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The

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Freethinker

Secular Humanist monthly

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

Preacher's
"worst
nightmare
comes true":
Televangelist
Pat Robertson is
sent packing by
irate Scottish
and English
humanists

– See p5 report



Also in this issue: Eclipsing
astrology with science, *centre pages*

THERE is an "epidemic" of cats in the UK. This snippet of information came to me courtesy of an item on Radio 4 last month in which a woman, who operates a cat refuge in London, made a passionate plea for owners to have their felines neutered.

As the owner of a "doctored" male, a handsome half-Burmese called Paco, I found myself vigorously nodding in agreement – then shaking my head in disbelief when the interviewee said that she encountered the greatest resistance to neutering from Catholics.

They are as reluctant to impose artificial birth control on their pets as they are on themselves, she said.

I really should not have been too surprised by this revelation. Catholicism has never been noted for its compassion or common sense, and – with regard to animal rights – it has been actively hostile.

At the end of the 19th century, according to Desmond Morris in his book *The Animal Contract*, the *Catholic Dictionary* categorically

stated that animals "have no rights. The brutes are made for man who has the same right over them which he has over plants and stones."

"Astonishingly, the statement continues with the ultimate callousness, declaring that it is 'lawful to put them to death, or to inflict pain upon them for any good or reasonable end ... even for the purpose of recreation,'" Morris writes.

That statement was made just over 100 years ago, in 1897.

"Nearly a century later its echoes can still be heard," says Morris, "despite the fact that we have witnessed a massive revolution against such an unfeeling philosophy.

"The old ideas cling to our language: we still use animal terms as insults; we still hound animals to death for pleasure; we still torture bulls to death in front of paying customers.

"The Christian legacy remains. We still feel ourselves to be superior beings with a licence to use the rest of the world as we wish. Far too many of us still subscribe, albeit rather quietly, to the *dictum* of the Jesuit priest who, at the turn of the century, said: 'Brute beasts, not having understanding and therefore not being persons, cannot have any rights ... We have no duties of charity, nor duties of any kind, to the lower animals.'"

The priest whom Morris quotes was echoing the sentiments of Pope Pius IX who, in the middle of the 19th century, refused to allow a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to be established in Rome.

According to Peter Singer, in his book *Animal Liberation*, recognition of the Society "would imply that human beings have duties towards animals".

The present Pope, who has been forced to apologise for so many of Catholicism's crimes and misdemeanors committed over the centuries, did – to his credit – make an attempt in 1988 to reverse Catholicism's callous attitude towards animals.

Clearly buckling under pressure from the environmental movement, John Paul II urged, in his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (*On Social Concerns*), that human development should include "respect for the beings which constitute the natural world".

His Holiness added: "The dominion granted to man by the Creator is not absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to 'use and misuse', or dispose of things as one pleases ... When it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws, but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity."

Unfortunately, such is the mindset of most

practising Catholics, that they will continue to regard cat-neutering – along with human birth control and abortion – as a violation of natural and "divine" law, and it will be left to the rest of us to clean up the mess caused by their dangerous intransigence.

(My thanks to Nelly Moia, a *Freethinker* reader living in Luxembourg, for the passages she referred me to in Desmond Morris and Peter Singer's books. See her letter on p15).

I DO not, as a rule, dispense financial advice. But this month I am impelled to urge those of you who hold shares in Sainsbury's, or any of its rival supermarket chains, to sell up at once. Indeed, I would suggest you get out of the food manufacturing industry altogether, because – if an attractive young woman named Jasmuheen is correct – human beings have absolutely no need of food.

Jasmuheen (no other name given, but photograph supplied) was brought to my attention by *Freethinker* subscriber David Wright.

Rolling his eyes in a manner that said "We've got a right one here", he handed me a pale lilac leaflet entitled *The Creation of Paradise and Living on Light*.

In it we are invited to meet "international metaphysics teacher Jasmuheen" who "since 1993 has been a breatharian – she has not needed to eat food. She has been physically nourished by absorbing the universal life force of prana (liquid light) directly into her body".

"Someone ought to tell the starving masses," said David. I, of course, agreed, but pointed out that it was unlikely that individual members of the starving masses would each be capable of coughing up the £125 (£99 concessionary rate) needed to attend one of Jasmuheen's weekend workshops.

Her seminars and talks, according to the leaflet, "flow freely in each NOW moment, allowing the consciousness of the audience to move into the highest paradigm the group intends. Her practical information and techniques awaken in us solutions to our problems, while connecting and initiating us to our cosmic knighthood."

Cosmic knighthood? Please!

Apart from teaching us how to live off the universal life force of "prana", Jasmuheen's courses also aim to make us "Masters in the game of Divine Alchemy".

What the leaflet neglects to point out is that anyone who forks out £125 on the strength of a sheet of badly-written gobbledegook must be tightly wired to the moon, and already occupying a realm of complete fantasy. They would therefore have no need to be taught how to "live in a river of magic, grace and synchronicity."

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Lewisham becomes a chaplain-free zone

By Denis Cobell,
President of the National
Secular Society

TO QUOTE from Revelations (1:8): "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending". This is the situation in which I found myself as the atheist chaplain to the Mayor of Lewisham. I was the first atheist chaplain to be appointed; now the civic year has ended I discover that under new mayoral arrangements there is no longer to be a chaplain at all.

This is good news. As secularists we see no need for religious interference in the process of government. This may be a small victory, but it is a step in the right direction. There are still chaplains attached to many local authorities, prisons, the armed forces and hospitals, some paid out of the public purse. We wish to see their abolition.

I therefore think we should make the maximum capital out of the fact that at least one local authority, Lewisham, has been bold enough to dispense with divine appointments altogether. The borough motto was penned by Cicero: *Salus populi suprema lex* – the good of the people is the chief law – and fits well within the humanist tradition!

Although some have questioned the wisdom of humanists accepting such posts, I would like to think that when they do, it brings to notice the outdated nature of these positions.

It is important not to rest on our laurels however. I know of at least one other authority which had stopped public prayers before council meetings; when there was a reversal to Conservative from Lib Dem rule, the prayers were reinstated. There is also the problem when atheists take up a post of Mayor, and find that the "system" virtually forces them into making religious appointments for traditional reasons.

Most people have little interest in a "mayor" let alone a chaplain, but local government is slow to move with real belief patterns. Thus taking on an atheist to fill such a position makes the ridiculous nature apparent.

The National Secular Society has published evidence that the United Kingdom is, of the western democracies, the most constitutionally infected by religious and church influence. So all praise to Lewisham to be amongst the first to curb this interference.

Despite this, it will be interesting to see how

the new Mayor copes with restrictions on Remembrance Day (see the *Freethinker* Nov/Dec 98). When I was chaplain, the local vicar, Rev David Garlick, still refused to include religions other than Christianity, let alone secularists, at this time of thanksgiving for those who gave their lives in war. This was despite Lewisham's multi-ethnic population and the evidence that many who lost their lives in battle were not religious. At one of his last public engagements the recently-departed Mayor received a deputation of humanists at his parlour. During his Mayoral year, he had formally received copies of the Bible and Koran, and thought it appropriate that there should be a volume on humanism to join them. Barbara Smoker was pleased to make a presentation of her book *Humanism*.

One of my little bits of fun during the past year as atheist chaplain, involved my being brought into contact with Dr Wesley-Carr,

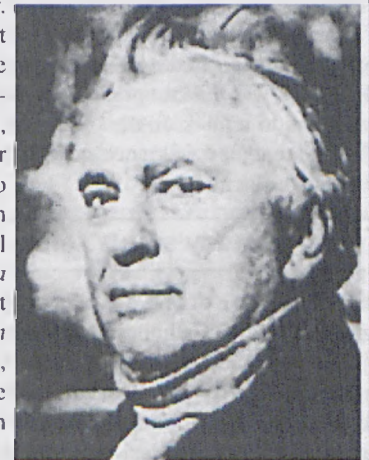
Dean of Westminster. Readers may recall Dr Carr achieved some notoriety through his enthusiasm to see Westminster Abbey's organist Martin Neary sacked. I attended an annual Westminster evensong, where all the London Borough Mayors wore their robes in procession with macebearers: Dr Carr asked how I, as a non-believer, found the service. I commented that it seemed to me a combination of opera and pantomime. He responded: "Really!".

My appointment as first atheist chaplain gave the media some excitement last year. "Outrage" they declared; my ending was accompanied by similar headlines: "Chaplain blasts MP": this was occasioned by my opposition to local MP Bridget Prentice's support for the recent NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. Every time we go into a bank or building society we see posters urging donations for Kosovan refugees. I wonder how much better it might have been if we had been asked to make donations towards the cost of the bombing, and let the government spend the equivalent of its war budget on the refugees? Yes, even atheist chaplains can adopt an ethical view on war!

Gore Vidal is newest NSS honorary associate

GORE Vidal, the American novelist, dramatist, critic and outspoken freethinker, has agreed to become an honorary associate of the National Secular Society.

Born in West Point, New York, he studied at Exeter Academy, and served in the Army during World War II. His novel *The City and the Pillar* (1948) was one of the first serious works by an American to deal explicitly with homosexuality. He wrote a number of successful novels, plays, short stories, books of literary criticism, essays, and, using the pen name of Edgar Box, mystery novels. He ran unsuccessfully for the US House of Representatives (1960), and the US Senate (1982); he drew on the former experience for his play *The Best Man* (1960). Said to have originated the idea of the Peace Corps, he was an often vitriolic commentator on the American political and social scene. Such fictional works as *Myra Breckenridge* (1968) display his capacity for irreverent wit, while in a semi-fictional work such as *Lincoln* (1984) and in his prolific output of reviews and essays, he displays the vast range of his knowledge alongside his generally disaffected attitude toward American society. Gore Vidal now lives in Italy.



The dubious odour of sanctity

ON May 2 Pope John Paul II beatified the Capuchin monk known as Padre Pio, who died in 1968, and whose shrine in the southern Italian town of San Giovanni Rotondo attracted more visitors last year than made the pilgrimage to Lourdes. The Vatican has declared that the 1992 healing of an Italian woman, Consiglio de Martino was a miracle worked through the monk's intercession. Many progressive Roman Catholics find it hard to accept his miracle-working powers and his traditional religious views, Philip Willan reported from Rome (*Guardian*, May 1), but that is no deterrent to this conservative Pope.

The beatification was a high-tech affair, linked by television with giant screens in St Peter's Square, at St John Lateran and San Giovanni Rotondo which, Willan said, contrasted with the "simple archaic faith professed by Padre Pio", who believed in guardian angels and the devil, and "was surprised to learn that his fellow friars did not commonly converse with Christ and the Virgin Mary or wrestle at night with demons".

Not all Catholics have been as credulous as the present Pope regarding Padre Pio. As long ago as 1920, the Holy Office began a series of disciplinary investigations resulting in his censure and banning from saying mass in public. Pope John XXIII was sceptical about the monk's notorious stigmata, which Padre Agostino Gemelli, the doctor founder of Milan's Catholic University, declared were of hysterical origin, although he was never allowed to examine the wounds. Other sceptics, according to Willan, suggested that they were "inflicted with nitric acid and sprinkled with eau de cologne".

It is alleged, too, that the Virgin Mary was not the only woman in his life, that he had sexual relations with some of his parishioners; was "less than scrupulous" in the management of the vast sums of money that flowed in from the faithful; and that he used expensive perfumes.

Perhaps it was this last predilection that led his admirers to remark on the "odour of sanctity", similar to the fragrance of violets and roses, that surrounded him.

Unsavoury saints to be

IF the beatification of Padre Pio has disturbed progressive Roman Catholics, that of Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac, wartime archbishop of Zagreb, and the proposed sanctification of Pope Pius XII have outraged Jews who are aware of the two men's Nazi sympathies.

Rabbi Marvin Hier, head of the Simon

Wiesenthal Centre in Los Angeles, told a New York audience that Pius "sat on the throne of St Peter in utter silence without ever lifting a finger, as each day thousands of Jews from all over Europe were sent to the gas chambers with his full knowledge" (*Guardian*, May 15).

The Vatican adamantly refuses to open its files on this period, Hier said, "files I am certain would prove conclusively that Pius XII knew all about the Final Solution ... in fact, that Pius XII was better informed about the killings than any other world leader".

Older readers will recall Avro Manhattan's exposures of both Pius and Stepinac. And it so happens that I have just read *The Rings of Saturn* in Panther paperback (£6.99), by the German writer W G Sebald, which acknowledges the "cleansing operations" of half a century ago, when Serbs, Jews and Bosnians were rounded up and "hanged in rows like crows or magpies" by the Croatian Ustasha, "its hand strengthened by the Wehrmacht and its spirit by the Catholic Church". After the war, Stepinac was sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment, but was released after five years on condition that he remained in Krasic, his home town. He was made a cardinal in 1956 by (guess who?) the pro-Nazi Pius XII.

Choose your cardinal

HUGO Young, himself a Roman Catholic, believes that Basil Hume has been the saviour of the Catholic Church in England and Wales (*Observer*, April 18) and that, thanks to him, although "the conservative hand of Pope John Paul II...came close to inducing schism, English dioceses have remained quiet throughout". Moreover, Young considers Hume to have been undoubtedly the most influential of modern English cardinals in Rome.

I wonder where he places that other influential leader of the English Catholic Church, Cardinal Henry Edward Manning (1807-1892), who played a leading part at the 1870 Vatican Council, which declared the infallibility of the Pope? After all, as Lytton Strachey remarked in *Eminent Victorians*, "Apart from the Holy Ghost, his [Manning's] appointment to the see of Westminster" had been thanks to the pope, Pius IX (Pio Nono); and Manning didn't let his master down. "In every juncture he had the right word, or the right silence; his influence ramified in all directions, from the Pope's audience chamber to the English Cabinet", Strachey continued. Il Diavolo del Concilio, Manning's enemies called him, and "he gloried in the name".

When Pio Nono died in 1878, Manning was approached and pressed to accept the

triple crown, but he declined. It was essential for the interests of the Holy See, he said, that the next pope should be Italian; and Leo XIII was duly elected. Had Manning got the crown, it is unlikely that England's most distinguished contemporary Catholic, John Henry Newman, would ever have been made a cardinal. Leo was more liberal and, thanks to the Duke of Norfolk, rather than Manning, Newman eventually got his hat.

Ann misses the joke

GOD has been included in the email address of a Cambridge University chaplain, the Rev Bruce Kinsley, much to the annoyance of local clergy and that doughty defender of conservative Christianity, Ann Widdecombe, shadow Home Secretary.

"It's tactless, tacky, needlessly offensive and not funny", said a spokesman for the diocese of Ely. Miss Widdecombe went further, calling it "blasphemous", and suggesting that Mr Kinsley should read the third commandment. You know, the one about taking his name in vain.

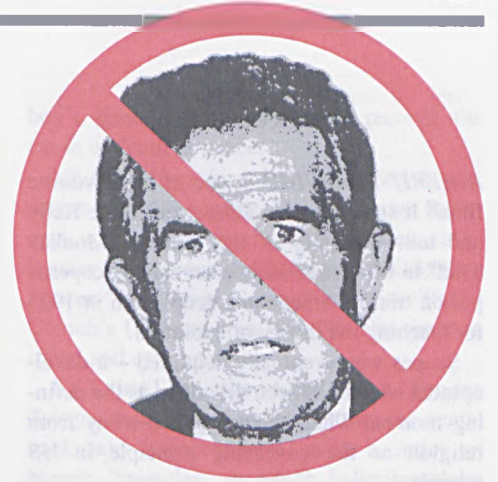
The former social security minister Frank Field was more tolerant. He thought it was "a rather neat thing to do". Whereas you might forget the chaplain's name, "even nowadays you wouldn't forget God". That was exactly Mr Kinsley's own justification, as he explained to the student newspaper Varsity. "It's nice to see that people can take a joke...it makes the world a happier place". Certainly happier than if Miss Widdecombe had her way.

Exercise while you pray

THE Internet was reducing opportunities for face-to-face contact between human beings, regretted Peter Scally (*Guardian*, May 1) (which was probably what people said about the telephone). However, thanks to him and his fellow Jesuits, God is now online for computer Catholics. "Sacred Space" was launched at the beginning of Lent and a thousand people a day were able to pray for ten minutes without leaving their screens.

"You begin with awareness of the presence of God, of your own feelings, etc", Scally explained, "and move on to reflect on a few lines of scripture (a different passage every day)". And if you can spare more than ten minutes, you can flick on to "Prayer Guide" pages by contemporary Jesuit writers. You can even get advice on body and breathing exercises which, in some way, help you to "get in touch with the presence of God in your life". Combining the physical and the spiritual at the keyboard, as it were.

Celebration on both sides of the border over the ditching of Pat Robertson



THREATS of boycotts and other unspecified action by humanist, gay, political and a variety of other groups have forced the Royal Bank of Scotland and Laura Ashley to sever connections with the right-wing American evangelist Marion Pat Robertson, head of the US's Christian Coalition.

Robertson, an outspoken homophobe, first entered the world of British business when he was made a non-executive director of the ailing Laura Ashley organisation.

It was felt that his "pro-family" stance would do much to boost the company's fortunes, but there was an immediate backlash when, in January this year, the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA) spearheaded a campaign calling for a boycott of Laura Ashley goods.

Robertson was back in the news later in the year when the Royal Bank of Scotland announced that it was about to join Robertson in a multi-million pound tele-banking venture in the US. The bank thought that many new customers could be recruited through Robertson's Christian Coalition TV network.

But it completely misjudged the feelings of its customers in the UK, and found itself targeted by the same organisations that reacted against Laura Ashley, plus a great many more.

On learning of these protests, Robertson reacted angrily by describing Scotland as "a dark country too tolerant of homosexuality."

This was too much for the Scots. Hundreds more individual accounts were withdrawn. Furthermore, the bank was on the brink of losing a number of key corporate accounts, including that of the newly-formed Scottish Assembly and the Scottish TUC – and its share price plummeted.

Bank officials acted swiftly to ditch Robertson. It is estimated that pulling out of the deal with the televangelist cost it around £30 million, but this was as nothing compared to the amount it stood to lose if it persisted with its association with Robertson.

Immediately after the bank severed its connections, Laura Ashley followed suit.

A jubilant GALHA immediately issued a press statement saying Robertson's "worst nightmare has come true – he has been cast out of Britain by homosexual humanists".

Commenting on GALHA's behalf, George Broadhead added: "We think it is beautifully ironic that the threat of a boycott was enough to drive Robertson away – after all, it was he who called on the Christian Coalition to boycott the Walt Disney Corporation after it refused to remove employment protection

rights from its gay and lesbian employees."

Robertson's brief and unhappy association with the Bank of Scotland and Laura Ashley was the prelude to far worse news for him.

Within days of his being booted out by the two UK companies, he learnt that his Christian Coalition organisation was no longer to enjoy tax-free status.

The ruling from the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS) could make the Christian Coalition liable for ten years' back taxes.

Founded by Robertson in 1988, the organisation has made substantial contributions to Republican candidates who endorsed its fundamentalist programme. It also supplied literature that was often distributed at churches by sympathetic pastors.

Barry Lynn, of *Church & State* magazine, published by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, was delighted with the IRS ruling, saying: "The Christian Coalition is a hardball political machine masquerading as a religious group. The evidence is overwhelming that it has been operating as virtually an arm of the Republican Party."

Minute's silence for COs observed at four locations

AS BARBARA SMOKER was writing her article "An Alternative Remembrance Day" (*Freethinker*, May), phone calls and letters were being hastily exchanged and hurried discussions held regarding the possibility of widening the observance of the minute's silence around the Conscientious Objectors' stone in Tavistock Square, London, to other groups in other countries.

As a result of these exchanges, a simultaneous minute's silence was held around a piece of sculpture in Potsdam, Germany (organised by Gertrud Jungbluth); in Japanese artist-poet Tsutomu Yoshida's home in Hokaido, Japan; and at the International Peace Conference in The Hague, where Bruce Kent called for a minute's silence to coincide with ours at Tavistock Square. As arranged, each minute's silence at The Hague, Germany and Japan, coincided with the minute's silence at Tavistock Square.

We are now hoping that people in more countries might join in the minute's silence next May 15 at midday. Secular humanist organisations

in this country which have international links could perhaps the BHA ask like-minded organisations in other parts of the world to consider the possibility of remembering, quietly for one minute, each May 15, those who acted upon what they perceived as their right to refuse to kill.

Bill Hetherington, a member of our group which organises the Right to Refuse to Kill ceremony at the COs' stone in London, spoke on the day of the laying of wreaths – carrying messages from all over the world – at Buchenwald concentration camp. The Buchenwald ceremony was organised by the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection. Buchenwald, apparently, was the camp to which those German soldiers not executed for desertion were sent.

On the following Saturday, May 22, a plaque was unveiled in Croydon in honour of Charles John Cobb, a WWI CO who died in 1919 in broken health, just three weeks after being released from prison. The plaque is the focal point of Charles Cobb Gardens, a small housing association development.

– Edna Mathieson

A backward step

INHERIT THE WIND is one of my favourite films. It stars Spencer Tracey and Gene Kelly and tells the story of the famous "Monkey Trial" in which a schoolmaster called Scopes is put on trial in American's deep south in 1925 for teaching the theory of evolution.

Scopes was eventually acquitted – a development which has been described as the defining moment when science pulled away from religion as the governing principle in US schools.

Regrettably, it now seems that the Scopes trial was not the final word.

Latest reports indicate that religious fundamentalists are well on the way to having creationism (*a la* Genesis) given equal weight to evolution in the American States of Nebraska, Arizona, Michigan and New Mexico.

Start of a clamour for seats?

IN A LATE Submission to the Royal Commission for the Reform of the House of Lords, the Roman Catholic bishops in England and Wales referred in approving tones to "the continued public recognition of the place of religion".

The reduction in attendances at Roman Catholic mass – now less than half the 1966 levels – seems to belie that claim. A new report to be published in the late Cardinal Hume's diocesan newspaper says that membership of the Catholic Church in Britain is "haemorrhaging at an unprecedented rate."

Undeterred by the decline, the RCs' (England & Wales) submission makes clear that the Church wants "sufficient [RC] bishops, not merely a token participation" in the new chamber, and reminds us that Scotland and Northern Ireland will also need consideration. This suggests expectation of a large RC contingent, which would be in addition to the 26 Anglican bishops already able to sit in the House.

The National Secular Society's submission predicted that there would be severe practical difficulties in limiting the number of religious representatives to represent other denominations and faiths. We believe the Roman Catholic demand is just the start of the clamour for seats.

There is no need to have religious representatives in the new chamber and, were there to be none, the inevitable jockeying for evermore seats would be avoided. An NSS letter making this point has been published in the *Guardian*.

Aitken finds God

FORMER Privy Councillor Jonathan Aitken has of late been taking religious instruction, attending an Alpha course at Holy Trinity Brompton. However, he has reportedly denied newspaper stories that he is to join a theological college after completing his jail sentence for perjury and perverting the course of justice. Subsequently, on 16 June, *The Times* reported that Aitken had confessed to a Jesuit priest before being sent down and that the convicted liar has enrolled for a course at the Anglican theology college in Oxford. So much for the denial. *Plus ça change.*

C of E wants a bigger contribution

The Church of England Archbishops' Council Finance Committee has recommended that congregations should donate 5 per cent of their take home pay, rather than the 3.2 per cent that they pay now.

Part of the reason for the increase sought is the cost of training the growing number being prepared for the ministry, thought to be a reaction to a significant rise in forthcoming retirements rather than an increase in the quality of applicants or any greater need for priests.

Massaging the figures?

EMPLOYMENT statistics have long been regarded with suspicion, largely because of the frequent and gratuitous changes in the way they are calculated. Should we expect the Church of England to set a shining moral example by not changing the basis of their own calculations when it comes to measuring attendances? If they do, shouldn't they give "like-for-like" comparisons? Or is spin-doctoring now as endemic in the Church as it is in politics?

Most – but not all – of the latest (1997) figures, include the diocese in Europe, which wasn't the case with the previous year's figures. Easter communicants have declined by 27 per cent in ten years. Confirmations, a useful indicator of the attitudes of youth, declined by 38 per cent. Both declines are in fact greater if the figures, as we suspect, are not comparable. Baptisms and Christmas Day attendances show smaller declines.

Shameful sectarian behaviour

SCOTTISH sectarianism has hit the headlines and caused the resignation of the Vice-Chairman of the (fiercely Protestant) Rangers Football Club. This followed a party to cele-

brate Rangers winning three championships concurrently – but perhaps even more important its victory over arch-enemies the (mainly RC) Celtic FC. Former Vice-Chairman Donald Findlay was secretly filmed singing sectarian songs. According to the *Guardian*, one – with a somewhat erratic metre – contained the line: "Fuck your Pope and the Vatican", and another: "We are up to our knees in Fenian blood. Surrender, or you'll die." Some would claim this to be innocent, if somewhat vulgar, fun. But is it?

After the game, a 16-year-old fan was murdered and there was other violence. At the previous match between the two sides on 2 May three players were sent off; the referee was injured by a missile from the crowd and threats were made against his home; and 113 people were arrested in running battles through Glasgow's streets.

Findlay introduced the songs with the words (captured on video) "You know at Ibrox [Ranger's ground] we don't have anything to do with that sectarian stuff any more." He then led the singing himself. Given this litany of recent violence, what then should we think of Findlay, who is Scotland's leading defence QC and a prominent Scottish Conservative?

Recent events in Kosovo, however, should remind us that by focusing all our opprobrium on a leader (like Milosevic), we are distracted from the unpalatable truth that such people would be unable to peddle their venom without considerable popular support.

Those working to eradicate sectarianism should not be discouraged by this disgraceful episode. Instead, they should point to it as an example of how deep-seated the problem is. And they should remind decent people throughout Scottish society that unless they all fight, this cancer will not be eradicated.

Given the foregoing, it is perhaps just as well that Scotland will not be including a question on religion in the 2001 Census.

Despite our efforts, questions on religion for residents of England and Wales seem to be becoming more likely.

Furious Carey

ARCHBISHOP Carey is furious with the BBC and the Dome. They are set to deny his demand for a silent "prayer" (which he would lead) in the hour before midnight.

He is seeking just one minute's prayer, considerably less time than he had originally requested and he has threatened not to attend the Dome celebrations if he does not get his

(Continued on page 9)

THE LIARS and deceivers who exploit the apparently endless credulity of the public can't be accused of being short of imagination. Some of the scams that have been reported in the papers this month are nothing short of ingenious. That doesn't mean to say that the victims are any the less stupid for believing them. When will they ever learn?

1. The bird has flown: In Paris, a Tunisian clairvoyant calling herself Meme advised her clients that if they wanted celestial intervention they would have to purchase a pair of owls which would be sacrificed in a special ceremony.

Needless to say, Madame Meme owns the shop where the owls are sold (at thousands of francs a pair) and after the ritual (which turns out to be less than fatal to the birds) they are returned to the shop for sale to the next dupes. Disaffected customers have complained to the police, who are reluctant to intervene, reasoning that these people are victims of their own stupidity. In other words, they couldn't give a hoot.

2. The heavenly hairdresser: Dr Rosaleen O'Brien from Luton, Beds., was reported by the *News of the World* to be in daily mediumistic contact with Princess Diana. Mrs O'Brien will bring messages from beyond the grave for £10 a time. Apparently she appeared on the Kilroy programme last year (itself an endless source of exploitative nonsense) and since then has been inundated with people wanting to know the latest about Diana's after-life. Mrs O'Brien reveals that "Diana looks much the same as when she died, only her hair is much shorter."

She must have been to Mr Teasy-Weasy's celestial salon. He died in 1974.

3. For my next trick I'll disappear: On a larger scale, the *Sunday Times* revealed that thousands of African Muslims have been duped by a child of five. Sheikh Sharifu from Tanzania was able to recite the whole Koran, and was said to have emerged from his mother's womb chanting: "There is no other God but Allah." Hailed as a "gift from God" he has preached to hundreds of thousands of Muslims in 14 African countries. Then suddenly, a few weeks ago, he disappeared, together with his uncle, Wazir, who had been promoting him. Also missing are the large amounts of money and goods that were showered upon him by wealthy admirers who believed it all. One of them is said to have been Colonel Gaddafi of Libya. An Islamic consumer group called it "the biggest scam of the end of the twentieth century" but others cling to the idea that the child really is in some way divine. "The uncle is guilty, but the child is innocent," said one

God does Diana's hair and takes up dentistry

red-faced Imam.

4. Just call me Jesus: Sergei Tropp is a 38-year-old traffic warden from Siberia. He claims to be the new Messiah and has set up a cult called "the Vissarionitsi". He has managed to convince thousands of people that he is Jesus Christ returned. Naturally, he requires his followers to give all their money to him in order that they can enter his father's kingdom. Many very rich and stupid people have complied with this request and gone to live with Vissarion in his "City of the Sun" built with their cash in Krasnoyarsk, Siberia. But, according to the *Observer*, Alexander Dvorkin of the Orthodox Church's sect-monitoring department, said: "I see resemblances between what Vissarion is doing today and what Jim Jones did with his People's Temple 20 years ago. More than 900 people died in a mass suicide in Guyana. Why must we wait for 5,000 to do the same thing in Siberia?" Another sceptic opines that "it will all end in tears". One can only look on in bewilderment.

5. The camel, the needle's eye and the rich man: The *Sunday Express* did an exposé of the Peniel Pentecostal Church (which has already featured in recent editions of the *Freethinker*) and revealed that it "is making millions from followers who believe its leader has the power to heal the sick through miracles".

Bishop Michael Reid, the cult's leader, has been making £2-million a year from his congregation, many of whom are willing to hand over a tenth of their earnings on top of other donations.

The flock are kept in a state of heightened excitement by Mr Reid's frequent miracle services, video recordings of which are sold to believers. "In one heart-rending video," the *Sunday Express* reported, "Reid claimed to have cured Sam Mildenburg, a four-year-old who suffered from the rare blood cancer haemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis. The video continued to be sold even after the boy had died. Later, following a complaint from an ex-member, a disclaimer was added stating that the boy had died of an illness unrelated to this disease. This is despite the fact that the

boy's death certificate clearly records the cause of death as cancer."

Mr Reid lives in a large detached house, drives top-of-the-range Mercedes and Rover cars with personalised number plates, takes regular trips abroad and helps spend £18,000 a year on "entertaining". According to the Peniel Church's 1996 accounts, £96,000 was spent on travel and car expenses.

6. Lying for the Lord: The *Sunday Telegraph* says that God is "putting the dental back into transcendental" with a series of bizarre "miracles" in which believers claim that one or more of their teeth have turned to gold. What's actually happening is that God is putting the mental back into fundamental.

In our age of scientific knowledge and progress, these tricksters are taking us back to the days of alchemy – this time transmuting base amalgam into gold.

Evangelical Christians in several charismatic churches claimed to have experienced the miracle of the molars. They say it is a sign from God on a par with changing water into wine. Naturally they hope that their numbers will be swelled by this new – and very appealing – miracle (now more popular with the happy-clappy cogniscenti than the hysterical Toronto Blessing). The *Times* and the *Mail* have given enormous coverage to this apparent alchemy, despite there being no evidence to support it.

The supposed gold miracles are being promoted by the Pioneer Trust, a European-wide Network of charismatic churches based in Farnham, Surrey. Gerald Coates, who heads the network, has been giving interviews left, right and centre, about what it can all mean. "Is God giving believers gold teeth and gold dust to save the nations?" he asked in a press release. The answer, of course, is no, and even Mr Coates has to admit that some of his followers might be deceiving him "in order to help the Lord".

There is little doubt that someone is lying through their teeth on this one, and anyone who goes in search of a gobful of glitter will find only fool's gold.

I suggest the Pioneer Trust moves its offices from Farnham to Fakenham.

MY QUOTE of the month is from Jonathan Meades, food writer for *The Times* and honorary associate of the National Secular Society: "If you believe in the existence of fairies at the bottom of the garden, you are deemed fit for the bin. If you believe in parthenogenesis, ascension and transubstantiation and all the rest of it, you are deemed fit to govern the country."

ECLIPSING A WITH SO

AS we all know by now, there will be a total eclipse of the sun on August 11, visible in Cornwall and subsequently at various places in Europe, the Middle East, then Pakistan and India. The fact that astronomers can plot the progress so accurately (Plymouth 11.13am, duration 1min 42 sec; Rouen 11.21, 1min 40sec; Luxembourg 11.29, 1min 20sec; Munich 11.38, 2min 8sec; and eventually, Vadodara, India at 1.31pm for 1min 2sec) provides scientists with a great educational opportunity, as has been emphasised by Professor Jay Pasachoff, a leading solar astronomer who chairs the International Astronomical Union's working group on eclipses.

The first claim for a European to have predicted a solar eclipse was made by Herodotus, and the credit given to Thales, who was said to have correctly predicted the year 585BC, when a total eclipse took place in Asia Minor. But as Herodotus was writing a century and a half later, doubt has been cast on the claim.

In any case, as Isaac Asimov points out in his *Biographical Encyclopedia of Science and Technology*, the Babylonians had worked out systems for the accurate prediction of lunar eclipses at least two centuries before Thales' time (624-546BC) and his ability to predict this solar eclipse to the year rather than the day, "was almost certainly acquired in the East". Thales was the first Greek to maintain that the moon shone by reflected sunlight and this, too, Asimov suggests, "may represent Babylonian lore".

Traditionally, eclipses and other misunderstood celestial phenomena, not to mention artificial millennia, have been treated as portents of disaster. Almost all cultures have at one time regarded them as omens linked to the deaths of monarchs and catastrophes such as earthquakes and floods, as Phil Whitaker says in his enlightening feature in the *Guardian Weekend* (May 29). In 1980 in parts of India where a total eclipse was visible, the vast majority of people stayed fearfully indoors. And when Stella Hornby, an ophthalmologist at University College, London was researching blindness in that country in 1998, she met several mothers who attributed the blindness of their infants to solar or lunar eclipses during pregnancy.

It was when I met a freethinker from Ceylon, as it then was, at a world congress many years ago, that I first learnt how astrology can seriously influence affairs of state in the Indian sub-continent. I didn't imagine then that the United States would ever have a President who put his faith in horoscopes, and in retrospect, I wonder how the world survived the

**Colin McCall
applauds efforts to
demystify natural
phenomena**

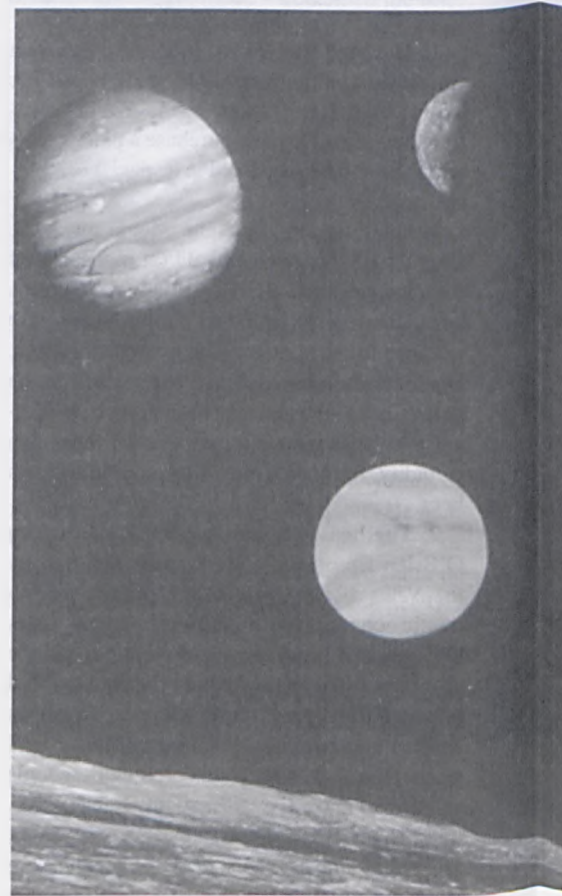
Reagan years. Not only did he believe in Armageddon, he followed the daily advice for his "sign" in the syndicated horoscope of one Carroll Richter. Born on February 6, Reagan was an "Aquarian" and proud of it! "I believe you'll find that 80 per cent of the people in New York's Hall of Fame are Aquarians", he told an interviewer

Moreover, the writer of an astrology column for the *Chicago Tribune*, Joyce Jillson, said that in 1980, Reagan aides paid her \$1,200 for horoscopes on eight prospective vice-presidential candidates (see Martin Gardner, *The Night is Large*, Penguin 1997). What a reflection on American civilisation.

Clearly, too, belief in astrological predictions is widespread in our own country. As often remarked, we have far more astrologers than astronomers, and they get far more space in the papers. At the end of 1997, the *Daily Mail* devoted its main front-page to "The Dawn of Aquarius" (yes, Ronald Reagan's sign), where we read that "slow-moving Neptune was about to join "forces" with the equally powerful Uranus as it moves into Aquarius. "... the Sun is rising. And the comet [Hale Bopp] reminds us that this Sun is not a physical sun but a spiritual, psychic, inner sun. It does not, therefore, have to obey the law of gravity. It can come over the horizon more swiftly if enough people rise to greet and encourage it. And it can dispel the darkness the moment it appears".

Richard Dawkins, who cites this "pap", as he calls it, in his latest book, *Unweaving the Rainbow* (Allen Lane 1998), also mentions that David Bellamy confided in *Radio Times* that he has the "Capricorn caution" over certain things, but mostly he puts his head down and charges like a real goat. Perhaps he only said it for "literary effect", but it's a pity a scientist should say it at all.

So when I turn to astrological influences in



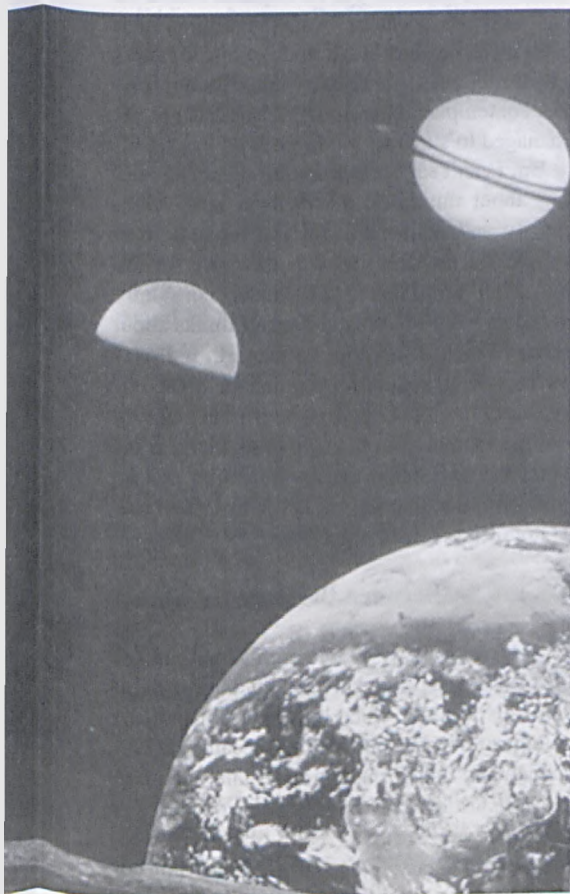
India, it is with no sense of national superiority. Far from it. It is to note a small but significant improvement in attitudes, despite the dead hand of Hinduism, where the demonic character Rahu devours the sun. As Phil Whitaker reminds us, India has a long tradition in astronomy, which has been brought home to the people by the Indian rationalists. Volunteers travelled the path of totality before the October 1995 eclipse, explaining the naturalness of the event with markedly happy results. "Whereas in 1980 most Indian people stayed indoors, so that, in the words of the director of the Nehru Planetarium, "all you saw in the streets were cows and stray dogs", hundreds of thousands turned out to view the 1995 eclipse.

This was more than an exercise in public education, says Phil Whitaker. Widespread scientific literacy is essential for the country's success in the fields of science and technology; and religion, there as elsewhere, is a major obstacle to progress. A solar eclipse provides a splendid opportunity for those seeking to win

ASTROLOGY

SCIENCE

● FEATURE ●



people over to the scientific world view: “a spectacular experiment staged simultaneously for millions, requiring next to no equipment, and one that cannot fail to leave an indelible impression of the predictive and explicative power of science”.

And not only in India. As mentioned above, Professor Jay Pasachoff instances eclipses as an excellent way of teaching the public about science, not just astronomy – “to demonstrate to children that we can predict things about the universe”. It might also help to counter the appalling effect of astrological moonshine that our children see their mothers and fathers reading in newspapers and magazines. In this connection, we need, as I think J B Bury once said, to save the child from its parents.

In English literature, Samuel Butler (in *Hudibras* and elsewhere) and William Congreve in *Love for Love* deserve mention for their mockery of astrology; but perhaps the most crushing indictment came, not surprisingly, from Jonathan Swift, under his pseudonym Isaac Bickerstaff Esq, in his *Predictions for the year 1708*. “This month a certain great person will be threatened with death or sickness’. This the newspapers will tell them; for

there we find at the end of the year, that no month passes without the death of some person of note; and it would be hard if it should be otherwise, when there are at least two thousand persons of note in this kingdom, many of them old, and the almanac-maker has the liberty of choosing the sickliest season of the year, where he may fix his prediction ... Then ‘such a planet in such house shows great machinations, plots, conspiracies that may in time be brought to light’, after which, if we hear of any discovery, the astrologer gets the honour; if not his predictions still stand good.” What was it about Neptune joining forces with Uranus as it moves into Aquarius (*Daily Mail* above)?

Which brings us up to date again, this time to quibble with Phil Whitaker’s otherwise informative piece. After acknowledging that the prediction of the timing and the precise location of every eclipse is a wonderful testament to man’s intellectual achievement he strikes a false note. For many observers, he says, “the experience of a total eclipse forcefully brings home the inability of science to answer the question why – a question fundamental to the human condition, and one that is firmly the preserve of spirituality, religion, myths, storytelling, art and poetry”.

The question is, of course, meaningless, but let us just state it to show it as such. Why does the moon, as seen from various parts of the earth, pass in front of the sun? What answer are those “many observers” seeking? Because God decrees it?

My question to Phil Whitaker is: why introduce nonsense into a fascinating factual article?

(Continued from page 6)

● OVERVIEW

way. But even the Archbishop has a boss, and she doesn’t seem too pleased.

Her Britannic Majesty is clearly regarding her forthcoming attendance at the Dome’s Millennium party as a painful duty, according to one of the most terse and revealing “leaks” from “a senior Royal insider” (as quoted in the *Sunday Express*). I have seen no denial or apology for the quote.

“There is a feeling that this massive celebration is to mark the anniversary of the birth of Christ. It is therefore appropriate for the Archbishop to be present at what will be the focus of the nation’s celebrations. As the Queen is going to be there despite her better judgment, she feels that the Archbishop should jolly well be there to endure the evening with her.” The Machiavellian plot thickens as a

local Greenwich church has invited Dr Carey, the Queen, Tony Blair and others to a pre-Millennium service. Carey seems keen to go, but I doubt if there will be much of a crowd, and the Sovereign is not known to seek out his company.

The Millennium candles to be provided countrywide by the churches also seem to be fuelling a row in church circles. There is a belated concern about the risks of fire, injury and even death – particularly in crowded and inebriated parties.

Televised Christmas worship

AROUND Christmastime last year, the Bishop of St Albans and the Archbishop of York both launched complaints in the national press

about the absence of a televised service of worship on Christmas Day. These were presented as if this were something new, but as I pointed out in the *Independent* at the time, there had been no such service for six or seven years – and nobody seemed to have noticed.

Undaunted, the Bishop of Wakefield has revived the whinge in an article in *The Times* – indicating perhaps that there is an organised campaign afoot to get ever more time on TV for religion.

The Times published a response from the NSS’s Press Officer, Terry Sanderson, who put the Bishop right on this point and added: “Given the general indifference to religion and continual decline in religious attendances, the present 700 hours per annum of religious broadcasting is excessive.”

A N WILSON asserts in this eminently readable book that the decline of religious certainty in Victorian times had its origins with eighteenth-century sceptics such as Hume, Bentham and Gibbon. It was helped along the way by the discoveries of science – Lyell the geologist with what Ruskin called his ‘dreadful hammers’ and particularly Darwin in *The Origin of Species*. But once god had apparently been dispensed with, and atheism had become the “religion of the suburbs”, great thinkers began to feel that we had thrown away something that we actually couldn’t manage without. For the first time in history, man had decided to go it alone.

Well, that’s Wilson’s conclusion, anyway.

It is difficult to know where Wilson himself stands on this issue. He says that those in the vanguard of freethought in the nineteenth century, the demolishers of biblical literalism and the rejecters of religious dogma, felt a sense of loss that amounted to despair after they had argued god out of existence. “What will you put in god’s place?” is the challenge that seems to be issued to those who assassinated the deity. Wilson seems unwilling to entertain the idea that no replacement is required, and that god has been surplus to requirements for some considerable time.

Insult to reason

God’s Funeral follows the flow of anti-Christian thought as it developed and gained power in the early nineteenth century. More and more people reached the conclusion that religion was not true, that it was an insult to reason and that human life would be immeasurably improved if it were abandoned. Wilson provides many fascinating character studies of those who struggled to settle the “god question”. His erudition in this respect cannot be faulted – he seems to have read every book in the British Library. Some of the protagonists are well-known – Marx, Hegel, Gibbon, Kant, Carlyle, George Eliot; and some of them are now obscure – James Anthony Froude, Edward Irving and John Sterling. All of them made contributions to the pool of thought that was – according to Wilson – to eventually drown god.

So first let us look at the book’s skill in showing us the lives and philosophies of the people who tackled the whole question of whether religion was true or false, or whether it was beneficial to mankind or a plague. Wilson is a witty biographer, and he not only illustrates the thinking of this large cast, but provides brilliantly anecdotal thumb-nail sketches that bring them to life as real people, with human foibles. Marx, for instance, was a

**Terry Sanderson
reviews *God’s
Funeral*, by
A N Wilson
(John Murray,
£20, pp402)**

man prone to personal vanity who insisted on living in utter squalor during his time in London, conditions that claimed the lives of his two children. George Eliot, author of *Middlemarch* and *Adam Bede*, horrified her pious father when she wrote to him: “I wish entirely to remove from your mind the false notion that I am inclined to unite myself with any Christian community, or that I have any affinity in opinion with Unitarians more than other classes of believers in the Divine Authority of the books comprising the Jewish and Christian scriptures. I regard these writings as histories consisting of mingled truth and fiction, and while I admire and cherish much of what I believe to have been the moral teaching of Jesus himself, I consider the doctrines built upon the facts of his life are drawn as to its materials from Jewish notions, notions to be most dishonourable to God and most pernicious in their influence on individual and social happiness...”

It is difficult now to imagine how seriously religion was taken during the first half of the nineteenth century; the intellectual and emotional agonies to which the Victorian doubters subjected themselves seem hardly credible to the modern mind. Yet this book makes clear that a genuine sense of bereavement afflicted those who could not honestly maintain their belief in god.

However, Wilson is less convincing when he concludes that it wasn’t really god that the Victorians wanted to kill off, but Dad. The image of the authoritarian, unfeeling father of that era (think perhaps of Charles Laughton playing the unyielding father of Elizabeth Barrett Browning in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*) is what the battle was really about. Wilson also suggests that Freud compounded this when he told us that all our troubles stemmed from our family life. “Freud,” writes Wilson, “believed that when humanity could throw off its illusions, it would destroy neurosis, the thing which made it unhappy. But his diagnosis of what made it unhappy was family life. He taught us that in order to become sane, we must undermine and question what is for

most of us the bedrock of our social and emotional security – our trust in, and love for, our parents.” So, it seems, all that atheism was simply projected anti-paternalism.

In the end, it is clear that god is dead only for those people who have cast him out of their head. There cannot be a single funeral for god: millions of funerals will be required before he can truly be declared extinct. I believe that each of us has to kill off god personally and I get the distinct impression that, although he has contemplated the deed, Wilson has not yet managed to slay the god in his own head.

But I can’t say for certain, for there is a feeling about this book that Wilson is mischievously and deliberately hiding himself from us. As he presents us with the ideas of the Victorian god-killers, the reader constantly wonders what Mr Wilson himself thinks about them. Which camp does he stand in himself? Perhaps he is aiming for journalistic objectivity, presenting the facts to us so we can make up our own minds. But then we think that it is his choice of facts, and the interpretation that he puts on them, that lets us know that this book is not dispassionate reporting.

Between the lines

So perhaps if we look carefully we can see Mr Wilson lurking between the lines, or at least his shadow. Once he was a pillar of the Anglican church, but then he became disillusioned and transformed himself into one of its fiercest critics. He wrote a life of Jesus and then one of St Paul, both of which were uncomplimentary. Now he describes himself as an agnostic, unable to take the final leap into full-scale atheism. Those who have read his journalism will find it equally difficult to pin him down. His comments on Anglican affairs can be vicious or even crude, and yet there still remains a distinct affection for the Church of England.

Like so many of the Victorians whose lives he so vividly describes, Mr Wilson seems to be on a journey of discovery. At present that journey is taking him away from god, but I have a strong suspicion that he is travelling on a return ticket and that eventually he’ll be back in the Christian fold. There will be no funeral for god *chez* Wilson.

The failure of this book is to imagine that it was only possible for “ordinary people” to kill off god after the theologians and “thinkers” of the nineteenth century made it possible for them. This elite may have needed to rationalise the death of their god for themselves, but for the vast majority of people in the Western

(Continued on page 13)

WHEN I was editor of the *Freethinker*, some 40 years ago now, I had two regular correspondents in South Africa, Eddie Roux and Malcolm Clarke, both at Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg, both of whom fell foul of the apartheid regime.

Eddie, who was Professor of Botany, was banned from teaching, writing or attending meetings; Malcolm, who had graduated from the university and taught in the mathematics department, was forced to leave to escape imprisonment, and went to Zambia to teach.

He became a great friend of Kenneth Kaunda, but had to leave that country for questioning a clause in the Draft Constitution drawn up by the British government, which caused an uproar. He returned, however, after independence, to become Head of Science and Education at the University of Lusaka. His was undoubtedly a varied and interesting life, spent mainly in the southern hemisphere from his birth in Lahore, then in India.

Although Malcolm rarely came to this country until his later years, I met him at a World Union of Freethinkers congress in Brussels, in

Malcolm Gordon Clarke (Jan 27, 1910 – June 6, 1999)



Malcolm Clarke pictured with his wife Lily in Spain in 1991.

Photo: Graham Livingstone

1959, of which I still have pictures. A few years later he and his first wife Nora spent a few days at our house on a number of occasions, which we certainly relished. Sadly Nora died in 1978. Among the many letters of condolence he received was a personal note from President Kaunda.

When Malcolm retired he chose to live in Spain, where my wife and I visited him and his surviving wife, Lily, who nursed him through his long final illness, and to whom we send our deepest sympathy and affection. We exchanged letters and phone calls, and I sent him a regular supply of freethought and scientific literature.

Malcolm was an avowed atheist and, according to his expressed wishes, he was cremated with no service. He always looked forward to receiving his *Freethinker* and, indeed, would ring and tell me if it was ever delayed. Although we might mostly be described as absent friends, we were close friends nevertheless. June and I will miss him and the stimulating companionship he always provided.

– Colin McCall

CELEBRATING INGERSOLL, by Derek Lennard

A PLAY celebrating the life and works of Robert Ingersoll will be staged at the Conway Hall library, Red Lion Square, London WC1 on Friday, July 9 at 7.30pm.

Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-1899) was said by contemporaries to be the "most listened to person in America" in the last quarter of the 19th century.

His lectures attracted thousands of people – on at least three occasions 50,000 came to hear "the Great Agnostic" of the nation.

His views on orthodox religion had an incredibly high profile and he was followed around by the press eager to hear his views on the day's news.

His views were so controversial and influential that even William Ewart Gladstone felt compelled to join the debate when Ingersoll discussed religious issues with the Reverend Henry Field in a religious periodical.

Ingersoll was not just well-known as a free-thinker but also as one of America's most noted lawyers and advocates (famously defending Charles B Reynolds against a charge of blasphemy in 1883); politician (he achieved no higher office than Attorney General of Illinois because of his controversial

"I have heard the greatest orators of the century in England and America ...none of them ever equalled Robert Ingersoll in his highest flights ... I heard Mr Ingersoll many years ago in Chicago. The hall seated 5,000 people: every inch of standing room was occupied. This was the greatest triumph of oratory I had ever witnessed"
– Elizabeth Cady Stanton, US suffragette and freethinker.

views, but his powers of oratory were so great that Republican presidential candidates routinely asked him to speak on their behalf); and as a colonel in the American Civil War.

The special centenary event at Conway Hall this month is an attempt to restore his reputation. In a two-hour programme of entertainment we try and capture his wit and wisdom in a series of sketches which celebrate his life and works.

The event should be of special interest to readers of the *Freethinker* as two of its regular contributors play a significant part in the evening's proceedings.

Terry Sanderson takes the role of Ingersoll's adversary, the Reverend Talmage, a Presbyterian preacher from Brooklyn who seethed with fire and brimstone.

National Secular Society General Secretary Keith Porteous Wood appears being interviewed for a place in heaven or hell – his performance in rehearsals had the cast in stitches.

The play is entitled *The Time to be Happy* – it commemorates Ingersoll's most famous saying: "The time to be happy is now, the place to be happy is here, and the way to be happy is to make others so."

Other memorable quotes from Ingersoll include:

"No one pretends to know where 'heaven' is. The celestial realm is the blessed somewhere in the unknown nowhere."

"Calvinism was the child of indigestion."

"Heresy is a cradle; orthodoxy a coffin."

"Imagine the Lord God with a bone in his hand with which to start a woman, trying to make up his mind whether to make a blonde or a brunette."

"Religion has not civilized man – man has civilised religion."



Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin

Nicolas Walter looks back on the life of the first Russian author who became famous outside his own country and after his death

The bicentenaries of two great freethinking poets were recently commemorated in the *Freethinker* – Heinrich Heine two years ago (December 1997), and Giacomo Leopardi a year ago (June 1998). The bicentenary of a third great freethinking poet falls this year. Pushkin was the first Russian author who became famous outside his own country and after his death. Outside Russia he is best known for the texts of so many operas – *Boris Godunov*, *Eugene Onegin*, *The Golden Cockerel*, *The Queen of Spades*, *Ruslan and Lyudmila* – but in Russia he is still acknowledged as one of the very greatest writers in the language.

Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin was born in Moscow on 26 May (6 June in the Western calendar) 1799. His father came from an old but impoverished aristocratic family, and his mother was the granddaughter of an African slave who had been a favourite of Peter the Great; he relished both connections, but disliked both parents. He had a miserable childhood but an excellent education, he began writing as a child, and when he left school he already had a high reputation as a clever man and a coming poet.

But Tsarist Russia was a dangerous place for an intellectual, and during the twenty years of his adult life Pushkin endured great sufferings, inflicted on himself by his own compulsive weaknesses and also inflicted on him by

the authoritarian regime. He began with a hectic period of drinking and gambling, womanising and quarrelling, which got him into debt and other troubles. In particular, several of his unpublished writings, which circulated in manuscript, were so subversive of political and religious and sexual orthodoxy that he was arrested and banished to the South. Although he had strong liberal sympathies, he was lucky enough not to be trusted by the rebels who tried in 1825 to organise the Decembrist rebellion against the accession of Tsar Nicholas; when it was crushed, several of his friends were among those hanged or imprisoned or exiled, and he was scared off politics for good.

He was already under police surveillance, and Nicholas put him under his personal supervision, forbidding him to leave the country and forcing him to spend most of his time on a family estate (where he was able to write) or at court in St Petersburg (where he wasn't). He still managed to produce an enormous amount of work, in all forms though with little profit. In 1831 he married Natalia Goncharova, a young woman who was very beautiful but rather stupid, and although they got on fairly well (and had two children) they were both

obliged to become little more than courtiers. She became the centre of attention from several men (including the Tsar himself), especially a French soldier called George D'Anthès. In the end Pushkin was forced to fight a duel with him, at which they were both wounded; D'Anthès survived, but Pushkin died two days later on 29 January (9 February) 1836. There was a universal outcry, quickly suppressed by the government, and Pushkin soon became an icon of both literature and liberty.

Pushkin saw himself as a poet, and he lives mainly through his poetry – lyrical, narrative, dramatic, epic. But he also produced remarkable prose, especially the deceptively simple *Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin*. His finest single work is a hybrid of the two. *Eugene Onegin* is an ambitious “novel in verse”, written over a period of eight years, confined to a complex rhyming and metrical scheme yet composed as fluently and lightly as prose; although it is impossible to render Pushkin effectively in English, there are several translations which preserve the original structure and make it possible at least to appreciate his genius.

His great achievement was to break with



A portrait of Pushkin, circled by five sketches he did of himself. The Russian, who was just five foot tall, described himself as having “a proper monkey’s face”.

both the European classical tradition and the Russian archaic tradition, and to turn ordinary language into extraordinary literature. His pardonably arrogant poem, *Exegi monumentum*, echoes Horace’s boast that he would not all die because he had built a monument in words, claimed that he would be remembered as long as a single poet is alive, and added that his special claim to fame was that “in a cruel age I sang the cause of freedom, and called for mercy for the fallen”.

Freethinkers may especially enjoy a relatively trivial early poem, *Gavriliada* (The Gabrieliad), a hilarious parody of the biblical stories of the temptation of Eve and the annunciation of Mary, in which the Jewish God is equated

(Continued on p15)

WE journalists find ourselves writing about the oddest things ...

Despite having no knowledge of or interest in the vehicles, I recently sold a feature to a periodical named *Land Rover Owner International*. All it took was to spot a neighbour working on an unusual looking vehicle in the street, persuade him to be interviewed about all the train-spottery details, get someone to take some pictures, and hey presto: one saleable quality article.

"In a mere six months, a Bristol Land Rover enthusiast has turned a bare chassis into a gleaming white six-wheel drive Land Rover. It was put together out of parts from five other vehicles, including a Safari, a pickup truck and a six-wheel electricity board tower wagon."

And so it went on. Disengage ego is the one of the things they tell you about when writing professional quality journalism; don't let your own opinions intrude into the subject at issue. You are just the conduit by which the information reaches the reader. I obviously succeeded in doing this on the Land Rover job: the piece was published almost without alteration.

However, the whole project left me with a nasty taste in the mouth. Nasty, because this Land Rover was built for no ordinary function. The gleaming white six-wheeler was destined to be shipped off to Africa for use by an Australian missionary couple, working in the African country of Niger, just south of the Sahara Desert.

Some of the funding for the Land Rover

came from a group called the Maxco Trust (standing for Maximising Resources for Christian Outreach), which raises money from Christians all over the world for such projects. The couple will use the vehicle to make contact with the isolated Wodaabe tribe, some of the last truly nomadic people in Africa. The Wodaabe are a fascinating tribe who place enormous importance on physical beauty. They believe they are the most beautiful people on earth – the Earth being to them a flat tract of land beginning in Senegal and ending at Lake Chad.

Taboos

The tribe have many strict taboos, including forbidding a mother from ever talking to her first-born child. One of their great delicacies is goats' intestines. I suspect that most humanists would agree with me that the idea of a couple of happy-clappy bible-bashers being let loose on these untainted people is perverted in the extreme. Centuries of experience tell us what will inevitably happen. Ten years from now when the Wodaabe are all born-again Christians, the women AIDS-ridden prostitutes, the men drunks and drug addicts, and their lands devastated by bulldozers, the missionaries will have done their job.

There are laws against child abuse on an individual level, but alas no such regulations inhibit the activities of so-called do-gooders doing the same thing on a cultural level in their

puerile attempts to book a place on the right hand of their illusionary "God".

Of course the cultural virus of Christianity has already spread about as far as it possibly can. Tribes like the Wodaabe are few and far between nowadays. They may even be the last to succumb. But if any more lost tribes should be found – as in 1993 a "lost tribe" of stone age nomads were discovered in Papua New Guinea – rest assured that, as in that case, Christians will be literally racing to get to them first to impose their sado-masochistic gobbledegook on the "unsaved" tribespeople.

In liberated Albania in recent years a similar trend has been noticed, with Christian sects and other loonies going for the hard sell in the suddenly created spiritual market place.

What we really need is a Star Trek-style Prime Directive. The UN or some other organisation needs to outlaw interference in the cultures of indigenous people.

In the event that we do ever discover intelligent life elsewhere in space, this will surely be essential if the Christians are not to decimate and obliterate whole planets rather than the entire cultures they have so far wrought their evil work upon.

Even if the Wodaabe don't do the right thing and throw the missionaries to the lions or pop them straight in the cooking pot – nomadic peoples are actually extraordinarily hospitable, so it's unlikely – let's hope that at the very least they feed the couple a double helping of those goats' intestines.

FREETHINKER CLASSICS: Latest pamphlet published

THE LATEST in the *Freethinker's Classics* series, E M Forster's *What I Believe and other essays*, has just been published by G W Foote & Co (£3 per copy, £2 multiple orders).

Edited and introduced by Nicolas Walter, the third in the series is a 48-page pamphlet with portrait illustration, and follows the earlier publication of G W Foote's *Secularism, the True Philosophy*, and P B Shelley's *The Necessity of Atheism* (£2 each, post free).

Forster, who died in 1970, was President of the Cambridge Humanists, formed in 1955 – a position he held from 1959 until his death. He was a Vice-President of the Ethical Union in the 1950s, a member of the Advisory Council of the British Humanist Association in the 1960s, and an Honorary Associate of the Rationalist Press Association from 1959.

"Forster, in fact, probably did more than anyone else in Britain to establish Humanism

as a human ideology – aesthetic and personal and practical, rather than scientific and philosophical and theoretical – when the Humanist movement was established on the foundations

God's Funeral

(Cont from p10)

world, god died of a wasting illness brought on by Lyell and Darwin. After them, he was no longer needed. Maybe "the people" had never needed him, but had been forced to have him. Now we have reached a place in history when it is safe for anyone – not just an educated minority – to say: "I don't believe a word of it; I'd rather trust my senses and my experience; I prefer the natural to the supernatural, the human to the divine."

Despite lingering feelings of guilt, most people find god's existence too incredible, and his earthly promoters too ridiculous. If god

of the old Freethought movement during the two decades after the Second World War," observes Nicolas Walter in his introduction to the pamphlet.

really has been erased from the mind, he can never be reintroduced. And I do not think there is a great yearning for his return, as Wilson suggests. This is a bereavement that most people don't need counselling for, the majority never noticed that it happened.

God's Funeral (the title is taken from a poem by the reluctant atheist Thomas Carlyle) will fascinate anyone interested in the history of freethought. A N Wilson gives generous mention to many of the forgotten battlers against the tyranny of god, and we should thank him for that.

Roman Catholic influence

IN A LETTER in the January issue of the *Freethinker*, I invited readers to contact me if they wished to examine how the international Roman Catholic Church-State tries to influence the non-Catholic community. The response has been good, and several NSS members are now beginning this study. However, it must be stressed that our actions are not anti-RC - we are simply endeavouring to examine and highlight how Roman Catholics influence the non-RC society, particularly in this country.

One major event we are planning is to make an annual Knox Award (a medal and £1000 in cash) early each year to the individual or organisation which has been most adversely affected in the previous year by the pressures of the Roman Catholic Church. And, to help our organising committee to make this award, we invite all readers of the *Freethinker*, throughout the year, to nominate possible names for our consideration. So, please bear this in mind during the coming months whenever you become aware of any specific RC action that is attempting to influence the non-RC majority in the UK so that the first Knox Award, early in 2000, can be a newsworthy event.

If you require any further information about the forthcoming Knox Award, or wish to make a nomination, please write to me at Suite 621, 28 Old Brompton Road, South Kensington, London SW7 3SS.

MICHAEL IRWIN

Defining socialism

A SOCIALIST society with access to goods and services has no need of a means of exchange (April 1999 *Freethinker*) because money is used by societies - slave-owning, feudal or capitalist - for a minority to enrich themselves by exploiting the majority.

Money limits people's access to goods by the differing amounts of money that they have; hence starvation on a massive scale whilst land is taken out of food production because there isn't a market for it.

The problem that some people seem to have in defining socialism is their belief that state-owned industries are socialist.

But in the past some right-wing administrations have nationalised industries if their continuation has been necessary for the running of capitalism.

The logical test to apply in defining socialism is this: if the production and distribution of goods and services are owned by the commu-

nity, will they need money to buy what they already own?

CARL PINEL
Stockport

In contrast to capitalism

JOHN RAYNER (*Freethinker*, April) quite reasonably wonders at the meaning of socialism. After all, Milton Friedman once described the United States as 46 per cent socialist, on the grounds that the government received in tax 46 per cent of all company profits, so that it in effect owned 46 per cent of each company.

More sensibly, let's make the general assumption that socialism is in contrast to capitalism. Since capitalism is based on production for profit, minority ownership of the means of production and the exploitation of the vast majority, it follows that socialism should involve the opposite of this: production for use, common ownership and an end to classes.

The Oxford Dictionary, with its unsatisfactory reference to community ownership, does not reflect this meaning. The label, though, is less important than the concept, and what really matters is not the use or misuse of the word "socialism", but the view that only a moneyless classless society can provide a decent life for all.

PAUL BENNETT
Chorlton
Manchester

Missed a key point

I HOPE the letter from Keith Porteous Wood in the *Guardian* on June 14 is not an accurate representation of the generally excellent NSS submission discussed on pages 3-4 of the June *Freethinker*, as it missed a key point about the right of bishops to sit in the House of Lords.

As Pike's *Constitutional History of the House of Lords* points out, "the Prelates, though spiritual lords, were Peers only by virtue of their temporal possessions" ie they only got their seats because, like the lay peers, they held lands directly from the Crown.

Even today, "the Bishop of Sodor and Man has no seat in Parliament, not having originally held his temporalities directly from the Crown." [Erskine May, 18th edition, page 5]

The bishops aren't supposed to represent the church's people: they represent its lands, and they have votes in the Lords in their capacity as landowners!

I hate to defend Henry VIII, who was surely our worse monarch ever; but it really was grossly unfair to describe the "bishops as a remnant of our Tudor past". In the usurper

Henry VII's first Parliament, 29 lay lords were heavily outnumbered by 2 archbishops, 19 bishops, and 28 mitred abbots. Thanks to Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries and seizure of the abbots' lands, they lost their seats.

Though Henry created five new bishops, the Lords has thereafter only contained 26 spiritual peers. During the rest of Henry's reign new creations and restitutions meant that the temporal peerage was never less than 36 and often nearer 50; and the secular majority now exceeds 1100.

ERIC THOMPSON
London NW2

Barking up the wrong tree

YOUR intermittent crusade against episcopal representation in the UK House of Lords, though commendable in principle, seems misguided to me.

The table on p4 of your June 1999 issue, which compares the constitutional arrangements of 28 mainly European countries, may be accurate in relation to superstructures but bears no relation to the substance of respective church power.

I do not claim to be conversant with the situation in all 28 countries, but I know something about Germany, whose citizens are compelled by law to devolve a proportion of their taxes towards the upkeep of mainstream churches; and about the Irish republic, where the Catholic Church possesses the virtual monopoly of primary and secondary education, ie is able to indoctrinate the vast majority of Irish children at their most impressionable age. This of course also applies to UK children who have the misfortune of being born into conforming RC households.

In comparison, the social and psychological effects of membership of the Church of England and exposure to its bland, watered-down version of Christianity are virtually nil. The same can be said of Scandinavian countries where the regular church attendance rate is down to single percentage figures.

Methinks this time the *Freethinker* is barking up the wrong tree.

D. BRESSAN
Melbourne

The Problem of Good

The notion that belief both in God and in the holocaust is intellectually dishonest is just about the clearest comment on the unsolvable "Problem of Evil" that bothers well meaning religious people so much. We secularists are



very accustomed to discussing this with believers. Less well aired is "The Problem of Good".

During my seventy-four years I have had a much easier ride than most of my five billion fellow humans. If our lives are presided over by a just and omnipotent god then I have to infer that I am a very good person compared with most. There are thousands of us who could argue similarly.

It is also the case that, on the whole, we whites have had an easier ride than the blacks, the browns and the yellows, and, by the same process of inference from the same premise, we have to conclude that whites are superior persons in the sight of the supposed just and omnipotent god.

So I am obliged to infer that the Just God theory entails both self-complacency and white racism on the part of individuals like me.

These entailments are unacceptable to me and to thousands like me.

For me to "believe in god" entails my believing that he (she or it) is at best indifferent to justice or, at worst, perversely unjust. There seems to be very little emotional support to be gained from entertaining such beliefs; no "faith" that I have ever heard of is centred on such a god.

You would need to be a pious punter indeed to embrace such a faith.

ERIC STOCKTON
Sanday
Orkney

Why not just "specism"

IN APRIL'S *Freethinker* I very much appreciated Heather Evans article on animals in Western civilization as shown and discussed in the two classics by the pioneers Richard Ryder and Peter Singer (*Victims of Science* and *Animal Liberation*).

I dislike the neologism "speciesism", however, and am pretty horrified by "painment" Why not opt for "specism"? It's the French choice in their translation of Singer's work *La liberation animale* - "*le specisme*". True, the Germans have kept the extra syllable and the original word: "*Speziesismus*". It's awful. As for "painment", there exists no English word for the German "*leidensfahig*" - capable of feeling pain - but does the word "feeling" not suffice? It implies the ability to feel pain as well as pleasant sensations, does it not?

I also regret that not more space was given to the revolting lack of pity for animals expressed in the teachings of the Christian Churches, especially the Catholic one. Jesus set the bad example in the pigs of Gadarene

episode and the learned theologians deduced from it that utter indifference towards the suffering animals is what the Christian God wants us to feel.

NELLY MOIA
Luxembourg

Speciesism may persist

I READ with interest Heather Evans' "Speciesism - Whatever Next?" (April issue of the *Freethinker*). However, is it not likely, considering man's inhumanity to his own species (interminable wars and ethnic cleansing), that speciesism too will persist in the foreseeable future?

I can see not a chance that one of the chief speciesist acts, animal experiments, will be curtailed when the medical profession keep insisting that they are necessary to reduce human suffering, making light of any direct pain these unfortunate animals experience.

Further, meat-eating is such a prevalent human occupation that eliminating the use of animals bred merely for our eating purposes is going to be difficult.

Why don't we just accept that we are not a very principled animal at all - just a very powerful one - and what we want of other animals is likely to be ours for the asking for a long time to come?

G. MORRIS
Snitterfield

Facts should be accurate

WHEN arguing against the falsities of organised religions it is surely important that our

facts should be accurate and our statements unprejudiced.

In L M Wright's "Jesus, the Pagan Sun God" (*Freethinker* Nov/Dec 98) it is said that the great library in Alexandria was burned in 47BC during Julius Caesar's siege, and replaced; the replacement was burned in AD389 by the Xian fanatic Bishop Theodophilus under an edict of Theodosius.

But most authorities say that only part was destroyed in 47BC, that it was damaged again by fire in AD391, and that it was completely destroyed when the muslim Omar conquered Alexandria in AD642. Professor Margaret Murray, the great authority on Egypt, says merely that it disappeared in AD642 without mentioning earlier destruction. I have not found any supporting evidence for the incendiarism of Theodophilus. When one comes across something like this it gives rise to doubt about other, unsubstantiated accusations of dirty deeds by religionists.

DEREK ROBERTS
Mitcham
Surrey

Please address your letters (preferably typed) to Barry Duke, *Freethinker* editor, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. The e-mail address is editor@freethinker.co.uk. You can also fax a letter to 0181 305 9603.

PUSHKIN

(Continued from p12)

with the Greek Zeus in his taste for young women, and unorthodox parts are taken by both Satan and Gabriel. It was far too blasphemous to be published, but it was widely read and Pushkin's authorship was widely known although he denied it, and it helped to establish his reputation as a subversive writer. (So did *Tsar Nikita and His Forty Daughters*, the problem of the latter being that they had no sexual organs!) Pushkin's real view of religion was ambiguous, since he claimed at various times to be an atheist and a Christian; but he lived and died as the former, and his philosophy in public as well

as in private was a combination of pessimism and stoicism as expressed in *Elegy*:

The aching sadness of my past endures,
And like good wine gains weight as it matures.
My future life is grim, without relief,
A surging swell of struggle, toil and grief.
And yet, my friends, I have no wish to die;
I want to suffer, live, and wonder why . . .

A detailed and lively biography of Pushkin has been written by the poet and novelist Elaine Feinstein. It is published to mark his bicentenary by Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £20.

HUMANIST CONTACTS AND EVENTS

Blackpool & Fylde Humanist Group: Information: Ivor Moll, 6 The Brooklands, Wrea Green, Preston PR4 2NQ. 01772 686816.

Brighton & Hove Humanist Group: Information: 01273 733215. Cornerstone Community Centre, Church Road (corner of First Avenue), Hove. Sunday, July 4, 4 pm. Annual General Meeting. Summer programme available.

Bristol Humanists: Information: Margaret Dearnley on 0117 9049490.

Bromley Humanists: Meetings on the second Tuesday of the month, 8 pm, at Friends Meeting House, Ravensbourne Road, Bromley. Information: 0181 777 1680.

Chiltern Humanists: Information: 01296 623730

Cornwall Humanists: Information: B Mercer, "Amber", Short Cross Road, Mount Hawke, Truro TR4 8EA. Tel. 01209 890690.

Cotswold Humanists: Information: Philip Howell, 2 Cleavelands Close, Cheltenham GL50 4PZ. Tel 01242 528743.

Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists: Information: 01926 858450.

Devon Humanists: Information: Margaret Siddall, 9 Smithay Meadows, Christow, Exeter, EX6 7LU. Tel: 01647 252113.

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

East Kent Humanists: Information: M Rogers, 2 Lyndhurst Road, Broadstairs CT10 1DD. Tel. 01843 864506.

Essex Humanists: Information: Brian Whitelaw, 66 Linnet Drive, Chelmsford CM2 8AF. Tel:01245 265664. Monthly meetings, second Sunday, 7.30 pm.

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA): Information: 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth CV8 2HB. Tel 01926 858450. Monthly meetings (second Friday, 7.30 pm) at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1.

Hampstead Humanist Society: Information: N I Barnes, 10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 0HP.

Harrow Humanist Society: Information: 0181 863 2977. Monthly meetings, December – June (except January).

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. Tel. 01224 573034. Convener: Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire. Tel. 01563 526710

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

Edinburgh Group: Information: 2 Saville Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 3AD. Tel 0131 667 8389.

Leeds & District Humanist Group: Information Robert Tee on 0113 2577009. Tuesday, July 13, 4pm – 8pm. Garden party at 15 Victoria Crescent, Horsforth.

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

Lewisham Humanist Group: Information: Denis Cobell: 0181 690 4645. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, July 29, 8pm. Humanist Forum: *Who are we and what do we do?*

Lewisham Humanist Group: Information and literature stall at

Lewisham People's Day, Mountsfield Park, Stainton Road, London SE6, Saturday July 10, 12 noon till 6pm.

Manchester Humanist Group: Information: Arthur Chappell. Tel. 0161 681 7607. Monthly meetings at Friends' Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester. Wednesday, July 14, 7.30pm. Keith Porteous Wood, General Secretary, National Secular Society: *Religious Representation in the New Second Chamber*.

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

North East Humanists (Teesside Group): Information: C McEwan on 01642 817541.

North East Humanists (Tyneside Group): Information: Christine Wood on 0191 2763123.

North London Humanist Group: Monthly meetings. Information: Anne Toy on 0181 360 1828.

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

Oxford Humanists: Information: Jean Woodman on 01865 760520. The Pauling Centre, 58 Banbury Rd, Oxford. Friday, July 16, 7.30pm for 8pm: Ron Bell: *Political Correctness*.

Sheffield Humanist Society: Information and literature stall at South Yorkshire Festival, Saturday, July 3, at Wortley Hall, Wortley, 10.30am till 4pm.

Sheffield Humanist Society: Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street, Sheffield. Wednesday, July 7, 8pm. Carl Pinel: *Religious Cults*. Wednesday, August 4, 8pm Annual General Meeting. Programme from Gordon Sinclair, telephone 01226 743070 or Bill McIlroy, 0114 2509127.

South Place Ethical Society and Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA): The Time to be Happy, a dramatisation of the life and times of Robert G Ingersoll. Devised by Derek Lennard. Friday, July 9, 7.30pm. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

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

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

Sutton Humanist Group: Information: 0181 642 4577. Friends Meeting House, Cedar Road, Sutton. Wednesday, July 14, 7.30pm for 8pm. Colin Jones: *The Use of Animals in Research*.

Ulster Humanist Association: Information: Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel. 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. Tel. 01892 890485 or Chris Ponsford on 01892 862855.

Please send your What's On notices to Bill McIlroy, 115 South View Road, Nether Edge, Sheffield S7 1DE. Tel: 0114 2509127.