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Secular  
Humanist  
monthly

# Free thinker

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

Vol 116 No 2

February 1996

NO  
HELL!  
NO  
HELL!  
HELL!



● The New English Bible (Mark quoting Jesus, page 72, NT Popular Edition): "...it is better to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than to keep both eyes and be thrown into hell, where the devouring worm never dies and the fire is not quenched."

● Church of England's Doctrine Commission: Hell is not "eternal torment" but is a state of "non-being."

● Full story: NICOLAS WALTER, Page 3.

*Homeless and  
jobless  
Please help!*

# The Freethinker

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

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Editor: Peter Brearey

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

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## Dead funny

SEVENOAKS Council has vetoed the idea of a litter-bin being placed in a local churchyard, saying it would attract more rubbish – *The Guardian Society*, December 13, 1995.

# Up Front

## God snubs His botherers

CHURCH leaders are nothing if not optimistic, even though the statistics remain as sorry as ever, comments the always well-informed Michael Brown, religious affairs correspondent of the *Yorkshire Post* (January 1, 1996).

Mr Brown notes: "On an average Sunday about three million adults attend church services in this country – a tiny proportion of the population – while 37 per cent of all churches have fewer than 25 in their congregations.

"These figures applied at the launch five years ago of the *Decade of Evangelism*, an inter-church drive aimed at bringing millions of non-believers to the Christian Gospel.

"Half way through the much-trumpeted decade, they remain roughly the same. And this Christmas between five and six million people went to church – rather less than 10 per cent of the population." Our emphasis.

Mr Brown continues: "So the campaign has been a failure? Not a bit of it, the church leaders say – with the air of Government Ministers who, despite trailing disastrously in the polls, insist they believe the Conservatives will win the next election.

"The church leaders insist that the Decade of Evangelism was never intended to be a recruitment drive – that it was not a blueprint for getting more bums on pews. It was, they say, an attempt to galvanise the various denominations of Britain into putting evangelism at the top of their agendas. And to that extent the drive has succeeded, they claim."

Well, they would claim that, wouldn't they, given the distressing statistics?

But they can't pretend that they were not warned that the Decade would be a flop. Just for the hell of it (if we may be permitted such a phrase, these days, in Anglican company), we looked up *The Freethinker* editorial for September, 1990, when media excitement about this latest Titanic attempt to "convert" Britain was at its height:

"Proclamations like 'Jesus is Alive!' and 'Come Back to God!' are as the call of the wild to evangelical Christians. So of course there is considerable excitement over the latest gimmick, a project known as the Decade of Evangelism. But alas, even at this early stage there are signs of dissension in the ranks of those who believe in the same God and read the same Bible. Nothing new about that, and if past experience is any guide, the Decade of Evangelism will peter out leaving the British people still determinedly indifferent to religious claims.

"Throughout the century there have been numerous crusades and attempts at religious revival by the Protestant faithful, while for many years at least one Roman Catholic organisation has been praying non-stop for the conversion of England. And what is the result of all this God-bothering? England has been converted to North Sea gas, the STD telephone system and decimal coinage, but not to Christianity.

"Around one-third of British people are not religious. Many of those listed as believers

reject fundamental teachings like the Genesis account of creation, the Virgin Birth and life after death. The mainstream churches are hopelessly divided on issues like the ordination of women...

"Evangelism means spreading the Gospel with the aim of converting people to Christianity. The fact that it is necessary to devote a whole decade to this noble cause rather contradicts the constant assertion by Christians (when it suits their purpose) that Britain is a Christian country. When questions are asked why there are compulsory religious lessons and worship of a 'wholly or mainly broadly Christian character' in State schools, or why the BBC devotes vast resources to broadcasting Christian propaganda (seldom allowing the right of reply), or why there is an Established church, the answer comes parrot-fashion: 'Because this is a Christian country.'

"What is the Gospel message that will be imparted during the Decade of Evangelism? It asserts that the universe is the handiwork of a creator who made it in six days; also that he created Adam and installed him in the Garden of Eden; that Eve, who was something of an afterthought, tempted Adam and brought about 'The Fall.' Because of this, God became man in the form of his own son, was crucified, arose from the dead and now reigns in heaven until the day of judgement. All this rigmarole in order that 'the world through him might be saved.'

"Those setting great store by the Decade of Evangelism are doomed to disappointment. The Christian message is irrelevant to this decade and to the next century. There is growing awareness of the churches' historical record. Christians are lumbered with dogmas and beliefs that are contrary to scientific knowledge. They cling to a moral code that is superstition's last defence in its battle against rationalism. Christianity is, in a word, incredible."

## Stop Press

THE C of E Doctrine Commission's suggestion that Hell is simply a state of "non-being" elicited an instant Press release from National Secular Society President Barbara Smoker. She noted that "non-being" is what free-thinkers have always maintained is humanity's after-death condition: "But they [the Christians] have yet to concede that there is no heavenly existence either – after all, that could put them out of business altogether."

And William McIlroy, former Editor of *The Freethinker*, summed-up our view in a feature in the *Sheffield Telegraph* (January 19): "Modern attempts to alter or abandon the Christian doctrine of eternal bliss or else blisters are quite dishonest. After centuries, the Christian church, its saints and scholars have preached and taught that Hell is a real place to which the damned would be consigned. Their message was based on biblical texts and the sayings of Jesus. An increasing number of Christians are now embarrassed and shamed by the doctrine of eternal punishment. The fear and terror inflicted on millions by such teachings condemns the Christian church as the greatest terrorist organisation of all time."

# Oh Hell!

## Christians deny Christianity – again

by Nicolas Walter

**H**ELL has been in the news again. In January the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England issued a report, *The Mystery of Salvation*, which proved the truth of its title, if nothing else. This is the latest attempt to restate Christian eschatology – beliefs about “last things,” what happens after death.

What caught the attention of freethinkers was the apology for some of the traditional doctrines. “Christians have professed appalling theologies which made God into a sadistic monster and left searing psychological scars on many,” said the report; and the “sadistically expressed” views of Hell were singled out as especially offensive.

What caught the attention of the media was the statement that Hell is not what it was, and indeed may not be anything at all:

*Annihilation might be a truer picture of damnation than any of the traditional images of the hell of eternal torment...Hell is not eternal torment, but it is the final and irrevocable choosing of that which is opposed to God so completely and so absolutely that the only end is total non-being...Those who make such a choice choose against the only source of life, and they have their reward. Whether there be any who do so choose, only God knows...*

What is happening is that yet again Christians are denying Christianity – in this case, the Biblical doctrine of Hell. This is a complex business. In the Judæo-Christian Scriptures there are two words for Hell. One is *Sheol*, an underworld where the bodies of the dead are buried and the souls of the dead may continue to live, often translated as “the grave” or “the pit.” The other is *Gehenna*, a place of torment where the souls and perhaps the bodies of the dead are burnt for ever. (The word seems to come from the name of a place for burning dead bodies outside Jerusalem).

Most religions believe in life after death and a place where dead people go, and some have a place where they are rewarded or punished for their past deeds. In ancient Greece and Rome, the dead went down to Hades (or Pluto), but there were also places where they were rewarded with bliss (Elysium) or punished with torment (Tartarus); and one of the torments was being burnt by fire.

Fire has symbolic importance in all human

cultures, as a god, as a (or the) basic element, or as a punishment. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said that everything came from fire, and the Greek Stoics said that there was a cosmic cycle of creation from and destruction in fire. The Teutonic *Hel* (from which we get the word Hell) is the goddess of the abode of the dead, a place of both freezing ice and burning fire. The Scandinavian *Ragnarok* and Germanic *Götterdämmerung* (twilight of the gods) ends with the world collapsing into fire (as at the end of Wagner’s opera).

Above all, the Zoroastrian religion of ancient Persia, based on a dualistic tension between good and evil deities, sees fire as the sacred symbol of God and an essential accompaniment to worship, but also as a method of punishment. In the final judgement, *Frashokereti*, the dead will be resurrected and judged, the good joining Ormuzd in a Heaven of bliss and the evil joining Ahriman in a Hell of fire.

Fire was also important to the early Jews, seen as both a characteristic sign and common weapon of Yahweh (used against Sodom and Gomorrah, against Pharaoh in Egypt and various offenders in the Wilderness, against Aaron’s sons and Elijah’s enemies). The later Jews, suffering conquest and exile and wishing their enemies to be punished, influenced by Persian and Greek as well as Mesopotamian and Egyptian religion, adapted their eschatology to include the torment of sinners by fire.

There are few references to Gehenna in the canonical books of the Jewish Bible (the Old Testament) but there are plenty in the apocryphal books which followed, plenty more in the canonical books of the Christian Bible (the New Testament) and even more in the apocryphal books which followed. (There are also references to Hades and Tartarus). The whole eschatology of Christianity is based on the dual doctrine of Heaven and Hell – that those who believe the right things and behave the right way will live for ever with God in Heaven, but that those who think and do wrong will suffer for ever with the Devil in Hell.

This doctrine is explicitly taught in the Synoptic Gospels, where Jesus holds a literal and physical view of Hell. When “the son of

man” divides “the nations” between “sheep” and “goats,” the latter will be “cursed” by “the king” and consigned to “everlasting fire” for “everlasting punishment” (Matthew 25:41, 46). There are repeated references to “the damnation of hell” (Matthew 23:33), “unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:12), “hell fire” (Matthew 5:22,18:9), “hell,” “the fire that never shall be quenched” (Mark 9:43-48), a “furnace of fire” where “there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:42, 50), “hell” where “both soul and body” will be destroyed (Matthew 10:28), “fire on earth” (Luke 12:49). The rich man in the parable is in “hell,” “tormented in this flame” (Luke 16:23-24).

The Epistles are less obsessed with Hell, but repeat that the damned will be in “hell” (2 Peter 2:4), “punished with everlasting destruction” in “flaming fire” (1 Thessalonians 1:8-9), the “fire of hell” (James 3:6), a “consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29).

The Apocalypse is more obsessed again. The damned “shall be tormented with fire and brimstone,” and “the smoke of that torment ascendeth up for ever and ever” (Revelation 14:10-11), shall be “cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Revelation 19:20), “shall be tormented night and day for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:10). This will happen not immediately after death, but after a later resurrection and judgement, when the good will go to Heaven and the wicked to Hell. This is “the second death,” after which the latter will be “cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14-15), “the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone” (Revelation 21:8).

This is very close to the Zoroastrian doctrine. There were similar ideas in Hinduism and Jainism and especially in Buddhism, which developed a series of heavens and hells through which good and bad people passed before the final Nirvana. Islam took over the Judæo-Christian eschatology, and the Muslim Hell is *Jahannam* (the Arabic for *Gehenna*), a place of everlasting punishment in fire, repeatedly described in the Koran.

Modern Christians argue that all this shouldn’t be taken too seriously, that Hell is somehow metaphorical and spiritual rather than literal and physical, and may even be an unfortunate mistake. The trouble is that almost all Christians believed otherwise for about nineteen

Keep  
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RED!

WE must be doing something right – in the eyes of our regular readers, at least. Donations to *The Freethinker* fund in 1995 were £700 up on the previous year, which is great news for those who have the unenviable task of trying to make the books balance.

But 1996 will not allow for complacency: we are expecting increases in both printing and postal charges – and the truth is that *The Freethinker* would be in *dire* financial straits were it not for the fact that it is underwritten by so much voluntary labour.

It is difficult to quantify such matters, but there is surely little doubt that, with the National Secular Society, we have done more than our bit over the decades to changing society's mind on issues ranging from contraception to animal welfare, from abortion to voluntary euthanasia – and now even our work towards the abolition of Hell fire seems to be bearing fruit! The next big ones are *genuine* moral education in schools and the disestablishment of the Church of England. As the advertisement says, we're getting there!

Small wonder that the current issue of the *Socialist Standard* says: "...*The Freethinker* is the best of its

type and well worth reading for the ammunition it provides against religious superstition."

Please...do your bit to keep your atheist journal out of the red. Rush cheques and POs, made payable to G W Foote & Company, to *The Freethinker*, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP.

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## Oh Hell! Christians deny Christianity – again

From Page 3

centuries. *The Christian Hell, from the First to the Twentieth Century*, an illustrated book written by Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner and published by the Rationalist Press Association in 1913, showed that the orthodox doctrine defined in the New Testament was held by the early Fathers and later Doctors of the Church, by most subsequent denominations, and by all leading apologists and evangelists, and that in the main stream of the Christian tradition Hell was always a real place in which real people endured real suffering in real fire for ever. The standard depiction of this scenario appeared in Dante's *Inferno*, which may be great poetry but is revolting philosophy. Later Protestant versions appear in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and Bunyan's *Sighs from Hell* (1658). Teaching children the fear of Hell was one of the main forms of religious education throughout Christendom for centuries.

Of course some Christians never held this doctrine, because they were either emotionally or intellectually unable to accept that an all-good, all-powerful and all-knowing God would condemn even the worst men to everlasting and infinite punishment; but these were usually heretics of one kind or another. Indeed one of the oldest Christian heresies was precisely Universalism – the belief that all would be saved – and it revived at the time of the

Reformation as one of the strongest reactions to the extremes of both Catholicism and Calvinism. (Universalism was incidentally the original doctrine of the congregation founded in London in 1793 which became the South Place Ethical Society in 1888). And the doctrine of Hell has always been one of the main grounds for the rejection of Christianity.

Ways were found to moderate the worst horrors of the doctrine. Some thinkers interpreted it allegorically or symbolically. The Catholic Church elaborated the doctrines of Limbo and Purgatory – that the souls of unbaptised children and good Jews and Pagans might exist in some kind of neutral place outside both Heaven and Hell; and that the souls of unabsolved sinners might exist in some kind of intermediate place between Hell and Heaven where their sins were purged, and might be helped to the latter by prayers and masses – or more profitably (in both senses) by the purchase of indulgences. (The casuistry and corruption involved helped to precipitate the Protestant Reformation).

In the Church of England, as in most Protestant denominations, Hell was taken for granted in the original articles and creeds and prayers and catechisms, and was universally taught until the 19th and even the 20th century. Open dissent came very late. Two clerical contributors to the symposium *Essays and Reviews* (1860) were prosecuted in the ecclesiastical courts for denying the doctrine of Hell; when

they won their appeal, it was said that "Hell had been dismissed with costs"! F W Farrar (the author of *Eric, or Little by Little*) denied the doctrine of Hell in sermons published as *Eternal Hope* (1878); he was assailed from all wings of the Church.

During the subsequent century most Anglicans have practically abandoned the doctrine of Hell taught in the Bible, whatever forms of words are preserved. Christians have long argued that punishment in Hell will be "lasting" rather than "everlasting" (though the Gospel directly contrasts "everlasting punishment" with "everlasting life"), or that Hell is not a place but a state of mind. The Anglicans now suggest that it might be mere annihilation – which is actually a definition of Heaven in Hinduism and Buddhism! Here, as so often, Christians are catching up with what unbelievers have been saying for centuries – though for us annihilation is neither Heaven nor Hell but simply a fact of death – but trying to make sense of Hell makes nonsense of what believers have believed for centuries.

What is happening is that eschatology is turning into escapology, as Christians struggle to free themselves from the bonds of their intolerable doctrines. (What will happen when no Christians believe any of the teachings of Christ?). The verdict must be that Hell is nothing, except a swear-word; and a swear-word is all *The Mystery of Salvation* is worth.

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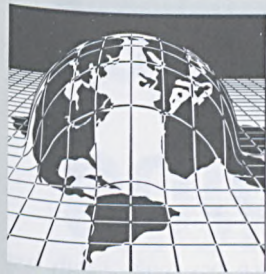
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# Down to Earth

with Colin McCall



## Mistaken identity?

TWO places which enjoyed (?) visitations from the Virgin Mary have been in the news recently. A huge church is being erected at Lichen in Poland, which receives a million pilgrims a year; but Muslims are disputing the Roman Catholic Church's right to the shrine at Fatima in Portugal, where three peasant girls had their vision 79 years ago.

When completed, the ornamented, gilt-encrusted Mary of Our Saviour Sanctuary in Lichen will be second in size only to St Peter's in the Vatican City. It will seat 7,000 worshippers at a time, and its dome and tower are described as dwarfing cathedrals like Notre Dame in Paris.

Fatima was the name of Mohammad's eldest daughter – and Iranian clerics are now suggesting that it was she, not Mary, who "appeared" to the girls in 1917.

Fernando C de Oliveira, writing in *Publico*, reports that, after an Iranian television documentary on the Islamic links through the Moorish occupation, more than 200 Iranian pilgrims had made plans to go to Fatima and the Portuguese embassy in Tehran had been inundated with requests for visas. But Vatican protests and visa delays postponed the trip.

De Oliveira suggests that a Portuguese ethnologist and sociologist, Moisés Espiritu Santo, awakened Iranian interest by asserting that "the town of Fatima, Mohammad's daughter Fatima and the Moorish crusades on the Iberian peninsular were one and the same – the product of popular culture and collective memory dating back to the Muslim occupation."

An amicable sharing of the site might have been possible in those Moorish times. At Cordoba, in Spain, the great and beautiful mosque was used by Arabs, Jews and Christians. Today that is inconceivable.

## 'Neo-paganism' in Poland

WITH the collapse of Communism in Poland, the Church regained its former power.

Crucifixes replaced portraits of Marx in government offices; a strict anti-abortion law was passed; sex education was abolished and replaced by religious instruction. Roman Catholic broadcasters were granted licences two years before private radio and television stations received permission to go on air.

According to Matthew Brzezinski (*The Guardian*, December 6, 1995), the Deputy Prime Minister, Henryk Goryzewski, told parliament: "I don't care if there is freedom of speech or democracy. It is not even important if Poland is rich or poor. All that counts is that Poland is a Catholic state."

Later that year, however, the former Communists were returned to power and, this summer, the left-dominated parliament refused to ratify a Concordat with the Vatican granting special privileges to Roman Catholicism.

November 1995 saw the defeat of the Church's darling Lech Walesa in an election described by Cardinal Josef Glemp as the choice "between Christian values and neo-paganism." Priests campaigned from every pulpit, and the Prior of the Jasna Gora monastery, "Poland's holiest shrine," declared that the gates of its holy shrine would be closed "to the people of the hammer-and-sickle, proponents of a civilisation of death, abortion and atheism."

And when Aleksander Kwasniewski's mother died Christian anti-semitism reared its monstrous head once more. Priests on the Church-affiliated Radio Maria said she had no right to burial in a Catholic cemetery because the family had Jewish origins.

But, says Matthew Brzezinski, the Church's assault backfired, especially with young voters. It surely did. Aleksander Kwasniewski was elected President.

## Reporting risks

JOURNALISTS are not welcome in the former Soviet Central Asian state of Uzbekistan, especially if they are women reporters like Julia Khaitina, from the Russian daily *Moskovsky Komsomolets (MK)*, concerned about "the creeping Islamic fundamentalism in this one-party republic," Nick Holdsworth reports from Moscow (*The Journalist*, December 1995-January 1996).

Aware that she risked confiscation of her interview notes with a member of the Uzbekistan opposition, Julia and another *MK* female reporter smuggled out their story. The two were strip-searched at the airport, which Julia described as embarrassing.

Nothing like as painful, though, as her discovery, on her arrival home, that her friend and *MK* colleague Dimitri Kholodev, who was investigating military corruption, had been blown to pieces in the newspaper's office by a booby-trapped suitcase.

## Hangers-on

ARCHAEOLOGISTS have begun digging again at Qumran, Jessica Berry informs us from the site, where one of them, Hanan Eshel from Bar-Ilan University, discovered more caves two years ago (*The Guardian*, December 19, 1995).

It is believed the caves were inhabited by the Essenes, Ms Berry wrote, "a Jewish sect that lived in the last two centuries BC and the first century AD. They are widely supposed to have written the scrolls."

That last sentence is correct. The Essenes are "widely supposed to have written the scrolls," but that doesn't mean that the supposition is

correct – merely that it has been energetically propagated and uncritically accepted.

In *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?* (Michael O'Mara Books), page 33, Professor Norman Golb notes how the same Hanan Eshel and fellow author Z Greenhut hung on to the old theory in spite of the archaeological evidence.

## Life on other planets

MORE news is to hand on the group murder-suicides of the Order of the Solar Temple, a doomsday cult which is rooted in centuries-old Roman Catholic secret societies and believes life continues after earthly death on other planets. It seems members can't wait to change their spacial abode.

Fourteen bodies arranged in the shape of a star were shot to death and set on fire by colleagues in an Alpine forest village near Grenoble in eastern France. The two killers – one a policeman – then set themselves on fire and shot themselves in the head. Among the dead lying nearby were the policeman's wife and two little daughters.

The ritual echoed group murder-suicides in 1994 by cult members in Canada and Switzerland that left 53 dead, including the cult guru Luc Jouret, a Belgian homeopath.

French and Swiss police are reported by Associated Press to be co-ordinating their investigations. And a French parliamentary commission has estimated that there are between 130 and 150 sects in France "that present a danger to society."

## Materialism marches on

IN THE 1930s, materialists were invariably challenged by idealists like C E M Joad to explain "life" in terms of physics and chemistry. Chapman Cohen, then Editor of *The Freethinker*, and others used to reply that they based their materialism on the current findings of science.

Needless to say, science has advanced enormously since then, so that Francis Crick, Nobel Prize winner for his work with Jim Watson in unravelling the structure of DNA, tells us: "Everything we know about molecular biology appears to be explainable in a standard chemical way. We also now appreciate that molecular biology is not a trivial aspect of biological systems. It is the heart of the matter. Almost all aspects of life are engineered at the molecular level, and without understanding molecules we can only have a very sketchy understanding of life itself. All approaches at a higher level are suspect until confirmed at the molecular level" (*What Mad Pursuit*, Penguin, page 61).

What would Professor Joad say to that?

# A freethinking enemy of Hollywood stereotyping

IT IS a fact that, very often, obituary writers will tend to concentrate on those aspects of a subject's life that they consider to be important rather than those which may well have been very dear to the heart of the deceased.

You will really have to search to learn that Tolstoy was a committed supporter of Esperanto, having learned its rudiments in the course of a single afternoon's study, and was the first President of the Esperanto Vegetarian movement; or that the hugely popular, pre-Nazi era movie actress Dolly Haas, was an atheist who had an entirely secular funeral in New York last year – as was the brilliant British character actor Miles Malleon – or that Wallis Simpson left the bulk of her estate to AIDS research, with the specific proviso that no such research could involve animal experimentation. Even our own *Freethinker* obituary on the late Brigid Brophy failed to give proper emphasis to her untiring efforts on behalf of non-human beings, and the passionate conviction with which she held these beliefs.

So now, notices of the sad death of the American actress Butterfly McQueen failed to show fully that she was so much more than the scatter-brained Prissy character she played in *Gone With The Wind*, but was a deeply sensitive and thoughtful person who subsequently suffered some pangs of conscience for having played a character which many felt showed Blackamericans in a reprehensibly stereotypical light. But not only did she manage to tone down the more hysterical and manic characteristics of Prissy's character during the filming of *Gone With The Wind* (and this, let us remember, was in 1938-1939, when concepts such as "black is beautiful" were totally unknown), but also subsequently refused roles which perpetuated a

**BUTTERFLY McQUEEN**  
(1911 - 1995)

by Dave Godin

poor image of Blackamerican womanhood. Like so many creative people whose commitment to genuine excellence unfairly earns them the reputation of being "difficult to work with," she was soon frozen out of the Hollywood community, where compliance, obsequiousness and conformity are premium requirements in order to "get along" (Greta Garbo being the exception that proved the general rule).

Moreover, McQueen was an ardent supporter of the American Freedom From Religion Foundation, of which she was a Life Member, and, at the age of 64, earned herself a Bachelor's degree in political science.

It is perhaps difficult for us in our culture to appreciate the deleterious effect the Christian religion had upon those who were held in bondage – or why so many who had suffered through its adherents took to it so readily and in such numbers. Of course its neurotic dictum of "forgiveness" suited the dominant ideology at the time of "reconstruction," and may well have been a factor in Blackamericans not pressing Abraham Lincoln (or his successors) to honour the promise that each person who had been held in slavery would be given 40 acres and a mule as compensation for their unpaid labour in helping build the prosperity of the United States.

Of course, white Christians also forgot with equal swiftness that they had often invoked quotes from The Book of Books to justify slavery, or that slave "marriages" (at which Christian clergy admitted in surviving corre-

spondence that often they could "hardly keep a straight face"), had no legal or religious status whatsoever; or that it was a punishable offence in Confederate States to teach a slave to read or write. But, as Bernard Shaw reminded us, people do not have their virtues and vices in sets. ("they come all mixed up – anyhow"), and after the psychic trauma of bondage, and the enforced ignorance it encouraged, Blackamerica took to Christianity and found within it something that consoled them, and would ultimately reward them for the gross injustices and cruelties they had suffered. (In fairness too, it must also be recorded that some Christians, such as the Quakers, were in the forefront of the "underground railroad" network which helped whisk slaves to freedom in the North, as well as the overall cause of Abolition). And within their own special interpretation of it (made more individualistic because in the South, white Christians still practiced apartheid in their places of worship) Blackamericans found a social focus and cohesion they perhaps would not otherwise have had. It also provided a cultural expression and form from which *all* of today's popular music derives – another free gift which Blackamerica has been forced to donate to the world with neither proper acknowledgement nor real reward. As an ardent fan of Blackamerican Soul music, and an ardent atheist too, the irony that the music owes such an overwhelming debt to black church culture is not lost on me!

Perhaps similar ironies caused Butterfly McQueen the same sort of ideological problems which she saw as compromises, and, as always with minorities, there was the additional burden of being one of the few who has "made it" and thus having to represent the whole of the group from which they had come. But it is truly a sign of some progress now to be able to say that the black American film director Spike Lee makes pretty cruddy movies; or that Penelope Spheeris, as a representative of female directors, makes films that graphically exploit violence and sexuality. And yet, despite what she saw as stereotypical behaviour, Butterfly McQueen more than overcame the shortcomings of her scripts, and showed beneath the exterior of her characters a warmth and a humanity, despite the dictates of a dominant ideology that worships "success," "talent," "ability" and "good looks," and which, because of this, ultimately makes whores and house-slaves of us all!

I have often said that the film *Gone With The Wind* makes more valuable observations about the human condition than all the books of the Bible put together, for there is a subversive subtext within it which is seldom noticed or remarked. *All* of its characters are archetypes: all the "scenes" are parables, and, read with an intelligence that perhaps its author never intended, it has a didactic message that I am sure Butterfly McQueen would have fully approved of. And of course, in this respect, it would have been much less potent without her outstanding contribution.

## The Case of the Dancing Fairies

YOU could regard this as the mystery Sherlock Holmes couldn't solve, writes COLIN McCALL.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle turned to spiritualism after his son had been killed in the First World War, and seemed to lose all the analytical skills for which his detective was noted. When he saw the photographs of the dancing fairies taken by two Yorkshire schoolgirls in the woods near their home at Cottingley in 1917, he took them to be genuine and published them in *Strand* magazine.

It was clear from the start that the pictures were faked – and one of the girls, Elsie Wright, then 15, confessed more

than 60 years later that they took them to save her cousin Frances from being told off by her mother for falling into the local beck and getting her clothes wet.

Elsie copied the fairies from drawings in a book and Frances cut them out – rather badly, in fact. Then they stuck them to toadstools and photographed them with a Brownie camera.

Why the renewed interest in the case? According to *The Times* (January 9), Paramount is planning to make a film, *The Golden Afternoon*, based on the two girls' adventures that day. A real-life fairy tale.

# Freethinkers demand moral education – but without superstition



**N**ICHOLAS TATE, the Government's chief adviser on the National Curriculum, grabbed the headlines in January with his insistence that more religion-related moral education is needed in schools.

And, in a press release, Nicolas Walter, Managing Director of the Rationalist Press Association, quickly agreed that: "More moral education is certainly needed – by Nicholas Tate."

Walter pointed out that for Tate to say that moral education depended on religious education was not only ignorant but also insulting:

"It is ignorant, because there is no evidence of any necessary connection between morality and religion. Non-religious people have just as much sense of right and wrong as religious people, and behave just as well (or as badly) as religious people.

"It is insulting because about a third of the people in this country have no religion, yet they are falsely told that they have less sense of morality than the rest. And their beliefs are almost completely ignored in the system of education about belief which is imposed by law through the National Curriculum and the local agreed syllabuses of religious education.

"The lesson which should be learned by people like Nicholas Tate is that the true facts about morality and religion are not what they keep on claiming. What is needed is a proper system of moral education in schools without any connection with supernatural belief. And moral education begins by telling the truth!"

In a letter to *The Guardian*, Nicolas Walter added the point that: "...it just isn't true that there are universal moral values which can be imposed with confidence, or that there is a clear distinction between right and wrong which can be expressed in a set of simple rules, or that schools can teach moral values when so many other sections of society teach such different values, or that moral education has any necessary connection with religious education any more than morality has any necessary connection with religion."

And in a letter to *The Independent*, Walter recorded: "The Humanist movement has been advocating moral education for more than a

century (forming the Moral Instruction League in 1897); but it has always insisted that this should not be confused with religious (or 'spiritual') education."

Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society, also issued a hard-hitting media release in which she pointed out that for 130 years the NSS had been demanding universal moral education – instead of "contentious and divisive religious teaching and religious assemblies."

She added: "Now the Chief Executive of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority is demanding moral education as 'a new initiative' – but apparently without getting rid of RE and religious worship to make way for it, and what he is advocating is 'traditional' moral absolutes, whereas what is really required is the inculcation of good social values and a commitment to fair play in all our dealings, working out whether an action in each case is likely to do more good than harm, or the reverse.

"Most teachers already try to inculcate good values through the whole of the school day, but formal moral teaching and discussion are almost invariably restricted to RE – thus falsely associating morality with religious beliefs. One result is that many teenagers throw out the moral teaching along with the theology.

***"The Humanist movement has been advocating moral education for more than a century (forming the Moral Instruction League in 1897); but it has always insisted that this should not be confused with religious (or 'spiritual') education."***

Besides, basic social morality has to apply to the whole of society, irrespective of religious beliefs.

"Replacing RE by moral education and removing religious worship from assembly would meet the need without adding to the teachers' load. In the USA and most northern European countries, not only is religion not compulsory in the state schools – it is actually prohibited. Why, then, must the British Parliament make it compulsory, with all the problems this entails in a pluralist society?"

"Rather than have RE on the timetable at all, the National Secular Society would prefer a change in the law to allow facts about religion to find their natural place in such lessons as history, art, literature and sociology. Parents who want their children to learn the tenets of a specific creed can surely carry out this teaching themselves or entrust it to their own church, chapel, synagogue or mosque – outside school hours."

On behalf of Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists, Roy Saich issued a media release which noted: "Past generations of British people had no more of a consensus about moral values than we have today. Some people found slavery morally acceptable, many opposed votes for women, and others thought capital punishment acceptable. Dr Tate's view of history and morality is astonishing.

"What Dr Tate seems to be proposing is to add a moral component to a range of unsuitable subjects. That would simply create an incoherent mishmash. What pupils need is a comprehensive and systematic moral education which includes moral philosophy. The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority should produce a model syllabus for the basic curriculum which would include secular ethical traditions, such as Humanism, in the same way as the basic curriculum now includes Christianity.

"A significant majority of teenagers are agnostic or atheist – as are Humanists – and to suggest that the Ten Commandments are relevant to them shows that Dr Tate confuses moral education with religious education and seems to want to go back to the religious instruction which took place in schools in the past."

# News of sects and violence

Monitored by RS

**TEENAGERS** discovered the body of travelling salesman DeWitt Finley, 56, in a truck on a back road in the Klamath Mountains in Oregon. He had starved to death over a nine-week period in which he was stranded in heavy snow, despite the fact that the road was clear several hundred yards beyond the truck. Diary entries indicated that Finley had failed to venture out of his truck because he was certain God would provide for his rescue. [*Daily News Journal* (Murfreesboro, Tenn.), 3-6-95].

**THE** pig wrestling event at the annual St Patrick's Catholic Church Roundup in Stephenville, Wis., was cancelled because of complaints that the pigs squealed too much. Said a Church spokesperson: "Some city folks come out here and...don't understand." [*Independence Examiner*, 1-7-95].

**AN** Associated Press story reported on the popularity of Jesus Malverde as the adopted patron saint of drug dealers in Culiacan, Mexico. Local farmers regularly credit him for their success at growing and smuggling drugs, and worship icons of him in local buildings. [*Albuquerque Journal*, 4-9-95].

**NATHAN FREDERICK KLIMOSKO**, 21, was sentenced to two years' probation in Kelowna, British Columbia, for hitting and choking his girlfriend into unconsciousness. The fight started in a car when the two disagreed over his interpretation of a certain passage from the Bible, and he reached over and smacked her in the face, blackening her eye. [*Barrie Examiner*, 20-5-95].

**MICHAEL BEAUDIN**, 36, was sentenced to 18 months in prison in Montreal for negligently causing the death of his five-year-old son Jonathan. Beaudin, a member of the Rose and the Cross religious sect, had said the son needed to be "purified" and had given him enemas with more than 400 times the recommended dosage of water. [*Montreal Gazette*, 11-3-95].

**STEPHEN J MILLER**, 16, was nabbed by the Virgin Mary after he trespassed at the Sacred Heart School in Groton, Conn. According to police, Miller tried to scale the roof of the school building, lost his footing and fell, knocked over a 400lb statue of Mary on the way down, and hit the ground just before the statue fell on his legs, pinning him. He was trapped for two hours before help, and the authorities, arrived. [*Hartford Courant*, 16-5-95].

*Being good without God*

# IT'S TIME CHURCH.

**A**S IT moves into its centenary year, the British Humanist Association has called on the Government to hold a Referendum in England on disestablishment of the Church. There are also many areas of inequality in the law where religions and their members are given privileges out of step with Europe and with British society today, claims the BHA.

Children can be confused by the claims that you cannot be good without religion, says the Association, and would benefit from the decks being cleared in prepara-

tion for a more honest and co-operative basis for building moral values, that might then spread through all sections of society, regardless of individual stances on religion.

Disestablishment quite simply means the repeal of all laws which make any difference between the established Church and other religious bodies, whether for privilege or control.

The BHA draws attention to the decline in regular attendance at Church of England services - to only about two per cent of the population. But even though the Church was disestablished in Northern Ireland in 1871, and in Wales in 1920, the Church of England still holds sway in England and, claim Humanists, enjoys many privileges that are ridiculous in today's society - from 14 Bishops' automatic right to sit in the House of Lords, to influencing some local regulations, such as the provision of free bus-passes to only those sixth-formers who attend church schools.

"The oath in courts is an obvious example of an established bias in favour of religious people," said Robert Ashby, Executive Director of the BHA. "Although many professional bodies, including the Magistrates' Association, have declared it must be scrapped in favour of a simple non-religious promise to tell the truth, similar to the present affirmation option, nothing has happened. The options to affirm, or swear on other scriptures, only complicates the process - and might even lead jurors to make unhelpful assumptions about plaintiffs and witnesses."

Marriage law is another area of discrepancy. The non-religious option is being chosen by an increasing number of people, but they face the frustration of attending a register office before their celebratory Humanist ceremony.



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# ME TO SLASH

# H-STATE LINK

“Without belief in God, we obviously have no place of worship and so our celebrants are denied the status of registration,” Mr Ashby noted. “Demand for serious, but non-religious, wedding ceremonies is increasing, yet still these customs persist long past their sell-by-date. Now that agnostics and atheists make up around one-third of the adult population, it is undemocratic that we are surrounded by this inequality.”

The BHA unveiled its plans for detailed research into the extent of religious privilege, which will provide a basis for the first thorough account of institutionalised religion’s effect on education, adoption, blasphemy, taxation, broadcasting, chaplaincy, and other areas of law. Some Humanists are urging insurers to talk of “acts of nature” rather than “acts of God.”

The Secularist and Humanist movements have been central to changes during the past 100 years – changes now taken for granted, such as the opportunity to visit an art gallery or pub or entertain ourselves in other ways on a Sunday. But some religious privileges, such as the largely unworkable requirement for collective worship in schools, have so far proved too stubborn to tackle, no matter how many people are opposed.

On disestablishment of the Church of England, the BHA is clear: “A rapidly growing number of religious people support our call. It is time that the Government and Synod sought the majority view of the country, holding a Referendum on disestablishment.”

Humanists support freedom of non-belief as well as belief, but insist that the State should be kept separate from the Church.

The opportunity to create the common ground of a stable and open society is not a gratuitous blow against Christianity, said Robert Ashby. Rather, it removes the



● Robert Ashby

Church from a position in which it can be viewed as ridiculous and places it, with other religions, in a position where it can re-build its public respect. Those who argue that disestablishment is merely irrelevant, and that a harmless tradition is too unimportant to be tampered with, are perhaps, subtly, posing the greatest threat to religion.

Even non-religious people note that disestablishment might make the Church of England stronger and more comprehensive as a denominational body – for example, able to consider even closer links with the Church of Wales or the Methodists.

The BHA wants young people to be given the opportunity to develop the capacity to think for themselves, and the desire to act for others.

“When the churches have less automatic power, we can make progress with a moral education that young people can understand and act upon,” Robert Ashby pointed out. “Juvenile crime is plaguing the lives of thousands of British citizens

each year. Taxpayers are pumping millions into the education system, only to see far too many young people virtually illiterate, involved in drug-taking and crime. Although children are told what is right and wrong according to scriptures, it seems not always effective. We must work towards shared moral values in schools, building children’s self-esteem and respect for others.

“A 1994 survey showed that 58 per cent of teenagers called themselves atheist or agnostic – it’s high time we fitted a positive education around the reality of teenagers’ attitudes today.”

The British Humanist Association is gathering examples of good practice in moral education from all areas of the curriculum. It gives English Literature as one opportunity, saying that fiction is one of the best foundations on which teachers can and do build a discussion of relationships and how one person’s decisions can affect others. The English national curriculum also includes targets such as to “distinguish between fact and opinion” at Key Stage 3.

● The BHA, presided over by mathematician and former Government advisor Sir Hermann Bondi FRS, is making “Good without God” the aim of its hundredth year of active and organised Humanism. Humanism is the belief that we must take responsibility for our own lives and do what we can to help others and the natural world, and that there is no evidence for a god or an after-life. The BHA was founded in 1896 by Dr Stanton Coit, as the Ethical Union, with the name changed to British Humanist Association in 1963. More information: Robert Ashby on 0171 430 0908 or from the BHA at Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald’s Road, London WC1X 8SP.

# Superstition and secular society in New Zealand

**L**AST century, Charles Bradlaugh was so impressed by the lack of any social impediment to freethinkers in New Zealand that he expressed a wish to visit the country – a wish, sadly, he was never able to fulfil.

One of the reasons Bradlaugh was so enamoured of New Zealand was that at the time the Premier of the colony was the notorious infidel Sir Robert Stout. Infidelity was not even a barrier to a knighthood here. Stout had long edited a freethought magazine called *The Echo* and his views were well known. Not only had the colony elected a freethinker as its Premier but also, even earlier, in 1877, had enacted the principle of secular education. As the various sects feared domination of any religious instruction by other sects, secular education came through the middle as the best option. Fully a third of the Parliament was in favour of secular education on principle.

What made all these developments possible was that, very early on in the colony's history, it became obvious that the Church of England could not be granted the same position as established church that it enjoyed in Britain. People had come to New Zealand to get away from that sort of thing.

So, with such auspicious beginnings, what is the state of religion in New Zealand today? By far the main area of grievance for religionists has been "the reign of godlessness" in the schools. For years and years, Christians worked to undermine the secular education system, and in 1962 the then National (Conservative) government permitted schools to close for half-an-hour a week for the purposes of religious instruction. This sly practice had been going for years, with successive governments turning a blind eye to it. Religious instruction goes on in a minority of schools, it being entirely up to each school board to decide, and provision for people to opt out is enshrined in law.

Over the past 20 years, New Zealand has

by Bill Cooke

become a target for second-rate American, Korean or Argentinian evangelists who are finding competition in the God-market a bit tough back home. Consequently, we are hearing more of the threats posed to decent people by "secular humanists." Fundamentalist sects have been the power behind well-funded but so far unsuccessful moves to repeal our liberal laws on homosexuality and abortion. A school board in one notorious Bible-belt suburb in Auckland recently even banned night classes in yoga, claiming that this is "offensive" (a much overworked word at the moment) to pious sentiment.

And well might the righteous shiver. Religious adherence has declined consistently every census this century. The Church of England, for instance, which had the support of 49 per cent of the population in 1916, was down to 22 per cent in 1992. Those with no religion constituted a tiny 0.38 per cent in 1916, but in 1992 were no less than 20 per cent of the population, or (shock, horror!) 666,000 people. A recent survey has shown that New Zealand ranks with Denmark as one of the most thoroughly secular countries on earth.

Fewer than 17 per cent of the country are regular churchgoers, and churchgoing drops markedly down the age-scale. Worse, a quarter of church-goers don't believe the creeds of their church, but hold a variety of peculiar monistic or new-age theories.

The churches are failing even to retain the loyalty of much of their congregation, let alone gather in the lost sheep.

The most recent milestone on the road to a truly secular society came with the 1993 Human Rights Act. Among the many grounds upon which it is unlawful to discriminate is that of "Ethical belief, which means the lack of a religious belief, whether in respect of a particular religion or religions

or all religions." Recently, I have had call to use this Act, after a bookbinder I have been going to for about 18 months suddenly found his Christian conscience and refused to print any more of my material. The last consignment I had had bound there was two years of *The Freethinker*! He has been officially warned not to repeat the offence. The incident has provoked a group to mount a petition seeking exemption for Christians from human rights legislation.

The religious Right is on the march here, although they aren't keeping in step with society generally. New Zealand has recently opted to change its voting system from the British first-past-the-post to the German mixed-member proportional method. One of the consequences of this has been that several hitherto loyal members of both National and Labour have discovered some deeply-hidden principles that have required them to set up their own new party. In most cases, these discoveries of political principle have been from politicians about to lose their constituency, or from those who have been dropped in the party pecking-order. Two of the new parties hoping to gather enough votes to cross the five per cent threshold needed to secure representation in parliament call themselves Christian Heritage and Christian Democrats. Both parties are made up of conservative Bible-bashing moralists who, I am sure, are confusing the unspeakable ideas of Newt Gingrich with those of some of the more horrible Old Testament prophets. The only difference between them is that Heritage doesn't allow non-Christians as members, whereas the "Democrats" wish to build a broad morals-based coalition. So far this dreary rag-tag has gathered about 2.9 per cent support between them. They need watching.

## Library

There are three main freethought groups representing unbelievers in New Zealand. The oldest, established in 1923, is the Rationalist Association, which owns its own building in Auckland and boasts a superb library. There is also a Humanist Society and a Sceptics' organisation, based in Wellington and Christchurch respectively. All three organisations, I am happy to say, co-operate closely with one another. One of the main features of the Rationalist Association meeting-room is a bust of Charles Bradlaugh. So, just as Bradlaugh was impressed with New Zealand over a century ago, his memory is kept alive by freethinkers here to this very day.

● Bill Cooke is President of the New Zealand Rationalist Association. He is in the final stages of writing a PhD on the Association's history.

## Consensus on advance directives

THE firmest yet Government statement in support of advance directives has come from the Political Office of 10 Downing Street, in answer to a query from a Voluntary Euthanasia Society member. The letter says: "An advance refusal, if it is clearly applicable in the circumstances, is already legally binding on the healthcare professionals just as a current refusal would be."

The letter adds that the Law Commission's proposals, which "are intended to clarify the position in statute," have been reviewed by an Inter-Departmental Working Group which has

reported to Ministers. An announcement will be made when they have considered the findings.

And Paul Boateng MP, the Labour Party legal affairs spokesman, has written a standard letter for Labour MPs to use in replying to questions from constituents about advance directives.

Mr Boateng writes: "Although there is currently no statute law covering advance directives, it is generally accepted that they are legally binding."

His letter goes on: "Labour welcomes the Law Commission's report and the British Medical Association's new code of practice as important stages in the progress of statute law in this crucial but incredibly delicate area."

# Stirring the thin gruel of Christianity

**What Really Happened to Jesus?**  
Gerd Lüdemann with Alf Özen.  
SCM Press, £7.95.

Review: DANIEL O'HARA

*best friends, will he everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine.*" (Nora Barlow's edition of 1958).

Of course, the "plain language of the text" is now being heavily discounted. The Church of England, which was described by Alan Bennett in a recent television programme as "so constituted that its members can believe almost anything, but almost none of them do," has recently produced a report, *The Mystery of Salvation*, which declares that there is no eternal torment. Indeed, the final end of unbelievers is now declared to be "total non-being."

So it has taken the Church 2,000 years to agree with the sane view that death is total extinction. Of course, unlike the theologians, Humanists are thoroughly democratic in considering this to be true for all sentient beings, including humans, irrespective of their beliefs. We consider beliefs to the contrary to be delusional.

A hundred years before Paul of Tarsus was frantically rushing around the Mediterranean spreading the new Christian superstition, the Epicurean philosopher and poet, Lucretius, expressed our view rather beautifully. He wrote:

*"Rest assured, therefore, that we have nothing to fear in death. One who no longer is cannot suffer, or differ in any way from one who has never been born, when once this mortal life has been usurped by death... There is no murky pit of Hell awaiting anyone... To none is life given in freehold; to all on lease. Look back at the eternity that passed before we were born, and mark how utterly it counts to us as nothing. This is a mirror which nature holds up to us, in which we may see the time that shall be after we are dead. Is there anything terrifying in the sight – anything depressing – anything that is not more restful than the soundest sleep?"*

Of course, death is distressing for the bereaved: but for the deceased, it is, quite literally, nothing at all. Our greatest philosopher, David Hume, shared this view. Just a few weeks before his death in 1776, he was visited by the odious James Boswell, who had a prurient curiosity about how this notorious unbeliever was facing his demise. Boswell recorded that Hume was "not jocular" in say-

ing "when he heard a man was religious he concluded he was a rascal, though he had known some instances of very good men being religious." The pious Boswell challenged Hume to consider that it was possible there might be a future state, but Hume responded "it was possible a piece of coal put on the fire would not burn, but it was a most unreasonable fancy that we should exist forever." Hume's equanimity in the face of death horrified and disturbed Boswell, and that pious old fraud Dr Johnson could not even bring himself to accept Hume's sincerity.

We can easily understand why Christians would wish to believe in the resurrection. Following St Paul, they see it as the basis for their own otherwise insupportable hope for eternal life. But there is really no good reason to accept it as a genuine historical event. There are simpler, naturalistic explanations of how the resurrection faith originated and how it is sustained today in fundamentalist circles. And in line with the principle of parsimony – Occam's razor – we should always accept the simplest explanation consistent with the facts.

We have seen how the traditions enshrined in the New Testament cannot be accepted, and indeed are no longer accepted even by many reputable Christian scholars. Anthony Freeman, who is an excellent New Testament scholar, was forced to leave the ministry of the Church of England in 1994 because he could no longer believe in God or any life beyond death. He would have liked to remain to continue to serve those who thought like himself, but his Bishop would not agree. (Incidentally, Mr Freeman considered my review of his book *God in Us* in *The Freethinker*, October 1993 the fairest he received).

But perhaps the tersest verdict on the resurrection was that delivered by the great 19th Century New Testament scholar, one of many to have abandoned his faith in the light of clear evidence. I refer to David Friedrich Strauss, author of *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835). Towards the end of his life, Strauss wrote a short book entitled *The Old Faith and the New* (1872). Unlike Professor Lüdemann, Strauss did not see himself as any sort of a Christian, any more than I do. Strauss wrote of the resurrection: "Rarely has an incredible fact been worse attested, and never has a badly attested one been intrinsically less credible."

This is a judgement with which all reasonable and unbiased students of the New Testament and Christian origins are likely to concur, even if many who owe obedience to ecclesiastical authority still find it prudent to stay silent. But it is encouraging that the tide is turning, and some, at least, are prepared to speak out.

AT THE end of his previous study of the evidence, notable for its detail, thoroughness and candour, the Professor of New Testament and Director of the Institute of Early Christian Studies at the University of Göttingen, Gerd Lüdemann, came to this specific conclusion: "the tomb of Jesus was not empty but full, and his body did not disappear but rotted away."

This is a greatly shortened and accessible version of that much longer work. It has been translated into English by an Anglican priest, John Bowden, and published by the Christian publishing house of which he has long been managing director.

Lüdemann considers that the basis for the resurrection faith was a subjective vision experienced by Peter back in Galilee some time after the crucifixion. When he and the other disciples later returned to Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks, they and their hearers were gripped by a wave of religious enthusiasm, a pentecostal fervour, which marked the true origin of the Christian movement. From this beginning, the new preaching was of a religion of salvation, based on the belief that Jesus's death had been a redemptive sacrifice, and his resurrection a mighty act of the God of Israel, vindicating his mission and appointing him Christ, or Messiah.

Gerd Lüdemann considers himself a Christian, and believes the Christian faith can survive and prosper notwithstanding his rejection of the physical resurrection and the later, fictitious, Gospel traditions of appearances and of the empty tomb. For myself, I rather doubt Christianity could survive such a radical re-interpretation – it's pretty thin gruel – though I entirely agree with him that the Gospel traditions are not historical.

What I cannot quite understand is why Professor Lüdemann should want Christianity to survive. I rather share the view of Charles Darwin, who went to Cambridge to prepare for ordination in the Church of England. Thanks to the *Beagle* voyage and his historic development of an alternative understanding of life, he avoided that particular fate. In his autobiography, he wrote movingly of how he "gradually came to disbelieve in Christianity as a Divine revelation":

*"...disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but was at last complete. The rate was so slow that I felt no distress, and have never since doubted, even for a single second, that my conclusion was correct. I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if it is, the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my father, brother and almost all my*

# More relevant than Christianity

*Vain is the word of a philosopher which does not heal any suffering of man. For just as there is no profit in medicine if it does not expel the diseases of the body, so there is no profit in philosophy either, if it does not expel the suffering of the mind.*

SO SAID Epicurus in one of the few fragments of his extensive works that has come down to us. We can read the writings of Plato, the "Christian before Christ," virtually in their entirety; for the philosophy of Epicurus (341-270BC) we are dependent on others, not all of them sympathetic.

But by a remarkable piece of good fortune, as Joseph McCabe put it, a single manuscript of *De Rerum Natura* ("On the Nature of Things"), the great didactic poem by the Roman Epicurean, Lucretius, was somehow preserved through the Christian ages.

John Gaskin, Professor of Philosophy at Trinity College, Dublin, includes a prose version of the poem in his excellent new Everyman, *The Epicurean Philosophers*, along with a collection of Epicurus' principal doctrines and three letters from Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*; aphorisms from

*The Epicurean Philosophers*. Edited by John Gaskin. Everyman, £6.99.

Review: COLIN McCALL

a Vatican manuscript discovered in 1888, and fragments in Greek literature. Roman quotations, in addition to Lucretius, come from Cicero and Seneca.

Gaskin also provides a 10-page chronology of Epicureans, an introduction, bibliography and notes, making what is justifiably termed the most comprehensive collection readily available in English. The translations are by Cyril Bailey, R D Hicks and Gaskin himself.

As my original quotation indicates, Epicurus was no esoteric philosopher: his Garden attracted men from all over Greece and the colonies; his teachings were influential in the Greco-Roman world and, as Gaskin says, are more relevant than Christianity today.

"The Epicurean idea of an infinite universe of matter and space, indifferent to human hopes and concerns but whose workings can be understood, is the predominant scientific idea with which we now live."

And Gaskin corrects those who consider the splitting of the atom to have shattered Epicurean materialism. Epicurus' tiny particles,

the "first beginnings" of things, maybe of different sizes but too small to be sensed, were called *atomoi* (uncuttables). No similar Latin word was available to Lucretius, so he used *primordia* (first beginnings).

John Dalton and others adopted the Greek word "to name particles which, it transpires after a hundred and thirty years, do not in fact have the indestructibility of *atomoi*. Perhaps there is no such entity as an *atomos*, as envisaged by Epicurus, "but what we call 'atoms' is certainly not what he intended."

Reasonably, then, Gaskin uses "primary particles" and "*primordia*" throughout the book. In passing, though, I would take issue on his criticism of R E Latham, translator of Lucretius at Penguin Classics, who does indeed refer to the split atom, but then adds, "this change (which may not be permanent) in the context of current scientific theories does not lessen the value of Lucretius' poem as a poet's exposition of the scientific outlook – or at least of an outlook which inspired much of the most fruitful work in the field of the natural sciences." Pretty fair all in all.

Returning now to the quotation with which I started. The Epicureans set out to rid men's minds of their two greatest fears: the fear of the gods and the fear of death. Epicurus himself, partly perhaps for political reasons, did not deny the gods, but he denied them any influence in human affairs. Death, he said, "is nothing to us; for the body, when it has been resolved into its elements, has no feeling, and that which has no feeling is nothing to us."

Lucretius pays tribute in Book 1 of his poem to the philosopher who first relieved man from "grovelling upon the earth, crushed by the weight of religion." Again and again, says the poet, "our foe, religion, has given birth to deep, sinful and unholy."

And he was writing, as John Gaskin notes, "without the advantage of almost two thousand years of the Christian era at his command..."

## When you've had enough – call SOS!

THE first issue of *SOS UK-Newsletter*, journal of the Secular Organisations for Sobriety, has been published.

SOS aims to help recovery for those alcoholics who can't agree with "the quasi-religious elements of AA and similar organisations."

Through meetings and publications, SOS seeks to help problem-drinkers replace the "cycle of addiction" with a "cycle of sobriety."

The first issue of the newsletter contains an article by an addict, "A suitable case for treatment" and a piece entitled "Politics of addiction is not an outside issue."

There are now SOS groups at Bristol, Central London, Hertfordshire, Rhyl and Luton. Send stamps – or a donation – for details in confidence to Secular Organisations for Sobriety, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP.

## Divide and hate: religion in the 90s

FROM the Catholic-Protestant killings in Northern Ireland to the Hindu-Sikh-Muslim massacres in India, from the Orthodox-Catholic-Muslim horror in former-Yugoslavia to the Branch Davidian cult tragedy in Waco, Texas, religion is still a powerful force that pits people against one another.

Award winning journalist James A Haught has chronicled the many recent surges of religious hostility in this important new volume. Many people tend to believe that religious killing peaked with the Crusades, the Inquisition and the Reformation – but, as Haught shows, the age-old pattern is still alive in the 1990s and can be seen in news headlines from around the world. He traces the origins of various conflicts, their significant developments, and current status.

Among the "hot spots" of religious conflict discussed are: Bosnia, India, Jerusalem, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sri Lanka – as well as incidents in the United States, including Waco and the bombing of the World Trade Centre and the attacks by fundamentalist Christians on doctors who performed legal abortions.

Haught addresses the irony of these conflicts: that religion – supposedly a source of kindness and brotherhood – has become one of the chief causes of hatred and war. With Soviet Communism and the Cold War no longer spurring conflicts, the world spotlight has shifted to ethnic strife, the vast majority of which

***Holy Hatred: Religious Conflicts of the 90s.* James A Haught. Prometheus Books (UK). £18.99 cloth. 237 pp. ISBN 0-87975-922-4.**

involves fractious faiths. *Holy Hatred* demonstrates how religion often divides people and breeds hostility

James A Haught is the editor of *The Charleston Gazette*. His previous books include *Holy Horrors* and *Science in a Nanosecond*. His work as a journalist has earned him numerous accolades, including the 1989 Hugh M Hefner First Amendment Award for Investigative Reporting.

## Pillar of the faith

ONE of the columns of an excavated early Christian basilica in Paphos, Cyprus is, in the words of the Berlitz guide book, "still described as St Paul's Pillar where the apostle was imagined to have been tied and lashed 39 times for preaching the Gospel – more than 300 years before the marble reached Cyprus."

## You're telling us!

### Enlightenment sought on the Sea of Faith

AS A non-believer, I recently joined the British Humanist Association. Although the literature clearly states that Humanists do not believe in God or hold other superstitious beliefs, I have now met several Humanists who also belong to the Sea of Faith.

They tell me that quite a few Humanists are members and that our President, Sir Hermann Bondi, recently addressed a meeting of this organisation.

I have been unable to elicit any meaningful information about the Sea of Faith movement, but I gather it involves some kind of spiritual beliefs. And one Humanist I spoke to talked positively about an ecumenical movement that would embrace all religions – including Humanism!

In his December article, "The Shadow in the Cave," Terry Liddle discusses why he feels spiritual beliefs are inconsistent with Humanism, and of course I entirely agree. He also alludes to "current proposals on 'spiritual development' in the Humanist movement" and "attempts to create a spurious and empty consensus between (believers and unbelievers)". Is he referring to the Sea of Faith?

This is all a bit of a shock to me! What's the point? Can someone enlighten me? Perhaps an article would be useful.

HELEN COX  
Porlock

### Sodom!

I DISAGREE, Mr Blewitt ("Poor Old Judas!" January): sharing Hell with the men of Sodom might take my mind off those long hours of eternity. Hell must be the highlight of Papal doctrine: you'd meet more gay men Down There than Up Here.

Unfortunately, Popes only like pleasure when it's hypocritical: Hell was made a sex-free zone centuries ago.

ROBERT ASHBY  
London E17

### Book hunt

I AM trying to find a copy of *The Warfare Between Science and Theology* by Professor Andrew White, last published in the 1960s, I believe. There is a copy in one volume and another impression in two separate volumes. Either issue would be most gratefully received from any of your readers. Could you please help? My address is 4 Bourne Lea, Shiney Row, Houghton-le-Spring DH4 4PF.

D REDHEAD  
Tyne & Wear

### TV danger to young

I NOTICED with interest Colin McCall's note

(January) on the availability on satellite of Christian TV. This is also available on cable. In fact, while the so-called soft-porn channels and some foreign, film and sport channels have to be requested, and in most cases require an additional fee, Christian TV comes bright and early in the morning, whether you want it or not, at no extra cost than the basic package.

I have written to my cable company suggesting that if people want Christian TV they must make the effort and request it rather than it be just another supplied channel. I pointed out that if I had children in the house I would be concerned about their unsupervised access to something I consider to be dangerous superstitious nonsense, and therefore cable companies should only supply it to those people who actually ask for it.

I would like to urge any of your readers with cable TV to take the same action. I have and at least send a message that not everybody sees Christianity on TV or anywhere else as a good thing.

ALAN R BAILEY  
Southend-on-Sea

### No brain, no mind

AS a late-comer to the discussion in the correspondence columns on the body and the mind (are they separate things?), may I suggest the simple concept that the mind is the activity of the brain? No brain, no mind (or even "soul").

Fan Chen of Wu Yin (Honan, China, today), b. 450, on the destructibility of the soul, wrote: "I have never heard that after the knife is destroyed the sharpness can persist."

Today we could say: Can the memory persist after the chip is destroyed?

STEWART VALDAR  
London N8

### Fruitless juggling

HAVING read *The Emperor's New Mind*, it is clear to me that Penrose has not "proved" but somewhat lamely speculated on the oddball idea that quantum processes have anything to do with the brain: it's a while since my 3rd year physics, but it strikes me that, however brilliant at cosmology, Penrose is not much cop on thought and computation. We simply don't need it, for the example given.

The idea that twins would become identical in thought and computation misunderstands the commonsense meaning of environments being "identical" (enough not to have an extraneous effect on the outputs currently being measured). If we were looking at a child's eventual income in \$10,000s per year, we would compare environments sufficiently "identical" in income and opportunity; not identical clone persons doing identical clone things. Similarly, when we talk about a material being "indefinitely strong" (enough not to bend or break under any of the forces being considered). To juggle these words in a way which is no longer and accurate model of the world is fruitless. If you want to ascribe a cause for why it's impossible to put people in

literally identical environments, it is the chaos and variousness of the world – a second's variation may make the difference between safety or a wheelchair, disappointment or winning a million, and all the little divergences build up to big divergences in outcome.

Clearly, common sense tells you that body, environment and choice all contribute to how your life goes. If you have built into you a club-foot or an inherent tendency to gloominess, then it will determine your life to some extent though not completely. If you are born in a mud hut or a ghetto where your academic brilliance cannot be realised, that will determine your life to some extent, though not completely. And, whatever your nature or circumstance, the personal choices you make within those constraints will also determine how your life goes. (I take it for granted that, for all practical purposes, what *seems* equals what *is* – that we are part of physical process moving into an unknown – to us – future and able to make free – to us – choices!).

All three factors contribute to outcome, and only tabloids or Home Secretaries would indulge in word-chopping like "choice played some part in these crimes, therefore [sic!] environment played none."

DAVID BIRD  
Birmingham

### Random influences

I AM truly grateful to Chris Condon (December) for supporting the thesis of determinism, and more especially for making the point that even if our brain-processes are affected by influences "at a quantum level which are non-deterministic" (may I say "random"?) that does not make a case for some extra-scientific *persona* exercising free-will.

I would acknowledge also that consciousness of our thought-processes gives us an imagined sense of responsibility for our decisions, which may be of some pragmatic value. But I hope Chris Condon is not suggesting that there is thus some homunculus behind the scenes who can be held morally responsible for our decisions, and, in the legal world, be considered deserving of retributory punishment – as distinct from the deterrent and reformatory objectives of the criminal law.

LESLIE JAMES  
Peterborough

### Why choose to be a determinist?

WE experience many things including causation, chance and choice. It may be that our experience is misleading and that these all boil down to causation – chance and choice being illusory. The doctrine that causation is the only non-illusory member of this trio is determinism – the doctrine that EVERY entity is the inevitable result of what has gone before. Antecedents Rule – OK!

We can arrive at this doctrine by the simple

# You're telling us!

From Page 13

and well-worn practice of dogmatising; choice and chance can be banished from our minds by the simple and seductive process of making the requisite assumptions.

When we experience the challenge of choice we can say that the experience is illusory; we can say that we are in a situation in which two causal chains merge. One of these is the causal chain that results in the issue presenting itself to us; the other is the causal chain that results in our "choosing" one forward path rather than another. The word "choosing" is, if determinism be true, best given in quotes to denote that it is an illusory choice; we are puppets and something (or Someone?) else holds all the strings. This view of things is unfalsifiable because there is, by definition, no way in which we can ever distinguish reality from seamless illusion – and the essence of determinism is precisely that the illusion of choice is seamless.

On the determinist view, what we perceive as a chance event is one which we know we have not chosen and for which the antecedent causal chain has not been, perhaps cannot be, identified by us. Clearly there is no empirical difference between a chance event (if such there be) and a caused event whose cause is now, and perhaps for ever, destined to be unknown to us.

So unfalsifiability can banish chance from our minds just as it can banish choice. There is of course no law against making unfalsifiable assumptions to sustain a given doctrine but people who do so run the risk of being rumbled sooner or later. That, after all, is what freethought purports to do to dogmatic religion – that very cradle and retirement home of unfalsifiability.

But to show that choice and chance can only be eliminated by unfalsifiable dogma is not to prove that they are real. All we can be sure of is the feeling that they are as real as is our decision to act like a chooser and a chancer. This is a coherent position – which is more than can be said of determinism, whose true believers, having chosen to view things deterministically, have chosen to say that they really have no choice.

Of course the familiar twins, nature and nurture, can obviously influence, or actually pre-empt, many of the choices that (we think perhaps mistakenly) we make. Of course many once seemingly chance events have since been shown to have identifiable causes. But it is the fallacy that induction is totally dependable (the fallacy that a general proposition can be established with certainty by a finite number of instances) that leads people to suppose, from particular experiences of choice and chance having being exposed as illusory, that choice and chance are always and necessarily illusory – that, in other words, determinism is established fact.

We experience causation, choice and chance and I can live with them. Those who choose to trade their empirically-based freethought for dogmatic unfalsifiability are entitled to do so, but they ought not to claim that they are thereby making a discovery about the way things are.

**ERIC STOCKTON**  
Sanday  
Orkney

## Hell fire!

AS more and more thoughtful people begin to realise that all religions are based on fantasy, the Church of England Doctrinal Committee has decided to alter their "hot potato" doctrine of Hell dogma, and now says that Hell is a state of nothingness.

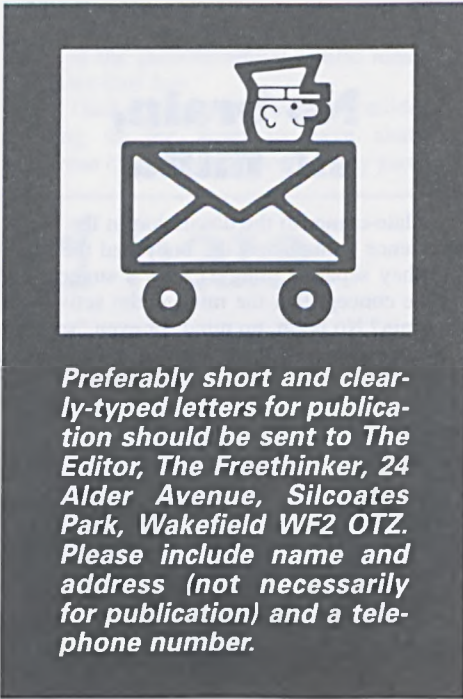
Better if they had come clean and admitted that Hell is only a four-letter nonsense noun.

**E WAKEFIELD**  
Mansfield

## Inconsistent

I REALLY had not wanted to continue the crime debate, but J H Morten seems determined to drag it on. I hope you will allow me a few (hopefully final) lines to point out that Mr Morten's arguments are:

1 Inconsistent: in his first letter he wrote



about murder by doctors; now he's suddenly switched to murder of doctors.

2 Irrelevant: what have doctors got to do with it anyway?

3 Uncorroborated: what is the precise source of his ridiculous (and also irrelevant) claim that 90 per cent of crime is burglary? Without full bibliographic details, his "facts" cannot be verified.

4 Severely qualified: his original assertion that we have "nothing to fear" from criminals made no reference to "violent assault and murder." He's had to add this major qualifier now that I've exposed the absurdity of the original statement.

Mr Morten seems not to appreciate the terrible damage and suffering caused by non-violent crime – the psychological harm and stress-related illnesses suffered by victims, the ruination of years of work by single burglaries (irreplaceable collections, manuscripts etc., stolen or destroyed), the destruction of small businesses (pilfering employees did that to my father), the obscene cost and dreadful waste of resources,

not to mention the sheer inconvenience. If identifying a simple and effective solution to all this makes me "peculiar," what does attacking the solution with absurd claims, inconsistent arguments and an irrelevant fixation on doctors make Mr Morten?

**[Dr] STEPHEN MORETON**  
Warrington

## Sentiment?

ERIC Stockton (January) accuses me of "a sentimentally one-sided statement of our necessary relations with other species." What is wrong with sentiment; does reason always have to be cold-hearted without emotion or passion? I do not think that necessity requires that our relationship with other species be ambivalent at all – either we respect their right to life, liberty and natural enjoyment or, as at present, we subject them to abuse, exploitation, suffering and premature death in some cases rendering them extinct.

As a Green Humanist, I advocate the former course and believe it to be for the best, both for humans and for other animals. Evolution, spurred by a need and a desire to survive, has made it possible for humans to use our brains to make informed rational choices.

We can contain the alleged threat posed to our food crops posed by some species by poisoning or shooting them – or we can reintroduce into the environment the predators which live by eating these species, thereby controlling their numbers.

We can preserve the forests in which grow many medicinal plants – or we can inflict dreadful suffering on laboratory animals in a futile search for wonder drugs.

We can hunt animals to extinction – or we can preserve them and their habitats and in so doing preserve the biodiversity necessary to continue evolution.

We can rear animals for food in battery farms or turn the land to dust by grazing cattle on it – or we can adopt vegetarianism.

We can poison bees with pesticides – or we can value the role they play in pollinating the fruit we eat.

Like the Christians, Jews and Muslims, we can claim that God has given us dominion over the animals, and restrict the circle of compassion to our own kind – or we can extend it to other creatures, realising that we are both products of the same evolutionary process and that the planet is as much theirs as ours.

We can live at war with nature – or in harmony with it.

Eric states that, when it comes to our relationship with animals, simple moral absolutes are out of order. I must beg to differ. I believe that not only is animal rights an essential part of Green philosophy but also that animals have an absolute right to life and that Greens have an absolute duty to defend that right.

Humans can derive great satisfaction from knowing they are helping animals to survive and thrive, and I'm sure most animals would be happier to be alive and free than in captivity or dead. Now that is what I would call a "mutually sustaining" relationship.

**TERRY LIDDLE**  
London

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# You're telling us!

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## Humanists and Republicans

NIGEL Barnes (January) asks whether there is any connection between Republicanism and Humanism, and he also implies the uniqueness of the British monarchy.

Humanists believe in an open, democratic, legal society of citizens with a written Constitution and a Bill of Rights. With an hereditary monarch (or dictator) at the apex of the system – to whom MPs and senior Civil Servants must swear allegiance – how can the system be democratic, the legal system legal, the subject a citizen?

A political system, to be valid, must be accountable to all the people. Also, all public offices should be open to all the people by competition: one should not be blocked by a caste system based upon a monarchy with its House of Lords.

The uniqueness-continuity problem is illustrated by the case of George I, whose family name was Saxe Coburg Gotha. George rarely lived in Britain and he could not speak English – but he was invited over by the ruling political elite despite his being 58th in line to the throne... and thus less "royal" than the "royals" already living in Britain.

Why did this happen? Because the elite had to choose somebody without Roman Catholic sympathies; royalty, being ultra-conservative, tends to revert to old standards. As Charles

Bradlaugh pointed out, 33 monarchs from William the Conqueror (royal French bastard) to Victoria, only 13 succeeded by straight hereditary right.

Britain's absurd political system could be corrected if the Royal Family was sent back to Germany, with the House of Lords abolished and a single-chamber system established with a balance of powers (for example, an independent central bank and the executive system open to challenge by different bodies such as the legal system) and a written Constitution which absorbs any residual royal powers.

ROBERT AWBERY  
Reading

## Serious purpose

S ROBINSON (January letters) asks why I engage in pointless speculation about a God I don't believe in – that is, Jehovah. My letters to *The Freethinker* are not so pointless as he seems to imagine, but are for the serious purpose of undermining the "authority" given to the Bible by Christians and Jews alike, and as a way of seeking revenge on behalf of the thousands upon thousands (if not millions upon millions) of innocent children who have been insulted by the Bible "God" in the text found in Deuteronomy 23.2: "A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord until the tenth generation."

Because these countless children were born of unmarried parents, what is their crime that they should be discriminated against by the biblical "God" who pretends to be a God of justice

and love (Deut. 32.4 and 1 John 4.9 respectively)?

The sooner humanity turns its back on the superstitious nonsense contained in the Bible, the better it will be for all.

Regarding Ray McDowell's letter, surely he doesn't expect me to quote the *whole* Bible, when I criticise the contradictory texts, to ensure that they are in context? There is a distinction between saying "should that be true" and "it is true."

DAVID YEULETT  
Greenwich

## Ad nauseam

HAVING read with interest several issues of *The Freethinker*, I am forced to the conclusion that practising Christians must be among your closest friends. It would appear that your magazine, and presumably humanists in general, would have little to talk about if it were not for the Christian Church which you criticise *ad nauseam*.

PETER WREFORD  
New Life Publishing Co  
Rotherham

● A Continental correspondent would like to hear from any reader who taped the TV film on Darwin which was shown in Britain on six mornings beginning December 26. A head teacher, our correspondent would put video copies of the film to good use! Particularly, she would like to see the first two episodes. Write to NM via *The Freethinker*.

# Pink Jesus just a gay delusion!

by George Broadhead  
Editor  
*Gay & Lesbian  
Humanist*

LESBIAN and gay Christians have always been eager to point out that Jesus had nothing specific to say about homosexuality in the Gospels – and to imply that his attitude towards it would have been benign.

Now, no doubt taking a leaf out of the recently published book by a gay evangelical Christian, the Rev Michael Vasey, they are making the ludicrous claim that Jesus would have felt at home in a gay bar.

An advertisement in *The Pink Paper* (the national weekly newspaper for lesbians and gay men) published just over a week before the alleged date of Jesus' birth, says that he would probably spend Christmas at Substation, one of London's best known gay discos.

The ad comes complete with illustration depicting him bearded, berobed, clutching a beer bottle, and surrounded by admiring punters. It claims: "When he was on earth, he spent all his time with people like us: left out by polite society" and generally depicts him as a paragon of indulgence and tolerance.

However, there is evidence in the "holy" book which gives a very different

picture from the one lesbian and gay Christians would have us believe.

It is highly significant that Jesus supports the statement in Genesis that in the beginning God created humankind male and female, and uses it as a basis for ethical guidance.

Moreover, as the Church of England's supposedly gay-friendly report, *Issues in Human Sexuality*, points out, he is recorded as upholding the biblical principle which most Christian Churches and institutions have followed ever since: that sex is morally acceptable only within a monogamous, heterosexual married relationship.

Equally significant are his rigorous views on sexual matters. He is portrayed in the Gospels (the only sources for what he is supposed to have said and done) as wanting to go further than the strict Mosaic Law in condemning what he

regarded as sexual sins. He claims that lustful looks are as culpable as adultery, and even invites his followers to mutilate themselves rather than give way to sexual temptation. While the Law allowed for divorce in certain circumstances, he condemns it outright and claims it makes people adulterers.

Given these views – which are worthy of Mary Whitehouse, the Rev Ian Paisley and Pope John Paul II rolled into one – can any rational thinking person seriously believe that Jesus would have tolerated homosexual practices and been any less hostile towards them than his followers like St Paul?

## Hostility

It is all too clear that the prudery and puritanism which have characterised the Christian Church's attitude to sex can be traced back directly to the recorded words of Jesus himself.

The baleful worship of virginity, celibacy and sexual abstinence, and the hostility towards homosexuals, which has flourished down the Christian centuries, is all there in germ in the Bible – and the inescapable conclusion is that the Christian religion is inherently anti-gay.

# 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, March 5, 5.30 for 6pm: Harold Hillman: *Miracles, Parables, Legends...Did They Really Happen?*

**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 858450. Waverley Day Centre, 65 Waverley Road, Kenilworth: Thursday, February 15, 7.30pm: Joan Skipper: *Voluntary euthanasia.*

**Crawley:** Information: Charles Stewart 01293 511270.

**Devon Humanists:** Information: C Mountain, "Little Gables," Burgmanns Hill, Lymington, 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 858450. Monthly meetings (second Friday, 7.30pm) at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (Library, 1st floor). February 9: Robert Ashby: *British Humanism 2096*. March 8: Andrew Saxton, Editor of *The Pink Paper: Lesbian and Gay Publishing.*

**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.* Tuesday, March 5, 8pm: Robert Ashby: *Making Humanism Happen.*

**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. Conference

1996 will take place on April 20 at the Caledonia University, Glasgow.

**Glasgow Group:** Information: Hugh H Bowman, 2 Riverside Park, Glasgow G44 3PG; 0141 633 3748. Sunday, February 18, 2.30pm: Elinor Kelly: *Citizenship and Asylum in the New Europe.*

**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 Te on 0113 2577009. Swarthmore Centre, Leeds. Tuesday, February 13, 7.30pm: Michael Meadowcroft: *Improving Democracy - Is Electoral Reform the Answer?*

**Leicester Secular Society:** Information: Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB; 0116 2622250. Sunday meetings at 6.30pm. February 11: Paul Southwood: *The Great Train Robbery of Rail Privatisation.* February 18: Paul Henderson: *Bosnia - an eyewitness Account.* February 25: *The Outer Limits of Animal Liberation.*

**Lewisham Humanist Group:** Unitarian Meeting House, 4 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, February 29, 8pm: Diana Elvin: *Why Eat Meat?*

**Manchester Humanist Group:** Information: 0161 681 7607. Meetings at St Thomas Centre, Ardwick Green North, near Apollo Theatre. March 8, 7.30pm: Richard Summers: *The Quakers.*

**Norwich Humanist Group:** Information: Brian Snoad on 01603 455101. Martineau Hall, 21a Colegate, Norwich. Thursday, February 15, 7.30pm: Michael Reader: *On Being a Hospital Chaplain.*

**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, March 6, 8pm: Barry Johnson: *Original Sin and the Politicians.*

**South Place Ethical Society:** Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1 (telephone 0171 831 7723). Full list of lectures and Sunday concerts (6.30pm) from the above address.

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

**Sutton Humanist Group:** Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Meetings 7.30pm for 8pm. Wednesday, January 10 Norman Wood: *Ninety Years a Freethinker.*

**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. Methodist House, North Street, Worthing. Sunday, February 25 5.30pm: Bob Savill: *The Surveillance Society.*

**Humanist Anthology:** Margaret Knight's magnificent work, extensively revised by Jim Herrick, with a preface by Edward Blighen. £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 McLroy'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.

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