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Power and Piety The Editor

A SIGNIFICANT political phenomenon today is the resurgence of autocracy. The defeat of fascism in 1945 ended a period of dictatorship in parts of western Europe, and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 weakened a longer period of the same in the East. There was talk of the ‘end of history’ as liberal, co-operative, peaceful, secular democracy appeared to be the model for countries everywhere. Alas, reports of the death of dictatorship have been greatly exaggerated.

Part of the reason lies in a revival of nationalism. There has been a growing resistance to the age of globalisation, whether of the economy or culture or ideas. The free flow of capital across borders has lessened the power of states to manage their own economic affairs, and the ability of individuals to cross the same borders has weakened ideas of national culture and shared values.

As a result, many people are turning to strong national saviours who will unequivocally put their own country's interests first and/or revive past national glories. Vladimir Putin is recreating the cult of strong Russian potentates from Catherine to Stalin. Turkey's President Recep Erdogan seeks to recreate the glory of the Ottoman Empire. India's Narendra Modi constantly talks of the glories of Indian culture. Donald Trump wants to make America 'great again' and says that "we have to start winning wars again".

In France, Marine Le Pen, the National Front candidate, made it through the first round of presidential voting and into a two-candidate runoff on 7th May. In Germany, where Angela Merkel faces re-election in September, Alexander Gauland's right-wing, anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AFD) is expected to improve on its previous performance and will probably meet the threshold required to gain seats in the German parliament.

Hungary is governed by a right wing party that uses the power of the state to undermine the judiciary, the press and other pillars of civil society. Its prime minister, Viktor Orbán, famously boasted in a 2014 speech that "the new state that we are building is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state." He has also declared that asylum seekers are 'a poison'. In Slovakia, Prime Minister Robert Fico, who has declared that "Islam has no place in Slovakia", has worked to restrict civil liberties and judicial independence.

Even in supposedly multicultural Britain, Brexit indicates a desire to "give us our country back again". Theresa May recently called an election to weaken opposition in Parliament. The Conservative campaign focused almost entirely on the need for strong leadership and Jeremy Corbyn's personal failings in this regard.

Another feature of these autocrats is their religious belief. Even though a growing number of people throughout the

world define themselves as non-religious, politics is still largely dominated by piety. Few autocratic leaders want to be seen as atheists. Putin, who presents himself as the defender of the Orthodox Church, reportedly prays daily. Trump has said: “First of all, I am a great Christian”, and “no one reads the Bible more than me”. Orbán in Hungary has declared that Europe’s ‘Christian identity’ is under threat from Islam.

Erdogan seeks to reverse the secularisation of Turkey introduced by Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the republic in 1923. His party has chipped away at the secular institutions of the state and encouraged the Islamisation of education and social behaviour as well as seeking to cull non-Islamist officials and officers. Erdogan has said that he wants to see “the growth of a religious generation”, which would replace long-standing secular domination.

Theresa May, the daughter of an Anglican vicar, goes to church most Sundays and has said that her Christian faith is “part of who I am and therefore how I approach things”. This is a significant remark because one might have thought that Christians were pacifists. Yet May, like most of Europe’s other autocrats, seem to regard pacifism as a sign of weakness and prefer to talk tough behind an arsenal of weaponry, most of it highly lethal.

Apparently, only an idiot would want to scrap Trident. And only an idiot who cared nothing about the economy would want to stop selling weapons to Saudi Arabia. Recently May was disappointed “as both a vicar’s daughter and a National Trust member”, that the word Easter – “a very important festival for the Christian faith” – is absent from a marketing campaign for the annual chocolate egg hunt held by Cadbury and the Trust. This sums up the madness of the modern world. Apparently, it is wise to sell arms to the totalitarian House of Saud to slaughter thousands in the Yemen and elsewhere but stupid to leave the word ‘Easter’ out of a

marketing campaign for chocolate eggs. Is that what her Christian principles taught her? Maybe she should have gone on an Easter hunt to find them.

THE MAN FROM THE BOG Andy Barr

MARTIN McGuinness was born in the Bogside area of Derry, second of seven children of religious parents, William, a foundry-worker, and his wife, Peggy. Unlike Gerry Adams, McGuinness did not come from a republican background, but grew up in a city where gerrymandering meant that Protestants always controlled the city council, even though Catholics were the majority population.

He experienced first hand the impact of an undemocratic and sectarian administration. Using its gerrymandered electoral majority they gave priority to unionist supporters when allocating housing or public sector employment. The Orange state blatantly discriminated against the city by depriving it of Northern Ireland's second University and refused to build a motorway from Belfast.

When the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) began campaigning for equal rights and demanding reform, it was in McGuinness's home town that the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) violently attacked a peaceful civil rights march in 1968. In January 1969 civil rights supporters were beaten by loyalists at Burntollet Bridge while the RUC looked on. Then in 1972 came Bloody Sunday.

Martin McGuinness, by then in the IRA, chose the road of violent conflict to confront this situation and felt that the Orange state was unreformable. He said that the circumstances in Derry in the 1970s were such that he, as well as others, had no other choice but to join the IRA. This is insulting to thousands of ordinary young

people in Derry who did not feel forced by circumstances to join the IRA. It also ignores the fact that there was another alternative available; that is the path of peaceful constitutional nationalism forged by fellow Derryman and SDLP leader, John Hume. He taught that justice, equality and, indeed, reunification could be achieved through gradual political change. It was Hume's bold vision of peaceful change that McGuinness ultimately adopted. According to Hume, the IRA campaign put back a united Ireland by many years, because it further divided the people of Northern Ireland and of Ireland as a whole.

Martin felt there was no point in joining the non-sectarian and peaceful civil rights movement. Having said all that, I often argue with people like myself from a protestant background: “if you were Catholics living in Bombay Street in 1969 when hundreds of homes were burnt by loyalist bigots, would you not have been tempted to join the IRA”? Did Martin not join for a similar reason?

Eventually, he came to believe that violence was not the way, indeed that it was destructive and counterproductive. At that point, it seems, his new chosen path was working with others to build an inclusive and better society for everyone. That found its ultimate expression in his partnership with Ian Paisley in the Stormont Assembly.

What changed his mind? Some people have argued that the discussions with Senator George Mitchell when Mitchell got McGuinness and Unionist politicians to spend a weekend talking and discussing their upbringing and how they arrived at their views was a turning point. They could actually understand how their political opponent's views were formulated. Others claim that it was speaking to Mandela who was successful in changing a similar sectarian situation. Whatever the reason, thankfully he did change and, what was more remarkable, he was able to bring his

supporters with him. Throughout his remarkable journey, from physical force republican to becoming a constitutional nationalist, he used his considerable personal authority to persuade the IRA that the long war of attrition with the British could not achieve victory.

His outreach to unionists was genuine. It is no accident that the most impressive tributes on his death have come from the Paisley family, Peter Robinson and Lord Trimble. By all accounts, he certainly had a pleasant personality. Gerry Adams claimed that getting Martin out of a meeting, venue or event was like trying to get a drunk man out of a pub. “He wanted to have the craic, to talk and shake hands with and swap stories with every person there, and that was his nature, and that’s one of the reasons why most people think of him so fondly.”

Despite his undoubted journey to peace, what is most disappointing about McGuinness is not simply his failure to disown the use of violence by the Provos, but his attempt still to justify their use of violence. Edward Daly, the Catholic bishop of Derry, put it quite well when he said: “In many ways Martin McGuinness is an exemplary man. He is a good father, a good husband, a strong churchgoer, I believe him to be honest and upright in his personal conduct. No, my only quarrel with Martin was with the legitimacy and morality of using violence for political purposes.”

Regrettably, there have been some hateful comments about his death. Lord Tebbit's unrepeatable remarks were grossly offensive and pathetic. But we must understand people’s deep feelings about the injustice created by the IRA campaign. Many other people have been grappling with their mixed feelings about Martin McGuinness, and sympathy must be given to those who find it too hard to forgive. You cannot force people to forgive, but, sadly, if

they don't forgive, it will be their own loss, for their humanity will be diminished and their hurt unhealed.

The image of McGuinness, as deputy first minister of Northern Ireland, standing side by side with a smiling Robinson, Paisley's successor as Democratic Unionist party leader and first minister, and shaking the Queen's hand during her visit to Belfast in 2012, vividly portrayed not only how far McGuinness himself had developed over the years, and how much he was prepared to risk. The two met on a number of subsequent occasions, the last coming in June 2016 at Hillsborough Castle, when the Queen unveiled a portrait of herself. After a 20-minute private meeting McGuinness said: "I am an unapologetic Irish republican and I value very much the contribution Queen Elizabeth has made to the peace process and to reconciliation".

Equally he sought reconciliation with victims of the violence from all sides, in 2013 accepting an invitation from Colin and Wendy Parry to speak at a peace lecture in Warrington 20 years after IRA bombs had killed their 12-year-old son, Tim, and another boy, three-year-old Jonathan Ball. "I thought it was important to go, to acknowledge the hurt and the pain," he said.

In conclusion it's difficult to sum up Martin McGuinness, because you end up saying that on the one hand he was responsible for this and on the other he helped to move the political process in a constructive path.

Escaping the Echo Chamber Eamon Murphy

I RECENTLY attended an evening of lectures in Dublin where one of the topics discussed was the rise of right-wing populism on both sides of the Atlantic. One comment from an audience member stuck with me. The lady mentioned an acquaintance from the United States who had voted for Donald Trump and com-

mented “I dunno, maybe he’s a Nazi or something”, before continuing with her point.

In doing so, she identified a significant problem with contemporary politics that has the potential to have an increasingly negative effect on wider society; not that the most powerful man in the world is an alleged proto-fascist who is full of racist and divisive rhetoric, though that in itself is certainly a problem. I’m referring to the characterisation of all Trump voters, and by association all people who vote for so-called right-wing populists – though the term is beginning to lose its meaning – as Nazis or fascists or other types of deplorable human beings.

While I’m sure plenty of the people who voted for Trump, or for Brexit, or for Marine Le Pen in France, are indeed racist, I would wager that a lot more of them cast their votes as they did because they have real and genuine concerns about their country and the direction it is going, or for their own well-being, and are reaching out in desperation.

For years, maybe even decades, media and social and cultural narratives have been such that if you raise concerns about matters such as immigration and its effects, or the influence of the European Union in national affairs, or the effects of issues like free-trade, globalisation or technological progress, this makes you a bad person, a xenophobe, an ultra-nationalist, an isolationist, anti-progress, or just plain stupid. As German sociologist Gerhard Bosch has written, the lack of open criticism of these policies has proved a huge mistake as, across Europe, right-wing populists have stepped in to fill the gap.

This is relevant to the United States too, where many of those who voted for Trump did so out of a sense of social or economic isolation, or a feeling that their voice was not being heard.

It has been noted that one of the ironies of Brexit is that many of the votes that helped push the referendum result over the line were from people who will now, to a great extent, find themselves in a worse position outside of the European Union. Perhaps feeling socially and economically neglected, some used their vote to protest against the political establishment. The resulting economic fallout and disappearance of European subsidies for economically depressed regions will now likely see them suffer further.

Similarly contradictory voting patterns played out in the United States last November. One startling statistic emerging from the U.S. Presidential election is that the counties carried by President Trump contributed just 36 per cent of the country's GDP in 2015, in comparison to 64 per cent from those voting for Hillary Clinton. These numbers highlight very starkly the economic divide between supporters of the two candidates. Again, ironically, it is the same poor people who are most likely to be hurt by Trumpist policies such as economic protectionism and the attempted repeal of healthcare legislation.

There has been an abject failure by the political establishment in these and other countries to address the concerns of a large part of their electorates, and now these cohorts have found politicians to articulate those concerns.

Large proportions of electorates are now voting for these populists, but the majority of them are not bad people. Taking their fears seriously doesn't mean abandoning individual social rights that have been hard won, or disavowing progress. It means answering what are often legitimate calls for social security, real political participation, or maybe cultural recognition, and doing so with concrete policies.

It means acknowledging that while immigration is indeed broadly positive for society – socially, economically, culturally, and often morally – immigration *does* create some issues, particularly when

it involves the integration of one wildly different culture into another. However, these are policy issues to be tackled, not excuses to close borders.

Most of these people are worth engaging with, as opposed to being fobbed off as fascists or Nazis. It's worth remembering that, following any referendum or election that provides a "new direction" for a country, voters on both sides still have to live together and polarising rhetoric, post-voting, is unhelpful for social cohesion.

What Donald Trump's brand of political campaigning has done is to lay bare a distasteful seam in politics, suggesting that the tactics of isolationism, protectionism and xenophobia can fill the gap when there is a failure by progressive policymakers to articulate a coherent vision of a better society for all.

There was no shortage of this to be seen over the course of the Brexit referendum campaign either. Support for the European project is seemingly at an all-time low. There are cries across the continent for greater 'sovereignty', for greater control over borders, economic affairs, and governance and accountability.

Progressive politicians must display leadership in explaining to people that sovereignty means something very different now to what it once did. Nowadays, real sovereignty is relative. The globalisation of so many aspects of modern society means that all countries are greatly affected by outside influences, whether they like it or not. It is better to engage with the outside world, and exert whatever positive influence one can.

Europe needs reform – of that there is little doubt. But the most problematic outcome from Brexit, or indeed from the election of President Trump, will not stem from messy transitions or from negative economic effects. It will be if the social, political,

cultural, and economic lessons of the referendum and election results are not acknowledged and acted upon, both in the countries immediately concerned and in others watching events unfold.

Globalisation can no longer be characterised as being unquestionably beneficial to all. Policy - makers cannot assume that the benefits of things like free trade, open markets and deregulation will filter down to everyone. Instead it must be acknowledged that these things do actually cause people, particularly low-skilled workers who are often at the bottom of the social ladder anyway, to lose their jobs, and that society often does a poor job compensating them with the net gains that are made.

Trickle-down economics has been shown to be one of the great fallacies of the neoliberal model, while the huge economic risks associated with a lack of regulation are surely now apparent. Politicians must question the gains from these policies: to whom do they accrue, and who are the losers.

What is required from progressives is a vision that articulates how everybody can truly be part of society; with adequate income to live on, and the ability to participate fully in decision-making on issues that affect them, essentially enjoying the benefits of being citizens of modern developed democracies.

Quoting Bosch, “if the European project reasserted its credibility by strengthening its social foundations, then EU critics would have no basis for their arguments”.

As noted, the current system is not without its problems. That should not encourage us to turn insular and isolationist. But nor should it make us ignore the legitimate concerns of people who, very sadly, now see Trump, Farage, Le Pen and Geert Wilders, among others, as their only hope.

Returning to the aforementioned audience member, my suggestion would be this: Instead of treating people who think differently to us as pariahs, or calling them names because they happened to prefer one over-privileged self-absorbed right-wing politician to another, we might have a better chance of achieving the progressive liberal society many of us desire if we spent less time talking among ourselves about how wrong everyone else is, and more time engaging constructively with the people who need to be convinced.

Tuam Babies: A Personal Journey Tom White

I WAS travelling back from my regular attendance at the Galway Humanist Group meeting on 26th February 2017; I'd presented a short talk to fellow group members on the topic of Humanist Ethics and was feeling relieved that what I had said seemed well received. On the way out of the city, I saw a man hitching a lift by the side of the road. I am normally reluctant to pick up hitchhikers but, given the fact that this guy seemed sober and respectable (and also given the topic I'd just been talking about!), I stopped and picked him up. We introduced ourselves and got on well. He wanted a lift to Tuam, about 20 miles from Galway. When we got to Tuam, which is a fair-sized town by Irish standards, I offered to give him a lift to his house, it being a wet day.

By way of conversation, knowing he was a local, I asked him about the Tuam Babies Scandal. It turned out that although he lived near to the alleged burial site, he had never been able actually to go there. This was because he was the father to three primary school kids and couldn't face the horror of the thought that, just a few decades before, one of his own children might have ended up in that unmarked mass burial plot. A big man in

touch with his emotions. Respect! Now, for the first time, he summoned the courage to lead me to the site; we effectively brought one another to where we each needed to go.

I have ‘form’ when it comes to the Tuam Babies. When rumours of scandal first began to get coverage in national newspapers a few years ago, I wrote an article in Hi magazine, accompanied by a couple of pictures of the small plot which subsequently became the subject of official investigation. After I had taken those snaps that day, I went back to my car and wept. I felt as if I had visited an Irish version of the Nazi Concentration Camps; the sense of historic pain and suffering simply overwhelmed me.

That feeling and those tears stay with me – I can never forget my visit to Tuam that day. Yet, because the site is hidden away in an extensive public housing development, I had little recollection of how to get there. I’d even need help again today if I went to revisit it. So my new-found friend in Tuam came in very handy for me. What we found was an eight foot high wooden board fence; the site has been effectively sealed off from public view. I was glad to see those blank boards for two reasons: my friend said he thought the authorities had started to excavate the site (and another site fairly nearby); and the boards saved my new friend from the emotional trauma which had prevented him previously being able to go there.

“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not” (Matthew 19:14) Were the ‘good Christians’ who discarded unbaptised children into mass graves ‘beyond the wall’ of consecrated ground obeying the orders of their religious leader? Were they simply ‘following orders’, the standard defence at the Nuremberg trials? No, they don’t even have that fig-leaf excuse! So I will maintain my rage, and I would urge every freethinker and humanist in Ireland to do the same. Bring up the bones, and before they are respectfully reburied, let the authorities parade

them through every town and village in ‘holy’ Ireland. It would help purge us of these dark sins. The truth of those bones is my ‘sacred relic’; no one on this island should be allowed

to ‘forgive and forget’ our little inconvenient truths. Germany has become a civilised nation again only by rationally and emotionally facing the horrors of its past – and so must the people of Ireland, the Catholic Church and any other organised faith or group who indulged in such callous crimes against humanity.

The process of the public enquiry has been painfully slow, but thorough. That’s often the way of public administration. No blame: I’d rather we get it slow and right than get it quick and wrong. ‘We’ are our increasingly secularist public authorities, secular voluntary organisations and individuals who are slowly dragging Ireland, South and North, into a better place. Theist zealots have fought us tooth and nail, and continue to do so. We must use the emotion generated by the impending report into Mother and Baby Homes to register another small victory for humanity, another small step towards civilisation. The tears of human suffering demand it.

On 4th March Government Minister Katherine Zappone announced that significant evidence of human remains has been found in the old sewerage system of the Mother and Baby Home at Tuam. The questions remains, how did those children’s bodies get there? As well as the order of nuns charged with administering the Home, I believe that the Commission of Enquiry needs to hear from the workmen who were instrumental in building the housing estate on the site of the then derelict Mother and Baby Home; did those workmen unearth bones during their excavations? If so, what did they do with them?

Regular updates are posted on the website of the “Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation” <http://www.mbhcoi.ie/MBH.nsf/page/Latest%20News-en>. Please bookmark that page

for future reference. Sometimes maintaining cold, moral outrage is the ethical thing for a humanist to do.

Should Humanists be Socialists? Bob Rees

AS a humanist, I am regularly appalled by the excesses of those promoting unregulated neoliberal capitalism. They seem to trample over just about everything that humanists espouse, from basic human rights to environmental conservation. The Socialist movement exists to oppose what's going on and to fight for social justice for all. But does this mean that humanism is therefore some kind of socialism? Should all humanists be socialists?

Humanists wish to make the best possible life for all people everywhere, and we mostly believe that greater social co-operation and respect for human rights are the way to go. Many humanists find themselves sympathising with political socialists in their opposition to unregulated capitalism, which is unashamedly founded on exploitation, competition and greed. Capitalist economics cannot in principle be socially just, and in practice, its proponents have promoted brutal dictatorships, imperial adventures, short-sighted pollution and over-exploitation of the planet's resources, as well as a wage-race to the bottom, tax avoidance, and the abandonment of essential government social services. These all run counter to fundamental humanist ideals.

Right-wing apologists deliberately frighten people by claiming that socialism will destroy the nation's economy and prohibit private ownership of possessions, and they never miss a chance to indict the socialist movement for the inhumane regimes of Stalin and Mao (who were in fact psychopathic dictators who never practised socialism). They oppose socialism because its aim is to protect the rights of common working people; the sort of people

that capitalists regard as mere resources to be exploited, and then discarded without a second thought. Humanists see people as ends in themselves, never as means to someone else's ends. Karl Marx was an adherent of humanist philosophy, before he segued into materialism. Predictably, the Church and its bishops have never made a secret of their bitter antipathy to socialism with its notions of social justice ... "let the poor find liberation through the redemption of their many sins".

So humanism and socialism share a common interest and a common opponent, but how significant is this? In 1955-6, Hungarian socialist politician Imre Nagy wrote in *Morals and Ethics*:

"We 'do not want a return to capitalism' rather 'a people's democratic system in which the ideals of socialism become reality, ... in which public life is based on higher morals and ethics ... where working people are masters of the country and of their own fate, where human beings are respected and where social and political life are conducted in the spirit of humanism". For this, Nagy was hanged by the Soviets in 1958.

Nagy was promoting the 'spirit of humanism', but he wasn't preaching humanism. Humanism is not a revolutionary working-class philosophy; indeed, it denies the validity of class differences, and urges reconciliation of all classes, creeds, nationalities and all the other artificial social divisions. Humanism is a way of looking at the world a-politically, it is not founded upon any economic system, but on universal ethical standards, and we humanists are concerned more with prejudice, ignorance and indifference than with material interests. This is why we promote democracy, education and morality, rather than revolution. We prefer to settle our disputes using reasoned debate and arbitration and, in Ireland, patience.

Socialism is an inflexible political doctrine which, like religion, has difficulty adapting to the modern world. To be politically effective, socialists, like adherents of all political movements (even humanist campaigns), must speak with one voice. Dissent within the ranks is unacceptable. Like religious devotees, practising socialists must surrender their private opinions and silently follow their recognised leaders and spokespersons. Conversely, humanism is founded on flexible freethought, where individual humanists are encouraged to consider each case on its merits and often draw different conclusions, since there are no right or wrong answers. A humanist may be attracted by aspects of socialism, and repelled by others, whereas for an active socialist, it has to be all or nothing.

Militant socialists will claim that more social progress has been achieved by conflict than by cooperation, which may be true depending on your view-point, but most humanists prefer to attribute long-term historical progress to advances in science and technology, human rights and moral values. Socialism protects social justice for human society, and defends non-capitalists against exploitation. But it has to be admitted that genuinely competitive capitalism encourages initiative and enterprise, and the optimum economic system would seem to be to take the best from each extreme to create a society of universal prosperity; a mixed economy where capitalism is encouraged but regulated by rules that protect everyone's interests, and where all strategic services are the responsibility of the State.

To summarise, humanism is freethought founded on malleable premises in sociology and politics, whereas Socialism is rigidly founded in materialist values pure and simple. The situation with Atheist associations is similar, insofar as they actively oppose religious interference in State affairs, which humanists find equally obnoxious, though all humanists aren't necessarily atheists (but some are). Similarly, humanism and socialism are two

unrelated concepts whose interests in certain areas happen to overlap. You don't have to be a socialist to be a humanist (but it helps).

WORDS NOT WEAPONS Roger Kelly

THERE has been disappointingly little coverage in the media of the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA).

I was 15 at the time NICRA was formed on 9th April 1967 and was more interested in the Beatles and the Who coming to play in Belfast. Also the struggle of the American Civil Rights Movement and the opposition to the Vietnam War made a bigger impression on my growing observations of injustices in the world.

However, the Dungannon civil rights march to protest against the discriminatory system of allocating houses and the Derry march on October 1968 brought home to me that something wasn't right about the the state of Northern Ireland. On the TV I observed peaceful civil rights marchers being attacked by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and the police brutality shocked many not only in Northern Ireland but also throughout the world. These events opened a new age of tumult in the crisis of unionism and awakened my political conscience to the injustices that were happening in Northern Ireland.

The permanently guaranteed parliamentary majority of the Unionist Party had built a state on sectarian discrimination and totalitarian leg- islation such as the Special Powers Act which led to social injustice mainly in the non-unionist popula- tion. When one looks back at NICRA'S aims, listed below, I would suggest that most objective and fair minded people and union- ists would today find little to object to in them:

1. To defend the basic freedoms of all citizens.
2. To protect the rights of the individual.
3. To highlight all possible abuses of power.
4. To demand guarantees for freedom of speech, assembly and association.
5. To inform the public of their lawful rights.

It had also six main demands:

1. 'One man one vote', which would allow all people over 18 to vote in local council elections and remove votes held by business owners – known as the 'business vote'.
2. An end to Gerrymandering electoral wards to produce an artificial unionist majority.
3. Prevention of discrimination in the allocation of government jobs.
4. Prevention of discrimination in the allocation of council housing.
5. The removal of the Special Powers Act.
6. The disbandment of the almost entirely Protestant Ulster Special Constabulary (B Specials).

NICRA's innovative approaches to tackling these social injustices were certainly not revolutionary but to a large extent were modelled on the National Council of Civil Liberties: organising marches, pickets, sit-ins and protests to pressure the Government of Northern Ireland. This strategy was successful in securing a much wider international and internal support for democratic change than traditional nationalist protests had done and the failure of the Republican/IRA Border Campaign from 1956-1962.

NICRA was a unique political movement at the time and all shades of political opinion were represented on its first Executive: Liberal, Labour, Nationalist, Republican, Communist, Trade

Unionist and even a young unionist was co-opted at its formal lunch.

Unlike nationalist/republican groups, NICRA accepted the constitutional framework of Northern Ireland's status as the basis for the redress of the civil rights grievances and demanded that Westminster as the sovereign authority fulfil its obligations towards all UK citizens in Northern Ireland.

However, by the early Seventies with the Conservatives back in government, NICRA had effectively been sidelined and sectarianism had intensified with the introduction of internment in August 1971 and the Bloody Sunday Massacre by the British Army in Derry. Elements of the civil rights movement unwisely called for 'Direct Rule' from London. This in many ways let the London authorities off the hook when political pressure for civil rights redress by way of measures like a Bill of Rights in Northern Ireland should have been increased.

Added to the difficulties was the split in the Republican Movement and the formation of the Provisional IRA. The Provisional IRA rejected the concept of mass civil rights struggle and opted for a military campaign which led to increased sectarianism and mindless killings, which in itself was a denial of civil and human rights. It needs to be stated that Loyalist paramilitaries and the British Army also engaged in acts of violence which exacerbated the whole political situation and led to a 'Dirty War' which marginalised NICRA even more.

While the following period of strife and the appalling loss of life and suffering cannot be glossed over, it is my view that successive British governments, which put British party interests before peace and political progress not only in Northern Ireland but throughout these islands, bear the main responsibility for the mayhem that developed.

NICRA's strategy did have success and the main civil rights demands were largely achieved, including the disbanding of the B-Specials and the abolition of the Special Powers Act. A points system for the allocation for housing was also established resulting in the formation eventually of the N.I. Housing Executive. The Fair Employment and Sex Discrimination Acts were introduced and the electoral system was reformed, thus ending Gerrymandering.

The Good Friday Agreement and the current political situation in Northern Ireland have some parallels with the policies outlined by NICRA. Equality of treatment, parity of esteem, and power sharing between nationalist and unionists in a devolved Stormont are effectively the continuation of the civil rights approach.

With the 'armed struggle' behind it, Sinn Fein now realise the primacy of politics within the peace process. It is now viewed as a credible progressive political party in Ireland and has played a major role in developing broad democratic policies supporting equal marriage, LGBT rights and the need for a new Bill of Rights in Northern Ireland.

However, negative comments such as Gerry Adams's reference to equality being a Trojan Horse for political unionism when he should have been saying that equality is the Achilles Heel for unionism, is loose language that does not help to win over moderate opinion in building the ongoing peace process and establishing a more respectful democratic society in Northern Ireland.

Sinn Fein have a responsibility that, by making inequality based on sectarian bigotry impossible, although members of the Democratic Unionist Party still spout it, liberal unionists and ex-unionists can hopefully unite with nationalists and republicans and discover the political implications of their common Irishness – which was at the core of NICRA's policy.

Humanist Spirituality Brian McClinton

SPIRITUAL Humanism. Religious Humanism. Christian Humanism. For many, these terms are oxymorons. Humanism, they insist, is naturalistic and maintains that only material substance exists. Cartesian dualism – which states that mind and matter are two distinct entities – is simply mistaken. By implication, there is no such entity as a soul which enters the body at conception and leaves at the point of death. So how on earth could Humanism possibly be spiritual or religious?

To answer this question we have to go back to Plato, who believed that humans have a soul (psyche) and that the soul and the body are two separate substances. In *The Republic* Plato has Socrates say to Glaucon: “Haven’t you realised that our soul is immortal and never destroyed?” Instead, as he suggests in the *Phaedo*, when the body dies the soul returns to animate another body. In other words, Plato understands immortality of the soul in terms of reincarnation. He says that just as sleep comes after being awake and being awake comes after sleep, so death comes after life and then death returns to life again. Depending on how the person has lived, the soul will be reborn as a lower animal or a better human. Moreover, all living things, even plants, have a soul and it is their distinguishing mark.

Plato attributes several mental states such as beliefs, pleasures, desires and fears, to the body. It is the soul whose function is to control these other mental states. How, then does the soul differ from the mind? In the *Phaedo* he suggests that the mind is the connection within the physical part of a person that can be used to understand the concepts contained within the soul concerning the ‘Forms’. Plato believed that the world of space and time is

ephemeral and decaying and is a mere shadow of the realm of 'Forms' or perfect ideas. Beyond the chaotic surface of our human world is an order of perfect goodness and beauty, not perceptible to the senses but intelligible to the rational soul. In a sense, Plato's theory of Forms prefigures the Christian idea of Heaven.

In the *Phaedo* he is allocating a small role to the mind because, as stated, he attributes several mental states to the body. In *The Republic*, however, the idea of the soul is broadened to include these other elements. Here he gives us a tripartite idea of the soul: *logos* or reason (in the *Phaedo* the whole of the soul); *thymos* or spirit; and *eros* or appetite. In effect, he is now equating the soul with all the mental and psychological functions – in short, the soul is what we call the mind. Thus we can see the confusions and contradictions when ancient philosophers talk about mental activities, especially when they are talking about a 'soul'.

Note that for Plato the 'spirit' is one of the elements of the soul. It is the 'spirited part' that displays passion, energy, ambition and power. So now we have another term, 'spirit', which further clouds the picture. In Christianity the spirit is a narrower concept than Plato's. In various Biblical verses it is suggested that only believers are spiritually alive because the spirit is the immaterial part of humanity that 'connects' with God, who Himself is spirit. John 4:24 says: "God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth". So the spirit is not just the spark of life; it is a spark that only believers have. Non-believers are spiritually dead.

Yet we do not have to accept this Christian idea of the spirit (or its idea of the soul, for that matter). No religion or ideology can claim monopolistic ownership of a concept or the sole right to interpret it. Terms such as 'soul' and 'spirit' are vague and essentially contested. It

isn't even clear when they are being used merely as metaphors and when they are intended to describe real entities.

Like Plato, the 17th century philosopher René Descartes was a dualist and, like Plato, he believed that the mind and the soul are identical. The term 'Cartesian dualism' became the standard western philosophy of mind for the following three centuries. In the *Meditations* (1641) he tells us that the mind and the body are distinct because the mind is a thinking, indivisible, non-extended thing, while the body is an extended, divisible, non-thinking thing. Nevertheless, Descartes was an interactionist because he accepted that the state of mind can affect the bodily state and vice versa. But how do they interact? The answer provided by Descartes is, however, entirely unsatisfactory: according to him, mind and body interact through the pineal gland.

Descartes believed that our identity comes from our mind – 'cogito, ergo sum': I think, therefore I am (*Discourse on the Method*). In what is called the argument from dubitability, we can doubt the existence of our own body but we cannot doubt that our mind exists. And, he argues, since our mind or soul exists independently of our body it is not bound to die with it. Indeed, since we cannot see any other causes which destroy the soul, we are naturally led to conclude that it is immortal. We can therefore understand how Gilbert Ryle came to describe Descartes' dualism as a theory of the 'ghost in the machine'.

Whether or not we accept dualism or materialism/monism, we can hardly deny that the mind is dependent on the brain. When the brain dies, consciousness and thinking die with it. Therefore, to identify the mind with the soul actually weakens the argument for the latter's immortality. Aristotle avoided this pitfall by maintaining that the mind is part of the soul, which is the life of an organism – what makes it a living thing. He argued that a living creature is a substance made up body, i.e. matter, and soul, i.e.

form. The soul is therefore the form of the body, the sum total of all the operations of a human being.

Philosophers now talk of two kinds of dualism: substance dualism and property dualism. In substance dualism, as with Plato and Descartes, the mind or soul is posited as a separate, non-physical entity. Clearly, with all our modern knowledge of brain activity this view simply won't hold water. We know that brain trauma can affect memory, language and even consciousness itself. There can be no doubt that the brain is directly involved in consciousness. In property dualism or soft materialism, close to the Aristotelian conception, there is just one kind of substance – the physical sort – but it has two distinct kinds of properties: physical properties (body) and mental properties (mind and/or soul). In short, the non-physical, mental properties, such as memories, beliefs, desires and emotions, inhere in a physical substance, namely the brain.

How the mind, soul and consciousness emerge from brains is still a mystery. How can a collection of cells or – if you like – 3 pounds of grey and white matter in the head produce a conscious being? If we could answer that question, we would know the origin of life itself. Maybe the identity theory is correct in that the mind is identical to the brain. A functioning brain is the same as a conscious mind, in which case we could argue that the 'mind' is a fiction of our brain.

Arguably, religion too is a figment of the brain's imagination. Humans alone practise religion because only humans have evolved imagination. We have the ability to create in our minds beings that don't physically exist and the possibility that people somehow live after they've died.

It seems likely, then, that concepts like 'soul' and 'spirit' are terms that were invented to describe particular creations of the brain but have been hijacked by religion for its own supernatural purpose. 'Soul' was originally used simply to describe the essence of life. It

was that which distinguished what was alive from what was not. Similarly with 'spirit'. This English word comes from the Latin 'spiritus', meaning breath. Again, we speak of the 'spirit' of a thing when we mean its essence.

There is no need to assume that 'soul' and 'spirit' are essentially different or that they describe real things other than categories produced by the brain. There is certainly no case for claiming that they are immaterial substances with supernatural underpinnings. The point is that the brain is not just a machine but is capable of creating thoughts and feelings which, far from being ghostly, possess the spark of life – the very essence of spirituality.

Yet, you may say, the word 'spirituality' is so opaque that it can cover a multiplicity of meanings and qualities. Are all our non-material thoughts 'spiritual'? Love? Compassion? Tolerance? Forgiveness? Awe? Wonder? Contentment? Serenity? Reflection? Community? Transcendence? Wisdom? Enlightenment? Creativity? Joy? Ecstasy?

One noticeable feature of this list is that they are all positive values. That is surely one aspect of the meaning of the idea. Spirituality, at least in part, refers to all the affirmative thoughts and feelings that we have about ourselves, others, the universe and all living creatures. The term 'oceanic feeling' was coined by Romain Rolland to describe the experience of oneness and solidarity with the whole human race and the natural world, "a sense of indissoluble union with the great All, and of belonging to the universal", much like a wave or drop of water belongs to the ocean. There is nothing inherently religious about this feeling, though believers often describe it in religious terms. By 'All' is meant the universe. In his autobiography *Story of My Heart* the 19th century naturalist Richard Jefferies described it thus: "It is eternity now. I am in the midst of it. It is about me in the sunshine;

I am in it as the butterfly in the light-laden air. Nothing has to come; it is now. Now is eternity; now is the immortal life”.

This celebration of a ‘wedding with the world, as Albert Camus called it, comes in the final passage of his 1942 novel *L’Étranger* (the Stranger) where the protagonist, condemned to death, muses on the eve of his execution: “The exquisite peace of this sleepy summer flowed into me like a tide... Emptied of hope, as I stood there staring at the night sky filled with signs and stars, I opened myself up to the tender indifference of the universe for the first time. Feeling it so like myself, so fraternal at long last, I realised that I had been happy, and still was”.

The oceanic feeling leads to the realisation that the ego and the self are really illusions or at most insignificant flecks in the vastness of the cosmos. This knowledge, far from signifying the absurdity and meaninglessness of our lives, can transform us from our mundane existence to a higher reality. Metaphorically, we are reaching for the skies. A transcendent experience in which the self washes away and we rise above the everyday world to experience a sense of union with the universe does not have to be religious. For example, we can let the sound of music transport us out of ordinary anxieties. Indeed, many famous sacred pieces were written by agnostics or sceptics. For example Fauré, who wrote that “art, and above all music, exists to elevate us as far as possible above everyday existence”, composed a beautiful Requiem that can be appreciated by an atheist as much as a believer.

OF course, most music is secular but this doesn’t mean that it isn’t spiritual. Indeed, as Fauré implies, music is a universal food of the human spirit and a major defence against the eternal darkness. Take Beethoven’s 7th symphony, a truly uplifting masterpiece that makes you feel glad to be alive. Beethoven takes folk dance tunes and raises them up to an altogether higher plane. Wagner wrote:

“All tumult, all yearning and storming of the heart, become here the blissful insolence of joy, which carries us away with bacchanalian power through the roomy space of nature, through all the streams and seas of life, shouting in glad self-consciousness as we sound throughout the universe the daring strains of this human sphere-dance. The Symphony is the Apotheosis of the Dance itself: it is Dance in its highest aspect, the loftiest deed of bodily motion, incorporated into an ideal mould of tone”.

Transcendence leads us to connect not only with the universe but also with other people and all living things. To realise that we as individuals are small and insignificant in the context of the cosmic vastness creates a feeling of solidarity and sympathy with other living things. Truly, we are all in it together. We then come to realise that we are only significant in relation to this larger whole. This knowledge opens our eyes to the truth about existence: that the meaning of life does not lie externally beyond life in some heavenly hereafter but it lies internally in the world beyond our own puny individual lives. In truth, the meaning of life lies in the contribution that we make to the lives of others and the living planet around us.

To be spiritual is therefore to make our contribution to human happiness and wellbeing and to bring out the best in the human spirit. As Humanists, one way is to promote the values we hold dear. They include love, freedom, equality, justice, happiness, compassion, reason and tolerance. These and many more are the core values of Humanism but, like many religions, we too can claim that the greatest of these is love.

Humanists can happily dispense with the idea that not believing in a god prevents them from having a spirit. Indeed, the human spirit is too important to be left to priests, mullahs or spiritualists. Arguably, we can do without religion but we cannot do without

spirituality. For we are talking about not only what the human spirit is but also what it can and ought to be. Spirituality is ultimately what it means to be human and how we can best express our humanity.

A humanist's task is, above all, to enlighten the world about Humanist values, to persuade humankind that they are important and liberating in and of themselves and do not require supernatural sanction. That is in essence what spiritual enlightenment means for a Freethinker and Humanist.

Eleanor Roosevelt rightly said that "it is better to light a candle than curse the darkness". Or as Erasmus put it: "Give light and the darkness will disappear of itself".

The Sash My Mother Wore Shelley Leggett

I WROTE in the last issue of IFH about how Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) was going to be holding a demonstration at Westminster on March 8 about the sudden hike in the age at which 1950s born women can receive their state pension.

Eight of us flew from Northern Ireland to represent our WASPIs here, and one of our number had arranged to meet her MP, Gregory Campbell of the DUP, inside Westminster. The rest of us went with her to give her moral support, but were delighted to be welcomed by Gavin Robinson, also DUP, and Gregory, who were both very charming, had their photos taken with us (right) and got us a front row view of the procession going into the house for Prime Minister's Questions and the Budget.

At one photo shoot someone said to make sure that the ancient painting above our heads was included. I remarked that the sashes

were the most important feature, and almost said to Gregory Campbell that was because some day we'll be singing 'The Sash My Mother Wore' in Northern Ireland. But I didn't know how he'd take it so in the event I said nothing.

Yet wouldn't it be great if the issue of women's pensions could bring about a cultural change in NI? Catholic and Protestant alike singing the Sash! And it's true the 7,000 of us who gathered there that day had no idea what religion, gender or nationality any of us were – nor did we care. The feeling of sisterhood and solidarity was tremendous and hugs and kisses and offers to take photos from total strangers were common.

Mark Durkan gave a passionate speech in which he told us not to give up, because what the government is offering us is 'Stones for Bread'. Mhairi Black, 22 year old SNP firebrand also spoke in support. She's a breath of fresh air, honest, principled and passionate in part due to her own mother being a WASPI. Of the cuts to housing benefits for the under 21s she said she was the only 20- year-old in the country George Osborne was prepared to help with housing, and that's because she is an MP.

Incidentally, George Osborne made £150,000 on top of his salary last month for four speeches and is set to earn more than £1.5 million this year which includes £650,000 from Blackrock Investment Institute for one day's work a week. And yet we are told that big corporations are afraid to spend money they have accumulated, meaning less money in the system and so wages cannot increase, pensions can't be paid, etc. So how come George Osborne can command such high salaries? And why is someone who saw the deficit increase under his watch so sought after by finance companies?

At one point Budget proceedings had to be stopped due to the noise we were making, but were resumed without comment eventually. Andy Burnham, one of the MPs who came out to speak

to us and show support, said he'd told Chancellor Phillip Hammond that ignoring the women protesting outside on International Women's Day about the hardship they'd been left with due to the Tory policy of visiting two increases to the state pension age with little or no notice showed great disrespect. 'Rubbish' came the reply. It also took two and a half hours before a woman was able to speak on the Budget despite several coming forward.

Women have provided 86% of the net gains to the Treasury through tax and benefit measures, up from 81% the previous year, and yet women still earn less than men. So we're still being ignored, even though a lot of us paid a small fortune to get to Westminster, which we can ill afford now our pensions have been stolen.

The knock-on effect of this Great Pension Robbery is that many of us now can't help our offspring on to the housing ladder meaning that in the future there will be a generation reaching pension age while still paying rent. And they will have come from the generation that could never retire.

Passing motorists, van drivers and many police vehicles showed their support that day by blowing their horns as they passed the demo, and one policeman who gave us directions inside Westminster wished us luck as he said police pensions have also been raided.

I believe we will win this fight eventually. WASPI is not going away and, in fact, the Government received notification on Budget Day of a legal challenge if measures aren't put into place to help all the women affected to coincide with International Women's Day.

The challenge will be on the grounds of Maladministration and Discrimination and part of it is for as many women as possible to write to DWP complaining of the lack of timely notification of the

pension changes and the rapid acceleration of the age at which we can receive it. Some of us have been informed by letter that because we are all living longer the government had to make difficult decisions, etc, but we have made it clear that we are not satisfied with this response.

For those who still argue that we want preferential treatment to men, and who obviously don't understand the issues, two previous pensions ministers, Steve Webb and Ros Altman, are now on our side along with several Tory backbenchers. The Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust has awarded us a grant and UNISON is giving financial support.

However, some of the women at Westminster on March 8 were clearly unwell, and one was carrying a placard that read 'Pension should come before death', and I can't help but wonder if this isn't a callous culling of the elderly by the back door.

It's well known that poverty plays a large part in life expectancy, or should I say lack of it? Theresa May used her Easter statement to reassure the country that Christianity still has a part to play in British society. I see what she means. Blessed are the poor.

Subsidising our own Destruction Eamon Murphy

THE environmentally-focussed scientific community now understands that for humanity to avoid climate disaster, the vast majority of existing coal, oil and gas reserves must remain in the ground. With this in mind, most developed economies have begun a process of decarbonisation which involves the removal of costly Fossil Fuel Subsidies (FFS).

The term "Fossil Fuel Subsidy" may be new to many, but environmental lobbyists are increasingly focused on removing

FFS as they are seen as an indirect or clandestine way of encouraging the burning of harmful fossil fuels that, under other circumstances, might not be economically viable.

“Subsidy” here is defined as anything that lowers the cost of fossil fuel exploration or production; lowers the price paid by energy consumers; or subsidises the activities or profits of energy producers. This may range from tax breaks on fossil fuel exploration to governments spending money on fuel-poverty alleviation policies that use fossil fuels.

An IMF study from 2015 gives two definitions of “subsidy” relating to fossil fuels: (a) where consumer prices are below the opportunity cost of supplying energy; and (b) a broader definition, based on “the true cost” of energy consumption, accounting for undercharging for environmental costs – carbon emissions, local air pollution, traffic congestion, and so on – and the failure to fully apply standard rates of consumption tax.

Based on the first definition, global energy subsidies were estimated at \$541bn in 2013. This was 0.7 % of global GDP in that year. However, under the second broader definition, subsidies were estimated at a whopping \$4.9tn (6.5% of global GDP). The bulk of these subsidies are due to under-pricing of energy.

Energy subsidies were recently projected to be \$5.3tn in 2015 – still 6.5% of global GDP. This is an increase of \$400bn in two years, and mostly arises from countries setting energy taxes below levels that fully reflect the environmental damage associated with energy consumption.

Despite commitments from most governments to phase out FFS, progress has been limited. The EU has committed to phasing out FFS by 2020, and the governments of the G7 countries have committed to doing so by 2025, but many have already broken from this pledge.

From 2013 to 2015 the European Investment Bank (EIB) provided approximately €7bn in funding for fossil fuel-related projects. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) made investments of up to €5bn in fossil fuel exploration over the same period. Both Banks are arms of the EU.

A specific case study on capacity markets in the United Kingdom shows that over €800m is set to be channelled to coal and diesel investments between 2014 and 2018. A major project that will have a significant impact on whether the EU meets its professed targets is the Southern Gas Corridor, a 3,500km chain of gas pipelines from Azerbaijan to Italy, expected to start pumping gas to Europe by 2020 and locking in gas dependency for decades.

Publicly funding this project goes against the EU's international commitment under the 2015 Paris Agreement and defies the European Commission's own projections that the demand for gas in Europe is dropping. The total cost of the project is estimated to be \$45bn. The EIB and EBRD contributions for the sections through Greece and Albania are expected to be the biggest single loans in the history of each of the banks (up to €3bn and €1.5bn).

In 2011, the International Energy Agency estimated that four-fifths of the total energy-related CO₂ emissions permissible by 2035 were already "locked-in" by existing capital stock (e.g. power plants and factories, buildings etc.) and that if stringent new action was not forthcoming by 2017, the energy-related infrastructure in place by then would generate all the CO₂ emissions allowed up to 2035.

This would leave no room for additional power plants, factories and other infrastructure that were not zero-carbon – something which would be extremely costly. It concluded, therefore, that delaying action was a false economy, as for every \$1 of investment avoided in the power sector pre-2020, an additional \$4.30 would need to be spent afterwards to compensate. In the six

years since there has been little movement to avoid this scenario. Even if the ratio of 1:4.3 is a little off, hugely negative macro-economic consequences are inevitable.

The EU may view itself as a leading voice in advocating for strong climate action. However, evidence suggests that the Union is way off track to achieve its goals, and that its public funding is out of sync with the Paris Agreement. A significant increase in current policy ambition and a major shift in investment trends by all governments is required, and soon.

The Reformation: Was It a Good Thing?

FIVE HUNDRED F years ago, on 31st October 1517, the Augustinian friar Martin Luther started the Reformation when he nailed his 95 Theses to the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg where he preached, challenging the authority of the pope.

Or did he? First of all, there is no real evidence that Luther did in fact nail his criticisms to the church door. There is no extant original printing of such a document and Luther never claimed to have done it. The story was probably a myth put about by his followers after his death – his editor Georg Röser and fellow reformer Philip Melanchthon being the most likely candidates.

What he certainly did was to write a letter on that date to Albrecht of Brandenburg, the Archbishop of Mainz, in which he included a Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences that were to be the basis for a discussion. Luther did not intend to start a revolution or to break away from the established Church but he wanted reform. And he pulled no punches. Thesis 86 asked: “Why does the pope, whose wealth today is greater than the wealth of

the richest Crassus, build the basilica of St Peter with the money of poor believers rather than with his own money?”

The Archbishop of Mainz, the recipient of the letter, was one of the seven prince-electors of the Holy Roman Empire and, as the substitute for the pope north of the Alps, it was under his authority that indulgences – remissions from temporal punishments in life or purgatory for sin – were sold. The pope, Leo X, had granted their sale to raise funds for the completion of St Peter's in Rome, and had sent Johann Tetzel, his commissioner for indulgences, to Germany to perform this task. (also known as Castle Church) is probably a myth.

Yet there was nothing new in Luther's attack on indulgences. Indeed all of his theological arguments had been aired before, in some cases centuries earlier, including the beliefs that the Bible is the central religious authority and that man reaches salvation by faith. Jan Hus, a priest, philosopher and Master at Charles University in Prague in the Kingdom of Bohemia (also part of the Holy Roman Empire), demanded a reformation of the Catholic Church and condemned indulgences. Man obtains forgiveness of sins by true repentance, not money, he argued. Hus, like Luther a hundred years later, was excommunicated by the pope; but, unlike Luther, he was burnt at the stake for heresy in 1415.

Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, a contemporary of Luther, was even more critical of the Catholic Church and the pope. In *Julius Exclusus* (1514), a satiric dialogue published anonymously, he ridiculed Julius II, accused him of corruption and imagined him being sent away from the gates of Heaven by St. Peter. In *Paracelsus*, the 1516 preface to his translation of the New Testament, he maintained that the truest link to Jesus was through the scriptures, which is exactly what Luther argued in his 95 Theses a year later.

Erasmus's best-known work was *The Praise of Folly* ('*Moriae Encomium*'), a vitriolic satire on the traditions of the Catholic Church, clerical corruptions and popular superstitions, written in 1509 at the house of Sir Thomas More, published in 1511 and dedicated to his host and fellow Humanist (its title is a pun on More's name). Using the familiar device of the 'wise fool' and speaking in the name of Folly, a Greek goddess -->

begat by Plutus and Youth, and also the term used in the Middle Ages as a synonym for human nature, he satirises priests, popes, pardons and indulgences, the worship of saints, transubstantiation, theological disputes, scholasticism, and indeed spares no one and nothing inherent in the Christian religion of his day. Theologians are attacked for explaining the mysteries of life and the Bible to suit themselves and for creating subtleties in doctrine that even the apostles would not understand. They describe Hell in minute detail, "just as if they had lived there for years".

As for the monks – whom he calls 'brainstick fools' – they invent rules to be kept with mathematical precision but do not keep them themselves. They are "highly in love with themselves, and fond admirers of their own happiness". They detest money but have the vices of wine and women. They use their religious authority to tyrannise. As for popes, cardinals, bishops and priests, if they were to live their lives as the apostles, in poverty and purity, they would give up their positions. The popes in particular "allow Christ to be forgotten, lock him up behind their money-making laws... and murder him with their atrocious manner of life".

Although a reformer and a liberal, Erasmus remained a Catholic. He disliked the religious warfare that developed because of the intolerant atmosphere it induced. Luther's stand, like that of the Church itself, was rigid and inflexible, and Erasmus preferred the road of moderation and conciliation.

Catholic defenders accused Erasmus of having laid an egg that Luther hatched. Erasmus replied that the bird which Luther had hatched was of a different sort. He was finally brought into conflict with Luther and attacked his position on predestination in his work *A Diatribe or Sermon on the Freedom of the Will* (1524). His arguments include that whoever denies the freedom of the will makes God responsible for sin which would be inconsistent with God's righteousness and goodness; and that the demands of God upon man assume his freedom, otherwise God would be a tyrant. He takes the view that man is free to accept or reject the grace of God. He writes: "By free choice in this place we mean a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them".

Erasmus steered a middle course, advocating a hybrid of grace and free will so that salvation is both by merit and grace. God cooperates with man, and man with God. It is a joint venture, a partnership. Erasmus believed that man was bound to sin, but had a right to the forgiving mercy of God, if only he would seek this through the means offered him by the Church itself. He created the intellectual climate in which freedom of thought and reason could develop. But of course this triumph did not come about by intellectual culture alone. Whereas Hus was burned at the stake, Luther survived excommunication because Frederick III, the Elector of Saxony – known to history as Frederick the Wise – hid him in his castle at Wartburg and, when the heat was off, Luther proceeded to organise his own church. Frederick was acting politically in his own secular interest, just as Henry VIII did in England in the 1530s. The success of the Reformation was thus made possible by the growth of these strong monarchies which were prepared to challenge the power of the pope and increase their own power.

What the Reformation did was to bring about a new set of political and social conditions under which freedom could ultimately be secured. But nothing was further from the minds of men like Luther and later John Calvin than the toleration of opinions differing from their own. Ironically, reformers like Luther and Calvin were closer to the Catholic Church than to Humanists like Erasmus. Luther, who had been educated in scholastic theology with little humanist influence, didn't believe in free will and replied to Erasmus's work in 1525 with *On Unfree Will*. Indeed, both Luther and Calvin were dogmatic and absolutist theologians who could not remotely be described as Humanists.

Both replaced one tyranny with another – the tyranny of the Bible instead of the tyranny of the Church – though of course it was the Bible according to Luther or the Bible according to Calvin. When he was safe and had some power, Luther asserted that it was the duty of the state to impose the 'true' doctrine and eradicate heresy. Thus Anabaptists should be put to the sword and Jews, as the murderers of Jesus, should be slain (*On the Jews and their Lies*, 1543). There is no doubt that Luther's anti-Jewish rhetoric contributed significantly to the development of antisemitism in Germany, and in the 1930s and 1940s provided a strong foundation for the Nazi attack on Jews.

John Calvin, unlike Luther, did not advocate the absolute power of the civil ruler. He stood for the opposite: the control of the state by the church. In other words, he favoured a theocracy, which is what he established in Geneva when he was given the opportunity by the city council. Liberty was completely crushed and 'false' doctrines were punished by imprisonment, exile and death.

Thus the Spaniard Michael Servetus, who criticised the doctrine of the Trinity and the concept of predestination, was tried for heresy and committed to the flames in 1553 (below). Philip Melancthon,

Luther's co-reformer and colleague, praised this act as a memorable example to posterity.

In other words, the reformers' justification for rebellion against the Catholic Church – religious liberty – was pious humbug. The liberty was only for themselves and, as soon as they met with opposition, they suppressed it. The struggle for liberty is empty if you are not prepared to grant it to your opponents when you have the power to do so.

It is a familiar picture to those who live in societies like South Africa or Northern Ireland. Puritan Christians in these countries imposed their own narrow biblical theology on the whole population even though a majority or a sizeable minority did not subscribe to it.

In so far as it managed its own affairs, Ulster between 1922 and 1972, far from ensuring 'civil and religious liberty for all' in the slogan of the Orange Order, displayed the classic symptoms of the Puritan state. Its obvious manifestation was an ingrained anti-Catholicism. Widespread segregation and discrimination, especially in jobs, housing and services, turned the Catholic population into an oppressed minority almost on a par with Blacks in South Africa, where a Puritan ethos also prevailed among the White rulers.

As in Calvin's Geneva, the Puritan Ulster state tried to block all measures which offended its ethic. It would have censored literature if it had the power to do so; in the theatre and the cinema where it did have local control it showed itself every bit as circumscribed in its commitment to liberty as the Republic. In the late fifties it succeeded for a time in preventing the staging of Sam Thompson's play *Over the Bridge*, which used vividly plain language to portray the bigotry of Protestant shipyard workers. Films were frequently banned or cut; even as late as 1988 Belfast's moral god-fathers effectively stopped the screening of

Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, after fundamentalists had complained that it was blasphemous.

Although Northern Ireland and South Africa under apartheid were the real progeny of the ideology of leading Reformation figures like Luther and Calvin, there is a developing myth in this year of the anniversary of 1517 that modern liberalism and secularism derive from Christianity and, in particular, the Reformation.

The idea is not entirely new. Nietzsche suggested that liberal values derive from Jewish and Christian monotheism, and of course he rejected these values for that very reason. In a recent work, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*, Larry Siedentop argues that no ancient society embraced the value of individual freedom. Individuals were wholly subordinated to family structures. The roots of liberalism lie in the Christianity that flourished in the Middle Ages. Indeed, secularism is "Europe's noblest achievement and Christianity's gift to the world".

Yet Christianity as portrayed in the Gospels is highly conservative. It subordinates the individual to the state. It tells the people to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and it tells slaves to obey their masters. All should subordinate themselves to a hierarchical earthly authority because their kingdom 'is not of this world'. The truth is the opposite of Siedentop's thesis. It was Renaissance Humanists who asserted individual freedom against the tyranny of the Church and, in some cases, lost their lives as a result.

That Renaissance Humanists largely failed to liberalise Christianity in the face of its intolerance is demonstrated by the fact that imperialism, racism and female subordination denied most of the people of the world their freedom for 300 or more years after the death of Martin Luther. Thus Lutheran and Calvinistic Protestantism was as illiberal and intolerant as Catho-

cism. Their conflicting orthodoxies continued to be enforced through education and, where necessary, censorship and persecution.

Moreover, after Luther's demise in 1546, Lutheran princes combined to fight for their independence from the Catholic Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, and soon Europe was plunged into a century of religious wars in which possibly 12 million people were killed. They were concluded in Europe with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which agreed that people would assume the Christian denomination of their ruler – hardly a liberal outcome. Of course in Ireland the fighting did not end but has continued into modern times.

Thus did Luther's Reformation lead to the permanent division of western Christendom and the further splintering of Protestantism itself. Whether this was a good thing or not is partly for Christians to decide, but it is hardly beneficial to society in general if the divisions cause sectarian strife or worse.

And what of the notion that Protestantism helped the growth of capitalism, as argued for example by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905). The Protestant – notably Calvinist – work ethic supported worldly activities dedicated to acquiring wealth, which indicated that you were one of God's elect. Weber noted that capitalism, which is a state of mind, developed in Europe and most strongly in Protestant nations, such as England, Holland, and Germany, where there were influential groups of ascetic Protestant sects. While there may have been some truth in Weber's analysis, it is hardly true today and, in any case, unbridled capitalism is highly problematic, arguably giving liberty only to the few who exploit others.

Whether or not we think that on a broad historical scale the Reformation was a step towards secularism, in its early years it clearly proved to be a mirror image of the Catholic hegemony

beforehand. If it helped the cause of liberty, this result was an unintended consequence of its founders. It is not Luther who is the real champion of free thought, however brave his “Here I stand, I can do no other” speech at the Diet of Worms, but Erasmus and the other Humanists of the Renaissance. They are our true champions.