

Secular
Humanist
monthly

The

Freethinker

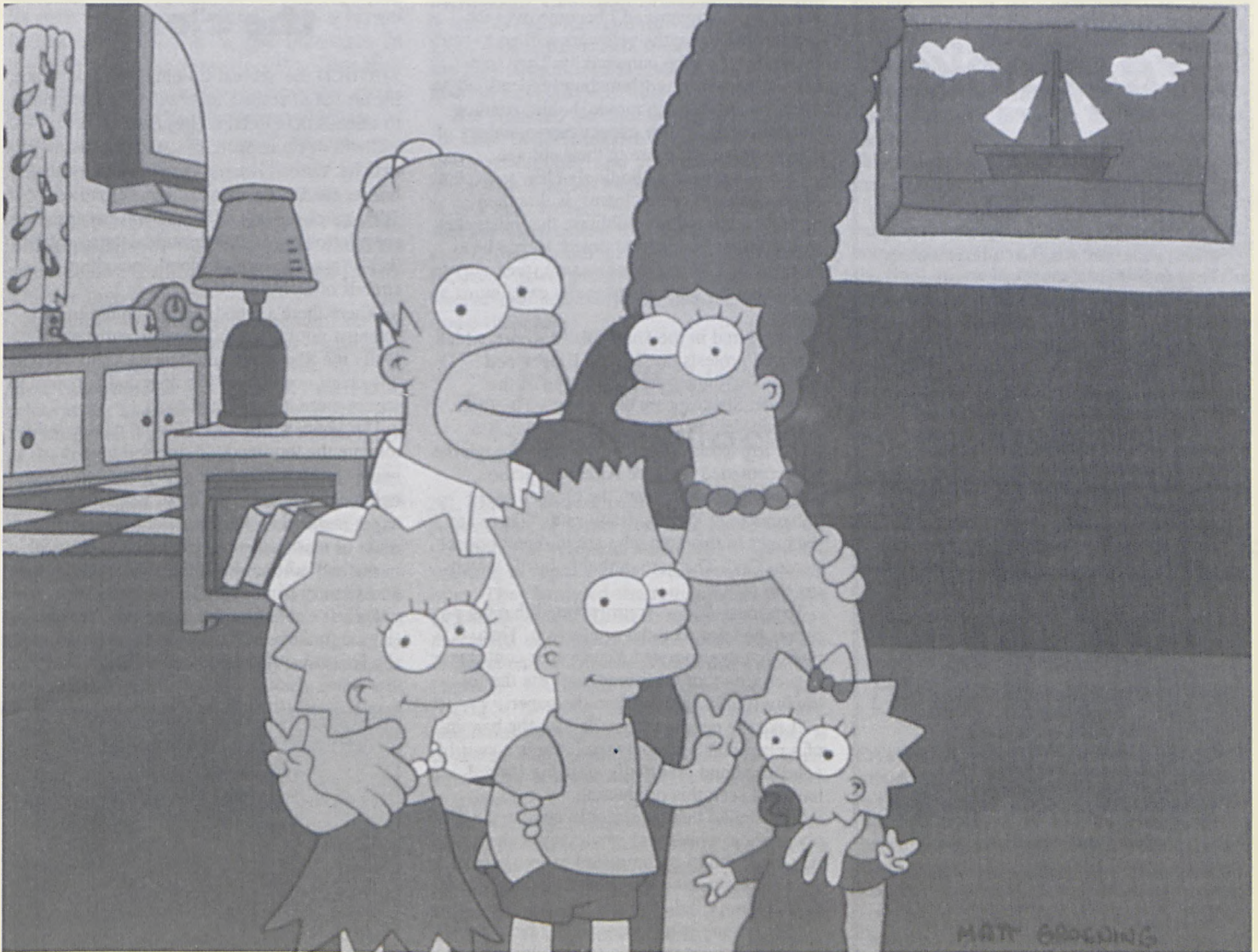
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Founded by G W Foote in 1881

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Aye Carumba!



***Are the Simpsons
getting at the godly?***

● **Meet The Simpsons – the American cartoon series on BBC 2 on Mondays and Fridays at 6pm.**

(Photograph: Twentieth Century Fox)

Up Front

Into the breach...

AS REPORTED in the May issue of the *Freethinker*, the late Peter Brearey's prime concern was that the magazine should maintain unbroken publication. His wish will be carried out.

Since Peter's death, many of the *Freethinker's* supporters and contributors have offered me their support in my role as acting editor. Their help is greatly appreciated, and I shall make full use of it.

My own association with the *Freethinker* goes back to the 1970s. Shortly after my arrival from South Africa, where I worked as

a journalist, I was befriended by the then *Freethinker* editor Bill McLroy, and over the years I worked closely with him and his successor Jim Herrick.

Unfortunately, I only got to meet Peter about two years ago when I was elected Treasurer of the National Secular Society. However, in that short space of time I grew both to like and respect him.

He was a great credit to the organisation, and I shall do my best to carry the torch until such time as a permanent editor is appointed.

Outraged - again!

IS IT my imagination, or do certain religionists actually enjoy being grossly offended? I ask only because the longer I spend on this planet the more amazed I become over the extraordinary lengths believers will go to snuff out things to be outraged by. Then, not content with having triumphantly identified an offensive book, play, movie, t-shirt, running shoe or football, they expect sane members of the population to share in their outrage.

Of course, what's blindingly clear to us, but never occurs to these clowns, is that their protests serve only to publicise the things they want to have banned or burned. Hence headlines like *Call for 'blasphemous' stage play to be banned* are guaranteed to put extra bums on seats.

It appeared in the *South Wales Argus*, which reported protests outside the Blackwood Miners' Institute over the staging of the Reduced Shakespeare Company's *The Bible, the Complete Works of God*. The play is a witty, irreverent roller-coaster ride through the bible provided by three American actors.

One bright spark from the Gospel Tabernacle in Pontllanfraith said: "There are Satanists in this area who are in direct opposition to God. They are probably inside watching the play."

The *South Wales Argus* reported that the protesters had not seen the production. That immediately prompted *Freethinker* contributor Jessica Boyd, of Cwmbran, to write the following (published) letter to the paper:

"Like the people who called for the banning of a play which presents the bible in a swiftly condensed and reportedly amusing form, I have not seen this production.

"But unlike them, I strongly oppose the blasphemy law, which they obviously seek to invoke. Nobody is compelled to see, hear or read anything, which would, they fear, offend their religious beliefs.

"But no-one in my view should be allowed to stop others from doing so. The blasphemy law is anachronistic, a relic of the days when the religious establishment was able to stifle and suppress anything which challenged their authority. It is in contradiction to the ideals of freedom of thought and expression and should be repealed."

A load of balls

MEANWHILE, a consignment of World Cup footballs has had to be withdrawn from sale

because of objections from "outraged" Muslims in Rotherham, South Yorkshire. The unofficial footballs, produced in India, were overprinted with the national flags of participating nations—including that of Saudi Arabia. The Saudi flag bears the words "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet". What do you do with a football? Kick it, of course. But kicking a ball bearing 'holy' words from the Koran was said to be "a gross insult", and the balls were removed from sale. Crazier even than the protest was the actual withdrawal of the balls. If people persist in caving in every time religious buffoons begin squealing we'll soon find every aspect of our lives once again controlled by mad mullahs and their Christian counterparts.

Bring on the clones

SHOULD the Second Coming ever take place, the arrival of Jesus Christ will owe a lot more to science than to Him Upstairs.

It will never happen, of course. A distinctly twitchy Vatican is making damn sure of that. It has recalled every scrap of the Shroud of Turin taken for scientific analysis because, speculation has it, the shroud contains—get this—"genuine human blood, including strands of DNA".

Where there's blood, there's bound to be a scientist not far behind eager to carry out a Dolly the Sheep-type cloning experiment. And any claret oozed by a son-of-a-god is bound to attract more interest than most.

The Vatican, of course, has no choice but to tolerate the thousands of deluded human beings around the globe who genuinely believe they are Jesus Christ. But allowing experiments that might conceivably produce a mass of messiahs is far too much to stomach. In the end no-one would be able to distinguish Christianity from a terribly bad acid trip.

There's another problem as well. You'd have to kiss goodbye to the Virgin Birth doctrine if scientists ever detected paternal DNA!

Barry Duke

The Freethinker

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NEW FREETHINKER EDITOR

Following the tragic death of Peter Brearey, G W Foote & Co is looking for a new *Freethinker* editor, with experience of journals. The qualities required include initiative, imagination and writing flair.

Please apply for further details and application form from G W Foote & Co, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL or telephone Jim Herrick on 0171 430 1371.

Please request information by August 1, 1998.

KEITH PORTEOUS WOOD reflects on the the Human Rights Bill, and reports on National Secular Society activities in respect of other key issues.

A cause for relief, not a celebration

THE GOVERNMENT has agreed to reverse the pro-religious amendments to the Human Rights Bill that were introduced in the House of Lords (*The Freethinker*, February and March). The Government is proposing its own amendment which gives a largely token concession to the churches in the form of a new section 9 to the Bill. This requires courts considering cases that concern religious organisations or their members to have “particular regard” to the European Human Rights Convention’s clause concerning freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This appears to be little more than an unnecessary reminder to judges to follow the law.

Assuming the promised amendments are made and there are no further significant pro-religious changes to the Bill, there is some cause for relief. I say relief, rather than celebration, because the passage of this Bill has taught us a great deal about the strength of the opposition we face.

In an article in *The Times*, David Pannick, QC, described the pro-religious Lords amendments as neither necessary nor appropriate. Despite this, and opposition to them by the Government, it bodes ill for the future that the pro-religious lobby succeeded in having the amendments passed in the Lords, even though they look like being largely reversed in the Commons. Readers of the article on the Bill in the March issue will recall the pivotal role of the well-funded pro-religious pressure group called the Rutherford Institute with its access to sophisticated advice and support.

More religious peers?

ON HEARING about the establishment of a committee to reform the House of Lords, the National Secular Society wrote earlier this year to Lord Irvine, Lord Chancellor, calling for the removal of the Bench of Bishops. The latest proposals from the Lord Chancellor are the opposite of our suggestion. He wishes to increase religious representation in the Lords to include other faiths. And it gets worse. The Lord Chancellor has suggested a reduction in the 26 Anglican bishops in the Lords, but Dr. Carey is belligerently refusing

to consider any reduction whatsoever, despite the Church’s attendances recently falling to below the million mark. If representatives of the other five major religions are appointed—and presumably some non-Anglican Christians, for example, RCs, Methodists, Church of Scotland (where will it end?)—we could end up with a dozen religious representatives in the chamber most of the time rather than the one or two Anglican bishops normally on “duty”.

The National Secular Society has brought the issue to the attention of supportive media (both newspaper and radio) and provided them with detailed background information. It has also written to the Lord Chancellor seeking a discussion. But I cannot say that I am optimistic; our new religion-friendly/all-inclusive government seems determined—I almost said hell-bent—on making the UK a quasi-theocracy.

Religious assemblies

AT THEIR annual conference, the National Association of Head Teachers endorsed the scrapping of religious assemblies in schools, wanting to replace them with secular assemblies. They branded the religious assemblies as unhelpful, inflexible, unmanageable. They described as “dogmatic and insensitive” the requirement that these assemblies should be “mainly Christian” in character. The NAHT’s General Secretary, David Hart, maintains that “The basic job of a teacher is to teach. That includes spiritual and moral values, but it is not our job to deliver collective worship.”

The Church perspective is somewhat different. The General Secretary of the C of E’s Board of Education, Canon John Hall, attacked the NAHT, saying—like some Victorian parody—“I believe that it is fundamental to our human nature to need and to want to pray. It is therefore one of the key tasks of the education system to teach people to pray.”

The National Secular Society immediately issued a press release supporting the NAHT and, as General Secretary, I took part in a one-hour debate and phone-in on national radio (Radio Five Live) with Joel Edwards Director General of the Evangelical Alliance and presenter Brian Hayes. The calls were mainly supportive of our stance, including several pointing out how difficult it is in

practice for pupils to ‘opt out’ without being victimised. One caller, however, thought that teachers should be required to teach the Bible as fact, whether they believed it or not. The Rev Edwards, from a Pentecostal church, when challenged, conceded that you do not have to be Christian to be moral. Interestingly, he regarded the C of E as a spent force and contrasted it with the fast-expanding membership of his church. I pointed out that, with only 20 per cent of secondary schools following the law on school assemblies, the law was unenforceable, and this requirement should be withdrawn immediately. I reminded listeners that the Union’s proposals were seeking to “ban” religious assemblies, simply removing the compulsion to have them daily. Surprisingly, the final quote was from a lay member of the General Synod, Liz Paver who is also a Head teacher in Doncaster. She said: “Teachers are not there to do the Church’s job. The Church of England only has to give one sermon a week, on Sunday, so why should they expect us to do their job for them five days a week? They have a cheek.”

Bishop commits suicide calling for abolition of blasphemy law

CATHOLIC Bishop John Joseph committed suicide in May in Pakistan to draw attention to its (Muslim) blasphemy laws. The penalty for infringement is life imprisonment or death. According to the *Independent*, judges have preferred to pass the death sentence, but none of these has yet been carried out. The only evidence that is required to bring charges is a complainant and a witness, and there are suspicions that some charges have been motivated by motives such as wanting to banish people so that their property can be taken over.

After British Christians dubbed the Pakistan law as “infamous and pernicious”, the National Secular Society was quick to ask leading Christians publicly whether they will join its campaign to abolish the blasphemy law in this country. In theory, at least, offenders could be imprisoned.

No takers yet, I’m afraid.

Peter Brearey – a personal tribute

by Keith Porteous Wood, General Secretary, National Secular Society

Peter Brearey, your late Editor, and his wife Pamela had only moved in March from the bustle of Peter's beloved West Riding to the beautiful Orkney Island of Sanday. Peter was to have spent his final years in semi-retirement there, but in the event, those years turned out to be just weeks. They were spent in increasing pain and his being confined first to the house, then to his room and, finally, to his bed. It is a measure of the man that, as during his earlier major operation, he continued to edit this journal with no indication appearing in it of his struggle, and no one except those closest to him knowing what was really happening. And none of this would have been possible without unstinting help from Pam.

By the time he ran away from home at 14, Peter had resolved that one day he would be editor of *The Freethinker*. From around then until his death he espoused idealistic, and sometimes unpopular, causes with courage, commitment and great energy. And there were many of them, but because of his modesty you only found out about them on a "need-to-know" basis. I never ceased to be surprised at discovering yet another unsuspected involvement or talent of his; how many readers knew he spoke Urdu, for example? He also went to enormous lengths to help many individuals in difficulties. The combined burden of these often emotionally draining commitments ensured that he had very little time for leisure.

He lived much of his life in the fast lane. Just over a week before he died on May 7, 1998, he talked to me about life's many ironies with characteristic—but devastating—humour: having given up the demon drink 18 years previously, but having smoked an ounce of tobacco a day, why was it, he demanded, he had cancer of the liver, rather than the lungs? This demonstrates the courage with which he bore his final illness. In a previous telephone call, from hospital in Aberdeen, he sounded bright, and I fleetingly thought that, against all the odds, it was to be good news. Then he said: "It looks like I won't be coming to your millennium party—I have been given a terminal diagnosis."

He left hospital a few days later to return to Sanday and the island's doctor kindly accompanied him on the final leg of the flight. Once home again, and by then on morphine, he was nursed constantly by his wife and sister until his death, with Pam, somehow, also managing to work. Such was Peter's professionalism as a journalist that, in excruciating pain, he refused the morphine while he was completing the editing of May's issue of the *Freethinker*, the last thing he ever did.

Peter's death is a spur to me to press even harder for the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia. We should all be able to die with dignity.

As in most remote spots, it is customary on the Island for bodies to be left in the church until burial. This was clearly out of the question for Peter and his body remained at their home.



● Peter Brearey

The funeral was just three days after he died, and many who knew of his death were unable to go, Sanday being one of the most inaccessible places in Britain.

A close friend of Peter's, Bill McIlroy, himself a former *Freethinker* editor and also one of my predecessors, conducted the funeral ceremony with great sensitivity. It took place in the kitchen of the old stone cottage with its two-foot thick walls. The coffin, with Peter's photograph on it, was by the window overlooking the sea and about 20 people were seated in rows. As well as family and friends, islanders came to pay their respects too, including one delightful old lady who, incredibly, they had just discovered was a distant relation of Peter's. After tributes, prose and poetry from Pam, his son Michael, and several friends, there was music, including Peter's favourite Paul Robeson songs. Peter's coffin was then carried out to the strains of "The Walk to the Paradise Garden" by Frederick Delius, a fellow Yorkshireman.

An idyllic cloudless and uncharacteristically calm day it was—the best so far this year, they said. We lowered the coffin into the grave in the garden and covered it with flowers. The garden overlooks a magnificent vista of grassy fields, sandy bays and sea to the horizon.

He will be sorely missed by his family and wide circle of friends, in whose welfare he took the greatest interest—those people from all walks of life who have been touched by his kindness, have succumbed to his mischievous charm, were impressed with his candour and courage—or simply beguiled by his impish humour.

To those causes which he held dear, he is an irreplaceable loss, too. As well as losing a beloved friend, the secular movement has suffered a double blow in the loss of a wise Editor and a popular Vice-President of the National Secular Society. His counsel was much sought, particularly in challenging times. He freely gave his time and energy to the Society, and his commitment was total.

Let us celebrate the life of a good and excep-

tional man. Let us honour him by doing our best to continue his work as he would have wished. He wanted the National Secular Society to grow and for it to disseminate ever more widely its own distinctive message and to be unfettered in its criticism of religion and all forms of harmful superstition. He wanted the *Freethinker* to go from strength to strength and build its influence with opinion-formers. But, shunning personal publicity, he did not want the magazine to become a "personality" paper and he rued the recurrent petty personality clashes. He kept the magazine as much as possible away from involvement in arguments in the movement, saddened by the energy they dissipated.

I never heard Peter describe himself as a Humanist, but I cannot think of anyone who better demonstrated humanist principles in action than he did. His death made headline news and the newspaper stand hoardings in West Yorkshire, where he was particularly loved. As they say there, "They don't make them like that any more, do th'?"

My thanks to Pamela Brearey for her unstinting work before and after Peter's death; to Bill McIlroy for a moving ceremony and for undertaking the marathon journey at short notice; to Gordon Sinclair for chauffeuring Bill to Sanday from Yorkshire and back—more than 1,000 miles, without which Bill would have been unable to officiate; and to neighbours Eric and Myra Stockton for providing accommodation and great hospitality to Bill, Gordon and me.

Colin McCall adds:

DEATH is the end for the individual, but not for those left behind. I can, and shall continue to hear that cheerful voice saying "Hello, Colin" over the phone, and I'm glad I shall, for it was ever welcoming.

My wife, who never met Peter, knew the same pleasure, because of his friendly chats and advice, as she accustomed herself to the electronic mailing of my pieces for *The Freethinker*.

Our sadness and foreboding came when I received a proof with Peter's writing at the top: "I'm feeling rather ill". After that the end came relatively quickly although not, alas, without a great deal of pain. But now, "life's fitful dream is over". And, thankfully, Peter Brearey was active, virtually to the last.

He and I had much in common, notably our secularism and socialism, and only a few weeks ago, he told me he was assembling a mass of recent data that supported Karl Marx's critique of capitalism.

No doubt it is lying there among the unused material he took with him to Sanday, his final resting place.

I'm sorry I wasn't able to make the trip to say farewell to a fellow fighter for freedom of thought, the Editor who put *The Freethinker* on the Internet and should have lived to take it into the twenty-first century.

The recent testing of nuclear devices in India and Pakistan has prompted the Indian Radical Humanist Association (IRHA) to issue a strongly-worded statement.

INDIAN HUMANISTS OPPOSE NUCLEAR TESTING

AT THE outset we make it clear that as a humanist organisation, the IRHA is totally against any nuclear test whether conducted by India or by Pakistan or for that matter by any developing or developed country. The reasons are obvious but still need to be reiterated:

Nuclear explosions and the development of nuclear weapons are a threat not to only human beings but also to all life on earth.

In 1985, then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi inquired about the cost of nuclear tests, and was informed that it would be not less than 15,000 crore rupees (one crore = 10 million; 41 Rupees = 1 USD), which should now be much higher. India cannot afford such a costly experiment at the cost of other priority programmes, namely removal of poverty and ignorance and providing basic facilities like potable water, health care, education, employment, etc.

Second, the next step of nuclear tests is to develop nuclear weapons which is equally or more costly and dangerous, and the Government do not give any categorical assurance that they will not develop these weapons.

Fundamentalism

The recent tests conducted by India and Pakistan may start an arms race not only in South Asia but also in the Middle East.

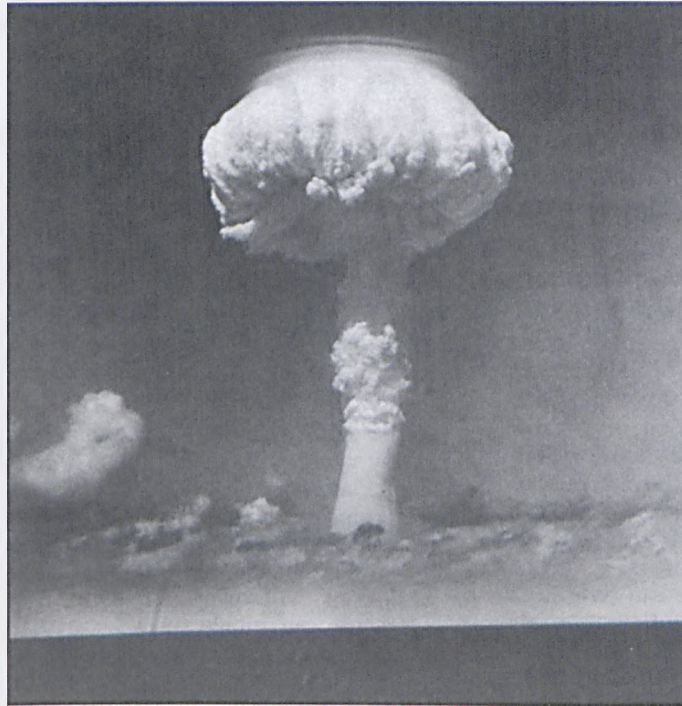
There is a widespread fear that with rising fundamentalism the nuclear weapons might fall into the hands of jingoistic politicians and fundamentalist governments which are backed by frenzied masses who may ignite a nuclear holocaust.

We condemn the recent testing of nuclear devices in India, particularly because the decision to do so was not taken by the people but (if the reports in the media are to be believed) by no more than five individuals, out of whom one is not an elected member and two others were actually defeated in the recent Lok Sabha (Parliament's lower house) elections which brought the BJP to power despite not gaining a majority of seats in the Lok Sabha.

However the IRHA feels that blame lies as much with the economically and technically advanced countries as with both India and Pakistan because:

- The five nuclear weapon countries refuse even to undertake a programme for gradual reduction and ultimate elimination of the nuclear weapons in their possession.

- The developed countries have all along been selling small weapons as well as weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems, especially to authoritarian and fun-



"There is a widespread fear that with rising fundamentalism the nuclear weapons might fall into the hands of jingoistic politicians and fundamentalist governments which are backed by frenzied masses who may ignite a nuclear holocaust."

(Photograph: Hulton Deutsch Collection)

damentalist rulers in the 'Third World' countries, most of them religious states, in order to maintain a high level of affluence and reduce unemployment in their own societies.

- The developed countries which are themselves sitting on huge piles of nuclear weapons and are now condemning India (and now Pakistan) for conducting nuclear tests, having fuelled the growing atmosphere of insecurity.

- The transfer of sensitive US missile technology and their soft policy towards China, despite Beijing's repeated violations of international treaties on transfer of nuclear technology, by transferring the same to Pakistan and Iran, has created an imbalance in the South Asia region. IRHA is however more concerned with what should be done next, than with apportioning the blame for the ever-increasing threat to peace in not only South Asia but the world at large. We suggest the following steps:

- Since there can be no vanquished or victors in a modern war, jingoistic calls to arms and threats of war should give way to a process of development of international friendship through dialogues.

- Humanists of the world should advocate total disarmament and destruction of all existing nuclear weapons, instead of insisting on nations like India to sign a discriminative NPT and CTBT.

- Humanists should prevail upon the Indian Government that India should immediately stop the process of weaponisation, and stop at the recently conducted tests only.

- War industries should not be allowed to continue and used as instruments to provide employment and maintain high standards of living in either developed or developing countries.

- While it is the politicians who give a call to arms, it is the poor who are sent to fight and it is the women and children who are the worst sufferers. Humanists, therefore, should put pressure on the politicians of their respective countries, to adopt policies of peaceful co-existence and complete abolition of war.

- Notice should be taken of the fact that despite the euphoria created and encouraged after the tests, many a sane individual and institution have opposed the tests and have been doing so at the cost of being branded unpatriotic. The euphoria is dying down now.

- The Indian humanists and other sane voices, although, labouring under a religious fundamentalist government, continue demanding peace with the neighbours, opposing religious fundamentalism and working towards better future for humanity.

It is very encouraging that IHEU have decided to hold the 14th World Congress in the disturbed subcontinent at Bombay in early January next year. This will present an ideal opportunity to Humanists of the world to express their solidarity in opposing nuclear armaments, arms race, fundamentalism and growing violence. These very themes among others will be discussed in the sessions of the congress.

ASK THE PARSON (16)

by Karl Heath

DEAR PARSON: Does this question seem crude, silly and childish to you? It shouldn't, for after all it's not unfair to point out that sometimes you personify God. You know that your congregation could not imagine, understand or fathom a god who was a metaphysical abstraction. How many of your congregation are capable of transcendental mysticism? So do you not prefer to go along with a familiar, homely image of a "loving father"?

Assuming that your congregation could not readily address their prayers and praises to an invisible cloud, do you not choose to leave unresolved the question of whether God has size, dimensions, shape and visibility? The Beatitudes say that the pure in heart will see God. What does this mean? Exodus, Ch33 v33 says that God showed Moses his bottom. What does that mean?

Many people are supposed to have seen Jesus. Unfortunately, none of the Gospels tell us what he looked like. In the early centuries of Christianity none of the faithful described what he looked like.

As I said in a previous letter, our familiar image of Jesus is derived from Byzantine icons invented seven centuries after his time. Who says that Jesus had a beard? The earliest known picture shows a beardless youth. Furthermore, whatever Jesus looked like during his incarnation, what does he look like now? Does he still retain the same body, or has he become invisible and beyond all dimensions? And does God the Father resemble Jesus?

All these questions are relevant to my last letter—"Two Worlds". I contrasted your worlds of transcendental images based upon faith with my world, which demonstrates its existence to me through my senses. I suggest



● Karl Heath

How big is God?

to you that while your world is meaningless to me, my world is accepted by you unless you are a Platonist.

But it seems to me that your difficulty lies in reconciling the two worlds. The physical universe is, for the most part, a mystery, and, for us humans, will always remain a mystery. But we can nibble away at partial understandings which make sense to us. What is not logical is the attempt to explain the whole of one mystery by postulating an even greater mystery to account for it. You end up with two mysteries instead of one, and the second mystery, unlike the first, is not susceptible to investigation.

But let me for the moment allow you the two mysteries. If you explain the universe by postulating a "Lord, Creator of the Universe" you are already personifying the Creator, since "lord" suggests a man. If the universe has a creator it is an invisible force pervading infinity, utterly unlike a human being and lacking all human qualities.

And yet you allow your congregation to believe that God created man in his own image, which means that, if we look like him, he looks like us. Please do not respond with any quibbles about the meaning of "image".

Astrology

The primitive idea of the Universe was that it consisted of a huge central earth with little bits revolving around it. It would be rude to suggest that any of your congregation are still primitive in their knowledge and understanding — like those who believe in astrology. (Astrology believers are like silly children in a moving train who think that the scenery is rushing past them).

While the primitive ideas of the universe prevailed, it was not altogether unreasonable to think of a human-like creator. There is some logic in a little tribal god—the guardian of a small group of people on a tiny space of this tiny planet. There is less logic when God's patch is extended to the whole

of the earth. But when we come to the whole universe as we know it—if we insist on a human-like creator—then the discrepancy, the dichotomy, the wholly unrealistic lack of proportion become utterly incredible. Singing "The Lord God made them all" may suffice as a nursery rhyme for children, but it is an insult to adults.

I will not burden you with statistics in what I have next to say. Please accept the word "billions". It is fairly accurate.

Suppose your God created the universe, which comprises mostly space, but contains billions of galaxies.

Where is Jesus?

Light travels at 186,000 miles per second, and the most distant galaxies are billions of light years away, a light year (pardon the obvious) being the distance light would travel in a year.

Where is Jesus?

Our galaxy, the Milky Way, is part of a local group. The Andromeda galaxy, a larger neighbour, is two million light years away. Our own galaxy is rushing towards it, but not to worry.

Where is Jesus?

Our galaxy is 250,000 light years in diameter.

Where is Jesus?

Out on one of the galaxy's spiral arms is our own "ten-a-penny" G-type sun, one of billions in the galaxy.

Where is Jesus?

Asteroids

Our sun, a microscopic speck in the universe, possesses a solar system of tiny planets, the whole, moons, asteroids and debris, amounting to only a fraction of the sun's mass.

Where is Jesus?

One of these tiny planets, our own earth, developed a microscopic itch of life.

Where is Jesus?

In the latest, most recent speck of time in the history of this life itch, some tiny, thin-skinned bipeds appeared.

Now Jesus appears!

His heavenly father has made him.

Perhaps now you will understand why I asked: How big is God?

He created a son, smaller in relative terms than the smallest microbe. You may say size does not matter. But the earthly Jesus is supposed to have had size. Does there not seem to be a mismatch? If size does not matter, do you know whether Jesus, wherever he may be now, still has a size?

Or a shape?

Or an appearance?

Or visibility?

"Oh, ye of little faith." That includes me. But as some say: "If you can believe all this you can believe anything."



Down to Earth

with Colin McCall

'Ju-ju' men still hopping mad

THE WORK Dermot Morgan did so well in life is continuing unabated from beyond the grave—and the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland is not amused. Before his sudden death at the age of 45 in March, the actor who created the celebrated Father Ted character said he had never lost his desire to smack the Roman Catholic Church on the nose for "keeping Ireland in the Dark Ages".

Now his choicest words about the church are again making headlines as a result of an article, written under a pseudonym in the *Dublin Pioneer*, a Catholic Church magazine. The writer lambasted the clergy who joined the public and politicians in praising Morgan at his funeral in Dublin. The article gave the press a great opportunity to recycle the lapsed Catholic's finest quotes about the church—thus making them accessible to folk who may have missed them the first time around. One in particular struck a raw nerve. In comparing priests to witchdoctors he said: "It's not healthy for these ju-ju men to hop around the altar telling you what to do."

Pioneer editor Father Bernard McGuckian, in defending the article, said peevishly: "Morgan spoke very harshly about us. He was relentless. It was supposed to be a love-hate relationship except there wasn't any love."

God is Segers' 'Mr Fixit'

WOLVERHAMPTON Wanderers' Dutch goalkeeper Hans Segers thinks that divine intervention helped him through his Winchester Crown Court retrial, when he was cleared, along with two others, of match-fixing. But he believes that God fixes matches.

"God let me save this", he prayed, when Leeds United were awarded a penalty in the closing minutes of Wolves' quarter-final FA cup match—and Segers did save the shot. But God must have been turning away—or fixing the other semi-final—when Wolves lost to Arsenal on April 5, and Segers' hopes, perhaps even his prayers for a Wembley final, were dashed.

Hodde's faith healer

LET'S stay with football. According to the England coach, Glenn Hodde, people like me have closed minds. Because, that is, we ridicule the role of his faith-healer Eileen

Drewery in his build-up to the World Cup. But in the unlikely event of his team winning the trophy, Hodde is sure to give some of the credit to the woman who, he says, "saved two careers when I was at Swindon", and has been assisting the national side for the past 18 months.

He's not sure if the players "understand" what Mrs Drewery is doing (*The Guardian*, April 22), and it's difficult not to share their puzzlement. If she possesses the healing powers that Hodde claims for her, why has the squad been plagued by so many injuries?

Priest jailed for life

RUDOLPH Kos, a Roman Catholic priest found guilty of more than 100 sexual assaults on altar boys, has been sentenced to life imprisonment in Dallas, Texas. And last year the allegations resulted in a record \$119.6 million civil judgment against him and his Church. But as *The Times* reported damningly (April 3), documents showed that "Church authorities were aware of the abuse".

Finding religion in the Full Monty

A NUMBER of interesting and some valuable programmes like *Face the Facts* and *Kaleidoscope* were dropped in James Boyle's overhaul of BBC Radio 4. But not *Thought for the Day*, that embarrassing morning slot when clergy and laity try to find religious relevance in topical affairs. Never more ineptly than when a vicar recently described the film, *The Full Monty* as "an engaging commentary on the gospel". I'm afraid I didn't catch the speaker's name but, on the surely reasonable assumption that only one Christian clergyman could have made this bizarre connection, I believe he must have been Andrew Knowles, Vicar of St Mark's, Wyke, Normandy, Surrey.

Certainly Mr Knowles expressed the same view in the March issue of his parish magazine, where he explained what everyone must know by now, that in the film, Robert Carlyle recruits followers "to seek a new life together as strippers". Then the reverend gentleman continued in all seriousness: "In his [Carlyle's] own personal Gethsemane (the back-stage changing room) he himself falters and almost fails but then triumphantly appears on stage with the others to achieve 'the full Monty'." The film ends with the group stark naked before an audience—"an image of utter humiliation and glory", says Mr Knowles. "Did anyone else think of the crucifixion?" he asks.

Not unless it was another parson on *Thought for the Day*.

Incidentally, I thank Mr Boyle for one of his changes: that Radio 4 will no longer play the national anthem on most royal birthdays. It sounds as though we will still have to tolerate it on some anniversaries, but let's be thankful for small mercies.

Pope delays Doomsday

ITALY has been gripped by "pre-millennial anxiety" since the earthquake in Umbria last September, which killed 11 people and damaged the Basilica of St Francis at Assisi, according to Richard Owen (*The Times*, April 24). There are also rumours that Vesuvius is about to erupt again. But the Vatican has sought to reassure the faithful that the "Third Secret" of Fatima, "revealed" to three Portuguese children in 1917, and kept secret by the papacy, did not predict Doomsday.

Speaking on "The Second Coming of Christ at the End of Things", the Pope told his audience that, although "history is moving towards its conclusion... Christ did not indicate any chronological deadline". Apocalyptic visions were to be taken "symbolically" as images of "the precarious position of humanity and the sovereign power of Christ".

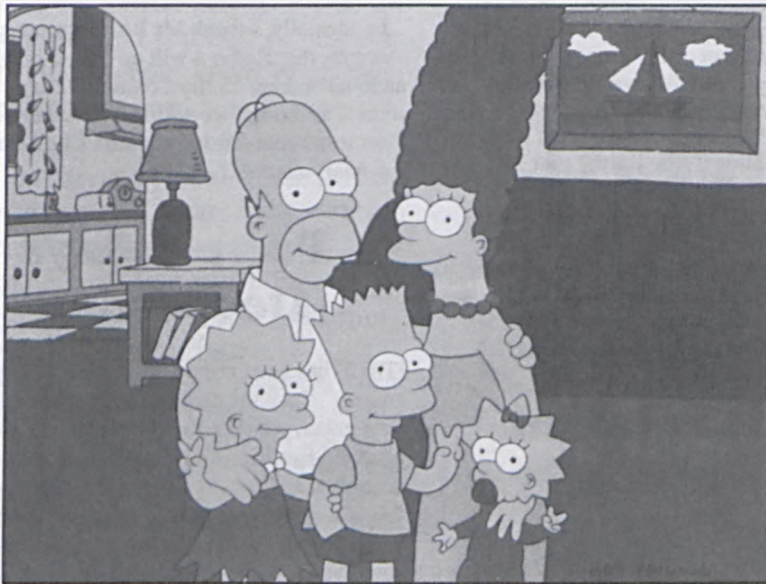
The "precarious position of humanity" seems singularly misplaced in a speech of reassurance.

'Rogues' running The Vatican

ALL IS NOT exactly hunky-dory in the Vatican itself, if the *Sunday Telegraph's* Roman correspondent, Bruce Johnston, is to be believed. And although his report following the double murder and suicide by a Swiss guardsman contained a number of uncheckable items (that the shot couple were members of Opus Dei, for example), the Pope's passion for globetrotting has meant neglect of internal business.

"Left to mind an institution that was always closed and over-centralised", the Curia answers "almost to no-one", said Johnston. The main pre-occupation these days is to wait for a successor to John Paul II. One cleric who dedicated his life to a Vatican department before being "forced to leave" by "faceless, arrogant and ignorant men" told Johnston that a "bunch of rogues" was "running the show now". Not for the first time.

Inject a healthy dose of scepticism into a TV cartoon series, season 1 you should have the zealots baying for blood. Add gay rights to the for far *The Simpsons* (BBC 2 and Sky 1) appear to have dodged major c busybodies don't realise how subversive this American cartoon serie.



Subver are a s

I HAD been aware for some time that *The Simpsons* enjoyed a huge following, but hadn't a clue what gave it cult status until the day I came across the science versus religion episode.

The storyline is simple. Little Lisa Simpson—the intellectual, vegetarian, saxophone-playing conservationist—insists that the developers of a huge shopping mall allow an archaeological exploration of their site before construction begins. They agree, and Lisa, with the help of school mates, begins digging.

She uncovers a skeleton—human but for one feature. It has wings. Everyone concludes it is an angel. While the authorities argue as to what should be done with the fossil, Homer Simpson, Lisa's dad, makes off with it and sets it up in his home. Soon, people come knocking at the Simpsons' door, wanting to touch the statue "for luck". They are quite prepared to pay for the privilege.

Lisa is not interested in the cash. She wants answers. The idea of the fossil being an angel is "preposterous" she says, and wants scientific tests carried out. "We'll soon have the facts then," she claims. Homer disagrees: "Facts," he declares with typical Homeric logic, "are meaningless. You can use facts to prove anything that's remotely true."

Lisa persists and takes a bone fragment for analysis. The scientist who agrees to examine it later says his tests are "inconclusive", to which the Reverend Lovejoy responds: "Well, science has faltered again in the face of overwhelming religious evidence".

Ned Flanders, Homer's insufferably sanctimonious Christian neighbour adds: "Science is like a blabbermouth who ruins a movie by telling how it ends. I say there are some things we don't want to know ... important things." (I later discover that Flanders is on

record as saying: "I've done everything the bible says—even the stuff that contradicts the other stuff". Curiously I also learn that Flanders played Blanche Dubois in Tennessee Williams' *Streetcar Named Desire* during his fraternity days).

Whipped into an anti-science frenzy, the townsfolk set about torching Springfield's Museum of Natural History and other scientific institutions.

Lisa, appalled at their behaviour, decides that the 'angel' has to be smashed, but finds it has vanished from her home. It later reappears on a hill, bearing the inscription: "The end will come at sundown." This is taken by the town to mean the end of the world, and everyone, except the bloody-minded Lisa—"I'm sorry to disappoint you mom, but the world is not about to end"—prepares for Armageddon.

Orgy

Come sundown and the angel booms out a message: "Prepare for the end ... of high prices." The angel levitates and the townsfolk are exhorted to follow it to the Heavenly Hills shopping mall. To Lisa's chagrin, far from being angry at having been so thoroughly duped by a phoney fossil planted by the developers, Springfielders dash to the mall to indulge in an orgy of spending.

Combining as it does satire and stinging social commentary (in this case by demonstrating middle-America's breathtaking capacity for religious self-delusion), this episode accomplishes two things. It instantly makes me a Simpsons devotee, then sends me on a quest to discover how much more there is in the series for the ardent sceptic and devoted libertarian.

A great deal, as it turns out—another gem

being an episode entitled *Homer Phobia*.

Although hilarious from start to end, this episode bravely tackles a very serious issue: that of homophobia. Given that *The Simpsons* is watched by millions of youngsters (and that anti-gay bullying is widespread in many schools) this should be regarded as a public service broadcast. In fact, I would go so far as to say that every school ought to have a video of the episode and use it as the basis for discussion around the subject of prejudice.

Again, the plot is a simple one. *The Simpsons* wander into a shop crammed with 1950s kitsch. Homer is amazed that "that kinda stuff is worth money" and tells the store owner John that "you should come over to our place. It's full of valuable worthless crap".

John (voice-over provided by movie director John Waters) agrees. He examines the Simpsons' vinyl record collection, and ends up having a boogie with Homer. The next day Homer suggests inviting John "and his wife" over for drinks.

Marge suggests John might not be married. "Oh," says Homer "a swinging bachelor, eh? Well there's lots of foxy ladies out there".

Marge: "Homer, didn't John seem a little ... festive to you?"

Homer: "Couldn't agree more. Happy as a clam."

Marge (with a distinct note of irritation in her voice): "He prefers the company of men!"

Homer: "Who doesn't?"

Marge: "Homer, listen carefully. John is a ho-mo-sex-ual!"

Homer panics: "Omigod, I danced with a gay. Marge, Lisa promise me you won't tell anyone. Promise me!

...n liberally with well-aimed barbs against do-goody god-botherers, and the formula and the moral watchdogs ought to be rabid with rage. But so for controversy. Is it possible, asks BARRY DUKE, that the ever-vigilant series really is?

...ersive Simpsons

...sceptic's delight

On being told he's being ridiculous he retorts. "Am I Marge, am I? Think of the property values. Now we can never say only straight people have been in this house."

Later, when he tells John to "stay the hell away from my family", Marge tells Homer he is embarrassing himself.

"No I'm not Marge! They're embarrassing me. They're embarrassing America. They turned the Navy into a floating joke. They ruined all our best names like Bruce and Lance and Julian. They were the toughest names we had. Now they're just , uh..."

John: "Queer?"

Homer: "Yeah, and that's another thing. I resent you people using that word. That's our word for making fun of you! We need it! Well. I'm taking back our word and I'm taking back my son!"

The episode gets progressively funnier as Homer tried to reverse whatever influence John may have had on Bart. Homer asks his drinking pals for advice. One says: "Time was you sent a boy off to war. Shooting a man'd fix em right up. But there's not even any wars no more, thank you very much, Warren Christopher."

Another suggests "Bart could shoot a deer, that's like shooting a beautiful man."

So the group take Bart out deer hunting—with hilarious consequences.

In a BBC interview, executive producers Josh Weinstein and Bill Oakley said that this episode (the first *Simpsons* episode written by Ron Hauge) "probably had the most (network) censor notes of any show we've ever had—two solid pages of single-spaced notes. But we were able to negotiate them down to just a few which were probably reasonable, and then we changed a few lines. But most of the edge was still there."

Simpsons' family values

Homer—fed up to the molars with being dragged to church by Marge each Sunday—rebels and declares he is giving up the faith. Later he dreams he has an encounter with God. In the conversation Homer says what bugs him most about church are the sermons. God couldn't agree more. The deity then says he has to leave "to appear in a tortilla in Mexico".

Bart is excited by the idea of hell. Told by Sunday school teacher Miss Albright that "today's topic will be hell," he responds by saying: "All right! I sat through mercy and I sat through forgiveness. Finally we get to the good stuff."

Miss Albright: "Hell is a terrible place. Maggots are your sheet, worms your blanket. There's a lake of fire burning with sulphur. You'll be tormented day and night forever and ever. As a matter of fact, if you actually saw hell, you'd be so frightened you would die."

Bart: "Wouldn't you eventually get used to it ... like in a hot tub?"

Miss Albright (emphatically): "No."

Lisa has high moral values and claims to have a "spiritual" side. But she has little time for small town cant and hypocrisy. In the 'angel' episode she describes the believers as "morons" and asks: "what sort of person believes in angels? ... If you believe in angels, why not unicorns or sea monsters or leprechauns?"

Marge is a curious combination—she can be both liberal and censorious. She likes nudity in the classical arts, but objects to violent cartoons. This tends to confuse Springfield people. When news breaks that Michelangelo's statue of David is come to Springfield as part of a tour of the USA, Marge is approached by fellow church attendees Maude and Helen who want her to "lead a protest against this abomination". Marge says it is "a masterpiece". Helen gasps: "It's filth! It graphically portrays parts of the human body, which, practical as they may be, are evil."

Italian poet and pessimist — a firm freethinker

GIACOMO Leopardi is generally considered to be one of the greatest Italian poets since the Renaissance, and—like so many leading writers in so many countries—he was a firm Freethinker. He is little known in Britain, partly because his poetry is almost untranslatable, a situation which is unlikely to be altered by his bicentenary.

He was born on 29 June 1798 into an aristocratic family in Recanati, a provincial town in central Italy. He had a very repressive upbringing, but he also had a very remarkable education, first by tutors and then on his own in his father's library. He was a precociously gifted scholar, especially in Classical learning and literature, and was expected to go into the Church; but he reacted against his parents' reactionary views of both religion and politics, and determined to become an independent writer. Unfortunately he suffered both physical and mental disability, being deformed by curvature of the spine and crippled by bouts of melancholy.

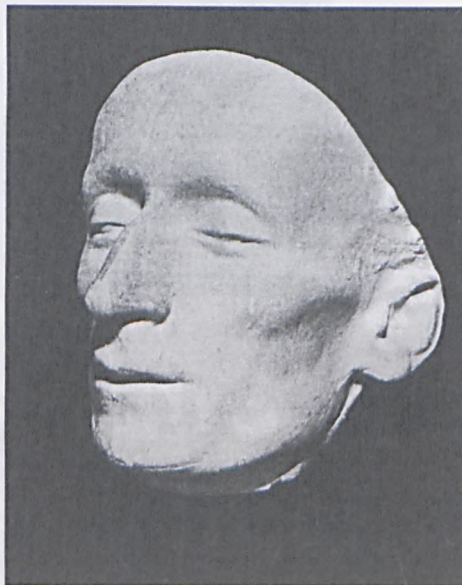
Some patriotic poems published when he was 20 brought him public attention, both favourable and unfavourable. His later poetry and prose gained him a reputation as one of the leading writers in the country.

However, he never managed to establish a viable career, though in 1832 he was elected to the prestigious Accademia della Crusca, and many of his writings were put on to the Index of books forbidden by the Papacy.

In politics he was a liberal and a patriot, opposed to both Church and State, and he became a significant figure among the intellectuals who led the cultural and political movement known as the Risorgimento (resurgence), which eventually culminated in the liberation and unification of Italy. In philosophy he was a rationalist and a sceptic, but also a nihilist and a pessimist—a poetic Latin equivalent of his German contemporary, Arthur Schopenhauer. The remark in

**Giacomo
Leopardi
(1798-1837)**

by Nicolas Walter



● *Death mask of Giacomo Leopardi*

his 1826 notebook, "Tutto è male" (All is bad), well sums up their view of the world.

In public he was a rather mysterious figure, producing exquisite poetry and prose, but excluded from society by ill health and deformity. He had few friends, and his cruel nickname was "Il Gobbo" (the Hunchback). In private he was intensely emotional, writing to his brother Carlo in 1822: "I need love, love, love, fire, enthusiasm, life. The world does not seem to be made for me."

He fell in love with several women, but never had a satisfactory relationship with

any, and the humiliating end of his last attempt to win one in Florence in 1833 prompted his best-known single poem, *A se stesso* (To Himself), a sort of free-verse sonnet expressing his nihilism and pessimism more strongly than anywhere else. Yet as he approached his early death, he wrote poems which expressed a more humanistic sentiment, especially *La ginestra* (The Broom-Flower), with its celebration of "the magnificent and progressive destinies of the human race" and its anticipation of a brighter future for the world. After living in various cities for fifteen years, he died of his many illnesses in Naples on 14 June 1837, not quite 39 years old.

His poems were collected in several editions as *Canti* (Songs), and his prose works were published as *Operette morali* (Moral Essays) and *Pensieri* (Thoughts); he also kept an enormous notebook for fifteen years which was later published as *Zibaldone* (Miscellany). There is a vast literature about him in Italian. There have been rather variable translations into English of his poetry and prose—the first of the latter by the Secularist writer James Thomson (BV) in the *National Reformer*—and there is a fine biography by Iris Origo.

To Himself

*Now may you rest for ever,
My weary heart. Perished is the
final deception,
Which I believed eternal. Perished.
Well do I know
That, in us, for the dear deceptions
Not only the hope, but the desire is
spent.
Rest for ever. No longer
Should you tremble. Nothing is
worth
Your cares, and nothing worthy of
your sighs
On earth. Bitter and boring
Is life, no more; and the world is a
clod.
Henceforth be still. Despair
For the last time. To our race fate
Grants only the gift of death.
Henceforth despise
Yourself, nature, the crude
Power which, stealthily, ordains
the common doom,
and the infinite vanity of all.*

(From *Canti*, 1835—translated by
Nicolas Walter)

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Terry Sanderson on the media

SHAMANS, QUACKS WITCH-DOCTORS...OH, AND FAITH HEALERS

ACCORDING to the *Times* magazine, 500,000 people in Britain "turn to faith healers on a regular basis". It's an understandable statistic. Who wants to have conventional treatments which might be painful or unpleasant when you can apparently be cured with a bit of arm waving?

According to a report in *The Sunday Times*, the NHS has funded (to the tune of £4,000) research by GPs to find the answer to the question that intrigues us all: Does spiritual healing really work?

Two surgeries referred a total of 60 people to faith healers to assess any improvement, and according to the *ST*, the majority of those treated felt they had "benefited". The types of ailments referred were arthritis, depression, psoriasis and eczema—all of which can be stress-related.

But if the healers can convince their patients that something is happening, and that these suggestions have an effect on their state of mind, which in turn affects their illness, isn't that a good thing?

I suppose if you're suffering from some irritating, chronic condition which the regular doctor just can't get to the bottom of, then you're grateful to anyone who can relieve it. The problem is that there is no evidence that the "healing" was responsible for the improvements felt by these patients. And what does "benefited" mean anyway?

Dawn Redwood, a healer who works in a doctor's surgery in Devon, is utterly convinced that she is effective. And she has no doubt where her supposed "powers" come from: "I believe the healing source is divine," she says. But if that is so, why does God bother to afflict people with psoriasis and eczema if he then goes and cures it at the behest of some finger-wagging supplicant?

Richard Littlejohn had another spin on this topic in his column in *The Sun*. Writing about Eileen Drewery, the faith healer retained by Glenn Hoddle to look after the England football team, he asked: "No-one has ever satisfactorily explained why, if she's so clever, she works her box of tricks on footballers with pulled muscles rather than curing children with cancer."

And spiritual healing is not always as benign as its practitioners try to make out. A report in *The Independent* revealed: "Scores of children taken to faith healers in the United States by parents who abhorred orthodox medicine have died despite suffering from conditions which were treatable."

The report concerned a survey of sects in

America, published in the medical journal *Paediatrics*. It found that from 1975 to 1995, 172 children had died, all but three of whom would have benefited from medical intervention. In 140 of the cases, children suffered from conditions with a greater than 90 per cent chance of recovery with medical care.

There was another study—this time by a nine-year old girl—reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, which debunked the claims of healers. The girl had invented a simple test, which involved the healers putting their hands through holes in a wall so that they could not see what they were treating. There were no discernible improvements from the supposed "human energy field" which healers claim to generate.

Dr Peter May, a GP in Southampton, is a rigorous critic of all claims of supernatural "healing" (he comprehensively debunked the American evangelist Morris Cerullo who was claiming to perform miracles at revivalist meetings a few years ago). Dr May is sceptical of "research" done by self-interested parties, such as that carried out by the National Federation of Spiritual Healers. The NFSH recently reported: "We gave 33 people, who had a variety of illnesses, a quality-of-life questionnaire before they saw the healer and then six months later. Everyone showed an improvement."

Dr May pooh-poohs such imprecise research: "If a believer sets up a study which fails, they won't submit it. So there may be 20 tests, only one of which is successful, yet that's the one that is published. In truth the only evidence that supports the efficacy of healing is anecdotal, which is dangerous. Treatment that requires no pain is appealing, but the danger is that a patient will throw away the pills or go to a healer rather than have her breast removed."

This is a view supported by Edzard Ernst, a professor of Complementary Medicine at the Postgraduate School, University of Exeter. In *The Independent*, Professor Ernst says that it is dangerous to rely on anecdotal evidence when

talking about medicine. "So, what is wrong with anecdotes?" he asks. "My grandmother smoked 20 cigarettes a day all her adult life and never had lung cancer. Does that mean that smoking does not cause lung cancer? No, it does not. Anecdotes are uniquely uninformative, even dangerous when it comes to generalisable matters of health. Historically, in medicine, we have struggled to get away from testimonials or anecdotes. Exactly 50 years ago, the randomised controlled trial was introduced as the gold standard to find out whether a given therapy is effective or not." Ernst thinks the randomised control trial—where patients are allocated at random to two or more groups treated by different methods, and subsequently compared in terms of pre-defined medical outcomes—should be applied to alternative remedies.

Until this happens, if a few people say that they feel better after going to a faith healer, then faith healers will continue to claim that their "therapy" works. Professor Ernst recognises that this can only bring complementary medicine into disrepute, and demands that all the claims made for these therapies be scientifically proved before they are advertised as effective.

Faith healers can never prove the efficacy of their supposed treatments, because there is nothing to be measured. You will hear little about their many failures, and even when they do admit them, they blame the patient rather than themselves. According to healer Lynn Rose, unresponsive patients are probably "blocking the healer's energy". Ms Rose says: "Patients usually do this unconsciously. It may be that they want to get well on a physical level but not on a soul level, or the patient continues to do an activity which prevents the body from recovering."

A case of heads they win, tails we lose.

We would all like to believe that spiritual healing works, but regrettably there is not a scrap of evidence to suggest that it does.

Peter Brearey Fund

A FUND has been set up for those who wish to make a donation in Peter's memory. It will be applied towards a portrait of Peter to be hung at Red Lion Square; a bench next to his grave on the island of Sanday, and a small wild flower garden around it. Any balance will be added to the *Freethinker* fund. We do hope members and friends will wish to give generously. Please let us have your donations before August 31, 1998. Cheques to be made payable to G W Foote & Company (PB).

MILLENARIAN MANIA

DOES THE sandwichman still walk down London's Oxford Street declaring that "The End of the World is Nigh"?

I haven't seen him lately, but there are plenty of cranks around who share his view—as there have been throughout the Christian era. The belief, after all, is canonical: "the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall", we read in Mark (13:24-5); and there are similar passages in Matthew and Luke. Not to mention Revelation, the textbook for millenarians. A most obscure textbook, alas, which has meant many things to many people and not much to others. When no less an authority than Martin Luther admitted that: "my spirit cannot accommodate itself to this book", what hope is there for lesser mortals?

The mass suicides of the Heaven's Gate sect and Order of the Solar Temple were recent examples of millenarian mysticism when Marina Benjamin was writing *Living at the End of the World*. But, as she demonstrates, apocalypse is "a grand narrative that refuses to die". Nor is its non-arrival any deterrent. The practice among the "mystagogues", as Kant called them, is to make excuses and announce a later date.

That's what makes Chen Hon-Ming a rarity: an apocalyptic prophet who admits he got it wrong. As reported in the New Zealand *Otago Daily Times* (March 26), he and 150 members of his Taiwanese cult moved to Texas last year in preparation for the final event when "God would broadcast on Channel 18 television" on March 21 and make a "personal visit to Dallas". Regrettably, Chen told his followers, "it appears that everything I have preached to you over the last four years has turned out to be shit...The sun has not disappeared. There has not been a nuclear holocaust, and we have not been rescued by flying saucers and taken to another planet. I give up".

Other millenarian leaders have not given up so easily. Witness California's Charles Taylor who, Ms Benjamin tells us, made a series of predictions of the world's end taking place in 1976, 1980, 1988 and 1992. Never heard of him? Let's go back in history, then: to martyrologist John Foxe (1516-87), who proffered 1564, 1570 and 1586; and (in a posthumously-published commentary on Revelation) 1594. Or Joseph Mede (1586-1638), lecturer in Greek at Cambridge, who wrote to Archbishop Ussher, saying that the millennium would come in 1736. In his books, however, he variously gave the dates as 1625, 1655, 1670 and 1710, though admitting that "what it means and what shall be therein, Posterity will better understand".

We can sympathise. Millenarian mathematicians have, in Ms Benjamin's words, "a limited repertoire of integers to play with—a cluster of mystical numbers from Daniel and Revelation—and only one axiom...the day-year theory, hailing from Psalm 90: "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." And although, as she says, Luther later gave Revelation a "lukewarm commendation", that was little help towards understanding it.

But the fascination persists. William Miller gained a following of 50,000, many of whom

Living at the End of the World
by Marina Benjamin (Picador
hardback, £12.99).

Review: COLIN MCCALL

sold their homes and businesses in anticipation of "Christ's glorious advent" in 1843. His non-appearance shattered the movement, but one visionary Millerite, Ellen Harmon White, recovered from the "Great Disappointment" and announced that the Second Coming would not be far off.

That marked the beginning of the Seventh Day Adventists, who are still with us. As are Jehovah's Witnesses, somewhat surprisingly considering the number of Armageddons they have survived under the leadership of Charles Taze Russell, Judge Joseph Rutherford and Frederick Fanz.

When 1975, the last named's predicted date came and went, he told a large audience that nothing had happened "because you expected something to happen". Didn't he, too? Whatever the answer, the Witnesses seem to have learnt their lesson. Now, as Frank Kermode has remarked, their "estimates have

been falsified so often that they no longer announce the date of the End".

Then there are the Mormons, who recently opened a new temple in Chorley, and whose scriptures seem to be joining the Bible in Forte "Heritage" hotel drawers, if my experience in Hereford is typical.

A "hopelessly disjointed affair. a second-rate pastiche" Ms Benjamin calls *The Book of Mormon*; "chloroform in print" was Mark Twain's description. A few Forte customers might open "*Another Testament of Jesus Christ*", as it is subtitled, out of curiosity, but fewer are likely to read its twaddle for long. Yet it claims to be the fastest growing new religion in the modern world. Maybe, but I question Ms Benjamin's figure of 900 converts a day, even though their range includes Samoa. Its founder was, as she says, an "inventor of tall stories".

It was during Ronald Reagan's presidency that the ending of our world seemed alarmingly nigh. In 1983, when he held the world's destiny in his hands, he told an Israeli lobbyist: "You know. I turn back to your ancient prophets in the Old Testament and the signs foretelling Armageddon, and I find myself wondering if we're the generation that's going to see that come about. I don't know if you've noted any of those prophecies lately, but, believe me, they certainly describe the times we're going through". Within the same decade, the preacher Jerry Falwell made a series of prophecies of war with Russia.

So, perhaps we ought to breathe a sigh of relief that life continues on this planet.

Not that all apocalypses have been nutcases. Newton stuck to the 6,000-year chronology, and to Archbishop Ussher's 4004BC as the Day of Creation, "giving short shrift to his atheistical Royal Society peer Edmund Halley, who calculated from the salting of the sea that geological time had to be measured in hundreds of millions of years". Voltaire rather nicely said that Newton wrote his commentary on Daniel and Revelation "to console mankind for the great superiority he had over them in other respects".

Indeed, Ms Benjamin argues that "Any temptation to dismiss the history of millenarianism as a history of human folly ought to be resisted" on the rather dubious grounds that "it has its own internal logic". An evaluative judgment, she says, "would be a category mistake like expecting sacred arithmetic to obey the logic of everyday mathematics". But it is the adjectives here that cause the confusion. Millenarian maths is only "sacred" because it is used for religious—and essentially Christian—purposes. The same criticism applies to the "mystical" numbers referred to earlier: there is nothing mystical about the numbers themselves. Archbishop Ussher and his successors made their calculations from figures derived, directly or interpretively, from the scriptures. Their arithmetic was no different from that we employ "every day". Moreover, the "whole point" of Marina Benjamin's book is "to make connections; to link up millenarian thinking to various patterns of secular thinking". And if I think some of the "secular" examples, like the Biospherians and Cryonists hardly deserve serious attention, they no doubt have a place among the loonies.



● *The end is at hand – again.*

(Hulton Deutsch Collection)

THE DEATH PENALTY – A CRIME FOR A CRIME

WILLIAM Blake somewhere declared he could see the truth in a grain of sand. The problems and tensions of the world can be analysed by exhaustive examination of a minutiae; from the tiny can come a better understanding of the whole.

This is what Peter Linebaugh seems to have grasped. In his fascinating book, *The London Hanged*, he simultaneously gives a highly detailed account of Albion's fatal tree and shows the light this sheds on England in the 18th Century.

Most of us are aware of the paintings of that period by artists like Gainsborough. They depict an affluent and self-confident landowner proudly surrounded by his possessions, a beautiful wife, a stately mansion, and a neatly cultivated garden. It is all very beautiful.

But the picture has a flip side—it is of the hangman and his noose. For wealth had been accumulated, vast tracts of land improved, by enclosure of the common land. This robbed peasants of their livelihood. The open fields, which they cultivated with primitive tools and where their few animals roamed, were rudely taken from them. The wealth of a few was accomplished by the destitution of the many.

Capital punishment sought to reinforce this process. The Black Act of 1723 added 200 more offences to those carrying the death penalty. To steal a loaf of bread risked fatal consequences. In 1810, a 10-year-old lad from Westhoughton, found guilty of setting a mill on fire, cried for his mother as the judge donned his black cap.

Peter Linebaugh catalogues many such personal tragedies. He also shows the depravity and inhumanity of society. A lot of people were impelled to commit crime by hunger and poverty. Some of those who hesitated had their qualms dispelled: informers would egg them on, then would tell the authorities and collect the reward.

Jonathan Wild became the king of crime. He had a big band of accomplices from whom he would receive rewards for devising crimes. But he also informed on some of them to the forces of law and order. In this way he waxed rich while still remaining in the good books of the State. His hapless victims found themselves consigned to a prison like Newgate, cold, unsanitary, overcrowded. After going through

The London Hanged, by Peter Linebaugh. Published by Penguin. Price £8.99.

Review: Dr Raymond Challinor

the formality of a trial, they would take their final journey to the scaffold. There, in an age before the mass media supplied excitement, a large number of people would assemble, waiting to see whether the condemned individual died courageously or if the hangman committed any mistakes. Occasionally, the crowd would fight to free the person awaiting execution—and sometimes succeed.



● Author and journalist Dr Raymond Challinor.

A great hero of the multitude was Jack Sheppard. His exploits formed the basis for the character of MacHeath in John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* and Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*. He cheated death by making remarkable escapes, sawing through leg-irons and cell-bars, running over rooftops, then returning to customary haunts to carouse with his friends.

But at last Jack Sheppard's luck ran out.

Linebaugh writes: "A few months after the hanging, the Earl of Macclesfield (who, as Lord Chancellor, had interviewed Sheppard in Westminster) was impeached from office, found guilty of bribery and embezzlement in excess of £100,000." Yet nobody suggested His Lordship should pay the ultimate penalty. The reason for this, cynics may argue, had already been given by Gerrard Winstanley, the Diggers' leader: "Indeed this Government may well be called the Government of highwaymen, who hath stolen the Earth from their younger brethren by force, and holds it from them by force."

But others had a rather different view. The stability of society depended on the preservation of the class system, with its unequal distribution of power and wealth. To strive to undermine it was not only reckless but also wrong. For the lower orders, submission was the supreme Christian virtue, regardless of the misery they had to endure.

Methodism

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, held this opinion. He visited Newgate prison, where he held a service for the inmates. He accompanied a bunch of condemned men to the scaffold, urging them to repent of their sins and glorify the Lord. Though he never wrote about his experiences,

Linebaugh says: "The hangings deeply disturbed Wesley—his handwriting became shaky, he could not write in his journal on the following day—and its editor surmises that this Tyburn visit caused one of his periodic attacks of illness."

It may well be the barbarity of the drama enacted shocked John Wesley. Definitely, it has Peter Linebaugh. An American historian, he knows about the thousands of individuals who languish in U.S. jails awaiting execution.

This probably prompted him to write this excellent book. Capital punishment remains an affront to human decency, a sign of the savagery of which the modern State is capable. Those who favour it talk of an eye for an eye; really it a crime for a crime. And this makes the American government one of the worst of serial killers.

Throwing
off the
shackles of
superstition

THE FREETHINKER plays a major part in helping this country throw off the shackles of superstition. You can help us continue the battle against religion by contributing generously towards the *Freethinker's* production costs.

Making cheques and POs payable to G W Foote & Co, please send donations to the Freethinker Fund, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

Many thanks to:

£20 I Hyde, R Lewis, S Smith; £15 W Sefton; £10.50 Musical Heathens; £10 J Gibson, J Glennister, D Levett, P Payne, C Rudd, R Schilsky, R Smith, J Tarski, J Wright; £5 F Egerton, T Richardson, J Segall, K Shah, R Tee, G Worrall; £4.50 K Heath; £3 A Gibbon, B Mercer.

Total from April 29 to June 16: £216.

● For donations to the Peter Brearey Memorial Fund, see Page 11.



You're telling us!

How about 'Saint' Tom?

WITH REGARD to St George's Day on April 23 and the difficulty English people have with identifying with the largely mythological figure of St George, it would be more appropriate perhaps for us to celebrate the life and works of the Englishman Thomas Paine.

Paine was unjustly outlawed from this country in 1792 after the publication of his greatest work, *Rights of Man*, which became the 'bible' of the poor. Many editions were printed within a few months of issue until it became proscribed and a crime to reprint it or offer it for sale.

It would be an acknowledgement that this great figure, who did so much for democracy and universal human rights, was victimised for condemning our then corrupt political system and the development of our empire which, though not all bad, was exploitative of large areas of so called 'uncivilised' parts of the world.

His 1776 *Common Sense* was the seedbed for civil society, and, as Paine said, the world was his country and to do good was his religion. Thomas Edison said of him: "I consider Paine our greatest political thinker and he practised what he preached."

Many would now agree with his views on religion which lost him so many friends after the publication of his *Age of Reason*. In putting moral and ethical values before religious dogmas, he was way ahead of his time. The United Nations have honoured him, why not his home country?

Until such time as Thomas replaces St George we will continue to commemorate Paine's life at Thetford on the anniversary of his death.

ERIC PAINE
Hon Secretary
Thomas Paine Society.

Alienating non-socialists

AGAIN I note the wholly favourable attitude towards socialism and other similar ideologies antipathetic to individual freedom which are constantly displayed in *The Freethinker*.

A notable example from your last issue was the wholly favourable review of a pamphlet expounding socialism and atheism (Socialism implies atheism & materialism). Here your reviewer performed the astonishing feat of mental gymnastics of appearing not to have noticed the very simple fact—and empirically verifiable fact it is—that the more fully capitalist a nation's socio-economic settlement the greater the material prosperity and personal liberty of the vast majority of its citizens, not just for the favoured few as happens in collectivist countries.

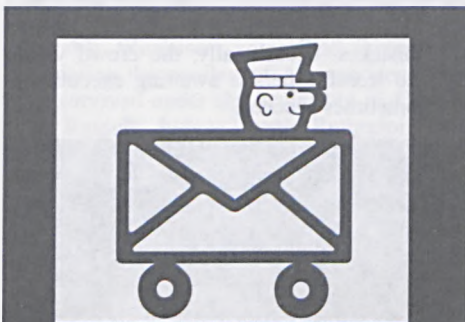
May your readers now have a clear editorial statement about whether *The Freethinker* is an atheist publication whose staff and readership merely happen to be almost exclusively socialist-inclined, or whether it is simply a socialist journal which deals with religious/atheist affairs?

If the former, then whoever runs *The Freethinker* has been guilty of an appalling failure in marketing by alienating so many potential non-socialist readers. If the latter, is it not time for a degree of openness and honesty by some clear indication of the journal's secular political stance, perhaps to be displayed in the masthead such as *The Freethinker – The Journal of Socialist Atheism*?

NIGEL G MEEK
Bromley

What's good for Mary...

ANDREW Moroz exposes 'The inconsistency



Short and clearly-typed letters for publication may be sent to Barry Duke, The Freethinker, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. E-mail address: iduke@compuserve.com

of theism' most effectively in his article in the May issue of *The Freethinker* [pages 7 and 10]. He could have been even more dismissive of the response to the question 'Why didn't God, since he is all-good and loving of his creatures, make the world such that all people freely chose to do good?'. After all, this is precisely what the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception teaches that one of their gods did in respect of the mother of another.

If he could do it for the Virgin Mary, it must be possible; and, if he's omnipotent, he could therefore have done it for the rest of us, too.

ERIC THOMPSON
London NW2

Wholly fictitious

EVIDENTLY my letter published in your March issue has had no effect on E Goodman (Letters, May). Is he still unaware that the Gospel Birth Narratives are wholly fictitious?

The birth in Bethlehem was invented solely to appear to fulfil prophecy (Micah 5:2), using a census as an excuse for moving Jesus' parents from Nazareth. But there can be no doubt that the census involved was that of AD 6 when

Rome took direct rule of Judaea and which Luke himself mentions (Acts 5:37). Unfortunately for Luke, Nazareth was in Galilee and unaffected by the census, not that it involved the mass migration he described. There is no evidence for a census by Herod-the-Great. In fact it is almost certain that Jesus was born under the rule of a 'Herod'—Herod Antipas, who inherited rule of Galilee when his father Herod-the-Great died in 4 BC. But Jesus never lived in Nazareth, which was no more than a collection of houses at the time. It is likely that he was born in or near Capernaum, 'his own city' (Matt. 9:1) about 1 BC.

Consequently the end of this century will mark the 2000th anniversary of his birth.

STUART CAMPBELL
Edinburgh

A lapse of memory?

THOUGH I have already admitted (March letters) having inadvertently added a year to the span of my NSS Presidency, Nicolas Walter not only reiterates this fact in the final paragraph of his April letter, but makes an equivalent error himself on the opposite side—citing 1995 instead of 1996 as my final year. If he now admits to a lapse of memory for once in his life, I will almost begin to believe in miracles.

BARBARA SMOKER
Bromley

Humanist funerals

OVER THE last few issues an interesting debate has ensued about the problematic subject of religious content in Humanist funerals. Various views have been expressed, along with my own in April's edition: One, the lie that it is Humanist officiants who prompt the inclusion of religious material, understandably enraged me; another, that while mourners attend religious services Humanist funeral ceremonies cater for mere "guests", amused me; some from practising officiants heartened me by their tolerance, insight and wisdom.

There were a further number however that worried me by their clearly purist line, indicating dogmatic attitudes and autocratic practices inconsistent with my own vision of how Humanist officiants should think and act. But then I am a liberal Humanist; and the very fact of having to employ what should be an unnecessary qualification seems to me to be what is at the heart of this issue.

In agreeing to conduct secular funerals for those who, for a variety of reasons, do not want religious ones, it can be assumed that Humanists are fulfilling an important social function. But by responding to the privilege of being asked we are indeed sometimes required to walk a tight-rope. The question is, at the expense of compromising to some small degree our own firm beliefs do we occasionally risk slipping—though not falling—for the sake of the feelings and sensitivities of our at least

You're telling us!

← From Page 14

potentially humanist clients, currently caught up in the grief, disruption, divided loyalties and confused feelings normally associated with bereavement?

As an individual officiant, I think the answer to this question is unreservedly "yes". While neither condemning or impugning the status of those whose answer would equally unreservedly be "no", as a colleague I do reserve the right to be disappointed by what seems to me at best a lack of foresight and at worst an illiberal stance at variance with the principles of Humanism.

Nigel Collins
Glos

● Nigel Collins is Regional co-ordinator, South Central England British Humanist Association ceremonies network.

Fighting drivel with drivel

THERE ARE lots of bits in the May *Freethinker* that were worth the read. Andrew Moroz' piece I liked, not that I read it all because as a devout atheist I have no need to read the drivel that one is obliged to write in order to get to grips with the absurdity of God. When I have written things on this subject, purely for my own satisfaction, I have often thought how inane I find myself obliged to be in order to refute such absurdities. Even so the pleasure I derive from this article is the driving force of its argument: that we can prove God does not exist.

It is one source of some regret to me that Bertrand Russell, being such a noted spokesman for the cause, was not even an atheist and would only concede to being an agnostic on this very point of issue. Note in his *Why I am not a Christian*, chapter 13, The Existence of God—a debate between Bertrand Russell and Father F C Copleston, SJ. This debate was originally broadcast in 1948 on the Third Programme of the BBC. Right at the start Copleston says: "I mean would you say that the non-existence of God can be proved?" To which Russell answered: "No, I should not say that—my position is agnostic." Most disappointing. For a discussion of the worthlessness of agnosticism to the atheist you could see chapter 3, *Why Agnosticism?*, of *Primitive Survivals in Modern Thought* by Chapman Cohen, 1935; Russell certainly could have benefited from doing so!

With regard to the article written by the socialist Paul Bennett who does not believe in the pursuit of atheism as being the crucial means to a better civilisation, I can see his point, but I stand directly opposed to it. The idea of socialism he seems to be advocating is idealistic, and while there is nothing wrong with having idealised concepts, there is everything wrong with attempting to live in accordance with them without recognising their limitations in the real world, in this case the world of people and the way people live and what

people are as part of the evolved fauna of this planet. The fact is that human nature no more permits an ideal social system than the diesel engine was able to bring to fruition the ideal heat engine.

For my part I think, above all else, that religion, which is still a powerful social force, must be largely superseded before it can be possible to envisage a society of independent-minded, freethinking individuals capable of even contemplating the idealisation of society, never mind achieving it. Certainly towards this end I would rather see a more political atheist movement with proposals such as the one on replacing religious education in schools with some-

thing like the study of world citizenship.

Howard Hill
Cheshire

● Peter Brearey's death prompted a number of *Freethinker* readers and contributors to send us letters of condolence and tributes, intended for publication. Lack of space prevented us from including them on our letters page, but all the correspondence has been forwarded to Peter's widow, Pam.

Miracle madness

*Bible folks worked miracles,
According to "the book".
They parted waters of the seas,
All axioms forsook.
They raised the dead and talked to snakes
Turned water into wine.
A stick became a serpent,
The sun refused to shine.
The dead were raised and donkeys spoke,
And rivers became blood.
Polar bears in Palestine
And rabbits chewed the cud.
The mountains moved, the sun stood still,
A virgin girl gave birth.
The rain came down for forty days,
And flooded all the earth.
A person walked on water and
Didn't even sink.
A man was dead for half a week,
And then was in the pink.
But, if nature's laws were voided,
By religious tittle-tattle,
The universe would be unhinged
And up a creek without a paddle.*

— by Dorothy B Thompson, courtesy of The Canadian Atheist.

FREETHINKER BOUND VOLUMES

THE bound volumes of *The Freethinker* for 1997 are now available, and may be ordered from the office at £25, post free. Anyone who previously ordered the set of three bound volumes of *The Freethinker* for 1994-1996 at £50, post free, and didn't receive them is asked to tell the office as soon as possible.

Please note that all payments on account of *Freethinker* subscriptions, purchases or donations should be made to G W Foote & Co and sent to 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

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

Birmingham Humanist Group: Information: Tova Jones on 0121 4544692.

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

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group: Cornerstone Community Centre, Palmeira Square (corner of First Avenue), Hove. Sunday, July 5, 4pm. Tea party and Annual General Meeting.

Bristol Humanists: Information: 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.

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: 01242 528743.

Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists: Information: 01926 858450. Waverley Day Centre, 65 Waverley Road, Kenilworth: Thursday, July 16, 8pm: Public Meeting.

Coventry and Leamington Spa: The Musical Heathens meet monthly for music and discussion. Information: Karl Heath on 01203 673306.

Devon Humanists: Information: Christine Lavery, 5 Prospect Garden, off Blackboy Road, Exeter (01392 56600).

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 2HB; 01926 858450. Monthly meetings (second Friday, 7.30 pm) at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1. July 10: Barbara Smoker speaks on the revised version of her book, *Humanism* (recently published). No meeting in August. Friday 4 – Monday 7 September: GALHA Annual Weekend Gathering, Pennant Hall Hotel, Penmaenmawr, North Wales.

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. Meetings at Hopwa House, Inskip Drive, Hornchurch, from 8 pm to 10 pm.

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

Glasgow Group: Information: Alan Henness, 138 Lumley 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.

Lancashire Humanist Alliance: Details from Steve Johnson, PO Box 111, Blackburn BB1 8GD.

Leeds & District Humanist Group: Information: Robert Tee on 0113 2577009. All meetings at 7.30 pm, Swarthmore Centre, Leeds.

Leicester Secular Society: Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB; 0116 2622250 or 0116 241 4060.

Lewisham Humanist Group: Information: Denis Cobell, 99 Ravensbourne Park, London SE6 4YA (0181 690 4645). Meetings at Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6, 8pm. Thursday, June 25: Subject: *Voluntary Euthanasia*. Speaker to be announced.

Manchester Humanist Group: Information: Arthur Chappell on 0161 681 7607. Meetings at Friends' Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester, on the second Wednesday of each month at 7.30 pm.

National Secular Society: Sunday, July 19. Visit to Down House, Kent (Charles Darwin's home). Coach leaves Red Lion Square, London WC1. Cost: £10. Details from Keith Porteous Wood on 0171 404 3126.

North East Humanists (Teesside Group): Information: J Cole 01642 559418 or R Wood 01740 650861.

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

North London Humanist Group: Monthly meetings. Information: Anne Toy on 0181 3601828.

Norwich Humanist Group: Information: Vincent G Chainey, Le Chene, 4 Mill Street, Bradenham, Thetford IP25 7PN; 01362 820982.

Sheffield Humanist Society: Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street (adjoining Bank Street), Sheffield. Wednesday, July 1, 8pm Annie Salmon: *Social Policies—a Humanist and Personal Perspective*. Wortley Hall, Wortley, Saturday, July 4, 11 am to 5pm. Literature and Information stall at the South Yorkshire Festival. Information: Gordon Sinclair: 01226 743070 or Bill McIlroy 0114 2509127.

Somerset: Details of South Somerset Humanists' meetings in Yeovil from Wendy Sturgess on 01458-274456.

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

Sutton Humanist Group: Information: 0181 642 4577. Friends House, Cedar Road, Sutton, at 7.30 pm.

Ulster Humanist Association: Information: Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE (telephone: 01846 677264). Meetings second Thursday evening of the month at Ulster Arts Club, Elmwood Avenue, Belfast.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group: Information: 01792 206108 or 01792 296375, or write Julie Norris, 3 Maple Grove, Uplands, Swansea SA2 0JY.

West Kent Secular Humanist Group: Information: Ian Peters on 01892 890485 or Chris Ponsford on 01892 862855.

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

NOTICEBOARD

COACH TRIP TO DOWN HOUSE (DARWIN'S HOME) NEAR BIGGIN HILL Sunday 19 July 1998*

Leave London mid-morning, calling at dinosaur exhibition at Crystal Palace (additional pick-up point). Led by Council member Mike Howgate.

Cost £10 to include admission. (*Revised date)

Please call Keith Wood at the National Secular Society on 0171-404 3126 for further details.

● Please send your events notices to Bill McIlroy, 115 South View Road, Nether Edge, Sheffield, S7 1DE.