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The

Free thinker

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

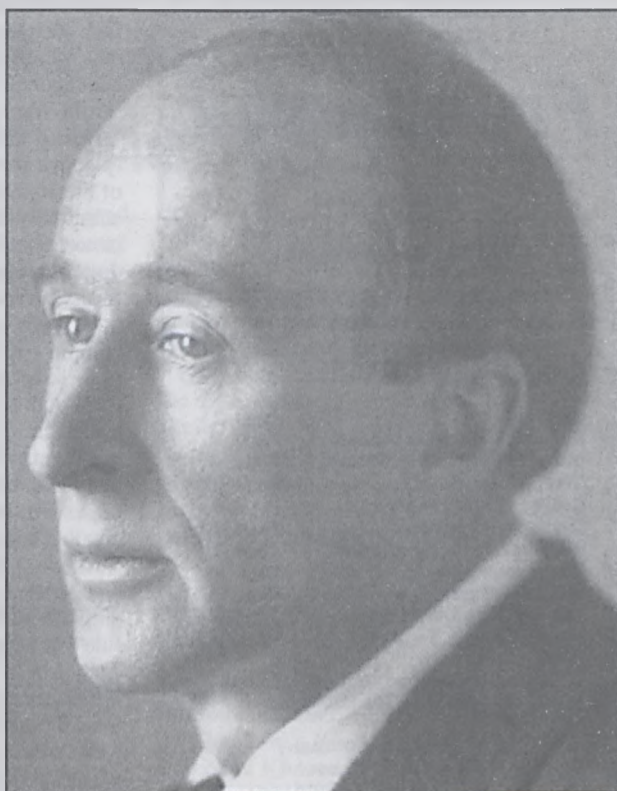
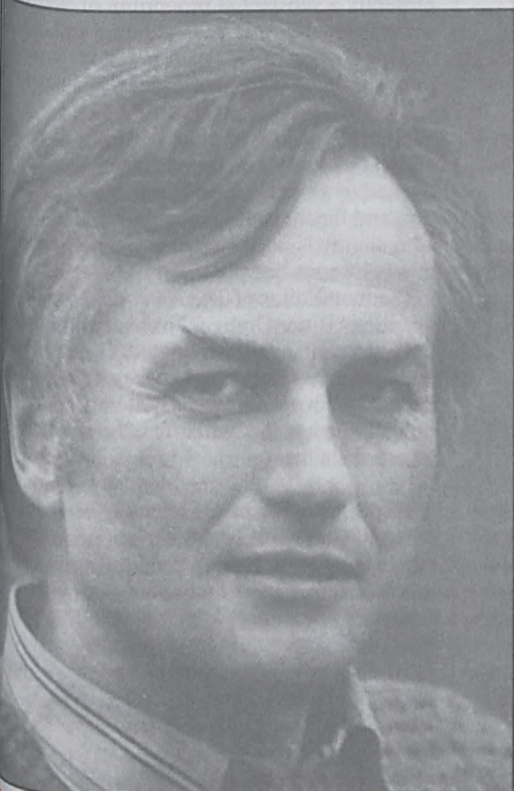
Vol 116 No 8

August 1996

Unbelief spans arts and science

From...

**DELIUS
TO
DAWKINS**



Dawkins – see Colin McCall, Page 7

Delius – see Terry Sanderson, Page 11

CAREY'S CHICKENS COME HOME TO ROOST

Nicolas Walter: Page 5

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Up Front

Bitter Orange

WITH brutish howls, their features twisted to soccer hooligan ugliness, they brandish the flag of a "Union" which no longer finds them either profitable or militarily useful. They are the Protestant underclass of the six counties of Ireland still controlled by the British Government. They are disfiguring their streets and our television screens – yet again.

Strangely, however, my detestation of their savagery is tempered by a certain sympathy, for there on the periphery of the riot slither the suited ones – the manipulators, urging on the

mob which is doing the risky bit of what may be a final attempt to maintain Orange hegemony in this corner of Ireland.

And then I am angry again as the paramilitary wing of the Orange Order – sometimes known as the Royal Ulster Constabulary – with astounding ferocity lays into the now equally unlovely crowd of Roman Catholics which tries to block the progress of the Protestant rabble.

And then another wave of near-compassion as I consider that the Prod placards protest loyalty to a "Crown" which would dearly like to ditch them, now that they are actually *costing* money – £4,000 million a year is the lowest estimate I have seen – instead of *making* it for the British, as they did in days gone by with their shipyards and their textiles; now that John Bull no longer needs Ireland as backdoor military protection or as a source of World War cannon fodder...

Here is another lost tribe which will assuredly go the way of the Boers and the Rednecks of the American South – a slow process, admittedly, but one which might at least begin in earnest when we have a government which does not rely upon the votes of Unionist MPs for its survival.

My view – as I have hinted before in this column – is that the only permanent solution to these recurring Troubles, these outrages from both sets of Christians, is the creation of a secular, 32-county state of Ireland. But that is a dream not to be realised overnight; the bowlered, besashed *users* and their yobbish dupes will see to that, and religion is the principal weapon in their battle to retain power.

Although there were good – bad – economic and political reasons why the English ruling-class for so long encouraged the "divide and rule" strategy of keeping Protestants and Catholics at each other's throats, those *ersatz* differences have long had a life of their own, even though the former reasons for staying in Ireland have gone.

IT WAS quite depressing the other day to come across *The Freethinker* for August, 1985, and to find that its editorial might almost have been reprinted, word-for-word, in the current issue of our journal:

"This year's 'marching season' in Northern Ireland was the nastiest for a decade. Violence bordering on mayhem was caused by members and supporters of the Orange Order, following the Chief Constable's prudent decision to re-route a parade away from a predominantly Catholic area of Portadown. The town is a notorious stronghold of Orange zealots who regard themselves as being entitled to display their swaggering arrogance and flaunt their banners wherever they please".

The churches in Ireland have always looked to their own interests, exploiting religious differences, promoting segregation and opposing social reforms, the editorial noted, adding a point which is even more acute today: "It is difficult to calculate the financial burden of the union and impossible to assess the damage it has inflicted on Britain's image in the world. The British people are baffled by the perversities of the situation in Northern Ireland and surveys show that they are becoming increasingly disenchanted with the connection..."

Then, as now, "the reaction of these valiant [Protestant] defenders of law and order if they don't get their own way is a threat to take the law into their own hands. This attitude stems from the fact that for far too long law and order was for the most part in their hands... The situation in Northern Ireland is the outcome of successive British governments' foolish and dangerous policies.

"By arming the Protestants in the years after Partition, Britain created a Frankenstein's monster that was always likely to get out of control. The police and other 'security' forces have been openly identified with the Protestant interest from the start. The Royal Ulster Constabulary had its own Orange lodge, and presently a substantial proportion of policemen come from Orange-Unionist families..."

"One section of Northern Ireland's population is imbued with 'master race' delusions, while the other has no confidence in Whitehall's ability to protect it from discrimination and violence. The province has been likened to a bubbling cauldron of hatred bigotry and fanaticism. It should be added that Christianity is one of the main ingredients of this poisonous brew".

The then Editor of *The Freethinker* used the headline "Bitter Orange" for his editorial; I have stolen it. Well, why not? It is every bit as apposite today as it was 11 years ago – and I cannot believe that the not-quite-all-party agenda now on the agenda will affect the fundamentals of the situation.

THE ultimate success of meaningful change, when it is attempted, will depend upon the very young from both communities, whose minds may not be entirely poisoned with love of Christ and hatred of their neighbours.

In the aftermath of the Ormeau Road affair our Leeds-based contributor Tony Akkermans had the following letter published in *The Guardian*: "Picture the scene: a country divided along religious lines, half and half Protestant and Catholic. Segregated schools, communities split into factions, barely on speaking terms. Northern Ireland? No, the Netherlands in the late forties and fifties.

"An enlightened government, sick of the 'them and us' mentality began to encourage closure of denominational schools. In my own village, the Catholic and Protestant schools were merged into a secular school where ethics were taught instead of religion; this process was repeated all over the country.

"Thirty years on, Holland has become a tolerant, homogeneous society, operating along humanist principles; religion for the minority can still be had in the churches.

"The problems in Northern Ireland will not be solved unless a start is made with bringing children out of sectarian isolation so that they can learn to grow up together in harmony".

There is a way forward. Perhaps the imposition of such a system (by the Crown to which the Loyalists are so noisily devoted, of course) could be one of the last acts of the British Occupation – before, at Washington's behest the UN forces arrive from Bangladesh and Nigeria to patrol the streets of Belfast in the inevitably turbulent run-up to reunification.

Peter Brearey

The

Freethinker

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

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

CONTENTS

Up Front	Page 2
Humanist leaflet for schools	Page 3
Down to Earth: Colin McCall	Page 4
Carey's Crusade	Page 5
Call for honesty in schools	Page 6
Dawkins' latest book	Page 7
Witness for the Persecution	Page 8
Glory, glory, glory!	Page 10
Delius: A Mass of Life review	Page 11
You're Telling Us! Letters	Page 12
What's On	Page 16

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Humanist leaflet aims to free children from indoctrination

FREETHINKING teachers, parents and, of course, very many school students will welcome a new initiative by the Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists – an attractive leaflet aimed at helping those who wish to do so to withdraw from religious indoctrination in the classroom.

Available in good time for the new school year and called *We're Getting the Hell Out of Here!*, it emphasises that both teachers and students can withdraw from the collective acts of Christian worship that schools are required by the government to have every day.

Instead of Christians being offered the choice to opt into the acts of worship, everyone must opt out of their way to ask to be withdrawn.

Pointing out that both teachers and students can withdraw, but that parents or guardians must apply on behalf of under-18s, the leaflet says: "If you are not convinced by Christian claims – because you are an agnostic, atheist, Buddhist, Hindu, Humanist, Judaist, Muslim, or doubtful – you can choose to withdraw from collective worship in your school. You don't have to give any reason."

It notes that a February, 1995, survey of 1361 British schoolchildren aged 13 to 15 found that one-in-three are agnostic and a further one-in-four are atheist – a combined total of more than 58 per cent.

Most usefully, it carries a form-letter giving the necessary wording to the Head Teacher: "I request that (name of pupil), who attends your

school, be withdrawn from all acts of worship at the school. I also request that he/she be withdrawn from religious education classes. In place of these activities, I request that additional lessons and/or sporting activities be provided so that time at school is not wasted."

The Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists' Roy Saich said: "We hope the leaflets will be widely used. The classrooms of publicly-funded schools are not the places for sermons about Hell – or anything else.

"What is lacking in schools is proper moral education, covering moral philosophy and secular ethical traditions".

Copies of the leaflets are available from Mr Saich at 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth CV8 2HB, but please do enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your request.

The *Freethinker* understands that the Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists would have no objection to groups copying and using the leaflets in other parts of the country.



Dawkins 'associates' with the NSS

PROFESSOR Richard Dawkins has said he is "delighted" to become an Honorary Associate of the National Secular Society, writes **Keith Porteous Wood**.

Professor Dawkins, whose latest book, *Climbing Mount Improbable*, is reviewed by Colin McCall on Page 7, joins a distinguished panel which includes Edward Blishen, Professor Francis Crick, the Rt Hon Michael Foot, Benny Green, Professor Ted Honderich, George Melly, Jonathan Miller and Lord Raglan, but which was weakened by the recent

deaths of Brigid Brophy and Lord Houghton.

We are delighted that Richard Dawkins has accepted our invitation. As well as being a distinguished academic at Oxford, he is well-known for his public attacks on superstition and his defence of Darwinian theory.

He recently addressed a packed meeting at the LSE, insisting that science could serve a similar function to religious education through its awakening a sense of enquiry and a wonder of the universe. On Sunday, July 20, he propounded his views on religion in a 10-minute nationwide lunchtime spot on ITV's *Agenda*.

SPES post falls vacant

THE post of Secretary to the South Place Ethical Society will shortly become vacant as a result of the decision of Nina Khare to join REFUGE, the organisation which supports women seeking sanctuary from domestic violence.

Expressions of interest in the full-time post are invited, and should include a short CV and details of past and present activities within the broad Humanist movement. Applicants must be computer literate. Applications should be marked

"Confidential" and addressed to Miss Barbara Smoker, SPES, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP.

● Nina Khare took up her post with SPES in July, 1991, having previously worked for the BHA. She is a fourth-generation freethinker, coming from the Essex families of Warner and High. Her mother, Jill Warner, worked in the office of the NSS.

At REFUGE she will be Finance and Administration Manager at the Chiswick establishment founded by Erin Pizzey, which became the model for similar initiatives around the world.

'Green light' to murder

A KUWAITI Islamic Court has declared Christian convert Robert Hussein an apostate. "This verdict gives the green light for anyone to kill me on the street," said the 44-year-old businessman after the trial. Hussein openly declared his conversion from Shi'ite Islam to Christianity last December. A trio of Islamist lawyers promptly filed a lawsuit against him in a religious court, demanding that he be declared an apostate and have his Muslim civil rights revoked.

As an apostate, he will automatically be divorced, lose all custody rights to his two children and relinquish his family inheritance.

From his current hiding place, Hussein said: "This court decision is a clear message to the world as to exactly what Islam is. If you look at Sudan, Iran or Saudi Arabia, you can see that they are all trying to impose Islamic values on everyone. It is amazing that these Islamic leaders in our governments go to Europe and tell everyone how tolerant Islam is. But when they get home, they forget all about brotherhood." Source: *Evangelicals Now*, July.

Easing of the fatwa?

IT WAS surprising but encouraging to see *Time Out* carrying a notice that Salman Rushdie was to sign copies of his new book, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, at a Dillon's bookshop in London on July 4, writes **Norman Bacrac**.

We understand that this was the first time advance notice of an appearance by Rushdie had been publicised.

I duly queued up with my copy of *The Satanic Verses*, which Salman cheerfully signed. He remembered that seven years ago, in July, 1989, the South Place Ethical Society and Larry Adler had organised a public reading in Conway Hall of extracts from the book, read by Martin Amis, Michael Foot MP, Mark Fisher MP, Hanif Khureishi, Gita Sahgal and others.

It may be that the book-signing presages an easing of the restrictions forced on Rushdie by the notoriously unfair *fatwa*.

● Norman Bacrac is Editor of the *Ethical Record* and a member of the Council of Management of the National Secular Society.



Down to Earth

with Colin McCall

Burning issues

"MY confidence in High Calvinism has been dented", bemoaned the Reverend Donald Macleod, Professor of Systematic Theology at the Free Church College in Edinburgh, after he had been cleared of five charges of indecent assault (*The Guardian*, June 26). "I don't understand how people who hold Christian beliefs can end up as virtual persecutors".

I appreciate Mr Macleod's contempt for his "virtual persecutors", but his reference to their Christian beliefs seems less relevant. As is well known, the founder of his church was not content with virtual persecution. Let us, for Mr Macleod's benefit, recall Calvin's declaration about the heretic Servetus: "If he come, and my influence can avail, I shall not suffer him to depart alive".

Calvin's influence did "avail". When Servetus passed through Geneva on his way to Italy, he was arrested and, after a long trial, he was sentenced to be burned alive. Among his "crimes", he had issued an edition of Ptolemy's *Geography* in which Judæa was described, not as "a land flowing with milk and honey", but as, in the main, meagre, barren and inhospitable.

As AD White recounts (*Warfare of Science and Theology*), "this simple statement of geographical fact" was used by Calvin "with fearful power". Servetus pleaded in vain that "he had simply drawn the words from a previous edition of Ptolemy; in vain did he declare that this statement was a simple geographical truth of which there were ample proofs; it was answered that such language 'necessarily inculpated Moses, and grievously outraged the Holy Ghost'".

Castellio was another who incurred Calvin's wrath on biblical matters, this time for treating *The Song of Solomon* as a love poem rather than a collection of mystical musings. "Calvin and Beza persecuted Castellio, covered him with obloquy, and finally drove him to starvation and death", says White.

And J M Robertson points out that Matthieu Gripaldi, a lecturer in law, who remonstrated with Calvin against the sentence on Servetus, "brought upon himself the angry scrutiny of the heretic hunter, and was banished from the neighbourhood".

Yet Mr Macleod can't understand how followers of John Calvin can end up as virtual persecutors!

Pope Domenica!

THERE may never have been a female Pope before now (Pope Joan being highly improbable), but a couple of popesses took part in demonstrations against Pope John Paul II during his recent visit to Germany. One, former prostitute Domenica Niehoff, was crowned

Pope Domenica in a Berlin Lesbian and Gay Festival, which protested against the Roman Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality, contraception and the status of women, reports Denis Staunton (*The Observer*, 23 June).

Berlin's Cardinal George Sterzinsky accused Domenica and her friends of "stirring up hatred against the real Pope", and putting the Cardinal in mind of "the worst period of the French Revolution and the darkest days of communism".

Nazism, rather than communism, was on the "real" Pope's mind as he celebrated Mass in the stadium built by Hitler for the 1936 Olympic Games, where Jesse Owens shattered the concept of Aryan superiority. The occasion was used to beatify two anti-Nazi priests; but, says, Staunton, John Paul "dropped a passage from the prepared text of his sermon claiming they were representative of the Church as a whole".

Very wise, too.

Right judgement

THE current issue of *New Humanist* pays a fine tribute to Richard Robinson, author of *An Atheist's Values*, which I reviewed for *The Freethinker* when it was first published way back in 1964.

"Among the questions of fact on which it is important to have a right judgement", Robinson wrote, "are the questions whether there is a God and whether there is a life after death. My answer to each of these questions is 'No'".

Absurdities

IT IS surprising how stupid habits catch on among journalists. In June, I criticised the Cambridge neurophysicist Ian Robertson for calling Richard Dawkins "the chief ayatollah of scientific materialism". Opening my *Guardian* on June 10, I find Mark Lawson, in a skittish "commentary" on the British Humanist Association's MORI poll, referring to Dawkins as "Our society's foremost Ayatollah of non-God".

Lawson also matches Robertson's absurdity about the Dawkinses of this world believing that "anything that can't be answered by the scientific method isn't worth talking about", with "Religion cannot explain the suffering; but nor can science address the beauties, mysteries and strangenesses of existence".

Then Lawson gets even sillier (and clumsier): "To the horror of those who hoped for in science a final rebuke to all scripture and incense, the great cosmologist Stephen Hawking goes to church".

How the *BMJ* came to publish Robertson's diatribe beggars belief, I wrote in June. I can only suppose that *The Guardian* must have thought Lawson's "commentary" clever. After

all, he facetiously uses the biological term "mutated" in his conclusion.

Christian cruelty

MICHAEL LLOYD, Chaplain of Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge is another Christian cleric who needs reminding of the history of his church. Replying to Polly Toynbee's assertion that religions are intolerant, he refers to "the essentially tolerant nature of our religion. Fanaticism and Christianity are not just different in degree, but in kind" (*The Independent*, June 8).

Under Paganism, says AD White, "a limit was imposed to the torture that could be administered; but when Christianity had become predominant through Europe, torture was developed with a cruelty never before known". In dealing with heretics and witches "there should be no limit to the torture" and "a great number of worthy people were sentenced to the most cruel death which could be invented. The records of their trials and deaths are frightful".

I am minded, too, of a relevant quote from Richard Robinson's *An Atheist's Values*. "It often happens", he said, "that a body, which fundamentally intolerant, turns tolerant when in a minority among a tolerant majority". He was thinking specifically of the Roman Catholic Church, but the remark is applicable to the Christian Church in general.

Grave decision

AS freethinkers well know, but the world at large doesn't, the Roman Catholic Church took charge of the excavations of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and foisted a false interpretation of them on the public. Cf *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?* (Golb); *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* (Baigent and Leigh); *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered* (Eisenman and Wise).

Now, ultra-Orthodox Jews, in the wake of their election success in Israel, are insisting on rabbinical supervision of all archaeological excavations in that country. (*The Independent*, June 8).

"Already we don't excavate ancient cemeteries even when we know where they are", said Professor Ami Mazar, Director of the Archaeological Institute at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. "This makes it very difficult to carry out research".

The ultra-Orthodox Haredim seek to end all excavations of graves, however old; demand that no excavation should start without the Chief Rabbi's permission, and that all work should be supervised by one of their own inspectors. "In future archaeologists could be sued for digging up a tomb", said Professor Mazar.

Add Judaism to that Richard Robinson quote on intolerance.

Reviewing Carey's Crusade for the faith and values of Judæo-Christian tradition, NICOLAS WALTER senses...

A genuine shift in our society

CRUSADES are really not a good idea at all. The original ones, which began exactly nine centuries ago, seemed all right at first, but as successive Christian armies marched or sailed from Western Europe through Eastern Europe or the Mediterranean to reconquer Palestine from the Muslims who had conquered it four centuries before, things went wrong and wronger. Christians and Muslims murdered millions of Muslims and Christians (and massacred Jews as well) and ruined several countries for two centuries. The two main results were the general one that European imperialism was launched on the path it has followed ever since, and the particular one that Palestine became the centre of contention it has remained ever since.

History (as Karl Marx said) repeats itself, first tragedy and then as farce. The original crusades, led by Popes, were unmitigated tragedy; the latest crusade, led by the Archbishop of Canterbury, has been an almost unmitigated farce, and indeed one of the most enjoyable episodes in the long decline of religious hegemony in public debate in this country. George Carey, prompted by recent statements from the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (the new quango in charge of centralised national educational policy), opened and closed a debate in the House of Lords on July 5 with speeches about moral decline (bad) and religious education (good), preceded and followed by articles and interviews all over the place.

He repeated his criticism of "moral relativism" and "privatised morality", of what he called a "widespread tendency to view what is good and right as a matter of private taste and individual opinion", in which "God is banished from the realm of the private hobby, and religion becomes a private activity for those who happen to have a taste for it". He appealed for "shared values", but attacked the values held by believers, alleging that they have "no ideo-

logical base for their ethical standards". He argued for a return to "the faith and values of the Judæo-Christian tradition", to "the teachings and example of Jesus Christ", and to the Ten Commandments, and warned that "we are in danger of squandering this inheritance". To be fair, he denied that his action amounted to a moral crusade, but this is what it was inevitably called, though it was also called a moral maze or moral muddle.

He got much support and little criticism from other speakers in the House of Lords (including representatives of the Jewish community, despite his Christian sectarianism) and from Government ministers, but little support and much criticism from the media, where reactions were almost universally hostile, even from many religious and right-wing commentators. It didn't help that his speech coincided with the latest developments in the 15-year saga of unhappy marriage and multiple adultery of the Prince and Princess of Wales and in the seven-year saga of the Trollopean feud between the Dean and Sub-Dean of Lincoln Cathedral, or that he made a series of stupid blunders both in his original statements and in his answers to questions. Whatever the reasons, the result was that radio and television news bulletins were followed by interviews and features, and newspaper reports were accompanied by leading articles and columns, which subjected the crude archiepiscopal propaganda to detailed and devastating demolition.

All the humanist organisations and many humanist individuals took part in the debate, especially on radio and television programmes and in newspaper correspondence columns, with more success than in any such episode since our move into Bradlaugh House two years ago. Barbara Smoker and Keith Porteous Wood, of the National Secular Society, and Robert Ashby, of the British Humanist Association, were in great demand (see Page 6), and I had the pleasure of saying both in print and on the air that Carey had broken his own rules by disobeying two of the Ten Commandments – he had taken the name of his Lord in vain, and he had borne false witness against the millions of

ordinary people (most of them parents and many of them teachers) who lead decent lives (and help others to lead decent lives) without worshipping imaginary beings or obeying arbitrary commands. But the really significant aspect of the episode was the equally unfavourable reaction from all sorts of people who are not committed humanists – teachers and educationists, scientists and philosophers, broadcasters and journalists – all agreeing that religion is not necessary for or even associated with morality and that religious worship and religious instruction in schools are not a proper basis for the moral education of children.

There has been a remarkable change since the last such episode – the Call to the Nation made two decades and two Archbishops ago – which had no permanent effect but was treated with considerable respect by the media. Perhaps the evidence that religious belief and observance are in serious decline, drawn from several recent public opinion surveys as well as from anecdotal testimony by many individuals, does indicate a genuine shift in our society. It is surely symptomatic that the *Daily Telegraph*, the main organ of conservatism in politics and religion, contributed to the debate with a lecture given by the playwright David Hare in Westminster Abbey explaining why he rejects Christianity and with a column by the journalist John Casey explaining why George Carey is wrong about religion and morality.

But there is no room for complacency. This situation makes it all the more necessary to continue the constant work of the freethought movement, not only to keep up the negative pressure on clerical power and propaganda, but also to build up the positive pressure for secular alternatives, in intellectual, educational, political, social and artistic thought and action. This work needs to be directed not so much against the ineffective sermons of the powerless head of the discredited Church of England, though these provide an ideal opportunity, as against the moralistic minority entrenched in both Houses of Parliament and in the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority, which stimulated and supported Carey's crusade.

CONGRATULATIONS on The Freethinker – some excellent articles therein, in addition to the usual high standard of the regular pieces. And I greatly enjoy the humour provided by some contributors: I grin every time I think of their witty essays!

So writes Vivien Gibson, of London W5, in a much appreciated (and unsolicited) testimonial.

In addition to Ms Gibson's note, we have received 757 sterling votes of confidence in what David Yeulett in this month's letters accurately describes as our *atheist journal*. Yes, we do mean contributions to the fund which plays such a vital role in keeping *The Freethinker* going despite the best efforts of whoever fixes postal charges!

Please...keep up the momentum: send cheques and POs (made payable to GWFoote & Company) to: *The Freethinker*, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP.

Many thanks to: H Ash, £1; J Hart, W Keeton, T Liddle, E Stone, E Strauss, £2 each; D Mitchell, £2.50; K Barbour, R Billen, B Clarke, D Gorrington, W Grant, S Holt, M Hyder Hussain, D Macintosh, P Rogers, R Simmonds, D Wood, K Wootton, £3 each; D Carney, £4; G Airey, B Aubrey, T Butterworth, M Carr, D Carter, D Clamp, E Douglas, J Dyke, A Fonesca, J Goldsmith, W Hall, P Harrigan, W Hill, B Johnson, C Jones, S Keery, JW Lewis, E McFadyen, A Negus, D Rogers, N Thompson, R Wood, £5 each; C Kensit, P Langford, £6 each; D Seymour, M Smith, B Van der Sloot, £8 each; A Blewitt, E Cherrington, J Clayden, R Condon, A Glaiser, D Hartley, H Jack, M Lofmark, C Matthews, R Meighan, H Millard, D Norman, I Norris, P Payne, P Proctor, A Rankin, K Spencer, R Stirrup, A Stuart, £10 each; M Ewing, £12; H Cox, L Wilkins, £13; P Lancaster, £15; T Bowen, £18; R Downes, M Hill, J McCallum, K Partington, £20 each; R Hutton, N Everitt, R Lewis, J Ross, £25 each; O D'Arcy, SKP, £40 each; B Smoker, £50.

Total from June 21 to July 18: £757. 50.

**Keep up
the
pace
– for
atheism!**

Carey campaign 'doomed to failure'

HUMANISTS CALL FOR HONESTY AND REASON IN SCHOOLS

GREATER stress on Christian morality in schools – as desired by the Archbishop of Canterbury – will do nothing to reverse so-called “moral decay”, the British Humanist Association insisted in a statement which greeted the Carey speech (see Nicolas Walter, Page 5).

BHA Director Robert Ashby said: “Most school classes contain children from different religious backgrounds, and a large proportion of atheists and agnostics. Morality must be given its rightful naturalistic basis if such classes are to be successful.

“Religious Education must be made more objective and representative. Under a new name – such as Belief Education – it should include the wonder and awe of natural explanations for the origin of life and the Universe, alongside the mutually incompatible hotch-potch of multi-faith legend.

“Children learn about the ‘Big Bang’ in science, yet they have been indoctrinated with Genesis and Creation myths since primary school. What price the values of honesty and reason in schools?”

The BHA statement noted that Humanists believe that people’s sense of what is good arises from their experience of living as part of a tribe: some actions benefit the success of the group, and these are thought of as good.



● Robert Ashby

Robert Ashby said: “At some point in evolution, we learned to connect pleasure with benevolent actions, and it is that pleasure that must be regained. We need to spend more time listening and talking to each other, and realising the pleasure that comes from helping

others.

“It is at moments of ‘good deeds’ – such as pulling over to let an ambulance past or assisting victims of a terrorist attack – that we become part of a community and regain some connection with our need to belong to some sort of tribe.

“And if RE became inclusive and relevant not only would it become a respected and exciting lesson but also children might learn to think-through difficult questions. What better preparation for the moral dilemmas of adult life?”

The Archbishop’s outburst sparked a media statement from Barbara Smoker, President of the National Secular Society. It noted that, while Carey bemoaned the fact that in Britain “unbelief has become the norm and practising Christianity a minority pursuit”, he nevertheless took advantage of “the anomalous, anachronistic privilege of his seat in the House of Lords” to launch a national crusade against “the privatisation

of morality” with the aim of reversing the move away from the principles which he regarded as “essentially Christian”.

Miss Smoker declared: “What arrogance! Christianity can claim no monopoly in moral principles and even less so in moral practice. The Archbishop says he fears ‘the collapse of the kind of civilisation as we have known it’. Apart from the bad grammar, let us hope so, indeed. The kind of civilisation which still divides the people of Northern Ireland and the former Yugoslavia derives directly from historical Christian chauvinism and righteous sectarianism.

“We’ve lost a language of blame and sin,” he says – apparently blind to the logic that belief in a god who created all human beings (and possibly Lucifer, too) must put any blame for the consequences on him alone.

“Having witnessed the inhumane outcome of fundamentalist Islamic societies re-nationalising morality, we are thankful that Dr Carey’s retrogressive Christian campaign is surely doomed to failure in Britain.

“However, we do agree with him on the need for more, and better, moral education in our schools. Indeed, since the very inception of the NSS in 1866, we have been campaigning for this to replace the unbalanced, time-wasting, morally distorting, and anti-educational, collective worship and religious education – which can have no legitimate place in our publicly-funded schools”.

And NSS General Secretary Keith Porteous Wood linked Gallup’s latest poll on morality to the Archbishop’s statement. He told the Press: “The poll states that only 10 per cent of British people ‘mainly got’ their moral code from religious bodies. This demonstrates that the Church’s teachings on morality are an irrelevance to the overwhelming majority of the population. People do not want to be dictated to by priests – or archbishops.

“Dr Carey believes that moral and spiritual lessons cannot be separated. The NSS maintains that ethics should be taught at school separately from religion. Young people need to learn how to make moral decisions, and that morality is essentially about social relationships and promoting the health of society as a whole.

“Less than half of those polled think Christian doctrine should be taught in schools. This Society has opposed religious teaching in schools throughout its 130-year history but accepts that the subject will find its natural place in the curriculum in art, music and literature studies.

“The NSS is adamant that belief should be an optional and private matter, and therefore religious teaching and collective worship have no place in schools. Now is the time to stop religious education lessons and assemblies in the UK. In state schools in France and the USA, they are expressly forbidden.”

The ever-vigilant Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists weighed-in with a media statement, too.

Spokesman Roy Saich declared: “Dr Carey’s call in the House of Lords for schools to teach ‘shared moral values’ is a disguised attempt to turn school teachers into school preachers.

“If we all shared the same moral values, as Dr Carey asserts, there would be no need for us to discuss ethical issues, nor for Dr Carey to deliver sermons. Schools should approach moral issues in an open, objective fair and balanced way. Instead, the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority recommends religious instruction in schools and gives no advice to them about the study of moral philosophy, or secular ethical traditions such as Humanism. Dr Carey should use his political influence to remedy this.

“He cites the Ten Commandments from the Bible as a universal standard, but some of these are obsolete and have little or no relevance to the third of the population who, like Humanists, are agnostics and atheists. A better place to start moral education is with the, still relevant, Golden Rule: ‘Do As You Would Be Done By’, which is centuries older than Christianity.”

● On a related issue, the National Secular Society issued a statement on July 6 accusing the Education Secretary, who had called for the reinforcement of collective worship, of being “sadly misguided”.

General Secretary Keith Porteous Wood said: “Gillian Shephard has just announced that collective worship in schools is to be reinforced. According to the Archbishop of Canterbury yesterday, only 20 per cent of schools perform a daily act of worship. This is despite its being a legal requirement and already being an important target area for Inspectors.

“Such a low level of compliance, despite previous reinforcement, should tell her that this is an inappropriate law that the country does not want.”

He stressed the importance of the separate teaching of religion and morality, adding that morality should particularly address relationships between individuals and also the improvement of all aspects of the world in which we live.

● In the past month alone, 12 new members have joined the National Secular Society. The subscription is only £5 a year: if you would like to support “the best of causes” by joining, please apply to Keith Porteous Wood, General Secretary, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald’s Road, London WC1X 8SP.



● Keith Porteous Wood

Dyed-in-the-wool Darwinian

WHY, Richard Dawkins wonders, is it so hard for even sophisticated scientists to appreciate that Darwinism is not a theory of chance? Sir John Herschel (1792-1871) called it "The Law of Higgledy-Piggledy", and Lord Kelvin (1824-1907) likened it to the Laputan method of writing books by combining words at random, as in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.

More recently, Sir Fred Hoyle reputedly compared it to a hurricane blowing through a junkyard and producing a Boeing 747.

What these critics fail to grasp is that, while mutation is random (in the sense of not pushing towards improvement) natural selection is not. In Dawkins' striking aphorism, "Every generation is a gene sieve"; and "The genes that penetrate to the future are not a random sample, they are an élite". They are the survivors. They have, through the adaptive capacity of their ancestors, been able to ascend the gentle, winding gradients of Mount Improbable.

The aim of this book is to demonstrate some of the ways in which the metaphorical ascent has been achieved: through the evolution of seeing and flying, for example, two of the faculties picked on by anti-evolutionists as "evidence" of design.

Indeed, Darwin himself is sometimes said to have doubted whether his theory could account for the evolution of the eye, on the strength of a long essay he wrote outlining natural selection, 15 years before *The Origin of Species*. He showed the essay to his wife with a "most solemn & last request" that she should publish it in case of his death.

In it he suggested that the human eye "may possibly have been acquired by gradual selection of slight but in each case useful deviations". Emma Darwin noted this as "A great assumption", so Darwin softened the passage.

After making what Richard Dawkins calls this "rhetorical concession", Darwin iterated his view that the eye had evolved by "numerous gradations" from simple to complex.

It is now authoritatively estimated that eyes have developed "no fewer than forty times, and probably more than sixty times, independently in various parts the animal kingdom".

Though they have no eyes, the general body surface of some single-celled organisms, some jellyfish, starfish, leeches and various other kinds of worms is sensitive to light; and "Weirdly, there is good evidence of cells that respond to light in the genitals of both male and female butterflies", though we don't know how the butterflies use them.

It may be that living cells are "more or less bound to be somewhat affected by light". A light ray consists of a stream of photons and, "When a photon hits a molecule of some coloured substance it may be stopped in its tracks and the molecule changed into a different form of the same molecule".

When this happens, energy is released; and in animals, the energy may trigger a reaction in a nerve. This, says Dawkins, "constitutes the first step in the process called seeing, even in an animal lacking eyes that we would recognise as eyes". In the metaphor of the book's title, the "first faltering steps up the slopes of Mount Improbable would have consisted in the gradual

Climbing Mount Improbable by Richard Dawkins. Viking £20.

Review: COLIN MCCALL

improvement of pigment molecules". That improvement occurs with the increase in the number of layers of pigment to capture photons. The more layers, the better, because photons are in short supply.

And, using a computer model, the Swedish biologists Dan Nilsson and Susanne Pelger have demonstrated "a smooth trajectory of improvements from a flat non-eye to a good fish eye", in a process possibly taking less than half-a-million years. Lenses, like eyes, have developed in different ways, with different mechanisms for changing the focus: mammals, birds and most reptiles do it by muscularly changing its shape; chameleons, snakes, fishes and frogs by pulling the lens a little forwards or backwards, as in a camera.

There are even three groups of fishes which have a secondary pair of eyes, and in one species, particularly, the embryological development of the secondary eyes is different from that of the main eyes.

"Nothing is as difficult to evolve as we humans imagine it to be", Dawkins comments.

Earlier he has said that our difficulty in flying makes us exaggerate how hard it is, when it is second nature to the majority of animal species: insects; birds, which outnumber mammals two-to-one; and bats, which comprise a quarter of mammal species. Flying seems formidable to us mainly because of our large size.

"Very small insects float without wings at all. Slightly larger insects are helped by tiny wing stubs to catch the breeze". But Joel Kingsolver and Mimi Koehl of the University of California in Berkeley, have suggested that the first insect wings were pre-adapted to a completely different purpose – that of solar panels for heating.

Vertebrates like flying squirrels and flying lizards don't actually fly, they glide; but they can control the direction and speed of their glide; and "It is easy to imagine true flapping flight evolving from repetition of the muscular movements used to control glide direction". Some biologists, however, think that true flight evolved "from fast-running, ground-dwelling animals whose arms became freed from their normal role in running".

As for birds: their story centres around feathers, which are modified reptilian scales, and it is possible that these, too, evolved for heat insulation which, of course, they still provide. Dawkins considers ways in which a small and agile dinosaur ancestor of birds might have developed the capacity to fly.

Among the many other absorbing subjects dealt with in *Climbing Mount Improbable*, I might mention DNA, viruses (and computer viruses), biomorphs ("bred with the 'Blind Watchmaker' computer program"), bacteria (some of which "are more closely related to us than they are to other, strange kinds of bacteria") and spiders' webs which, if creationists think defy Darwinian explanation, they reckon without the "dyed-in-the-wool Darwinian" author of this book.

I should add that it is beautifully illustrated by Lalla Ward, Richard Dawkins' wife.

Muslim marriage nightmare

by Colin McCall

MY WIFE, a retired teacher who now does voluntary Adult Literacy and English Second Language work, recently had experience of the awful effect arranged marriages can have on Muslim women.

Gerald Bourke describes the nightmare undergone by Saima Waheed and Arshad Ahmed, who met two years ago, fell in love, and were secretly married in February, after Saima's father had refused his sanction (*The Guardian*, June 25).

When he found out, Mr Waheed went to Arshad's home and forced him, "allegedly at gunpoint", to surrender the marriage deeds and agree to a divorce. When he took legal action to gain custody of his daughter, the court ruled that, at 21, Saima was able to make up her own mind; but it refused to allow her to live with Arshad. She is now in a home for distressed women run by the Independent Rights Commission of Pakistan, whose chairwoman, Asma Jehangir, "a fearless campaigner for women's rights", has "long been a target" of Pakistan's religious right.

Pakistan secularists are taking a keen interest in the case before the High Court, which will decide whether a Muslim woman can choose her husband; and a newspaper column-

nist cited by Gerald Bourke, has written: "Islam says a woman cannot give herself in marriage without the consent of her guardian. What can a woman own, then, if not even herself?"

Whatever the verdict, two young people's lives have been ruined by religious fanaticism. How many more can there be? my wife asks.

Howgate on evolution

NATIONAL Secular Society Council of Management member Mike Howgate will be running a 20-week course on Evolution at London's Natural History Museum.

The course, which starts on October 9, is divided into two termly sessions; it will be on Wednesday evenings from 6.30 to 8.30.

For further information contact the Centre for Extra-Mural Studies, Birbeck College, 26 Russell Square, London WC1B 5DQ.

WITNESS FOR PERSECUTION

I HOPE that I am not contracting a persecution complex, but it seems that, wherever I live, zealots from the local Kingdom Hall select me as a focus for their missionary exercises and pursue me with all of the persistence and most of the indelicacy of double-glazing salesmen.

So importunate have some of them been that; more than once, I have contemplated announcing a surrender if only to bring their unsolicited and generally unwelcome visits to an end. But that would have been to display cowardice in the face of the enemy, so I have, on those occasions, said sternly: "Get thee behind me, Charles Taze Russell!" and engaged them.

I wonder if Abel ever knew what he had started in that land east of Eden? I ask this because a Witness told me once that he was the very first of their number. I recall suggesting that this may have been the motive for Cain's fratricide but this did not discompose her any more than my pointing out that her claim was not substantiated in Genesis. But it seems that what was denied to Abel's biographer was revealed several centuries later to Paul, who selected the Hebrews as a repository for the information.

Another Witness told me that her organisation had no less an authority for its existence than Isaiah (chapter 43, verse 10). On referring to my edition of the Bible, I protested that it was not recorded therein that the prophet had either Pastor Russell or Judge Rutherford in mind when he wrote that verse. But my problem was, apparently, that I lacked their lines of communication.

This prompted me to ask why Jehovah made himself known only to members of sects such as hers when it was doubters like myself to whom he ought to appear. And I told her I would not object if a manifestation were not as spectacular as some of his Biblical ones. I did not expect him to go to the trouble of engaging a burning bush or a passing cloud, just so long as he introduced himself. But this would be to put the fiery chariot before the horse. In the reasonable world of Jehovah's Witnesses, it is necessary to believe in their god before one may pass the time of day with him.

Because of the entrenched position of Witnesses, discussion often seems pointless, so when they call on me, my efforts are usually directed towards removing them from the

by Neil Blewitt

doorstep as quickly as is consistent with courtesy. I suspect that others react similarly, though with varying degrees of forbearance. As to *how* to remove them, I know of no infallible method. One can warn them of the presence of chicken-pox in the house or, if they declare themselves to be immune, bubonic plague; or invite them in to help search for three hungry pet mambas which have that moment escaped. One can claim membership of an organisation incompatible with theirs – for example the Church of Outer Mongolia – or announce that one is supporting indigenous deities that week, perhaps Epona or Bran the Blessed. Such announcements will usually induce sufficient uncertainty in the callers to enable the householder politely to close the door. Of course, one need not open the door in the first place. One can pretend to be out but this is usually considered to be *infra dig* and to show a lack of imagination; or one can appear to make a genuine error as to the nature of the caller by shouting from the hallway: "Sorry, but I'm voting Liberal Democrat this time!" or "Just two pints today, please, milkman!" One can also call out through the open window of a room immediately above where the Witnesses are standing: "Gardyloo!" This has been known to produce some quite spectacular results. Finally one can say, as I did once, "I never see anybody without an appointment!" but this has the disadvantage of prompting the bolder among the Witnesses to knock again ten seconds later seeking to arrange a meeting. I am currently working on a rejoinder to this.

I have tried not taking them too seriously. Thus, in response to their greeting: "Good morning! We have some news for you today..." I have enquired if the Pope has just told a dirty joke in 57 languages or the Archbishop of Canterbury has gone topless on Page 3 of the *Church Times*.

Unfortunately, humour is wasted on what I have generally found to be a humourless people. I told one so once but consoled him with the thought that Jesus was not recorded as having a sense of humour either. We are told that he wept, but never that he smiled. But then there is precious little to smile at in the Bible anyway, except its manifold absurdities.

If I have felt argumentative and the conversation turns – as it almost invariably does – to the proposition that the Bible is Jehovah's holy book and every one of its 774,746 words is true, I have invited comments on a number of familiar inconsistencies.

I recall observing, for example, that although Jehovah is recorded in Genesis as having created light on the first day, he did not produce the sun until the fourth. Where, I wondered, had the initial light come from? I was told "Well, God *is* light!" And that was as good a conversation-stopper as I heard that day.

I asked another Witness which story of Judas's death should one believe: Matthew's, that he hanged himself, or The Acts' that he was disembowelled? The answer, for readers who may also have been troubled by these conflicting accounts, is that both are correct. Judas fell from the tree on which he hanged himself and was impaled on something particularly unpleasant to the detriment of his bowels. Similarly with the fate of the pieces of silver. Were they used to purchase the field in which he died, as stated in The Acts, or returned to the chief priest so that he could purchase it, as reported by Matthew? Simple. Judas received the reward, bought the field, then, feeling awful about the whole business, sold it, returned the money, went back there, hanged himself, becoming disembowelled in the process, thus leaving the chief priest free to make an investment in the field himself. Now why hadn't I thought of that?

I asked, too, in view of the contradictory stories in Genesis 1 and 2, if animals were created before Adam or *vice versa*. When my caller hesitated, I inquired if the second act of creation might have been by way of an encore. She thought this most unlikely but felt it was a matter she would have to refer to a Mr Jefferson, who would be in a better position to answer it than she. He would call on me and set my mind at rest on the matter. That was many years ago now and I am beginning to fear for the well-being of that gentleman, who has still to put in an appearance.

In a let's-be-reasonable-about-this approach, I said to a young lady once that in my study I had a number of books which contained biographies of gods of all nationalities, dimensions and aptitudes. There must have been a thousand there, ranging from the Egyptian

DR THE TION

I asked another [Jehovah's] Witness which story of Judas's death should one believe: Matthew's, that he hanged himself, or The Acts' that he was disembowelled? The answer, for readers who may also have been troubled by these conflicting accounts, is that both are correct. Judas fell from the tree on which he hanged himself and was impaled on something particularly unpleasant to the detriment of his bowels.

ah to the Slavonic Zuttibur. She agreed with my supposition that she would reject as being mythical all but one of these – her very own Jehovah. I said that in that case there was very little difference between us. She denied the existence of 999 gods and I just one more. It really wasn't worth arguing about, was it? But, of course, I had forgotten. Jehovah was the true god; the others were false, existing in the imagination only and put there probably by Satan who, poor devil, can seem to do nothing right.

My wife advised me to say bluntly that I was an atheist. She had used this direct approach once and her caller had turned about and raced down the garden path as if Beelzebub himself were pursuing him. I tried this on two elderly ladies who called on me, but my disclosure evidently distressed them since they regarded me as if I had recently been bereaved and it made me feel most uncomfortable. So nowadays I tend to appraise my callers' sensibilities first, and if I doubt their capacity to deal with the trauma attendant on discovering an atheist, I break the news rather more gently to them.

On one such occasion, I commented to my visitor that there was a certain unfairness about our respective positions. I did not believe in a life after death whereas she did. If I were wrong, I should be made painfully aware of the grossness of my error, while if she were wrong her ultimate slumber would never be disturbed. She offered me the comforting thought that there is no hell as a place of eternal torment, and cited no less an authority than Joseph Franklin Rutherford, the second president of her organisation, who had reached that conclusion after a long and painstaking study of the Bible. I told her that this came as something of a relief to me, as my reading of Jesus' own words in the Gospels, John's in Revelation and Paul's in his letters indicated the contrary. She offered no opinion on this but assured me that not only would nobody go to hell because there was no such place but also that all those who had died, from Adam onwards, would be raised from their graves. I thanked her heartily for this information and hoped that none of us would feel any the worse for the experience and we parted on good terms. I did not point out some of the ramifications of her belief, not wishing to delay her progress towards my neighbour who was slinking into his shrubbery at the

time. But all one can hope is that Jehovah, or officers appointed by him, have been keeping meticulous records of where every morsel of every corpse is – in particular those whose bones have crumbled to dust or whose ashes have been scattered to the four winds or on the sea; those eaten by wild animals or cannibals, those blown to smithereens on the battlefield, amputees, those involved in organ transplants and those who have undergone circumcision. If records are inadequate, one can imagine the confusion and discomfort that may ensue when amendment is attempted at the resurrection, for example in those who may be given a prepuce three sizes too small, or as Thomas Hardy described in his poem *The Levelled Churchyard*:

*...Here's not a modest, maiden elf
But dreads the Final Trumpet
Lest half of her should rise herself
And half some sturdy strumpet...*

Lest it be thought that I have been unreasonable in my dealings with Witnesses, I have to say that in my formative years I used to invite them into my home to discuss their religious beliefs. I have read their literature and been to their meetings, as I have to those of other sects from Salvationists to Spiritualists. I have pointed this out to Witnesses and asked if any of their number had acted in a similar spirit of enquiry including, perhaps, a humanist or freethought meeting in their itinerary. I never found one who had. But then they had no need to for they are as convinced of the rightness of their cause as they are of the error of everybody else's. The one thing, I have commented, which they have in common with almost every other religion and sect on earth. Not that this did a great deal of harm, I reassured them, beyond begetting the odd war here and there, but what was a war or two among friends? But there, I fear, I was displaying my ignorance. Wars are caused not by Jehovah but by Satan. Not to be put down, I suggested that Jehovah had done pretty well without Satan's help in the Old Testament. But this was to misunderstand the situation. Jehovah was fighting Satan. That may have been the case, but he never defeated that doughty devil who was to remain defiant from Genesis to Revelation. One wonders why Jehovah created him in the first place. Or why he didn't incarcerate him in

the second.

One Sunday, when Witnesses came to my door for the fourth time in as many weeks, my irritation was such that, as I went to answer their knock, I did not need to think about what I was going to say because the words "Sod off!" immediately suggested themselves. But I did not use them. I find it difficult to be unpleasant even to Witnesses, however unfortunate, and doubly so if they are of the opposite sex. So I simply told them that I was observing the fourth commandment and added with all the solemnity I could muster, while pointing dramatically to nowhere in particular, "Go and do thou likewise!" But before they did, I asked if they would kindly make a note of my name and address and display it at their Kingdom Hall, or Kingdom Come if that would be more efficacious, with an announcement that I was weary of their fundamentalist foolishness and now I was not merely uninterested in Jehovah but I had developed a positive animosity towards him, so would they refrain from calling on me ever again. Now Witnesses find some difficulty in accepting an expression of indifference or even aversion as either genuine or permanent, so I had to repeat my request on two subsequent occasions before the visits eventually ceased. Well – for about six months, that is. At the end of that time, I was summoned to the door to find an elderly gentleman there who was obviously a Witness. For those readers who prefer a tidy ending to a piece of writing I have to say, with some regret, that my visitor was not the elusive Mr Jefferson of many years earlier who had come to present the findings of his research into the origins of life on earth. This gentleman gave a quite different name and said, I thought rather timidly: "I'm sorry to disturb you, sir, but you made a request several months ago that we should not call on you again. Well – I'm just checking to find out if that is still the position."

I complimented him on his ingenuity and assured him that it was, and would he now make another note not to call a further six months hence to check that what I said when he last called to check still obtained – because it would.

But I doubt if that is the last Witness I shall see.

Like a rampant lover, they rarely take no for an answer.

J A P PHELPS, writing from Durban, aims "to show, indirectly, how the odd urge to 'worship' cropped up"

RICHARD LEAKEY, the archaeologist, has shown that there was a time, half a million years ago, in the evolution of our ancestors, when the neocortex or "new brain" was not well developed and at the same time, the larynx had not yet achieved its present flexibility. There were no words or language to help those people focus and recall the facts and emotions of their existence. And even more importantly, no words to help them share their ideas with their children or community. They learned mainly by imitation.

There is a concept, almost obsolete today, which played a vital role in the consciousness of people at that time. Its name is Glory. (There are other words, Wonder and Awe, which express similar concepts.) The members of the community could only share wordlessly the glory and wonder of the return of Spring, or of sunshine after storm, or the discovery of new edible roots or nuts, or the birth of a precious child. Eugene Marais in *My Friends the Baboons*, says he has seen how baboon mothers shared the Glory of a new-born baboon child with its own mother. Richard Leakey is a practical, fossil-hunting, digging archaeologist. He tells us that the chronological series of fossil skulls of three to four hundred thousand years ago shows a gradual difference in the basi-cranium indicating that the larynx was changing and improving its position over some thousands of years. The evidence turned up in a certain Central African bank of shale. The crucial skeleton has been named the "Turkana Boy", found by Leakey in Kenya in 1986.

E H Lenneberg in *The Biological Foundation of Language*, (1967) states that the muscles of the tongue and lips were developing at the same time. This allowed "labial, explosive and sibilant sounds (the L, P, S sounds) to develop". This changing of the



position of the larynx and lips slowly allowed the formation of articulate, distinguishable sounds. Concurrently with this came the expansion of the neocortex to understand these sounds and store them, to focus and recall these sounds, and finally, with the use of words, weave dreams into stories – the waking dream of abstract thought. Laurens van der Post tells us how Bushman grandmothers tell little stories to the children. Leakey describes this period as "the great leap forward". We can assume that evolution would inevitably have selected the most vocal and communicative members. Advancing hand-in-hand with the improving larynx and lips would have come the best brains, to express both practical and abstract thoughts in words. It is significant that, even today, leadership goes to the most fluent speakers. It is also significant that the skulls of Neanderthal man (a different species) show that their basi-crania were formed differently, making the finer vocalisation that we associate with *Homo sapiens* impossible. It was this that condemned them to extinction. (The fossil evidence shows that Neanderthal man only died out 30,000 years ago.)

It is also worth mentioning that Eugene

Marais states, in *My Friends the Baboons*, that there seemed to be a "muttering and whispering among the leaders when a decision had to be made." He also tells how the "words of command" were immediately understood and obeyed. The earliest speech among *Homo sapiens* would have expressed only emotions or concrete facts. Slowly the logical concepts of "If this...then that" and "Not only...but also" have evolved. But vestiges go on surviving, if not actually detrimental. They remain dormant awaiting an appropriate stimulus. Certain emotional conditions cause a lump in my throat, to choke my speech. I know not why. It is an odd vestige. In this same way, "Glory" has survived, something that still lifts the human spirit, older than words or logic. It is locked in the Limbic System, the pre-human or even pre-primate brain. I'll give you an example of this strange emotion. On a Christmas Day in a suburb of Sheffield, my son and I chanced to look up from our flat window and saw a long skein of wild geese. There were at least 200 birds, tracing the finest vee formation in the sky. They were flying higher than birds normally fly, going Southwest, knowing confidently their distant destination. We were filled with "Glory". We did not need the words "instinct" or "Winter migration" or words at all; it was the sight itself that moved us. A primitive Cro-Magnon man and possibly even a Neanderthal man would have felt the same exultation, perhaps even more intensely.

When Pythagoras proved that the square on the hypotenuse equals the sum of the squares on the other two sides...or Priestly demonstrated that water (till then thought to be an element) can be broken down by electrolysis into two gases, Hydrogen and Oxygen...or when Watson and Crick suddenly understood the form of the DNA molecule...or when a mother holds her new-born child in her arms for the first time...or when Columbus sighted the New World...there comes a moment of "Glory". These apparently disparate events have something in common. The first discovery of an eternal truth strikes a chord in any mind that is subconsciously in tune. It is this that lifts the human spirit. When Shakespeare put into the mouth of Cassius the words, "There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune", he made a great truth suddenly shine out – something that had been "subliminal" (below the level of consciousness, from *limen*, a threshold.)

It dates back three or four hundred thousand years. (The Christian era is only two.) Language can sometimes put into words a truth that was known or felt, "wordlessly", all that time ago. But it is incorrect to think that all thought can be expressed in words, and all emotion even less so. Poetry, the epitome of word use, combines the power of metaphor with the rhyme and rhythm of the word sounds. Just as birds sometimes revel in their power of flight, riding the currents of the wind, so poets revel in the power of their words. But there is still something that words cannot express. At the end of a great short story or poem or the climax of a Greek tragedy, the listener or reader is thrown back to something older than words, to a brief moment of Glory.

Head-hunting IHEU in London move

AN Executive Director for the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) will be needed from January, 1997, when its HQ moves to London.

This will be a challenging, full-time post, initially for three years. The salary will be in the region of £25,000 pa. Full details and a job description will be available after July 31 from: Jane Wynne Willson, Co-President, 96 Wentworth Road, Harborne, Birmingham B17 9SY, UK.

A high-profile appointment of this kind is what the IHEU Board has long desired. With the decentralisation of a large part of IHEU's work, the availability of new communication channels, and a new office and staff, the challenges and oppor-

tunities are very great.

The new IHEU office will be part of the Conway Hall complex in central London, where the National Secular Society, the British Humanist Association, the Rationalist Press Association and the South Place Ethical Society have their offices.

Shared

The new premises, which are on the ground floor, are being adapted by the landlords (SPES) to house IHEU as an independent unit, although some facilities can be shared if this is mutually advantageous.

Interviews for the Executive Director post will be in London in the Autumn.

Book launch

● The actor Barry Morse pictured, left, with H J Blackham and Barbara Smoker at the launch of Mr Blackham's new book, *The Future of Our Past: From Ancient Rome to Global Village*. Mr Morse read extracts from the book at the event, at which Miss Smoker – the 400pp work's editor – presided and Mr Blackham signed copies of his book. *Rationalist Press Association* members may obtain the book at the subsidised price of £20 from the RPA; others may order it from bookshops (ISBN 1-57392-042-8, Prometheus Books, 1996) at £27. The work was reviewed by Malcolm Rees in the May issue of *The Freethinker*.



When you come to think about it, it is quite a tribute to the anti-clerical implications of Delius's setting of Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* that...this performance had to be preceded by a public apology from the Archdeacon of London for any offence which might be caused by the performance of such a work in such a setting – Martin Kettle, *The Guardian*, July 4. The *Freethinker's* man in St Paul's was **TERRY SANDERSON**, pictured right.

Delius – still making 'em faint in the pews



As we arrived for the concert, the Archdeacon of St Paul's, the Venerable George Cassidy, was at the microphone assuring the audience that he had read the text and thought that its "affirmation of life" was acceptable, not irreligious, and therefore he had no problem with the performance of *A Mass of Life* in the cathedral. Delius, on the other hand, would probably have considered the choice of St Paul's as an insult to his music.

Nonetheless, the performance went ahead and a new generation of critics was enchanted by the music. "Verily, this is a gorgeous piece", said the *Independent*, "but it can also be deeply touching – for instance the aching harmonic twist at the baritone's words 'Hush, the world is perfect'". The *London Evening Standard* called it "a profound and moving experience".

In 1928, when he was blind, paralysed and incapable of continuing work, Delius was joined at his adopted home in France by a young Yorkshireman called Eric Fenby. Fenby had heard Delius's music on the radio and had been deeply moved by it. Distressed to hear of the composer's plight, he offered himself as an amanuensis, an offer which Delius took up with alacrity. And so, in the last few years of his life, Delius was given the opportunity to dictate a few final, magnificent pieces.

The story of their relationship is one of the most extraordinary in musical history, and is related by Eric Fenby in his book *Delius As I Knew Him*. Fenby was a deeply religious man, something which irritated Delius, who lost no opportunity to mock and undermine his young friend's beliefs. "Eric, I've been thinking", the great man said one day. "The sooner you get rid of all this Christian humbug the better. The whole traditional conception of life is false. Throw those great Christian blinkers away and

look around you, stand on your own two feet and be a man...Sex plays a tremendous part in life. It's terrible to think we come into this world through some despicable act. Don't believe all the tommyrot the priests tell you; learn and prove everything by your own experience".

Delius thought that composers who took their inspiration from religion diminished themselves: "Given a young composer of genius, the surest way to ruin him is to make a Christian of him. Look at Elgar. He might have been a great composer if he had thrown all that religious paraphernalia overboard. Look at Parry – he'd have set the whole Bible to music if he'd had time!"

Delius's other great choral work, his *Requiem*, is his most overtly anti-religious composition. Dedicated to the fallen of the First World War, it rails against the "House of Lies" that religionists have constructed for themselves. At one point the choir shouts "Hallelujah" and "Allah, Allah" in a dreadful and hopeless cacophony. Later in the piece, as the composer considers the "eternal renewing" aspects of nature, his music once more enters the realms of the sublime. When it was composed, nearly 80 years ago, the *Requiem* would have been regarded as outrageous. Perhaps this is one piece of music which is unique in having been stifled by religious censorship. Hopefully, now that such considerations are not so important, it can be restored to the repertoire.

Richard Hickox and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra (who played *A Mass of Life* at St Paul's) also played the *Requiem* recently in Winchester, and they will record both pieces for later release on compact disc. It should be a disc worth waiting for.

HE composer Frederick Delius was an atheist. He had no time for religion or for those who practise it, and this philosophy is reflected in his music. Besides the well-known orchestral masterpieces, such as *The First Cuckoo in Spring* and *Summer Night on the River*, Delius composed four full-scale operas and hundreds of other smaller pieces reaching across most musical idioms. His oeuvre reflected nature and the inner world of human feeling. Perhaps his greatest work, and certainly his most monumental, was *A Mass of Life*, set to Nietzsche's text *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. *A Mass of Life* calls for two choirs and a double orchestra – which may explain why it is rarely performed. It certainly cannot be the quality of the music that has relegated it to a relative obscurity, for the composer Peter Marklock wrote in 1923: "This colossal work, without a doubt the greatest musical achievement since Wagner, a Mass worthy to rank with the great Mass of Sebastian Bach, is as almost entirely unknown. It may be that, in an age of superficiality in art, its very profundity militates against it. But such music is proof against the age that gave it birth". And so, when it was announced that *A Mass of Life* was to be featured in the 1996 City of London Festival, I hurried to purchase tickets. It occurred to me as I put my money down that St Paul's Cathedral was a strange venue for a performance of an atheistic "Mass" – one that doesn't mention Jesus but extols the joys of being alive, of dancing and drinking, climbing mountains and looking at girls' ankles. It occurred that others, too, hadn't missed the irony and letters of protest were received by Cathedral authorities.

You're telling us!

Time to outlaw 'useless' circumcision!

WITH reference to "It's a snip – at £80!" (Page 14, July), at the present time laws are in force forbidding the docking of dogs' tails, except for prophylactic reasons. Likewise, laws exist to forbid female circumcision.

However, we still have no laws forbidding the circumcision of male children. This useless, dangerous and painful operation is still carried out on thousands of young males because it is a requirement of the Jewish and Mohammedan religions.

Should not we Humanists try to have this senseless practice outlawed, and thereby give young males the same protection that at present is given to young females?

PETER WINDLE
Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Future of those empty churches

I RECENTLY heard on Radio 4 that the Church of England has come to an agreement with certain non-Christian religious groups to let them hold their services in C of E churches. This appears to be a new solution to an old problem for the C of E: what to do with empty churches.

Christianity is in rapid decline in this country. *Social Trends* (HMSO 1996) shows that in 1994 there was a total of 6.5 million church-goers (from all religions); but in 1970 there were 8.8 million. If this fall in church attendance is broken down into religious groupings, the astonishing fact emerges that non-Christian church-going has actually increased over this 24 year period! The largest decline was in Anglican church-going. In the *C of E Yearbook* (1995) there is further evidence of Christianity's decline in England. In 1900, 650 babies out of every 1,000 births were baptised into the C of E. In 1992, this was down to 260 per 1,000 births, a decrease of 40 per cent. In 1910, there were 227,000 confirmations; in 1993, there were only 52,000 – a decrease of 77 per cent.

So how has the C of E dealt with its problem of empty churches? In her interesting architectural history book *How Old Is That Church?* (Blandford 1990), Pamela Cunningham tells us that redundant (that is, empty) churches have been dealt with in three ways:

- Preserved intact, by using the Redundant Churches Fund which was set up by the 1969 Redundant Churches Act.

- Demolished.

- Adapted for new uses (that is, sold).

Between 1969 and 1987, 1,167 Anglican churches were declared redundant; 654 of them (56 per cent) were adapted for new uses; 280 (24 per cent) were demolished; 242 (20 per cent) were preserved. I firmly believe that demolition should be a last resort – for example, if the building is about to fall down. The demolition of "safe" churches would be very foolish. Stalin's 1930s programme of church demolition has only led to them being rebuilt at this very moment. Henry VIII was responsible for knocking down a considerable number of

English monasteries. In May, I visited one of them – Buildwas Abbey in Shropshire. Wandering round the ruins of this once magnificent building, listening to an excellent English Heritage Walkman tape, I could not help feeling angry, wishing Henry had left such buildings alone for people to enjoy today.

Letting other faiths use redundant churches may help the C of E keep the "preserved" numbers high in the short run. But in the long run adapting redundant church buildings will be the only solution. I dislike them being adapted as warehouses or furniture shops for then they are truly lost to us as historical monuments. A good example of an adapted church can be found in London. St Mary's-at-Lambeth is not far from Lambeth Palace, the Archbishop of Canterbury's modest London home. It was declared redundant in the mid-70s. In 1977 the Tradescant Trust was formed to save the church from demolition. It is now a Museum of Garden History (the first in the world). The church is very old. In 1086, it belonged to the Countess Goda (Edward the Confessor's sister). Among the dead in its graveyard are John Tradescant (the gardener to Charles I who gave us the wonderful flower the *Tradescantia* and brought the pineapple to this country), six Archbishops and Admiral Bligh of *Bounty* fame.

My advice to the C of E is simple: sell your empty churches. The more museums we have to visit, the better. When McDonald's open their first restaurant in a church building I do hope they will have tastefully adapted both interior and exterior, so that I can enjoy my cup of coffee in peaceful surroundings.

MARTIN KIRBY
Peckham

TRAVELLING around Britain, or Europe, even the non-believer cannot fail to be impressed by the outstanding architecture, sculpture and historic attraction of the best of religious buildings. Whether city cathedrals or village parish churches, they dominate their surroundings at the focal points of communities. Many are major tourist attractions – and they were built to last!

What should be the non-believer's attitude to the future of such buildings?

It must be remembered that many were built, not just for a small religious sect, but for the whole community, at times when the ordinary citizen did not choose his own religion. They represent tremendous effort of dedication and togetherness, put in by members of a community to signify their common aspirations.

It is a pity that they are controlled by church bodies who now represent only a small proportion of the population, and their grandeur is out of all proportion to the size of their congregations.

My dream is that, one day, they could be brought back to serve and represent the whole community. Could this ever be practicable?

The more mundane redundant churches are already being either demolished, or converted into housing, warehouses or sports halls. It is only the best buildings that need concern us.

With declining membership and increasing maintenance costs, might the churches one day accept shared use – in return for help towards funding of repairs?

Might non-Christians accept limited presence

of crosses and other Christian relics, as symbols of the historic development of these buildings in return for introduction of displays of secular projects (and possibly those of non-Christian religions), and increasing use of the buildings for meetings of non-Christian organisations (ones intended for the whole community or as multi-faith commemoration of major past events)?

I wonder if readers of *The Freethinker* have thoughts on this subject? The buildings are prominent a part of our heritage for non-believers to ignore.

ROGER McCALLISTER
Dawley

Politics & religion

WITH regard to the discussion in your magazine as to whether atheists ought to support wing policies, I would have thought that evidence of history suggests that religion and politics – any brand of politics – make a bad mix. Look at Iran, Saudi Arabia – Northern Ireland. The same may be said of religion, too, when carried to extremes under Communist rule in Russia – and Albania.

Surely freethinkers can be, and are, of political persuasion, though one might reasonably suppose that those who oppose religious superstition would also oppose cultural superstitions which lead to racial and sexual inequality.

Keith Ackerman in his letter (July) seems to get well off the point: if I read him rightly seems to be saying that left-wingers should be Christians (or is it the other way round?) matter on which I suppose they can make their minds without any help from atheists to his exciting rewrite of early Christian history, my mind was boggling over the thought of Roman yuppies getting into the arena on the wrong side of the lions, and trying to make how these lively lads "invented" Christianity because although rich they were somewhat "ascetic", before I lost my way completely among Freudian terminology, Victorian pornography, Margaret Thatcher, and Straw's clean sweeps.

But the injunction to read Shelley is something we can all approve of, even if some would not agree with all his beliefs. He was not only an atheist but also a radical, a vegetarian and a very fine poet. One of his poems, *England in 1817*, criticises the religious establishment of the time as being "Christless and Godless". Shelley could put his point of view without descending to cheap and silly slanders.

ELSIE KARBAL
Colchester

I HAD felt that my complaints to all sundry about the leftist bias of organised atheism in this country (incidentally, something always true elsewhere) would quickly be rather tiresome and I was quite prepared to leave it alone. That is until I read the correspondence in your July issue.

J H Morten's syllogistic *non sequitur*

You're telling us!

From Page 12

ism means progress. *The Freethinker* is a progressive magazine, therefore *The Freethinker* must be leftist" was almost quaint in its arrogance and use of terminology – "progressive" and "reactionary" – which reeked of the good old days of marxist-led "popular and progressive fronts".

for Keith Ackerman's tortured exposition of Christianity was invented by parasitic middlemen to justify capitalism; well really! It is dramatic that all forms of superstition, whether identified with the name "religion" or not, set themselves up to some degree in opposition to particular ideologies. It is certainly true that mainstream, institutional Christianity has historically opposed socialism and *vice-versa*, but it is as true to note Christianity's opposition to restrained capitalism. Roman Catholic concepts such as the "just price" and proscriptions against usury can still find an echo in modern Christian Socialism of the sort apparently favoured by many on the Labour front bench; news that Mr Blair has been receiving Roman Catholic communion bodes ill for those who believe that the future of this country, indeed all others, lies in accepting the (generally progressive!) tenets of libertarian capitalism. I say again: there is simply no necessary correlation between being opposed to superstition in all its forms and adhering to any particular particular ideology; to claim otherwise is both offensive and mendacious.

NIGEL MEEK
Bromley

Unpleasant character

SUS of the Gospels a sublime pacifist (Peter Ambrose, Page 14, July)? It's news to me! Are you to take seriously Matthew 10.34 as reflecting what Jesus actually said: "I came not to bring peace, but a sword"? Or, again, Luke 12.36: "...and he that hath no sword, let him buy his garment and buy one".

Handily the words of a peacemaker! Add to the above the threats of Hell fire he is supposed to have made against unbelievers, and his central character of the Gospels comes across as a very unpleasant character indeed! He was then, it has been known for a long time that the Gospels are far from being "gospel".

Might I suggest that the Rev Peter Gamble does his homework before again appearing in what is essentially an atheist journal?

DAVID YEULETT
Greenwich

Changing the RSPCA

RECENTLY, I attended the AGM of the RSPCA. As a Republican Infidel, I'm unhappy with the "Royal" in the society's name – and the venue being Church House, which is decorated with religious slogans in big gold letters, wasn't pleasing either.

prayer I was *flabbergasted*. This wasn't printed on the agenda and had I known I would have absented myself from that part of the proceedings. I also imagine that members of non-Christian faiths present would have found the reference to Jesus in the prayer disturbing.

One of the reasons I am a member of the RSPCA is that I believe that there is no YHWH or other god who has given animals to human beings to do with what they will. On the basis of the available evidence, I believe that human and non-human animals are products of the same evolutionary process and that humans have the moral responsibility to treat animals as fellow creatures with which we share the Earth. Prayer has not saved one animal life; human action has saved many animals from untimely death.

However, at the meeting there was a discussion of the horrific practice of Jewish and Muslim ritual slaughter. While some progress is being made with the Muslims, the Jewish Board of Deputies still sticks rigidly to the dictates of the unknown author of Leviticus. There was also a report on the mistreatment of dogs, regarded as unclean animals, in Muslim countries.

I have written to the Director General of the RSPCA asking that the prayer at the AGM be abolished or replaced by a secular ceremony. Can I now ask other Humanists who are RSPCA members to please do the same?

TERRY LIDDLE
Eltham

R G TEE (letters, July) writes that he sees "nothing wrong in being speciesist". However, I am sure that if he were aware of the precise meaning of "speciesism" he would wish to rethink his attitude.

The Chambers dictionary definition: *the assumption that man is superior to all other species of animals and that he is therefore justified in exploiting them to his own advantage.*

Dr Richard Ryder, the clinical psychologist, coined the word "speciesism" in 1970 when first he was confronted with horrific laboratory experiments, frequently serving trivial purposes. The word has, of course, an analogy with "sexism" and "racism", (ideas which most of us Freethinkers have no difficulty with these days).

Ryder then went on to question our similar exploitation of non-human animals in areas such as intensive farming, hunting and the fur trade. He is the author of the powerful book *Victims of Science* (which discusses speciesism in detail). In recent decades it has been largely Ryder's radical influence that has revolutionised the RSPCA. The Society's past image of being primarily concerned with pet animals (or "companion animals") has changed; the equal sentence of farm, wild and laboratory animals has now been, and quite logically, acknowledged.

HEATHER EVANS
Kenilworth

RGTEE's repeated contention (July) that the concept of animal rights is flawed because rights cannot exist without reciprocity remains unproven. He refers to those who *could* become mentally impaired. But what of those who are born in that condition? They can never enjoy the right to a self-determination which they

cannot safely exercise. This is an unavoidable form of discrimination, which still gives them, in a decent society, the right to care and protection.

Discrimination is what we also exercise in determining which rights we consider it desirable and expedient to grant to which animals. R G Tee sees nothing wrong in being "speciest". Nor do I, in this context. But I hope that he is not so "speciest" that he would wish to rescind all legislation which gives protection to non-humans? If not, isn't this argument really about whether granting a protection is granting a right? Isn't it really just a matter of semantics?

JESSIE BOYD
Cwmbran

Praying for peace

WHEN the doctrinally religious pray for peace, what do they expect their God to *do*? Destroy all weapons of war? Deprive the warmonger of his "gift of free will" by injecting him with a benevolence-inducing chemical? Influence his mind while he sleeps?

Any reference by the pray-ers to "God's mysterious ways" will be regarded as a monumental cop-out...

VIVIEN GIBSON
London W5

Jesus, the Jewish bandit?

PLEASE allow me to comment on Stuart Campbell's review of *The Unriddling of Christian Origins* by Joel Carmichael (Page 6, July).

Campbell does not like the idea that Jesus was a Jewish bandit and was rightly executed under Roman law as an insurrectionist. But, despite his intriguing alternative idea (*The Rise and Fall of Jesus*, Explicit Books), it simply will not do to dismiss evidence which he partially lists. Campbell quotes Carmichael as saying that "no commentator has yet ventured to explain" the appearance in the Gospels of Barabbas, the leader of an insurrection. I have not read Carmichael's book, but in *The Mystery of Barabbas: Exploring the Origins of a Pagan Religion* by Dr Michael Magee (AskWhy! Publications, ISBN 0-9521913-1-8) a similar thesis begins with the identification of Barabbas. The purported release of Barabbas not Jesus is the key to understanding that Jesus was a seditionist. The bogus exchange was invented to explain traditional accounts of the crowd calling for Barabbas. Jesus was Barabbas! The meaning of *Barabbas* is *the Son of My Father*. Who is that but Jesus, the Son of His Father, God? The forename of Barabbas is even given as Jesus to make the identity more certain. If this identification is not valid, Christians have to explain why God has such a cruel sense of humour.

Campbell criticises the "bandit thesis" because

Turn to Page 14

You're telling us!

From Page 13

it takes no account of Jesus's pacific nature, his forecasts of resurrection, the coming son of man and the empty tomb. In fact in most of these there is nothing to explain, or the explanation is in Jesus's Messianic ideas. Thus the forecasts of his resurrection, as every rationalist must know, are simply inserted by the Gospel writers after the event. It is possible to explain them as Campbell does in his book, by saying that Jesus planned a hoax but there is simply no need for such an explanation. Campbell criticises Carmichael for failing adequately to "sort out fact from fiction" in the Gospels. And yet he himself happily accepts the most bizarre Gospel accounts as true history and builds up his theory on them: the raising of Lazarus and the miracle at Cana occur only in John's Gospel; not one of the post-crucifixion appearances occur in the original Gospel of Mark, still regarded by scholars as the earliest Gospel.

That there is little evidence that Jesus held the Temple by force is hardly surprising given that the Gospel writers wanted to suppress it. Yet if he did not hold the Temple by force how was he able to defy the Chief Priest who had the Temple Guard to keep order, and indeed forbid people to pass through the Temple area? On the evidence of the Gospels Jesus must have controlled the Temple, presumably by force of arms, no doubt backed up by the very large numbers of pilgrims in Jerusalem for the Passover willing to support a Messiah. The Romans certainly counter attacked within a few days having had reinforcements from Caesarea. This counter attack is disguised by the little-apocalypse of Mark 13, but displaced remnants of it appear in Luke.

Campbell is also far too ready to accept non-Christian sources, notably Josephus, on face value, yet they too were censored by Christians after their ultimate triumph at the end of the fourth century. Many "lost" books from the early post-crucifixion years are lost because Christians destroyed them. They made it a capital crime to possess works describing Jesus as a bandit or a magician. Is it surprising that so few clues remain? That they do is only because no one ever was able to censor all writings according to an agreed account.

Campbell writes that it is "outrageous" to claim that ancient authorities refer to the armed character of Jesus's enterprise. Would that rational argument were so easy. Make an assertion with a powerful adjective and no one will doubt it. Polemicists against Christianity had every reason to reveal the true story of Jesus. He was a highway robber leading a band of men in insurrection – thus say Lucian, Celsus and Sossianus Hierocles. It is possible to argue that these people wanted to discredit Christianity, but against this must be the even stronger motivation Christians had to hide the truth about their supposed founder.

The incident of Barabbas appears in the Gospels simply because it was part of Nazarene tradition circulated by word of mouth. It could not be omitted from the Gospels but the bishops of the early Church and the Gospel writers told their flocks that they had misunderstood the story. They rewrote it to suit the pro-Roman, anti-Jewish needs of the gentile church.

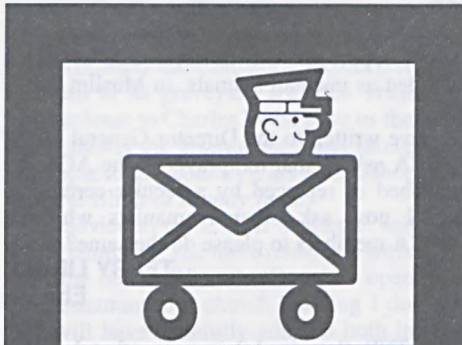
Perhaps Carmichael's book is pretty atrocious, but one has to distinguish between bad

presentation and bad ideas. Jesus was treated by the occupying force as a traitor to the ruling power, the Emperor. They did it because that is what he was! He accepted the accolade of kingship, defied the authorities in the Temple, must certainly have held control in Jerusalem to do so, told his supporters to carry arms – all of which were capital offences. Even without any other evidence, the case is clear, surely. Jesus was a seditionist not a hoaxer.

SHIRLIE SPENCE GRIFFITHS
AskWhy! Publications
Frome

Jesus was no henotheist!

MANY thanks to Aaron Judah for introducing me to "henotheism" and its distinction from "monotheism" (Page 10, July). However, I have



Short and clearly-typed letters for publication may be sent to Peter Brearey, 24 Alder Avenue, Silcoates Park, Wakefield WF2 0TZ. Please include name and address (not necessarily for publication) and a telephone number.

to take issue with his claim that Jesus was henotheistic and that it was Paul who introduced monotheism when he created Christianity (I agree with the latter).

Jesus' injunctions in Matthew 10:5 and 15:24 do not support the idea that he was henotheistic; they were merely reinforcement of his belief that he was primarily the saviour of Israel. I know of no evidence that Jesus and his contemporaries were henotheistic. Aaron Judah himself quotes from Owen's *Encyclopedia of Religion* to the effect that the Israelite henotheistic stage ended at the Babylonian exile. Nowhere in the New Testament is there any indication that Jews acknowledged the existence of gods other than Yahveh. The conclusion must be that Jewish monotheism had evolved well before Jesus' time.

As a PS: Can I just correct Michael Hill in his claim (July letters) that the sun will one day become a "red dwarf"? He has been inadvertently distracted by a certain popular television programme; the sun will eventually become a

"red giant", before it ends up as a "white dwarf".

STUART CAMPBELL
Edinburgh

I SUPPORT Aaron Judah's henotheist (polytheist) claim for Mosaic Judaism (before 70 BC), but the argument can be extended. The Hebrew Testament has three basic forms for names of God: El, Elohim and Yaweh (Lord) and there are about 15 variations of the above names in the OT. El (a proper noun) is the name of the Canaanite God, as well as being God in general in the OT.

The Jews like the Arabs claim their language is unique and sacred, but their languages are West Semitic in origin, and the relationship can be shown on a Semitic language tree diagram. The following are all related, in some order: Aramaic, Canaanite, Babylonian, Phoenician, Moabite, Assyrian, Arabic and Hebrew. Since Jews were related genetically and linguistically to the locals, it would be difficult to define a true monotheistic god. It is also interesting to note that the name ISRAEL, arranged, becomes IS RA EL. Isis is the mother God of Ancient Egypt, RA is the Sun God/God of Light in Ancient Egypt, and El is the creator Canaanite God!

Arabs have 99 names for God in the Koran but they refer to *attributes* of God, and the Koran's later date (611 AD) and reformulations allow a clearer concept of monotheism.

The Moses-Judaic God was a tribal deity which has been elevated to universal monotheistic form by Christians then Arabs. Paul introduced exclusivity, by accepting slavery, Jews by exclusive behaviour.

Angels (bird-like humans) existed in Ancient Egypt and Iraq long before Moses-Judaism started. The Egyptian God Nut is often shown with wings, and in Ancient Iraq the human female god Lillith had talons and wings. Angels are but ancient "recycled" gods, added to brighten up dull monotheism. If the Jewish God is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present then angels are redundant.

Angels, exclusivity, having many names for God, all detract from the concept of monotheism and thus imply contradictions.

ROBERT AWBURN
Reading

Atheist thought

I HAVE set up a "website" entitled ATHEIST THOUGHT which I invite you to draw to the attention of your members and readers.

This venture has been undertaken on my own personal responsibility hence my avoidance of the title, of such words as Humanist, Secularist, Rationalist, Ethical. Had I used any of these terms, I might have been thought to be presenting myself as writing for any of the organisations whose titles include such words. I am, in fact, proud to be a member of several such bodies but that does not entitle me to write on their behalf as an individual.

The "page" is updated approximately monthly. The format is threefold: an explanation

Turn to Page 15

You're telling us!

From Page 14

face – a brief “thought” of roughly the duration of a broadcast “thought slot” – and a somewhat longer piece purporting to give background material.

The content is more “godless” than “anti-god” and nothing would please me more than to receive, and possibly publish in the “page”, comments from any constructively interested persons.

My e-mail address is:

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The URL of ATHEIST THOUGHT is:

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ERIC STOCKTON
Orkney

Pride and prejudice

BOTH the tabloids and the broadsheets have jettisoned several of their journalistic big-guns to reassert their claim that AIDS – in Britain, the USA and most Western countries – is predominantly a disease transmitted by anal sexual intercourse, or by sharing infected needles when injecting drugs.

Prominent among these are Ann Leslie of the *Mail* and Andrew Neil in the *Sunday*

Express. Both Neil and Leslie believe that most homosexuals have never been at risk of catching AIDS; their view, maintained over several

years, has been affirmed by admissions from organisations such as Gay Men Fighting AIDS and the Terrence Higgins Trust. These have

shown all along that gay men and needle-sharing drug users have been those most at risk.

Their claims, made in the 1980s, that all were at risk was the only way in which they could persuade the Government to devote large funds to fighting AIDS. At the expense of self-indulgence,

I remind readers that in *The Freethinker* of July, 1987, I wrote an article under the title “AIDS and the Puritan Backlash”. I raised several points questioning the likelihood of AIDS

becoming widespread among the heterosexual community here. A most heretical stance at that time. Among the medical issues I posed were:

(a) syphilis had been predominant among gay men in the previous 20 years, with few female

cases, and a trend showing no signs of change; (b) hepatitis B, almost exclusively sexually transmitted among gay men, in a similar manner to AIDS, but far more infectious, showed

no sign of becoming widespread in the whole community; (c) the spread among haemophiliacs would cease once untreated blood products were not used, and (d) although most venereal diseases were rife, alongside AIDS, in sub-Saharan Africa, the main ones, syphilis and

gonorrhoea, were declining in the West.

But the thrust of my argument supported propaganda and its pecuniary backing, on the grounds that many who were opposed to this

came from the puritan Christian lobby. I quoted Anthony Grey, who had written earlier in *The Freethinker*: “crassly ignorant statements about

it (AIDS), and attacks upon sufferers come from some Tory MPs and the usual bunch of evangelical Jesus botherers”. Fundamentalists of both Islamic and Christian origin have kept up their tirade against homosexuals. Unlike Ann Leslie and Andrew Neil, I do not see the £1.5 billion spent on AIDS as wasted. This money has alerted many people to the prejudice there has been against gays, and has enlightened them that most opposition to gays/lesbians/bisexuals comes from those who quote scripture: texts from the Old Testament and St Paul which sit alongside other obscure passages which not even the anti-gay born-again Christians would dream of practising. On July 5, the Archbishop of Canterbury headed a back-to-basics revival, neatly evading his closeness to Royal “family” hypocrisy but ironically proximate to Gay Pride’s July 6 25th festival in London; no thanks to him, much has altered in the public mood to mitigate past prejudice.

The whole attitude of gay or straight young people to sex has become open; it recognises the nonsense and danger of the religious prejudice. In the 1960s London Transport was prohibited from displaying posters advertising family planning. Look what AIDS propaganda has achieved in promoting the safer sex message! Use of condoms, and knowledge about the sexual transmission of disease, has come into the limelight. The incidence of many sexually transmitted diseases has fallen dramatically. Syphilis is rare, and the number of cases of gonorrhoea is the lowest for decades. Although AIDS has risen by 19 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the latest WHO figures, its incidence in the West is much lower than was predicted in the 1980s. Much of this can surely

be attributed to AIDS publicity. Baroness Jay, former Director of the National AIDS Trust said: “If there had been no great awareness campaign and then there had been high levels of infection there would have been the most terrible fuss. It’s one of those things that you’re damned if you do and damned if you don’t”. Presumably there will now be a removal of AIDS funds from the “ring fence” enjoyed by charities and the DoH. Maybe this is appropriate now, but I hope that the good achieved will not be neglected and lead to further irrational attacks on gays.

As someone who conducts gay weddings, but who also has contacts with the evangelical Christian churches, I am only too well aware of the sentiments of those who see love directed at anyone other than a member of the opposite sex as wrong. It must be recognised that among those opposed to gays there are many in the forefront of opposition to *all* sexual permissiveness. They are puritans who are not content to keep their views to themselves. They believe in back-to-basics, with all the suppression and hypocrisy engendered by old-fashioned sexual mores. As a humanist, I have spoken in schools on this subject to children: apart from teenagers’ disinclination to believe in gods and religion, most possess a tolerant attitude to gays, a common sense approach to sex, and a tolerant world view. Freethinkers must be honest. But in the context of the time in which the AIDS challenge arose, we must be aware that out of suffering has arisen a generation of young people who no longer see lesbians and gays as “queer”.

DENIS COBELL
Catford

DATA PROTECTION ACT

WE ARE in the process of creating a computer database of the names and addresses of postal subscribers to *The Freethinker*. The information it contains will be used only to facilitate the journal’s more efficient distribution and to maintain subscription records, and in no circumstances will it be passed on to any other company or organisation outside the humanist movement.

Readers possess the right to have their names and addresses excluded from the database, and they should make their wish known to the Company Secretary, G W Foote and Company Limited, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald’s Road, London WC1X 8SP.

● While we have been working on the creation of the database, a number of readers who had already paid their subscriptions received “reminder” letters. We apologise for any inconvenience caused – it is hoped that most inaccurate information has now been weeded out from the system.

● Kindly check the name and address on the envelope containing this issue of *The Freethinker* (with particular reference to the postcode) and let us know of any errors.

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, September 1, 5.30 pm for 6 pm. Bernard Soole: *Christianity – Cultural Contraceptive of the West*.

Bristol Humanists: Information: Margaret Dearnaley on 0117 9502960 or Hugh Thomas on 0117 9871751.

Bromley Humanists: Information: D Elvin 0181 777 1680.

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

Chiltern Humanists: Information: 01296 623730. Tuesday, September 10, at Wendover Library, High Street: Meeting on the Sea of Faith movement. Details to be finalised.

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, August 15, 7.30 pm: Jim Herrick: *George Eliot's Humanism*.

Crawley: Information: Charles Stewart 01293 511270.

Derbyshire: Kevin W Stone, of 22A Church Street, Ashbourne, would like to hear from readers of *The Freethinker* in his area, possibly with a view to forming a group.

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

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

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA): Information: 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth CV8 2HD; 01926 858450. Monthly meetings (second Friday, 7.30 pm) at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (Library, 1st floor). Friday, August 9: Discussion and social. No meeting in September.

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, August 6, 8 pm: Dr Michael Kehr: *Alternative Medicine – an "Orthodox" View*. Tuesday, September 3: Lesley Brown (Eastbrookend Country Park): *Wild Barking and Dagenham*.

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.

Recent publications by National Secular Society members include:

● *Jesus the Pagan Sun God* by Larry Wright (£7.50 from 12 Kent Road, Swindon SN1 3NJ).

● *The Potts Papers* ("beguiling satire") by Terry Sanderson (£7.70 from The Other Way Press, PO Box 130, London W5 1DQ).

● *Humanist Anthology* by Margaret Knight, ed. Jim Herrick (£8.50 from RPA, Bradlaugh House, 47 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP).

● *Foundations of Modern Humanism* by Bill McIlroy (£1.25 from NSS, Bradlaugh House).

Glasgow Group: Information: Alan Henness, 138 Luton Street, Grangemouth FK3 8BL. Telephone: 01324 485152.

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 on 0113 2577009. Swarthmore Centre, Leeds. Tuesday, October 8: Paul Rogers, Professor of Peace Studies, Bradford University: *The Causes of Conflict*. Tuesday, November 12: Granville Williams, Campaign for Press Broadcasting Freedom: *Digital Television – Trick or Treat?*

Leicester Secular Society: Information: Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB; 0116 262222. Sunday meetings at 6.30pm.

Lewisham Humanist Group: Programme obtainable from Denis Cobell, 99 Ravensbourne Park, London SE64 4. Telephone (0181) 6904645.

Manchester Humanist Group: Information: 0161 7607.

Norwich Humanist Group: Information: Vincent Chainey, Le Chene, 4 Mill Street, Bradenham, Thetford IP7 7PN; telephone 01362 820982.

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

Sheffield Humanist Society: The Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street (adjoining Bank Street), Sheffield. Wednesday, August 7, 8pm: Annual General Meeting. Wednesday, September 4, 8 pm: Roland Meighan and Janet Meighan: *The Next Education System – a Humanist Vision*. Literature and information stall at the Green Mercury, Merlin Theatre, Meadow Bank Road, Nether Edge. Saturday, September 7, noon until 5 pm. Information: Gordon Sinclair, 9 South View Road, Hoyland, Barnsley S19 9EB; 01226 743070.

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 above address. Telephone: 0171 831 7723.

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

Sutton Humanist Group: Information: 0181 642 4545. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, September 11, 7.30pm for 8pm: Peter Heales: *Humanists be Spiritual?* Wednesday October 9: David Rainger: *William Morris*.

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

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

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

West Glamorgan Humanist Group: Information: 01423 842343 or write Julie Norris, 3 Maple Grove, Upland, Swansea SA2 0JY.

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