out of 10 abortions are funded under the NHS, but this varies widely according to where the woman lives and what priorities have been set by her health authority or NHS trust.

Another ALRA objection to the present situation is that women in Northern Ireland are not entitled to the same treatment as those in the rest of the UK. Each year, many hundreds have to travel overseas to get the abortions they need.

ALRA is calling for a new abortion law – one which allows women the right to decide for

CAMPAIGN FOR CHOICE

themselves whether or not they are ready for motherhood, at least in the first three months of pregnancy: "Give women the right to choose, and we could also save the time and expense involved in seeing two doctors. Instead, women would see one doctor who would give them medical advice, information and access to counselling if they wanted it."

Doctors with a conscientious objection to abortion would still be allowed to opt out of abortion treatment – but they should be obliged to declare this objection, and to make clear a woman's right to see or be referred to another doctor.

ALRA says a new law should oblige health authorities to provide comprehensive and easily available family planning, pregnancy testing, counselling and abortion services to meet the needs of local women. Hospitals should provide day-care services, where women could refer themselves without first being required to see their GP, and where abortions could be carried out separately from other gynaecological procedures.

The Association would also like to see the abortion rate reduced by better sex education and contraceptive use: "We know that women find unplanned pregnancy and abortion a distressing experience, and there is no evidence that they risk it in preference to contraception."

ALRA does not accept that a new law would cause the number of abortions to soar, pointing out that the abortion rate has come down in recent years, and: "Those women who really want abortions get them – often by travelling

great distances and at considerable expense to themselves. Abortion law reform will simply lessen the difficulties for those women."

The cost of early abortion is not great and would be further reduced by cutting bureaucracy and streamlining the procedure: "In any case, women facing unplanned pregnancy are taxpayers also, and deserve good health care regardless of their ability to pay."

To the question *How can you be sure women will make the right choice?* ALRA replies: "How can you be sure doctors make the right choice? There are no guarantees that women facing unplanned pregnancy won't later regret whatever decision they take, any more than we can guarantee that they will marry the right people or bring their children up well. But we can say with confidence that, provided they are given the right information and support to reach a fully informed choice, most women will know what is best for them and their loved ones."

The law protects the rights of health workers with a genuine conscientious objection to abortion: "We would agree that it is better for women seeking abortions to be treated by staff who are sympathetic to their situation. However, we don't think doctors and nurses should be able to pick and choose to be involved with some abortions and not others – any more than they can pick and choose between patients in other areas of health care."

To sum-up, to give women the right to choose on abortion, both in law and in practice, ALRA proposes the following five changes to the 1967 Abortion Act:

- Abortion on request in the first three months of pregnancy.
- And then only one doctor's approval up to 24 weeks.
- A duty on doctors to declare their conscientious objection.
- Inclusion of Northern Ireland.
- A duty on the NHS to provide abortion services.

Readers of *The Freethinker* who want to support the campaign may contact the Abortion Law Reform Association at 27-35 Mortimer Street, London W1N 7RJ (telephone: 0171 637 7264).

So why is there so much nonsense in the papers?

A SURVEY by the London School of Printing reveals that 72 per cent of British journalists do not practise a religion.

Fifty-seven per cent of those in the survey – *The News Breed: British Journalists in the 1990s* – said they will vote Labour next time,

while only six per cent said they will vote Conservative.

Median age of the sample was 38, and a quarter were women.

Median salaries overall were £32,500 for men – and £22,500 for women. The survey revealed that around two per cent of UK journalists are Afro-Caribbean or Asian.

President Ludo

● *The Earl of Listowel, a founder member of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society in 1935, and President since 1951, has retired from the presidency to enjoy – at the age of 89 – a well-deserved rest from campaigning for the right to die. Lord Listowel handed over to a popular new President, Sir Ludovic Kennedy, writer, broadcaster and campaigner against miscarriages of justice. Accepting the presidency, Sir Ludovic said: “What a change in our fortunes there has been in the 60 years that Lord Listowel has been associated with our movement. The barriers against voluntary euthanasia are beginning to crumble, one after another.”*



Growing menace of the right-wing religionists

THE more liberal stance adopted by the Church of England during the last decade, beginning with *Faith in the City*, has prompted calls from right-wing politicians for Christianity and politics to be kept separate. This has coincided with right-wing Christians making a determined bid for greater political influence.

The established churches have previously upheld the idea that wealth and poverty are part of the natural order: workers have been cajoled into accepting their lot with the promise of “pie in the sky when you die” and threats of eternal hell fire for acts of rebellion.

But if the Church of England is becoming more liberal in response to declining congregations, fundamentalist Christianity is growing in support and militancy. There has also been a conservative backlash in some sections of the mainstream churches. Of course, there have been no calls from right-wing politicians for a cessation of political activities by these groups.

In the USA, Ralph Reed’s Christian Coalition claims to have 1.6 million active supporters and a \$25 million annual budget. This is an increase from 500,000 activists and a budget of \$14.8 million only two years ago.

Reed is trying to get the Republican Party to adopt the Coalition’s right-wing policies – including a new school-prayer Bill and opposition to abortion. Together with other reactionary elements – the American Family Association, the Christian Film Office and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Los Angeles – they are trying to censor the Hollywood film industry. The American Civil Liberties Union claims that the concerted efforts of self-appointed religious puritans have censored school books throughout the USA.

Reed has stated: “The future of America is not shaped by who sits in the Oval Office, but by who sits in the [school] principal’s office.”

A survey by *Campaigns and Elections* magazine in 1994 reported that the Christian right dominated the Republican Party in 18 states and had a considerable influence in 13 others.

Reed presents a moderate image to outsiders

and takes care not to alienate other religious groups. But Pat Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition and former presidential candidate, preaches wild conspiracy theories to committed supporters. His group has attracted some anti-semites, but has failed to attract Afro-Americans because of right-wing support for segregationist policies in the past.

Presidential candidates Bob Dole, Phil Gramm and House Speaker Newt Gingrich have all been eager to be seen at the Coalition’s events to canvass the Christian vote.

Gingrich has set forward his ideas to make the rich richer and the poor poorer in his book *To Renew America*, in which he advocates replacing state welfare with private charity.

Like many Christian demagogues before him,

Enemies of civil liberties – at home and abroad: Carl Pinel reports

Gingrich has a great deal to say about family values and moral responsibility but there have been allegations about extra-marital affairs during his first marriage which could compromise his position with the puritanical right.

Gingrich’s ideas have been influential in Britain among right-wing politicians. The Conservative Party’s lurch to the right over the past 16 years has been accompanied by calls for a “return to Victorian values” and a move “back to basics” which have had an increasingly hypocritical ring as more and more Conservative MPs have been caught with their trousers down or their hands in the till.

A more explicitly Christian group in England, although less fundamentalist than its American counterpart, is the 10,000-strong Movement for Christian Democracy, which has links with right-wing Christian Democrats on the Continent. The movement started in January, 1989, with 20 members of the Epiphany group

formed by David Alton MP. The Movement for Christian Democracy held its inaugural conference in November 1990 and is now one of Britain’s fastest growing political organisations.

While the MCD claims to bring together Christians from all political parties, it has an agenda which appeals to conservative-minded people. Its bi-monthly journal, *Christian Democrat*, has a circulation of 45,000 and puts forward a “pro-life” agenda – which is a euphemism for being anti-abortion and opposed to birth control programmes, divorce and homosexuality. Its Summer, 1995, issue adopted the familiar tactic of trying to frighten women by claiming a link between abortion and breast cancer.

The MCD is enthusiastically pro-European, in contrast to the nationalism, anti-semitism and xenophobia of most right-wing groups. But anti-semitism has been a feature of Christianity from its earliest days and can be seen in some of the Continental Christian Democrat parties. In the 1930s, the British Union of Fascists had such a strong following among Catholics in the North West that in Lancashire Mosley was nicknamed “the Pope.”

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the British Council for Christian Settlement in Europe was a front organisation for the fascist British People’s Party.

Abroad, the Catholic Church’s enthusiastic support for Franco in the 1930s and Pope Pius XII’s concordat with Hitler callously disregarded the plight of the Jews and the poor.

The growth of fundamentalism in the USA and Australia has led to demands for “creation science” to be taught in schools.

If the fundamentalists grow in support and influence, then the teaching of ancient, discredited myths will take precedence over scientific advancement. Right-wing Christianity is the enemy of civil liberties and social justice, but fundamentalism, allied to right-wing ideology, has frightening implications for the poor, minorities, rationalists and anybody who does not endorse the narrow, puritanical and often tyrannical views of its fanatical adherents.

RSPCA slates religious slaughter cruelty

JEWISH groups have reacted angrily to calls from the RSPCA for a ban on their religious method of slaughtering farm animals, described by the society as "outdated and inhumane."

The ancient tradition of *shechita*, which involves an animal's throat being cut without pre-stunning, is criticised in an RSPCA information book as causing unnecessary pain and distress.

Dr Martin Potter, head of the RSPCA's farm animal department and the book's author, told the *Sunday Telegraph* (December 3, 1995): "There is a substantial body of evidence to show that the animals suffer terribly for as long as a minute after the throat is cut. We recognise the importance of religious traditions, but could they not, within this tradition, now accept stunning?"

In Britain, farmers and abattoirs must stun livestock before killing – but Jews and Muslims are exempted on religious grounds.

However: "A lot of Muslim abattoirs are now using pre-stunning," said Dr Potter. "Many within the Muslim faith have been prepared to change."

Kosher

But Dayan Yisroel Lichtenstein, a senior rabbinical judge in the London Federation of Synagogues, said: "Animals have to be free of certain blemishes, one of which is concussion. That would destroy the kosher state of the animal."

Michael Kester, executive director of the National Council of Shechita Boards of Great Britain, said: "The animal feels nothing, and loses consciousness extremely rapidly – usually within one or two seconds."

The Farm Animal Welfare Council estimates that about 55,000 cattle are killed in Britain each year under *shechita*, along with 28,000 sheep and goats and more than two million poultry.

Miriam Parker, of the Humane Slaughter Association, told the *Sunday Telegraph* that *shechita* meat should be labelled.

"At least 50 per cent of that meat ends up on the general market," she said. "People often don't realise they are eating animals who have died this way. They must be given the choice."

NEIL BLEWITT, caught up in the eternally hypothetical, finds himself singing along with the Superstar lyric...



Kay Stewart: *The Australian Rationalist*

**What if ... Noah's ark
had capsized?**

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POOR OLD JUDAS!

A SERIES of articles could be written on the theme *What if...?* Suitable starting points could include: What if, at the moment of Creation, God had said "Dammit – I've forgotten the words!?" What if Noah's ark had capsized? What if Mary had miscarried or given birth to twin girls? And what if the angel had been unable to move the stone from the entrance to Jesus' tomb? The possibilities are legion.

But here I am concerned with the Atonement, and my first question is: What if, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas had kissed not Jesus but the gardener, the Captain of the Temple or the Chief Priest? I have long wondered.

Before considering the Atonement further, I must confess that I have always felt some sympathy for Judas. Without his kiss, there may well have been no Crucifixion or Atonement; in fact, little point in Jesus having been born at all; and yet Judas has been vilified for 2,000 years and, according to the Acts of Andrew and Paul, consigned to Hell, there to remain soulless until the Day of Judgement, with only Herod and Cain for company. Not a pleasant prospect – but perhaps a little better than having to share the accommodation with the men of Sodom.

Suicide

One might add that, because of his kiss, Judas felt it incumbent upon himself to commit suicide. It is of no concern here that he was also reported to have died by bursting asunder so that his bowels gushed out. Either way he was comprehensively dead. But what a poor reward for setting in motion the train of events that enabled Jesus to atone for the accumulated sins of thousands of years!

The wife of Judas has also received no credit for her part in the business, and yet one narrative of the Passion reveals that it was she who prompted him to betray Jesus. Against that, it has to be admitted that she played a part in his suicide too, although she shared the responsibility for that with a dead cockerel. The narrative states that when Judas told her of the betrayal, he confessed to being worried because of what would happen when Jesus rose again on the third day. She replied that Jesus would no more rise from the dead than that the cockerel she was roasting over the fire would crow... at which point the bird left the spit,

spread its wings and crew lustily (three times, moreover, so that its significance should not be lost) leaving Judas with little else to do but seek a stout rope and a tall tree.

Without Judas, then, there would have been no kiss, no Crucifixion and no Atonement, and Jesus would have been left to slink away from Gethsemane to die in obscurity; and both the religious and the non-religious person may agree that a superannuated god dying of old age, toothless and witless, with humanity unredeemed, is not worth very much. And where, one may ask, would that have left those born since Adam, languishing beneath the weight of their sins? It may be that Jesus would have brought relief by choosing some other method of sacrifice later on, or perhaps another god may have descended and acted on his behalf. But one suspects that the moment would have passed and, in any case, gods, as a general rule, do like to have a Judas.

There are other *What-ifs* in the Passion story. What if, for example, the crowd had cried out "Crucify Caiaphas!" or "Stuff Barabbas!" Or what if Pilate, instead of washing his hands, had announced that he had just invited Jesus to become the chaplain to the Roman legions?

But let us move on to another aspect of the Atonement. Did Jesus really suffer on the cross? Or did he dissemble? Given that he was a god, or at least the son of a god, that he spent 40 days in the wilderness with nothing to eat and still had the strength to go to Jerusalem and to the top of a mountain with the Devil, and that he would later rise into the upper atmosphere with no protective clothing or breathing apparatus, undergoing crucifixion should have presented no difficulty. So why did he suffer?

The answer may lie in the fact that gods tended to be very good actors. Zeus, for example, was a master of disguise and would have earned a small fortune as a quick-change artist, while Venus would have made Gipsy Rose Lee look like an amateur. Perhaps Jesus would have graced the stage too – and not only as a conjurer, turning water into wine, clay into live sparrows and children into goats, but also as a dramatic actor whose *piece de resistance* was to be nailed to a cross at a matinee and appear to suffer agonies so intense as to die – though only to return to life at a late-night performance the following day.

There are some who say that, rather than feigning to suffer on the cross, he should have been terribly flippant about the whole affair to show that gods were not affected in the same way ordinary folk might be in similar circumstances. But to have said to the multitude on being nailed to the cross

"How tickled I am to be here!" or to the malefactors, with studied insouciance, "Do you come here often?" would have betrayed a lack of gravitas which a god dying a redeemer's death ought to have in abundance.

Jesus, being of divine origin, would have been aware that it was customary for gods to die for the redemption of others but, oddly, he seems not to have referred to it directly. He did, however, foretell his death, resurrection and ascension and, although it may not have been his original intention to bring about a general atonement thereby, he may have thought that, as he was going to die anyway, he would throw that in for good measure.

Privy

But others appear to have known. John the Baptist had an inkling; Caiaphas, in an enlightened moment, realised that somebody had to die for the people, and Old Testament prophets like Isaiah and Zechariah had known several hundred years before the event. Paul deduced it afterwards and was never loth to declare to anybody who was interested – and frequently to many who were not – that he had long been privy to the thoughts of the Almighty.

The authors of the Prayer Book were also aware of the significance of the divine sacrifice, placing it second in importance only to the doctrine of the Trinity in the section entitled Articles of Religion. These Articles were approved by no less a person than the monarch and with such enthusiasm that there was a promise, if not a threat, in the preface that any dissenter would be met with the royal displeasure.

There are two final *What-ifs* about the Atonement. So far as I know, nobody was ever consulted as to whether they required Jesus to die for their sins – either contemporaneously or in retrospect. But what if they had? For myself, had I been canvassed, I would have said that I did not want a god – or anybody else for that matter – to die for me, unless it gave him a particular pleasure to do so. I cannot speak for others, but I imagine that their answers to the question would have included Yes – No – Don't know – Don't care – Please himself – What's the catch? – Who are you calling a bloody sinner?

And, to return to the sin that started it all, what if Eve had said to the serpent "Bugger off!?" Or, if she had allowed herself to be beguiled, what if Adam had said "No thank you, my dear, but I wouldn't mind a nice Yorkshire pudding"?

'There is war between religion and Humanism'

NICOLAS WALTER said that while there could be dialogue between religious people and Humanist people, it was another matter whether there could be dialogue between religion as such and Humanism as such. He went on to outline his beliefs, noting that the "three most important elements of Humanism" are:

- that all the factors, interests, criteria of any situation are always subordinated to human factors, interests, criteria;
- there is no spirit or mind or principle or force or power or pattern behind the universe, no point to it other than what we give it;
- the rejection of authority.

As a result, said Walter, there is war between religion and Humanism; there may be a truce between them, but never peace. "The question is," as Humpty Dumpty said, "who is to be master – that's all." In every case, there must be a final appeal, an ultimate test, a last judgement. Here there is such a wide gap between religion and Humanism that they can scarcely hear one another.

Take an obvious area of discussion: morality. In religious morality the last judgement comes from some superhuman or extra-human or sacred person or institution or text; in Humanist morality the last judgement comes from the human individuals involved. In religion man is judged by God or Bible or Church or State; in Humanism God and Bible and Church and State are judged by men and women. We may reach much the same decisions, but we get there by different routes. Take a specific topic of discussion: life and death. In religion such matters are decided dogmatically, according to doctrines about who gave us life and who may give us death. In Humanism such matters are treated pragmatically, according to the balance of the claims and interests of the individuals involved. We may end by doing much the same things, but we get them from different places.

The Humanist approach is much the same as the scientific method. It is often claimed that there is a division of labour between science and religion – science answers questions *how*; religion answers questions *why*. However, during the past few hundred years science has given a huge number of answers *how*, but dur-

NICOLAS WALTER was one of a strong team of Humanists which contributed to the inaugural conference of the Centre for Critical Studies in Religion, Ethics and Society at Westminster College, Oxford, which is sponsored by the Academy of Humanism, a prestigious international body associated with the American Centre for Inquiry. The proceedings – dealing with the subject of dialogue between Humanism and religion – will be published (details later). Here, The Freethinker presents an extensively edited version of Nicolas Walter's contribution.

ing several thousand years religion hasn't given a single answer *why*. Religion is not an answer, but a question.

Humanism is an answer – or rather, the many Humanisms are many answers. My own Humanism is a pretty minimal one. It involves neither religion nor ritual; I am not a religious or ritualistic animal. It is entirely sane; my right-brain is fully occupied with art, music and literature and humour. It is not a "life-stance" or "eupraxophy"; I have no more need for secular than for sacred nonsense. It avoids such terms as "spirit" and "worship," however defined; I have no need for alien vocabulary. It perceives nothing as ultimately important; as A J Balfour said, nothing matters very much, and most things don't matter at all. I agree with Freud that religion is a neurosis; but so is psychoanalysis. I agree with the Marquis de Sade that nature is hostile to us. I agree with Matthias Claudius that "man is not at home in the world." I agree with Max Stirner that there is no such thing as "Man," only me and others like me. We should exorcise all the spectres which have haunted us, from God to Humanism itself. I am atheist about God, and agnostic about most other things in the same category. Questions about the value of existence or the meaning of life have no value or meaning. There are no cat-

egorical imperatives or fundamental principles. The ultimate reality is that there is no ultimate reality. The golden rule is that there are no golden rules. Here I may not share much common ground with some other Humanists, but I can speak for many others.

I cannot say how people behave in religion; it is a club I have never belonged to. But in Humanism – and by this I mean not just the few thousand people who call themselves Humanists, but the several million people who live their lives without any supernatural or superhuman belief, whatever they call themselves – everything is down to individual human beings in the company of other individual human beings. The human species, this unhappy family of thinking animals, is alone in the universe, and we have to make our own way in it. To do this we have only our human faculties – reason, emotion, observation, knowledge. The presumption of Humanism is that all human beings have these faculties, and that all questions which can be answered may be answered with them. Half of us are fools, but there is no way of telling which half. Most of our answers are wrong, but they are not final answers, and they may be improved. This will be done, if it is done, only by us. This is the great project of Humanism.

There are exceptions to my argument, but they actually prove it. On the one hand, if religion adopts the approach of Humanism – as it often does nowadays, with all the closet atheists in the churches – then it ceases to be religious and becomes Humanist, and true dialogue is possible, a dialogue which I wish to join, have often joined, and am joining here. On the other hand, if Humanism abandons the approach of Humanism – as it sometimes does – then it ceases to be Humanist and becomes religious, and true dialogue is also possible, though not a dialogue I wish to join.

The conclusion I draw is: No, religion is not "Humanist"; and: No, no real dialogue is possible between religion and Humanism. Of course we can talk and work with religious people (I think of Quaker colleagues in the peace movement), live with and sleep with them (I think of Communist friends and Catholic girl-friends); but this is because they are human. If dialogue between us is possible, it is based on what we have in common, our shared humanness – on Humanism.

A corollary I draw is that, from the point of view of Humanism, religion is meaningless – not that it doesn't mean anything, but that it doesn't mean anything worth meaning. By the same token, natural religion or natural theology or rational religion or religious Humanism, while they may exist, are contradictions in terms.

And the postscript I add is that religious people agree with me. The Protestant theologian Karl Barth said that "belief cannot argue with unbelief, it can only preach to it"; I say that unbelief cannot argue with belief, it can only criticise it: which is why we need a Centre for Critical Studies.

The son also rises

DR BILLY GRAHAM celebrated his 77th birthday by announcing that his eldest son, Franklin, will succeed him as Chairman of the multi-million dollar Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

Franklin, aged 43, gave his parents a lot of concern as a teenager. He failed at school, stayed out late, drove fast cars, chain-smoked and once escaped death in a plane crash while learning to fly. Later – after a firm talking-to from his father at a Lausanne conference – he gave up smoking, graduated, took up charitable works – and was ordained in 1981.

Dr Graham, who is suffering from Parkinson's disease, was full of gratitude when the board of the Association appointed young Frank to a new post of first vice-chairman, with direct succession to Chairman and Chief Executive "should his father ever become incapacitated."

He said: "Franklin was selected by the board, and as a father I am both proud of his capacity for leadership and humbled in gratitude for the Lord's blessing on him." Source: *Sunday Telegraph*, November 12, 1995.

Escaping the awful truth that we are alone in the Universe

WHY THEY INVENTED JESUS

by Stewart Valdar

IN 1937, while working at the Ecclesiastical Commissioners as cartographical draughtsman, I bought five booklets from the series "Pamphlets for the People" (Pioneer Press, one penny each), entitled *Did Jesus Christ Exist?*, *Morality Without God*, *Woman and Christianity*, *Must We Have a Religion?* and *The Devil*. They put into words what I had come to believe at the age of 20. I bound them together and the chief draughtsman, Len Matthews, a kindly man, drew an image in Indian ink of the Devil on the cover for me.

I retain this now time-stained book on my shelves, a reminder of my early attempts to replace rationalism for the all-pervading mythology of religion. I never cease to marvel at the fantasies that the human mind is capable of inventing and believing to escape the awful truth that we are alone in the Universe.

Did Jesus (Greek form of Joshua), the Christ (redeemer) exist – or was he, like the later William Tell and Robin Hood, a figment of the human imagination or an amalgam of a number of outstanding individuals at a crucial time in history?

Certainly, there is no contemporary historical evidence supporting the New Testament (an arbitrary collection of edited writings, set down between 70 and 150 years afterwards) stories of such a man-god. Josephus (AD c37-95) wrote about the various Jewish groups – the Sadducees, Zealots, and Pharisees – but didn't mention the Christians, nor did the Roman historian, Pliny the Elder, who described the Essenes, whose Dead Sea Scrolls foreshadow beliefs later borrowed by them, including the definitive "Sermon of the Mount" lifted word-for-word and attributed to Jesus.

As Professor G A Wells (*Did Jesus Exist?*, Pemberton, 1975) put it: "If Jesus really lived on Earth, he could have made little impact on his contemporaries, as no personal traits of his life and character found expression in the early literature about him."

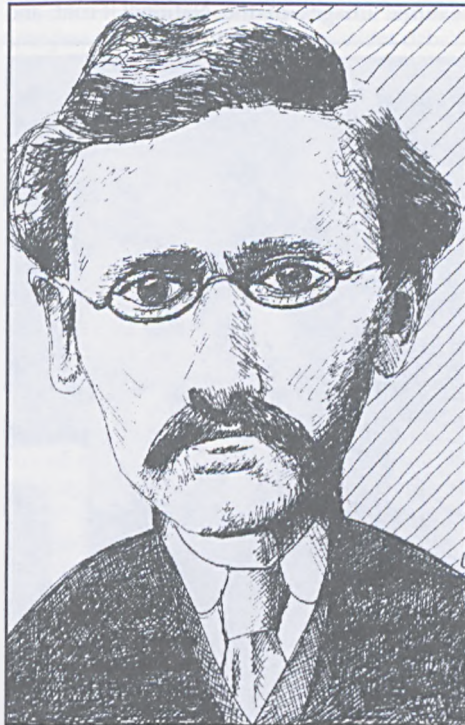
My reading over the years has brought me to the conclusion that unlike Mohammed (c570-632AD) and Buddha (c563-483BC), from whom ideas were borrowed later by the Christians, Jesus (alternatively described as of Bethlehem or of Nazareth) did not found Christianity. He was invented by the Christians years after his alleged life on Earth.

The invention was necessary to substantiate their cult. There was fragmentation from Roman persecution and disillusionment among the faithful because of the non-appearance of a Second Coming. The Jesus story was substantially concocted between the end of the First Century and the first half of the Second Century AD and embodied in the Gospels ascribed to Mark (end of the I C), Matthew (early II C), Luke (first half of the II C) and John (about 140 AD). These works show signs of editing and later insertions – for example, the name of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, a compromise formulated at the Conference of Nicea (325 AD), appears in Matthew.

Professor Wells (in *The Historical Evidence for Jesus*, Prometheus Books, 1982) says: "We find that only from about 90 AD did Christians

regard Jesus as a teacher, miracle worker and a near contemporary, crucified under Pilate. In documents dating from 90 to 110 AD Jesus figures simply as a supernatural personage whom God had sent in human form into the World to redeem it and was crucified there in unspecified circumstances."

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke are thought to have been founded on Mark, and Matthew, adapted and edited for dogmatic purposes over the years, which was written succinctly in polished Greek (not the Aramaic of the early Christians) was, according to a recent



● Chapman Cohen: *The New Testament Character [of Jesus] is as unoriginal as a moral teacher as he is as a God. (Sketch by Geoff Day)*

book by the Greek scholar Enoch Powell, the common source of the other Gospels. The same person is thought to have written Mark and Acts. Scholars say that the Letters of Paul, written shortly before 70 AD, form the basis of the early Christian beliefs.

Incidentally, Matthew traces Jesus back to Abraham but Luke links him to Adam, a risky pedigree since the Bible gives the date of the creation of the Earth as 4004 BC, the Jews as 3,722 BC and science as 6000,000,000 BC!

Then there are the books of the Apocrypha, composed by Jewish authors 150 BC-100 AD, which include stories of the middle years of Jesus, obviously a part of the same body of religious writings that have been arbitrarily left out of the approved works.

Although the character Jesus, as depicted in the Gospels never claimed to be the Messiah, the Redeemer awaited by the Jews (and still awaited) to deliver them, Christians make such

a claim. It is remarkable that the Jews who have lived in the area since long before Biblical times have no record or knowledge of Jesus – yet he is acclaimed by Christians all over the world! And for such an obviously knowledgeable character, it is remarkable that not a single word written by him exists.

The Christian religion and its practices evolved over the years, drawing ideas from existing religions. The virgin birth, baptism by water, eating the God (Communion) are obvious examples. Its ethics are substantially Jewish. It has been said that Christianity relates to Judaism as a colony does to the mother-country and that such teachings that are not mirrored in Jewish writings can be found in pre-Christian literature of Egypt, Greece, Rome and India.

In developing a central character, we were given Jesus the Jewish Magician: he raised people from the dead; cured the sick by word and touch; cured epileptics and insane people by casting out devils that were the cause of the complaints, fed a multitude of people with a few baskets of food and when finished had seven basketsful left; held intercourse with devils, was offered the World if he would fall down and worship Satan; and caused blackness over the world when he died and graves to open and the dead to walk about the streets. After his death and burial, he appeared twice to some followers, finally ascending to Heaven in the full sight of 500 of them. It is remarkable that nearly 2,000 years after these alleged events they are still believed.

After nearly 60 years of reading about these matters, I can only echo the words of the author of the pamphlet *Did Jesus Christ Exist?*, Chapman Cohen, a fellow Jew, on the often vaunted teachings of Jesus:

"Miracles are as incredible in the mental as in the physical world and it is impossible to believe that Jesus, who in no respect showed himself the intellectual superior of the peasants around him, who accepted every superstition that flourished among his most ignorant contemporaries, and who was intellectually overshadowed by scores of Roman, Greek and Alexandrian writers, should have impressed the World with his moral grandeur.

"There is not a single moral saying attributed to Jesus that is not to be found in the old Bible or, in a better form, among the Jewish Rabbinical writings. His sayings were among the accepted common-places of his time. The New Testament character is as unoriginal as a moral teacher as he is as a God.

"There is no evidence that contemporary pagans were at all impressed by the moral evidence of Christians who they saw as a fanatical, ignorant, intolerant sect, of whom some very strange stories were afloat. If one goes carefully through the teachings of Jesus they will note a complete ignoring of a social problem and also the civilising influence of family life. Children are introduced only to be held up as an example for men to follow with regard to their ignorance and helplessness. There is nothing of art, or science or education. There is no consciousness of social life, there is nothing concerning the nature or function of the state. All these things were admirably given in the Greek and Roman writers. There is nothing about them in the teaching of Jesus."

Universities wake up to Islam threat

THE National Union of Students has called on the Government to ban the extremist Islamic group *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* after evidence that it had embarked on a widespread campaign of intimidation and violence in British colleges.

Most freethinkers would oppose any such ban – not only on philosophical grounds but also for the practical reason that such legislation has a way of being used to silence the bleats of the sheep as well as the nannying of the goats. But it is instructive to note that university people have at last become aware of the dangers posed in academia by fundamentalist Muslims – which *The Freethinker* has been pointing to for years (Barbara Smoker *passim*, and see G N Deodhekar, *The Freethinker*, October, 1995).

Jim Murphy, the NUS President, said the group was sending students overtly racist

propaganda calling for the removal of Jews and Hindus from places in higher education.

"It is the single biggest extremist threat in the UK at the moment. The college authorities know it, the police know it, and it is astonishing that Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, is doing nothing about it," he said.

The students were supported by the Association of University Teachers. David Triesman, its General Secretary, said he was alerting members.

"It is essential we all work together to ensure that universities are supportive environments for learning and living, irrespective of a student's racial origins," he said.

Evidence of the extent of *Hizb-ut-Tahrir's* penetration of student campuses came in results from a 24-hour telephone hotline, set up a year ago for students to report incidents of racism. Although publicity for the hotline featured images of the National Front and

British National Party, two-thirds of the calls from students expressed concern about the behaviour of *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*.

There were more than 100 reports of distribution of offensive material by Islamic extremists, primarily *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, and 50 reports of offensive meetings, 47 threats of violence and 31 acts of physical intimidation or harassment.

Mr Murphy said the Government could act against the group under existing legislation, but the threat posed by it was so serious that Mr Howard should consider banning it: "Several Muslim countries in the Middle East have banned this organisation, but this country is not willing to use its power."

Destruction

Mr Murphy said London Guildhall University was closed for a day during October after a warning from the police that *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* was planning violence. There were also several incidents when its activists clashed with students trying to prevent them recruiting among the intake of undergraduates.

"Their material is overtly racist. It calls for the destruction of Israel and India. It calls for a ban on homosexuality. They have circulated material in student unions saying that Jewish students have no place in our education system, that Hindu students are dogs, and that women should be subservient."

Results of the Campus Watch racism hotline showed 91 complaints against the British National Party and other extreme right factions, compared with 271 against Islamic extremists. There were also reports from other English regions, Scotland and Wales.

The Home Office said it was aware of *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, but had no power to ban it. All organisations had the right to freedom of speech unless they were identified with terrorism, a spokeswoman said. The distribution of racist material was an immediately arrestable offence. Source: *The Guardian*, October 31.



● National Secular Society President Barbara Smoker conducted what the media call a "Lesbian wedding" – Barbara prefers "non-religious Lesbian affirmation ceremony" – at Brockwell Lido, South London, in August, part of which was shown in the *Modern Times* series on BBC2, December 6. It was accurately described as "moving" by the TV critic of *The Guardian*.

Preaching to the unconverted

READERS will note that we have increased the page size of *The Freethinker* to true (rather than American) A4. Also, the quality of the newsprint has been improved – giving, we hope, a better look to Britain's atheist journal.

The aim has been to secure more space for words and illustrations – and to make *The Freethinker* more acceptable in retail outlets (whose proprietors care muchly about size: just about every periodical is true A4, these days).

Need we mention that all this costs money? We realise that there is scant

hope of *The Freethinker* making a profit at this stage of its career: it is always heavily subsidised. We must rely on readers who care to help spread the ideas of Secular Humanism, Rationalism and Freethought to provide us with the wherewithal to pay the bills (we dread the prospect of postal charges increasing in the Spring). Every donation helps to us to preach to the unconverted by widening the distribution of the 'paper, as well as underpinning our traditional role of house journal to infidels.

Make cheques and POs payable to G W Foote & Co and rush them to: *The Freethinker*, Bradlaugh House, 47

Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP.

Many thanks to: R H Barr, W Heffer, G McGee, R S McAllister and E Wakefield, £2 each; F Campbell, £2 50; L D Hall, £3; Clarke, J Drummond, D B Foy, T Green, E Gwinnell, L T Johnson, J N Lloyd, A Negus and S Smith, £5 each; W H Brown, £8; Anonymous, N Blewitt, J Boyd, G Brum, A C F Chambre, E H Crapper, S Lee, L A Harling, J Lippit, A J Ringer, M Whiny, S Williams and D Yeulett, £10 each; T Morrison, £20; C Freeberne, £25; M Davies, £30; N J Dunlop, £40; S J Macer, £50; W Scott, £100.

Total for November 1995: £463.50.

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You're telling us!

One-sided sentiment

WITH regard to Terry Liddle's December article "The Shadow in the Cave," the phrase "not in competition but in mutually sustaining relationship" seems to me to be a sentimentally one-sided statement of our necessary relations with other species.

Those relations are necessarily ambivalent – sometimes needing to be mutually sustaining and sometimes needing to be relentlessly competitive.

My farmer neighbours have no mutually sustaining relationship with the ubiquitous rabbits who eat their crops; none of us has a mutually sustaining relationship with killer micro-organisms.

The ethics of our human relationship with other species is a very difficult area precisely because of its necessarily ambivalent character. Simplistic moral absolutes are out of order in this area as in others.

ERIC STOCKTON
Orkney

● Regarding his own December article, headed "Acceptable means to laudable ends," Eric Stockton writes: "The (controversial) acts and omissions doctrine is that the two are NOT ethically equivalent even if they have the same outcome. Sorry for the error."

Why praise the Lord?

I WOULD draw the attention of readers of *The Freethinker* to the hymn by John Milton, "Let Us With a Gladsome Mind Praise the Lord for He is Kind," which is enshrined in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*.

Verse six tells us: "All things living he doth feed, his full hand supplies their need." After all due allowance for the poet's blindness, the simple fact that the pious sentiments expressed are just not true. Were they so, there would be no need of OXFAM, CAFOD, Crisis at Christmas, Shelter and the host of other charitable agencies. Yet this hymn has been sung up and down the country by purblind, devout Christians for ages – perhaps as a salve for conscience in passing the buck to Him Up There!

DAVID YEULETT
Greenwich

Book aid sought

I WONDER if any reader can help me in identifying the author and title of a book, published about 1981-82, concerning the bombings and killings in Salt Lake City during the early 70s, arising from the discovery by a member of the Mormon Church that Joseph Smith's claim of a "special revelation" was based upon forgery and plagiarism?

It seems to me that we have had more than our fair share of Mormon missionaries in this area during the past 12 months and, while these

young men are unfailingly polite, they are nevertheless untiring in their efforts to drag their listeners into the Mormon fold. I have had many an interesting exchanges with these dedicated young men, but I was surprised to hear that they have never heard of the mayhem in Salt Lake City which is the subject of the book I am trying to identify. I was very sorry that I couldn't direct their attention to the book in question but its author and title completely escape me. Can any reader throw any light on this, care of *The Freethinker*?

MARTIN O'BRIEN
Malvern Wells

Discredited creeds

THE use of the word "sin" in the Church of England dispute about their report on marriage and cohabitation, made me realise for the first time just how our attitudes in the wider debate are unconsciously influenced by preconceptions, well seasoned by a good sprinkling of emotionally-weighted words.

The whole business of deciding new "tribal"/"socially acceptable" rituals or norms is at present in the melting-pot; and one feels that the Midnight Hags, stirring their "spleens of toad, gall of bat, and toes of newt," might make a better job of sorting it out than our present political and social masters.

At stake are individual freedoms, children's rearing, parental duty, and the needs and responsibilities of society.

The whole object of sex is reproduction. Copulation, in humans, has the secondary function of emotional bonding in order to provide the long-term stability required for rearing a human child to maturity. Forming societies is (supposed to be) a further guarantee of environmental stability. And all our attitudes, actions and interactions can be evaluated in terms of these three precepts.

Of course, when one forms a society or social grouping, then the jockeying begins to claim some advantage for your set of genes above the rest. Class, leadership, religion, race, tribe, nationality *et al* are all grist in the mill of claiming precedence over others of supposedly lesser standing. Until modern times, such rivalries, even when taken to the extremes of exterminations, affected relatively small pockets of population; and most people were too isolated by distance to feel themselves personally threatened.

From 1492, however, when the discovery of America signalled the start of a revolution in communication abilities and the development of ever more sophisticated weapons of mass destruction, the genocidal massacres gathered apace, reaching their climax in the first half of this century, right here at home in Europe, with over half-a-billion brutal slayings in the space of 35 years.

Is it any wonder that people have, in the last half-century, started to question the ethos of the old moralities, which have so obviously failed to provide the required stability and safety needed for successful child-rearing? After all, passing on YOUR genes is what the whole exercise is supposed to be about.

As Rupert Brooke had it in his third War Sonnet "The Dead": "... (They), gave up the

years to be...and those who would have been. Their sons, they gave, their immortality."

Bosnia and Rwanda are two, too awful, reminders of where the old moralities and certainties can still lead. And yet our leaders, both political and religious, continue to spout out the old emotion-filled condemnations of those who don't conform. But "The Selfish Gene" requires some guarantee of immortality before it will agree.

Our so-called leaders have long since ceased to be that. They do not go forward to show us the path, and light the way to a better future; they merely try to hold the line from a long and vicious past. It is our denigrated single mothers, long-term unemployed, impoverished senior citizens, and evicted mental patients who are cast into the future's wilderness to find the way or perish; while those who have no answers (although they're paid to have) sit at home and moralise, from a script of discredited creeds.

WILFRED GAUNT
Leicester

Replies to Smoker

THE answer to Barbara Smoker's question (November) is that, by her own philosophy, Calvinists think as they do because they can do no other: they are not free-thinkers.

In reply to Leslie James, though I entertain the notion of free-will (and of free-thinking: I subscribe to this journal) I do not suggest that a man's body and his mind are different things (for example, "like a jerkin and a jerkin's lining" as Sterne put it). I consider that body and mind are terms that are used in thinking about a single entity in two entirely different ways. Though only one of these ways is scientific (mind is not a scientific concept), each is logical, valid and essential.

Whereas men are objects – fit subjects for a scientific mind to study – they are also subjects. If not, they would not know that they existed and there would be no one about to study them (except, according to Ronald Knox, God).

Unlike Calvin, determinists of our day believe that science is the only source of indubitable truth (they are scientific positivists). They therefore see themselves and their fellowmen as objects but they ignore the fact that they are subjects too and that, as such (by my philosophy), they are people with minds of their own, however much influenced by others – they are not just puppets on a string which, as explained before (October), is what Barbara Smoker's crazy creed implies.

GORDON EASTON
Oban

BARBARA Smoker (November) objects to the concept of "blame"; but she nevertheless blames theology (or theologians) for it. Blame has a valuable social function; for it is simply an attempt at fault location. One might object to a particular apportionment on the ground that it is wrong, but not, surely, on the ground that the whole concept is theological. Punishment does not necessarily follow, not even theologically (see Matthew 5, 45); but when it does the aim is

You're telling us!

From Page 13

to effect a cure. Again one might object on the ground that punishment is sometimes (even usually) ineffective. Nevertheless it is more often effective than earlier (theological) attempts to expunge the ills of society by human (or animal) sacrifice.

"Divine" retribution is useful not because it is eternal but because it carries with it the certainty of being found out. God sees all and is therefore the 100 per cent efficient detective. By exploding this myth we secularists must inadvertently share blame for the level of crime; but there is no justification for compounding the offence by destroying the idea of blame.

Barbara and others seem to have the idea that every religious concept was thought up one night by some goddite or other in order to tighten his hold over the rest of us. In this they have a far higher opinion of the inventive ability of goddites than I. Whatever they may claim, neither the goddites nor the gods are entitled to copyright over the religious canon, which is nothing more than a record of the customs and practices current in successful societies when mankind came out of the neolithic age.

To give them their due, the churches do seem to be aware that practices that served hunter-gatherer tribes well are not necessarily appropriate to modern society. Unfortunately, having no other criterion by which to judge morality, they are in no position to distinguish between those practices that should be chucked and those that merit retention; so they are at the mercy of every politically correct fad that comes along. I think we have much that we could teach them here; but only if we can get our own act together.

GLYN EMERY
London N1

Flower power

BELATEDLY I have come across Ben Hayes' question (September issue) regarding the role of the pansy as a symbol of freethought. It derives its origin from a double meaning (in the best possible taste) in the French language. The French for freethought is *la libre pensée*. As well as thought, *pensée* also means pansy, hence the logo.

TONY AKKERMANS
Leeds

Challenge

R G TEE (December) writes of the "flawed logic" of Dave Godin's letters to *The Freethinker*, but he invariably misses their point; the implications of "might is right" have always seemed rather lost on him.

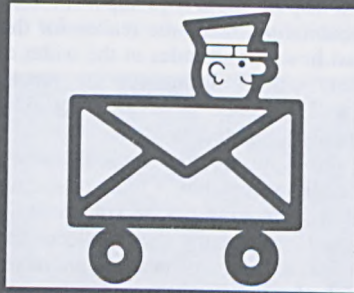
However, I have a challenge for R G Tee: to demystify animal rights for himself by reading the Preface and Chapter 1 of *Animal Liberation* (I'll post it), written by a "master" of logic, the philosopher Professor Peter Singer; and then, when he is more fully informed, to report back his findings – in a letter worth our reading.

HEATHER EVANS
Kenilworth

Questions of toleration

ALTHOUGH I agreed with much of the content of the article by Dr Harold Hillman (November), there were several points where I considered his reasoning to go awry. In particular, he makes a common mistake in his discussion of the toleration of other viewpoints.

He finds it to be "one of the unstated hypocrisies of democracy" that an advocate of a particular viewpoint should be able to tolerate the existence of contradictory viewpoints. But there is no hypocrisy here; rather there is a conflation of issues by Dr Hillman. As a Freethinker, I have the utmost tolerance for individuals to follow whatever religious, politi-



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.

cal, social or other belief they wish. However, respect for such individual freedom of thought does not demand an identical type of respect for the beliefs themselves. I can respect the freedom of others to be Christians, for example, even though I vehemently disagree with the religious views themselves.

There is, then, no hypocrisy involved in, say, being an atheist and accepting that others should have the freedom to be non-atheists. But it is important to realise that the respect for freedom of thought should never be confused with a demand by one's religious or political opponents that their thoughts be respected, for that indeed would be hypocritical.

JONATHAN AINSWORTH
Lancaster

Crime and criminals

I MUST answer Dr Stephen Moreton's December letter, criticising my points about criminality.

He says I live in a strange world because I state that 90 per cent of crime is burglary – but I was quoting a high-level policeman who, in

my opinion, should know more about crime than Dr Moreton.

He says I live in a world "in which residents of respectable neighbourhoods with doctors around...are more likely to be murdered (so Manchester's Moss Side is quite safe then?)" I would like to know how many doctors have been murdered in Moss Side in the last year.

When he quotes my remark that "we have nothing to fear from habitual criminals," and goes on to ask if therefore we need not take precautions against theft etc., Dr Moreton shows that he has misunderstood my original letter. I emphasised that in my opinion the general public has nothing to fear from habitual criminals in respect of violent assault and murder – obviously not the sort of crime he talks about. And as for leaving valuables in unattended cars, that is a great temptation to poverty-stricken people who aren't habitual criminals.

Dr Moreton quotes Press reports of fearsome killings and rape. I agree with him that these are six crimes too many – but they are still only six over a period of a year. He says he could "dig out" (that seems to me to be the operative word) cases of child abuse by habitual criminals. He probably could – but how many compared to those by non-criminals?

He thanks all Humanists who have written to him in support of the death penalty. Such people are peculiar Humanists and short-sighted. In Victorian times, there were more than 200 offences for which people could be hung – and when this figure was reduced drastically, strangely enough, the number of murders declined!

In countries where the death penalty was abolished long before Britain, crime in general – leave alone murder – was negligible in comparison to that in our country.

J H MORTEN
London WC1

Get it right!

IN contrast to David Yeulett (December), I think it is important that quotations from the Bible, or any written work, be made in context. Christians are fond of accusing unbelievers of quoting their "holy" book out of context. Why hand them such an easy line of attack?

Referring to his own quotation from Timothy – "All scripture is inspired by God" – Mr Yeulett writes: "Should that be true..." That clearly implies the possibility of its being true. Surely not!

Except when in direct response to something Christians have written or said, I get a bit worried when Freethinkers start quoting biblical texts, whether in or out of context.

RAY McDOWELL
Co Antrim

IF correspondent David Yeulett doesn't believe the Bible is true, why should it matter to him so much that a text appears self-contradictory, or why does he engage in pointless speculation about the opinions of a god he doesn't believe in? If we assume for a moment that the Bible is true, then the Christian god is cruel, contradictory, confusing – and nothing Mr Yeulett says will alter that.

S ROBINSON
Glasgow

Turn to Page 15

You're telling us!

From Page 14

Republicanism

CONGRATULATIONS on your excellent Up Front on Republicanism (December). Interestingly, Republicanism is the one distinctly political issue which never seems to have divided Freethinkers, and all previous Editors of *The Freethinker* have subscribed to it. You seem to be on safe ground.

ELLEN WINSOR
Gosport

WHETHER there is any necessary connection between Humanism and Republicanism, I leave it to others to discuss. One wonders, however, how many millions, not only in Britain but also all over the world, would watch a TV interview of a British President's daughter-in-law?

NIGEL BARNES
London NW8

Stirner stuff

SID PARKER (December) asks where Max Stirner exalts crime. In *The Ego and His Own*, pp. 240-241 (translated by Steven T Byington, Dover Books), Stirner states: "in crime the egoist has hitherto asserted himself and mocked at the sacred; the break with the sacred, or rather of the sacred, may become general. A revolution never returns, but a mighty, reckless, shameless, conscienceless, proud *crime* does it not rumble in distant thunders, and do you not see how the sky grows presciently dark and gloomy?" (The emphasis on *crime* is in the original).

Stirner's views on the state and religion deserve to be more widely read than they have been, but his rather extravagant and, at times, tedious exaltation of the individual approaches solipsism and may be little more than compensation for the failures of his life.

CARL PINEL
Stockport

Three Noughts Festival

IN 1995 we marked the 300th anniversary of the composer Henry Purcell, the fiftieth anniversary of the end of WWII, and the centenary of the National Trust – good reasons all for celebration. In fact, if it were not for our propensity to attach importance to multiples of ten or a hundred, most TV and radio programme planners would be seriously short of ideas. At least in these examples there is a point in the retrospective, some benefit to be had out of the celebration.

The next big event is, of course, the millennium three – yes, count them three – zeros in the year number. Two thousand years since – since... well, not a lot happened 2000 years ago, at least, not with any significance for us. So what are we supposed to be celebrating? Why, those three zeros!

All through recorded history, people have been convinced that the times they lived in were something special, that some doom was almost

at hand. Many civilisations, such as the Greek and the Maya, envisaged cycles of destruction and tried to predict the next world disaster. At the turn of the last millennium, the Vatican was happy to receive the worldly goods of those who believed the end was nigh. When the end proved to be as far away as ever, the Vatican relied on the law to hang on to the bequests.

In more modern times, we have identified social trends with decades – the Roaring Twenties, the Swinging Sixties and so forth. This is largely a figment of the media, whose writers prefer simple equations to a more responsible analysis of social phenomena.

Here we are, then, in a supposedly educated society, celebrating the advent of three zeros in a year number – officially, since it is acknowledged that the celebrations will be a year too early to mark the real beginning of the Third Millennium. There is a Government Commission specially set up to organise the events. It uses large sums of money from the National Lottery in pursuit of numerological folly. A letter to the Heritage Department asking why this Commission exists merely elicited a booklet about the Millennium Commission's activities. Apparently, nobody can give a good reason for its existence.

If we are not celebrating anything in particular, it would at least be comforting if future generations could say: "In the year 2000, they created this or achieved that." We would be making a kind of upside-down anniversary, as Lewis Carroll might say. It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards. Obviously such an important achievement ought to be of benefit to everyone, funded as it is from public money. How, then, is this expensive, unelected body marking the anniversary of nothing? Will we, perhaps, ensure that we have a properly integrated transport policy in place by then so that we can make a good start on improving the environment? Set up a Parliamentary

Commission to work out a really democratic constitution instead of the illusion we now have? Work out from scratch a fair and effective education system? Build enough houses and flats for everyone who needs one?

But no. The Government is asking for ideas. They can think no further than some opera house or bridge to be opened with a royal snip of a ribbon in the year 2000, or some exhibition centre with, up to now, precious little to show off. Far from benefiting the whole people, the projects already suggested seem to be of minority interest. No Big Idea has emerged.

The Government has already reneged on its promise not to use lottery funds for essential spending. So why not honestly announce that, to boost both national morale and coffers, the cash now being frittered away by the Millennium Commission on white elephants will be used for some worthwhile national, rather than sectional, effort along the lines suggested above?

But surely, some will say, we will be celebrating 2000 years since the birth of Christ. Well, no. On the best historical analysis the opportunity for that has already passed. Thanks to a mistake by a 6th Century Syrian monk called Dionysius Exiguus, who tried to work out when JC was born and got it wrong, the datum year of the West's calendar has no significance. Because of this, and out of consideration for other cultures, there is a growing tendency to use *ce* (common era) for AD, *bce* (before the common era) for BC. In any case, the achievements of Christianity over the last two millennia can hardly be counted a success story worth a national knees-up.

So three cheers for three zeros, fitting symbols of the Government's real commitment to the people, to the environment and to our future. But they *are* rather attractive on the end of a dividend figure, aren't they?

B THORPE
Cheadle

Westminster backing for Humanists on education

EVEN in the face of the widespread crime and anti-social behaviour in our country today, no action is being taken to ensure that sound moral education is provided in our schools, according to Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists. They are so concerned that they have written to MPs and peers asking them to take the matter up.

The Humanists say that in schools moral education is often given perfunctory treatment and wrongly identified with Religious Education.

"The philosophical bases of morality are inadequately covered, if at all," the group's Roy Saich told Parliamentarians. "Moral education is, at best, diluted across the curriculum, and knowledge of ethical traditions, such as Humanism, does not form part of school examinations."

The Humanists have been gratified by the support they have already received.

Replies include:

John Butcher MP: "I fully share your concern to ensure that a sound moral education be provided in our schools."

Don Foster MP, the Liberal Democrat education spokesman: "It is vital that school pupils have the opportunity to learn about the different religions represented in our society and about the views from non-religious ethical traditions."

Lord Morris: "Morality is not recognised at all, except in so far as individual teachers convey to their pupils the standards they themselves hold."

John Redwood MP: "I agree that those who are Humanists believing in a non-religious-based morality should also put their views to young people who can then come to their own considered opinion."

Geoffrey Robinson MP: "I entirely agree with the points you have made."

Further details from Roy Saich on 01926 58450.

What's On...What's On...What's On...

Birmingham Humanist Group: Information: Adrian Bailey on 0121 353 1189.

Blackpool & Fylde Humanist Group: Information: D Baxter on 01253 726112.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group: 40 Cowper Street, Hove (near Hove Station, bus routes 2a, 5 and 49). Sunday, February 4, 5.30 for 6pm: Marguerite Laporte: *Cosmology*.

Bristol Humanists: Information: John Smith on 01225 752260 or Margaret Dearnaley on 01275 393305.

Central London Humanists: Information: Cherie Holt on 0171 916 3015 or Hilary Leighter on 01895 632096.

Chiltern Humanists: Information: 01296 623730. Friends Meeting House Berkhamstead. Tuesday, February 13, 7.45 for 8pm: *Raising Children (and Grandchildren) Without Religion*.

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

Cotswold Humanists: Information: Philip Howell, 2 Cleavelands Close, Cheltenham GL50 4PZ. Telephone: 01242 528743.

Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists: Information: 01926 58450. Waverley Day Centre, 65 Waverley Road, Kenilworth: Thursday, January 18, 7.30pm: Jane Wynne Willson: *Humanist Parenting*.

Crawley: Information: Charles Stewart 01293 511270.

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

Ealing Humanists: Information: Derek Hill 0181 422 4956 or Charles Rudd 0181 904 6599.

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

Hampstead Humanist Society: Information: N I Barnes, 10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 0HP.

Havering & District Humanist Society: Information: J Condon 01708 473597 or J Baker 01708 458925. HOPWA House, Inskip Drive, Hornchurch. Tuesday, February 6, 8pm: Trevor Beecham: *Current Trends in the Treatment of Crime and Delinquency*.

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.

Glasgow Group: Information: Hugh H Bowman, 25 Riverside Park, Glasgow G44 3PG; 0141 633 3748. At 72 Berkeley Street, Glasgow, Sunday, January 21, 2.30pm: Nancy Allan: *A Teaching Exchange in Pakistan*. At Glasgow Caledonian University, Thursday, February 1, 7.30pm: *State-funded Segregated Schools - Parental Right or Social Wrong?* Discussion chaired by journalist and broadcaster Leslie Riddoch. Admission by ticket: £2. Enquiries: 0141 633 3748.

Edinburgh Group: Information: 2 Saville Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 3AD; 0131 667 8389.

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

Leeds & District Humanist Group: Information: Robert Tee on 0113 2577009. Swarthmore Centre, Leeds. Tuesday, January 9, 7.30pm: Martin Gough: *Is Beauty in the Eye of the Beholder?*. Tuesday, February 13, 7.30pm: Michael Meadowcroft: *Improving Democracy - Is Electoral Reform the Answer?*

Leicester Secular Society: Information: Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB; 0116 2622250).

Lewisham Humanist Group: Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, January 25, 8pm: Barbara Smoker: *Sex and the Pope*.

Manchester Humanist Group: Information: 0161 681 7607. January 12: Social Evening. February 9: AGM.

Norwich Humanist Group:

Information: Brian Snod on 01603 455101. Martineau Hall, 21a Colegate, Norwich. Thursday, January 18, 7.30pm: Nicholas Taylor: *The Work of a Funeral Director*.

Preston and District Humanist Group: Information: Peter Howells on 01257 265276.

Sheffield Humanist Society: Information: Gordon Sinclair, 9 South View Road, Barnsley S74 9EB; 01226 743070. Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street (adjoining Bank Street), Sheffield. Wednesday, February 7, 8pm: Arthur Chappell: *Brainwashing - a Cult Survivor's Tale*.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1 (telephone 0171 831 7723). Thursday, January 11, 7pm: 70th Conway Memorial Lecture. Dr David Starkey: *Equality or Diversity? The 'Natural' Foundations of a Democratic Morality* at Conway Hall: all welcome. Full list of lectures and Sunday concerts (6.30pm) from the above address.

Stockport Secular Group: Information: Carl Pinel, 85 Hall Street, Offerton, Stockport SK1 4DE; 0161 480 0732.

Sutton Humanist Group: Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Meetings 7.30pm for 8pm. Wednesday, January 10: Fanny Lynes: *Reflections on 40 Years of Humanism*.

Teesside Humanist Group: Information: J Cole on 01642 559418 or R Wood on 01740 650861.

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

Ulster Humanist Association: Information: Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Meetings second Thursday of the month, Regency Hotel, Botanic Avenue, Belfast BT7.

Worthing Humanist Group: Information: Mike Sargent, on 01903 239823 or Frank Pidgeon on 01903 263867.

Humanist Anthology: Margaret Knight's magnificent work, extensively revised by Jim Herrick, with a preface by Edward Blishen. £7.50 plus £1 post from the Rationalist Press Association, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP. ISBN 0 301 94001 0. Please order a copy at your public library.

Foundations of Modern Humanism: William McIlroy's pamphlet is now reprinted. Price: £1 plus 25p p&p; bulk order rates from 0114 2685731. Payment with order, please, to: Sheffield Humanist Society, 117 Springvale Road, Walkley, Sheffield S6 3NT. Quoting ISBN 0 9525644 0 8, please order a copy at your local public library.

HUMANIST HOLIDAYS

Easter 1996, York

Friday, April 5 (dinner) to Tuesday, April 9 (breakfast). Half-board. £142 shared and single accommodation in attractive 4Star hotel in central York, with most rooms on ground or first floor. Latest date for booking: Thursday, February 29. Apply to Gillian Bailey, 18 Priors Road, Cheltenham, Glos., GL52 5AA. Telephone: 01242 239175.