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Founded by G W Foote in 1881

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How Byron raised Cain among pious persons

Colin McCall - Page 8



State funding for religious education threat

Equality – not apartheid – in our schools

Editorial - Page 3

The Freethinker

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

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CONTENTS

Up Front	Page 2
Islamic schools' campaign	Page 3
NSS Bosnia debate	Page 4
Down to Earth: Colin McCall	Page 5
New Christian Herald	Page 6
Report from India	Page 7
Byron raises Cain	Page 8
The faith dealers	Page 10
God-awful anthem!	Page 11
Nature of love	Page 12
You're Telling Us! Letters	Page 13
Myra Hindley	Page 15
What's On	Page 16

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'Divisive' religion

"IN building temples we can build bridges," you editorialise. Temples, churches, synagogues and mosques are centres of religious superstition. Historically and contemporaneously, religion has been a divisive, not a bridge-building influence. **Bill McIlroy, Sheffield Humanist Society Press Officer, The Star, Sheffield, January 31.**

Up Front

Rationalism over religion

CELEBRATING the creeping triumph of rationalism over religion, as we are entitled to do from time-to-time, we are bound to exclude from our boast those tortured lands of Islam (along with the redneck states of the American South, where Jesubabble is still as much a part of daily life and politics as nostalgia for the days of whuppin' slaves, sellin' cotton and waitin' for the *Robert E Lee*).

Indeed, the stream of horror stories from the Muslim countries is endless. The latest is from Algeria via *The Observer* (February 11): "Some fundamentalist gangs storm government schools which they say are guilty of teaching immoral subjects such as French, music and PE that aim to corrupt innocent Muslim girls. One example is the Mohammed El Azahar school in Blida, south of the capital. Six armed fundamentalists broke into the building last summer and kidnapped Fatmeh Ghadban, 15. Minutes later she was brought before the schoolgates and stabbed to death in front of her helpless friends and teachers.

"Fatmeh, according to the Algerian government, is one of 112 schoolgirls and women teachers killed last year and the death toll is still rising. The authorities say the targeting of girls and women was inspired by Sherif Kosami, one of the Emirs of the Armed Islamic Group...His published teachings include a ban on young women attending co-educational schools."

Before he was killed in a gun battle, Kosami – self-styled rightful successor of the Prophet Mohammed – issued a religious edict that gave fundamentalists the right to rape girl children – and they do: "According to this *fatwa*, holy warriors of Islam have the right to claim sexual pleasure before they sacrifice their own lives in the name of Allah."

Clearly, there is a long, long way to go before humanity is cured of what G W Foote – 110 years ago and aptly – termed "that mental aberration which is called religion."

Still, we may allow ourselves an odd moment to reflect that progress is made, in some parts of the world.

Who among the English (apart from those of us concerned with disestablishment and disendowment) does anything much but giggle at the dull, death-throed Church of England? It enters the people's consciousness only when it attracts media attention by rejecting a further fundamental plank of The Lord's teaching, or when it throws up another eccentric vicar, like Chris Brain, who, it says in *The Star*, Sheffield, (February 8) is "plotting a sensational return to leading rave-type sessions." Chris, who was alleged to have sexually abused more than 20 women of his flock, "has fled to America to re-launch his controversial 'rock' events. Brain earned national notoriety as leader of Sheffield's Nine O'Clock Service, organising mass rave events for Jesus."

The Catholic Church is in trouble, too. A story in *The Age* (Melbourne), February 12, reflects its universal dearth of clergy: officials estimate that by 2010, 80 Melbourne parishes

will not have resident priests.

The same newspaper (December 18, 1995) discusses an academic study which revealed that RCs are voting with their feet, and other fascinating parts of the body, when it comes to contraception: "In 1966, married Catholic women aged between 35 and 39 had an average 3.18 children, compared with an average 2.91 children across all religions. In 1991, the mean family size for Catholic women aged between 30 and 34 was just 1.73 children, compared with an average 1.7 children across all religions."

In Italy (*The Economist*, January 6) a survey by Milan's Catholic University found: "...70 per cent of those interviewed think they can be 'good Catholics' without following the Vatican's precepts on 'sexual morality.' Some 55 per cent of Italians have no qualms about contraception, and another 16 per cent say they favour it, albeit with reservations. Only a fifth flatly condemn abortion..."

And talking of the Church and "sexual morality," *The Age* for February 10 informs us: "Victims of sexual abuse committed by Catholic clergy were offered a 'sincere apology' yesterday by one of the church's senior leaders in Victoria. 'We must live with the pain and shame of what has happened,' the Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Melbourne, Monsignor Gerald Cudmore, said... 'We deeply regret the fact that priests have been involved in sexual abuse, and on behalf of the whole church we offer the victims of such abuse a sincere apology.'"

Imagine such an admission even 10 years ago: the victims would have been lucky to escape with a clip around the ear and the threat of eternal damnation, had they dared to complain.

In the UK, according to *The Times*: "Since 1985, more than 2,500 sisters have been lost from Britain's 200 orders and, of the 8,000 remaining, almost half are more than 70 years old." A spokesman for the *Catholic Herald* said: "Most are desperate to attract younger women before their order dies out altogether."

And in Holy Ireland – Saints preserve us! – only 60 per cent of RCs now attend Mass – compared with 90 per cent only two decades ago (*Financial Times*, December 2, 1995).

The British Jews, too, are part of the trend away from superstition: the rate of male inter-marriage with non-Jewish women is as high as 44 per cent in the crucial younger ages (under 40), according to *The Times*, February 16.

As Nicolas Walter recently pointed out to *The Spectator* (in reply to a Paul Johnson fantasy that the number of atheists has declined "since the heyday of organised atheism in the 1880s"): "At the end of the 20th Century public opinion surveys show that about a third of the population have no religious belief and that about 12 per cent – more than the number of Roman Catholics – are atheists or agnostics."

"The organised Humanist movement today is about the same size as the organised Secularist movement a century ago, and includes many more leading members of society. The real differences between then and now are that disbelief is no longer such a disadvantage and that many more people are now neither for nor against religion but indifferent to it."

You see – there *is* good news out there!

State education: demand equality not apartheid

by The Editor

are doing so with a force and a confidence their own parents lacked."

Yusuf Islam believes the movement will continue to grow. He thinks his chances of getting state funding are better than in 1993, when his last application was turned down, because there are no longer surplus school places in the locality, the paper said.

Back in the North, Akram Khan-Cheema, former Chairman of the Governors at Feversham College, Bradford, an independent Muslim school, weighed in with a solution to the "problem." This, he told *The Independent* (February 15) was state funding for Muslim schools. Muslims were now becoming increasingly assertive in their demands for equal treatment with Christians and Jews. There were 674,000 state school places for 800,000 Roman Catholics in this country, but still not a single one for a Muslim.

With all the major political parties – but especially Labour – living in pre-election dread of alienating the Muslim vote, there is a growing possibility of Britain's Muslims seeing their dream come true.

We are entitled to ask if state-funded Muslim schools would accommodate the objections to Western school life raised by Muslim parents here.

These affect art lessons – Islamic law bans drawing the human form – and some parents also object to the use of musical instruments in music lessons, fearing their connection with pop music and Western youth culture, which they see as riddled with sex and drugs. There have even been requests for separate play areas and separate classes for boys and girls. Under the 1993 Education Act, the basics of reproduction must be taught in biology and are compulsory. At some schools, Muslim parents have complained that textbook diagrams showing the human reproductive system are pornographic! Plainly, freethinkers will insist that such attitudes have no place in any state-funded system of education.

Muslim success would give new hope out on the wilder reaches of Christianity, and to the Sikhs, to the Hindus and the rest. Our schools system would become even more hopelessly divided than it is today, with an entirely unacceptable form of Government-created educational apartheid in place.

And, once they managed to get their feet under the table, the Muslims, with that steadfast zealotry for which they are renowned, would

not be easy to move, even if public opinion generally decided against state-funding for religious institutions. Establishment of state-funded Islamic schools would mean the end of our hopes for a secular state system for generations to come.

This effort really must be nipped in the bud. Secularist and Humanist organisations would be justified in postponing all other activity to concentrate on pressurising the Government, the Opposition (especially) and local authorities on the issue. As a matter of urgency, all readers of *The Freethinker* should write to Gillian Shephard – imagine what an impact that would make – and the already considerable letters-to-the-press initiative should be stepped-up.

Individuals and groups outside our movement should be lobbied and their support solicited for a campaign for a change in the law to secure the gradual removal of all state-funding for all religious schools. This would put the Muslims on an equal footing with all other religious and non-religious people and remove one of their principal – and entirely justified – objections to the present arrangement. It would actually help to heal the divisions which afflict our society.

As National Secular Society President Barbara Smoker has repeatedly insisted, we should demand non-sectarian schools which would allow facts about religion to find their natural place in such lessons as history, art, literature and sociology, and introduce non-sectarian moral education. Religion-based assembly should be abolished.

Parents who must have their children learn the tenets of a specific creed should carry out this teaching themselves, or entrust it to their own church, chapel, synagogue or mosque – outside school hours.

This view is not lacking in influential support.

Rabbi Julia Neuberger (*The Times* February 16) commented: "Children who will grow up in a multi-faith community should learn to live together, and they can only learn that by being at school together...The 1988 Education Act was wrong in making religious education and assemblies broadly Christian. Children should be encouraged to explore their own religions and hear about other people's. It is parents who should do the religious indoctrination...some evidence suggests that sectarian education is actively harmful. It can lead to sectarian tensions, or at least extend their life, as Northern Ireland has shown."

And former Bradford secondary school headmaster Ray Honeyford wrote to the *Daily Telegraph* (February 14) that the Kirklees parents' policy of withdrawing their children from religious education had implications for race relations: "Every time religious education appears on the timetable, brown and white children are separated – and children are reminded of what divides them."

Reluctantly, he conceded: "Since we are never, in our profoundly secular society, likely

BERTIE

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A SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY EVENT



Seeking a secular solution

THIRTY incredibly motivated souls braved virtually Siberian conditions on the evening of Friday, January 26, to attend the first National Secular Society meeting in a long time, at the Conway Hall in Central London.

The subject – *Bosnia: Is a Secular Solution Possible?* – had possibly gone off the boil a bit since the time the meeting was planned, in the aftermath of the over-running of the Bosnian government “safe haven” of Srebrenica. We now, of course, have the Dayton Peace Plan, a war crimes tribunal and NATO troops, but the subject of a “secular” peace is arguably even more central to a “lasting peace.”

The first speaker, Branka Magas, who is a Croat and author of *The Destruction of Yugoslavia – Tracking the Break-up*, outlined the history of the Yugoslav Federation and detailed its break-up along religious rather than ethnic lines. As was later explained, the “ethnic” category and the designation of the Bosnian government side as “Muslim” were mendacious red herrings, if not downright black propaganda. The only people in the former Yugoslav Federation who are not ethnic Slavs are the Albanian population of the Kosovo region.

Branka started by outlining the constitution of the former Federation, which was composed of six republics and two provinces. The republics included four regions recognised for centuries as distinct: Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Montenegro, plus two recognised by the Partisan government of Tito in 1945: Slovenia and Macedonia.

These republics, while being integrated so far

by Mike Howgate

as economics and foreign affairs were concerned, had the right of veto on legislation and had their own police forces; the national army was forbidden to intervene in the republics without their consent. Importantly, they all had the right to secede from the Federation.

Branka defined two strands to the pre-20th Century history of the region: the Ottoman and the Hapsburg. Both had been multi-confessional, even to the extent of the Ottoman Empire allowing the expansion of the Serbian Orthodox Church into Bosnia and building churches. The question, she said, was not *Why are there Muslims in Bosnia?* but *Why aren't there any in Croatia or Serbia?* The answer, she proposed, was that, with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Croats and Serbs eradicated all evidence of Islam within their territory. All mosques were destroyed, bar one. This was especially thorough in Serbia, where the national-mythological tradition was defined in opposition to Islam.

Branka Magas traced the ferocity of the “ethnic cleansing” by “Chetnik” Serb nationalists to the pervasive influence of this mythology, which was actively promulgated by the Orthodox priesthood and taken up by Milosevic to serve his own political ambitions. But, she said, it took five years of hate and fear propaganda to convince people who had lived at peace with their neighbours for nearly three generations to consent to a national war mobilisation.

The dual message was to eradicate the

“threat” of a mythical Islamic state in the midst – and then this was used as a thinly-disguised excuse to establish a Greater Serbia with access to the Adriatic. However, despite the overwhelming preponderance of military might in the hands of its foes, the virtually unarmed Bosnia army (with a Serb deputy commander) had turned virtual defeat by the Summer of 1993 into a major offensive in late 1995.

The second speaker, Melanie McDonagh, Catholic, is a leader-writer for the London *Evening Standard* and a regular visitor to the area since the conflict started.

She described harrowing accounts she had received at first-hand from people “ethnically cleansed” by the “Tigers,” a notoriously barbaric militia. Serbs who sided with their Muslim neighbours would be first to be killed, the “Muslims would be hunted down like animals.”

From her visits to “Serb”-held areas, she spoke of the eradication of mosques and Catholic churches – as against the position in Bosnian government-held areas, where all religious denominations are free to worship and in Orthodox or Catholic churches have been destroyed. This, despite the pressure from waves after wave of embittered displaced Muslim refugees.

The norms of civilised behaviour have succeeded, despite the odds, in retaining the semblance of a tolerant “secular” state. The “Joint Presidency” is still maintained, despite the preponderance of the “Muslim” party in the government. In some areas, “Social Democrats” reformed Communists – are regaining ground. The few atrocities committed by government forces are investigated and the perpetrators are punished.

Melanie remains, however, pessimistic about the prospects for a “secular” solution to the conflict. She sees the hatreds as too ingrained. The “ethnically cleansed” areas of Bosnia would take generations to reintegrate into a unitary state. How could a Muslim family claim its property in Pale and move back in any practical sense? She also fears a Muslim backlash as displaced refugees from “ethnically cleansed” areas see their best option as being their own Muslim, if not Islamic, state.

Branka is more optimistic. She sees the vast amount of money likely to be pumped into war-ravaged Bosnia as a positive incentive to reconciliation in a pragmatic world. Serbia and the Pale régime she sees as encumbered by outmoded “Stalinist” industry. A new vibrant industry and commerce in Bosnia would attract the recalcitrant “Serb” and “Croat” sections of Bosnia back to the fold, especially given the Dayton/international recognition on paper of unitary Bosnia.

It was a bit unfortunate that the discussion (and there was lots of it) concentrated on the rights and wrongs of claims and counter-claims about the veracity of reports about, and the sizes of, mass graves, rather than the matter in hand. However, as the chairman of this groundbreaking meeting, I felt I had to go along with the direction the meeting took, rather than intervene to bring it back on course. More strict chairing in future, perhaps, and there are more meetings in the planning stage. Watch this space.

Friends of *The Freethinker*?

IT WAS pleasing to read the report in the February issue that donations to *The Freethinker* fund are on an upward curve, writes TONY AKKERMANS, Leeds. Coincidentally, I have also seen the figures for contributions paid by Church of England members – and I must say that the sacrifices they make in their cause (average donation per member: £20 per month) put most of us to shame.

I concede that a direct comparison between Church membership and a subscription to *The Freethinker* is not entirely valid. Freethinkers tend to be fiercely independent and are sceptical about any form of organised activity or cause. They have no churches and very little, if anything, in the way of ceremony.

In fact, what would Freethinkers have at all – if it weren't for a fearless mouthpiece that puts forward our alternatives for a better society and acts as a voice of protest when our secular rights get trampled upon?

The opposition certainly is tightly organised and financially powerful. We must never lose sight of Burke's dictum: “When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall one by

one...” I think that *The Freethinker* fund should be renamed “Friends of *The Freethinker*” and anybody making a substantial or regular donation may think of him/herself as such. I for one certainly pledge that I will keep supporting the only truly Atheist publication in word and deed.

Thanks, Tony. We would be glad to hear readers' ideas on how we can raise more money to support the expansion of our freethought journal. In the meantime, please 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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Total for January: £385.50



Down to Earth

with Colin McCall

'Materialism' provokes a Prince of Wails

OUR mystical monarch-in-waiting, who lacks none of the material comforts of the world, complains about the materialistic nature of the plans for the millennium (*Perspectives on Architecture*, February-March).

He would have us use the occasion for "spiritual renewal," to celebrate what he calls "the glorious richness of God's world and to re-establish our spiritual foundations, which we can draw from the great religions of the world... to see and sense the spark of the spirit in everything; to learn from the things which have gone wrong..."

Someone should tell the Prince that what has "gone wrong" is in no small measure due to the influence of those "great religions of the world" which he so admires. And that the "resurgence of spirituality across the world" which he detects and aims to further poses considerable danger, especially in the form of Christian and Islamic fundamentalism.

Capital notion?

WE MUST re-establish respect for law and order and above all for the sanctity of human life. I believe this means bringing back the death penalty for murder" – Election Address of the UK Independence Party candidate at the Hemsworth by-election. (Cited by Smallweed, *The Guardian*, January 20).

Shameful shackles

ALL readers of *The Freethinker* – indeed most people outside Michael Howard's small circle of friends – must have been appalled and ashamed to learn that women prisoners in Britain are ever manacled and chained, let alone when they are pregnant.

No bench of magistrates should send a woman to prison for shoplifting, anyway, but I suppose powerful supermarket chains have to be appeased. (Think, though, what it must be like to see all those trolleys loaded with goodies you cannot afford!)

One of Michael Howard's intimates, his Prisons Minister, Ann Widdicombe, defended the practice of shackling pregnant women prisoners in hospital, and claimed that it had the support of NHS staff – until their dis-

avowal forced her to apologise to the House of Commons.

In a *Guardian* interview (January 20), Widdicombe told Megan Tresidder: "I had a duty to carry out, which was to balance the needs of the general public in terms of safety," the threat here coming from a woman in childbirth!

"Not a very Christian reaction, though is it?" asked her interviewer, mistaking Christianity for morality.

Outmatching Howard

ANN WIDDICOMBE, who left the Church of England for Rome in 1993 over the ordination of women, is veritably a fundamentalist. She sees Heaven "as people in white nightgowns with lots of harps, and Hell as a place with burning lakes." Which, given that the latter is occupied, is as immoral a system as can be imagined. Even Michael Howard can't match that.

Widdicombe went to a convent school in Bath, where the nuns were "very rigorous" but encouraged her to believe she could do anything she wanted to. She was very ambitious and, perhaps regrettably, she "never had an ambition crushed in my life."

'Patronising prejudice'

THE OBSERVER was right (January 21) to oppose the suggested replacement of juries in serious fraud cases. The presumption that "juries are incapable of understanding complex financial evidence is a patronising prejudice," the paper said after the acquittal of the Maxwell brothers.

Taking complex frauds away from juries, it continued, "would soon lead to many other charges being deemed too troublesome for jury trial," and it is "one of our basic protections that serious criminal charges should be judged by panels of ordinary people."

Missing the point

CRITICISING a *Guardian* leader on the teaching of morality in schools, Richard Wilkins, general secretary of the Association of Christian Teachers, argued that: "Even in a secular society that wants to educate its children in morality, God is necessary until something better comes along. As yet nothing has."

His letter missed the point of the leader,

that, "If God approves of actions because they themselves are morally right, God is logically dispensable" (January 16).

It doesn't follow from this, as Mr Wilkins thinks, that "any source of morality is logically dispensable." It merely rules out any supernatural or non-human source.

Albania invaded!

"IT IS astounding how many missionaries, Christian and Muslim, there are in Albania," David Lodge reported for BBC Radio 4 on January 15. They regard it as "virgin territory where they can sell their wares."

One of the Christians explained that "I opened an atlas one day and there was Albania shining with the light of the Lord"; and he could hardly resist a sign like that, could he? "God had plans for me," said another, full of his own importance.

One group was bribing Albanians with free trips abroad, and another one informed Mr Lodge that it had a place on the Internet dedicated to God.

Not surprisingly, Albania's Ambassador in London was concerned about the missionary invasion. The country had enjoyed religious harmony for 500 years, please don't disturb this, he pleaded. The religion of Albania was "Albanianism, being Albanian."

But that's not enough for the missionaries.

Virtual unreality

THERE is apparently fierce religious competition on the Internet, as elsewhere. ("On Line," *The Guardian*, January 25). And now, Jacques Gaillot, former Bishop of Evreux, northern France, who was sacked by the Vatican for his liberal views, has expanded the Diocese of Partenia, a ruined city in the Sahara – which he was given by the Pope as a punishment – by going on the Internet with a "virtual diocese," also called Partenia.

It is a dream come true, he says. Well, it's certainly a dream.

And now the good news...

ROMAN Catholic attendance at Sunday Mass fell by 36,000 last year, according to figures in the 1996 *Catholic Directory*. And of the estimated 4.5 million Catholics, fewer than a third were in church on an average Sunday.

Old whines, new bottle

by Denis Cobell

THE letters column of that bastion of Conservative support the Daily Torygraph is not always quite so strong a supporter of the Church as it used to be. For example, I rather liked the recent letter from Kit Malthouse on clerical criticisms of the National Lottery: "This is an interesting, if patronising, stance for a fabulously wealthy institution which, for nearly 2,000 years has successfully solicited funds in return for the chance of a heavenly jackpot."

Indeed, what hypocrisy exists in the Church leaders' critical attitude towards the Lottery – and what is it to do with them how the rest of us, who have no time for their prognostications, deal with Mammon?

However, a fresh arrival on the Christian newspaper scene – a revival in reality – the *New Christian Herald* (NCH), sees nothing wrong in Christians pleading for lottery funds to assist their cause. Lottery money, NCH notes, can be accepted because we live in an imperfect world. News also comes that groups of Welsh Christian who "normally cross swords" have been brought together through the television: perhaps they have been watching "Lottery Live" together?

The word "new" in front of an old name, is usually as relevant as the word "open" placed before "government." The old *Christian Herald* went out of business some years ago; the NCH is a trifle nattier than the old CH.

When I was a teenager, living in a born-again Christian household, I was a regular reader of the old CH and used to ride my bike around our little Sussex town delivering it weekly to the faithful few and collecting the few coppers it cost at that time. My own son is aghast at this; he grudgingly trudges around with a weekly local paper, for which he is paid, while I foolishly did my task without payment.

When the National Secular Society celebrated its centenary in 1966, the CH also celebrated its centenary, and I wrote a piece in these pages entitled "Contemporaries."

Inter alia, I wrote: "The *Christian Herald* has survived, it seems, by burying its head ostrich-like in the sand, as a Victorian monument, failing to comment on major issues that affected the country during the past century...no correspondence contradicts the paper's line...this blinkered, Bible-punching product of Grub Street, makes no active intellectual approach to any of the world's great problems."

Well, times have changed – a bit, and the NCH, risen Phoenix-like out of the ashes of the old CH, with Editor Russ Bravo, hit the news-stands in January, without reference to the old order. Issues are confronted which the old paper would have ignored. Thus are Evangelical Christians dragged into the 20th Century, just as the rest of us are getting ready for the 21st (that is if freethinkers accept the historical basis for millennium celebrations).

The evangelicals which NCH represents, are having a good time. The Archbishop of Canterbury welcomed the 150th anniversary celebrations of the Evangelical Alliance at Wembley in January. Openings of their churches now exceed closures, stated *Signs of Life*, a report published half-way through the C of E's Decade of Evangelism. Moreover, parishioners now donate on average £4.52 a week compared with £3.77 in 1990 (maybe readers of *The Freethinker* should take note!). Also, 60 per cent of ordinands now leaving theological colleges are Evangelical, compared with 10 per cent in the 1950s – but only a third of parishes are Evangelical. So there is a chance that they are having some considerable influence. The Alliance has also had a meeting with Prime Minister John Major.

Although a headline reads: "Hell – new report turns up the heat" (and my understanding of the Anglican Doctrine Commission's, *The Mystery of Salvation*, reviewed by Nicolas Walter in *The Freethinker*, February, is that just the opposite was proposed), there are some interesting points of controversy in NCH. It men-

tions, for example, Christian charities in the US which have had to return money given by a donor since convicted of fraudulent share-dealing. If all churches had to return money on the basis of fraudulent statements their coffers would soon empty!

Less reassuring is a comment from Stephen Green, National Director of Christian Voice, an agency arguing that the Old Testament regulations for Israel are perpetually valid – and that the UK Parliament should restore the death penalty for murder.

Among the letters is one headed "Gay propaganda must be fought" and another on "Alton's good news," which refers to David Alton MP, an opponent well-known to Humanists.

Also featured is Richard Wilkins, of the Christian Teachers' Association, who avers that Christian beliefs provide the best hope in encouraging good behaviour in children. He seems not to have realised that after 2,000 years many youngsters still do not take Christianity seriously. This is despite a report on another page that the use of a former fire station for getting young people to hear about Christ has come about because for many churches are no-go areas. This is their language – but I can't help reflecting that the fire station probably helped "save more folk before its decommissioning.

The NCH has news of "planting" – putting new churches in communities where none exist at present. In view of regular closures, which I note in local papers, it is surprising that there aren't enough churches for the numbers wanting to join congregations; Prince Charles should have investigated this more thoroughly before suggesting millennium funds go to building more sacred structures for non-Christian faiths.

What does all this hold for Humanists? I am sure some, such as Peter Wreford (*The Freethinker* February letters), will regard my concern as just one more example of the criticism which fills these pages "ad nauseam." There are indeed freethinkers who believe we are pushing at an open door, but I think there are three points to place against their reticence.

Journals such as NCH have a wide circulation, compared with Humanist periodicals, and they intrude into the lives of the vulnerable. When people – particularly today's many disadvantaged and unemployed youngsters – are in stressful situations, religion of this evangelical nature, which may not be so injurious as some cults, entices them to false hopes. We must be prepared with counter-arguments.

Secondly, discussions about morality, and the belief that religion is needed to be good, are still widely accepted. NCH promotes this; it is our job to show that ethics arise out of social interaction.

Finally, there is still vast privilege and wealth in the Church – out of all proportion to active support for Christianity – that is perpetuated by law, and given every encouragement by the NCH.

Atheists and Humanists need a voice. Wouldn't it be nice if we had a 50p weekly selling at W H Smith?

'Earthquake' nobody noticed

THE situation with the televangelists continues to cause much sadness in North America, says the (UK) *New Christian Herald*, February 3. Charismatic leader Benny Hinn's story of mass healings at a Christian hospital in 1976 is largely fabricated, according to the St Louis-based organisation Personal Freedom Outreach, the magazine adds.

The Evangelical Press News Service has reported: "In the organisation's *Quarterly Journal*, G Richard Fisher calls Hinn's story of the healing, published in Hinn's *Welcome Holy Spirit*, a 'tall tale.'" Hinn says that when he and other clergy anointed patients in a Catholic hospital with oil they "began to receive instant

healing." Pastor of the 10,000-member Orlando Christian Center, Hinn adds: "Within a few minutes the hospital looked almost like it had been hit by an earthquake. People were under the power of the Holy Spirit up and down the hallways as well as in the rooms."

According to Fisher, the hospital in question issued a statement saying: "No such events have ever occurred at General Hospital." Fisher said Hinn's claims could not be verified through medical records or by testimony from past nor present hospital staffers.

Hinn's ministry spokesman George Parson would not comment on the specifics in the Personal Freedom Outreach article, but affirmed the accuracy of Hinn's book, reports *New Christian Herald*.

Three conferences and a board meeting: report from India by JIM HERRICK

'Transcending all boundaries'

THERE has arisen a myth of the mystic East, sated with gurus and godmen and omniscient religion. In fact, although India is a country heavily influenced by religion (a Hindu majority, with a large minority of Muslims) it has a strong sceptical and scientific tradition going back as far as some early Sanskrit writings. And in modern times the constitution of India includes the aim: "To develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform." In my visit to India I was able to encounter freethought and sceptic groups vigorously in action.

I attended (and spoke at) the International Rationalist Conference (December 27-31, 1995), the International Seminar on Integrated Human Development in South Asia – Problems and Perspectives, organised by the Indian Radical Humanists (January 3-5, 1996) and the World Atheist Conference (January 4-6, 1996). I also attended the Annual Board Meeting of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (of which the National Secular Society is a member). As in Britain, the different Humanist organisations have different emphases, but there is much overlap of ideas and activities.

Various themes emerged repeatedly: the threat of fundamentalism, communalist strife, freedom of speech, how to change society to bring about greater equality of wealth, the empowerment of women, the exposure of the tricks of the godmen by scientific methods, the historical and philosophical basis for Secular Humanism.

The International Rationalist Conference was run by the Indian Rationalist Association in Delhi. Two items led to considerable coverage in the national press: the refusal of the Indian government to allow a visa to Taslima Nasrin to enable her to visit the conference and a firewalking demonstration.

Firewalking was equally media-friendly at the World Atheist Conference. The aim is to demystify the activity by showing that anyone can do it without prayer or supernatural powers. One branch of the Indian Rationalist Association, led by Sanal Edamaruku, is famous for travelling around villages and debunking godmen (a television production, *The Guru Busters*, was shown in Britain last year).

The first topic of the conference was "Transformation of Traditional Societies" at which Jane Wynne-Willson (a British Co-President of IHEU) spoke perceptively about the "Role of Alternative Ceremonies in Transforming Societies." The second topic was "Freedom of Expression," at which I spoke on "Freedom of Speech as a Universal Human Right." I feel strongly that the move to suggest that freedom of speech is a cultural factor which operates differently in different societies (especially Muslim societies) must be resisted.

Two organisations were inaugurated at the conference: the International Alliance Against Fundamentalism and the Asian Rationalist Federation.

The IHEU board meeting took place in Bombay at a new centre being built by the

...in modern times the constitution of India includes the aim: "To develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform."

Indian Radical Humanists. It is called the Centre for the Study of Social Change and will include the M N Roy Human Development Campus. The enormous building is not yet completed and will provide a centre for Humanist activity and also a development campus for training in primary health care, vocational training, public library, performing arts, international hostel and conference complex. It is a mighty project.

The most controversial and important debate at the Board Meeting resulted in the decision to move the IHEU headquarters from Utrecht to London. New membership organisations were accepted from Austria and New Zealand and we learned that groups are beginning in Indonesia and Senegal.

The conference of the Indian Radical Humanist Association was titled "Integrated Human Development in South Asia – Problems and Perspectives." This was an in-depth seminar looking at the socio-cultural problems of South Asia and the practical programme for human development.

Without time to attend all this conference, a group of us were swept via a five-hour-late plane and a five-hour coach journey to the World Atheist Conference in Vijayawada. This was my third visit to the Atheist Centre and it felt like coming home, so friendly were the Gora family who run the place as a co-operative

venture. It is known throughout the world for its development work – hospital, criminal reform, vocational training programmes, refuge for mistreated women, and so on.

The conference was titled "Positive Atheism for a Positive Future" – a theme which I must admit I had suggested to Lavanam (the member of the family who deals mainly with international contacts and whom many people have met in Britain). I pointed out that atheism without a positive ethical element was just the same as nihilism. But I also warned that human nature was flawed and we don't know what the future holds, we can only work in hope for progress.

The World Atheist Conference contained artistic events such as dancing (a dance for peace) and theatre (a series of anti-religious sketches). Also taking part in this conference were representatives from the Dravidar Kazhagam or "Self-Respect Movement" founded by Periyar. This organisation is militantly anti-religious and strongly opposed to the Brahmin caste. They are strong in the South of India and I was unfortunately unable to attend their further events. Another event which I missed was the Sixth Narsingh Narain Memorial Seminar organised by the Indian Humanist Union (the most ethicist wing of the Indian Humanist organisations) and at which Jane Wynne-Willson spoke on "Humanism and Religion."

The trip was exhausting and fascinating. Despite the poverty and difficulties of daily life, India is a great civilisation which is developing fast. Does it want to reach that peak of the capitalist system in which every family would own a car? This would have devastating environmental effects. Secular Humanists have a formidable task ahead given the power of religion, of communalism, of caste. But as was said by Saraswati, Gora's 85-year-old widow: "Atheism is universal, transcending all boundaries. It is human centred. It aims for all-round development of the personality of the individual. Human freedom and human dignity must be achieved. We strive for the same."

● A former Editor of *The Freethinker*, Jim Herrick edits *New Humanist* and *International Humanist News*. He is Chairman of the National Secular Society's Council of Management.

It's all the same to us!

QUOTE from Christopher Dunkley (of Radio 4's *Feedback*) in his *Financial Times* TV column, February 10: "...viewers who do not believe in the supernatural...see the world's numerous theistic superstitions and fables as similarly weird. To the non-believer it makes little difference whether you go around drinking your own urine, chopping the heads off white cockerels, or drinking the blood of your creator. To the rational thinker it is all equally embarrassing and destructive of human dignity."

Chris Dunkley notes, however: "...the significant and astonishing thing is that instead of setting out from a neutral position to describe and consider all such belief systems, including late 20th Century fundamentalist Christianity, the BBC allows its religious programmes department to be run by members of one particular branch of one of the world's many religions. The BBC would not dream of allowing its programmes about politics to be made by a department run by the Tories so why do they allow their religious programmes to be made by a department run by Anglicans? Time, surely, for a spot of disestablishmentarianism?"

Equality – not apartheid

From Page 3

to produce a sufficient number of religious education teachers of the right calibre, perhaps we need to think the unthinkable – the complete separation of church and state, as in the United States, with the religious formation of the child being the sole responsibility of the parents and the local religious community.”

Melanie Phillips pointed out in *The Observer* (February 11): “The whole point of multi-faith teaching was to *avoid* giving offence to minority faiths. Now one such minority is rejecting it as worse than useless. So much for woolly liberalism. Islam... expects the majority culture not merely to accommodate it but also to adapt itself to it and change its own practices accordingly.”

“Schools should not set out to change society or transmit an explicit set of values. Religious education should be just that, *not* religious instruction whether in Islam or Christianity or anything else. If children aren’t given religious values by their parents then no amount of RE teaching at school will plug the gap... Schools should provide children with the habits of rational thought and inquiry as part of their initiation into what it means to be a human being in a particular society within a wider world. Those habits are undermined by indoctrination, whether this takes the form of imposing a particular faith narrative through RE, or censoring books on the grounds that they must not give offence...”

Columnist Carol Sarler, in the mass-circulation *People*, January 28, derided the “liberal thinking” which says that we should, above all else, respect other people’s beliefs: “No we shouldn’t... we should not respect a religious belief that endorses practices we abhor... This is not... an issue of race; it is an issue of morals. All races can live together in harmony, as long as they share the same morality. Forget multicultural; the proper path to lasting peace is unicultural – and in Britain today that means adhering to the simple doctrine of doing unto others as you would be done by. Let us use the public purse to keep it that way.”

The Freethinker agrees – and considers it vital that we do not feed the Muslims’ sense of apartness by maintaining laws which discriminate against them. It is just as important that we do not allow state funds to be used to perpetuate their particular brand of superstition.

● As we went to press, *The Times* (February 22) reported yet another move which we deplore as seeming more likely to point-up the differences between children, rather than create the “togetherness” which our society needs: “Muslim pupils are being allowed segregated religious education classes for the first time with the approval of Gillian Shephard. The Education Secretary has decided not to intervene in a Birmingham primary school which launched separate classes for Muslim children under the guidance of an Islamic teacher.

“About 500 children at the Birchfield Community School, where 70 per cent of pupils are Muslim, receive tuition from the teacher. Mrs Shephard has been assured that the lessons have a multi-faith approach in line with the locally agreed syllabus.”

Colin McCall scales ‘the height of bl...

Byron r – for go

IN HIS life of Shelley, Richard Holmes links Byron’s *Cain* with Shelley’s *Queen Mab*, Volney’s *Ruins of Empire* and the works of Thomas Paine as entering “the small radical repertoire of key books recognised by the next generation.”

Mary Shelley thought *Cain* was Byron’s “finest production,” while Shelley considered *Don Juan* and *Cain* very great poems. And when Shelley heard rumours that the atheistical tendencies in *Cain* were the result of his influence, he remarked that he would have been happy to have any influence in that “immortal work” but he had “not the smallest influence over Lord Byron in that particular.”

Not everyone shared the Shelleys’ admiration when *Cain* was first published – along with two other plays and three cantos of *Don Juan* in December, 1821.

“None can look on *Cain* without feeling both pain and sorrow,” said *The Literary Gazette*, “a more direct, more dangerous, or more frightful production than this miscalled Mystery, it never has been our lot to encounter.” Francis Jeffrey, Editor of *The Edinburgh Review*, while admitting the play’s beauty and power, regretted that it should ever have been published. It will, he wrote, “give great scandal and offence to pious persons in general – and may be the means of suggesting the most painful doubts and distressing perplexities to hundreds of minds.” And the Methodist Dr James Kennedy, who later tried in vain to convert Byron, regarded it as “the height of blasphemy” and “productive of mischief.”

The publisher, John Murray, wasn’t keen either, but Byron refused to alter the “impious” passages to make Lucifer “talk like the Bishop of Lincoln.” “Are these people more impious than Milton’s Satan? or the Prometheus of Aeschylus?” he asked.

Well, no, But Milton and Aeschylus were not for everyday reading, as was the “wicked” Lord. And *Cain* makes splendid reading, as I will try to show.

The poem begins with Adam, Eve, Adah (sister and wife of Cain), Abel and Zillah (sister and wife of Abel) praising God and offering a sacrifice. Cain refuses to participate. He has, he says, nothing to ask and nothing to thank God for. “Dost thou not live?” Adam asks him. “Must I not die?” Cain retorts. His father had plucked the Tree of Knowledge:

...knowledge is good,
And life is good: and how can both be evil?

But life involves toil – and injustice. Why should he suffer for his parents’ sins? He was unborn; he did not seek to be born and he did not love the state “to which that birth has brought me.”

He sees, though, that the real fault lies not with his parents, but with their maker, who planted the tree invitingly near to them. When he questions his parents, however, they have just one answer: it was the will of God, and He is good.

...How know I that? Because
He is all-powerful, must all-good, too, follow?
I judge but by the fruits – and they are bitter –
Which I must feed on for a fault not mine.

Lucifer, who then appears, knows Cain’s thoughts, which are

...the thoughts of all
Worthy of thought.

After a discussion on life and death, Lucifer makes one of his great speeches against the “Omnipotent tyrant” whose “evil is not good.” Goodness would not make evil. Let him sit on his vast and solitary throne creating worlds,

...to make eternity
Less burthensome to his immense existence
And unparticipated solitude.

Cain responds. Not till now has he met any one to sympathise with him. His father is “tamed down”; his mother has

of blasphemy'

raises Cain Good Reason

...forgot the mind
Which made her thirst for knowledge at the
risk
Of an eternal curse;

his brother is a shepherd boy who offers up
the firstlings of the flock

...to him who bids
The earth yield nothing without sweat.

Lucifer denies tempting Eve. It was not he
who planted the tree within the reach of inno-
cent beings, whose very innocence made them
curious. "Then who was the demon?" Was it
not the "Maker" who "makes but to destroy"?

Cain asks him if the stars will die like we
do? Perhaps, Lucifer replies, "but long outlive
both thine and thee." Cain is glad of that:

I would not have them die –
They are so lovely.

But what is death? He fears it is a dreadful
thing. Lucifer himself has no knowledge of
death, but he praises those who

Prefer an independence of torture
To the smooth agonies of adulation,
In hymns and harpings, and self-seeking
prayers.

Cain blames his parents for begetting him

...and all the few that are,
And all the unnumbered and innumerable
Multitudes, millions, myriads, which may
be,
To inherit agonies accumulated
By ages!

Despite Adah's pleadings not to do so, he
accompanies Lucifer, who will show him
"worlds beyond thy little world." Cain
exclaims:

O God! O Gods! or whatsoe'er ye are!
How beautiful ye are! how beautiful
Your works, or accidents, or whatsoe'er
They may be!



● Lord Byron

Then, having glimpsed the world of the
dead, he wonders why animals should die,
when they did not eat of the forbidden tree.
Again he poses the question, whence evil?
Evil was the path to good, Adam had told him,
but it was a strange good that must arise from
its "deadly opposite."

Later, a reference to Lucifer's "superior"
brings the firm denial.

I have a victor – true; but no superior
Homage he has from all – but none from
me:
I battle it against him, as I battled
In highest heaven.
Through all eternity...will I dispute.

And, he tells Cain:

One good gift has the fatal apple given –
Your reason: – let it not be over-sway'd
By tyrannous threats to force you into faith
'Gainst all external sense and inward feel-
ing:
Think and endure.

Cain returns to earth, sadder than before in

Adah's eyes; and his words sound impious in
her ears. He thinks it better that his son Enoch
should cease to live, rather than endure sor-
row, and bequeath it.

Abel has heard of Cain's wandering with
what could be a "foe to the Most High," and
insists that they should sacrifice together.

O God!
Who made us,

the kneeling Abel prays, while Cain remains
standing, wondering if Jehovah is to be propi-
tiated with prayers and softened with a sacri-
fice of blood; with "sanguinary incense to the
skies," or with

...the sweet and blooming fruits of
earth...a shrine without victim
And altar without gore

The fire on Abel's altar kindles into a col-
umn of brightest flame, while a whirlwind
scatters the fruits on Cain's. God has shown
his preference for blood. Make another before
it is too late, urges Abel, but Cain will have
none of it.

Intending to overturn the (to him) offensive
sacrificial altar with its "scorching flesh and
stinking blood," he struggles with Abel,
snatches a brand from the fire and hits his
brother, who collapses and dies.

An angel puts the mark of Cain upon his
brow. Then Cain and Adah, with their chil-
dren, make their way "Eastwards from Eden."

It is a powerful play which had a rare revival
by the Royal Shakespeare Company in
London this year, and it contains Byron's most
searching religious questioning, particularly,
as I have shown, on the problem of evil. This
does not make him an atheist, like Shelley. As
J M Robertson said, Byron was "too wayward
to hold a firm philosophy."

Yet, despite his protestations in the preface,
says his biographer Leslie A Marchand,
"Byron did make Lucifer voice his own spec-
ulations as an intellectual rebel of the Age of
Reason...He knew he was inviting the wrath,
if not of the Omnipotent, at least of the pious
British public."

A FRIEND in need is a friend indeed, so the saying goes. But why do we bother doing things for friends? I believe the answer has a profoundly unhelpful impact on the nature of faith.

If the only reason we ever did something for a friend was because we expected them to do something in return for us, it would be a curious form of friendship – it would be more contractual than voluntary. Sometimes, certainly, we anticipate a warm response, kind words and greater “bonding” – the little considerations which have a great bearing on the pleasure of human existence.

But if I said to you, a friend, I will only do this act of kindness for you because I expect you to reward me similarly, you might say: “Fair enough – I’ll just look in Yellow Pages instead and get the job done professionally, if I have to pay for it.”

Friendship, of course, is not a contractual relationship, and very often comes nowhere close to being a rational relationship either. Perhaps it comes down to love, commitment and respect, which are often ill-defined and emotive words.

These qualities may also be applied by many religionists who follow Jehovah or Allah or whatever. They say they love their “god” – or go even further, as a local Pentecostal Church poster succinctly but mysteriously put it: “God is love.” But the religionists want things all ways, as the recent debate about whether Hell really exists made plain. For to gain converts, they have to introduce a reward system. If they didn’t, they would, perhaps, be likened to a bunch of hippies who merely profess the gospel of free, unstructured “love” which, as often as not, would have no more eternal quality than a one-night stand.

No one has yet devised a system which is based on friendship or love alone – it is too elusive, and cannot be made the property of one individual, state or church. But this does not stop church people from trying – and provides the clearest possible evidence of the fraud they perpetrate.

They either say that love of god will relieve the repentant human from fear (because you won’t go to Hell) or you will have something to look forward to – a life after death in everlast-

Contradictions of the faith dealers

by Colin Challen

ing bliss or some such. Such propositions were easier to sustain when the universe could still be seen purely as an anthropocentric entity, with “up” and “down.” But as science progressed, ever so slowly against the opposition of the church, doctrine had to absorb new meanings. Yet this evolution has only had a marginal impact – most believers still cling on to unchallenged interpretations of their “good book,” whichever one it may be, since that is still the simplest way of dealing with their cognitive dissonance.

For those who have grasped the untenability of their religion, the word “faith” has taken on a greater significance. Indeed, faith has come to connote a quality in the believer, rather than that which is believed in, for it signals their preparedness to offer themselves entirely up to their god without the guarantee of reward once promised to their less enlightened predecessors. Let’s face it – that has to be the test of faith, it has to be “blind” for it to work, otherwise we’re back to the old contractual reward system of the carrot and the stick. The very system (which despite its obvious uses in controlling society) is necessarily mechanistic and anti-spiritual, and clearly has little to do with “love or friendship. What kind of god is it that is so emotionally crippled it could only offer a relationship based on a carrot and a stick? Not one that lead-

ing-edge clerics would wish to defend, that’s for sure.

Faith also has the unhappy consequence for religionists of making them *de facto* agnostics. By its very nature, faith demands that the ultimate proof is unavailable. Faith is about taking that very risk. We are not talking about scientific faith here, since science generally adopts the Popperian approach of conjecture and refutation – it admits it may be wrong. The faith of a Christian is a certain belief which could never lead a follower into making the statement: “Look, Jesus saves – but I may be wrong.” Nevertheless, their faith can only be valid if the possibility of their being wrong exists – whether they like it or not.

Doubt

Their certainty of course may correctly be said to rule out my assertion that faith leads to an agnostic conclusion. But only in the believer, who would be in a state of “false consciousness” as Kierkegaard describes it. Faith is the bedfellow of doubt – for faith to be faith, it must be blessed with a measure of its own value, and its value, apparently, is in cementing a relationship with a proposition that wishes not to be proven in the laboratory of human science.

The fact that some believers would never actually admit to being agnostic does not excuse them of this frightening label. It merely makes their faith more shallow. And for those believers who do question their faith, but still purport to follow it, the contradictions are sometimes too much to bear, especially if the doubts are sown by “one of their own” like the erstwhile Bishop of Durham.

Contradictions are a natural part of friendship, but they are blessed with the possibility of rational – or even irrational – resolution. Contradictions of faith are not, and by definition never can be, since that is one of faith’s distinguishing features. It is interesting therefore to witness how contemporary religionists, of the “with it” type, proclaim such human-centred expressions of their faith as “I have a friend in Jesus.” This is less cocksure than “Our Lord the Saviour,” and so it must be if it is to appeal in the modern idiom. But this new way of expressing faith, as the very latest modern English translation of the Bible illustrates, necessarily calls upon human qualities to replace supernatural qualities. Therein lies, one hopes, the demise of faith in the supernatural.

‘Death’ need not be the end!

PILOT BABA, a renowned Hindu holy man, crawled unsteadily out of the ground, four days after being “buried alive” in one of the most ancient feats of Indian mysticism. He acknowledged the cheers and substantial financial offerings of 10,000 devotees.

The art of not breathing, *bhu-samadhi*, can be performed in water or earth: the Baba has appeared to demonstrate both over the years. Close up, however, his magic is rather less impressive. He was buried not in earth, but entombed in a hole 9ft deep and 9ft wide, with a *charpoy* (string bed) and blanket. The hole was covered with wooden poles, topped with corrugated-iron sheeting, a plastic cover and a couple of inches of soil, giving the impression he was buried.

Members of the Indian Rationalist Association, watched as the Baba, surrounded by priests, addressed the multitude, telling them that his demonstration of spiri-

tual and mental power was for the good of people the world over. He had many boxes of apples, which he said he would imbue with some of his powers and distribute.

The money rolled in. Sanal Edamaruku, secretary general of the Rationalist Association, and several supporters wore bullet-proof vests. He said he had received death threats for trying to discredit the holy man.

The Baba performed his feat in a public park in the small town of Rohini, near Delhi. Mr Edamaruku said the aim was to rally public support to take over the park for construction of a temple: “All of this is to do with land-grabbing. Once he gains popular support, he can gain access to political power and eventually take the land.” All miracles performed by holy men were tricks; appearing to be dead was a favourite: “All you do is squeeze a ball in your armpit and the pulse in your wrist will practically disappear.” Source: *The Times*, January 26.

What a God-awful anthem!

BUT CAN WE DO ANY BETTER?

by Dr Harold Hillman

THE National Anthem is a prayer and a statement of desirable national morals. A prayer is an attempt to influence God. The term "save" can mean either protect the Monarch or give her salvation. It would be meaningless in the context of the National Anthem if it meant "protect" because God has created those who would attack the Monarch, as he has instilled in them the evil inclination which causes them to do so; also, his omniscience warns him beforehand whether or not the Monarch's enemies will attack him or her. Therefore, "God save" must mean "God, please accord salvation to the Queen." Unfortunately, he has already created her and programmed her for being saved or not. Theists would argue that God has given the Queen, her enemies, and, indeed, all human beings *free will* to exercise or suppress their evil inclinations.

Theists generally believe that God is omnipotent, all-good and omniscient. However, it is obvious that when God gives man free will, he is giving away some of his power, and therefore he ceases to be omnipotent. In human prayer, one is attempting to influence God. However, the motive-power for this attempt can not come from God himself – since it would be ridiculous for him to try to influence himself. It must come from the free will, which he has granted to human beings. So also must the motivation for any evil deeds, since he is all-good. One must conclude that prayer, salvation, human free will, philanthropy and repentance are all incompatible with the omnipotence of God and his all-goodness.

The first sentence of the National Anthem also assumes that all Monarchs of the past, and all those who will reign until the Anthem is changed, were, and will continue to be, "gracious." Roget's *Thesaurus* gives the synonyms for "gracious" as "tasteful, dignified, choice, exquisite, excellent," *inter alia*. Even a brief perusal of the most sanitised pro-Royalist history of Britain shows that these epithets have rarely been accurate descriptions of the behaviour of most Monarchs. Also, it is obviously impossible for the authors or the singers of the Anthem to forecast that future Monarchs *will* be virtuous. This brings one to the obvious realisation that the Anthem implies that anyone occupying the throne at all is, *ipso facto*, a model person.

The same implication is behind the phrase "Long may she reign." This assumes that she has a *right* to rule over her subjects, and they have a duty to obey her. This right has not been questioned since Oliver Cromwell set up the Commonwealth in 1654, but it only lasted until 1660, when Charles II was restored to the throne. However, neither opinion polls, nor party manifestoes in the 20th Century have shown up significant anti-Monarchist

feeling, so that one must conclude that in Britain the Monarchy rests on the apathy of the public and a traditional but widespread *feeling* that it is legitimate. Perhaps, the question of the legitimacy and the democratic credentials of the Monarchy will be raised again in the 21st Century.

Briefly considered, William, Duke of Normandy, defeated Harold II, the second son of the Earl Godwine at Hastings in 1066. He then conquered the whole of England, and his mappers compiled the Domesday Book, which was a list of his spoils. William then gave or sold desirable bits of England to his supporters. The British Monarchy has derived its power, its patronage and its wealth from the Norman Conquest. Whereas the power has been grossly diminished by the rise of Parliament, the wealth and patronage still originates from the military victory of 1066, and public acceptance of the legitimacy. A number of Annual Conferences of the Labour

Party in the 1950s called for the abolition of the Monarchy or the House of Lords – with a lack of conviction demonstrated by the failure of the Labour Party to carry out this policy since.

The request to send the Queen "victorious, happy and glorious" is also based on the supposition that power is right, but another clear implication is that the British government has always and will always conduct just wars. Modern historians, who try to be objective and just, would not agree that all the imperialist wars, and all the subsequent wars to prevent colonies becoming independent, were just; nor would the people of the former colonies. Furthermore, nowadays few people would agree with Cherubino that war is a glorious thing.

"Oh Lord, our God, arise" implies that all patriots and Monarchists are also theists. Therefore, atheists, agnostics, non-theists, uninterested people and Buddhists can not express this sentiment sincerely, which is divisive. "Scatter her enemies, confound their politics, frustrate their knavish tricks" also implies that Britain and the Monarchy always espouse righteous causes.

"On thee our hopes we fix" and "God save us all" are prayers. The latter for the first time extends the tabernacle of salvation from the Queen to all her subjects, but the third verse reverts to prayer for the Monarch alone. "Thy choicest gifts in store, On her be pleased to pour. Long may she reign." What is the morality of asking God to shower his choicest gifts on some of the wealthiest people in the country, when millions live in poverty?

The Anthem ends by calling on the Queen to defend our laws, so that we may have reason to ask God to defend her. It seems to me to be the wrong way round to assume that the Monarch is virtuous – and wait until the end when you ask her to be good to justify that assumption.

Summary and conclusions: In analysing the National Anthem, it becomes obvious that man's free will and the effectiveness of prayer are incompatible with the concept of God's omniscience. Most of the Anthem refers to the well-being and military success of the Monarch. Very little of it encourages morality or community of citizens, or is concerned about their welfare. The legitimacy of the Monarchy rests upon conquest. Non-theists can not sing the National Anthem sincerely. In view of all its shortcomings, the time has arrived for it to be rewritten to express modern democratic sentiments.

● Readers who agree with Dr Hillman's case are invited to write a new National Anthem for publication in *The Freethinker* which should (a) not mention religion; (b) be unmilitaristic in nature; (c) not be divisive; (d) state some duties and rights; (e) attempt to encourage the welfare and equality of all. First prize – a year's free subscription to *The Freethinker* added to your existing sub., if appropriate; second prize is a six-month subscription and third prize is three months. Entries must reach me on or before April 30: Editor.



● Happy – but glorious?

(Photograph: Hulton Deutsch Collection)

The magnificent ideal

The Nature and Pursuit of Love: The Philosophy of Irving Singer. Edited by David Goicoechea. Published by Prometheus Books (UK). £34. ISBN 087975-912-7.

Review: LESLIE JAMES

PROFESSOR Irving Singer of the Massachusetts Institute of Linguistics and Philosophy is renowned for his lifelong study of love in both its theoretical and practical dimensions. He has explored the concepts of romantic love and married love to see if they are mutually supportive and has identified what he considers to be the two essential ingredients of love, namely *eros* (that is, appraisal, evaluation of the object of love, appreciation and desire) and *agape* (that is, bestowal, enrichment and creative care for the beloved).

In this book, David Goicoechea, a professor at Brock University, Ontario, has sought to explain and expand Singer's analysis. The book comprises a collection of essays originally delivered at a three-day colloquium at Brock University by 19 professors – of philosophy, linguistics, mediæval studies, or music. The work opens with two searching interviews of Singer by Robert Fulford, and introductory and explanatory chapters by Goicoechea. It ends with a studied response to the contributors by Singer.

Singer will please Humanists since he sees love as related to biological forces, as related to normal responses that belong to us as parts of nature. It is a relationship, he says, which happens to ordinary men and women. He refuses to accept that love is transcendental, outside our physiological and psychological make-up. For Singer, love is simply an idealised human relationship, and courtly love and romantic love are merely examples of the relationship coloured by the mediaeval concept of chivalry or the romantic notion of love as exemplified in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. But Singer is



● **For Humanists, love is a euphemism for the biological and instinctive attraction of sex and for the happy, lasting relationship which arises from it...**

(Photograph: Hulton Deutsch Collection)

a practical man and wishes to harmonise love with sex and marriage. Sexual love with marriage is, for him, a magnificent ideal.

David Goicoechea's introduction is a helpful summary and critique of the contributors. His own essay, "Appraising – Bestowing – Growing – Adoring," examines Singer's relationship to Nietzsche's philosophy as centred round the concept of "*amor fati*" (love of fate) and the will to power. But in his response, Singer rejects the Nietzschean notion that one can love an inanimate universe.

The 19 papers which follow examine the

altruistic element in love (Vannoy), the Greek conception of love (Gooch), and the supposed love between God and man (Nicholson) which Humanists will firmly reject. Walter Principe deals with love between friends "according to Thomas Aquinas," again with religious overtones. John Mayer examines the joyless love prescribed by the Puritans and the intellectual love of the Rationalists. (I hope this does not deny Humanists the passion and joy of sexual relations!). Other contributions examine Sartrean existentialism, sexual love, whether scientists make love, and even the purely physiological, sexually explicit nature of love. Sylvia Perkins makes it clear that Kierkegaard's philosophy of love is essentially religious. Peter Hutcheon questions Singer's rejection of Freud's theory of love and accuses Freud of ignoring Darwinian causality and natural selection.

I suspect that hard-headed, agnostic Humanists will find this book something of an intellectual extravaganza. They will have no difficulty in accepting Singer's basic theory that love must comprise both an adoration of the object of love and the need to endow the object of love with care and protection.

But Humanists will have no truck with religious connotations of love. For Humanists, love is a euphemism for the biological and instinctive attraction of sex and for the happy, lasting relationship which arises from it and which has been institutionalised as marriage. Love is also a fitting name for the compassionate concern and affection which Humanists have for humanity world-wide.

Court without counsel

How to Defend Yourself in Court. Michael Randle. Civil Liberties Trust. £4.99. ISBN 0 9001 37 41.

Review: LESLIE JAMES

WE hope it is highly unlikely at the present day for any Humanist in his capacity as a Humanist to be charged with a criminal offence.

Outspoken, logically argued rejection of religious belief can no longer be condemned as blasphemy, and, while Humanists rightly question religious beliefs on intellectual grounds, they studiously avoid giving personal offence to religious adherents. Humanists can freely forswear the oath in court and their children can be withdrawn from acts of faith in state school assemblies. They stand for freedom of opinion

and toleration and are opposed to bigotry.

However, should a Humanist ever be subject to a criminal charge and wish – for personal, financial, or self-justifying reasons – to defend himself without professional legal assistance, this booklet will be of inestimable value.

It sets out the procedure of the Magistrates' and Crown Courts with admirable simplicity, takes a defendant through each step in his prosecution – summons or arrest, appearance in court, plea, trial, sentence and even appeal. It gives him excellent guidance on the steps to be taken in preparing his defence, the books to read and the witnesses to interview. And, finally, it explains in simple terms the most important and most elusive features of all – the strategy and tactics of the trial itself.

A more lucid, easily assimilated, guide it is hard to imagine.

You're telling us!

Balls, belles, brutality

DAVE Godin's obituary of the talented American actress Butterfly McQueen (February) refers to a "subversive sub-text" within the film *Gone with the Wind*. He later refers to the author, from which some people will wonder whether he means the original novel as well, since this has an author, Margaret Mitchell, whereas the film does not, but is a joint effort of producer, director, scriptwriter, cameraman and probably many others, especially the talented cast.

This needs stressing since the film takes a somewhat different stance from the book. The novel, in giving a romantic picture of the old South – all balls, belles and barbecues – largely glosses over the brutal slave system which propped it up. In so far as black people come into the novel at all, it is mostly as appendages to the whites. I know it cannot always be assumed that an author concurs in the views expressed by her characters, but here there seems little doubt – the narration shows a thoroughly racist attitude being approved of. Slavery is shown as being appropriate to the blacks; freedom doesn't agree with them; the Ku Klux Klan is glamourised; Rhett Butler casually mentions the lynching of a black man for being "uppity to a white lady," and he insults Prissy in racist language which I don't care to repeat.

It's easy to see that when the book came to be filmed alterations would have to be made. A film will always have a wider and longer-lasting distribution than a book, and by the later 1930s there was considerable, even if belated, pressure for black people's civil rights, even in the deep South. The memory of D W Griffith's deeply racist *Birth of a Nation* (1917), which held up the vile Ku Klux Klan for admiration, and was widely held to have some responsibility for a resurgence of that organisation, must still have been vivid. The film therefore concentrates on the problems – sexual, family and economic – of Scarlett O'Hara and her friends, and the racist attitude of the book is almost entirely removed.

True, the slaves are largely invisible, but the two main black characters, played by Hattie McDaniel and Butterfly McQueen, are depicted with real humanity. And the KKK is never mentioned in the film; the fracas in which Scarlett's husband dies is just a showdown with a criminal gang (colour not stated); there is no lynching of an "uppity" black man, and Rhett Butler's nasty taunt is blue-pencilled.

All of which is a vast improvement. But a "subversive sub-text"? It is the function of art to be all things to all men, to be capable of showing many layers and admitting of many interpretations; every generation will find something new in a well-known book or film. Dave Godin's interpretation sounds fascinating; a full-length article by him on *Gone with the Wind* would be both informative and instructive. Not least because, in my ignorance, I could not see that subversive sub-text, unless we are to assume that both book and film are exercises in irony. Could that be so?

ELSIE KARBACZ
Colchester

Animal rights

TERRY Liddle (February letters) and I would probably agree about the ethics of many practices of animal use and abuse by human beings. At the worst end of the scale might be the staging of dog-fights for wager and for sadistic kicks; animal testing of cosmetics would be in the same league. Fox hunting (the romantic fancy dress and the quasi-ecological excuses notwithstanding) is unacceptable too. So far so good!

We might, bearing in mind what is perceived as "their right to life, liberty and natural enjoyment," object to circuses and perhaps even more to training sniffer-dogs to risk horrible injury and painful death detecting explosives for our safety.

But what about the liberty and natural enjoyment of life "rightfully" to be the lot of guide dogs for the blind? Mr Liddle's simplistic either/or absolutism might cause him some difficulty in distinguishing ethically between, say, Mr David Blunkett and a bullfighter; my amiable relativism enables me instantly to admire the one and to condemn the other. (Although I am sorry for the poor old dog sitting through all those ignorant and ill-mannered "debates").

It is in respect of our eating that the incoherence of ethical absolutism is most obvious. The vegetarian will not kill animals for food but will eat the products of living animals (dairy goods and eggs). A vegan (one who eschews the use of any animal product whether or not killing is entailed thereby) wrote recently to one of our letters pages pointing out that the vegetarian has ethical problems: *what would the vegetarian have us do about surplus bull calves, surplus cock chicks and old cows and old hens past their productive life?* The vegetarian would either have to kill these (in which case he might as well rear them humanely, kill them likewise and then eat them or feed these redundant animals until natural death (a death that might be unpleasant – an old bull too stiff to bend down to graze might die horribly of starvation; he might fall and be unable to rise). In any case, feeding animals simply because you won't kill them is a waste of real resources – a waste that a meatless human diet is held to obviate. The vegan sought to avoid all this ethical wheeling and dealing by advocating a diet solely of vegetable matter. He thought he had played the ace of trumps; he had not.

To grow food crops you have to fight our natural competitors – in this island mostly rabbits. You might shoot them. But if your ethics will not let you do your own dirty work then you can adopt Mr Liddle's evasion (an evasion worthy of some old churches and some "new" political parties I might name) and introduce natural predators "which live by eating these species."

This seems to me to be the ecological equivalent of the oldest trick in the imperialist book – set the inferior beings at one another for our benefit – divide and rule! It undoubtedly works but is it ethical (even supposing the introduced predators don't themselves come to pose another problem for us and for other species, prompting our killing them sooner or later)?

One of the predators introduced to kill rabbits is the organism responsible for myxomatosis. I have seen, within a few hundred yards of my home, scores of wretched sufferers from this appalling condition; I would rather be shot in

health, and eaten, than be so infected.

Which brings me to the *reductio ad absurdum* of the absolutist position encapsulated in Mr Liddle's "right to life, liberty" etc. If he and I together came upon an animal in terminal pain we would, I think, both feel bound to kill it. He would have the ethical problem of metamorphosing his perception of its right to live into our shared and evident duty to kill it. As with Blunkett and the bullfighter, I think my unashamed relativistic, eclectic, but benign, empiricism is more in keeping with Humanism than his uncertain hold on slippery absolutes that look as though they are lifted from some *a priori* creed.

ERIC STOCKTON
Orkney

HEATHER Evans (January) obviously regards my December letter as "not worth our reading." Yet it contained reasoned argument – something entirely absent from *her* letter!

Yes, I have now read the preface and chapter one of Singer's *Animal Liberation*, and I have found nothing to change my view that the idea of "animal rights" is based on a fundamental flaw. When we talk about "human rights" we take for granted that those rights are reciprocal; that we have both the rights – and the responsibility of allowing those rights to other humans. When we try to extend those same rights across the species boundary, there is no reciprocity. Other animals, in their natural state, do not even extend any such responsibilities to their species, but only to their immediate shared gene pool – the pack, the pride or the herd. Yes, I am "guilty" of being speciesist, but so is nature, so is the very word "Humanist."

Let's face it – the case for the very concept of "Human Rights" is not based on pure altruism but on enlightened self-interest – as indeed is the concept of "society."

R G TEE
Pudsey

Stirner stuff II

I DID not ask Carl Pinel (his letter, January) where, in *The Ego and His Own*, Max Stirner exalted "crime." I asked where Stirner exalted "the criminal as the anarchist *par excellence*," as Mr Pinel claimed in his article on Camus in the November issue. This he has not shown – which is not surprising since Stirner was no anarchist, despite his frequent labelling as one.

The passage Mr Pinel quotes is a piece of poetic rhetoric concluding several pages examining the idea of law as something sacred and hence any violation of it being regarded as "criminal." Since it forms part of a much wider treatment of "crime" than can properly be treated in a letter, I will spare your patience and simply refer interested readers to Stirner's book.

S E PARKER
London W2

Why I left

THE recent debate in your pages over the relationship between humanism and republicanism highlights why I left the NSS after just one year.

➤ Turn to Page 14

You're telling us!

From Page 13

I had naively assumed that "humanism" and "secularism" were simply synonyms for "non-superstitionism" only to find that they were really a cover for a disparate collection of views which tend to be socialist and/or Green in origin.

From a purely tactical point of view, is it wise to so aggressively alienate atheists such as myself who are most assuredly neither socialists nor Greens?

NIGEL G MEEK
Bromley

Damnation!

IT DOES occur to me, with regard to the discussion on Hell that, as always, the Christian teachings thereon, apart from being plain daft, were or are, founded on a complete scientific fallacy – that of eternal fires, that "are not quenched" and go on forever.

For surely this is not correct. Even the Sun will one day be extinguished, having used up all its inflammable material, so that it will eventually go cold and die – and all of us with it.

STANLEY J MACE
Swanage

IT IS certainly Good News that the Christian church has abolished Hell – or at least downgraded it to "nothingness." I for one feel quite relieved. Not that I believed for a minute in the existence of Hell, or any life after death. However, it wasn't nice knowing that millions of people assumed that after my death I was going to spend eternity enduring the most appalling suffering: bad vibes, you know.

How strange that now a Christian's idea of Hell (Nothingness) is a non-believer's idea of reality – that is, the natural order. At first one might be led to believe that the gulf between Christianity and Humanism is narrowing; but on consideration, it seems the opposite is true.

HELEN COX
Porlock

Ethical origins

WHAT makes Nicholas Tate, the Government's chief National Curriculum advisor, think morals/ethics are anything to do with religion (February, page seven)? When Moses came down from the mountain with his Tablets of Stone, he immediately ordered the *deaths* of those who made the Golden Calf idol (no need to make idols now that God looked like a human being!). Moses then turned his attention to Caanan, saying that it was permissible to *steal* and to *kill* to obtain that land. Obviously a case of say one thing and do another. Abraham paid in silver for his plot of Caanan land.

The first known written Law/Ethical Code was by Ur Namu (2100 BC): ancient Iraq (Sumerian) was Humanistic in form; only five rules survived. This was followed by the code of Hammurabi (1760 BC): ancient Iraq (Babylonian), whose Code was in an eye-for-an-eye, tooth-for-a-tooth form. Later, in about 1250 BC, we have the Moses Code. Also,

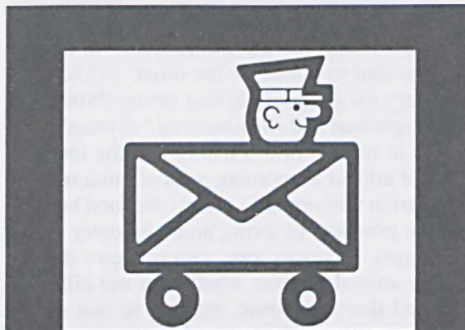
ancient Egypt had some excellent ethical proverbs and religious "clean food" rules; Moses was educated in Egypt.

It is very instructive to observe the origins of things: the social invention of ethics/law in ancient Iraq was motivated by a *rapid* rise in city populations, due to the invention of agriculture. Ethics is thus a relatively practical set of rules, meant to guide human nature.

ROBERT AWBERY
Reading

Forces of darkness

I WAS astonished by the letter headed *Ad nauseam* (February). Whatever does Peter Wreford do at the New Life Publishing Company? I assume he does something similar to our own excellent magazine – except on the other side (the title suggests this to me, anyway).



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

And why would he think Christians are "among our closest friends" if, as he says we criticise them *ad nauseam* (and I agree that we do criticise them)? This is our purpose, Mr Wexford – and if you are still interested in reading *The Freethinker*, you will read more of the same!

Incidentally, we do have other things to talk about in our private lives, but, as I say, *The Freethinker* is for the aforesaid purpose. And it is, as far as I know, the only magazine directing a "leading light" against the overwhelming forces of superstition, darkness and ignorance!

IRENE C CHANDLER
Hertfordshire

PETER Wreford has been "forced to the conclusion" that Freethinkers must have practising Christians among their closest friends. Ridiculous! No unbeliever worth his or her salt would want to be friends with someone whose creed forbids marriage to one of us and which sees us in the same light as murderers, whoremongers, idolators, sorcerers and liars (Rev.

21). No unbeliever would want to be friends with people who often detest each other because of theological differences.

To those Freethinkers who *do* have Christian friends, I would urge them to preserve the purity of our unbelief and – if I may quote out of context – "come ye out from among them!"

RAY McDOWELL
Co Antrim

Their kind of day

DID any of your readers notice that in January three consecutive weeks of the *Radio Times* "My Kind of Day" feature was occupied by people with a religious bent?

First was Martin Bashir (*Panorama*), who we learned, draws strength from his local church, but sees himself as "fallen and sinful" and reaches out to the "creator for his forgiveness" and as the scripture says "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Very nice.

This article rang the alarm bells as the church had just announced that Hell was now officially "a state of non-being." I cut out the article and had a side-bet with my father that the following week would bring an article in the same rut.

The following week, "My Kind of Day" had George Baker (TV detective Wexford), who we were told, doesn't sing except in church, arises from his slumber at 3.30am – and finds this a good time to pray. He also believes that the "power of thought is quite spectacular healing."

On the radio, Uncle Tom, of *The Archers* fame, had just had an intellectual debate about the ordination of women priests, with which he strongly disagrees. More alarm bells, and the bet went into "roll-over" until the following week.

And sure enough, the last "My Kind of Day" had a Benedictine Abbess, Dame Paula Fairlie (*Everyman*: "Suburban Sisters"), who, we learned, has a staple diet of Psalms which embrace the whole range of human emotions and stands before God to ask for his forgiveness (for what, we did *not* learn). According to the Abbess, "silence and enclosure are essential for a healthy life of prayer." Unfortunately, only one novice has stayed at the Abbey since 1988 – maybe they should pray for more recruits instead of for forgiveness.

I watch very little TV but couldn't resist the *Everyman* programme, which was a very useful lesson in how not to waste your life away.

After all this, I wrote to the Editor of *Radio Times*, requesting three consecutive "My Kind of Day" features by persons for whom religion matters not one jot.

My side-bet has been rolled over again – and modified to whether or not *Radio Times* comes up with the goods. I think not!

DM GOULD
Stockport

● Pressure on space has forced me to hold over many letters from this issue. They will all be published, eventually: Editor.

Discussion

Myra Hindley: A suitable case for ill-treatment?

by Leslie James

THE public interest provoked by Myra Hindley's 5,000-word letter published in *The Guardian* on December, 18, 1995, followed by Ministerial-level discussion about whether she should be removed to an "open" prison, are not without their implications for Humanists.

What should the Humanist's attitude be to the life-long incarceration of Ian Brady and Myra Hindley and to the latter's plea to be released and rehabilitated?

In the *Guardian Weekend* of September 30, 1995, under the title "A Cure for Murder," Anne Moir and David Jessel provided an edited extract from their recent book *A Mind to Crime* (published by Michael Joseph). The whole of the book aims to reveal how biological factors are a dominant element in the causation of crime.

We learn that males, by virtue of their gender, are much more prone to criminal behaviour than females, that free-circulating androgen (a hormone) promotes aggressive and anti-social behaviour, that high or low levels of serotonin in the brain are associated with socially undesirable behaviour, and that lesions in the temporal lobe of the brain cause unpredictable outbursts of emotion. And all these unfavourable biological conditions are ordained by the individual's genes. While it may not be possible to say that criminals are predestined, it cannot be disputed that genetic brain disorders or personality defects interacting with an unfavourable environment give rise to crime. The final chapter of the book indicates that some brain malfunctions respond to a combination of medication and psychological treatment, and criminal conduct can thus be eliminated, or at least controlled. The book constitutes a substantial scientific confirmation of determinism, though the authors seem a little reluctant to accept the logical conclusion of their findings.

The Moir and Jessel extract was headed with an inset which showed two photographs of Hindley, one at eight years of age and the other at the time of her prosecution as one of the Moors Murderers. The inset bore a reference to female psychopaths, and made the point that psychopathy wears the mask of sanity and that those afflicted by it feel justified in their actions, however horrific. The inescapable implication of this inset was that Myra Hindley was a psychopath – and this led her to protest vigorously at being so labelled. She insisted that she had been examined by psychiatrists and a senior psychologist and that the results of all these examinations

had ruled out psychopathy or any evidence of a disordered mind. She followed this up with her 5,000-word letter to *The Guardian* in which she sought to establish her normal mental processes and told how she came to participate with Brady in their joint atrocities.

The significant points in her letter are that, in support of her repudiation of psychopathy, she accepts "full responsibility" for the part she played, and that in her early years she was a normal, happy girl, notwithstanding that her father drank heavily at weekends and used violence towards her mother – and towards her too when she tried to restrain him. During this unhappy period of her life, she contrived to keep her feelings under control, and she now thinks that this "fatal ability" to control her emotions was probably a main ingredient of her relationship with Brady. When she gained employment in the office where Brady worked, she developed a fatal attraction to him and eventually became totally dominated by him, criminally amoral and callous.

After the first murder committed by Brady, he said she would have suffered the same fate if she had shown signs of abandoning him. Surprisingly, she claims that she was more culpable than Brady in that, as a woman, she was able more easily to abduct the child victims. Arrest and trial brought her closer to Brady and she even discouraged him from suicide and exchanged love letters with him. She accepts that she was wicked and evil but resents the fact that the tabloid press denies her the right to claim that she has changed and has condemned her as a permanent icon of evil.

The letter is thus, by implication, a plea for public sympathy, release and rehabilitation. She complains that not enough credit has been given to her change of character, though she admits failure to express public repentance, and makes an obscure distinction between remorse and repentance.

The letter provoked considerable comment in the press, but no one raised the crucial question of whether, in the light of the behavioural sciences, she could be held truly morally responsible.

In so far as the crimes committed by Brady and Hindley were horrifyingly unnatural, both of them could be labelled psychopaths. The definition given of psychopathology by the Royal Medico-Psychological Association, as recorded by the Royal Commission on Mental Illness and Mental Deficiency 1954-

1957, included "sexual offences and violent actions with little motivation and an entire absence of self-restraint, which may go as far as homicide" as symptomatic of the disease. This was surely exemplified by Hindley?

She admits her responsibility, even her greater culpability, but significantly provides no evidence of any great moral struggle between good and evil. Her affection for Brady seems to have been the dominant element in her thought-processes. Society clings to the notion of freedom of the will, and the criminal law aided by the Church operates on this assumption, but there is little evidence of its operation in Hindley's case. No transcendental agent intervened to guide her.

It may well be that the crimes she and Brady committed were so unspeakably horrible that imprisonment for the rest of their lives is justified to signify society's outrage at the depth of depravity to which they had sunk, and to provide a stern measure of general deterrence should anyone be tempted to emulate them. To that extent it may be regrettably necessary that they should *both* serve as icons of evil.

Reticent

At the same time, we need to ask ourselves whether, if we had experienced exactly the same genetic and environmental circumstances as Brady and Hindley, could we have behaved differently? And if the answer is *no*, then, while using them as deterrent examples for the rest of us, we need to treat them with compassion and humanity. Anne Moir and David Jessel are strangely reticent on this aspect of crime and punishment.

Unfortunately, we are a retributory society, and there is no doubt that if Hindley were released she would be in danger from acts of private or public revenge. For that reason, if no other, her release and rehabilitation in society are probably impracticable.

Ironically, as a Humanist I ask myself if man, with his instincts, had been part of the Almighty's wonderful design, why did God clutter up the sex instinct with so many potential deviations? Why paedophilia, why homosexuality, why obscenity? Why, in subjection to sex, are we confronted with the problems of contraception, abortion, and population explosions? Is not the sexual function's close association with the excretory function itself a sad confusion? Is it not all a sorry mess?

● Leslie James is a barrister and a former Chief Officer of Police.

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

Birmingham Humanist Group: Information: Tova Jones on 0120 4544692.

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, April 7, 5.30 for 6pm: Susan Frost: *Charter '88 and its Plans for the Future*

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 Lighter 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, March 21, 7.30pm: Peter Brearey: *The Freethinker - Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.*

Crawley: Information: Charles Stewart 01293 511270.

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

Ealing Humanists: Information: Derek Hill 0181 422 4956 or Charles Rudd 0181 904 6599. Thursday, March 28, 8pm, at Friends' Meeting House, 17 Woodville Road, Ealing: Richard Headicar (Socialist): *How to Abolish Money!*

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). April 12: Nettie Pollard: *Liberty (NCCL) and its Contribution to the Gay Rights Campaign.*

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, April 2, 8pm: Annual General Meeting, followed by discussion.

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 Caledonian University, Glasgow.

Glasgow Group: Information: Hugh H Bowman, Riverside Park, Glasgow G44 3PG; 0141 633 3748. Sunday, March 17, 2.30pm: Sheila McLean: *Law and Ethics in Medicine and Access to the Media.*

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 Teague on 0113 2577009. Swarthmore Centre, Leeds. Tuesday, March 12, 7.30pm: Dr Kirk Mann, Leeds University: *The Underclass - A Race Apart?* April 16: AGM and Supper.

Leicester Secular Society: Information: Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB; 0116 2622250. Sunday meetings at 6.30pm.

Lewisham Humanist Group: Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, March 28, 8pm: Tony Milne: *Beyond the Warming - a Critique of the Greenhouse Theory.*

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.* April 12: Discussion on "Becoming a Humanist."

Norwich Humanist Group: Information: Brian Snoad on 01603 455101. Martineau Hall, 21a Colegate, Norwich. Thursday, March 21, 7.30pm: Arthur Hamlin: *Dowsing for Health.*

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, April 3, 8pm: Carl Pinel: *Roots of Gay Oppression.*

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 Hall Street, Offerton, Stockport SK1 4DE; 0161 480 0732.

Sutton Humanist Group: Friends House, Cedar Road Sutton. Meetings 7.30pm for 8pm. Wednesday, March 13. Annual General Meeting.

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.

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

NOTICE

The Humanist Housing Association cannot give preference to Humanists when considering applicants. This is in keeping with the law, which does not allow discrimination by religion or lack of it, even in housing associations set up by churches or bodies such as ourselves