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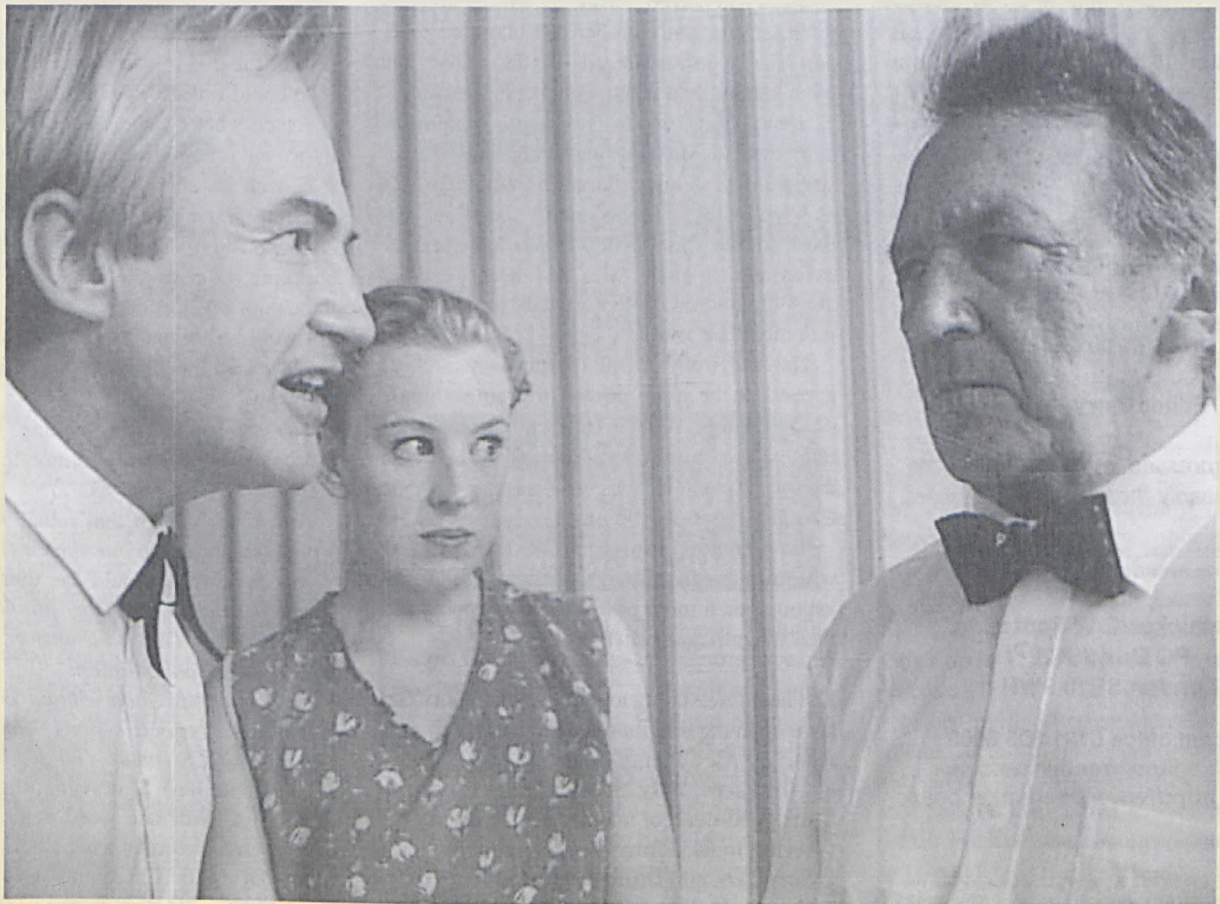
# Freethinker

Secular Humanist monthly

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

A timely return for *Inherit the Wind*, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E Lee's play based on the Scopes Monkey Trial in Tennessee in 1925. The London production at the King's Head Theatre, Islington, opened in September just as new battle lines were being drawn between creationists and evolutionists in the US.

– See Carl Pinel's centrepiece feature



Larry Lamb (left) as defence lawyer Drummond and George Sewell as prosecutor Brady. Phoebe Welles-Cooper played the pastor's daughter.

## Also in this issue:

*Challenging the Church's domination of the media, p4*



THERE'S a line in a little-known Cole Porter song, *Sweet Nudity* (from the show *Nymph Errant*, 1933), which goes like this:

*Take it off, take it off, take it off ...  
Brothers and sisters  
Misters and Misses  
Remove it – don't wear it  
Learn to grin and bare it.*

Well, in Mexico they're baring it, but that's certainly no grin on the face of Holy Mother Church, which has received a sharp and very unexpected slap in the kisser from a most surprising quarter – thousands of hitherto docile and subservient Catholic women.

The source of all the trouble is a clench of highly-toned, well-oiled buttocks (and much else besides) belonging to a group of hunky male strippers – Mexico's answer to the famous American troupe, the Chippendales.

In this most Catholic of Catholic countries, the Church expects people to do as they are bloody well told – and it told its women in no uncertain terms that they were to stay away from the male strip shows.

The women reacted by blowing a collective raspberry in the direction of their parish priests and the Church in general – and the theatres hosting the show are proving every bit as well packed as the strippers' bulging G-strings.

It soon dawned on priests, fathers, brothers and husbands that this behaviour was symptomatic of something far more sinister than simple female bloody-mindedness. It had all the hallmarks of a determined assault on Catholic patriarchy – the central pillar of Mexican society. And, naturally, they are not best pleased by it all.

Some priests have gone so far as to threaten women with excommunication if they attend the show. This has had absolutely no effect. Similarly, husbands and fathers who have forbidden their wives and daughters to see the strippers have been told to bugger off and mind their own business.

One woman, interviewed for radio, said her husband had parked outside the theatre and had rung her constantly on her cell phone to order her out. "I just switched off the phone and ignored him," she stated with gleeful defiance.

Commenting on the storm his troupe has unleashed in Mexico, one of the unrepentant strippers sneeringly referred to Catholic priests as "hypocrites in frocks" and pointed out that the Catholic Church in Mexico had recently exonerated a priest who had been sexually abusing children. "Who are they to talk about morality?" he asked.

The sad irony in all of this is that there appears to be more power in a single jiggle of bare arses than in the entire output of rational argument and philosophical discussion deployed over decades against the Catholic Church's stranglehold on Mexican society.

But if baring your backside in Mexico is what it takes to give the Church a fit of the vapours, then more power to the strippers and their magnificent *glutei*.

Just how devastating an effect male nudity can have upon the religious is demonstrated in this report by Ali Catterall in the *Big Issue*:

**In Esero, Italy, Sister Cecelia Pasera dropped dead of a heart attack after seeing male skinny dipper, Sandro Sorgi, 26, run through her convent flower garden chased by a pack of hounds.**

**Pasera, 62, had spent the last 43 years in the secluded convent in the Italian Alps without once seeing a man in his birthday suit.**

**"The sister had recently undergone a complete medical and she seemed in excellent health," said convent doctor Claudia Dosconi. "But she died of cardiac arrest, and it's obvious from**

**what the other nuns told me that the sight of a nude man was simply more than she could stand. They said she screamed, put her hands over her eyes, then sagged to the ground on a row of snapdragons."**

LONDON has an abundance of bad drivers, but the imbecile who almost reduced me to a bagful of organ donor parts in the Marylebone Road recently was possibly the worst I have ever encountered.

I was on my motorcycle, he in a Volvo estate which kept veering from one lane to another in an exceedingly reckless manner.

What made the incident all the more irritating was the sticker in the car's rear window: *God is in the driving seat – I am only the passenger*, it smugly declared.

When the car finally stopped at a traffic light, I drew up alongside, banged on the window and asked the startled occupant whether he was the god referred to in the sticker – and if so could I please see his driving licence?

Asked what I was on about, I told him that in heaven (or wherever the hell God lived) He may well be able to drive his Volvo like an absolute prat with total impunity but here on earth we had rules, and changing lanes without checking the rearview window or using one's indicators was just not on.

I would have had a lot more to say, but the lights turned green and we were forced to part company.

The incident got me thinking: if Christians can convert their cars into mobile propaganda wagons, why not atheists?

And if we did go that route, what slogans would we plaster on *our* vehicles?

My favourites would be those good old standbys, *Religion is the problem, not the answer*, and *If God is the answer, it must have been a damn fool question!*

Or how about *Good without God, Religion rots reason, Jesus is coming – look busy*, and *Christ is for Christmas – not for life?*

One could have a drawing of an ant nailed to a cross, with one word beneath it: *Anti-Christ!* Or a picture of a big atheist shark about to devour a little Christian fish (or Ichthus, as it is known – see item on page 11).

At this point it's over to you. Put your ideas to paper and mail or e-mail them to:

**Slogan Contest  
Freethinker/G W Foote Ltd  
PO Box 26428**

**London SE10 9WH**

**E-mail: editor@freethinker.com**

Closing date for entries is November 30, 1999. The winner will receive a year's free subscription to the *Freethinker*.

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# Alpha is at it again with more millennial moonshine

AT FIRST glance, the man in the giant Alpha Course posters, which are being plastered at great expense all over the country, appears to be staggering under the weight of an enormous malformed salami, while balancing a ball on one knee.

But closer examination shows that peculiar his burden is in fact a huge, stylised question mark, and the question being posed in the latest crop of Alpha posters is: "Is there more to the millennium?"

The rational answer, of course, is no. A date is a date and nothing more – however interesting the juxtaposition of numerals. But Alpha, a cocktail of evangelical Christian organisations, does not see it that way, and is desperately trying to imply that the year 2000 has some deep religious significance.

So it is using the date as bait for a fresh intake of recruits for the courses it began running just over a year ago via a network of some 4,000 churches in the UK.

So what happens at an Alpha Course? A *Freethinker* writer enrolled in one of its programmes, and reports as follows:–

Having read Nicky Gumbel's book *Questions of Life* I decided to field-test the product it promotes and signed up for a course.

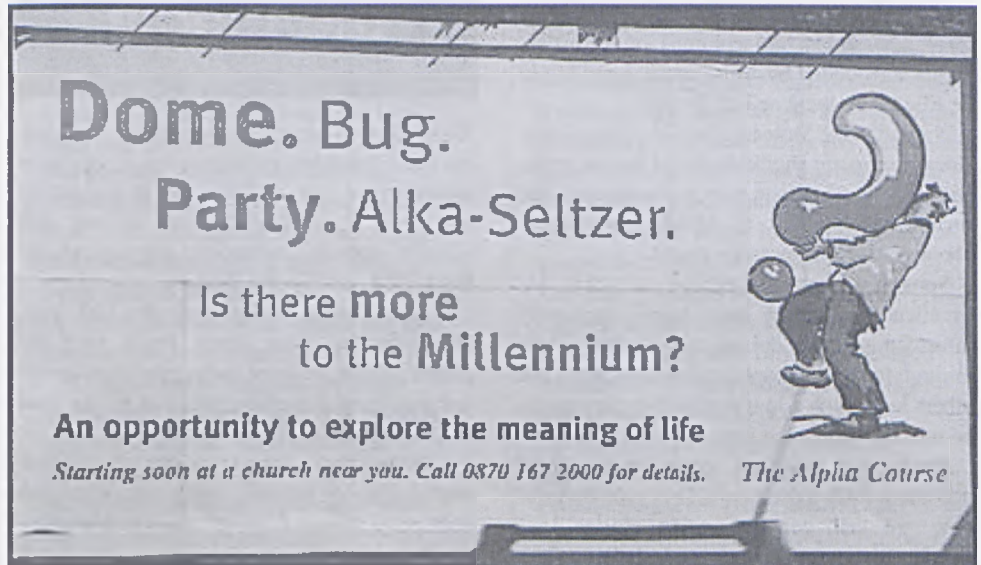
Arrangements vary, but this one consisted of an opening supper, six two-hour evening sessions followed by an all-day, three-session event, and then a further five two-hour sessions. I attended eight of the eleven evening sessions and the all-day event.

After an informal buffet, each session opened with an hour-long video presentation by Gumbel. Following a coffee break the meeting split into discussion groups for three-quarters of an hour.

As I was the only non-believer present there were opening and closing hymns and prayers, though it was conceded that this would have been inappropriate, at least initially, with a mixed group.

The full meeting consisted of between 25 and 30 people, of whom one, myself, was an atheist and one a member of a minor sect. All the others were regular church-goers from a single congregation of a major denomination.

Seven, including myself, were male and four were teenagers, of whom one was male.



The secretary dropped out after the first meeting and two of the others subsequently for domestic reasons. I stayed the course, though I was unable to attend the final meeting.

## Jesus is top dog in Blackpool's tackiest tableau

A 21-FOOT illuminated tableau featuring Jesus Christ will be a centrepiece of Blackpool's special millennium lights, according to a report in the local paper, *The Citizen*. The tableau, which will start with a star falling to earth and culminate with the Christ image bursting into light followed by the message "Jesus – the Light of the World", will be launched with a religious service on December 10.

Local churches are contributing "substantially" to the £10,000 cost of the tableau, which will be resurrected each year for four years, according to the report.

"I think it's fabulous," said Father Denis Blackledge of the Sacred Heart RC Church in Talbot Square. "It'll be seen by an estimated 16 million people during the four years, so it will be well worthwhile."

Nicky Gumbel is an excellent presenter and spices his delivery with a judicious mix of Biblical quotes, up-to-date testimonies of those who claim to have been healed or converted, and jokes – some very good – some very corny.

The small group discussions centred around members' responses to the ideas presented in the video and they generally felt that this helped them to clarify their thoughts in a way not possible in a formal church service.

The climax of an Alpha Course is the "Holy Spirit Day." This is a residential occasion, either on its own or as part of a two-day conference. The Gumbel videos may here be replaced by live presentations by other evangelists. As this event occurs two-thirds through the course, it can generally be assumed that non-believers will either have converted (or be on the brink) or have dropped out. The appeal to reason which is a feature of some of the earlier sessions is therefore dropped.

With the group isolated in an environment conducive to meditation and a frequently emotional presentation enhanced by the manipulative deployment of prayer and music, members are reported to undergo experiences analogous to what is presumed to have happened at Pentecost. Sobbing, swooning and speaking in tongues have been recorded.

(Continued on page 13)





CATHOLIC PRIESTS have been told that they should learn to use the media to ensure that "God's word is spoken and heard". The instruction came from Archbishop John Foley, President of the so-called Pontifical Council for Social Communications – a department of the Vatican. He was speaking at a conference of priests in Birmingham. "Every priest, every seminarian and every parish leader should know how to write a press release, as many local newspapers are columns of advertisements surrounded by white space, yearning to be filled with local news," he said.

Naturally, the Vatican is anxious that its missionary message should be heard far and wide, and there is no reason why we humanists and secularists shouldn't be equally enthusiastic about getting our message across.

Some local humanist groups, of course, are excellent at keeping their local community informed of their doings and of their ideas through their local paper and radio station, but others keep such a low profile that they might be mistaken for some kind of secret society.

Maybe the time has come for us all to become a little more media savvy, to find out how we can generate news stories, get involved in moral debates and challenge the Church's automatic access to so much media space and time. The fact is, if we don't make ourselves known to local journalists, they won't come to us for comment.

So how do we get this knowledge? There are some excellent books available about dealing with the press. To start with, try *How to Write a Press Release* by Peter Bartram (*How To Books*, £9.99). Here are some other tips (which some will regard as teaching Granny to suck eggs, but which might be useful to others):

- The letters columns in local newspapers are easy to get into. You can conduct some really good debates with the religiously-inclined. Make sure your events are always mentioned in any community columns.

**We must all challenge the Church's domination of the media**

National newspaper correspondence columns are much harder to penetrate, but if you have something to say, and you say it succinctly, you have as much chance as anyone else (except perhaps champion correspondents Keith Flett and Nicolas Walter).

- Keep abreast of developments, and think of angles that your group might have on events. If you let local radio producers know that you have something relevant to say, you will be invited on to talk shows to say it.

- If you have a local story that has national implications or interest, make sure you send your press release to wider sources, including the Press Association. *The Writers Handbook* has a comprehensive list of contacts for national media. You should also make sure the national secularist and/or humanist organisations are put in the picture as soon as possible. They may be able to help – but remember, speed is of the essence (sometimes even minutes matter); news stories have a limited shelf life.

- Try to foster good relations with local journalists. Get to know them by name and ask for them when you phone in with a story – they're much more likely to use it that way.

- Don't be despondent if your story never sees the light of day. Sometimes there is a great deal of competition for the space available, and the editor just has to make a choice. Keep try-

ing, and soon your group will become better known. This also has the serendipitous effect of increasing membership.

- Naturally if your group actually does things – such as active campaigning – it is more likely to be of interest to newspapers and broadcasters. Media stories are almost always about conflict (notice how many times the word "row" appears in newspaper headlines). If you are challenging some new church outrage (and there are plenty of them) or contradicting someone in authority, then your story will have the necessary drama to catch the journalists' attention.

The letters column of the *Freethinker* shows that we non-believers have some fascinating things to say, and a great deal of knowledge that deserves a wider audience.

TO GIVE some indication of our progress, here are the results of a study conducted at Nottingham University on "new trends in religious belief" and presented to the Paris conference of the World Association of Public Opinion Research.

The study showed that up to 1990, 71 per cent of people questioned said that they believed in God, 9 per cent did not know, and 20 per cent said they had no belief. This last figure of 20 per cent had almost doubled in comparison with 1968, when only 11 per cent of respondents said that they did not believe in God. The data also showed that belief in a personal God had declined from 45 per cent to 32 per cent between 1947 and 1990. But in the same period, those who felt that "there is some sort of spirit or life force" had risen from 39 per cent to 41 per cent.

Dr David Hay, who had compiled the report concluded that we lived in a culture that had "suppressed the natural religiousness of the species. This is particularly true in Europe, where secularism is our invention."

Needless to say, Dr Hay's assertions are open to challenge. Is religiousness really a natural state for human beings? Is secularism a human invention? Or is it the other way round? Anyway, Dr Hay says that most under 40s find the culture and language of traditional religion especially remote. "It doesn't mean anything to them," he said.

Indeed, we can see for ourselves that young people in our society are almost wholly ignorant of traditional religion. When they hear priests speaking that strange churchy language, they sensibly run a mile. Yet, says Dr Hay, they have "a primitive and incoherent spirituality which they found both acceptable and useful." Hopefully, it will remain unorganised and therefore less harmful to other people.

**Have you considered joining the National Secular Society?**  
 For more than 130 years the NSS has been fighting religious privilege, and opposing the extremes of religious intolerance.  
 Today, with the proliferation of sinister cults, the increase in superstition and the dangers posed by religious conflicts, the rational voice of the NSS needs to be heard more than ever.  
 We are at the forefront of the renewed debate on disestablishment, and are vigorously arguing for the removal of the Bishops from the House of Lords.  
 You can be part of these and other important campaigns by joining the NSS today. The subscription is £10 a year for single membership (£15 for partners living at the same address). Unwaged membership is £6.  
 Please write to the National Secular Society at 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL, or telephone 0171 404 3126 for an information pack. The e-mail address is [kpw@secularism.org.uk](mailto:kpw@secularism.org.uk). The NSS website ([www.secularism.org.uk](http://www.secularism.org.uk)) includes an application form.



# Bigot loses his place in cyberspace

HOMOPHOBIC net surfers were in for a shock last month when they accessed the notorious website *www.godhatesfags.com*. Instead of the anti-gay and anti-semitic rant normally posted on the site by Fred W Phelps, pastor at the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, USA (see *Freethinker* report, July 1998), they had *www.godlovesfags.com* pop up on their computer screens.

A mischievous hacker managed to hijack Phelps' domain, and transferred it to the *godlovesfags* site run by Kris Haight.

And this is the message it contained:

**Oppression is based on the lie that some people are better than others. Racists, anti-semites, sexists, and homophobes all attempt to justify their persecution by claiming that their targets are dangerous, dirty, subhuman, and a threat to "good" people.**

**Demonising lies foment oppression by rationalising cruelty and by intimidating would-be challengers with the threat of being branded a vermin-lover ... As gay people we have seen how oppression depends on lies. Until recently, homosexuality was uniformly presented as a sign of mental sickness, criminality, and sinfulness. Movies, books, or photos that did not conform to**

**this dogma were suppressed. To suggest that gay sexuality need not be labeled bad meant risking one's reputation, career, and life.**

**But effectively tackling homophobia, like challenging any oppression, depends on confronting the lies that underpin erroneous notions about one group's superiority over another. Martin Luther King said that to lance the boil of racism that plagues America, the festering, rotten process must be exposed to the healing air and light of the truth. King understood that truth is both the foundation of justice and the fundamental antidote to oppression that poisons both master and slave.**

**While freedom depends on truth, finding and proclaiming the truth also requires freedom. Sometimes this freedom takes the form of heroic individuals refusing to parrot official lies. By risking ridicule, prison, and even death, such heroes remind us that we all ultimately have the freedom *not* to participate in dehumanising lies.**

**But we are lucky to inherit the freedoms already won by others' brave actions. Throughout much of this century, the freedoms of speech, press,**

**and assembly guaranteed by the Bill of Rights have been recognised to cover sexual matters. Exercising these freedoms has been the key to persuading more and more people to come out with the truth about homosexuality, thereby rendering homophobic lies powerless.**

**Given how essential First Amendment freedoms have been to gay liberation, it is disheartening how many gay people seem ready to give them up. All across the country, gay organisations have called for hate crime laws to criminalise people for saying the wrong things. University groups have supported campus speech codes that punish students and faculty for words judged "demeaning." And recently, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation attempted to organise pressure to dump a website called *godhatesfags.com* from the Internet because it is "hurtful".**

**Anyone who participates in these campaigns to curtail freedom of expression is a dangerous fool. While "shut up!" may be an understandable initial reaction to disagreeable expressions, it is not a policy that serves us well. Freedom really is indivisible. Truth does not need the "protection" of any bureaucrat, librarian, or web master. Indeed, truth becomes most clear and powerful when allowed to shine side-by-side with all of its competitors. However politically correct or seemingly well-intentioned, "protected truth" always putrefies into oppressive dogma.**

**Instead of trying to safeguard only expression we personally approve of, we must fight to expand First Amendment liberties for everyone. As congress and the courts ram through chilling new censorship legislation, and as the President calls for increased regulation of television, telephone, and cyberspace communications, we must resist, not co-operate. Instead of pursuing some officially sanctioned facsimile, we must defend the freedoms that reveal the real truth, the genuine source of our liberation.**

Shortly afterwards, by way of demonstrating his dedication to free speech, Haight returned *Godhatesfags* to its rightful place in cyberspace.

## NSS Bishops submission gets attention world-wide

The National Secular Society's address to the Royal Commission on the Reform of the House of Lords has not gone unnoticed. It drew a lengthy – and incensed – response in the *Independent* from none other than Secretary General Philip Mawer of the Archbishops' Council.

He failed to address any of the points the NSS raised and resorted to attacking the Secretary of the NSS, Keith Porteous Wood, personally by noting that "he would, wouldn't he?"

Philip Mawer presumably regretted his childish retort when he saw Barbara Smoker's response in a subsequent edition, turning this phrase (coined by a member of another old profession – call-girl Mandy Rice-Davies) against himself.

The NSS submission has been circulated world-wide by the International Humanist & Ethical Union and American Atheists, and has even been posted on a website in Slovak. It is now about to be translated into French.

### FREETHINKER BOUND VOLUMES

Bound volumes of the 1998 editions of the *Freethinker* are now available.

The cost per volume is £25 inclusive of postage and packing. Please send your order, together with a cheque made payable to G W Foote Ltd, to *Freethinker*/G W Foote, PO Box 26428, London SE10 9WH.



### A senseless census question

THE GOVERNMENT has confirmed that the 2001 Census will contain the first-ever religious question for England and Wales. In Northern Ireland, religious questions have been routine in past censuses – perhaps because of the destructive obsession with religion there. Curiously, there will be no such question in Scotland.

The Government claims the reason for the inclusion of questions for England and Wales is to supplement questions on identifying “ethnic minority sub-groups in terms of their religion”. During testing, some respondents indicated that “religion was a better indicator of their ethnicity and culture than ethnic group alone”. Yet there is only one tick box for Christian, so this will not identify, for example, how many ethnic Afro-Caribbeans swell Seventh Day Adventist pews. Whatever the official reason for collecting the statistics, they are likely to be used by all the religions to seek ever more privileges. Even when the form of question was expected to include the words “faith” or “practising” I was concerned that the figures collected would be an exaggeration. After testing, these words have been dropped in favour of “What is your religion?”. On this basis, practically everyone who has been baptised will tick “Christian” even if they haven’t seen the inside of a church for years.

There will be a “None” box and a blank box to write in. Those in Northern Ireland who write “no religion” will be asked what religion they were brought up in. (Shades of the joke “yes, but are you a Catholic atheist or a Protestant atheist?”) Hopefully there will be a “None” box for that too.

The introduction of the questions for England and Wales will require new legislation. Its passage through Parliament will present our last opportunity to challenge the questions’ inclusion or their wording. However, it is unlikely that a Government with so many religious adherents on its front bench, not to mention one with such a large majority, will heed such protests.

### The Archbishop of Cant

AFTER yet another of Dr Carey’s pallid moral pronouncements, the *Daily Mail* earnestly asked “Is this the worst Archbishop of Canterbury we’ve ever had?”. Dr C’s travails were made worse by the debacle over millennial prayers at the dome, a saga which ITV must be thinking of turning into a soap opera.

The latest episode concerns the horse-trading between Carey, the Queen and the event

organisers as to whether His Grace will grace the dome with his presence. We now learn that he will bore the nation in prayer at around 11.15 pm, probably before most people have turned on their televisions, and rather earlier than the midnight slot he had hoped for.

That he is being allowed to speak there at all is reportedly only due the personal intervention of the Queen and Tony Blair (who many will have hoped would have had more pressing demands on his time). If George was expecting to be publicly congratulated for being invited to lead the prayers, the reality was rather different. Instead, he received a public roasting for allegedly having committed a security breach over the Queen’s itinerary. This was because his press release had noted that the 11.15pm prayers would immediately follow the Queen’s arrival.

I confess to being one of Dr. Carey’s most loyal fans, second only to the brace of broadsheet religious affairs correspondents who treat his every word as if uttered by the Almighty him- (or her-) self. Let me explain. George is doing more for the cause of secularism than I could ever do, and I am probably alone in hoping he never retires.

On the other hand, Anglican Bishop of Edinburgh, Scottish Primus Richard Holloway could hardly be more different. He is intelligent, caring, undogmatic and courageous – and if he were the worst that religion could produce, we could shut up shop.

These qualities, however, seem to be a serious impediment for a bishop and so it is little surprise that he’s not exactly flavour of the month with his Anglican colleagues. He led an international Anglican conference in Dundee last month whose aims included papering over the cracks of disagreements from the last Lambeth conference. There, the missionary zeal of the Southern African and Asian bishops was clearly an embarrassment to a large number of liberal Europeans and North Americans.

Richard Holloway’s views are considered so unacceptably liberal by these Southern African and Asian bishops (and some from the USA’s rapidly expanding bible belt) that Archbishop Moses Tay, retiring Archbishop of South-East Asia, told the world’s press that he had refused to attend the bash in Dundee on the grounds that Scotland is such a heretical province.

Carey clearly wasn’t pleased with the rift in the Anglican communion that Tay had made so public, but neither did Holloway escape criticism. Carey criticised Holloway’s recently-published book which suggests that the church’s attitudes to casual sex, homosexuality and drugs are a product of our culture rather

than God. Carey has accused Holloway of abandoning “Christian morality”. In reality, the issues almost no longer matter; Carey is doing a balancing act – he will not want to be seen as the primate who presided over the split of the world’s Anglican communion. And when they’ve sorted these issues out – if they ever do – the next schisms in waiting are women bishops and the remarriage of divorcees where the former spouses are still alive.

Another example of Holloway’s liberalism – and common sense – was that he took a similar line to the National Secular Society’s on prayers in the Scottish Parliament: that there should be none, or at worst, that there should be two minutes’ contemplative silence. This was contrary to a formal recommendation of the Parliament’s Business Committee for sessions to be started with prayers on a rota basis with each “faith” (which apparently includes Humanism!) being represented in proportion to the number of adherents.

The Society’s views were carried in some Scottish newspapers, but nevertheless – as expected – the Parliament decided by a large majority to accept the recommendation. Predictably, the bigots tried to insist that the prayers should only be Christian, but they failed. A small consolation is that the prayers are to be weekly, rather than daily (as at Westminster).

### Millennium Dome

ACCORDING to the Radio 4 *Sunday Programme*, the so-called Spirit Zone at the Greenwich Dome is expected to have a controversial aspect to it. It will acknowledge some of deeds of which religion should be ashamed. This is in line with NSS suggestions published at the beginning of last year. It seems our voice was heard.

### Alan Clark

NOTORIOUS for bedding judge Harcourt’s wife and his two daughters – or perhaps I should say blabbing about it – we now learn from the *Independent* that the late Alan Clark was received into the Catholic Church earlier this summer “quietly and without fuss”. Curiously, Harcourt has converted too, and Clark’s father also did so shortly before his death – as did Malcolm Muggeridge and George Brown. Another was Oscar Wilde who considered Catholicism to be “the only religion to die in”. Why is it that conversion is so popular with senior Tories? Clark follows John Gummer, Ann Widdecombe and Sir George Gardiner ... and will Tony Blair be next?



### In America's footsteps, alas

CARL Sagan, the American astronomer who died in 1996, prefaced one of his articles with contrasting quotes from two of his country's presidents. "There is nothing which can better deserve our patronage than the promotion of science and literature", George Washington told Congress in January 1790. "Knowledge is in every country the surest basis of public happiness." In a campaign speech in 1980, Ronald Reagan asked "Why should we subsidise intellectual curiosity?"

Sagan was worried about a trend in funding from basic scientific research towards technology and engineering applications. "Many young scientists are not only unable to find grants to support their research; they are unable to find jobs", he wrote. As usual we are following in the USA's footsteps.

Geneticist Steve Jones, author of *Language of the Genes* and *In the Blood*, explained to *Observer* interviewer Euan Ferguson why he had "sold out" of academia. The research money was "drying up"; and when he was head of department, he was "trying to hire great scientists, really brilliant young scientists, on lower salaries than those of a bus conductor." The lack of money made things impossible.

Fortunately, he has not given up writing, and his new book *Almost like a Whale*, is, in Ferguson's words, a "celebration of the unarguable rightness of Darwin's case, updated to take into account our century's advances, particularly in genetics." It had been a huge task, Jones said, which has made him marvel at Darwin's diligence. "It took me three years with a word processor and access to the whole of science and the Internet", whereas Darwin wrote the *Origin* in a year. "Astonishing".

Jones also revealed that he had received hate mail and death threats from creationists, although most of it was "just crackers", telling him he would burn in hell.

And he turned to Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* to summarise his own position towards religion: "If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties."

Significantly, Bacon (1561-1626) was the first great British pioneer of scientific research. He wanted to set up a college for the purpose, equipped with laboratories, botanical and zoological gardens, specialist technicians etc, but he couldn't get royal support for the scheme, and he didn't live to see the foundation of the Royal Society which he inspired.

### Sir Cliff in doubt

THE murder of Jill Dando has reportedly disturbed Sir Cliff Richard's religious faith. "I was really angry with God", he said. "It shook me rigid that someone as beautiful, talented and harmless could have been killed. She was really a lovely woman" (*Sunday Telegraph*, August 1).

Apparently he "screamed and railed" at the deity and hasn't received any answers from him, except that there is good and bad on this planet and "we attempt to do the best we can to eliminate the kind of person that would kill Jill". A surprising confession, the *Telegraph* commented, as Sir Cliff was "one of the few prominent Christians on the music scene".

He admitted, too, that as the years go by, he finds it more difficult to adhere to the Christian principle of turning the other cheek. Recognition of this absurdity in the still much-extolled Sermon on the Mount has taken rather a long time. He is 59 now, and was 21 when he "rediscovered" Christianity. "When I read about Jesus in the New Testament I just thought: 'If it's true, this has got to be the most unbelievable thing'". That's right, Cliff, unbelievable.

### Nothing literal, mind you

FOR the Most Rev Richard Holloway, Bishop of Edinburgh, the Scottish Episcopal Church, to which he belongs, is "fairly flexible": its rituals are not to be taken literally, but as symbolic. Which is as well for him.

When asked about God (by James Meek of the *Guardian*, August 18) Holloway referred to something out there, something transcendent; but he wasn't sure what. And the Bible? Obviously not to be taken literally. Jesus he regarded as a "righteous rebel, one who cared for sinners and the marginalised", but not as the literal son of God, executed and brought back from the dead. He described his own preaching of the resurrection as "evolving". He preached that as a symbol, not necessarily as a brute physical fact. He's "agnostic" on that.

Perhaps most radical of all, and certainly most relevant today, the Bishop insisted that religion cannot provide a moral framework for society because society evolves in a way that religion doesn't. His new book may be called *Godless Morality*, but he didn't think it necessary to take sides between believers and unbelievers. He occupied what he called a "frontier kind of place". On the fence, you might say. I wonder if he'll get off when he retires in a few years' time?

### It's not just the name ...

MANY scientists seem to dislike Gaia as a name, said James Lovelock in his address to the society of that name. But in the printed extract in *Guardian Society* (August 4) he mentioned only John Maynard Smith as saying "What an awful name to call a theory."

I'm not quite sure what that theory is and I haven't been able to call up the Gaia Society on the Internet. *The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary* gives me "The earth regarded as a self-regulating system in which living matter collectively defines and maintains the conditions for the continuance of life; the hypothesis that the earth is such a system". But Lovelock's Gaia includes us and the earth in some sort of greater whole, and he quoted the philosopher Mary Midgley on an "enclosing whole" which "reminds us that we are not separate, independent autonomous entities".

We have, she said, "carefully excluded everything non-human from our value system and reduced that system to terms of individual self-interest". But who are "we"? Margaret Thatcher and her kind? Certainly not the leading Utilitarian philosopher of today, Peter Singer, whose morality specifically extends to the other animals. "We are mystified", the Midgley quote continued "...about how to recognise the claims of the larger whole that surrounds us..." Again clarification is needed. What is this "larger whole" and what are its claims? Perhaps these queries are answered in Mary Midgley's original text, but Lovelock cited the excerpts as though they were self-explanatory.

And it is explanations that are lacking. Gaia, we are told, is "something to which we could be accountable"; it "has been the guardian of life for all its existence". But Darwinists know no such "guardian of life", so Maynard Smith would have more than a name to quarrel with. Of course, as intelligent beings, we feel a responsibility for protecting the earth and (most of) its inhabitants and not polluting the solar system, but I don't know if that would satisfy James Lovelock and his "greater whole". Whatever his Gaia may be, he offers it as "a world view for agnostics"; and that lets me out. I'm not an agnostic.

### Archbishop of Canterbury George

Carey was taken to hospital last

month after being stung on the

foot by a wasp - a sole in torment?



# CREATIONISM'S STRUGGLE FOR

According to fundamentalist Christians the earth was created in six days just over 6,000 years ago. From 1701 until well into the nineteenth century the Authorized version of the Bible stated that the world was created at 9am on October 23, 4004 BC – derived from Bishop Ussher's calculations of the lives of the prophets.

In time, the mainstream churches accepted the theory of evolution because of the evidence submitted by Charles Darwin in *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, or *The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for life* (1859), and the compelling confirmation of scientific discoveries made compromise necessary to salvage some credibility and retain their dwindling following. But fundamentalists have never accepted the evidence of evolution. For them, the Bible with all its inconsistencies and absurdities is literally true.

To combat the discussion of evolution which permeated scientific circles in the 1850s, Philip Gosse, a geologist of some distinction but also a member of the Plymouth Brethren wrote *Omphalos: An Attempt to Untie the Geological Knot* (1857) in which he stated that God had created fossils when making the world less than 6,000 years previously. This provoked Charles Kingsley to write: "If Scripture can only be vindicated by such an outrage to common sense and fact, then I will give up Scripture and stand by common sense."

Unfortunately, Kingsley's common sense did not extend to the rest of the absurd myths stated in the Bible.

The most famous 19th-century confrontation between creationists and evolutionists took place in the summer of 1860 when T H Huxley, Darwin's most fervent supporter, debated with Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford. Wilberforce asked Huxley if he was descended from an ape on his grandfather's side or his grandmother's side, eliciting Huxley's famous reply: "I would rather be the offspring of two apes than be a man and afraid to face the truth."

To insult a bishop in public was unheard of. Lady Brewster fainted at the shock, but most of the audience applauded.

In the United States there were many more determined attempts to promote creationism. One of the aims of the World Bible Conference in 1919 was the suppression of free thought on evolution, and the Lusk Laws in New York State decreed that schoolteachers "must obtain 'certificates of qualification' testifying to their moral character, loyalty to the government, and conservative political views."

Probably the most famous and well known

confrontation between the fundamentalists and evolutionists in the 20th century occurred at the trial in Dayton, Tennessee, of John Thomas Scopes in 1925 for teaching evolution to schoolchildren. Scopes was found guilty and fined \$100. A film of the trial, starring Spencer Tracy and Frederic March – *Inherit the Wind* – was made in 1960 and this helped to renew interest in the debate between evolution and creationism, and alert people to the dangers posed by fundamentalists in trying to impose their views on society. The law making it illegal to teach evolution in Tennessee was not repealed until 1967. But to some extent the trial backfired because the fundamentalists were made to look ridiculous and most other states were deterred from following their example.

A 1987 Supreme Court ruling declared that the teaching of "creation science" in schools advocated religion and violated First Amendment rights. But fundamentalists are persistent as well as fanatical and creationism continued to be taught in schools until restrained by a lawsuit in 1993.

From the late 1960s creationists changed their tactics and demanded that biblical creation be taught as a theory of equal validity with evolution, claiming that teaching evolution in schools promoted secular humanism which they insisted was a rival religion. This change of policy resulted from the federal courts overturning attempts by some states in the "Bible-belt" to introduce creationist policies in education. Fundamentalists also sought to promote creationism by claiming scientific validity for their views rather than biblical revelation.

The Foundation for Thoughts and Ethics (sic) in Richardson, Texas, found a way of bringing religious fundamentalism into schools in the mid-1990s with its publication, *Of Pandas and People: The Central Question of Biological Origin*, which disguises promoting creationism as the pursuit of science. The book claims that evolution is not consistent with the intricacies of life, without mentioning that evolution is accepted by most scientists and that creationism has been discredited by scientific discoveries.

The publishers have distributed 22,000

copies of *Of Pandas and People* to schools in 18 states in an anti-evolutionary drive. Ralph Reed's right-wing Christian Coalition has stated its intention of controlling the schools and it is estimated that more than 2,000 school boards are run by fundamentalists. Although the fundamentalists have failed to get legal backing for teaching creationism, their aggressive stance and control of school boards have influenced the curriculum.

In California, the Institute for Creation Research grants master's degrees in astrophysics, science education, geology and biology. It recently received nearly \$250,000 expenses after bringing a legal action against the State of California for trying to prevent the Institute from awarding degrees.

By Carl

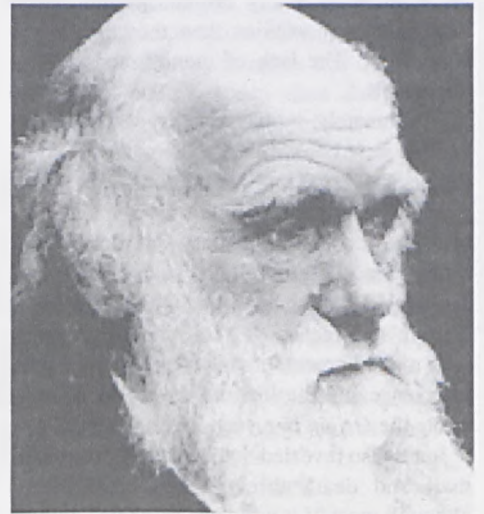


Photo: Bettmann Archives

**Charles Darwin, the source of all the conflict**

The science writer Frank R Zindler, in his speech to the Convention of American Atheists in 1992, has described some of the mental gymnastics that fundamentalists indulge in when trying to explain Old Testament myths to give them some sort of scientific credibility. Indeed, most of the arguments put forward by creationists are no more sophisticated than the claims put forward by Gosse nearly a century-and-a-half ago. Henry Morris, president of the Institute for Creation



# ISTS AND THE FOR POWER

● FEATURE ●

Research in San Diego has tried to explain the light from stars that are billions of light years away by stating that the lights do not come from the stars, but only appear to!

Another argument put forward by some creationists is that there are too many coincidences in nature for there not to be a design.

arl Pinel

As cosmologist and Quaker George Ellis claims in *Before the Beginning: Cosmology Explained:*

"The symmetries and delicate balances we observe require an extraordinary coherence of conditions and co-operation of laws and effects, suggesting that in some sense they have been purposefully designed" (1993). But this view of a perfectly created world, with everything neatly dovetailed fails to explain why so many creatures have become extinct. Surely an omniscient deity could not have blundered so badly! In fact there is nothing in nature that demonstrates purposeful design.

Creationism is not confined to fundamentalist Christians. In 1988, the Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists published a collection of essays: *Challenge: Torah Views on*

*Science and its problems.* In an article entitled "How old is the universe?" Rabbi Simon Schwab concluded that the earth was 5,735 years and six days old (in 1962). He also claimed that darkness was "created" and not merely an absence of light. This view was echoed by Professor Richard Niessen of Christian Heritage College (which is closely affiliated to the ICR) who believes that there should be more research into darkness.

Zindler has recounted the search for Noah's Ark that the fundamentalists undertook, after being taken in by an April fool's hoax that appeared in *Kolnische Illustrierte Zeitung* in 1933 and later reprinted in the White Russian refugee publication: *Mech Gedeona (The Sword of Gideon)*. Some fundamentalists are receptive to the most absurd suggestions if they appear to confirm their far-fetched beliefs.

Others continue to believe that the earth is the centre of the universe and that the sun revolves around the earth every twenty-four hours. Dr Gerardus Bouw insists: "If God cannot be taken literally when he writes of the rising of the sun (S-U-N), then how can we insist

that He be taken literally when writing of the Son (S-O-N)?" At this point atheists could rest their case. But the faithful are not to be confused by facts, preferring to continue to believe in the intellectual somersaults of "creation scientists."

In Glen Rose, Texas, Dr Carl Baugh managed to make money out of selling aluminium casts of a giant's footprint at a hundred dollars a time. The original cast was displayed in Baugh's Christian Evidence Museum. Although Baugh claimed that the 'bigfoot' print was found in the Paluxy riverbed it has transpired that the residents of Glen Rose carved footprints to sell to the gullible during the Great Depression. Some of the gullible purchasers were creationists who believed the footprints were fossils that confirmed both the Garden of Eden and the Flood. In August 1999, creationists on the Kansas Board of Education voted six votes to four to remove evolution theory from the curriculum. Other education authorities are likely to follow their example. In the most technologically advanced country in the world superstitious beliefs continue to thrive with nearly a third of college graduates accepting the biblical account of creation.

In Australia, the Creation Science Foundation publishes a magazine, *Ex Nihilo* which purports to provide evidence of the creation of the world as it is described in the Book of Genesis.

(Continued on p13)

## Timely return for *Inherit the Wind*

GIVEN RECENT events in Kansas, the revival of *Inherit the Wind* at the King's Head Theatre in London could not have been more timely.

The play, written in the 1950s by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, was a hit on Broadway and tells the story of a young teacher, John Scopes, put on trial in a small Tennessee town for the "crime" of teaching Darwin's theory of evolution.

Prosecuting was the fire and brimstone fundamentalist, William Jennings Bryan (here renamed Matthew Harrison Brady), and defending was the champion of liberal causes, Clarence Darrow (in this version called Henry Drummond). Veteran actors George Sewell and Larry Lamb, ably supported by a large cast on a small stage, brilliantly bring the battling attorneys back to life.

*Inherit the Wind* is an entertaining and thoroughly engrossing exploration of the oft-conflicting demands of science and religion. If it reappears in the West End, rush to get tickets.

— Terry Sanderson

• See Keith J Ackermann's letter on the subject in *Points of View*, p14.



Photo: Grolier Interactive Inc  
The famous American lawyer Clarence Darrow (leaning against a bench) in action during the actual Monkey trial.



**Unholy smoke**

PEOPLE who give up smoking are more likely to go to heaven, according to a new directive from the Vatican. The *Enchiridio Indulgentiarum* is a list of deeds which count towards the remission of sins. Apart from packing in fags, it suggests regular prayers and making the sign of the cross in the office.

**Devotion – then oblivion**

Five devout Thai Buddhist worshippers at the sacred Phra Pathom Jedi temple were killed outright when three giant ceremonial joss sticks collapsed on them.

**Divine solution sought**

Faced with a budget deficit of \$7-million, the Mayor of the American town of Irvington, New Jersey, Sara Bost, organised a gospel-singing vigil earlier this year to pray for help over the budgetary crisis. Her spokeswoman, Jacqueline Andrews declared: "The Mayor said there was no better way to respond than to invoke God's leadership, whether it be for financial or other help."

The ascerbic retort from attorney J Edward Waller, who lost to Bost in the last mayoral election, was: "We didn't elect her to lead us in prayer. We elected her to lead us out of this financial crisis."

**Mark of the Beast**

Philip Hudok, a physics and chemistry teacher at Elkins High School, West Virginia, has been given special dispensation to wear an identification card *not* bearing a bar code. Hudok believed that the bar code might be the Antichrist emblem prophesied in the Book of Revelation, and invoked legal help from the Rutherford Institute, a right-wing religious group based in Virginia, in his quest to have the bar code removed. However Hudok failed in his bid to have the bar code struck from all the students' identity cards.

The ID scheme was introduced as part of a new safety plan for teachers and students.

**Atheism on a plate**

America's Freedom from Religion Foundation has produced its very own cookbook. Entitled the *World Famous Atheist Cookbook*, it features recipes such as Atheist Apple Crisp, Forbidden Fruit Cobbler, Chicken Salad with no Religious Nuts, Open-Minded, Open-faced Sandwich, Nothing is Forever Bran Muffins

and Devilishly Good Chocolate Cake. The book has been compiled by Foundation President Anne Nicol Gaylor, and draws together recipes contributed by Foundation members from Maine to California, with "a sprinkling of offers from other countries".



**Muzzling *The Simpsons***

FOX TV, producers of the popular TV series *The Simpsons*, have been forced to curb jokes about Catholics following pressure from the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. The scriptwriters are reportedly "really angry" at this infringement of their creative freedom.

But the killjoy CLRCR does not always get its own way. Earlier this year it failed in its attempt to stop the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a predominantly gay street theatre group in San Francisco, from staging an Easter Street festival. The League felt the festival's timing was "inappropriate" and wanted it moved to another date.

William Donohue, the League's President, said his group would ask Catholics not to do business with the city unless the date was changed. The League's plea was rejected by the city's Board of Supervisors on the grounds that "the actions of one group not popular with another group is no reason to deny anyone their rights".

**Bad taste**

An Alsatian dog sank its teeth into a 45-year-old Somerset vicar who called at a farmhouse

to discuss a problem about a family grave with two of his parishioners. Alan Elwood was bitten on his legs, arms and stomach, and had to receive 11 stitches. Immediately after the incident, a joke that the dog – whose name is Satan – had to be treated for food poisoning began doing the rounds. This was described by members of Elwood's flock at Kingsbury as being "in very bad taste."

**Fishy goings-on**

The city of Republic in Missouri, USA, has been ordered by a federal court to remove a Christian fish symbol (ichthus) from the city seal. Judge Russell G Clark ruled that the symbol, which is also a feature of the city's flags, street signs, stationery and vehicles, violates church-state separation.

"The portrayal of the fish impermissibly excludes other religious beliefs or non-beliefs and – intended or not – depicts Christianity as the religion recognised and endorsed by the residents of Republic."

The judge added: "The Republic city seal pervasively invades the daily lives of non-Christians and sends a message that they are outsiders. The Constitution forbids this."

**State-church break**

THE LUTHERAN state church in Sweden is to be disestablished next year.

In breaking with the Government, the Church of Sweden will take responsibility for choosing its own leaders and developing its own internal policies. The establishment of the church originated in the 17th century, when the King was declared head of both church and state. Under the present system the Government appoints bishops and cathedral deans.

After separation, the Government will continue to collect a compulsory church tax (in future to be called a "fee") from all church members, but non-church members, who currently pay 75 per cent of the member rate, will not have to pay at all after dis-establishment.

**Exploding myths**

A CONFERENCE of Jehovah's Witnesses in Manchester this summer literally went with a bang. A security alert was sounded when an unattended briefcase was discovered during the conference, and the bomb squad was called in to investigate. After the decision was taken to blow up the bag, it was found to contain a large quantity of Bibles.



# Dick Condon: a “rock solid atheist” until the end

DICK CONDON, 80, whose death in August was reported in last month's *Freethinker*, had “an outstanding record of voluntary service to the secularist movement,” according to Bill McLroy, a former editor of the *Freethinker* who officiated at the funeral on August 18.

“He served on committees at national and local level, and became a Vice-President of the National Secular Society. Whilst not the most talkative of people, what he did say was always relevant and to the point.

“The limelight held no attraction for him. He preferred the private study to the public platform,” said Bill.

He added: “For many years Dick travelled from his home in Hornchurch to the National Secular Society office in north London. Again in an entirely voluntary capacity, and with characteristic modesty, he worked behind the scenes doing routine but very necessary secretarial work.

“Dick was a rock solid atheist, secularist and freethinker, who will be remembered for his loyal friendship and personal integrity.”

*Freethinker* contributor Colin McCall adds: “When G W Foote and Co Ltd and the



**Dick Condon pictured with his wife Jean**

national Secular Society were in Gray's Inn Road, something like forty years ago now, Richard Condon used to come into the office every Friday afternoon to collect his copy of the *Freethinker*, then a weekly, and give generously to the paper's and the society's funds. It was a regular occasion which he and the staff enjoyed, with coffee and biscuits and a short but stimulating chat.

“With Dick's death, I am, alas, the only surviving member of the group.

“On marrying, I had to leave in search of a better-paid journalistic post. When I returned to active participation in the society's affairs, Dick was there, as Vice-President, to welcome me back, and I am glad I renewed the comradeship in recent years. He was a stalwart freethinker, as all who met him knew.

## Injured Jehovah's Witness dies after refusing blood

A JEHOVAH'S WITNESS hit by a car in California died because she refused a blood transfusion, a jury in Pomona heard during the trial of Keith Cook, 32, the driver of the car who was subsequently charged with her murder.

Defence attorney Charles Unger admitted that Cook, who was driving under the influence at the time of the accident, was responsible for the accident, but argued that his client should not be found guilty of murder because the victim, Jadine Russell, refused a blood transfusion in accordance with her religious beliefs. After deliberating for three-and-a-half days, the jury convicted Cook of gross vehicular manslaughter, driving under the influence, and injuring the daughter of the dead woman.

## Vatican tribunal to sit in judgement of Teresa

A TRIBUNAL set up by the Vatican to consider whether the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta should be beatified is expected to take into account a number of damning allegations against her.

These include charges that Mother Teresa did too little for the sick in her care and accepted donations from dubious supporters such as the former Haitian dictator “Baby Doc” Duvalier and the disgraced British media tycoon Robert Maxwell.

According to a report in the *Rationalist International Bulletin*, published in New Delhi, India, Mother Teresa also accepted \$1.25 million from Charles Keating, a California banker jailed for swindling small investors in a multi-million dollar savings and loan scam.

The Teresa Tribunal will also investigate some charges made by Anna Sebba, a British author, and Christopher Hitchens, author of *The Missionary Position*.

“The most dangerous thing that she did was hand out pills against tuberculosis without monitoring patients. Often the disease mutated, and that led to full-blown epidemics,” Sebba alleged in her book about the Catholic missionary.

Hitchens claims that “all efforts to discover what she (Mother Teresa) did with the enormous sums of money given to her by individuals and institutions were in vain. No clinics or hospitals were built, but a large number of convents were opened”.



Photo: Bettmann Archives

**Mother Teresa, who accepted money from dictators and swindlers**



**G**reenpeace's attack on the wrong crop was a patent but trivial error. Their failure to attack the right problem with appropriate methods is far more serious.

I think I can best illustrate my point by analogy. A hundred or so years ago the people of Washington DC were bothered by pollution of the streets around the capital by carriages plying for hire. They were successful in obtaining a law which required the carrying of a broom and shovel in every hack. The law was not repealed with the departure of the horse-drawn taxi service. We can now see that this problem was inappropriately specified.

If the law had required, as a principle, that vehicles deal with any pollution for which they were responsible (rather than a specific commodity) it would have been a valuable precedent for today's problems. As I see it, the specification of the problems underlying genetically modified crops are similarly inappropriately specified.

Problems are often better stated in terms of procedures rather than products. In the GM case we will require new and different decisions and may also require different structures of decision-making. What is the basic problem involved in GM? What precisely are the principles (not farmer's fields) which should be addressed? When these are identified and appropriately specified (not concretised) we will know what we need to do.

A more satisfactory perspective is obtained if, first, the class or kind of problem is identified, then, other cases within the same set may be examined. GM issues involve more than technicalities of which few people are sufficiently informed. In this they are similar to some recent developments in medical technology. For resolving these problems some useful procedures of public policy were set up, notably the Warnock Committee which took both risk and ethical features into account. Evidence was carefully obtained from both professional and lay persons. The majority of the public seemed content with the outcome.

Those interested in GM either as opponents or developers should adequately differentiate between the elements of the debate that rely upon ethics, risk analysis or mythology. While the last category can be deplored, it is present and will have to be accommodated. There will be those who claim that any intervention in "nature" is "playing god" (presumably their God?). It is unlikely that many of this persuasion will be amenable to arguments, but they might be satisfied if there were provision for conscientious objection.

Unfortunately there doubtless exist interests that would seek to stimulate and exploit well-

intentioned emotional irrationality. The duty to protect vulnerable individuals in their persons needs to be extended to cover, for example, financial exploitation. This is admittedly a very difficult and necessary task because individuals who are willing to base decisions on faith are highly vulnerable and not easy to reach by normal educational methods. There is here a class of problem that needs much more attention than it has received to date.

What are my proposals? First, unscramble the concepts which underpin the definition of GM or non-GM. (There are various procedures and it may be that attitudes would vary). When this is known the nature of the next step may become clear. The focus of concern will then be generalised in classes of problems rather than a package of events or activities. Once the

**Leslie Wilkins,  
Research Professor,  
State University of  
New York, argues for  
a more cerebral  
approach to issues  
like genetically-  
modified crops**

task is seen to relate to a category problem, data can be obtained on analogous or similar issues elsewhere or in the past. It will be possible then to concentrate on the decision structures that were regarded as successful for similar classes of problem. There is probably much work here for policy research: a more useful tactic than crop bashing, but far less dramatic.

A few rough notes may help to illustrate the kind of policy research approach proposed. A comparison with the United States seems likely to be informative. There, it seems, GM foods have experienced little public opposition for the several years they have been in production.

This cannot be because the consumer in the US is unconcerned about food quality – the British are not known as health freaks. If this comparison is valid, the detail should be explored. It is unlikely that the British panic is because we are better informed: we do not have a Freedom of Information Act.

As an Anglo-American academic I may make a few tentative suggestions as to the difference in public attitude between our two countries. The US public has been well served

by its Food and Drugs Administration and the National Science Foundation as well as the National Institute of Health. These official bodies have not betrayed the public trust in the past.

They are prestigious institutions mediating scientific and ethical issues on behalf of the democratic system. The UK has no such bodies, or none that are known and trusted by the general public. Instead of these research foundations we have many agencies with "charity status" which means that they get all their income from public subscription. In such organisations it is believed, perhaps rightly, that fund-raising requires emotion-based appeals. The rational, ethical decisions necessary to evaluate complex problems is not concordant with the demands of charitable money-raising ventures.

It may well be that the British public's distrust of its institutions of public health guardianship is justified. In which case the remedy is to change those institutions or to establish institutions to perform the functions which are needed. On the other hand, it is possible that the US public is more gullible and should be more suspicious. Whatever is the true state of affairs, it is clear that the differences in public attitudes are not based on differences between the GM products.

**T**here is no doubt that the British experience of the BSE crisis is burned into the public consciousness and influences attitudes towards official pronouncements on scientific matters.

It is, however, strange that the politicians have managed to divert distrust to scientists, when it should be obvious that BSE's relationship to CJD was not a politician's discovery.

Nonetheless, it will doubtless be argued that it was "science" which started the problem with animal feed contamination. Was that so? It may be that my source of information on this matter is incorrect but (according to my reading) the contamination was due to intentional reduction in the temperature at which the feed was processed. Fuel costs are a large proportion of production costs for animal feeds. Now who was most likely to suggest a reduction in fuel costs? Surely it is those who have an interest in increased productivity and reducing production costs. And who is within this suspect set? So far as I know, the individual who authorised the reduction in process temperature has not been identified.

There have been no court proceedings reported in the press. If I were a detective in charge

*(Continued on next page)*



### Alpha and the millennium (cont. from p3)

Nothing like that happened on the occasion I attended, but the general consensus afterwards was that something of a spiritual nature had occurred.

At this point Alpha comes close to employing the technique of emotional hijacking perfected by Billy Graham. However, in fairness, it must be said that a thirty-hour course spread over three months and backed by tapes and books is much more sophisticated and genuinely challenging than Graham's timeshare selling - "before you leave this hall" - technique.

Also in contrast to the tone of many American evangelists, notably Pat Robertson, there was no right-wing political agenda.

Alpha will leave the informed atheist cold because its appeals to reason and evidence are blatantly flawed, and it is not the purpose of this article to repeat what has already been published in demonstration of these flaws. (See *Questions of Life, Freethinker*, September 1998).

**Wrong crop (cont. from previous page)**  
of solving this case I doubt that I would first search the laboratories of scientists.

The problem with GM foods as with many other complex issues is that the public must have institutions it can trust for decision making or advice on risk. The trustworthiness of institutions will have to be earned over time, but infinite time will not produce trust in institutions which are poorly designed in the first place.

In the UK at the moment we have no alternative but to accept the disturbed state of public opinion and accommodate to it, even where it may not have a logical basis. But, most importantly, we must start setting up decision-making institutions to deal with ethical factors arising from all aspects of contemporary complexity. There may well be more, and even more complex, issues than those posed so imprecisely in the current GM debate. In the present case, and perhaps more generally with this class of interface between technology, risk and ethics, there will remain groups which will reject the logical base in risk analysis and cost-benefit, even though that base may be subjected to overriding ethical constraints. We have to recognise the appeal of simplification and ensure that the procedures of decision-making do not give credibility to any exploitable emotive perspectives. The task is to invent competent decision making structures that can earn public confidence. This is a demanding cerebral task which is not assisted by dramatic posturing.

However, lapsed Christians with residual childhood memories of the faith, and poorly-informed waverers seeking an escape from the slings and arrows of harsh reality, may well be attracted to its fairytale world in which miracles are not uncommon, religious experiences abound and the faithful are enfolded in inexhaustible love. Three characteristics of this world are worth noting:

(1) God is interventionist; He answers prayers, offers guidance on a wide range of domestic and career, as well as spiritual and moral matters, heals miraculously and descends upon his worshippers so as to induce striking mental and sometimes physical effects, like speaking in tongues.

(2) The divine dimension is intensely personal: Gumbel repeatedly stresses the personal

nature of the relationship between the believer and Christ; both the Holy Spirit and the Devil are discrete personal entities.

(3) The approach to the New Testament is strictly fundamentalist. The Gospel miracles are taken literally, as is the doctrine of atonement - that God the Father literally transferred the death penalty imposed upon all mankind as a result of sin, to the Son. There are hints that the Old Testament is to be similarly regarded - the Fall is cited, as are the alleged prophecies of the coming of Christ.

None of this is of any interest to the atheist, but it may be asked how many members of mainstream Christian denominations are comfortable with such a world, and how many of those who have completed an alpha course are aware of the implications of Gumbel's teaching.

### Creationists and the struggle for power (continued from centre pages)

Much of the evidence used in *Ex Nihilo* is misquoted or misrepresented from reputable scientific journals. In Queensland, the group distributed 12,000 copies of its free news-sheet the *Creation Science Prayer News* in the Brisbane area.

The fundamentalist churches in Queensland have been damaged by financial and sexual scandals in recent years. In addition, a corruption scandal involving a number of cabinet ministers in the state robbed them of political support. The movement was also split when its chief creation scientist, John Mackay, left to form his own organisation. For the time being, fundamentalism in Australia has retreated as the result of self-inflicted damage to its credibility.

In Britain, fundamentalist groups are less powerful and confined to the lunatic fringe of Christianity. Nevertheless, whilst the mainstream churches continue to lose support, fundamentalist groups are growing. A few independent fundamentalist schools have succeeded in obtaining grant-maintained status. There is no doubt that religion in retreat produces strange bedfellows: Hindus and Muslims have supported attempts by fundamentalist Christians to obtain funding. But Hindus and Muslims have tried, and in some cases succeeded, to obtain state funding for their own religious schools and it is an astute tactical ploy to support the recognition of unorthodox religious views in schools within the state sector to pave the way for state funding for themselves.

If fundamentalists wish to teach impressionable children the discredited doctrine of creationism then they should confine their activities to their own homes, churches or independently-financed schools. To describe an unsubstantiated, and patently absurd, statement in Genesis as "creation science" is to invest a disproven myth with a status which it does not deserve and which should not be financed out of taxation.

Scientific advances continue to undermine the beliefs of creationists, and writers like Victor J. Stenger, Frank R Zindler, Richard Dawkins, Stephen Jay Gould and Niclas Berggren have brought scientific ideas to a wide audience through a series of popular books and lectures on evolution. Their ideas may have the same impact on the public as Charles Darwin, Thomas Huxley and Peter Kropotkin had in the 19th-century. In *A Plea for Atheism* Charles Bradlaugh states: "The so-called belief in Creation is nothing more than the prostration of the intellect on the threshold of the unknown."

This is the danger of fundamentalism: the slavish acceptance of patently absurd statements as infallible holy writ hinders the search for knowledge and the application of scientific methods to understand the universe.

It is not just ideas about creationism that fundamentalists wish to force upon others. They are usually politically reactionary as well as theologically conservative, as would be expected of those who unquestionably worship a deity who is depicted as a vengeful megalomaniac in the Old Testament. Thus, they tend to be pro-capital punishment, anti-abortion, homophobic and against divorce.

History has shown that fundamentalists have been dishonest and unscrupulous in their attempts to impose their ideas on others. If they should achieve political power to enforce their irrational beliefs then they will pose a threat to the freedom of us all.



**Flawed film**

KEITH Porteous Wood (*Overview, Freethinker*, July) claims *Inherit the Wind* as one of his favourite films. As a courtroom drama the film is excellent, but as an accurate account of the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925 the film is flawed.

The character of Matthew Harrison Brady, who prosecuted the Scopes character, is portrayed as an unreasoning religious fanatic who insists on the absolute literal truth of every word in the Bible. The real prosecutor in the Scopes case was William Jennings Bryan, the nearest America ever came to a socialist candidate for President. Bryan had opposed the creation of the Gold Standard, which he called "Crucifying Mankind upon a Cross of Gold", because he believed it would result in economic collapse in the long term. He also believed that the only true standard by which to judge a country was not how many opportunities it offered, or how well-off the average citizen was, but the actual condition at that time of the least well-off. Bryan's opposition to Darwinism stemmed from his fear that the state and federal authorities were using it as a spurious, pseudo-scientific justification for policies rooted in "Social Darwinism", ie cutting back welfare programmes and leaving the poor to die out through starvation. Bryan also deplored the adoption by many states of "Eugenics" programmes, encouraging prosperous white middle-class families to have large families and discouraging poor and black families from having children, even resorting to compulsory sterilisation of people deemed "feeble-minded". Bryan felt that Scopes was the thin end of a wedge that would allow the State of Tennessee to officially adopt a policy of Eugenics; he felt that ultimately eugenic policy would result in extermination camps. Bryan never lived to see the Great Depression or Auschwitz, the twin culmination of both the Gold Standard and Darwinism; he would have felt that his worse fears were confirmed.

The character of Scopes' defender, Henry Drummond, is based on the actual defending counsel, Clarence Darrow. Far from being the high-minded man of ideals that Drummond is, Darrow was an unscrupulous mercenary, who believed that "No man is guilty who can afford my fee".

Darrow once famously swallowed poison in court to disprove the medical examiner's testimony, while making sure that in the next room was a fully equipped paramedic team armed with both antidote and stomach pump! Darrow had only taken the case because the *New York Times*, which was paying Scopes' legal costs,

promised him a very large fee.

In short, although *Inherit the Wind* is a more than passable drama, it is a highly inaccurate reconstruction of actual events and should be taken with a substantial pinch of salt.

KEITH J ACKERMANN  
Tilbury  
Essex

**Countering complacency**

GEORGE BROADHEAD (*Points of View*, September) accused me of pettiness for criticising your report of the Pat Robertson-Bank of Scotland affair.

I am sorry if George feels like that but I stand by my criticism. Like Roy Saich, I believe that the humanist movement should be able to present a broad front on issues of this kind. Robertson is indeed a virulent homophobe but he is also totally against everything humanists stand for. In fact, he has specifically identified secular humanism as the principal enemy of his movement.

Fortunately, many organisations in Scotland, including the HSS, opposed the bank on this issue. I was on the HSS Council at the time and I unreservedly supported the Council's stance, but like the other members, I considered our action to be a purely token gesture given the very modest influence the HSS can have on Scottish affairs.

I still think that the *Freethinker* report exaggerated the role of the humanist movement, including GALHA, in this matter.

My point in writing was to try to counter what I considered to be unjustified complacency about the strength of organised humanism in Britain.

However, like George Broadhead, I heartily welcome the BOS decision to have nothing to do with the odious Pat Robertson and I congratulate the gay rights movement, including GALHA, for the part they played.

JOHN CLUNAS  
Aberdeen

**Give the Catholic Church credit**

IN THE August issue of the *Freethinker* Pope John Paul II was described as heading a church of "malevolent illusionists".

The *Freethinker* is very selective in what it says about the Catholic Church.

The Church is right to condemn abortion as it involves the destruction of innocent defenceless life.

The Pope and very many Catholic bishops have condemned the unjust distribution of wealth in the world. Jon Sobrino, Leonardo

Boff, and Gustavo Gutierrez are devout South American Catholics who campaign on behalf of the poor. As well as being a left-wing socialist, the Irish Nationalist, the late James Connolly murdered by the British in 1916, was a Roman Catholic. In his excellent *Socialism, Nationality and Religion*, he quotes church fathers and saints in order to denounce social injustice.

At Easter, Pope John Paul II called on all nations to abolish the death penalty.

Ampleforth College abolished beating when it still existed in most schools. I myself went to a school ran by a Roman Catholic at which frequent beatings occurred. That school now is run on very humane lines.

ANDREW HARVEY  
Carlisle

**Clinging onto old superstitions**

At the end of his article, *Atheists and Death*, (*Freethinker*, September), Colin McCall calls for readers' responses. Here is mine:

Even the most basic of education makes it clear that mental activity is the product of electro-chemical processes in the brain. It should be obvious, therefore, that the "soul" has no possibility of carrying on any sort of life after the death and destruction of the brain that sustained it. I share Colin McCall's puzzlement at the number of people who still refuse to abandon old superstitions concerning life after death. The ultimate reason why this idea has had such a strong appeal to people through the ages is probably biological: the individual's determination to live on, come what may, is essential for the survival of any species. But there is no biological requirement for a philosophical acceptance of death. That is probably why such an acceptance is not "standard issue", and that would be the reason why a promise of life after death is so attractive: it seems to satisfy a basic biological urge.

YNGVE BAUTZ  
Newcastle upon Tyne

**The nonsense of "regression"**

NO DOUBT most readers share my exasperation with those television programmes which give free rein to oddities who claim to have lived former lives revealed by their hypnotist's ability to regress them. Even though there is always one sane scientist, philosopher, or just a commonsense spokesman in the invited audience, these are never allowed the time to challenge the "time travellers", and are always drowned out by the clamour of the romantically-minded simpletons who dominate the







studio discussion. It would be a great satisfaction if the sane could put the following points or queries to those who claim past existences.

1. If each person has lived before, wouldn't this imply a limit to the overall individuals, as a process of "recycling" would be sufficient to people the globe for all time? Therefore, there would be finite numbers.

2. If there are finite numbers this would mean the "identity" of the individual would be diluted or blurred by multiple, superimposed personalities!

3. But given this "recycling" limitation, how could this work, since there are more people in the world now than, say, 4 BC, wouldn't this mean the improbability of trying to fit a quart of latterday entities into a pintpot of former lives.

4. Why is it that "regressed" people seem to recall certain historical periods or venues which appear to be dramatically attractive – Tudor, English Civil War, American Civil War, Wars of the Roses, the Crusades etc? Why don't subjects regress to a life as an early resident of Nippon or Lydia; as a resident in a whale, Jonah; to a prehistoric Eskimo life; or indeed, as a caveman?

5. And what would happen if a subject being regressed today emerged into the identity of a person who was actually in the process of being regressed themselves (say, into the 1950s when this kind of probing was cinematically fashionable)? Would today's subject slip through the 1950s personality into one further back without experiencing anything of the 1950s "stop"? And of course, if this "regressing" had always been practised, would today's subject keep slipping back through periods (like the clicking airport destination board) and eventually come to a stop as the aforementioned caveman, or even brontosaurus?

These are serious questions; I ponder them greatly. I wonder what Voltaire would have said.

MRS P GOODWIN  
Littleover  
Derby

#### Unwarranted reaction

YOUR correspondent Carl Blackburn (*Outrageous and Racist*, September *Freethinker*) has enjoyed working himself up into a frenzy over my article *Adopting the Missionary Position* (July).

Merely uneasy in his opening paragraph, he progresses to outrage and finally climaxes his letter in a state of shock.

This reaction is wholly unwarranted how-

ever, as a calm re-reading of the article will show. My motive in mentioning the Wodaabe tribe's liking for goats' intestines was patently not to show how "primitive" they are. Nor did I suggest that they are cannibals. On the contrary, I stated that such nomadic people are actually extraordinarily hospitable.

I am not a racist and I do not write racist articles. Nor, I am sure, is it the policy of the *Freethinker* to publish racist material.

HUGH THOMAS  
Bristol

#### Never made Pope

SORRY, Karl Heath (*Ask the Parson*, 20, *Freethinker* August) Cesare Borgia never reached the exalted heights of Pope, in spite of becoming a Cardinal at the ripe age of 18. Perhaps Karl had in mind the uncle of Alexander VI who had been Pope Calixtus III.

The Borgias generally had a pretty bad press, invoking much hostility and jealousy, and the charges of incest were unproven and part of the campaign of vilification.

Certainly, though, Alexander appeared as a vigorous and active man and remained so into old age; the famous orgies most likely did take place and showed that for this Pope at least sexual activity was regarded as part of heaven's bounty!

Let's not forget that his division of South America into the two spheres of influence of Spain and Portugal was a masterstroke and settled instantly what could have been an enormous and continuing problem.

It seems to me that the Borgias were no better and no worse than their contemporaries at the time, but generally just better at what they did. Machiavelli certainly thought so.

BRIAN CATTIERMOLE  
Stevington

#### Ale, not Champagne

Surely if Bill McIlroy (*Points of View*, September) is a socialist he should be drinking real ale and not "socialist champagne".

JOHN EVERS  
Surrey

#### Doggy heaven

IMPLICIT in the Christian belief in heaven is that it will be populated by worthy souls. (*Freethinker*, September.)

The occupants will therefore be gentle and loyal and will have contributed much to human happiness.

Conversely, those who have slaughtered and

pillaged God's world will be excluded. On this basis, *homo sapiens*, the most destructive pest on the planet, will be banished. My guess is that any who do slip through will find heaven populated by Labrador retrievers.

This contention, the result of observing my Labradors, Sammy and Ben, is at least as plausible as any view of heaven based on Christian belief.

DENIS WATKINS  
Pembrokeshire

#### Linguistically correct

NELLY Moia (*Points of View*, July) is probably right to object to my word *speciesism* on aesthetic grounds. It is ugly. It is, however, correct linguistically and useful ethically.

As for my *painism*, *painience* and *painient*, as Nelly Moia points out, there are no single English words for *capacity to feel pain* or *capable of feeling pain*. Yet these are increasingly seen to be the crucial concepts in ethical theory. What is it about human and nonhuman animals that gives them a distinct moral status from pieces of furniture? The answer is that they are *painient*. On this understanding is built the whole of modern moral law.

DR RICHARD RYDER  
Devon

#### Mucking about with the "f" word

OH, HOW I laughed when I learned that those clowns formerly known as the Young Conservatives have renamed themselves Conservative Future: United Kingdom, and have produced a logo bearing the initials CFUK.

This has annoyed the fashion house French Connection, UK, more commonly known as FCUK. The last I heard the company was threatening to sue over breach of copyright, and said it did not wish to be associated in any way with the Conservatives.

Given the current lamentable state of the Tory Party, I would have thought that CFUKED would have been a far more appropriate, if dyslexic, choice of letters.

COLIN HART  
Islington  
London

Please address your letters (preferably typed) to Barry Duke, *Freethinker* editor, PO Box 26428, London SE10 9WH. E-mail: editor@freethinker.co.uk Phone/Fax: 0181 305 9603.



## 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, November 7, 4pm. Ann Mitchell: *Humanist Rites of Passage*.

**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. Tuesday, November 9, 7.30pm for 8pm. Keith Porteous Wood, General Secretary, National Secular Society: *Bishops in the Reformed House of Lords – NSS Submission*.

**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: Tel. 01843 864506. Talks and discussions on ten Sunday afternoons in Canterbury.

**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. Friday, October 8: Noel Coward Centenary Celebration.

**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. Press and Information Officer: 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. The Swarthmore Institute, Leeds. Tuesday October 12, 7.30pm David Johnson: *Education for Citizenship and Values*.

**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, October 28, 8pm. Denis Cobell: *The Tale of a Humanist Chaplain*.

**Manchester Humanist Group:** Information: Arthur Chappell. Tel. 0161 681 7607. Monthly meetings at Friends' Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester.

**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.

**Sheffield Humanist Society:** Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street, Sheffield. Wednesday, October 6, 8pm. Terry Sanderson: *Religion and the Press*. Wednesday, November 3, 8pm. Gordon Sinclair: *Evangelising Humanism*. Wednesday, December 1, Annual Dinner with guest speaker. Programme from Gordon Sinclair, telephone 01226 743070 or Bill McIlroy, 0114 2509127.

**South Hampshire Humanists:** Information: 11 Glenwood Avenue, Southampton, SO16 3PY. Tel: 02380 769120

**South Place Ethical Society:** Weekly talks/meetings/concerts Sundays 11am and 3pm at Conway Hall Library, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Tel: 0171 242 8037/4. Monthly programme on request.

**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, October 13, 7.30pm for 8pm. Robbi Robson: *Humanism – Achievements and the Way Ahead*.

**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. Wednesday, October 20, 8pm. Barbara Smoker: *Living with the Enemy*.

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Please send your listings and events notices to Bill McIlroy, 115 South View Road, Nether Edge, Sheffield S7 1DE.  
Tel: 0114 2509127.