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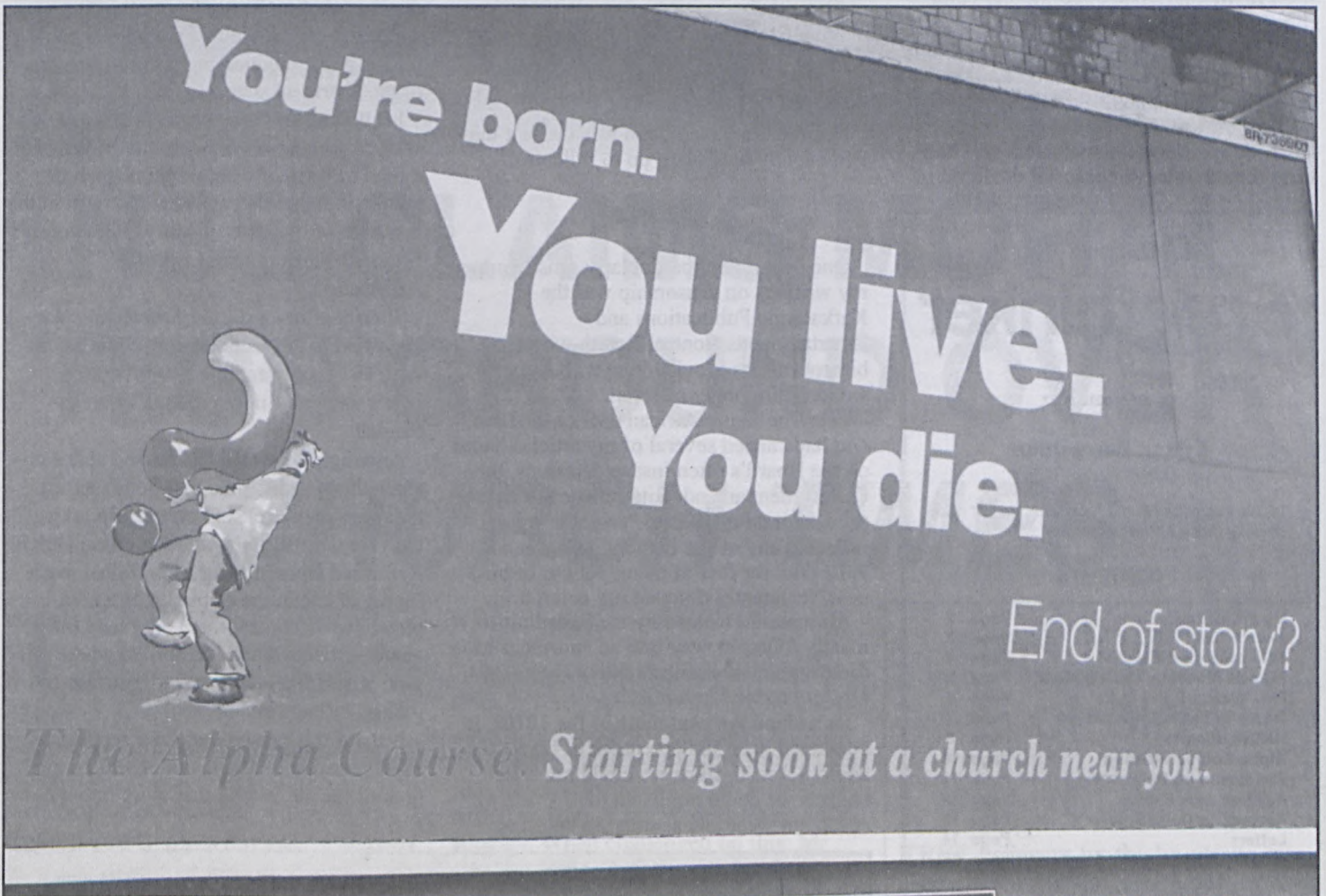
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# The Freethinker

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

Vol 118 No 9

September 1998



**WARNING: THIS  
ADVERTISING  
CAMPAIGN CAN  
SERIOUSLY  
DAMAGE YOUR  
MENTAL HEALTH**

See  
report  
and  
review  
on  
Pages  
10 and 12

# Up Front

## Taking the battle into a new era

LAST MONTH the Directors of G W Foote and Co—publishers of the *Freethinker*—appointed me as editor of the *Freethinker*. The appointment came three months after I had taken on the role of acting editor, and a quarter of a century after a copy of the publication had first fallen into my hands.

I had just arrived in Britain—an exile from my native South Africa which I had been forced to leave because I could no

longer live under the heel of the vicious Christian national regime which then ruled the country.

The authorities, I believe, were as glad to see the back of me as I was to leave: both the police and the defence force had made it clear to me on several occasions that they did not like the tone of the articles I was writing both for the mainstream press as well as a number of small underground publications.

What upset them most was that my pieces were not openly seditious. That would have earned me a prison sentence or a banning order.

No. What enraged them was the fact that I frequently held them up to ridicule.

### Bizarre

One department particularly sensitive to my writings on censorship was the Kafkaesque Publications and Entertainments Control Board, whose bizarre rulings provided me with some wonderfully funny material,

After the South African version of *Time Out* had carried several of my articles based on the Board's often insane decisions, the Government amended its censorship laws to make it an offence to "criticise or ridicule" any of the Board's rulings, and *Time Out*, for fear of being put out of business, reluctantly dropped my column.

All material banned by the Board ultimately found its way into an enormous tome entitled *Jacobsen's Index to Objectionable Literature*.

By around the beginning of the 1970s, it contained over 50,000 entries of books we could not read, films we could not watch, records we could not listen to, T shirts we could not wear and posters we could not

put up on our walls—including one bearing the motto "Black is beautiful".

However, notably absent from *Jacobsen's Index* was the *Freethinker*—until my arrival in the UK.

I cannot describe the feeling of elation I felt on discovering the existence of a magazine devoted to the removal of religious interference from people's lives, and immediately submitted an article to the editor in which I demonstrated Christianity's complicity in the engineering and enforcement of the apartheid state.

I followed up with an article on censorship, in which I used the South African model to warn of what might happen if people in Britain were ever to cave in to the demands of the likes of Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers' and Listeners' Association.

Shortly afterwards, the *Freethinker* was classified as "objectionable" by the South African censors and the two offending issues and "all future editions" were banned.

Although the world has moved apace on since then—it is ironic that South Africa today has more relaxed censorship laws than we do in Britain, and the brutal Dutch Reformed Church, which controlled every aspect of life in the Republic, is a completely spent force—there are many other areas in this country and abroad where religion is still freely allowed to exercise its malign influences.

It is for this reason that the *Freethinker* must continue its work, and it will be an honour for me to take that work into a new era.

## The Freethinker

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

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Editor: Barry Duke

Views expressed in the magazine are not necessarily those of the publishers.

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## Hello, hello, hello

WHAT is it about Christianity that attracts the very worst elements in society?

I ask the question because hardly a week goes by without a report in the press about some criminal or sociopath turning to God.

The latest of these reports appeared in the London *Evening Standard* on September 14 under the front page headline "The Born Again Supergrass".

### Corruption

The story concerned a corrupt Scotland Yard detective constable who had been charged with two offences, including conspiracy to supply cannabis. Suddenly, the policeman, who cannot be named for legal reasons, found Jesus, confessed his corruption and in doing so implicated a number of others officers.

The *Evening Standard* quoted one police source as saying: "He is a born-again Christian who decided that this is what he had to do. When he realised the CIB anti-corruption squad was onto him, he rang up and asked to come in. No-one could quite believe it."

There's a bright side to this tale. If Christianity's popularity continues to grow among society's criminal fraternity there will soon be more Christians under lock and key than walking free.

## Superstition gains a foothold in the Dome

SECULARIST hopes that the Millennium Dome in Greenwich would be a superstition-free area were dealt a blow this month when, at the 11th hour, funding was found for a 'spiritual' section.

The planned religious section of the Millennium Dome at Greenwich looked like being scrapped because no sponsor had come forward with the £12 million needed to create it.

The area, devised by the 25-member Lambeth Group of religious advisers to the Millennium Project, includes a pyramid-like spiritual place for con-

templation, and 'pilgrim's progress' walkway, illustrating the history of religions in Western civilisation.

Last month, Liam Kane, Managing Director of the New Millennium Experience Company, admitted it was proving more difficult to find the cash for the religious zone than for any of the other 13 areas within the Dome.

Ironically, the people who have stumped up the cash for the zone are not Christians, but Sikhs. According to a report in the *Daily Mail*, the British Sikh community is extremely wealthy and has a great deal of money to

splash around.

What wasn't explained was the Sikh's motive in bailing out the zone.

More bad news is that church services in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Northern Ireland—conducted simultaneously and broadcast live—will be held on the first Sunday of the new Millennium.

Culture Secretary Chris Smith said that the Government would recognise 2000 "as an extremely important Christian anniversary" and added: "the services will be an official recognition of Christian significance."

# NSS CLAIMS MORAL HIGH GROUND OVER CHURCH TIMES

**T**HE NATIONAL Secular Society has received a right-of-reply from the *Church Times* over what the NSS General Secretary called "a gratuitously offensive attack". But the NSS is still not satisfied that it has been treated fairly by what many regard as the Church of England's "house journal".

The row erupted over a piece about the Internet by *Church Times* columnist Andrew Brown. Mr Brown was commenting upon the websites being operated by religious extremists which promote anti-homosexual and anti-Semitic ideas. "What is one to do about [an anti-homosexual] site like [www.godhatesfags.com](http://www.godhatesfags.com) or [www.chick.com/reading/tracts/0055](http://www.chick.com/reading/tracts/0055), which contains the most blatantly anti-Semitic caricatures I have ever seen? Both of these sites might have been put up by the National Secular Society to discredit Christianity."

Keith Porteous Wood, General Secretary of the NSS, immediately complained to Paul Handley, the editor of the *Church Times*, that the Society had been misrepresented as hate-mongering. In an angry protest, Mr Wood told Mr Handley: "Rather than resulting from the actions of this Society, the roots of the vast majority of anti-gay hate-mongering results direct-

ly or indirectly from selective biblical literalism."

Mr Porteous Wood demanded that the *Church Times* apologise for the slur, and also carry a letter from the NSS refuting the charges made by Andrew Brown. The next issue of the *Church Times* carried an edited version of Mr Wood's letter, but no apology. When challenged on this, Mr Handley claimed he thought that Mr Wood had demanded an apology or a letter, not both—despite the fact that the demand had been made in writing, and later agreed by phone.

### Disagreed

Mr Handley disagreed with Mr Wood's contention that simply publishing his letter fell far short of the paper admitting its error. He clearly accepted that the offending words should have not been used, but said that they had not been intended to cause offence.

A rueful Keith Porteous Wood said: "Naturally, I had imagined that the editor of a prominent Christian newspaper would keep to his undertaking. Now I know better. Also, I'm sorry they didn't publish the last sentence of my letter 'Christianity manages to attack itself very effectively indeed, without the need for hate-mongering from this Society.'"

## A load of old bull

TRUE believers by the hundreds come from miles around every day to seek cures for their illnesses from two bulls in a small east Indian village known as Bat Treng.

They believe that a lick by one of the bulls will cure or alleviate a variety of sicknesses, including stomach aches, fatigue, and stiff joints, and some even claim that the animals' lick can cure blindness and other physical disabilities. In the event the animals aren't in the mood for licking, it is thought that eating their waste can achieve the same effect.

One woman travelled 115 miles to the village in order to buy 70 cents worth of dung and urine. The animals fame started after a lame man claimed he was cured when one of the bulls licked his leg and a woman said she was healed when one of the bulls drank from the family cistern.

Shops have sprung up in the village and are doing big business selling bundles of grass and herbs so that people can feed the bulls while praying for cures.

— From *The American Rationalist*, July/August 1998.

# NSS CALLS ON IHEU TO DEBATE PROTECTION FROM RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION

**T**HE NATIONAL Secular Society is concerned about renewed speculation that the European Convention on Human Rights is to be extended to protect religious groups from discrimination. Far from being discriminated against, many such groups are already over-privileged and demonstrate considerable clout through their existing power bases and often almost unlimited financial resources, says the NSS. Some religious groups are also protected by archaic blasphemy law.

The Society believes that the secular view on this issue needs to be widely disseminated and it has approached the International Humanist and Ethical Union with outline proposals which were raised in Heidelberg where IHEU recently held a general meeting. Their Executive Director, Babu Gogenini, told the *Freethinker*: "The NSS has raised a legitimate area of concern with which I hope IHEU will be able to assist. Unfortunately, time pressures prevented a fuller discussion at Heidelberg but we hope to formulate a resolution for IHEU's January 1999 meeting in Mumbai (formerly Bombay)."

The NSS is requesting IHEU to publicise a secular humanist standpoint on this subject and for it to lobby policy makers to take such views into account when this issue is formally proposed.

## The NSS draft proposals

Any new protocol extending ECHR discrimination provisions to religious groups should include 'belief' generally, so that humanists, secularists, atheists, rationalists etc. are covered too. It must also minimise the possibility of abuses. In particular:

A) there must be no curtailment of the freedom to criticise belief systems.

B) any extension to the ECHR must not empower religious groups to require:

i) time off during working hours specifically to engage in religious observance (this would be an unreasonable imposition, but particularly impractical on an assembly line)

ii) the installation of special washing or sanitary facilities

iii) segregated spaces, eg for prayer or for separation of men and women.

C) a "reasonableness" override to the religious protection may be necessary, so that some of the more bizarre cults are not given the opportunity to hold the rest of the population almost to ransom.

Whether or not the Convention is extended to include discrimination against religious groups, it should be amended to require the abolition of blasphemy law which is inappropriate and dangerous in a multicultural soci-

by Keith Porteous Wood  
General Secretary  
National Secular Society

ety. Additionally, blasphemy law discriminates in favour of one religion to the detriment of those of other religions or of none.

## Background

The Society does not condone discrimination against individuals, nor of shopkeepers refusing to serve those of a particular religion, for example. This complicates opposition to anti-discrimination provisions protecting religious groups. However, the Society has grave misgivings about the potential for abuse of such provisions by the religious groups themselves.

Other groups such as the elderly, disabled, and gays may also receive protection against discrimination under these proposals which are expected to extend beyond the existing areas of personal freedom and civil rights to those such as employment, housing and the provision of goods and services. If introduced, these provisions are likely to be proposed for all groups at the same time. Any attempt to veto the religious groups alone would be unlikely to succeed.

As reported earlier this year, the House of Lords (supported by religious groups and where 26 bishops have seats) voted for the virtual exemption from the Human Rights Bill for the 'top six' religions. Fortunately, this was largely reversed by the House of Commons, with support from the Government.

The litigious nature of cults (in particular), backed up by their capacious financial resources, has led to self-censorship. Even if religious litigants consistently lose in the courts, any small non-religious campaigning groups who are their victims will not have the time or resources to defend themselves continually.

Eighteen months ago, a UK case (about a video *Visions of Ecstasy*) on freedom of expression resulted in the European Court (not related to the European Union) upholding the UK Government's right to retain the blasphemy laws, which this Society has been fighting against for the last 130 years (see January 1997 *Freethinker*). Apparently oblivious of the UK blasphemy law, Christians in Britain are urging the repeal of (Muslim) blasphemy laws in Pakistan where, regular readers will remember, an RC bishop even committed suicide to draw attention to them. Disturbingly, there have even been calls from the UK's Muslim community for the law to be extended to protect Islam as well as Christianity.

## Secular Space

The issue of space needs to be considered in the light of the proposed extension of the Convention to include protection for religious groups. It will be necessary to decide what is "secular" space and what is "religious" space. Clearly this could be approached by defining one or the other. The Society's preliminary thoughts on this are as follows:

(i) Secular space should include all areas open to the public (except specifically religious buildings). In the case of a railway station, for example, it should be acceptable for a family group waiting for a train to pray quietly, provided they were not upsetting other travellers (but it is unlikely that praying in public on a train, unless almost empty, would be acceptable).

A pragmatic solution could be for religious observance in secular space only to be acceptable if no-one objects. If however, a custom be established that a particular part of the (hypothetical) station were cordoned off for use by adherents and free access was therefore impeded, this would be unacceptable.

(ii) Establishments with a religious foundation but performing public secular functions (eg some schools, hospitals and long care facilities and hospices) may need to be governed by special provisions. Would it be unduly harsh to define these establishments as secular if they receive public funding, or perhaps the majority of their funding is public?

Some of our members have already complained about state hospitals and nursing homes and the intrusion they have suffered as a result of uninvited visits from clergy or about near-compulsory Christmas carol services. Earlier this year, the Society made a formal submission on this topic to the Royal Commission on Long-Term Care of the Elderly. This issue is particularly vexed in the UK where practically all hospices are provided by religious institutions.

(iii) Nuisance caused in secular space by religious activity in religious space also needs to be addressed. The predominant problem is noise and vibration: bells, calls to prayer, or loud communal singing, for example. However there are other problems, such as obstruction or disturbing visual images. Most such nuisance problems will have to be dealt with at community level because customs, values and situations vary widely.

Babu Gogenini added: "These interesting proposals about secular space have relevance outside Europe, too."

Readers' comments are welcomed. You can write to me at NSS, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. [Source of proposals: 6 July, 1998, *Independent*]

# THE MIRACLE MACHINE MOVES INTO TOP GEAR

**T**HE PRESENT Pope has created nearly 500 saints and blessed, more than all his predecessors put together.

He regards saint-making as an important part of his missionary work and likes to provide one or two for every country whose soil he now traditionally kisses on arrival. But he is still not satisfied, and has even changed the rules to make saints faster, by reducing the required number of qualifying miracles from two to one, according to a seemingly Roman Catholic writer, John Cornwell, in an article from a recent *Sunday Times* magazine sent to me by a reader.

The Jesuit Father Pieter Gumpel, a professor of theology, who is Relator of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, would go further, abolishing even the need for one physical miracle. "I think there are other divine signs which could be a sufficient confirmation [of sainthood]", he told Channel 4's *Equinox* programme, "*The Miracle Police*" on July 28.

For the present, though, one miracle is still necessary, and it is the job of the *Consulta Medica*, under Dr Raffaello Cortesini, chief of surgery at Rome's medical school and a member of Opus Dei, to examine any case put before them. If they decide the case is *inexplicabile quoad modum*—inexplicable as to how it occurred—it will then go before a body of cardinals and theologians for endorsement. If the medical panel splits evenly, Cortesini has the casting vote, but I have no reason to think that the "breakneck" beatification of Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, right-wing founder of the Opus Dei movement, received any preferential treatment except, perhaps, under pressure from a reactionary pope.

Another regular panelist, Professor Francesco de Rosa, consultant in "internal medicine" at the same medical school as Cortesini, explained his theological position to John Cornwell, "that God intervenes on request in a direct and specific way to alter the laws of nature. And God does this in order to demonstrate divine approval that the saint candidate is indeed a saint". "All nature is a gift, including the laws of nature", continued de Rosa. "God takes away our health, and it is he who gives it back". How would you rate the critical faculties of a medical specialist who could say that?

Then consider four examples that have passed the "medical" test in recent years: 1. A child in southern India whose stunted legs suddenly elongated and grew normal; 2. A patient in the United States with a hand and wrist burnt to the bone, whose flesh was restored without treatment within a day; 3. A nun from north Italy with inoperable and untreated stomach cancer, whose tumour disappeared in weeks; 4. A young man from Naples who was instantly cured, without

by Colin McCall

treatment, of fatal leukaemia. If those made the grade, how monstrous must be the 99 out of 100 that didn't.

John Cornwell recounts how he visited the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints and tried to verify a number of miracles; but when he asked to see proofs of "before and after", de Rosa "retreated behind the defence of confidentiality". Time and again, Cornwell was told that "x-rays, photographs and other crucial proof had been returned to some remote hospital or long-dead doctor, or were remote or inaccessible". And he concludes: "So the medical evidence for each miracle might be plentiful and impressive to the scientists, but it remains tantalisingly inaccessible to the outside investigator".

He was shown the file on Joseph Pennapampil (which could well be case number I), a six-year-old in the diocese of Kerala in India, who was born in 1954 with both legs and feet deformed and stunted. In May 1961 his mother prayed to a candidate for sainthood called Cyril Chavara, who had been dead for about 90 years, and within weeks both Joseph's legs and feet had allegedly become normal, so that he could walk and run.

Cornwell pursued this case for a fortnight and was assured by a Vatican official, Monsignor Michele di Ruberto, that it would be possible to see before and after pictures of the boy, "even X-rays". But although Cornwell continued to ask for documentation, it was never forthcoming. The monsignor "repeatedly found reasons for not producing it".

One notable exception to the Roman Catholic Church's usual secrecy about miracle assessment occurred something over 40 years ago, when Dr D J West, who was Honorary Research Officer to the Society for Psychical Research, was allowed to inspect the dossiers of 11 miracles alleged to have taken place at Lourdes between 1937 and 1950. His detailed examination of the medical documents can be found in *Eleven Lourdes Miracles*, published by Duckworth in 1957.

West was critical of the general absence of laboratory tests, X-ray examinations before and after the cures, and argued that the cases should have been investigated more rigorously and sceptically. He concluded that there was no evidence for miraculous intervention in any of the cases considered.

I have space for only one example here, regarded as pretty sensational at the time. According to an English newspaper account in 1963, Mme Rose Martin "was sent home from hospital riddled with cancer to die".

Lowered into the water at Lourdes, "she felt a movement, gentle and warm through her body. That night she walked. Back home

her doctor certified: '*You were incurable. Your tumours have vanished*'. That was how it appeared in the *Daily Sketch* graphic feature "*Focus on Fact*" by Gary Keane and Neville Randall, italics and all.

Dr West's findings were rather different, as he had made clear in his book and in *The Rationalist Annual* of 1958 and, as I, then secretary of the National Secular Society, duly informed the newspaper, though to no effect. To put it bluntly, another kind of "movement" could well have been the cause of Mme Martin's recovery. But let's not look ahead.

In February 1946, she had a hysterectomy because of a cervical cancer, and underwent a further operation in October to remedy an abdominal hernia and a fistula that would not heal. In April 1947, she returned to hospital complaining of pain in the rectum and constipation. On examination, the surgeon found a swelling in her rectum, the size of a mandarin. "This was assumed to be an inoperable secondary cancerous growth", Dr West wrote in *The Rationalist Annual*, and it does seem that Mme Martin was sent home to die. For the next three months she was bedridden and taking enormous doses of morphine.

On June 30 she was taken to Lourdes on a stretcher and on July 3, following her third immersion in the waters, she felt better and was able to get up and go to the lavatory successfully. When she was seen by the hospital surgeon, the lump had gone. Subsequently Mme Martin gradually gained weight and strength.

A miracle cure, then? Only if the original diagnosis of cancer was correct. And there's the rub. Whereas, in 1946, the surgeons had confirmed the original diagnosis by microscopical examination, no such procedure took place on the second occasion, which Dr West considered "odd". He would have thought that other possible causes of Mme Martin's illness would have been investigated, but no. The dossier didn't even include a temperature chart. Then he suggested an alternative explanation of the "miracle": "the condition might have been aggravated by the large doses of morphia that the patient was taking, since this drug causes severe constipation. Indeed, there is even a possibility that the 'tumour' was simply a mass of faeces".

The evidence supports this view. In a statement included in the dossier, Mme Martin herself said that she did, in fact, have a large bowel movement (the details of which I'll spare you) on the train to Lourdes. "This case history shows how a story that can be explained quite easily is worked up into a miracle", wrote Dr West.

Now, with the Pope pressing for more miracles to make more saints, more working up may be required at the Vatican.

A sinister para-military scouting organisation—the Association of Catholic Guides and Scouts in France—is the subject of this month's Cult Watch feature.



# Priest accused of sending four scouts to their death

**T**HE DEATH of four young boys on a sailing trip in France this summer has alerted the French to the activities of a sinister scouting organisation which has links to an ultra-traditionalist Catholic sect and the far right National Front.

Local authorities were asked to inspect all summer camps run by the French Association of Catholic Guides and Scouts after the deaths on July 20, which the police are treating as manslaughter. Any of the camp's leaders—mainly priests from the Brotherhood of St Pius X which broke from the Vatican in 1988—not qualified to supervise the activities they supervise face prosecution.

The crackdown came a fortnight after the drownings. According to locals, the boys should never have put out to sea without supervision. None held sailing certificates, the dinghy they were in was overcrowded, the weather forecast was appalling and the swirling currents off the Brittany coast, where their camp was based, are notorious even for experienced sailors.

According to a report in *The Observer*, four sailing dinghies and an accompanying motorboat left the small port of Tredez-Locquemeau for a three-day camping and sailing adventure. Only two of the dinghies reached the first port of call, the fishing village of Perros-Guirec a few miles away; the other boys were washed further down the coast and pitched tents where they could.

Jean-Yves Cottard, the 51-year-old priest in charge of the camp, instructed both crews to rejoin the rest of the group the following morning. One boat made it, but the second, crewed by seven boys between 12 and 16, was pushed back again.

Cottard found the boys at 8am the next day and, despite their obvious uncertainty, ordered them to set sail again. He did not tell them of a forecast of force six winds, nor did he send the motorboat to look after them on the crossing.

## Capsized

At about lunchtime the boys capsized for the first time. They righted the boat but could not empty it. They set off two flares, but no-one saw them. Two hours later they again capsized. The three youngest boys drowned, and a fourth, who made it back into the boat, stopped breathing soon after.

Cottard, who has been charged with manslaughter, deliberately disregarding safety rules, and failing to come to the assistance of people in danger, was remanded in custody after the tragedy.

His lawyer, Dominique Remy, explained the association's aims. "They are to forge remarkable will and consciences; to raise boys of exceptional quality who can survive two days in the woods on three pieces of bread, and to encourage boys to excel themselves through discipline and devotion to God."

Initially, the drownings were regarded as a tragic accident, but the police began asking questions and they established that Cottard's camp, run every summer, had received a warning following a safety inspection two years ago. "This was not an accident, far from it," said the state prosecutor, Phillippe Astruc. "This was a deadly accumulation of criminal decisions."

The French Association of Catholic Guides and Scouts is not recognised by the French scouting movement, the Ministry for Youth and Sport, or by the Catholic Church. Founded in 1979, it has between 500 and 1,500 members. It takes part in the National Front's May day parade, and its headquarters in Mantes-la-Jolie, an industrial suburb west of Paris and a National Front and Catholic fundamentalist stronghold, are owned by Jean Marco, the Front's second in command in the region.

At the boys' funeral—a three and a half hour service in Latin—scouts from the association, wearing blue sailor uniforms and black combat boots, carried the coffins.

The police refused to release Cottard to celebrate the mass—much to the anger of parents.

"For us, Father Cottard represents Jesus Christ on earth," said Lt-Col Dominique Buchet, the father of one of the victims.

And in the congregation, *The Observer* reports, a boy no older than 13 or 14 said serenely: "God gives and God takes away. This was the will of the Lord."

## Thank you for your generous donations

**FREETHINKER Fund Donations 17 August – 17 September 1998:**

£25 L Dubow; £20 W Harman, U Neville, P Staniforth, J Walsh; £15 J Lance; £13 R Richardson; £10 J Barrett, E Crapper, P George, L Georgiades, P Gregson, N Henderson, C Matthews, J Mehta, C Minary, M Schofield; £8 P Baylis; £7 J Crowley; £5 E Carson, P Forrest, R Harris, A Hawkins, M Jackson, M Kamal, S Kennedy, J Lippitt, R McCallister, K MacLeod, W Stirling, R Vickers, D Wright; £4 S Peel; £3 P Browning, R Cannon, G Darroch, R Delaurey, M Hami, D Mansfield; £2 I Andrews, H Evans, D Simpson, P Wood.

**Total: £343**

**Donations to the Peter Brearey Memorial Fund, June – August 1998:**

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**Total: £1,318**

Peter's widow, Pam, would like to thank all contributors to the Memorial Fund. Special thanks also to the many *Freethinker* readers who sent cards and letters of condolence.



# Down to Earth

with Colin McCall

## More regrets from The Vatican

THE POPE, who has already “apologised” to the Jews for their treatment at the hands of the Church (albeit not to their satisfaction) is to ask forgiveness for the crimes of the Inquisition. These will come under the scrutiny of some 50 historians invited to a conference at the Vatican next month, chosen for their professional competence, irrespective of their faith, according to the Pope’s personal theologian, Father Georges Cottier.

And it is intended that the Pope should lead a penitential procession from the Basilica of Santa Sabina to Rome’s Circus Maximus on March 8 in the millennial year. Philip Willan’s report in *The Guardian* (June 29) didn’t say whether the pontiff will kneel penitently before the statue of Giordano Bruno in the Campo dei Fiori, where the heretic was burned at the stake in 1600, after an eight-year trial and six years in the Inquisition’s dungeons, where he steadfastly refused to recant his pantheism and Copernican beliefs.

Willan mentioned quite rightly that Bruno was a Dominican friar, but he was too unorthodox to stay in the order, and he fled to Switzerland in 1575, then to France, England (where he published his chief works and was friendly with the deists) and Germany. He was lured back to Italy and arrested by the Venetian Inquisition, before being transferred to Rome.

Market stalls generally fill the Campo dei Fiori these days, but trading could no doubt be suspended for such a momentous event. Now that Galileo has been exonerated by the Pope, it would be fitting if Bruno should follow, although 400 years too late.

## Bible ‘a pious fraud’

DEIST Sam Gibson decided “to examine the Bible and determine if it really is what I suspect... a pious fraud”. So he read it through in search of contradictions and found 70, including two from Exodus and two from Jeremiah.

Among those from the New Testament were Mark and John differing over the time of the crucifixion and, of course, the four gospels’ variant wording on the cross. And another example of a contradiction from the same book, in this case John: “I and the Father are one” ( 10.30) and “...I go unto the Father: for the Father is greater than I” ( 14.28).

You will find all 70 on Sam Gibson’s website, [www.erols.com/cygnus6/home.html](http://www.erols.com/cygnus6/home.html).

Alternatively you could refer to *The Bible Handbook*, which is still in print well over a century since it was compiled by G W Foote and W P Ball.

## Novelist wants his burden back

THE BIBLE may be a pious fraud for deist Sam Gibson, but American atheist writer Russell Banks considers it “the master narrative of his life”. So he disclosed in an interview with Frances Welch (*Sunday Telegraph*, July 5). I’m not sure what Banks means by that remark, nor when he adds that the Bible “tells the story of humanity in a way I understand”.

I can only say he must be content with a very limited account of the human story.

He has just published *Cloudsplitter*, a novel about the American folk hero John Brown, narrated by Brown’s son Owen, and Banks found that he was “telling the story of Abraham and Isaac from Isaac’s point of view”.

Which must have been pretty hair-raising: realising that your father is willing to sacrifice you to his god.

Banks feels an affinity with Owen Brown: “believing in sin but not in God”, and regrets his atheism. “I do have a sense of smallness”, he says. “I could call it existential angst but I prefer loneliness”. Yet, for him, “religion was not helpful; it was a burden”. People are generally pleased to shed a burden but, in a perverse way, Russell Banks would like his burden back.

## ‘Rational explanation’ for Biblical plagues

A GROUP of epidemiologists in the United States have spent several years attempting to prove that the 10 plagues of Egypt are based on fact, *The Observer* informed us (August 9). “Each had to have a rational explanation”, says Dr John Marr of the New York City Department of Health, apparently because “he came across a toxic algae that turns rivers red”.

In Exodus, you may remember, Aaron and Pharaoh’s magicians began their colossal conjuring contest by each turning the waters of Egypt into blood. Dr Marr holds the algae responsible, presumably on both occasions.

And he is “intrigued by the possibility that all 10 plagues involve viruses, bacteria, parasites, arthropods and insects”.

But he seems to have overlooked the frogs that came out of the bloody waters. Not to mention the preliminary acts with the snakes and rods.

## Circle of deceit

IN A non-committal article in *The Guardian Weekend* (August 8), John Vidal described how, by invitation, he witnessed the making of a crop circle by four men on a dark night.

The hoax formation was declared “absolutely genuine” by the Wiltshire Crop Circle Study Group, a leading circle of believers.

## Islamophobia? Blame the Taliban

AS I read in my paper that the Taliban had almost completed the conquest of Afghanistan, I found, inside the pages, a folder from Amnesty International, asking “Ever worn nail varnish?”

In Kabul, it tells us, “you’d never get to wear it again. The violation of women throughout Afghanistan has become so terrifyingly extreme that you could have the end of your thumb cut off for daring to do so”. One woman suffered this “punishment” at the end of last year; and for similar “crimes” relating to their appearance or dress, 200 other women were rounded up and lashed on the back and legs.

If there is islamophobia in Britain, Islamic groups like the Taliban must take the blame.

## Good message, dubious medium

I WAS sorry when I first heard Steve Jones fronting a television advert for a car; sorry that a professor of genetics should demean himself in such a way, even though his earnings would help his research.

But I certainly liked what he said: “Evolution isn’t just a theory; it’s happening right now. The truth is all around us in the living world...”

The message is fine, as I have repeatedly insisted in these columns. The danger is it might get lost in the medium.

## The Archbishop of Canterbury wants more Hell

# THE DEVIL'S I

**H**ELL ISN'T what it used to be. Indeed, depending on whose definition one reads, it may not exist at all. But what is certain is that Hell simply will not go away. And nor should it because whether Christians like it, loathe it, or are simply embarrassed by it, Hell remains fundamental to the faith.

The difficulty is: how do you 'sell' Hell to an increasingly sophisticated society?

Of course, the problem of how best to define Hell is not a new one.

Chapman Pincher, in his twopenny pamphlet, *The Devil* (published early this century) referred to the tendency of some leading Christians to deny the existence of a personal devil and observed that "founders of sects such as Wesley, preachers such as Spurgeon, and a host of lesser lights, would have considered a repudiation of a personal devil as equivalent to a confession of Atheism. After all, Hell is part of the historic teachings of the Christian Church as a whole, and Hell implies devils just as devils imply Hell.

"It is also impossible to accept the Jesus of the New Testament without also accepting a personal devil. Jesus had personal conflicts with the devils of the New Testament, and plainly accepted as beyond doubt that all disease was caused by devils. The clergy of the Church of England and of the Roman Church are all endowed with the power to cast out devils. Leave the devil out and it is impossible to understand a very large part of Christian history."

Pincher pointed out that "half-hearted and humane believers" who rejected the traditional view of the Devil and Hell were not representatives of Christians as a whole. "There are millions of believers in this country who still believe in a personal devil and a literal Hell. Their outlook is as barbarous and brutal as those of the primitive Christians".

He predicted "there would be an unholy row in the Churches if a clear official repudiation of the doctrine was forthcoming.

"The clergy try to keep their hold on the more backward by carefully chosen language that implies a belief in Hell, and also hope to retain the goodwill of the more enlightened by saying nothing about it".

The closest the Church has come to repudiating the doctrine of Hell occurred in January 1996 when the Church of England's Doctrine Commission effectively redefined Hell as possible annihilation rather than eternal torment.

All well and good, but annihilation leaves nothing for the imagination to embellish

**A serious problem exists for modern mainstream Christians: how do you reconcile a place of everlasting torment created by a benign and everloving God? Barry Duke examines their Hellish dilemma.**

upon—and, as we all know, the success of any religion rests on its ability to manipulate the mind.

But all is not lost. Hell, in somewhat of its old guise, returned to the agenda this summer when *The Times* carried this headline: *Carey tells clergy to give congregations Hell.*

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, it revealed, has written a book, *Canterbury Letters to the Future*, in which he berates timid preaching and, according to the report, "urges Christian clergy to rediscover their confidence and to address apocalyptic issues such as the end of the world".

"The end-time, as a promise rather than a threat, was absolutely central to the message of Jesus," he says in his book, and said that science has proved that the Universe must end "in either a bang or a whimper".

So what happens after the apocalypse? Dr Carey is certain that it will be judgement by God after death, and Hell. "Scripture is very clear about its reality. It must not be understated, trivialised or ignored."

The report omits any description of what Carey's Hell might be like. This I find very unsatisfactory, and share the frustration of the American freethought columnist Judith Hayes, whose attention turned to Hell after the Lakeland, Florida *Ledger* ran a feature entitled *Visions of Hell* in 1996. According to the seven religious leaders quoted in the *Ledger* piece, Hell can be a place where you are simply separated from God (a state all non-believers are quite happy to exist in right now); a supposedly horrible fate, or a place of unbelievable agony.

Hayes says that if we are to accept the notion of Hell, we are confronted with the problem of which one to opt for.

"The Unitarian Hell," she writes, "is symbolic, although a spokesman for the Unitarian position played a linguistic shell game. While claiming that the language of religion is mythology, he nevertheless insisted, in the same breath, that religion is

not fantasy or fiction. Perhaps being unfamiliar with dictionaries he wanted it both ways.

"The Muslim Hell (boiling, freezing, tongue-piercing) seems most unappealing. A very nasty place all the way around. And apparently the Prophet Muhammad's vision of Hell included more women than men. Why? Because women had been ungrateful to their husbands. This makes sense since Islamic women have been notoriously ungrateful for having their genitalia sliced off and/or sewn shut, and for being bartered like beads in a bazaar, and for being forced into harems. They pretty much define ingratitude, and Hell seems eminently fair here."

She also points out that "Islam teaches that in addition to Hell there is also a fair amount of suffering in the grave, prior to Judgement Day. A demon will continuously crush the head of the sinner with a sledgehammer until the day of resurrection. "Moreover, the sinner's body will be slowly crushed by the narrowing of the grave. I am not making this up. Aside from the obvious biochemical factors overlooked here (such as decomposition), the omission of which reflects a childlike, primitive world view, there is also a childlike nature in the type of punishment being described here. Sledgehammers? Any talented nine-year-old could come up with something more imaginative than that. All you can do is shake your head and sigh.

"Will we ever stop this nonsense? Will the day come when we stop screaming threats at each other about some outlandish place of torture in some unknowable afterworld? When will we cease to believe in this maliciously cruel myth called Hell? When are we going to learn to appreciate our wonderful world and out all-to-brief visit here. When will love and tolerance finally dominate hate?

"I fear it will not be in my lifetime".



l in sermons, but, once again...

# N THE DETAIL

## Hell may be hot but you'll sizzle in Heaven

IF WE'RE to be saddled with Hell, it should at least provide us with some degree of amusement. That this can be done was demonstrated this summer with the publication of an apparently serious report by two scientists who concluded that Hell's fires burn at 445°C.

Using descriptions from the Bible, Jorge Mira Perez and Jose Vina, physicists at the University of Santiago de Compostela in Spain, discovered that heaven too was devilishly hot—those who are saved, they say, would enjoy the sultry temperature of 232C, or approximately the heat required to oven roast a chicken.

For their calculation of Hell's temperature, the scientists used a passage in the Book of Revelations which relates that "the fearful and unbelieving...shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone".

"This passage implies that the temperature of Hell must be equal to or somewhat below the boiling point of brimstone, better

known as sulphur, which is 717.6 Kelvin [445C] at normal pressure," said Perez.

He and Jose Vina even consulted the Bishop of Madrid to check whether their choice of passages and interpretations was correct. To calculate the temperature of Heaven, they used a passage from Isaiah that describes the brightness of the sun and moon there. "Moreover, the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days." They then used a complex law of physics known as the Stefan-Boltzmann fourth-power law of radiation to deduce Heaven's temperature to be 232C.

The Spanish scientists' findings contradict partially an anonymous article in a 1972 issue of *Applied Optics*. This stated that Heaven had to be hotter than Hell—a sweltering 798 Kelvin.

In a letter published this summer in the magazine *Physics Today*, Perez and Vina said the *Applied Optics* authors misinterpreted the Isaiah passage, wrongly multiplying seven by seven to make the illumination in

Heaven 49 times as bright as that experienced by us on earth. After Bishop Eugenio Ramiro Pose of Madrid confirmed that only a single factor of seven was intended, Perez and Vina recalculated Heaven's temperature as 504.5 Kelvin—blisteringly hot but still cooler than Hell.

According to Roger Searle, professor of geophysics at the University of Durham, the team's findings have finally exploded at least one myth about where Hell is to be found. "The temperature at the centre of the earth is about 6,000C, so the old idea that Hell is right in the middle cannot be true. The only places on earth that have a temperature of 450C are hydrothermal vents on the bottom of the ocean, so perhaps we should stay away from them in the future," he commented wryly.

A spokesman for the Evangelical Alliance said "You have to suspend knowledge and rationality to believe that this is genuine scientific knowledge. The irony is that it is usually scientists who accuse theologians of being irrational."

## So, is hell exothermic or endothermic?

IN MAY, 1997, the Momentum, Heat and Mass Transfer II final exam question at the University of Oklahoma's School of Chemical Engineering was "Is Hell exothermic or endothermic? Support your answer with proof."

A Dr Schlambaugh, who is renowned for asking questions such as "why do airplanes fly?", posed the question.

Most students wrote proofs of their beliefs using Boyle's Laws or some variant.

One student, however, wrote the following: "First we must postulate that if souls exist, they must have some mass.

"Then we must ask at what rate souls are moving into Hell and at what rate are they leaving.

"I think we can safely assume that once a soul gets to Hell it does not leave, and thus no souls are leaving. As for souls entering Hell, we must look at the different religions that exist in the world today.

"Some of the religions state that if you are not a member of their religion, you are going to Hell. Since there is more than one of these religions, and people can not truly belong to more than one religion, we can project that all people, and therefore all souls, go to Hell.

"With the birth and death rates what they are, we can expect the number of souls in Hell to increase exponentially.

"Now, we must look at the rate of change in the volume of Hell. Boyle's Law states that in order for the temperature and pressure in Hell to remain the same, the ratio of the mass of

souls and volume of Hell need to stay constant.

"So: a) If Hell is expanding at a rate faster than the rate at which souls enter Hell, then the temperature and the pressure will drop until Hell freezes over, or b) If Hell is expanding at a rate slower than the rate at which souls are entering hell, then the temperature and pressure in hell will increase until all hell breaks loose.

"So which is it?"

"If we accept the postulate given to me by Theresa Banyan during Freshman year, that 'it will be a cold day in Hell before I sleep with you' and take into account the fact that I still have NOT succeeded in having sexual relations with her, then (a) cannot be true.

"Thus and therefore hell is exothermic.

"QED."

# Humanists sound warning over the Alpha Course

**C**OVENTRY and Warwickshire Humanists have written to David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education and Employment, asking him to confirm that his department has not verified or endorsed the Alpha course now being widely publicised.

They have asked Mr Blunkett to issue a statement of clarification to schools alerting them to the fact that it is a recruitment exercise by Christian churches—not a bona fide education course.

Roy Saich, on behalf of the Warwickshire group, said: "The course book by Nicky Gumbel seems to be deliberately trying to

mislead people. I don't think anyone who knows anything at all about history or 'the science of textual criticism', or had done any research into it, would write what he has.

"The course must be marked as a failure and the book itself could be harmful for students of history."

The Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA) have also sounded a warning about the Alpha course, which is being promoted via a £1 million advertising campaign.

GALHA points out that the Alpha movement's aim is to halt the decline in religious belief and "win back Britain for Christ".

A network of 4,000 churches will provide a ten-week introductory course to Christianity based on fundamentalist princi-

ples.

The campaign has the strong support of the Archbishop of Canterbury who took a leading role in opposing the lowering of the gay age of consent to 16.

"It almost goes without saying," says GALHA secretary George Broadhead, "that the Alpha course will stress the key Christian teaching on sexual morality which promotes celibacy outside marriage and condemns homosexual practices. Lesbians and gay men should be extremely wary of getting involved in this malign Evangelical Christian outfit."

● Turn to page 12 for Jack Hastie's review of the 'set text' of the Alpha movement, *Questions for Life*, written by Nicky Gumbel.

## Support grows for Dr Moor

A MASS RALLY in support of Dr David Moor, the Newcastle GP charged with murder, took place outside Newcastle Magistrates Court on September 10 as part of a mounting campaign to have the charge against him dropped.

Dr Moor was charged with murder this summer following the death of George Liddell, an 85-year-old cancer patient.

Dr Moor first came under the media spotlight in July 1997 when he spoke out in support of Dr Michael Irwin, Chairman of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, who admitted to having helped as many as 50 people to die throughout his career.

Dr Moor himself told of how he had eased the deaths of patients over his 30-year career as a GP.

As a result of the charge against Dr Moor, many friends and former patients immediately founded the Friends of Dr Moor organisation, the sole aim of which is to have the charge against him dropped.

Among his many supporters is Joe Ashton, the MP for Workson who introduced the Doctor Assisted Dying Bill to Parliament last December.

To find out what you can do to support the Friends of Dr Moor, please contact them on 0191 245 2788.

## Spanish taxpayers snub the Catholic Church

**THE** secularisation of Spain—unthinkable a mere 30 years ago—is now taking place at such a rate that the once rich and powerful Roman Catholic Church is running seriously short of both money and influence.

The financial crisis has occurred because of steadily dwindling donations via the income tax system. If a Spaniard wants to give money, all he or she has to do is tick a box on their tax return, and 0.52 per cent of their income is automatically assigned to the church.

The trouble is that fewer and fewer Spanish people are choosing to tick the box, and nowadays just over 30 per cent support the church financially.

The result: The Catholic Church's income is down to around £55 million a year and falling.

A recent report in the *Sunday Telegraph* said that the traditional figure of the village priest in what used to be a fervently religious country is now under particular pressure. An ageing clergy, the depopulation of the countryside in many regions of Spain and financial strictures have all taken their toll.

The paper quoted Father Ramon Otero,

an administrator in the bishopric of Ferrol in Galicia as saying, "in urban areas secularisation has been very marked. Now it is appearing with growing force in rural areas as well."

This summer the church's financial crisis developed into a sensitive political issue as a result of a request by the church for an increase of its share of individuals' tax payments to one per cent. This could double the amount the church is currently receiving and eliminate the need for special state credits of £30 million a year needed to pay its clerical staff.

The opposition Socialist Party, unhappy with the proposed reforms, said the church was reneging on a long-standing agreement that it would become financially self-sufficient.

"Cancelling the church's debts every year is unconstitutional because it is done at the cost of all Spaniards whether they are Catholic or not," said Alvaro Cuesta, a socialist MP. Sr Cuesta sees the proposed reforms as "a malicious attempt to confuse the taxpayers".

Favouring Catholicism over other religions is specifically prohibited in Spain's 1978 constitution.

Terry Sanderson on the media

# ATHEISTS GET THEIR OAR IN

**T**HE *Daily Telegraph* is run by a very enthusiastic Catholic who insists that the paper takes religion very seriously. Indeed, the *Telegraph* puts so much emphasis on the world of faith that some editions could be mistaken for the *Catholic Herald* and, as in all theocracies, never a word of dissent is allowed. No letters appear in its correspondence column that veer from the party line, no columnist would dare write anything that was theologically incorrect.

Fortunately, the other broadsheets take a less blinkered view. Yes, they all have religious correspondents, and yes they all have regular columns about religious affairs, but they also allow more opinions than one to be expressed in their pages. Atheists are getting their oar in much more frequently these days. And, being the majority, this is how it should be.

A good day to study the heterogeneous nature of our non-religious press was August 21. The *Guardian*, a self-avowed "secular newspaper", ran an article by Annabel Miller, who is assistant editor of the Catholic magazine, *The Tablet*. In it, Ms Miller prophesied a religious revival: "I believe religious faith, when not distorted by fanatics, is vital for the health of the nation," she wrote.

Ms Miller says that as a girl growing up in "atheist North London" in the 1970s she tended to keep her religious impulses secret because she feared her friends would consider her eccentric. Now, she says, her friends see her religious practices differently. "They may not be flocking to the nearest basilica for confession, but they are more interested in things spiritual and have more respect for the established faiths."

She says that in the past 10 years this "quest for spirituality" has led people to New Age gurus, crystals and astrology. But, she says, these are lonely and selfish routes to enlightenment and eventually people get fed up with them. It is at that point that the old-time religions will come back into favour.

And on what does she base this opinion? "Teenage girls are wearing bindis on their forehead while their mums are dressing like Jemima Khan. This Easter, *Time Out* ran a guide to London churches"—which, coincidentally, Ms Miller wrote herself—"Dolce and Gabbana are doing T-shirts with the Madonna on them and Gregorian chant is pouring from every car radio."

Ms Miller recognises that in doing these things people are "only toying with religious symbols". She is right, they are. A recent survey revealed that in the good old god-fearing USA, more people recognise the meaning of the golden arches of McDonald's than they do the Christian cross.

Ms Miller asserts that "People want space to be quiet and help with their problems. They don't want to be preached at or made to perform." This is quite right. However, churches don't fulfil that function any more.

But lest from all this we think the *Guardian* has caught Jesus fever, we need only look at the editorial in the same issue to be reassured. This concerned the Millennium Dome and the quest

**"I don't know when exactly it became apparent that nobody at all believed in God. Up until quite recently, I thought it was just me and everybody I knew and pretty well everyone I'd ever met in my life who thought it was a load of rubbish, perpetuated by the arms business for the sole purpose of fomenting one war after another. But quite recently, I've realised that nobody at all believes in God, even the people who think they do. Or, at any rate, say they do."**

— Philip Hensher, *The Independent*

for a sponsor for the religious element of it. "We were promised a 'Pilgrim's Progress' of religion and a multi-faith experience, but would the designers have included religious wars, intolerance, bigotry and the burning of martyrs?... A religious theme park would be reprehensible; it would be hypocritical to claim that religion was now the core of western life... Christianity has been central to the evolution of western society, even if it is now thought surplus to requirements; religion should have its place at Greenwich, along with modern icons such as web sites and mobile phones."

Over in the *Independent* on the same day, just to prove that we have a diverse press, Philip Hensher was giving the opposite message. "I don't know when exactly it became apparent that nobody at all believed in God. Up until quite recently, I thought it was just me and everybody I knew and pretty well everyone I'd ever met in my life who thought it was a load of rubbish, perpetuated by the arms business for the sole purpose of fomenting one war after another. But quite recently, I've realised that nobody at all believes in God, even the people who think they do. Or, at any rate, say they do."

Mr Hensher says the first inkling of this insight came to him with the arrival of "all those durr-brained bishops from Africa for some Church of England conference."

He says that it was "difficult to avoid the conclusion that Christian forgiveness was not very high on the agenda of a lot of these awful scum,

that they were a whole lot keener on hatred and incitement of violence against innocent homosexuals."

Then he got on to the story of the Sunday school teachers who had told their tiny tots that Princess Diana was in hell. The theology, Mr Hensher said, was faultless. If you sin and don't repent before you die, then you go to hell. But people don't care much for hell. They prefer "the idea of heaven, particularly a heaven with our favourite people twinkling away in the firmament, but we obviously don't believe in it; if we seriously thought there was anything in it, we'd also believe in the possibility of hell, and maybe even amend our lives. But, of course, we don't; we only believe in talking about heaven in the way we believe in talking about Father Christmas, as something for the children."

In the meantime, says Mr Hensher, with unarguable common sense, "we will carry on telling our children that the Princess of Wales is a star in heaven, simply because it is too boring and complicated to tell the truth... she's not in hell, but she's not in heaven either. She was a good, ordinary woman, and that, surely, is enough even for children. I wish it was possible to tell them so, in accordance with what everybody now so clearly believes, not to start talking about angels in heaven, and respect not only the dignity of the dead, but our own dignity."

The headline over this piece was: "The dead have no known address."

Not even Doris Stokes?

## 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 GWF at 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

# QUESTIONS OF LIFE

**N**ICKY Gumbel, creator of the Alpha movement which is currently co-ordinating a one million pound advertising campaign on behalf of the churches, is not only an ordained priest of the Church of England but also a former practising barrister.

Chapter I of *Questions of Life*, which purports to begin to answer the question "Is Christianity true?" is almost entirely anecdote, false analogy and mere assertion.

The serious apologetics start in Chapter III.

First Gumbel argues that the Gospels are reliable because there are so many early manuscripts. There are in fact about 270 early vellum manuscripts dating from the 4th to the 11th centuries and nearly 90 papyrus fragments going back to the early 2nd century. This is very impressive indeed but not the thousands quoted by Gumbel.

It is also irrelevant; what matters is not the date of the earliest surviving manuscript, which is a matter of chance, but the gap between the alleged events and the fixing of the texts, and the nature of the process of transmission of the tradition. On this Gumbel completely ignores the work of the Form Critics of the 1920s.

As a clergyman he can hardly be unaware of this scholarship.

He then attempts to prove the divinity of Christ from

- (a) his teaching and character
- (b) his supposed claims
- (c) the resurrection
- (d) his fulfilment of prophecy.

All of these arguments fail because the author has ignored the Form Criticism and simply assumed the total reliability of the texts.

## Deification

They also fail specifically because:

(a) It is inadmissible to infer divinity from teaching and character. Otherwise Francis of Assisi, Gandhi and Mother Teresa would be strong candidates for deification.

(b) It is dubious if Christ made any claim to divinity and in any case absurd to argue that if such a claim was made by a man not demonstrably deranged it must be true. The literature of Christian, Muslim and Hindu mysticism is full of claims of identity with the Godhead which are not usually taken to imply divine status.

(c) Even if the evidence for the fact of the resurrection was watertight, divinity cannot logically be inferred from recovery from a cataleptic state mimicking death or even from clinical death itself.

(d) The Old Testament texts are difficult to interpret (cf Isaiah 53) and, in any case, the Gospels could well have been specifically

## Jack Hastie reviews the 'set text' of the Alpha movement, written by Nicky Gumbel

written to prove prophecy had been fulfilled.

This chapter exhibits basic weaknesses in historical criticism and an ignorance of philosophical methodology.

Chapter III (Why did Jesus die?) attempts to establish the redemptive power of Christ's death by citing the Pauline and Petrine epistles. No reason, however, is given for accepting the authority of these texts. The usual way of establishing the authority of Biblical documents, apart from the Gospels, is first to prove Christ's divinity by the methods used by Gumbel in Chapter II and then to show that he believed them.

But the epistles cannot be authenticated in this way since they were composed after his death.

The second half of the chapter contains a judicial analogy (p49), the falsity of which is glaring. Then comes a perfect gem; "...he is not a God who is aloof from suffering". In the light of the bubonic plague of the 14th century, the witch and heretic burnings of the 16th and 17th, the Atlantic slave trade of the 18th, the wars, holocausts and pogroms of the 20th and the endemic famines of Africa and Asia, this must surely be the overstatement of the millennium.

The rest of the book is of no interest to the critical enquirer. It is so steeped in the Redemption myth as to be quite meaningless unless the truth of this has been established. And it is full of comforting little anecdotes selected from among the mass of tragic and contradictory evidence for their supposed support of Gumbel's case.

Chapter X argues the case for the existence of a personal Devil.

This is not central to the book in the way that the Redemption myth is, but it does illustrate Gumbel's method of argument and the kind of Christianity he is promoting.

His case for the existence of a personal Devil is:

- a) It is supported by Biblical evidence.
- b) "Christians down the ages have almost invariably believed...in the Devil.
- c) "Common sense" derives his existence from the presence of evil in the world.

The first is no kind of argument at all unless the work of the Higher and Form critics is disregarded and a simplistic fundamentalist position adopted.

Second. Christians have also traditionally believed the earth to be flat and the sun to revolve round it.

The third is at least based on a considerable body of fact, but there are explanations of evil which do not rely on the existence of

a supernatural being.

In the presence of such explanations it is not admissible to infer the existence of Satan from the sad things quoted by Gumbel on p151 since Satan is not an ineluctable deduction from them or even a probable explanation.

At this point one might simply dismiss the book as a lightweight popularisation, but the integrity of the author's scholarship must also be called in question.

He quotes as authoritative Thomas Arnold on the historicity of the resurrection. The passage quoted was written in 1841, before modern New Testament scholarship had got under way.

He quotes a passage from Josephus (*Antiquities* Bk XVIII) which is universally regarded by scholars as a later interpolation and was unknown to the 3rd century Christian writer Origen.

In a footnote at the back of the book (who reads these?) Gumbel admits only that the text "may have been corrupted".

He quotes the 18th century historian Gibbon as listing among the reasons for the success of the early church "the miraculous powers of the primitive church." (p209)

## Unacceptable

In fact Gibbon wrote, "the miraculous powers ASCRIBED to the primitive church." (Book 15) Gumbel goes on to quote Gibbon on the contrast between the scepticism of his own time and the willingness of earlier ages to believe as if Gibbon deplored the former. In fact it is quite clear that he regarded the credulity of earlier times as unacceptable in his own day.

This is a serious matter. Gumbel has not only misquoted Gibbon but misrepresented his views on the reasons for the success of the early church.

He suppresses all reference to the work of the Form Critics.

To demonstrate that prayers are granted he quotes anecdotal evidence in connection with which his arguments are purely opportunistic; ie he doesn't cite those that are not answered.

He produces arguments for the existence of the Devil which surely no qualified barrister would ever advance in court. Throughout this review the question of motive has constantly presented itself with regard to Gumbel's writing. The personal sincerity of the man in his mission is not within the scope of this enquiry, but some judgement of the text is legitimate.

As a trained priest he ought to be familiar with Biblical scholarship, and as a practising barrister his ability to evaluate evidence should not be in question. That he has chosen to suppress this ability so spectacularly must raise questions about his intentions in writing this book.

# EUTHANASIA NOT RIGHT FOR EVERYONE

M SCOTT Peck is "a physician psychiatrist and theologian". This sounds quite impressive, but all it really means is that he trained as a doctor, subsequently specialised in psychiatry and is interested in the non-clinical, everyday aspects of the relationship between how people see the world—in the wider sense of the term—and their behaviour. I could truthfully describe myself and many of my psychiatric colleagues in similar terms. Dr Peck has also written a book called *The Road Less Travelled* which deals with some of these important aspects of the human condition. He refers to this book (and to others which he has written) very frequently and tells us repeatedly that after it became a best-seller, he had a successful life as a lecturer. I suppose that Jeffrey Archer could say the same but this does not make either of them a literary figure of historic proportions.

Nevertheless, initially I rather warmed to Dr Peck. He is clearly a thoughtful and humane physician and by no means a knee-jerk anti-euthanasiaist. He admits to having 'pulled the plug' on occasion, and can conceive situations in which voluntary euthanasia would be an appropriate option for him. He explains carefully how he can simultaneously hold a relatively relaxed attitude to voluntary euthanasia as an individual matter, whilst rejecting it as a generally acceptable social and legal concept. Dr Peck is thus exactly like those marginally liberal parents and gynaecologists who, in the 1960s, were willing to concede that in the occasional case (and especially where their own daughter or wife might be concerned) abortion could be defensible, but it wouldn't be right for everyone to have this option.

## Hospice

He justifies his position by some rather tortuous arguments which are really just more elaborate versions of those put forward by the religious element (which is to say the majority) of the British Hospice movement. In essence, this is that much spiritual growth can take place in the last few months, weeks or even days in the lives of people who know they are soon to die. Dr Peck acknowledges that many people do not share his views about religion and adds, honestly enough, that many who claim to be religious and who may be ostentatious in their adherence can be much less 'spiritual' than those who reject religious belief.

Unfortunately, although Dr Peck sympathises with us unbelievers, who he acknowledges to have a very important influence on society, he knows that we are wrong because God has spoken to him. For example, when he was writing a novel which he now recognises had a rather unsatisfactory character development, God dropped a very broad hint that he should read the Book of Daniel, which he had not previous-

***Denial of the Soul—Spiritual and Medical Perspectives on Euthanasia and Mortality* by M Scott Peck. Simon & Shuster 1997. ISBN 0-684-82145-1. 242pp. £15.99.**

**Review: Dr COLIN BREWER**

ly looked at in any detail. Would you believe, a much better idea emerged from the pages of the Good Book.

He is progressive enough to acknowledge that God might be a woman, but the frequency with which God is described as 'He' suggests that such a radical notion doesn't come easily.

However, I can't help thinking that Dr Peck's god—of whichever sex—showed a marked lack of imagination in directing him to the Bible rather than to any of the texts of competing religions, to which Dr Peck refers only fleetingly.

Another dodgy belief system which influences and encumbers Dr Peck's view is the world of psycho-analysis. Like many American psychiatrists of his generation, he went through a training analysis, although there is no evidence that this particular kind of training makes people into better psychiatrists. Indeed, when one looks at the early history of the psycho-analytic movement with its tantrums, vendettas and excommunications, it is very questionable whether it even makes them better human beings. 'See how these psycho-analysts love

one another', as Tertullian might have said.

Although Dr Peck is far from being the most ferocious opponent of legalising voluntary euthanasia that we are likely to encounter, he is at heart a theological authoritarian who wants to tell us not only how to live, but also how to die. I give him full marks for recognising that the debate about voluntary euthanasia is really about suicide and that the case for it is even stronger in chronic, progressive conditions than in terminal illness. However, I think that he agrees with "Dame Saunders" (as he calls her) who once told me that she thought that suicide was a worse sin than voluntary euthanasia.

I am all in favour of trying to ensure that those contemplating assisted or unassisted suicide in these situations have plenty of time to think about spiritual and religious matters before making a final decision. Contrary to Dr Peck's impression that most such patients are not given any spiritual advice, I think that most GPs sympathetic to voluntary euthanasia and faced with a request for it would strongly advise their patient to discuss the matter with a cleric of their choice if they thought that these issues were important to that particular patient. In effect, Dr Peck wants voluntary euthanasia to be kept illegal so that people like him can have an opportunity to persuade unbelievers of the reality of God and an after-life.

God save us from this particular member of the God Squad.

● Dr Colin Brewer is a psychiatrist and member of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society's Executive Committee. His review was reprinted with permission from the September 1998 issue of the VES Newsletter.

## Scientologists win an apology

THE CHURCH of Scientology brooks no criticism and is quick to react to any it may encounter. Last year the magazine *Computer Shopper* fell foul of the Scientologists and subsequently published the following apology:

In the April 1997 issue of *Computer Shopper*, [columnist] Zygote accused the Church of Scientology of using pseudo lie-detectors to bullshit gullible masses.

Ever since then we have received an unwelcome monthly barrage of pamphlets and literature, mostly accusing Zygote of being "way off beam". Zygote appeals to the Scientologists to stop harassing our staff, particularly our Ms Xandra Beelzebub, and apologises for any misunderstanding. Zygote was, in fact, referring to the Church of Appliantology, founded by CD Rom Hubbard, way back

in 1950.

CD Rom Hubbard was a war hero, ukulele maestro, father of three and mother of two, and he wrote over sixty-nine thousand books on the subject of Diuretics: the Appliance of Science. With his lifelong friend Edgar Ron Hoover, he developed advanced sucking modules with a scientific bent for the greater glory of men with cruel lips, no chin and a paunch. The Church of Scientology, on the other hand, is capable of improving life in a troubled world, by means of a fax machine in East Grinstead. We accept this, we take note of the fact that you have registered the crucifix as a trademark, but enough is enough. Thank you.

— Submitted by Mr J Radford, of West Moors, Ferndown.

# You're telling us!

## Another cracked code

EVERY SO often, presumably to keep every rational person on their toes, someone publishes a book purporting to show, without any vestige of doubt, that aliens landed on the earth at some distant time or that some recently discovered monument, pile of bricks or lines drawn or carved on the surface of the earth have either supernatural significance or God-given messages for beleaguered mankind.

These writers are quick to tell us how clever they have been in unravelling mysteries that would otherwise have passed unnoticed and give us endless details of the efforts they have made to reveal these wonders to us while seemingly quite oblivious of the fact that other more prosaic explanations would equally fit the phenomenon.

But then of course they are so much cleverer than the rest of us for they know there is no better way to make money than to soak the suckers and screw the ignorant. Of course there is no question of their behaving immorally by so doing because the public don't have to buy the tripe do they?

The most recent blatant bit of rubbish of this genre is *The Bible Code*.

It is put before us with all the usual hype of brilliant author (appeal to authority—top mathematician and all that), startling revelations, to outdo those of the Bible extraordinary discoveries (you can say that again).

The *Daily Mail* told me that Dr Eli Rips eliminated all the spaces between the words of the Bible so that it was in the same form as when "Moses received the Bible from God." Now hang on a minute—my Bible tells me that old Moses was only up the Mountain for forty days and nights and when he came down he was carrying "two tables (sic) of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God." (Exodus 31 v 18).

It wasn't the Bible he had been given because a lot of it was written after Moses was dead!

It should be remembered that the original Bible was written in Hebrew in what is called an "unpointed" system by which theologians mean written without vowels. Later these vowels were guessed at! It is true that originally there were no spaces between words, no punctuation, no sentences and the verb 'to be' was generally omitted. I leave it to the reader to decide how easy or difficult it might be to read, let alone make sense of. And what guarantee of accuracy when the original Hebrew is then translated into other languages.

However for a bit of fun I thought I might try for some startling discoveries myself while at the same time carrying out a rather simple experiment. I have a fairly extensive personal library so I closed my eyes walked along and reached for and took down a book. On opening my eyes I discovered I had chosen a rather old one entitled *The Universe of Science* by H Levy. It was first published in 1932 and I have a first edition. I opened it at random and found myself looking at the top of page 85. The first complete sentence on the first line was "The difference so far enters merely in this way. I started to write down every letter starting with

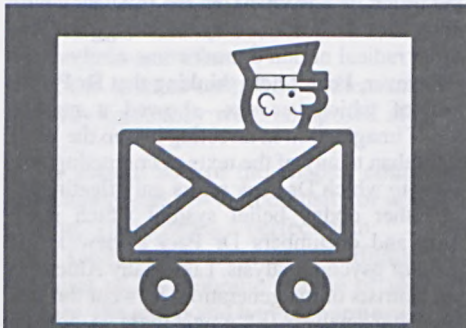
T and skipping every three letters. T i r e a t m l.

By using my specially calculated formula this translated into "Tire at ml" and I realised that way back in 1932 Professor H Levy (of mathematics at the Imperial College of Science, University of London) from whom I had had the honour to receive lectures was telling me to beware of the coming of the metric system. Too late. We are irredeemably lost. If only I had had the understanding to unravel the secrets of his book all those years ago.

RALPH ISON  
Farnham Royal

## An incompetent fabrication

E GOODMAN (*Freethinker* letters, August) suggests that Luke's census is not needed to fulfil prophecy—and takes this as evidence that



**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**

the celebrated birth must have occurred in the year of the census. Its main purpose is probably to lend a much-needed veneer of authenticity to Luke's yarn—the insertion of historic names and events into otherwise unbelievable stories was a technique common to the gospel business.

The author of the childish drivel that is the apocryphal Gnostic "first Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ", for instance, placed the birth quite specifically in the 309th year of the "era of Alexander". Some Christians point to the very mention of names such as Augustus Caesar as proof of the gospels' veracity!

The census, however, is also a transparent device to get Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where the messiah had to be born. As such, it is a totally incompetent fabrication. The cuckold character called Joseph lived and worked in Nazareth. Nazareth is not Bethlehem, nor was it in Judea; indeed, like the rest of Galilee, Nazareth was not even under direct Roman rule. Joseph therefore did not need to register at all, and it is utterly absurd that a Galilean should register for taxation (dragging his heavily pregnant wife along, of

course) in Roman Judea, where he had no property or residency, on the basis that he was descended from David [Luke 2:4]. The story is nonsense.

In any case, there was no "census of all the world" as Luke so explicitly describes the event.

There is no historical record of any empire-wide census, and it is inconceivable that every historian of the time failed to record such a momentous event. Those who wish to have settled for the next best thing—a minor census in AD 6 that was local to Judea, marking its full incorporation into the Roman Empire.

Luke also places the annunciation of the birth in the reign of Herod the Great. Given that the conception, immaculate or otherwise, is understood to have occurred around about the same time (Matthew, too, places the birth in the time of Herod), accepting the Judean census date of AD 6 as the divine date of birth creates yet more problems. In the real world, a King of Judea and Roman direct rule cannot be co-simultaneous! Nor is it a trivial matter that Herod was ten years dead by AD 6. Either he was miraculously resurrected—to reign in some miraculous concurrent mode with Roman direct rule that would be the envy of Ulster...or we have the miracle of the longest pregnancy in history.

Who writes this rubbish?

All the contradictions, however, can readily be explained with a bit of lateral thinking: Luke made it all up. A cursory reading of the apocryphal gospels should convince even believers that gosselling people of the time were in the business of making stuff up—and, like Luke, that they weren't awfully good at it. It makes about as much sense to argue over Batman's date of birth—more, really, as at least nowadays storytellers are more proficient at creating consistent and credible fiction.

PETER MCKENNA  
Liverpool

## Snide swipe at humanists

MUCH AS I admire Karl Heath's series of questions for which the Church has no acceptable answers, his August effort, *Make-believe or made to believe?*, was ruined for me by his snide and gratuitous swipe at humanists and agnostics.

I am indeed an atheist but mere atheism in and of itself is not enough. It is merely an assertion that God does not exist. Without a generally agreed definition of "God" the statement that there is no such thing is not very constructive. I am also an agnostic, not in the sense that I don't know about the existence of God but rather as a positive statement that the very nature of a belief in God is such that its truth cannot be known.

Fortunately there is a good word for the philosophy, which adds to the denial of any God the very important human virtue of compassion.

That word is humanism. When Karl Heath condemns it as a "milk and water" name, analogous to the respectability of those who pretended to see the emperor's imaginary new

# You're telling us!

From Page 14

clothes, he thereby betrays his own ignorance and a nasty streak of intolerance unworthy of a true humanist.

OWEN DUMPLETON  
Washington  
UK

## Humanists rely on reason

VERY FEW would argue that modern day humanism originated from the ideas of the enlightenment, that is to say, humanists rely on reason and free thought to make sense of the world rather than on ignorance, superstition, and reliance on institutions such as religion and monarchy which in pre-enlightenment times meant the absolute authority of the church and the divine right of kings.

Human beings were seen not as free thinking individuals, capable of making decisions about how they lived their own lives, but were subjects with their pre-ordained place in the world and society.

What puzzles me is how many who claim to be humanists also claim to be conservatives.

"Conservatives...They put little faith in unrestrained human nature and entertain little hope that it can be improved. Human nature has an evil streak in it which no amount of social tinkering will eliminate."—*Political ideology today*, Ian Adams, Manchester University Press.

We as humanists believe (I would hope) that the major intellectual ideas coming from the eighteenth century enlightenment were meant to improve the condition of mankind by reason, liberty and free thought. These very ideas the Conservative Party was formed to oppose. Tradition instead of reason, hierarchy in place of liberty and religion in place of free thought. Of course it is possible to equate the 'New Right' with reason, with its reliance on the market place and the *laissez-faire* classical liberal ideas of Adam Smith to solve all mankind's ills.

Humans can ignore tradition, religion and hierarchy using reason to make their own way in the world, accumulating wealth with no regard or obligation to their fellow humans. Yet is not the very idea that the market itself is some mystical force outside the control of mere humans some form of religion?

It may be very unfashionable to claim as I do that the only way humanity can be liberated from religion, ignorance, and prejudices against those of different colour and sexuality and poverty is to realise the one and only thing that nurtures all these evils is the system that forces incessant competition between humans, capitalism.

For those who would claim it is non stop competition that drives society I would answer, if from the very beginning of mankind emerging as a thinking rational being all he had ever done was compete with his neighbours, then we as a species would never have evolved and would still be naked ignorant savages competing with each other for scraps of food.

Only by co-operation have we evolved to our

present state.

A MITCHELL  
Leeds

## In defence of Orwell

THE defence of socialism by Keith Ackermann (*Freethinker*, August) includes an ill-tempered and ill-informed attack on George Orwell, which should be answered.

Contrary to what he says, Orwell never opposed socialism, but was a socialist throughout the 20 years of his public life.

At first he was much concerned with the distortion of socialism by its bourgeois advocates, especially intellectuals; later he was much concerned with the perversion of socialism by its totalitarian apologists, especially Communists: but always he was mainly concerned with socialism in its basic sense of liberty, equality and humanity.

*The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) described conditions in the depressed areas of the industrial North and the author's own eccentric ideas about socialism. He did not portray "working-class people as pig-like semi-humanoids grubbing in the muck"; but paid proper tribute to their hard struggle for existence, and he directed his main criticism at middle-class socialists, ending with the argument that they should join the working class.

*Homage to Catalonia* (1938) described how he served in the militia of the Marxist POUM during the Spanish Civil War and witnessed the sabotage of the Spanish Revolution by the Communists, narrowly escaping death in both episodes, and it included an eloquent defence of the classless society of anarcho-syndicalist Catalonia.

During the Second World War he served in the Home Guard, which he wanted to transform into a "People's Army", and worked on the left-wing Labour paper *Tribune*. After the war he supported the Labour Government from its election in 1945 until his death in 1950, complaining only that it wasn't sufficiently radical in its policy or open in its publicity.

*Animal Farm* (1945) was an accurate fable about the betrayal of the Russian Revolution by the pig-like Communists. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) was not a "violently anti-socialist novel", nor was it "intended as a thinly-disguised attack on the 1945 Labour Government". It was a powerful satire on what could happen to socialism if the totalitarian features of Communism and Fascism were allowed to prevail. It was indeed interpreted by some people, mostly in the United States, as an attack on the Labour Government, but Orwell himself issued explicit denials of any such intention. It is actually a defence of true socialism, precisely on the grounds of "freedom" and "choice", and its anti-hero says several times that the only hope is in the proles.

Orwell never "betrayed" or "denounced" anyone to "the Secret Service". As appears in documents released by the Public Record Office in July 1996, he supported the "Information Research Department", a Governmental organisation formed in 1948 to produce anti-Communist propaganda, and in May 1949 he gave to an old friend in it a list of 35 people who should not be approached for such work

because they were suspected "Crypto-Communists" and "Fellow-Travellers". This isn't an edifying episode, but it is absurd to call Orwell an "informer" or a "grass". It should be remembered that almost all the people named were indeed supporters of or sympathisers with the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union; that this was at the height of the Cold War, when Communists had seized power in most of Eastern Europe (the Berlin Blockade was still operating) and were putting pressure on Western Europe, infiltrating the Labour Party and Trade Unions and the media in this country as they had done elsewhere; that he had good first-hand experience of their techniques; and that he was mortally ill (he died eight months later). All the evidence is given in the final volume of the recent edition of *The Complete Works of George Orwell*. (Incidentally, is Keith Ackermann right about Jack Hilton's hostility towards Orwell? The *Complete Works* also includes Orwell's favourable reviews of Hilton's books and documents their friendship as late as 1945.)

MARY LEWIS  
Freedom Press  
London E1

## Right wing Censors

NIGEL Meek, Frances Watkins and Michael Hill are bedfellows of Mary Whitehouse. When they encounter views with which they disagree, their instinct is to ban them, not discuss them. To them "left wing" is bias, while their own views, presumably "right wing", appear to them to be honest opinion.

Michael Hill said that the *Freethinker* is supposed to be "politically neutral". What on earth does he mean? Supporting the *status quo* or tacitly accepting it is every bit as political as opposing it. Smug, middle class people, reading the *Daily Mail* in their comfortable brick boxes, their well-fed children clad in clothes made by other children starving in Asian sweatshops, are just as political as any agitator.

Michael Hill also speaks of "Marxist trash". I challenge him to list the titles of all the works by Marx or Engels, which he has actually read, and to state why they are "trash". I expect silence. The rude expression "put up or shut up" seems appropriate. From Frances Watkins comes the mind-blowing statement that "politics and religion are not linked". Was no history taught in her school? Has she never heard of the Crusades or the Thirty Years War? Even if she knows no history, what of the present? Has she never heard of Ulster? Does she not know who crowns our Head of State in Westminster Abbey?

I suspect that she shares the ignorant right wing that everything she disagrees with is "politics", while her own views are neutral and impartial.

Finally, I find it deeply offensive that these correspondents should traduce the memory of Peter Brearey.

KARL HEATH  
Coventry

# 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:** Information: 01273 733215. Cornerstone Community Centre, Palmeira Square (corner of First Avenue), Hove. Sunday, October 4, 4.30pm, Beatrice Clarke: *Sects, Cults and Esoteric Movements*.

**Bristol Humanists:** Information: Margaret Dearnley on 0117 9049490.

**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, October 15, 7.30 pm, public meeting.

**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 (Library, First Floor).

**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.

**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: 0113 2577009. All meetings at 7.30 pm, Swarthmore Centre, Leeds. Tuesday, October 13, Frank Pennycook: *Progress, Prosperity and Posterity*.

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

**Lewisham Humanist Group:** Information: 0181 6904645. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6 4YA. Thursday, October 29, 8 pm, public meeting.

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

**Musical Heathens:** Monthly meetings for music and discussion (Coventry and Leamington Spa). Information: Karl Heath on 01203 673306.

**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, October 7, 8 pm, Carl Pinel: *The Case for Voluntary Euthanasia*. November 4, 8 pm, Barry Johnson: *Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildering - the Church and Witchcraft*. Information and literature stall at Sheffield Peace Fair, Town Hall, Pinstone Street, Saturday, November 14, 10.30 am to 4.30 pm. Information: Gordon Sinclair on 01226 743070 or Bill McIlroy on 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.

**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.

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