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Freethinker

Secular Humanist monthly

Founded by G W Foote in 1881

**God's teeth! It's the alleged Miracle
of the Molars as the ancient art of
alchemy surfaces in the '90s**



When bog-standard fillings apparently turn to gold during an evangelical prayer meeting, whose hand is at work – God's or the tooth fairy's? That was the question posed by Barbara Smoker, former President of the National Secular Society, when she featured last month in the BBC 2 television documentary, *Living with the Enemy*. See her report on the centre pages.

Also in this issue:

Resisting pressure to increase religious schooling – p3

THE HUMANIST movement is organised religion's greatest asset. It acts as religion's ever-vigilant pilot fish, leading the great white shark into clear blue water, scraping away its barnacles and keeping it lean and fit to hunt.

Religion is by nature conservative and reactionary, with an aversion to reform, and always in danger of being left behind and rendered irrelevant. It badly needs a think-tank to keep it abreast of modern times. This is where humanism comes to its rescue. Progressive, humane, creative, humanism develops universal, people-friendly ideals and standards which it then hands on a plate to religious leaders, enabling them to catch up with mainstream thinking and re-occupy the centre ground.

A quick re-alignment of the goal posts and humanism is left protesting on the sidelines. Women's rights, gay rights, sex education, contraception, relaxed censorship, easier divorce, Sunday sport and shopping; all benefits pioneered by humanists in the teeth of religious opposition and now stealthily adopted by

religion as proof of its modernity. By constantly countering religion's worst excesses humanism has hugely contributed to religion's survival well beyond its sell-by date.

I believe it is time that humanism called for a moratorium on this mission of mercy. It is time it stopped handing out the medicine and let the sickness run its course. Be under no illusion: behind its politically correct facade religion still hides its ugly face. Its killjoy inclinations are still itching to be unchained. Its woman-hostile nature, its hang-ups about sex and easy living are yearning to be freed, as does its preoccupation with sin and self-abasement. It has a secret longing to call the shots once more, to cajole, manipulate and ultimately control. Deep is its nostalgia for yesteryear, for sweet were the times when the rectories were bigger than the churches and nobody had heard of child abuse.

So let them strut their stuff just one more time. Let them brush aside their mask and allow their true colours to show. Let the bigots rant once more, let the ayatollahs of all persuasions rage against the iniquities of modern times. Let there be worship in state schools and

creationism too. Let them put priests in charge of women's bodies. Let them control what we see on television and the internet.

Let them remove sex education from schools, condemn premarital sex. Let them shut the shops on Sundays. Let them attempt anti-gay legislation. Then stand back and see what happens next. At last the young would quickly discover what untrammelled religion is all about. Our sons and daughters, now scornful of our 'dead horse flogging' would soon feel their precious freedoms threatened. They would recognise that stripped of its happy-clappy, touchy feely charm, religion in the raw is harsh, dogmatic and decidedly uncool.

But this time its tyranny would fail to conquer, for in today's society religion cannot regain its ground. It can succeed only in a climate of ignorance and fear. That climate humanism has altered for good. Rocked out of their complacency, the young would join humanist ranks in droves, up in arms in defence of their liberal way of life. Then almost overnight humanism would at last achieve its rightful place.

Beat children and reverse Britain's moral decline, say Christian child care "experts"

AN American couple who believe in beating children rather than cuddling them have been peddling their controversial views in Britain.

A report by Linda Jackson in the *Telegraph* revealed that Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo, self-styled childcare experts and committed Christians, had been invited by Christian Education Europe Ltd, a group which supplies special Biblical teaching material to evangelical schools and home education projects, to give a series of talks in which parents are told to spank children from the age of 18 months up to five times a day, even for small transgressions.

During their visit last month, they claimed that parental over-indulgence had led to Britain's decline into "immorality". And they blamed Penelope Leach, the child psychologist and author of a best-selling child development guide, for significantly contributing to the decline.

Robert Thomas, a spokesman for Christian Education Europe Ltd, said that the Ezzos had come to Britain to address four conferences – the biggest in London on October 30, which attracted an estimated 1,200 people.

In books outlining their "Bible-based" childcare programme, the couple suggest that parents hit children with a plastic spatula or similar implement which will "inflict pain but not break bones or damage skin tissue". They also

advocate that children should not be fed on demand, and say that even babies should be smacked for poor table manners.

Their books, which are distributed worldwide, have led to the biggest controversy in parenting for 40 years. However, their theories – reported to have been adopted by at least one million parents – have been described by one paediatrician as the "most dangerous I have seen".

In an interview with the *Telegraph*, Mr Ezzo who used his visit to the UK to introduce his "ministry" – Growing Families International – a company, that makes more than £1-million profit a year – said that the recent cases of 12-year-olds giving birth in Britain highlighted the need for a new "moral emphasis" in child training. He said: "One of the most destructive influences in England has been the child-centred parenting plan – the Penelope Leach philosophy which has dominated this country for the last 20 years.

News of the Ezzos' trip has dismayed children's rights lawyers. Rachel Hodgkin, a lawyer specialising in this field said that their books "should carry a health warning". She added: "The Ezzos' insistence that demand-feeding inculcates a selfish baby is questionable. I'm very unhappy if the Ezzos' philosophy is promulgated in this country."

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Pressure to increase religious schooling “undesirable”, says NSS

THE CHURCH of England’s push to increase the number of Christian teachers has been strongly criticised by the National Secular Society.

In response to an “Education Day”, organised last month by the C of E and attended by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Carey, NSS General Secretary, Keith Porteous Wood wrote the following letter on behalf of the NSS to Education Secretary David Blunkett:

The Society’s Council has asked me to write to you to express its concern at the Church of England’s pressure to increase its influence in education. As I expect you are aware, their “Education Day” conference took place on 13 October and was attended by Estelle Morris. She was reported in the *Daily Mail* to have told the conference that “she would like to see more Christians in the classroom”. We have taken this to relate to teachers.

Appointing teachers on the basis of their beliefs, rather than on their abilities, seems to us an ill-considered idea. We do not believe Christian teachers teach maths or geography or English better than non-Christian ones. Any suggestion that a teacher’s Christianity bestows some kind of special quality would be an affront to the many non-Christian teachers who have devoted their lives to educating our children. Research shows that at present only ten per cent of teachers regard themselves as religious. It would be unacceptable for the rest to be implicitly deemed inferior.

We feel that Christians should have no special privileges over non-Christian or even non-religious teachers. Any policy encouraging Christian teachers could hardly avoid discrimination on religious grounds, something that this organisation – and no doubt the teaching unions – would resist most vigorously. It would be totally unacceptable for teachers’ appointments, promotion or job prospects be determined by their creed, or lack of it.

The Archbishop of Canterbury says that he wants to increase the number of church schools. Many (but by no means all) Church of England schools have a worthwhile academic record, but it seems this is often achieved through covert selection and there is a suspicion that, overall, such schools are

better-funded than the mainstream schools. The selective transfer of children out of the mainstream State system can impoverish the mainstream schools and create a vicious circle of educational “apartheid”. Victims of this apartheid include: (a) parents who feel they have to feign belief in order that their children can have access to a religious school, if they deem it to provide the most appropriate education in the area, and (b) the pupils attending mainstream schools in areas where they have been weakened by more promising pupils being “creamed off” by religious schools or by the religious schools being more generously funded. Perhaps inadvertently, the Government seems to be encouraging this apartheid through acquiescing in – if not encouraging – the transfers of schools from the main-

stream to the religious sector.

We believe religious schools should be discouraged and better-funded and better-managed mainstream schools be provided so that communities can be educated in an integrated way regardless of creed or lack of it.

The very concept of state-subsidised education being denied to children by religious schools because of their parents’ beliefs (including lack of belief or perceived inadequate piety) is abhorrent in a secular society. We ask you to require that paying a state subsidy to religious schools should be contingent on a non-discriminatory entry policy.

I must also relay to you Council’s concern about the very concept of religious schools. We feel that by subsidising Church of England, Catholic, Jewish, and latterly Muslim and Seventh Day Adventist schools, the Government is hampering rather than enhancing race or community relations.

To separate children on racial and religious grounds at this formative time of their lives is destructive and undesirable. We can see some inkling of the future from the effect of sectarian schooling in Northern Ireland.

Dr Carey says that he wants to introduce more church schools in deprived areas. Many of these areas are multi-ethnic and the introduction of more church schools will create a demand for schools run by other religions, further fragmenting their communities.

Dr Carey also wants to increase the influence of the Church in state education. I receive a significant number of calls from parents of pupils in mainstream state schools all over the country who are distressed that their children are being taught religion by Christian teachers as fact, not “Some people believe ...”.

Such a method is an abuse of impressionable young minds. Could I ask you please to issue a circular reminding teachers in mainstream schools that they should not to teach religion as fact.

I look forward, on behalf of those who are not Christian, to your detailed response to the points we have made.

Have you considered joining the NSS?

For more than 130 years the National Secular Society 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 NSS 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. The NSS website (www.secularism.org.uk) includes an application form.



THE HEALTH Education Authority has issued a report on religion and mental health (see details in Keith Porteous Wood's *Overview* on page 6). As well as blithely recommending that exorcism might be useful for some people suffering from mental illness, the HEA also says if a person sees visions and hears voices that nobody else does, it should not be assumed that it necessarily indicates mental illness. After all, saints and martyrs heard divine voices, so, as far as the HEA is concerned, they can be real, physical happenings and not just delusions.

I can point to at least one headline (from the *Daily Mail*, July 8) which indicates the dangers in that kind of thinking. It reads: "God told me to kill – schizophrenic in frenzy stabbed social worker 100 times, jury told."

Now I am not suggesting that everyone who suffers from schizophrenia is a danger to society – far from it. I have worked in psychiatric hospitals and I know that the vast majority of people with these kinds of problems are of no threat to anyone, except occasionally themselves. But the HEA report recommends that people of faith suffering emotional illness should go to their rabbi or priest for help, which surely has the potential to cause more problems than it solves. Clergymen may consider themselves to be God's representatives on earth, but as far as psychiatry goes, they are mostly amateurs.

But, says the HEA, we are not talking about extremes, only about those poor souls who suffer from depression and anxiety, and for whom religion is a comfort.

I'm sure that's occasionally true, but I refer them to an article in the *Daily Mail* by Cheryl Calloway who was a Jehovah's Witness. Ms Calloway tried to leave the sect, but found that getting into it had been much easier than getting out. The JWs made life incredibly difficult for this woman, to the point of driving her to despair. A follow-up letter from a Colin Graham of Liverpool told a similar tale. "I've been a Jehovah's Witness for 28 years," he wrote, "I have suffered from depression for several years and have found this common

among JWs. This eventually caused me to lose control of my life, get into debt and finally go over the edge and try to commit suicide. I expected support from this 'loving organisation' but all I got was ostracism ... It's no good talking to JWs because they're indoctrinated to believe that everything outside the organisation is from Satan, and they're frightened to look for themselves."

As for exorcism – my heart fell into my boots when I saw that a publicly-funded agency was recommending such an approach as a treatment for mental health problems. What happened to Mr Blair's promises of modernisation? We seem to be regressing into medievalism as he increasingly allows public bodies to be taken over by religious fanatics. And as if to prove the point, the *Sunday Telegraph* ran a story about a temple in India that is promising to exorcise demons from the mentally ill (for a fee, of course). Julian West, who attended the ghastly performance, reported: "As the ritual began, the atmosphere in the temple grew increasingly demented. Women with long, dishevelled hair, emerging from the temple recesses like wraiths, began howling and throwing themselves on the stone courtyard, somersaulting and writhing on the ground. An older woman wearing a torn green sari swung from the long nails protruding from the 'devil's tree'; one bare-chested young man twisted and lunged so violently he had to be held back by the crowd. At the heart of this inferno, the sacrifice – a complex ritual involving 12 large cauldrons of water into which various powders were thrown, chants and drumming – continued calmly ... Although no one was apparently cured during the ceremony, temple priests claim to have a '99 per cent success rate'".

This is the cruelty to which the encouragement of superstitious clap-trap leads. It is almost unimaginable that the HEA, an agent of a Government that is about to lead us into the 21st century, is even paying lip service to such madness.

Thankfully, the God merchants didn't get a totally clear run in the media last month.

Writing about the charges being levelled against the wartime Pope, Pius XII – that he had been less than hostile to the Nazis – George Monbiot in the *Guardian* turned the searchlight onto the present Pontiff (see Colin McCall's *Down to Earth* on page 7). In a final, impassioned attack, Monbiot wrote: "The Pope's position reflects not only a fundamentalist interpretation of the laws of God. Like Pius XII, he insists on total political control. Autocratic, backward looking, both popes have sheathed themselves in ecclesiastical mythology, an infallible barrier to impregnation by reality. The Vatican wants to celebrate the year 2000 by canonising Pius XII for helping the oppressed. A better way to mark the millennium would surely be the indictment of John Paul II for crimes against humanity". (Under international pressure, the Vatican has now put the beatification of Pius XII on hold).

Of course, in the interests of what it sees as balance, the *Guardian* then put the religious point of view by publishing the text of the Archbishop of Canterbury's contribution to a time-wasting debate in the House of Lords about whether or not religion causes war and conflict. Naturally (as reported elsewhere in this issue) the Archbishop didn't think it did. A headline in the *Independent* a couple of days later, however, told a different story: "Indian Christians fear Pope's visit will bring more violence." I expect Dr Carey, expert sophist that he is, will be able to make that sound as if religion has nothing to do with it.

The *Guardian* then allowed its balance to swing the other way. The day after the Archbishop's empty contribution, Salman Rushdie parried with an out-and-out, no-punches-pulled attack on religious superstition of all kinds. It was extracted from his new book "Letters to the Six Billionth World Citizen" published in English by Uitgeverij Podium of Amsterdam (available from Dutch Internet bookshops including www.nl.bol.com). "Intellectual freedom, in European history, has mostly meant freedom from the restraints of the Church, not the state," he wrote. "This is the battle Voltaire was fighting, and it is also what all six billion of us can do for ourselves, the revolution in which all of us could play our small six billionth part: once and for all we could refuse to allow priests, and the fictions on whose behalf they claim to speak, to be the policemen of our liberties and behaviour.

"Once and for all we could put the stories back into the books, put the books back on the shelves, and see the world undogmatised and plain.

"Imagine there's no heaven, my dear Six Billionth, and at once the sky's the limit."

Freethinker fund

MANY THANKS to the following supporters who have contributed so generously to the Freethinker Fund up to the end of September (the list includes some which were inadvertently omitted from previous acknowledgements):

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NSS challenges bishop over blasphemy law comments

THE BISHOP of Rochester's maiden speech in the House of Lords (*see Keith Porteous Wood's Overview on page 6*), prompted the National Secular Society to challenge the bishop over his remarks about blasphemy laws in Pakistan. The letter penned on behalf of the NSS by Keith congratulates the Bishop on his maiden speech, but adds:-

One aspect of your speech, however, puzzled me. With the injunction (at column 673 of Hansard) "people who live in glass houses should not throw stones", you reminded us that we should examine our own house before criticising those abroad. You did so in the context of dissatisfaction with the lack of statutory protection of religious freedom in Great Britain, except in some cases under Race Relations legislation. By column 675, however, you decried "so-called "blasphemy" laws" in Pakistan.

I realise this issue is something about which, understandably, you feel most strongly, and, of course, I also regret that a Roman Catholic bishop committed suicide in protest at the Pakistan law.

In the last report I saw on this Pakistan law it was not thought that anyone had been executed under the law. Turning to the situation in this country, however, while blasphemy is no longer a capital offence here, a prison sentence is still possible for the common law offence of blasphemous libel and the penalties can be harsh. The last person to be convicted (the editor of *Gay News*) was sentenced to prison, albeit the sentence was suspended. The effect on him was still profound. In my view the conviction ruined his career. Furthermore, the combined fine and costs were very high.

Sadly, far from atrophying or becoming less stringent, the law here is now considerably harsher as a result of this last prosecution just two decades ago.

I am, of course, assuming you were aware of the UK law to which I refer and which gives privileged protection to the doctrines of the Established Church, another of whose privileges is the seats on the Bishops Bench that you have recently joined. If my assumption is correct, it seems you are prepared to decry a blasphemy law in Pakistan under which Christians suffer, but despite your earlier glass

house analogy you fail even to mention the existence of blasphemy law in this country under which, in essence, Christians' sensibilities are protected.

I am sure you will want to set the record straight; could I ask you therefore please to explain:

(1) Whether you think such a law in this country sits comfortably with the concepts of religious freedom you expounded so eloquently in the House, and particularly

(2) the criteria on which the blasphemy laws should be repealed in Pakistan but not be abolished here (if such is your view).

I hope that the answers to these questions will indicate that the Society can count on your support for our campaign for the abolition of the blasphemy law, which has been twice recommended by the Law Commission.

I hesitated before writing this open letter, mindful that it was your maiden speech. However I felt compelled to do so less because of your reference to glass houses but rather that this is not the first time that you have decried Pakistan's blasphemy law in public without (as far as I am aware) acknowledging the existence of our own blasphemy law.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Shock, horror as top evangelist makes off with a man

BRITISH EVANGELISTS are in a state of shock over the news that one of their leading preachers has left his wife and children to set up home with another man.

According to news reports, Dr Roy Clements, 53, pastor of Eden Baptist Church in Cambridge for the past 20 years, is believed to be living with a man in his mid-20s in the north of England, but a spokesperson for the Evangelical Alliance insisted that Dr Clements was only involved in a "celibate friendship with another man".

Dr Clements was a prominent lecturer in the influential international evangelist conference circuit. He was also expected to become the next head of the Evangelical Alliance - a body

radically intolerant of homosexuality.

One colleague, Rev Philip Hacking, was quoted as saying: "I'm shattered for him. This is the saddest moment of my ministerial career and I am praying for his restoration."

Humanist Holidays

Get away from it all this winter for a holiday in the company of other humanists.

This year's Yuletide Humanist Holiday is being held at the Wish Tower Hotel, Eastbourne. The gathering will take place from December 23 to 27.

Activities planned so far include a guided coach trip around scenic Sussex.

Please contact Jon Buttolph at the BHA for more information and a booking form.

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Religion and Peace

SEEMINGLY oblivious to the religious component in practically every armed conflict in the world today, the Archbishop of Canterbury initiated a Lords' debate on October 15 on Religion and International Order – religion's role in promoting world peace. It is little surprise that nearly all the speakers in the five-hour debate thought religion *did* have a valuable role to play. Some made token references to religion-induced strife, then – as if driven by some kind of psychological state of denial – immediately dismissed or ridiculed the very possibility.

Dr Carey, for example, posed the question "Do religions cause conflict?" but concluded that their impact [in this respect] was over-rated. He then mocked the sceptics: "It is claimed ... that religion is a kind of diabolical yeast, fermenting and fomenting strife and discord ... The argument implies that religious leaders could serve the world best by piping down."

There was little indeed to please free-thinkers. One of the few exceptions was the contribution by Lord Gretton, in his maiden speech: "Education can help but I believe religion will find it hard to help, especially in the case of Northern Ireland as it is one of the primary reasons for social disorder."

An equally realistic contribution came from Lord Hasket who warned: "Religion *does* cause conflict. It is no good lamenting the declining role of religion, harking back to the past when the religion-centred explanation of the world was all that there was. Religion will never again occupy such a place. To contribute to the discussion about human rights issues, it must do so on equal footing with other secular ways of looking at the world. It must win the argument and not see itself as occupying some privileged position."

In another maiden speech, the Bishop of Rochester (Bishop Michael Nazir Ali), himself a former Muslim, used the opportunity to call for more religious tolerance in the world. With the injunction "people who live in glass houses should not throw stones", he opined that in this respect there was still some way to go in the UK. While acknowledging that religious groups and "secular humanists" enjoy greater religious freedom than in past centuries, he expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of statutory protection of religious freedom in Great Britain, except that afforded in some cases under Race Relations legislation.

He then proceeded to decry "so-called blasphemy laws" in Pakistan, but failed to apply his own glass house analogy by omitting to acknowledge that we also have blasphemy law in the UK (something the NSS has written to

him about – see text of letter on page 5).

An example of the increasing mingling of religion and politics in this country came from Baroness Scotland, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. She reassured the House "that all Britain's embassies are properly conscious of the great contribution made by the religious leaders in their regions and have proper access to them." I am not suggesting that our embassies should be banned from contacting religious leaders, but I hope the fawning references above were more a gloss for the benefit of the House than a description of how our diplomats operate.

The debate provided Lord Longford with an opportunity to make another of his grandiloquent historical references to Christianity – like saying Blair was the most Christian Prime Minister since Gladstone. This time he described the proceedings as "the most far-reaching Christian debate since 1961". If judged by the meagre media interest in this Friday afternoon debate, this was something of an overstatement. What we should perhaps be concerned about however is just how much influence is exerted behind the Parliamentary scenes by religionists who constituted the vast majority of those participating in the debate.

In concluding the debate, Dr Carey conceded that "There is so much 'bad' religion around, but there is also a great deal of good religion, with warm humanity in our churches, mosques, synagogues and temples ... We can only create a better world if we can work closely together and see religion as a potential source for change."

This preoccupation with clerics and peace is being mirrored at the United Nations, apparently following a suggestion to its Secretary General by Ted Turner, who owns the CNN network. It is planned to hold a Millennium Peace Summit shortly before the UN General Assembly "to encourage faiths to bury ancient enmities and co-operate in resolving world conflicts". The Pope, Aga Khan, Grand Mufti and Dr Carey are likely to be among the thousand to be invited. Naturally, the proceedings will be broadcast live, presumably on CNN. Former NSS President Barbara Smoker told the *Sunday Telegraph* it was about time religious leaders worked for peace, but doubted whether they would have much impact.

HEA "religious" booklet

THE NSS has asked the Health Secretary to withdraw a report which appears to endorse exorcism as treatment for those with mental health difficulties. The report, *Promoting*

Mental Health, the Role of Faith Communities is published by the Government-funded Health Education Authority. It states that "some hold that deliverance ministry is an important part of their belief in prayer and some people have found exorcism and similar approaches helpful". Although the report includes a number of important *caveats* like "an emphasis on demons and demon possession can be very damaging to vulnerable people", it contains pages of liturgy, prayers and biblical references. The overwhelming thrust of the report is that religion is to be encouraged as a major support for those with mental health difficulties who have faith.

Former Medical Director of the United Nations and recently co-opted National Secular Society Council member Dr Michael Irwin said: "For a Government-funded body to countenance referring people with mental health problems to exorcists is an outrage. This is dangerous mumbo jumbo, not medical treatment. Very few religious leaders have been trained to deal with mental health problems. It is potentially dangerous to expect amateurs to deal with such complex situations."

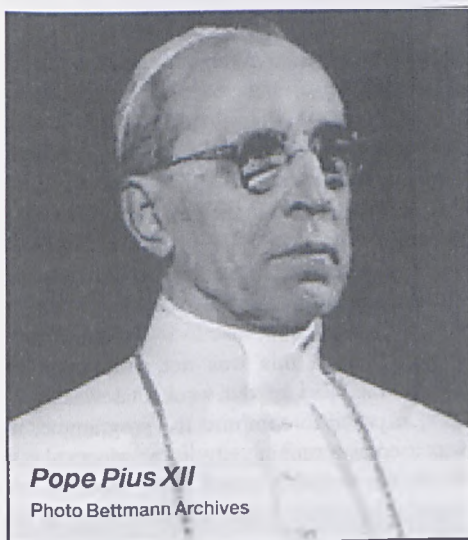
When dealing with those with mental health difficulties, the report advises rabbis and priests not to be judgmental. While some are more sensitive than others, their job requires them to urge their flock to follow the so-called sacred texts. They would be likely, for example, to condemn homosexual relations, which would probably not help any depressed homosexual seeking their help. This is just one specific example of religion being the problem rather than the cure. Many have been scarred by religion-induced guilt or frightened by threats of eternal damnation or the violence of much of the Bible.

An aim of the report is for religious communities to help remove the stigma of mental illness. This is a worthy objective, but let us not forget that religion played a key role in "demonising" or creating the stigma in the first place. Some religious organisations can and do help people with mental difficulties, although secularists would tend to attribute this more to the provision of material help and a sense of community than to religion itself.

Perhaps the facilities provided by religious organisations could be better utilised to provide community support to the religious with mental health problems – but could this report be the thin edge of the wedge; the Government tentatively shifting responsibility for the care of such people? An obvious danger of such a transfer would be that the facilities for the non-religious could gradually atrophy, reducing the quantity and perhaps quality of facilities available to them.

Crimes of the popes

THE VATICAN has announced that it intends to go ahead with the beatification of Pope Pius XII despite his support for Nazism. John Cornwell, a Roman Catholic historian, who had hoped to clear Pius' name by examining the Vatican archive, has found the pro-Nazi allegations to be true. He discovered, *inter alia*, that Pius disbanded the Catholic Centre Party, which stood in Hitler's way, helped stamp out opposition in the Church, and persuaded the Catholic prime minister to form an alliance with the Nazis.



Pope Pius XII

Photo Bettmann Archives

And when I turned to the *Guardian's* comment and analysis page on October 7, I could well have been reading the *Freethinker*. Close as Pius' association with the Holocaust might have been, wrote George Monbiot, "he is unlikely to have been directly responsible for as many deaths as the man who now sits in his place". John Paul II is a "mass murderer": every year he "kills tens, possible hundreds of thousands of the world's most vulnerable people" by forbidding Catholics to use condoms. His fulminations are mostly ignored in Europe, but not in countries where women have few rights and there is little access to alternative sources of information. "Every papal decree against contraception sentences thousands to a lingering death" from Aids. The Pope may personally sympathise with the sufferers, but he refuses to let them use the one sure method for preventing spread of the disease.

Worse still, thanks to Mussolini, the Vatican enjoys national status at the UN General Assembly and uses its position to disrupt the UN's family planning and Aids programmes. And although many Catholic bishops in Africa may privately recognise the absurdity of the Pope's position, their dioceses are

dependent on the Vatican for their funding. In public, therefore, they toe the line and forbid the use of condoms. George Monbiot concluded that John Paul should be indicted for crimes against humanity.

Significantly, none of the letters printed up to the time of writing attempted to defend Pius XII or to justify the present pope's contraceptive ban. And the "official" reply from the Rev Kieran Conry of the Catholic Media Office merely argued that there was no higher incidence of Aids in African countries that are mainly Roman Catholic.

He then stupidly asked whether the spread of Aids would be halted if the Pope were to change his mind tomorrow.

The answer, of course, is no, but it would be a great help, as it would have been if Pius XII had excommunicated Hitler and Mussolini.

A female lament

FIVE days later, following news that Cardinal Thomas Winning was giving financial support to girls as young as 12 who refuse an abortion, the *Guardian* carried another critical piece, though this time by a practising Roman Catholic, Joanna Moorhead.

The Cardinal, she declared, was out of touch with women because, like the rest of his brethren in the hierarchy, "he knows hardly anything about us". In her 36 years as a card-carrying Catholic and especially in her six years working for organisations within the Church, Moorhead had met a lot of priests, and most of them had only two women in their lives: their deeply religious mother who "raised six, seven or eight children without a murmur of complaint", and the Virgin Mary who, "as a paragon of uncomplaining virtue" put even their mothers in the shade. Then they either led a celibate life or were involved in a sexual relationship cloaked in fear and guilt. Either way was unsatisfactory.

Joanna Moorhead had given up trying to explain why she felt so strongly that women as well as men should be admitted to the priesthood. Some Roman Catholic women had decided to opt out altogether or turn to a more woman-friendly church. Her own church, as she rightly wrote, had never been "in tune with the women in its ranks". Now, "on the eve of the third millennium of Christianity, it's more

Quotable quote

An atheist is a man who has no invisible means of support.

— H E Fosdick (1878 – 1969)
(also attributed to John Buchan)

out of touch with us than ever".

Which is really saying something.

Empty pews in the Netherlands

LAST July, the *Tablet* carried an article by Jan Kerkhofs deploring the decline of Christianity in the Netherlands in the present century. According to a 1900 census, only 1 per cent of the population said they didn't belong to a Christian church; by 1958 the figure had risen to 24 per cent; and by 1991 to 58 per cent, and as high as 70 per cent in the 21-30 age group. If the trend continues, only a quarter of the Dutch people will be Christian by the year 2020.

Taking up the theme in the *Guardian's* "Face to Faith" column on August 14, Patrick Reyntiens described Amsterdam as already a "post-Christian civilisation", with the city's churches reduced to the status of "museums", although that hardly seemed the right word when they contained nothing but "an oversized 17th century kitchen table". Similarly vacuous was Sint Bavo's Kerk at Haarlem. True, there was a beautiful display of Spanish religious art in the Nieuwe Kerk, but even this was exhibited without "spiritual or psychological empathy".

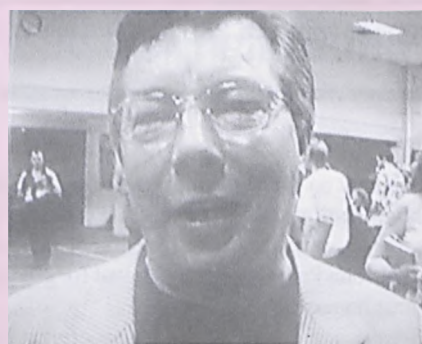
Like a museum, in fact. And to make matters worse, the Dutch exhibitors had treated the immaculate conception and the virgin birth "with condescension allied to incomprehension".

Exactly as they should be.

Beware of Baptists offering love

WE HAVE all opened – and closed – our doors to American Mormons; but we have not yet been bothered by the Southern Baptist Church, which claims to have 16 million members in the USA and 4,800 missionaries around the world. And perhaps we will be spared. The aim at present seems to be conversion of Muslims and Jews, particularly at sensitive times like Ramadin and the Jewish New Year, respectively. Hindus and Buddhists must look out, however, as conversion manuals are being prepared for them.

Meanwhile, American Jewish leaders have reacted strongly to the Baptists' campaign of "love". "We'd like a little less love and a little more respect", said Rabbi Eric Yoffie, President of the American Hebrew Congregations. What came through was not "love" but "arrogance". Mind you, what irritated him most was the Southern Baptist taunt that 70 per cent of the world's Jews were "secularists or atheists", which could well be true.



Christian Gerald Coates

An estimated 1.4 million viewers of the 2 programme, *Living with the Enemy*, on 13 October 1999. After the screening, the programme received hundreds of calls – the major one from Barbara. In addition, a spiritist was contacted on an internet forum.

My week with the

The fly-on-the-wall BBC2 television series, *Living with the Enemy*, brings together extremists on either side of a contentious issue. The issue chosen for the programme transmitted on 13 October was Christianity versus atheism, for which I was chosen as the representative atheist, while the “enemy” with whom I was to lodge for a week in Surrey was Gerald Coates, leader of the Pioneer Team – a widespread evangelical Christian network of about 100 happy-clappy churches and several social projects in the “new church” movement – together with his wife and colleagues.

A great deal of time and trouble is devoted to selecting the protagonists for this series, but at the end of the day the producers are more interested in personal confrontation than in the issues themselves. The editing policy therefore concentrates on trivia at the expense of anything that might smack of an intellectual debate – which, to ratings-conscious television moguls, is nowadays anathema for any programme destined for prime-time transmission.

In fact, it seems to me that there has been noticeable “dumbing down” even in the past year, since the previous series of *Living with the Enemy* showed more sustained argument on the issues between the enemies than we were allowed – as the *Daily Telegraph* critic, reviewing the programme I was in, pointed out: **Living with the Enemy (BBC2) obligingly served up a neat illustration of its own decline. In the last series, the religious journalist Damian Thompson spent a week with an evangelical group. There was a difference of beliefs, but the two sides made a decent attempt to understand each other and had real conversations.**

This time, he complained, “the two people simply shouted across each other until the programme ended”. It is not true that it was all shouting, but certainly any “real conversations” on theology (as opposed to personal matters) were almost entirely edited out.

Gerald was as long-winded and evasive as any politician, but he was always gentlemanly to me – rather too smooth, in fact – whereas I was my usual abrasive self.

However, I only once really lost my cool. Needless to say, that moment was seized on by the editors as being good screen fodder. It took place during the only communal dinner of the week, to which Gerald and his wife had invited four of their evangelical activists. So there was I – Daniel in the lions’ den, pitted against six of them, and trying to eat at the same time: not the most relaxing situation. In the end, I turned on one of the four guests, and told him he was weak-brained. Had I simply said that in

the sphere of religion he was allowing his emotions to get the better of his reason, it would have sounded less rude.

Gerald protested that the man must be very intelligent, since he earns £100,000 a year – which suggested something to do with serving Mammon. Indeed, as the preview in the *Evening Standard’s* “Hot Tickets” magazine noted, “the evangelists ... unwittingly reveal their mercenary smugness.”

Most of the previews were reasonably kind to me. “In keeping with this series,” said the *Guardian*, “both sides remain unconvinced of the other’s beliefs. But Barbara knows her Bible and can argue the toss more strenuously than Gerald.”

What an extraordinarily wasteful medium television is today. Though the fly-on-the-wall documentary is by no means the most expensive format, since it saves on studio costs and high celebrity fees, it is by far the most time-wasting. I realised, of course, that they would shoot many times the film footage required, but was amazed to discover that it was as much as sixty times the requirement – that is, some thirty hours of filming, often employing two camera angles, for a programme limited to 28 minutes.

Needless to say, the whole production team, from the executive producer and series producer down the hierarchy to the director of the production team for the particular programme, the assistant producer and various technicians, complain that the programme deserves a whole hour, but the inadequate time at their disposal does not mean that they edit out irrelevances and avoid repetition. What it does mean is that they can choose some funny or disconcerting episode as the main theme of the programme.

In our case, it was the alleged miracle of the sudden alchemic transmutation of amalgam tooth fillings into gold. There had been one such hysterical occurrence during a “Toronto

Blessing” at Gerald’s home church the week before my visit, but the ridicule this had attracted in the tabloid press caused him and his colleagues to shield the miracle recipient from any further contact with the media and to ban us from filming in the same church during my resident week. So the director of our production team resorted to showing me a video of the event and filming my reaction to it.

Although this was not, strictly speaking, part of the week that was supposed to comprise the programme, it was used as a running gag – the camera shots inside the woman’s mouth being repeated, as though the editors had insufficient material to fill their 28 minutes.

I actually feel quite sorry for the woman (pictured on the cover) for making such a public fool of herself, but I cannot help being glad that she enabled me to get in the best of my quips that was not edited out: I asked Gerald why, even if she was convinced about the gold miracle, she had ascribed it to God, when it would seem more logical to ascribe it to the tooth fairy; to which he solemnly declared that he did not believe in the tooth fairy.

As the *Evening Standard* commented in its write-up of the programme, “Perhaps God is the tooth fairy”.

It seemed to me that God the Dentist made my “enemy” too easy a target for me and I would have been better off with a more traditional theologian. After the transmission, however, I scrolled (on a friend’s internet) the BBC’s Online Forum on the programme, running to 214 messages, and, to my horror, found that a number of the contributors – presumably, educated, computer-literate young people – do actually believe in alchemy.

The one head-to-head argument that I would have particularly liked to retain was my attack on the immoral doctrine of salvation through vicarious atonement – which, though the very

... viewers saw Barbara
 ... theist viewpoint in the BBC
 ... *with the Enemy*, on October
 ... the BBC received many
 ... majority in support of
 ... spirited debate was
 ... forum set up by the BBC.



Atheist Barbara Smoker

the evangelists

cornerstone of Christianity, is inexplicably overlooked by most atheist philosophers. (Carefully avoiding hard words like "vicarious", I used the analogy of the whipping-boy, but it was obviously still too serious for peak-time viewing.) Gerald's response, that the Saviour had willingly accepted crucifixion for love of humanity, hardly makes the scenario either moral or rational; it merely makes Christ masochistic so as to excuse the Father's capricious sadism.

I allowed the kind-hearted ladies who run a weekly "prayer station" in Cobham to pray over my chronically tingly fingers, in a hope-

less attempt at faith-healing - though I did warn them I had no faith whatsoever in their ministrations. Afterwards, asked what I would have said had my fingers thereupon improved, I had to admit that, deferring to David Hume, I would have put it down to coincidence, which would be so much more credible than the supernatural suspension of natural law - the agreed definition of a miracle.

Since my week's intercourse with the evangelicals I have been asked by several people whether it moderated my atheism. Now that *would* be a miracle.

- Barbara Smoker



Hysteria at one of the evangelical prayer meeting shown in the documentary

Viewers have their say

HERE IS a small selection of the 214 messages on the BBC's on-line forum after the screening of *Living with the Enemy*.

- Barbara speaks the truth. How refreshing to be able to listen to someone trying to spread the truth instead of the word ... we already have enough religious programmes on TV so it was long overdue to have the other side of the argument aired.

- What a wasted opportunity. Instead of an interesting and informed debate about Christianity vs secularism, we had half-an-hour of little more than petty name-calling. The woman "defending" secularism was narrow-minded and rude ...

- Ah Barbara, so nice to hear a sane person speak ... don't worry about God - "he" only exists through faith, so if you don't believe in him, he can't exist!

- Why are there so many angry atheists out there?

- We're not angry, just exasperated. We cannot believe how gullible you religious types are - my parents included. We're trying to save you!

- I am a committed Christian and I believe in all miracles which come from God through prayer in the name of Jesus. As a result of prayer I have witnessed the miracle of gold fillings in my (Christian) parents' teeth.

- No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless it is more likely that the miracle is true than the testimony is false. The very nature of the miraculous and the well-documented mendacity of the human species just about sews this one up.

- (1) Accepting that God cannot possibly be omnipotent AND man have free will, why should I worship a flawed God? Equally, if man has no free will, is it ordained that I should be an atheist, and so will I have a decent spot in heaven (preferably with convenient parking)?

(2) Taking into account the fact that "God moves in mysterious ways" is an oft-used cop-out, does this mean that God is inherently incomprehensible? And if this is so, why should I believe the interpretations of any religious leader?

• The BBC's on-line Forum proved particularly useful to the secularist cause as it included links to both the National Secular Society and the Freethinker websites.

THE US PRESIDENTIAL campaign has only just begun, and already it discomforts me. Seldom can a candidate give a speech without rhetorically launching us into a new millennium. Each describes a new world in which every child thrives in school, everyone lives longer, and a rising tide of living standards raises all boats.

Politicians are not alone in predicting progress. In the October 1-3 issue of *USA Weekend*, doctors and scientists promise that during the next decade medicine will attack diseases with a new arsenal of "magic bullets". Walter Lippmann's "American Century" is finally here, and we can join Andrew Carnegie in climbing "onward and upward".

But my sense of *deja vu* leads me to wonder whether we will make much progress. I think we will enter the 21st century with the convictions of the early 20th century and will have trouble creating something new from what is old. The truth is that we have never shed the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. In 1901 he began to teach philosophy at the University of Goettingen, where he bedeviled undergraduates by asking them what they saw when he held up an apple. At such moments the room would fall quiet, for the students had an uneasy feeling of being lured into a trap. A student would at last summon the courage to announce that he saw an apple, but Husserl would repeat the question until someone answered that he saw redness and roundness. With other senses one could feel solidity, taste tartness, and smell a delicate fragrance. In short, no such thing as an apple exists. Rather we choose to construct one from the phenomena of redness, roundness, and the like.

From Goettingen phenomenology has spread to the popular culture of America, a land where Cindy Crawford may have the most recognizable face. Like an apple, Crawford does not exist as a coherent whole for us. The archetypal woman, she is a composite of lips, breasts, hips, hair, and the trademark mole. Her appearance matters to us because she is beautiful. To be more precise, we define Crawford as nothing more than a collection of phenomena which we judge to be beautiful. Without these phenomena, without this beauty, she would disappear from the magazines and television that saturate our lives. She would cease to exist for us.

For nearly a century, then, our somnolence in the doldrums of phenomenology belies the notion of progress. More to the point, the very notion of progress is obsolete. The great biological idea of the last two centuries may be extinction rather than evolution. The fossil record reveals that 9/10 of all species are now



An artist's impression of an encounter between early hominids on the plains of Africa. It is believed that early humans had a common ape ancestor in East Africa seven million years ago.

Illustration: Topham Picture Library.

extinct. It is tempting to believe, as Herbert Spencer did, that the dull perish whereas the bright survive. After all, brontosaurus and his lumbering kin have been extinct more than 60 million years, though we continue to thrive. We can bask in the knowledge that the pageant of life has culminated in us.

But this view cannot stand scrutiny. Species last an average of five million years, but like every average, this one conceals the extremes.

Neanderthal had a brain as large as ours but survived less than one million years; the dragonfly, with just a few ganglia for a brain, has hovered over the earth for more than 60 million years. Bacteria have not needed a brain to thrive for all 3.5 billion years of life on earth. By contrast hominids, the brainiest animals, have barely clung to life during the last geological blink of an eye. Donald Johanson believes six or seven species of them may have existed two million years ago; we alone are left. Our once luxuriant bush has withered to a single twig.

What explains our survival, and does our

survival prove that progress is real? Both *Australopithecus bosei* and Neanderthal probably were stronger than us, judging from their sturdy skeletons. *Homo habilis* was the first to make tools, and *Homo erectus* first tamed fire.

Neanderthal began the practice of burying the dead, evidence that she was the first hominid to be conscious of existence. We were johnny-come-latelies to all these milestones, yet we alone have survived.

If we cannot claim superior strength or intellect as a reason for our longevity, we may have no choice but to admit that we have simply been more lucky than our kin. We are the youngest hominid, having existed only for the last 100,000 years. This is no proof of our superiority, given the longevity of bacteria, the dragonfly, the shark, and other species we would like to deem inferior. "Replay the tape of evolution," says Stephen Jay Gould, and *Homo habilis* or Neanderthal might still be alive, not us. Perhaps all hominids would now be extinct.

If this is progress, it does not reassure me.

Ingersoll goes to the fringe

Following its successful appearances at Conway Hall in London and Leicester Secular Hall, the Ingersoll centenary play *The Time to be Happy* can be seen at Teatro Technis, 26 Crowndale Road, London NW1 on Friday, November 26 at 7.30pm (tel 0171 387 6617)

The play, devised by GALHA chairperson Derek Lennard, features Keith Porteous Wood and Terry Sanderson. It will be followed by a discussion on humanism.

Tickets are £6.50 (Concessions £4.)

Bride and groom croaked

THE PRIEST chanted hymns, the guests clapped, the bride and groom croaked. Hundreds filled a Hindu temple for the wedding of two frogs – a ceremony to appease the rain gods in Assam, India's rainiest region which at the time was in drought. A third frog acted as bridesmaid.

– Report in *The Age*, Brisbane

"Saffron scandals" in Thailand

BUDDHIST MONKS in Thailand, according to a recent report by Andrew Marshall in *The Times Magazine*, are behaving so badly that the government proposed late last year that, before entering the monkhood, all men should be urine-tested for drugs, and blood-tested for HIV.

The proposal came after Thai newspapers began carrying lurid reports of all manner of crime committed by monks. Among the many photographs published in the *Thai Rath* newspaper was one of a monk tussling with police trying to confiscate the mobile phone he stole from the abbot. Another shows a monk in handcuffs, arrested for dealing in heroin.

Thai police have received more than 60 complaints about drug abuse in Buddhist temples over a two year period.

Other "saffron scandals", as they are called, include a monk who got drunk and raped a 21-year-old woman at knifepoint, and another who was jailed for shooting dead his homosexual lover who had tried to break off the relationship.

There are almost 300,000 men and boys in the Buddhist monkhood, or Sangha, an institution revered almost as much as Thailand's beloved monarchy, but Thai Buddhism is said to be woefully out of touch. "Mainstream Buddhism doesn't work any longer," says Sulak Sivaraksa, a co-founder of the International network of Engaged Buddhists, a global activist group.

Aussies denied Joan of Arc replay

AUSTRALIANS are asking themselves what ever happened to the mass suicide promised by the Magnificat Meal Movement.

Followers of the MMM, which worships the Virgin Mary and whose leader Debra Geileskey claims to speak to both Mary and God, were expected to vanish in a puff of smoke on the

ninth day of the ninth month, 1999.

Geileskey reported in her diary in 1996 that she had a vision that she would be burnt at the stake, just like Joan of Arc, and it was generally believed that she would lead her flock in a fiery mass suicide on September 9.

The media kept watch over the cult's compound at Helidon, west of Brisbane, but had nothing to report except a car chase up the Great Dividing Range, from Helidon to Toowoomba. This occurred after Geileskey and a group of her followers sped out of the compound, followed by assorted hacks and photographers. Police say that dangerous driving charges may be brought against sect members involved in the chase.

Name that lama

A SEVEN-YEAR-OLD New Zealand boy has been recognised as the reincarnation of a Tibetan High Lama. As a result of his recognition, Karma Kunsang has been renamed Karma Kunsang Thuten Dorje Lungtok Nyima Pal Sang Po Pong Re Rinpoche. He ranks just below the Dalai Lama. The boy was recognised after a series of signs, including the local Buddhist community reporting "a feeling" he was a special person at his birth.

PERSONAL VIEW: Whatever happened to prevention being better than cure?

IN HEALTH matters it seemed, back in the 60s and 70s, that the idea of preventative medicine being better than waiting until people got sick *then* trying to cure them, had eventually got through.

What we wanted was a "National Health Service", not a "National ill-Health Service"! At last the notion was accepted – we thought – that it made more personal and economic sense, that illness where possible should be prevented or at least dealt with as early as possible.

Instead of waiting until a condition or disease reached an advanced stage when it would be more difficult to treat, even be untreatable, or have done much damage to the patient's health in the meantime, early advice or treatment should be encouraged. No one now seems to defend this strategy, that in keeping people healthy, prevention is better than cure.

All we hear through the media is that people are "taking advantage" of the NHS and doctors, by seeking advice and treatment too soon, before they *are* really ill!

In education, although not the result of planned policy, the historical establishment of denominational schools, and the religious content of the syllabus illustrates the impossibility of ridding ourselves of religious indoctrination. Pressure from the churches and religionists ensures that not only existing denominational schools persist (with housing following and the current spectacle of Ulster sectarianism), but now other religious groups want to claim their own slice of control of the education system to perpetuate their beliefs.

In the same way that there is no such thing as a "comprehensive"

school if there are selective schools in the system, there is no such thing as a non-denominational school where there are sectarian schools, taking out one set of pupils.

Unwillingness to cure the problem promises to let it get worse rather than better. In this case it is neither being prevented nor cured.

Now for once government has a chance with the constitutional changes to the proposed upper chamber (if we really need one) to avoid such sectarian problems with that body in the future. If it takes easy options now the results will be back to haunt them and us all in the future.

– Prevention will obviate the need for cure.

The government is under intense pressure not only from the C of E to keep its privileged position, for its bishops to sit as peers as at present, but also from all the other religions and denominations wanting to get in on the act. They all know that if they can just get the plush red seats under their bottoms it will be very difficult to shift them later. And who can blame them, after all? The value of seats in the chamber as a platform for them to promote their religions and gain publicity is immense.

The NSS is almost alone in countering this plethora of religious lobbying with a rational and coherent submission. We should take every opportunity to warn our elected representatives of the dangers in the hope of appealing to such good sense they may have.

– A W F Mayer

THE great merit of Montaigne, wrote William Hazlitt, was that he "had the courage to say as an author what he felt as a man". The same might be said of Hazlitt himself. As Virginia Woolf remarked, "He has no reticence and he has no shame". And his grandson Carew Hazlitt noted a "radical incapacity", which Hazlitt shared with his father of the same name, for disguising what he felt.

"Radical" is the operative word, as recognised in Tom Paulin's sub-title. William's father, a Unitarian minister, was a fearless radical who inspired his children with a passionate political commitment. They were known as "Real Whigs": intellectual descendants of the Commonwealth men who briefly made England a republic in the seventeenth century, in a line of descent which Tom Paulin traces from Milton, Harrington and Algernon Sidney.

William was born in Maidstone in 1778 and attended the Unitarian academy Hackney New College in the 1790s, when Unitarians were under attack from government, and from Edmund Burke, as "avowed enemies" of the Anglican Church. "Letters were opened at the post office, several prominent Unitarians were imprisoned, and some were transported to Botany Bay", says Paulin. And on July 14 1791, "a church-and-king mob" set fire to Priestley's house and laboratory in Birmingham; an act which prompted the 13-year-old Hazlitt, then living in Wem, to write a letter of protest to the *Shrewsbury Chronicle*.

Priestley, whom the young boy described as "one of the best, one of the wisest, and one of the greatest of men", was later to be one of Hazlitt's teachers at Hackney New College, where the students had given Thomas Paine a republican supper and made republican speeches, much to the disgust of the royalists.

Paulin sees the attack on Priestley's house and the Treason Trials of the London shoemaker Thomas Hardy, John Horne Tooke and others (all acquitted) as "seminal events" in Hazlitt's life. He frequently referred to the trials and their defendants in his writings, and was later commissioned by Thomas Holcroft's widow to compile a memoir of her husband, another of the defendants. He also paid tribute to William Godwin, whose pamphlet, published just before Hardy's trial, "possibly saved the lives of twelve innocent individuals". The philosopher, as Paulin says, "had won a decisive victory over the State".

And on August 17, 1819, the day after the Peterloo massacre, Hazlitt gave a copy of his "angriest and most provocative book", *Political Essays*, to Godwin, inscribed "with the Author's best respects". The book itself was dedicated to Leigh Hunt's brother John,

"The tried, steady, zealous, and conscientious advocate of the liberty of his country, and the rights of mankind ..." In 1813 the Hunt brothers had been sentenced to two years' imprisonment and a fine of £500 each for libelling the Prince Regent in their journal the *Examiner*, to which Hazlitt contributed. He was also to risk imprisonment after Waterloo by his violent attacks on the government.

Historically, Hazlitt saw the Reformation as giving a "mighty impulse and increased activity" to intellectual argument and scientific enquiry throughout Europe after the gothic darkness and "intolerable abuses" of centuries. Paulin notes that by layering his account of the Reformation with a series of historical allusions, Hazlitt "is able to compare that event both to the fall of the Bastille and to an explo-

The Day-Star of Liberty:

William Hazlitt's Radical Style

by Tom Paulin. Faber and

Faber paperback (illustrated)

£10.99.

Humanism: Beliefs and

Practices by Jeaneane Fowler.

Sussex Academic Press £15.99

sion. The Reformation agitates inert prejudices, rather like Joseph Priestley conducting experiments with electricity, and it also produces a heroic race of writers". Noted, too, is Hazlitt's use of the alchemical term "projection", which Paulin follows up at some length with typical insight and erudition.

He is equally enlightening on general influences affecting the essayist, citing, for example, Priestley's advice to his pupils to give the appearance of "present thought, and extempore unprepared address" when writing or speaking, which will make them appear "in earnest". Philosophically, he points out, although rejecting Locke's idea of the understanding, Hazlitt "believed strongly in the relationship between the body and the understanding, the senses and the intellect. So intense was his critical monism that he uses both 'body' and 'unctuous' as terms of the highest aesthetic approbation...This concept of perfect mental and physical integration is the very foundation of Hazlitt's critical method."

Hazlitt praised the "singular unified sensi-

bility" of seventeenth century English prose, notably that of Bacon and Jeremy Taylor. The former's "induction of particulars is alike wonderful for learning and vivacity, for curiosity and dignity, and an all-pervading intellect binds the whole together in a graceful and pleasing form"; while Taylor's style displayed a "transparent brilliancy", a prose style which, like Hazlitt's own is, in Paulin's words, "more than prose—at least as prose is commonly understood". We should read Hazlitt's prose as if it were the work of a creative writer: "Hazlitt on Milton is also Hazlitt on Hazlitt".

Above all, Paulin emphasises the influence of the Ulster-born "father of the Scottish Enlightenment" Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), whose "greatest happiness for the greatest number" was famously adapted by Jeremy Bentham, and whose ideas "shaped the culture of Rational Dissent". Hutcheson observed that all our pleasures are increased by sharing. "There's scarce any cheerful or joyful commotion of mind which does not naturally require to be diffused and communicated". And Hazlitt, like his admired Bacon, is driven by a need to "exalt the good which is communicative".

Hazlitt was incensed by England's opposition to the French Revolution, its siding with a reactionary, primitive Roman Catholicism, and he invoked the voice of "outraged humanity" over the massacre of the Waldensians in Piedmont in 1655. "Voltaire heard it, Rousseau heard it, Milton heard and gave it back in that noble sonnet to 'our slaughtered Piedmontese brethren'". But, Hazlitt continued scathingly, "Mr Wordsworth, though he must have heard of the massacre at Nimes, has not yet made them the subject of a sonnet to the King, nor has Mr Southey whispered the case of the Spanish Patriots in the ear of the Prince Regent". The English government, he declared, wanted to give back to the Roman Church "her fires, her mummeries, her holy oil, her power over the bodies and the minds of men". Had John Bull nothing better to do than to turn "bottle holder to the Pope of Rome"?

Hazlitt had no religious belief, but in moments of crisis he identified with Unitarian values and more widely with Dissenting Protestantism; and he showed what Paulin calls a type of emotional and tribal solidarity in defending Unitarianism against the attacks of Coleridge and Southey. Coleridge was unfavourably contrasted with Godwin and likened to a balloonist who forsook the "plain ground of prose". Hazlitt noted, incidentally, that Coleridge had called his first son Hartley after the "associationist" philosopher; then had

(Continued on next page)

"become suddenly enamoured of Bishop Berkeley's fairy world", whose name was given to the second son. The third was named Derwent, after the river of that name, appropriately Hazlitt thought, because Coleridge's ideas were like a river "flowing on for ever, and still murmuring as it flows".

Tom Paulin disputes E P Thompson's view of Hazlitt as simply a middle-class reformer whose style "with its sustained and controlled rhythms, and its antithetical movement", belongs to the "polite culture of the essayist". Hazlitt was rather "a radical who knows something of the apparently unreformable, desperate, heroic, present-centred nature of common life".

The year 1821 was a distressing one for Hazlitt, with the death of his friend Keats in Rome on February 23 and of his hero Napoleon on St Helena on May 5. A month later the essayist (also a painter, we must remember) saw a painting by Poussin at the Royal Institution in London which inspired him to write an essay which Paulin calls "more than a piece of art criticism: it is an elegy for those two geniuses and for the values he shared with them". "On a Landscape of Nicolas Poussin", says Paulin, "has one of the finest opening paragraphs in the history of criticism, a paragraph so long and carefully moulded, so epic in its momentum, that it's like a concentrated essay in itself." And when you get this scholarly and stimulating book you will be able to read those 50 lines with the same pleasure as I did.

It was in that same year, 1821, that Hazlitt composed his essay *On the Fear of Death*, to which he prefixed Prospero's words "Our little life is rounded with a sleep", and in which he compared non-existence after death with non-existence before birth, a time when "we were not called to appear upon the stage of life, to wear robes or tatters, to laugh or cry, be hooted or applauded; we had lain perdu all this while, snug, out of harm's way..." But "there is nothing in the idea of a pre-existent state that excites our longing like the prospect of a posthumous existence". In reflecting on death, however, "we mix up the idea of life with it, and thus make it the ghastly monster that it is. We think how we should feel, not how the dead feel."

William Hazlitt died in 1830.

— Colin McCall

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THERE IS a real need for straightforward impartial accounts of the system of belief and behaviour based on a view of the world without supernatural or superstitious support, whether it is described neutrally as

freethought, or negatively as unbelief or infidelity, atheism or agnosticism, or positively as secularism or rationalism, ethicism or humanism. There have of course been many books and booklets, pamphlets and articles, produced by the organised freethought movement, but most of these have been propaganda rather than exposition; there have also been several critical publications produced by outsiders, but most of these have been sectarian or academic or ignorant, or all three; there have been few attempts to take a middle path.

Jeaneane Fowler, a research fellow at the University of Wales College in Newport, has made a serious effort to fill the gap. Her 360page paperback appears in the *Sussex Library of Religious Beliefs and Practices*, a series which is "intended for students of religion, social sciences and history, and for the interested layperson", and for which she has already written one book on Hinduism and is now writing another on Taoism. It might be feared that a new book on humanism would be prejudiced by such a provenance, but Barbara Smoker's old booklet on humanism also appeared in an educational series on world religions, and Fowler's new book doesn't show any signs of constraint by its context.

Forewords

On the other hand, it does take a definite and narrow line in the wide and vague field of freethought, as indicated by fulsome forewords by Hermann Bondi and Paul Kurtz, leading figures in two of the largest humanist organisations in the English-speaking world. In fact Fowler concentrates on the beliefs and practices which are expressed in Britain by the British Humanist Association and in the United States by the Council for Secular Humanism, and which may be called capital H or "lifestance" humanism (she quotes the arguments on this subject between Harry Stopes Roe and myself, preferring the former).

This centralist humanism is distinguished from more militant forms of freethought, as represented by the National Secular Society and the Rationalist Press Association. It is significant that Fowler acknowledges help from the BHA but not from either the NSS or the RPA, and that her material on the specifically secularist and rationalist movements is not only very brief but also rather unreliable (despite being largely taken from work by David Tribe, Jim Herrick and myself). This centralist humanism is also distinguished from religious humanism, as represented by the Unitarian and Universalist churches, the Positivist and Ethical movements, and the

recent Sea of Faith movement. It is significant that Fowler virtually ignores this milieu, although it was the background of the British and American humanist organisations and is still a source of humanist recruitment.

Other limitations of the book are that it says almost nothing about freethought in other parts of the world including only a few passing references to the International Humanist and Ethical Union and to the Netherlands, Norway and India; and little about freethought as applied to other areas than religion including only a couple of pages on pseudoscience and the paranormal. After all, it is arguable that freethought in general is more serious outside than inside the English-speaking world, and that freethought in the particular form which has become known as "skepticism" is more serious than traditional freethought. But the academy is even more parochial than the media.

However, once it is clear what this book is and is not about, it is possible to appreciate its account of what many unbelievers in Britain and the United States who call themselves humanists think and do in areas which were once monopolised by religion. After a chapter on humanism in general, there are chapters on the humanist view of human beings, of God and faith, of society and morality, of reason and doubt, of life and death, and of rituals and ceremonies. The approach is sympathetic, and the treatment is conscientious; most of the information is relevant, even if much of the discussion is not.

Freethinkers, both inside and outside the formal movement, will disagree with various points. I would dispute many historical details, and I dislike the inclusion of specifically religious items in examples of ceremonies. I can't help feeling that too much space is given to the negation of religion and too little to the affirmation of humanity. I especially regret the absence of any discussion of the place of art and literature, music and humour, in the humanist view of the world. I am bored by the repetition of so many platitudinous remarks by the author and the inclusion of so many unnecessary quotations from other authors, and I am repelled by the ponderous style and verbose arguments.

As is so often the case, the book would have been much better if it had covered more ground more briefly and more clearly. But it is one of the few books on humanism which can be recommended to outsiders, even if with qualifications, and Jeaneane Fowler deserves our gratitude for trying so hard to explain what we are up to.

— Nicolas Walter

Bradlaugh and the Tories

I MISSED Peter Windle's comments (May *Freethinker*) on Charles Bradlaugh and socialism, but thought Bill McIlroy delivered a *coup de grâce* (June) to any suggestion he was a Tory manqué.

Despite this Mr Windle returned to the fray (August) with an argument along the lines that if a skua isn't a seagull it must be an albatross. Not only that, but it's alleged that because Mr McIlroy claims a skua isn't an albatross he must be a supporter of seagulls.

There is however a serious side to historical projections which may be worth considering. Political ideologies and party platforms don't always coincide, and both evolve with time. A commentator might have claimed, for example, that the Conservative Party would never choose as parliamentary leader a Jew, a bachelor or a woman; yet the unthinkable happened. So when at the end of *President Charles Bradlaugh, MP* (1971), I asked "What would Charles Bradlaugh himself be were he alive today?" my answer was "It is hard to say. Some possibilities were canvassed. But membership of the Conservative Party wasn't one of them!"

Attitudes to socialism crop up a lot in the *Freethinker*, usually without definition. The problem is, of course, that there are so many possibilities. Let me set out Bradlaugh's attitude, as I see it, to some of them.

In his youth he identified with supporters of Owenism, a woolly and fraying mixture of utopian socialism and "rational religion". Later in life, as a prime exemplar of common-sense and practicality, he merely commented that all the utopian experiments (communes with an average life of 18 months) had failed. Throughout his life he was a friend and/or supporter of many continental socialists and anarchists because they were the chief opponents of tyranny and superstition. And he remained a close friend and colleague of Annie Besant after she turned "scientific" socialist.

I would expect him, if alive today, to be sympathetic to "socialism" if it meant – as it does to many contemporary advocates, whether of the "champagne" or "beer" variety – "from each according to his ability, to each according to the work done"; equating "national interest" and "social contract" with "public good" and not "class interest"; expecting "free enterprise" to embrace co-operative endeavour rather than cut-throat competition; promoting liberty, equality (of opportunity) and fraternity. He would oppose "socialism" if it meant – as it does to Marxists, heirs of the Social Democratic Federation and Socialist League and linguistic purists, including myself, who

like words to have distinctive meanings, a stepping-stone to communism ("from each according to his ability, to each according to his need"); class struggle; red revolution; levelling down instead of up; "public ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange"; curtailment of personal liberty in the interest of a supposititious "greater good". His objection would be that the inevitable "cure" of Stalinism was worse than the "disease" of capitalism. In other words, his objection was practical rather than ideological.

Conversely, the objection of the Conservative Party to socialism is ideological rather than practical, on the grounds that it is man-centred rather than God-centred; fundamentally hostile to notions of monarchy, aristocracy, squirearchy, hereditary privilege, social classes, patriarchy, paternalism, religion and all other hierarchical structures; desirous of replacing all private philanthropy with a comprehensive welfare state; prone to mass hysteria and therefore politically unstable; supportive of an "illusory" goal of world brotherhood and therefore essentially unpatriotic. While Bradlaugh and Toryism may have come to the same conclusion about socialism, I can't see him wanting to be associated with the above world-view!

Then there's the question of whether the Conservative Party would want Bradlaugh as a member. The objection of his contemporaries that he was "uneducated" (he left school at eleven - not uncommon at the time) wouldn't apply today, as he would have gained scholarships to secondary school and university whether or not education was literally free. But he would probably still be too independent, iconoclastic ("Iconoclast" was a pseudonym he chose), down-to-earth, rabble-rousing and egalitarian for Tory tastes. To say nothing of his views on church and state.

I don't know what the current situation is, but at the time of my involvement the Humanist Parliamentary Group was unable to recruit a single Tory. Some Conservative MPs told me privately that they supported its aims and those of the National Secular Society but couldn't afford to be associated with it because of the attitude of Conservative Central Office and/or, their constituency party.

DAVID TRIBE
Australia

Bryan: setting the record straight

I'M MYSTIFIED by Keith J Ackermann's claim (*Freethinker*, October) that William Jennings Bryan was the nearest America ever came to a socialist candidate for president.

Over the years the American Socialist Party put up candidates such as Eugene Debs and Norman Thomas – twice they polled nearly a million votes. The Socialist Labor Party, Communist Party and Socialist Workers' Party also stood for election.

Bryan stood three times as the candidate of the Democratic Party. While some of his policies such as monetary reform were progressive, Teddy Roosevelt called them "an attack on civilization". Bryan was never a socialist and never called himself one.

What Bryan was was a Presbyterian – a fundamentalist who thought that the Bible was inspired by God and every word was literal truth. He opposed the theory of evolution, which he wanted banned, because he thought it undermined public morals. His motivation for his anti-evolutionism, like his prohibitionism, was in no small measure

his view that it was a vote winner.

I can find no evidence that Bryan opposed evolution because of his opposition to its misuses by Social Darwinists and Eugenicist totalitarians. Can Keith provide a source for this claim?

Clarence Darrow was by no means as bad as Keith depicts him. A Democrat who for many years was close to the Socialists, he was a noted labour lawyer who had defended among others Debs and Ben Gitlow, a Communist candidate for Vice President. He had a keen interest in science and organised a Biology Club which was addressed by the leading scientists of the day. His letter to Bryan which put fifty five questions about Biblical truth was never answered.

Inherit The Wind is dramatic fiction, and as such cannot depict historical personalities in an accurate way. For a factual account I would suggest Ray Ginger's *Six Days or Forever?* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1958). This draws fair and accurate pen portraits of both Bryan and Darrow.

By all means let us discuss historical events and personalities. However, it would be useful if contributors to the discussion gathered all, or as many as possible of the facts before hand.

TERRY LIDDLE
London.

"Obscene" defence of abortion

ANDREW Harvey's letter (October *Freethinker*) in defence of the Roman Catholic Church as a force for social justice amazed me. Although individual Catholic priests in Latin America have certainly campaigned on behalf of the poor, so-called "Liberation Theology" has been roundly condemned by this Pope and



the Church hierarchy. The Church's approach to the poor has had less to do with reducing world poverty than in a sense "sustaining" it to ensure that it continues to have a role in underdeveloped countries, and to give them people to practise their "charity and compassion" on. Mother Teresa of Calcutta was a prime example of this.

But for Mr Harvey to defend the Catholic stand on abortion is frankly obscene. Is he not aware that the Church takes the same stand on any form of artificial birth control, abortive or not, sentencing millions of women to endless pregnancies and risk of death, sustaining the very poverty the Church is supposed to be so against? Does he not know that Catholic representatives at the UN attempted to prevent the supply of "morning after" pills to Kosova women raped by Serbian militiamen? Does he not know that the Catholic Church is resolutely opposed to "safe sex" programmes in the Third World, leading to ever-rising rates of HIV infection in countries where their influence is strongest?

The Catholic Church could not care less about "innocent defenceless life"; the more suffering and pain there is in the world, the more they think there will be a need for them. The Catholic Church, and the current Pope in particular, is one of the greatest forces for evil in the world. They create hell on Earth to make people hope for heaven after they die; they are the absolute antithesis of humanism.

MR S C CHUMBLEY
London

Catholicism breeds antisemitism

ANDREW Harvey accuses the *Freethinker* of being selective in what it says about the Catholic Church.

When the church-backed Solidarity movement in Poland formed its first government, replacing the Communists, its first action was to withdraw pensions and welfare benefits, and even confiscate artificial limbs, from Polish veterans of the Spanish Civil War, on the spurious grounds that, "The International Brigade were Communist terrorists and murderers who burned churches, murdered priests and raped nuns".

The Solidarity government also banned abortion, and sex education in schools, and made possession of contraceptives a criminal offence.

Further, when Lech Walesa finally stepped down, he ran a vicious antisemitic campaign on behalf of his successor: his whole campaign was summed up in the slogan, "Vote Solidarity, because the other man is a Jew". Throughout the Solidarity regime communism was entirely blamed on the Jews, and there was

an upsurge in anti-semitism – with the full blessing of the Church; indeed, anti-semitism and Catholicism seem to go together wherever the church takes an active role in politics; one should ask what happened to the Jewish population of Ireland and why there is only one Jew left in the whole of Limerick, for example.

KEITH J. ACKERMANN
Essex

Correcting Creationist report

AS A KANSAS subscriber to your journal, may I offer a correction to your short article in the September issue about the resurgence of Creationism? The Kansas State Board of Education does not have power over any curriculum; rather they establish standards for the State of Kansas examinations. Thus, local districts are entirely free to retain evolution in their science classes, and, of course, national college entrance examinations will continue to have some such materials on their tests. So the Board is being ground between two millstones. Furthermore, there is extensive and intense opposition to the Board's action from the Governor of the State, university presidents and faculty, science teacher organizations, etc. It seems clear that the elections next year will see the right-wingers on the Board ejected from office.

Attempts by these types on the Board are really like all projects to control, if not eliminate, the truth. Their attempt to focus only on micro-evolution instead of macro-evolution is like telling astronomers they can look at anything within the solar system, but don't go beyond that.

FRED WHITEHEAD
Kansas, USA

No-one's gagging Robertson

PAUL COGGINS (Points of View, September 1999) calls the campaign against Pat Robertson "censorship". But nobody prevented Robertson from making his homophobic remarks, and nobody is preventing him from speaking in such terms now. Pat Robertson was and is free to say whatever he likes; others are free to disapprove and decline to do business with organisations associated with him. Indeed, the tactic of boycott is one of the few weapons open to campaigners: companies value profits, not reasoned argument. Presumably reasoned argument was used to persuade others to join the boycott.

It is important that we define censorship narrowly; broadening its meaning weakens opposition to restraint of free speech by normalising

it, making it something that everybody does – not just states, corporations and other powerful organisations. It is not censorship to cease buying a newspaper if its editorial policy changes to one you disagree with; it is censorship to prevent the newspaper from publishing.

It might be argued that Robertson's situation is analogous to that of a secularist teacher who is sacked after Christian parents withdraw their children from school. This, though of course a lamentable violation of civil rights, would not strictly be an example of censorship either. It is also hard to see Robertson as a helpless victim of prejudice.

DAN J BYE
Sheffield

CONGRATULATIONS to Keith Porteus Wood on his excellent address to the Royal Commission on the Reform of the House of Lords.

It seems to me that he had certainly done his homework, and he marshalled his facts and figures splendidly in emphasising the ever-increasing decline of religious belief in this country. I have always maintained that the Bishops in the House of Lords are total anachronisms and it is presumptuous on their part to assume that their pronouncements on any given subject reflect the beliefs of the people of this country.

I thought that the remarks of the Bishop of Oxford, Richard Harries, were little short of absurd when he said that the more modern the world gets the more religious it becomes. Indeed, he covered himself in ridicule when he cited America as the most modern and religious country in the world. I would have thought that even the Bishop would be aware of the fact that America is the most violent country in the world, and only recently Bill Bradley, a Democratic candidate remarked: "Every day in America 13 children are killed by guns – not injured, not hurt, but killed."

We can only hope that the good Bishop will do his homework in future before giving voice to such fatuous remarks.

MARTIN O'BRIEN
Gwent

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

HUMANIST CONTACTS AND EVENTS

Bath Humanists: Information: Hugh Thomas on 0117 9871751.

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 Cleevelands 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, Nov 12: Chris Morris, Editor *Outcast: A Step in the Right Direction?* Saturday, Dec 11, 20th Anniversary Dinner at the Square Wine Bar, Tolmers Square, London NW1. Details and booking form available. Tel: 01926 858450.

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 Nov 9, 7.30pm. Kevin McClure: *Alien Abductions*.

Leicester Secular Society: Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone

Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB. Tel. 0116 2622250/0116 241 4060.

Lewisham Humanist Group: Information: Denis Cobell: 0181 690 4645. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, Nov 25, *David Porter: Threshold of the Millennium*.

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, November 3, 8pm. Gordon Sinclair: *Evangelising Humanism*. Saturday, Nov 13, 10.30am till 4pm. Literature and information table at annual Peace Fair, Town Hall, Barkers Pool. 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, Nov 10, 7.70pm for 8pm. Speakers Panel: *What Humanism Means to Me*.

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

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

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

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