

The **Free**thinker

Secular Humanist monthly founded by G W Foote in 1881



Meet Christian, the cross-bearing bear who made Christians cross. The aptly-named figurine hit the headlines earlier this year when zealots around the country denounced the figurine as 'profane' and 'blasphemous' – and in so doing boosted sales of the bear, which is now changing hands at five times its original price

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Guns and Poses: Armed with automatic rifles, two Muslim *jihadists* brandish Islam's most potent weapon of mass destruction, the Koran – see *Freethinking Allowed*, page 2

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I DO not believe in burning books. That's the job of Christian and Muslim zealots. If I did hold with the notion of destroying tomes I considered grossly offensive or a threat to my well-being I would be warming my hands in winter before the combined, comforting flames of the Bible and the Koran.

And I would certainly not drop a book down the toilet. That's plain stupid, because it would only bugged up the plumbing.

Certainly, if someone were to raid my book collection, and set fire to my James Baldwins, Kurt Vonnegut Jrns, and Gore Vidals, I would be incandescent with rage, but I would not want the perpetrators lynched. They are only books, after all, and are easily replaceable. That's what Amazon.com is for.

So, what's the big deal about the Koran and toilets?

By now, the whole world will be aware of the Big Story of last month – the report in *Newsweek* magazine in which it was alleged that interrogators at the notorious Guantanamo Bay, in order to wind up Muslim inmates, had deposited copies of the Koran on or in the toilet bowls of the prison facility. There was even a rumour that a copy of the Koran had been flushed down the toilet. The result was a savage outbreak of violence and turmoil in Afghanistan which the American-backed Afghan government said it was completely unable to control or to manage. People died, as they always do when the religious have a hissy fit, President Bush was again burned in effigy, and the streets again teemed with angry mobs demanding Death to America and the handing over of the perpetrators to Islamic lynch mobs.

The report, as it turned out, was without substance, and *Newsweek* retracted it. This made not a jot of difference, because Islamists believe that even if the whole thing was a pack of lies, the infidel devils, given half a chance, would consign the Koran to the barbecue or the bog. To be a good Muslim, it seems, one has to spend every waking moment in a perpetual froth of indignation and rage – and nothing is designed to raise a Muslim's blood pressure more than the suggestion that someone, somewhere, has abused the Koran.

It's no good saying to these people "calm down, dears, it's only a bloody book!" Bloody, of course, being the operative word, because, to them it is so much more than several million tedious words of Arabic gobbledegook committed to paper: it is nothing more or less than the actual words of an Arabic-speaking God putting right all the cock-ups in earlier "holy" books: specifically the Talmud and Bible.

Lee Harris, contributing editor to Tech Central Station, an American literary website, elaborates on this point.

"There are some things that even the most enlightened Westerners don't get about Muslims – their fanaticism about the Koran ...

The Koran has always been the great stumbling block to any Western understanding of Islam. The Koran means so little to us, and so vastly much to them. We cannot, to be frank about it, comprehend their admiration, not to mention their abject adoration, of the Koran understood as a book. Compare it to Homer or the book of Genesis, or the Gospels, or the great Hindu epochs, and you will be bowled over by the difference.

**This month
Freethinker editor
BARRY DUKE
comments on
the alleged
desecration of Korans**



"Thomas Carlyle once made the comment that only a high sense of duty could carry a Western reader from the first Surah to the last.

"But it is not as a book that Muslims regard the Koran – that is our first misconception. It is in itself a holy and sacred object, like the cross to the Christians or the American flag to the patriotic and red-blooded among us: you don't mess with it. It is not to be trampled on, or stuck in a toilet. It is the great visceral connector that makes all Muslims feel that there is a community between them.

"It was the one thing that Muslims could agree not to squabble about. It was the miracle by which all the differing Arab tribes could be united. Other peoples, notably the Jews, the Christians, and the Zoroastrians had their books; it was now the turn of the Arabs to receive theirs – though theirs would supercede the previous editions of God's Word, much in the same way that a new and up-to-date physics text renders those from an earlier era obsolete.

"The Koran, however, differed radically from other sacred books. *They* were inspired by God, but the Koran was *the very word of God*, and in the language that God clearly



This photograph of the late Pope John Paul II kissing a Koran enraged fundamentalists around the world. By kissing it, they said, he symbolically accepted its doctrine that rejects the Holy Trinity and the divinity of Jesus

spoke when he was by himself, namely, Arabic. Islam would never have been such a challenge to the earlier faiths if it had claimed to have discovered a new god; but it didn't. It claimed to be centred on the *same* god as that of the Jews and Christians – only the Koran represented this god correctly.

"Mohammed insisted that any conflict between the new revelation and the previous ones could only have arisen through the accidental or deliberate misinterpretation of God's word by Jews and by Christians. Thus Islam was born flinging a challenge into the face of both Jews and Christians. It claimed to understand the Jewish and the Christian God better than the Jews and the Christians understood Him; and it was this extraordinary claim that explained the common medieval interpretation of Islam as a Christian heresy – which is why the often politically incorrect Dante put Mohammed in the pit of hell reserved for schismatics and heretics ...

"The Koran does not claim simply to have been inspired by God, the way that Jews and Christians have traditionally interpreted their scripture; rather it is understood as having been quite literally dictated by God, word by word. Or, more precisely, Arabic word by Arabic word.

"By this I don't mean that Allah reveals his Word and that this Word is then encoded into Arabic, as it might have been encoded into any other language: I mean that, according to Islam, Allah's Word is itself Arabic. The Koran is co-eternal with Allah; it always existed, and always will exist; and it has always been in Arabic."

Harris goes on to point out that those who claim that both religions [Christianity and Islam] are equally universalist in their scope and aim are wrong.

"Christians say that the Holy Spirit does not speak to us in his language, but always in ours.

"A God who only speaks Arabic can hardly be universal in the same sense as the Christian God. Yes, it may become universal if everyone forsakes his own native language in order to speak Arabic; but just how universal is a God who is that much entrenched in the ethnocentric particularism of a small sect of nomadic desert tribes? Not to mention the surprising coincidence that the ruler of the universe should be a native speaker of their language," observes Harris.

To you and me and any other rational human being, the nonsense that adherents of the world's great faiths immerse themselves in should be of absolutely no consequence. But it becomes of paramount importance when these beliefs translate themselves into mindless violence, or when they are used to control those who have no interest whatsoever in living their lives according to religious diktat.

To hell with the Talmud, Bible and Koran!

Incitement to Religious Hatred – Blair’s promise to listen is hollow

THE Government’s renewed determination to outlaw “incitement to religious hatred” has been condemned by the National Secular Society.

NSS Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood said: “The Prime Minister promised during the election that he would listen to his critics in this new term, but his threat to use the Parliament Act to force this unpopular measure through gives an entirely different message. It smacks of authoritarianism and arrogance.”

The NSS has been at the forefront of the battle to derail these proposals, and they have been rejected by Parliament on three separate occasions. Keith Porteous Wood commented: “These proposals have failed to reach the statute book despite three attempts in the last four years. This is because the scale of opposition has been of almost unprecedented breadth. It has been across all parties, in Parliament and in the press. Opposition has

come from the Conservative and Liberal Democrat front benches as well as Labour back benches.

“The House of Lords Religious Offences Committee deliberated for over a year and decided not to recommend what the Government is now proposing. Human rights and justice organisations have also strongly opposed the government’s legislative proposals. The major evangelical Christian groups are equally opposed, as are other religious groups, including some Muslim ones. How much stronger could the opposition be, and is it not arrogant of the Government to assume there are all wrong?”

“The principal problem which the legislation seeks to address is white separatist groups inciting hatred on racial grounds, but using religion as a proxy. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats tabled a joint amendment to clarify that the race hatred legislation could be

used in such instances, but the government opposed the sensible solution, which carried minimal freedom of expression dangers.

“The thresholds of proof proposed by the government are dangerously low. It is not necessary to prove intent, merely that material could have been seen by any person — not even any reasonable person — in whom it is likely to stir up racial or religious hatred.

“There have been widespread serious allegations that the Government has been motivated in pushing through this legislation simply to appease minority religious interests. Freedom of speech is our main protection against attacks on our democracy and justice. Freedom of speech is already being eroded by the month in the face of unprecedented attacks from religious groups, and it will be dealt a further major blow if these proposals reach the statute book.

“We call on the Government to accept the opposition amendments.”

Arab pop show branded ‘a crime against Islam’

SAUDI religious scholars have condemned an Arab television *Star Academy* competition as “a crime against Islam” and urged the handsome Saudi Arabian pop singer who triumphed last month to repent.

According to a Reuters report, more than 60 sheikhs rounded on the fresh-faced Hisham Abdul-rahman, whose victory in the *Star Academy* reality show triggered the closest thing to pop hysteria seen in the ultra-conservative Muslim kingdom. In a statement posted on the Saudi news Web site Al-Wifaq they also criticised the “depraved” Lebanese television station which broadcast the show.

Young Arab men and women were put together in an “abominable state of mingling of sexes ... exposing themselves, singing, dancing and corruption”, they said.

Abdul-rahman received a hero’s welcome on his return to Saudi Arabia in late April.

But a public appearance in a Riyadh shopping mall, where admirers rushed to shake his hand or even kiss him, proved too much for authorities.



Vigilantes known as the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, dragged him

away and put him on a plane to the Red Sea city of Jeddah, newspapers reported.

“A number of youths and girls crowded round him and deviant behaviour occurred. Then the commission removed him from Riyadh on the orders of the governor,” the 63 sheikhs said in the statement.

“We call on this youth, and all who took part with him ... and all who gave media coverage or prizes or votes, we call on all of them to repent before God,” the sheikhs said.

Saudi Arabia, home to the puritan Wahhabi school of Islam, requires women to be covered in public and accompanied by a male relative. Mixing of unmarried men and women is forbidden.

In *Star Academy*, a group of young musicians from across the Arab world shared a house and were filmed 24 hours a day as they competed for a recording contract. The programme drew huge audiences across the region, but angered religious scholars.

Saudi Arabia’s main mobile-phone operator said in January it was blocking customers from voting by text message for a winner because the programme failed to match the kingdom’s values, but many Saudis insist they were still able to vote.

“What happened is considered a crime against Islam and a great offence against the Islamic nation,” the statement said. It also criticised the crowds who flocked to see Abdul-

rahman, saying they “indicate a defect in society.” Al-Wifaq said Saudi authorities had also decreed that Abdul-rahman be prevented from accepting any prizes in Saudi Arabia — meaning he will lose out on a car which one local company planned to award him.

**Afghan woman
executed for adultery**

AN Afghan woman has been stoned to death for adultery, the first such incident in Afghanistan since the Taliban was ousted from power.

Amina, a 29-year-old married woman, was publicly stoned to death earlier this year after a district court’s decision in Argo, to the west of Faizabad, the provincial capital of Badakhshan.

Adultery is forbidden in the Muslim country and, under Islamic sharia law, the penalties can range from flogging to stoning to death. Several women and men were given such punishments in Badakhshan, a remote north-eastern province, during the government of the Mujahadeen (holy warriors) in the 1990s.

The practice became common during the rule of hardline Taliban who controlled most of Afghanistan until late 2001 when they were ousted from power.



Top 'sex Nazi' (no, not Pope Benedict) is exposed as gay

IN MORE than 20 years in the US Legislature, Republican Jim West initiated legislation to outlaw sexual contact between consenting teenagers; supported a bill that would have barred gays and lesbians from working for schools, day care centres and some state agencies; voted to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman; and, as Senate majority leader, allowed a bill that would ban discrimination against gays and lesbians to die in committee without a hearing.

But last month West, 54, one of the most powerful, anti-gay Republican politicians in Washington, was exposed as gay. Local newspaper the *Spokesman-Review* reported that Spokane Mayor West spent time cruising the internet in search of sex with young men.

West, who became Mayor of Washington's second largest city, Spokane, was exposed after he attempted to solicit a man on the internet chatline, Gay Com. What the arch-conservative, God-fearing Christian did not know was that the person to whom he offered gifts, favours and a City Hall internship was in fact a forensic computer expert working for the newspaper.

Immediately after the story broke, West admitted to using the trappings of his current office to entice what he thought was a young adult man, but denied allegations that he molest-



ed two young boys more than 20 years ago.

West confirmed to the *Spokesman-Review* that he did make offers to a man he believed was 18. After the story hit the newsstands, West sent reporters a remorseful e-mail. "I want to sincerely apologize to you personally for the shame I have brought to the Mayor's office and the city," West wrote. "I stumbled and let you down."

But he denied accusations by the *Spokesman-Review*, which carried out a three-year investigation, that he had molested two young boys. Now adults, the two alleged that West fondled them and forced them to perform sexual acts on him when they were boy scouts.

Asked about the claims, West told the newspaper: "I didn't abuse them. I don't know these people. I didn't abuse anybody, and I didn't have sex with anybody under 18 - ever - woman or man."

In a statement, West elaborated: "Allegations about my private life were twofold. I categorically deny allegations about incidents that supposedly occurred 24 years ago as alleged by two convicted felons and about which I have no knowledge. The newspaper also reported that I have visited a gay chat line on the Internet and had relations with adult men. I don't deny that."

During a February 26 online conversation published in the *Spokesman-Review*, West wrote to someone posing as a 17-year-old teenager. "Remember, I'm very closeted. No one knows I like guys. Except the few guys I've been with and highly trusted," West wrote.

"It's just that the openly gay guys are a little over the top for me. I don't really like the in-your-face attitude some guys have. And their massive political agenda either. I say live and let live. Most gay guys turn me off, too."

In one chatroom conversation West said he hated "damn sex Nazis" who tried to regulate other people's lives, but, hypocrite that he was, failed to disclose that that he himself was one of America's worst "sex Nazis".

Cross-bearing bear upsets Christians

A "blasphemous" figurine, no longer on sale following complaints from Christians, is now changing hands at five times its original price.

So great is the demand for the four-inch high bear that it is being sold on the internet auction site, eBay, for around £50.00.

When the bear was first released to coincide with Easter, thousands of enthusiasts rushed out to buy it.

The bear, aptly called Christian, was the latest in the Bad Taste Bear series. The figurine came complete with a crown of thorns and his very own cross, inscribed with the words "Pilate's Pizza - 0800- Peperoni."

John Wright, of the hugely-successful Bad Taste Bear company based in Newcastle, said: "We were only having a bit of fun ... People take things way too seriously."

He was referring to the row that blew up after the bear went on sale. Religious leaders were outraged, with the Rev David Holloway,

vicar at Jesmond Parish Church in Newcastle, going so far to brand it "blasphemous".

But the Dean of Newcastle, the Very Rev Christopher Dalliston, of the city's St Nicholas' Cathedral, said that although the figure was in bad taste there are more pressing matters to consider - such as children dying of poverty.

"I would like to shake his hand," John said. "He summed it up perfectly, and if it makes people actually think about Easter and its meaning, then great. We were having a giggle and we think it's funny, that's all."

A lot of people found it funny. All 5,000 of the limited-edition bear were snapped up by avid Bad Taste bear collectors. Figurines in the range



include bears on the toilet, bears in bondage gear and bears on drugs

But the company says it does have limits, and not every suggested design is accepted. There was an idea for an Osama Bear Laden and an Adolf Hitler, but the company decided this might be going too far.

Quote of the month

"RATZINGER'S countenancing of paedophilia and thus the wrecking of children's lives, while inveighing against contraception, homosexuality, and now brazenly meddling in US policy, is hypocritical and something this world doesn't need. Besides President Bush, the rabid evangelical extremists just got themselves another standard-bearer in their quest to dump our constitution for a theocracy."

- Comment, *Sag Harbor Express*

Jewish fundamentalists planned to attack 'holy' Muslim site

ISRAELI police last month arrested and released a group of ultra-right-wing Jewish fundamentalists who planned to spark an ethnic bloodbath by attacking the holiest Muslim site in Jerusalem.

News of the plot to attack the Dome of the Rock was released after a suppression order, in place for several days, was lifted.

Authorities said they had arrested three young men from an ultra-orthodox Hasidic sect who planned to buy a shoulder-fire missile and fire it at the Dome of the Rock, the third holiest site in Islam.

They then talked of attacking police with hand grenades, before committing suicide.

The Government said it released the three because there was no evidence they had taken steps to carry out the plot.

The site is holy to both Muslims and Jews. The Dome of the Rock is built in the precincts of the Jewish temple destroyed by the Romans 2000 years ago. The site, in Jerusalem's Old City, is at the centre of intense political and national tensions.

In September 2000, then opposition leader

Ariel Sharon's insistence on entering the site with his supporters sparked days of Palestinian rioting that led to the present round of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Muslims have warned that any attack on the site would spark massive unrest around the world.

The Israeli security agency Shin Bet has warned repeatedly in recent months of plots among right-wing Jews to attack the site in the hope of sparking anarchy, aimed at derailing Prime Minister Sharon's Gaza "disengagement" plan.

Members of the mainly religious Israeli right believe that for the Messiah to come to earth, Jews must occupy and control the entire biblical land of Israel – usually defined as everything between the Euphrates River in Iraq and the Nile in Egypt – and rebuild the destroyed temple in Jerusalem.

Mr Sharon's plans to withdraw troops and 8000 settlers from the Gaza Strip have enraged the Messianic Jews, who have usually been funded and armed by the state and protected by the police and army.

Heart of the Beholder to be screened in London

A FILM event organised by GALHA (the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association) takes place this summer on July 8 and 9.

GALHA will be showing two very interesting films. The first will be the British premiere of the much-anticipated *Heart of the Beholder* – a film by Darlene Lieblich about the persecution of an American family by a squad of reprehensible Christian zealots. The couple ran a chain of highly successful video rental stores, but attracted the unwelcome attention of a group of Christian fundamentalists who tried to stop them hiring out *The Last Temptation of Christ*. The background to the making of this film, and the vicious campaign to prevent it being screened at film festivals and other venues, has been extensively covered in the *Freethinker*.

The film had to be made with private finance, as none of the major studios was prepared to deal with the anticipated consequences. More information (and pictures) can be accessed at www.beholder.com.

The other film is *Latter Days*, directed by C Jay Cox. It tells the story of Christian Markelli (played by Wes Ramsey), a hunky, twenty-something West Hollywood party boy who gets more than he bargains for when he tries to seduce nineteen-year-old Aaron Davis (Steve Sandvoss), a sexually confused Mormon missionary who moves into his apartment complex. When Markelli exposes Davis's sexual desire, Davis rejects him for being shallow and empty. The encounter shatters both boys' reality and then draws the two into a passionate romance that risks destroying both their lives.

Again this caused great controversy when it opened in the United States, although it has been critically praised. (More information at www.latterdaysmovie.com)

The films will be shown at The Screening Room, Covent Garden Hotel, 10 Monmouth Street, London WC2. *Heart of the Beholder* on Friday evening at 7pm and the following day at 3pm. *Latter Days* will have two performances on the Saturday at 1pm & 5pm.

Tickets (£6.00 or £10.00 for both films) are available on-line at <http://www.galha.org/events/film.html>

Tickets can also be purchased by post. Cheques (and an sae) should be sent to GALHA, 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 2HB.

Irish atheist and comedienne conducts Dave Allen's funeral

ICONOCLASTIC Irish comedian Dave Allen is no longer with us, but his spirit lives on the form of an atheist woman comedienne.

Jeanne Rathbone, a British Humanist Association celebrant who conducted Dave Allen's secular funeral, performs under the name Sheela-na-Gig, a name given to the female masturbating figures found all over Ireland on cornerstones on castles as well as on churches.

According to a report in Scotland on Sunday, Jeanne "is their modern-day counterpart. Her hour-long monologue explores vanity and hypocrisy in a fiercely funny way. Originally from the west of Ireland and now based in London, she is an alcohol counsellor by day. She has a perceptive eye and an attuned ear for the ridiculous.

"Minimal props, a penis-shaped false nose and some Playboy pin-ups are used to devastating effect."

Jeanne told the *Freethinker* that "as an athe-

ist/humanist I regarded Dave Allen as a role model and a trailblazer when I became a comedienne. His family deemed it hugely appropriate that a fellow Irishwoman and atheist should conduct his funeral, which contained wonderful tributes that provided much laughter along with the tears."



WHEN I was in college, I wrote a research paper that changed my life forever. I had grown up in a fundamentalist Christian family living in the buckle of the Bible Belt where I was fed a steady diet of racism and Cold War anti-communism. My grandfather had been a member of the Klan in the 1920s, and as a high school student I was saving money to join the John Birch Society.

Most personally detrimental to me, however, was the denigration by my high-school-educated parents of higher education. "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing," they exhorted from the Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament. And, when I insisted on attending college, they reminded me incessantly that the wisdom of man is foolishness in the eyes of God.

However, getting an education from a fundamentalist, Bob Jones University-like institution would be acceptable. I did not attend Bob Jones, but almost miraculously, given the fact that I was attending a similar institution, I started to think critically, and therefore, from their perspective, my parents' caveat that "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing" was validated.

In the second semester of my freshman year, I chose to write a research paper on race. It was 1964, and that summer Congress would pass the Civil Rights Act.

Throughout my high school years, Martin Luther King was becoming a household word, and few people in my world held anything but contempt for the "coloured communist sympathiser."

The Dominionist Godfather

THE godfather of the Dominionists is Dr James Kennedy, an influential evangelical preacher.

A former Arthur Murray dance instructor, he launched his Florida ministry in 1959, when most evangelicals still followed Billy Graham's gospel of non-partisan soul-saving. Kennedy built Coral Ridge Ministries into a \$37-million-a-year empire, with a TV-and-radio audience of three million, by preaching that it was time to save America – not soul by soul but election by election. After helping found the Moral Majority in 1979, Kennedy became a five-star general in the Christian Army. Bush sought his blessing before running for president – and continues to consult top Dominionists on matters of federal policy.

"Our job is to reclaim America for Christ, whatever the cost," Kennedy says. "As the vice-regents of God, we are to exercise godly dominion and influence over our neighborhoods, our schools, our government, our literature and arts, our sports arenas, our entertainment media, our news media, our scientific endeavors – in short, over every aspect and institution of human society."

As I reflect on my innocence at that age, but more importantly, my thirst for knowledge, I recall the hours of reading and research invested in the topic. Specifically, I set out to discover if African Americans were genuinely equal with whites. Pathetically, I was actually seeking evidence for the humanity of blacks. On the one hand, that I needed to research the topic in order to grasp that African Americans were my broth-

In a swingeing attack on Christian fundamentalists, CAROLYN BAKER warns of the danger of 'Dominionism'

ers and sisters was tragic, but on the other hand, that particular research project at that particular time in my life opened one door and closed another forever, and there was no turning back. I didn't get an A on the paper, but it launched for me a journey of social justice that I have been on ever since.

Today, as I witness the possibility of losing the last shreds of liberty to a fundamentalist theocracy, I am reminded once again of my college research paper and how "dangerous" research, critical thinking, and asking the right question can be. All those years ago, I extricated myself from the fundamentalist Christian programming of my family and subculture, and now I am watching it threaten to engulf my entire country.

To even attempt to understand the religious right, which many are now naming "Dominionism," one must grasp the mental duress it holds on its followers. I should know; I was one of them.

Axiomatic in the worldview of the fundamentalist, born-again Christian is: "I have the truth, I'm right; you don't have the truth, you're wrong." As a result, critical thinking, research, or intellectual freedom of exploration are not only unnecessary, they are dangerous and potentially heretical.

Paul Krugman noted in a recent article that while the religious right bashes academia for its "liberal bias", studies of the political persuasions of college and university professors indicate that persons who prefer academia as a lifelong career tend to be more liberal, just as those who prefer the military as a lifelong career tend to be more conservative.

The halls of academia do not spawn the likes of Tim LaHaye minister, (author and Bible prophecy "expert") or evangelist Pat Robertson. Remember, "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

But simply shunning critical thinking does

not make one a terrorist. What does, however, is the notion that because one has 'the truth' and everyone else who believes differently is "wrong", those individuals will be condemned to spend eternity in hell and must be incessantly reminded of their fate and their "inferior" status in the eyes of God. Moreover, because of one's "superior" spiritual status, one has the so-called "divine authority" to subvert, by whatever means necessary, the very machinery of government in order to establish a theocracy in which one's worldview is predominant.

When sufficiently pressed, Christian fundamentalists intractably argue that people are poor because they have not been born again.

Like the Puritans of seventeenth-century America, they regard wealth as a sign that one is following the will of God, as poverty indicates that one is not. People are poor because they are doing something to cause themselves to be poor, and whatever that may be, the underlying cause is that they do not have a "personal relationship" with Jesus Christ.

'Let us not overlook the obvious: Dominionism is about dominion – over women, children, the poor, people of colour, alternative sexual orientations, and the earth. It fits so nicely with fascist tyranny. Christian fundamentalism is fundamentally Un-American'

Increasingly, one sees many faces of colour in fundamentalist congregations, and those individuals are, almost without exception, born-again Christians who toe the Dominionist line with other people of colour. Dominionism deplores the mental health system. Like those who are poor, the mentally ill would not be so if they were born-again Christians. After all, mental illness is a label given by the Dr Phils of the world to people whose minds have been devoured by Satan. What they really need is Christian conversion and, of course, a great deal of medication from the pharmaceutical lobby.

The only valid therapist is Jesus; down with Oprah, God bless Joyce Meyer. Obviously, according to Dominionism, government should not be financing mental-health programmes.

And what about addictions? In case you haven't caught on to the drill yet, Jesus is the answer to that one as well. Who needs a Twelve-Step programme? There's only one step: Accept Jesus Christ as your personal saviour as soon as possible, and your addictions will be erased faster than those 18 minutes on

the Richard Nixon tapes. (Remind me to write another article on the religious right AS an addiction.)

Christian fundamentalism in "cafeteria style" has chosen which parts of Jesus' teachings it chooses to honour and which not. Preference is always given to the "I am" passages such as those in the Gospel of John in which Jesus says, "I am the door; the bread of life; the way, the truth, and the life; the light of the world; the living water," and so on, supposedly claiming to be God and commanding his listeners to accept him as the only way to live forever with God in heaven and escape eternity in hell. Little attention is given to the Sermon on the Mount and the many passages where Jesus condemns the wealthy and the religious leaders of his time for their callous, hypocritical, mean-spirited absence of compassion. In fact, theologians who pay much attention to Jesus' teachings on compassion are viewed as bleeding hearts, unorthodox, and not really Christian. For this reason, Pat Robertson stated on his 700 Club Programme, January 14, 1991: "You say you're supposed to be nice to the Episcopalians and the Presbyterians and the Methodists and this, that, and the other thing. Nonsense. I don't have to be nice to the spirit of the Antichrist."

Let us not overlook the obvious: Dominionism is about dominion – over women, children, the poor, people of colour, alternative sexual orientations, and the earth. It fits so nicely with fascist tyranny. Christian fundamentalism is fundamentally un-American.

Dominionists clearly desire a revised United States Constitution that will institute a fundamentalist Christian theocracy. As investigative journalist Katherine Yurica has so assiduously reported, the Dominionist agenda would shred the Constitution and end the democratic republic our Deist founding fathers hammered out for five gruelling months in 1787 in Philadelphia.

In fact, Pat Robertson believes that only Christian people should interpret and benefit

Liberal US judges are worse than Nazis or Muslim terrorists

In a nationwide TV broadcast last month Christian Coalition founder Pat Robertson said that the threat posed by liberal US judges was "probably more serious than a few bearded terrorists who fly into buildings. When interviewer George Stephanopoulos asked if the evangelist really believed that these judges posed "the most serious threat America has faced in nearly 400 years of history, more serious than al Qaeda, more serious than Nazi Germany and Japan, more serious than the Civil War?" he responded, "George, I really believe that!"

from the Constitution. Again, on his 700 Club, December 30, 1981, he stated that "The Constitution of the United States is a marvelous document for self-government by Christian people. But the minute you turn the document into the hands of non-Christian people and atheistic people they can use it to destroy the very foundation of our society." Never mind that most of the founding fathers did not consider themselves Christian and clearly, adamantly, and unequivocally defended the right of everyone in America to believe – or not believe – as he/s chose.

Replacing this republic would be the Dominionist theocracy which pronounces itself above the rule of law and claims to be directed by the "higher law" of the Bible. In that society, abortion would be illegal, even in cases of rape or incest; capital punishment would be mandatory in every state, and for some Dominionists, it should be extended to anyone with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual; the nation's entire infrastructure and economy would be privatised; public schools would be turned into essentially Dominionist parochial schools, and no social services would exist except those of faith-based charities.

The fastest-growing industry in the nation, the prison system, would undoubtedly find itself at the top of the financial markets as hordes of "unbelievers" were incarcerated. However, given the multitudes of fundamentalist Christian organizations now proselytizing in the nation's prisons, the heathen masses would be given "one more chance" to be born again, hence sending them to prison would be doing God's work and society favour.

Most egregious, and certainly paralleling terrorism's culture of death, is the fundamentalist Christian contempt for life – I repeat: *contempt for life*. As Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister notes, being "pro-birth" is not the same as being pro-life. Forcing females to have children without providing what they need financially, emotionally, and educationally is a pro-birth agenda that murders countless bodies and souls.

Because they don't think the Sermon on the Mount is really very important, these individuals have an appalling disconnect, fawning over the decaying body of a woman in a permanent vegetative state while praising the demise of over 100,000 innocent Iraqi citizens and touting the patriotism of some 1,600 dead U.S. troops.

The religious right of twenty-first century America is anti-American, inherently violent, and a cruel, tyrannical, punitive, force of death and destruction. In its mindset, adult human lives do not matter because the human condition itself is inherently evil, resulting in eternal and everlasting punishment in hell, unless its members are redeemed in a prescribed manner

by the fundamentalist God/ man/saviour, Jesus Christ. Moreover, with an embarrassingly adolescent flamboyance, Dominionists shamelessly rape, pillage, and desecrate the earth because, in the first place, their Bible has given them authority over all things human and in the second place, their "imminent" apocalyptic rapture, transporting them from the human "veil of tears" to live happily ever after in heaven, entitles them to do so.

Meanwhile, we the unredeemed, the unbelievers, the poor, the feminists, the gay and lesbian, the disabled, the homeless, the mentally ill, the addicted, and those who are conscientiously following divergent spiritual paths of their choice, are suffering in the wake of Christian fundamentalism's devastation of the economy, the earth, and the human race.

But this is what we deserve for not becoming born-again devotees of their Jesus. And we deserve even worse – to burn in hell for all of eternity. Hence, we are expendable, inconsequential, and a force to be conquered, broken, imprisoned, or killed. In his article, "Feeling The Hate", in the May 2005 issue of *Harpers Magazine*, Chris Hedges conjectures that we may well see a civil war in America between the religious right and everyone else who does not identify with it. I do not know if this will happen, but I do know that the demented logic and circular reasoning of "the Bible says" fundamentalists must be challenged and exposed at every turn for what it is: intellectual, emotional, and spiritual terrorism – un-American, un-democratic, inhuman. Furthermore, I wouldn't be surprised if some of their children, somewhere, sometime, write research papers that prove to the world that "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing".

• Carolyn Baker is an adjunct professor of history living in Southern New Mexico.

The Dominionist oath

AT the beginning of 2005, 900 of America's staunchest Christian fundamentalists gathered at Fort Lauderdale to examine what they had accomplished in last year's presidential election – and to plan what's next. The name of the conference: *Reclaiming America for Christ*. These evangelical activists are cock-a-hoop, for they succeeded in bringing four million new Christian voters to the polls last November, sending George W Bush back to the White House and 32 new pro-lifers to Congress.

At the conference's opening ceremony, the Dominionists recite an oath they dream of hearing in every classroom: "I pledge allegiance to the Christian flag, and to the Saviour for whose kingdom it stands. One Saviour, crucified, risen and coming again, with life and liberty for all who believe."

Religion and 'go perfect'

The late John Paul II is certainly the man for the job of patron saint of paedophiles, but it would be wrong to hold the Catholic Church solely to blame for the sexual predation of the young. For, as Donald Capps pointed out in his 1992 presidential address to members of the US-based Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, religion and child abuse go "perfect together" and "are mutually attractive".

Capps is quoted in a lengthy article published on the official website of the Hare Krishna Movement (ISKON – the International Society for Krishna Consciousness) which is the latest religious organisation – many call it a cult – to have become embroiled in a child abuse scandal.

Details of abuse suffered by children at the hands of their Hare Krishna mentors were revealed in American documentary *Faith and Fear – the Children of Krishna* screened earlier this year by Australia's SBS (Special Broadcasting Service).

Reviewing the documentary for *The Age*, Melbourne, Nicole Brady wrote:

"Think Hare Krishna and chances are you get an image of sari-clad, barefoot people dancing through the city chiming bells and infectiously chanting 'Hare Krishna. Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna'. For most of us that stereotype probably encapsulates all we know about the religion – or cult, as some featured here would have it – but there is a lot more to know.

"Running for more than an hour, this comprehensive documentary charts the arrival of Hare Krishna beliefs in America, looks at how the religion took root there, and follows its evolution to the present-day lawsuits brought on behalf of some children sent to Hare Krishna boarding schools, or *gurukulas*.

"It is a tale as intriguing as it is tragic, because some of the individuals claim to have been victims of terrible abuses. Using archival footage, the documentary introduces us to the Indian believer Prabhupada, who as an old man was told by his guru to leave home and head to the United States to spread his beliefs. He arrived in New York smack in the middle of the age of free love and flower power, yet somehow his message of a religion that forbade intoxication, gambling, illicit sex and meat found a willing audience. Within months hundreds of young Americans had become Hare Krishnas, freely embracing the strict lifestyle of a believer.

"Once they married and had children, however, their children were denied that same luxury of choice. Following the advice of Prabhupada, the children were sent to Hare Krishna boarding schools where they were subjected to physical and emo-

tional abuse in the name of religious instruction. Even worse, some were the victims of sex abuse at the hands of believers and also paedophiles who infiltrated the schools.

"The film-makers interview some of the graduates of the *gurukulas*; one testifies "there was never a moment in my childhood when I was not terrified". The film also features interviews with parents who abandoned their offspring to such awful places – their comments offer a fascinating insight into how thoughtlessly trusting people can be.

"Sadly, this documentary adds the Hare Krishnas to the grim list of religious bodies that have failed to protect children left in their care. As ever with these cases, the irony is utterly tragic."

The Hare Krishna scandal first hit the headlines in the late 1990s. In a front-page report on October 9, 1998, the *New York Times* carried a report by Laurie Goodstein. She wrote that "in its own official journal, the Hare Krishna movement has published an unusually candid expose detailing widespread physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children who were sent to live in the group's boarding schools in the United States and India in the 1970s and 1980s."

"Parents were often unaware of the abuse because they were travelling around soliciting donations for their guru's books, in airports and on the streets, leaving their children in the

care of Hare Krishna monks and young devotees who had no training in educating children and often resented the task," the report said.

The movement's leadership was first forced to confront the victims of abuse at a meeting in May 1996, when a panel of 10 former Krishna pupils testified that they had been regularly beaten and caned at school, denied medical care and sexually molested and raped homosexually at knife point.

A recent documentary shown in Australia added the Hare Krishna movement to the long list of religious organisations which have become embroiled in child sex-abuse scandals.

EMMA JONES reports.

"I remember being made to sleep naked in a cold bathtub for a month," Jahnvi Dasi, 26, who was sent to a Krishna boarding school in Los Angeles at age 4, said in an interview with the *New York Times*. "I had wet my bed, and it was easier for them to make me sleep in the tub than to change my sheets."

Ms Dasi also told the leadership meeting in 1996 that she wound up in a diabetic coma for three weeks after her teachers insisted that her health problems were a ruse to avoid cleaning the school and chanting in the temple. "They neglected to take me to a doctor, so I ended up in a coma," at which time she was taken to a hospital, she said.

The paper said that the Hare Krishna movement is now acknowledging that the legacy of abuse and the leadership's failure to grapple with it earlier have led many Hare Krishna children and their parents in this country to abandon the faith.

"Many people don't trust the leadership," E. Burke Rochford Jr., a sociologist of religion at Middlebury College in Vermont, the author of one of the two studies published by ISKCON, said. "They don't trust the movement, and people have become estranged as a consequence."

The movement now claims an estimated 90,000 followers in the United States, of whom only about 800 live full-time in the



Child abuse 'together'

group's 45 American spiritual communities, called ashrams. At the movement's peak in the United States in the late 1970s, about 10,000 devotees lived in American ashrams, but most now live and work in the secular world. Another significant shift is that where once the movement in the United States consisted almost entirely of Anglo converts to Hinduism, about half of the people now worshipping in Krishna temples in the United States are recent immigrants from India and Asia.

In recent years, the Krishna movement has experienced its biggest growth in Eastern Europe and in India, where it was once regarded with disdain by native Hindus. Internationally, there are now an estimated million adherents to the Hare Krishna movement, known formally as ISKCON.

Goodstein reported that "public revelations of sexual abuse by clergymen have plagued religious groups from the Roman Catholic Church to the United Methodist Church in the last decade. But it is rare for a religious organisation to choose to disclose the extent and causes of systemic child abuse in its official publication.

"We need to get to the bottom of it," said Anuttama Dasa, the North American director of communications for ISKCON, "and to the best of our ability do whatever we can to try to repair the damage to the kids and show them we do care as a religious society."

Several schools with dedicated, loving teachers avoided any allegations of abuse, Rochford wrote. But severe sexual and physical abuse was common at the *gurukulas*, where many American adherents sent their adolescent boys. When children tried to send letters home sharing their misery, some schools in India censored the letters, Rochford said. The highest levels of abuse in American *gurukulas* were reported in Dallas, Seattle and New Vrindaban, West Virginia. There have been several lawsuits arising from child abuse cases at these Krishna schools but they do not approach the number or scope of such cases brought against the Roman Catholic Church.

Nevertheless, one claim made against the movement in 2000 was a sizeable one – a \$400-million lawsuit filed by more than 40 former pupils of boarding schools run by the

organisation between 1972 and 1990. A news release from the office of the attorney handling the case stated at the time: "Today 44 young adults filed a \$400-million-dollar damage suit against the Hare Krishna for sexual, physical and emotional torture inflicted upon them as children. The suit says plaintiffs were sexually, physically and emotionally abused, along with hundreds of other children, who were kept during two decades at Hare Krishna's boarding schools.

The suit, filed in the Federal District Court in Dallas, Texas, named ISKCON as the lead defendant, along with sixteen other ISKCON entities and seventeen individual members of its governing board of commissioners, including the estate of the movement's founder, Prabhupada. The plaintiffs reside in various cities in the United States, Canada and England.

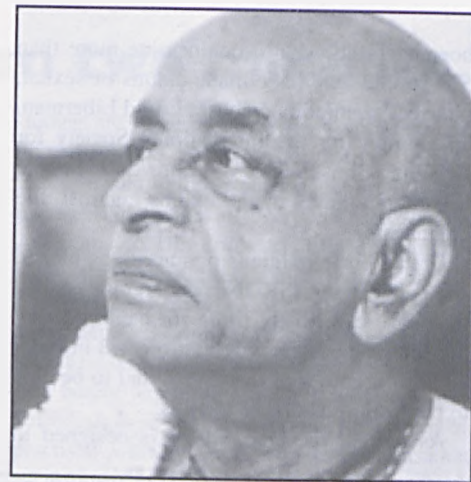
Dallas trial lawyer Windle Turley, attorney for the plaintiffs, said "This lawsuit describes the most unthinkable abuse and maltreatment of little children. It includes rape, sexual abuse, physical torture and emotional terror of children as young as three years of age. The worst of the practices spanned two decades, starting in 1972 with ISKCON's first school in Dallas, Texas. The abuse continued in a half-dozen other schools in the US and eventually at two boys' schools in India."

Although the leadership in ISKCON has long been aware of the mistreatment and abuse inflicted upon little children entrusted to it to raise, the full scope and profound maltreatment of its children has only recently been exposed.

"We believe the facts as they are developed will reveal more than a thousand child victims, many of whom have already taken their own lives or are today emotionally and socially dysfunctional.

"Elements within this new religious movement have attempted to operate outside the child protection laws of a half-dozen states. As a result, a generation of ISKCON children are permanently, and many profoundly, injured."

Greg Luczyk was 9 years old, attending a Hare Krishna boarding school in India, when he made what the religious community's leaders apparently considered a grave mistake: he



The late Prabhupada

found money on the streets of Mayapur and spent it on chocolate for himself and his fellow classmates. Luczyk, now 30, says he was locked in a room for three days without meals and subjected to regular beatings by a Krishna minister. Luczyk said that until a few years ago he could not speak about the horrors he says he experienced at the hands of the Hare Krishna teachers.

He said the abuse has had lasting effects: he is unemployed and has trouble finding work because of what he describes as a lack of self-esteem. "I just have a fear of people," he also says. "I always thought that this stuff would never come out," Luczyk said. "A lot of suffering and internal pain does not always come up to the surface. For me, it was just blocked right out."

Responding to the lawsuit, Anuttama Dasa said: "It is terrible that child abuse has affected public and private schools, neighborhoods, churches, and families. Sadly, some children of the Hare Krishna society have also been victimised. If any of the events alleged in this suit did occur, we regret that they did, and we will continue to make every effort to help address the needs of the young people named in the suit," said Dasa. "At the same time, numerous allegations made in the suit by the lawyer, Windle Turley of Dallas, are gross exaggerations and outright falsehoods," Dasa said.

The Vaishnava religious tradition to which Hare Krishna devotees adhere is a monotheistic branch of the Hindu faith. Vaishnava scriptures state that the protection and care of children is an essential religious practice. According to Dasa, child abuse in any form is "horrible violation" of Krishna principles. Later, more joined the class action against ISKCON, bringing the total of plaintiffs to 90. This prompted the organisation to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in 2002. Two years later the movement filed a re-organisation plan in bankruptcy court that its leaders

(Continued on p10)

hoped will allow it to compensate more than 500 people who have made claims of sexual, physical or emotional abuse. David Liberman, an attorney for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, said 540 people worldwide have made claims against the organisation.

Unlike other religious organisations tainted by similar crises, ISKON is not arguing against the abuse claims. By filing for bankruptcy, it hopes that its assets will be protected in order for it to keep out of the courts, and to be able to pay compensation to victims.

As part of the deal, which is designed to

save the future of the global sect and block further claims by abuse victims, Hare Krishnas around the world have been asked by head office in America to contribute to the compensation fund. The movement operates in more than 350 countries.

The editor of the ISKCON Communications Journal asked Rochford to write an article chronicling the history and causes of abuse at Krishna boarding schools.

In his study, Rochford said that the movement drew very young devotees, many in their late teens and early 20s. Those who were not successful proselytizing and collecting contri-

butions on the street were put to work in the movement's boarding schools. There was no screening of teacher candidates, no training, little financial support, high turnover and often as many as 20 students per teacher.

"The mentality of the time was that distributing the guru's books and engaging oneself in missionary activity was the most important service that one could be involved in," said Rochford. "People's status within the movement was very much based on their ability to be effective in those tasks. Family, the way we see present in most Christian traditions, was not valued in the same way. Sexuality and family were something for those that were spiritually weak."

Prabhupada's teachings also condemned homosexuality. "The homosexual appetite of a man for another man is demoniac and is not for any sane male in the ordinary course of life."

"Celibacy was the ideal", wrote Rochford. But to accommodate families, the movement's founder asked the Krishna temples in the United States to set up boarding schools modelled on the *gurukulas*, or Hindu schools, in India.

The goal was to immerse students in the spiritual life, which Swami Bhaktivedanta taught meant cutting the "ropes of affection" between parent and child, Rochford wrote. Children were sent to the *gurukulas* as early as age 3 or 4, and visited their parents as seldom as once a month, or even once a semester.

The movement no longer maintains boarding schools in the United States, and many Krishna families now send their children to public schools. But some Krishna temples do run day schools for students.

ISKON turns its eyes to Africa

When religions begin to falter or fail in the west, they turn their attention to more gullible parts of the world, and the Hare Krishna movement is no exception. According to the South African newspaper, the *Post*, an African American Hare Krishna big-big has decided to "spread the word of godliness to the people of his mother continent."

"His Holiness" Bhaktivedanta Asrama Maharaja, who holds the rank of "the highest order of the Krishna Consciousness Movement", came to South Africa earlier this year on a whirlwind recruitment drive. He "believes Africa is in need of spiritual upliftment and he has planned to return next year and remain in the country until he is satisfied Africa's youth and older generation come back to God. Love of God and engagement in service to God elevate our consciousness and create fellowship and community."

"I am here to speak to everyone regardless of religious denomination. Spreading the word of spirituality and the oneness of God is what we need to focus on in order for there to be fewer atrocities in the world," he told the *Post*.

Asrama Swami was born on June 5, 1955, in New York. His father was the late Honourable Uwa Nnochiri of Uzuakoli, Abia State, Nigeria, where he was a tribal chief, and his mother is Joyce Nnochiri, an American citizen.

He "began his career in spirituality" in 1978 when he joined the Hare Krishna movement in London and subsequently opened preaching centres in, and has preached throughout, England, the United States, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Malaysia, Mexico, Hong Kong, China, Indonesia and Nigeria.

Who is this man?

Hanging in the library of the South Place Ethical Society in Red Lion Square, London, is this portrait of an unknown man holding an early edition of the *Freethinker*.

Investigations as to the identity of the sitter have so far proved unsuccessful.

Malcolm Rees is writing a pamphlet about the pictures that hang in the library and would appreciate any help he can get to identify the man in the portrait.

Malcolm says it is possible that the man is "just a concept, or the idea of an ideal freethinker. But maybe it was a real person. Can anyone clarify this?"

Any information should be sent to Malcolm Rees, Archivist, South Place Ethical Society, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R, or e-mail library@ethicalsoc.org.uk or telephone 0207 242 8037.



Bookings now being taken for Secularist of the year event

The inaugural £5,000 Irwin Prize for "Secularist of the Year" will be presented at a glittering lunch at the Montcalm Hotel, near Marble Arch in London on Saturday, October 8, 2005.

The number of places available is strictly limited and allocated on a first-come first-served basis (with NSS members going to the head of the queue, of course). The cost will be £35.00 for a three course lunch with wine and coffee included.

To reserve your place, send a cheque to NSS, PO Box 130, London W5 1DQ. Remember, there is still time to nominate someone you think deserves the prize, for doing something significant to promote secularism in the past year.

NSS officials, staff and honorary associates are ineligible, though. Send your suggestion to tas@secularism.org.uk

Dead Pope gets his cue to perform two miracles

POPE Benedict XVI announced last month that he had begun the process for the sainthood of Pope John Paul II, overriding the customary five-year waiting period following the death of a possible candidate. The Pope made the announcement during a meeting with the Roman clergy at the Basilica of St John Lateran, first telling the assembled priests, "and now I have a very joyous piece of news for you."

Immediately after Pope John Paul's death on April 2, there were calls from the faithful for his canonisation. At his funeral Mass, pilgrims held up banners saying "Santo Subito" ("Immediate Sainthood").

The Pope read a letter in Latin in which the Vatican official in charge of sainthood, Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins, announced that Benedict himself had fired the starting pistol in the race to elevate John Paul to sainthood.

The announcement drew a standing ovation from the Roman priests. Benedict, who had been seated, stood up to join the clergy in applauding the major tribute to his predecessor.

John Paul himself lifted the five-year waiting period for Mother Teresa (after the death of the nun who dedicated her life to "caring" for India's poorest people).

But Vatican experts have noted that, even with the waiting period lifted, a lengthy investigation into John Paul's life and confirmation of a miracle attributed to him would be required before he could be beatified.

Vatican procedures in place for some 500 years require one miracle for someone to be beatified and a second to be canonised. Following the late Pope's death, Italian newspapers were rife with reports of alleged miracles attributed to John Paul.

But the reports stemmed from inexplicable cures that occurred while the pontiff was still alive, and this is simply not good enough. According to Vatican rules a miracle has to have occurred after John Paul's death for it to be considered in the saint-making process.

News of the dead Pope being fast-tracked to sainthood prompted the wickedly sharp **Ravingatheist.com** to post the following report on its website:

Despite the pressure of popular demand for the immediate canonisation of the late Pope John Paul II, Vatican officials have vowed not to perpetrate a massive, cynical fraud to bestow sainthood on the late pontiff. Saint-candidates must perform two posthumous miracles to earn the title.

"We will not stoop to shameless, crowd-pleasing trickery to fill our pews and coffers," announced Pope Benedict. "More particularly, we will not exploit an illiterate, delusional third-world peasant by bribing a team of

phony doctors to declare that she was cured of some unspecified grave illness after praying to a bedside picture of Pope John Paul II."

'Let the miracles commence!' That was the message sent by the Vatican to Pope in the Sky John Paul II, who is being fast-tracked to sainthood.

Benedict added that if the deceased pontiff does fulfill his miracle quota with medical cures, they will be of an unapproachable sort – fully befitting of an omnipotent being, and performed on live television. "Severed limbs regrown, decapitations undone, the Twin Towers depulverized, Christopher Reeve risen from the wheelchair and the grave to host the Oscars in front of an audience of a quarter-million resurrected tsunami victims," Benedict vowed. "Not some questionable third-hand anecdote about the 'unexplained' remission of leukemia at the hidden, microscopic cellular level in the body of a mud-hut-dwelling Brazilian commoner."

Another Cardinal reaffirmed that Vatican

stooges are not meeting as we speak to plot an unconscionable global scam that, in a sane world, would be prosecuted under the criminal racketeering statutes of every civilised society. According to His Eminence Edward Cardinal Egan, the sophisticated minds responsible for managing the Church's vast financial empire are not currently chortling over a scheme to con the gullible masses with a transparent faith-healing ruse barely worthy of a snake-oil-selling carnival sideshow revivalist. "Nor will such deceit be practised with the hubris of an organisation accustomed to decades of immunity for child-rape due to its infiltration of the highest level of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government," Egan pledged.

Blogger and radio host Hugh Hewitt also applauded the Vatican's decision not to trivialise itself by stooping to the level of lesser, primitive voodoo-religions.

"The mainstream media will try to convince us that medical miracles by dead popes is nonsense that nobody can believe in 2005," Hewitt said. "But aided by the Holy Spirit, His Holiness will prove the supremacy of Catholicism with a display so dazzling it will make Mother Teresa's coffin-based canonisation miracles look like a child's toy-store magic tricks."

There is no easy path to sainthood

MANY of the world's religions bestow special status on people who demonstrate a life of almost perfect virtue. Religions differ on the title assigned to these people. The Catholic church calls them saints. The process by which someone becomes a saint is called canonisation. The Catholic church has canonised around 3,000 people – the exact number is unknown because not all saints were officially canonised.

For centuries, saints were chosen through public opinion. In the 10th century, Pope John XV developed an official canonisation process. Canonisation has been revised in the last 1,000 years, most recently by Pope John Paul II in 1983, who canonised more than 280 people since 1978. He made several procedural changes to the canonisation process, including the elimination of the "devil's advocate" from the review process. The devil's advocate was the person designated to attack the evidence offered in favour of canonisation.

Previously the process of becoming a Catholic saint was very lengthy, often taking decades or centuries to complete. But soon after her death in 1997, Mother Teresa's followers began pressing the Vatican to waive the rule that prevents the process of canonisation from beginning until five years following the candidate's death. This rule has traditionally been used to allow for a more objective look at a person's life and achievements. In 1999, the pope did waive the five-year rule, allowing the canonisation process for Mother Teresa to begin.

Here are the steps that must be followed:

- A local bishop investigates the candidate's life and writings for evidence of heroic virtue. The information uncovered by the bishop is sent to the Vatican.
- A panel of theologians and the cardinals of the Congregation for Cause of Saints evaluate the candidate's life. If the panel approves, the pope proclaims that the candidate is venerable, which means that the candidate is full of Catholic virtue.
- The next step toward sainthood is beatification. Beatification allows a person to be honoured by a particular group or region. In order to beatify a candidate, it must be shown that the person is responsible for a posthumous miracle. Martyrs, those who died for their religious cause, can be beatified without evidence of a miracle.

(Continued on page 12)

CARDINAL Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, was John Paul II's Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the office originated by Tomas de Torquemada under the title of Grand Inquisitor. As Wojtyla's Grand Inquisitor, Ratzinger was responsible for enforcing the Vatican's theofascist totalitarianism.

As Pope, Ratzinger has castigated Spain for following a growing pattern of tolerance and legalising same-sex marriages. At least he is consistent. In a 1986 document he described homosexuality, a completely victimless lifestyle, as even other Christian sects are now recognising, as an "intrinsic moral evil". Separation of Church and State is as repulsive to the new Catholic Führer as it was to Torquemada and Khomeini. Apparently this homophobe is unaware that many biblical heroes were gay, including David and Jeremiah, and all-male recreation (but not all-female) was banned by the priestly author of Leviticus for the same reason it was first banned by Zoroaster – to force gay men to start breeding tithe-paying believers.

Not content with imposing papal dictatorship on the world's half-billion Catholics, Wojtyla's Rottweiler, no doubt in the expecta-

tion of himself eventually becoming the Catholic Tyrannos, systematically set out to overthrow the Constitutions of all secular nations and turn them into subject states of the Vatican Empire.

For that purpose he ordered American politicians to commit high treason by consciously violating the First Amendment and instituting

WILLIAM HARWOOD goes straight for the jugular in his analysis of the new Vicar of Christ

laws dictated by a foreign Head of State.

Had Vladimir Putin ordered American socialists to work toward making America a Russian satellite, such an order would have been denounced as unacceptable interference in America's internal affairs. Diplomatic relations would have been severely strained if not discontinued. But because the foreign power trying to subjugate America was the Vatican, Wojtyla's butt-kisser in the White House obediently lapped it up, for the logical reason that Bush himself is consciously trying to overthrow the First Amendment and turn America into a Christian equivalent of the Taliban's Afghanistan.

For example, Ratzinger wrote a letter to US bishops instructing them to deny communion (in other words threaten with damnation) to Catholic politicians who supported a woman's right to choose abortion. Most observers saw the timing of that letter as an attempt to blackmail and intimidate Senator John Kerry, and force Catholics to vote in favour of retaining the talking chimpanzee currently polluting the White House. Had any American who lacked the bishops' legal defence of "freedom of religion" threatened voters with a secular equivalent of damnation, the perpetrator would have found himself facing a lengthy jail sentence for, in effect, uttering death threats.

Nor was Ratzinger content with terrorist threats against nonconformists to his mythology. He consciously suppressed accusations of sexual abuse against paedophile priests. Former choirboy Juan Vaca alleged that, when he was eleven years old, a priest named Macial, "pushed my hand onto his penis ... And he gets my penis himself and starts to masturbate me." Vaca and several other victims filed a lawsuit in the Vatican's secretive court, seeking Macial's excommunication. It was Cardinal Ratzinger who saw to it that the accusers were never questioned by Vatican investigators or asked to make statements, and the lawsuit was quietly swept under the carpet. And when hundreds of paedophile priests were

accused of child molestation, Ratzinger's reaction was to declare that, "the constant presence in the press of the sins of Catholic priests, especially in the United States ... is a planned campaign ... intentional, manipulated ... to discredit the Church."

Ratzinger has made no attempt to deny that, at the age of 14, he joined the Hitler Jugend. But he explains that, in 1944 when it was evident that Germany was going to lose the war, he emulated a lot of other conscripts and deserted. What he has never done is express regret for serving the Nazis, or denounce Hitler's Final Solution as morally wrong. And in 1998 he contributed an essay, "Freedom and Truth," to a pro-Nazi book published by a neo-Nazi publishing house that has also published books denying that there ever was a Final Solution. Since Ratzinger opposes Turkey's admission to the European Union on the ground that Europe is a "Christian" continent, and labels all religions except Catholicism as "gravely deficient" – declaring that only Christians "have the fullness of the means of salvation," and even the Eastern Church is "the diseased arm of the Universal Church" – his failure to denounce Hitler's ethnic cleansing of an opposition religion should come as no surprise.

Karol Wojtyla was a serial killer whose ban on birth control and disease control led to the deaths of millions. After only a few weeks in office, Joseph Ratzinger has made very clear that the prohibition is going to continue, and the deaths are to continue.

The road to saintdom

(Continued from page 11)

On October 20th, 2003, Mother Teresa was beatified. She is now known as Blessed Mother Teresa of Kolkata.

In order for the candidate to be considered a saint, there must be proof of a second posthumous miracle. If there is, the person is canonised.

These alleged miracles must be submitted to the Vatican for verification. Sister Teresia Benedicta of the Cross was canonised in 1997 after the Vatican verified that a young girl who ate seven times the lethal dose of Tylenol was suddenly cured. The girl's family was said to have prayed to the spirit of Sister Teresia for help.

In Mother Teresa's case, her supporters insist that she has performed at least two posthumous miracles. In one case, a French woman in the US broke several ribs in a car accident.

Her wounds were "miraculously" healed as she was wearing a Mother Teresa medallion. Another possible miracle occurred when Mother Teresa appeared in the dreams of a Palestinian girl, telling the girl that her cancer was cured.

Source: www.howstuffworks.com

Vatican outraged by Benedict the Nazi image

AN Italian court has told a website which published a photo mock-up of the Pope dressed as a Nazi to suspend its activities because it "offended the Roman Catholic religion."

But, despite these warnings italy.indymedia.org refused to remove the image.

Under Italian law, "offending the Catholic Church" is punishable by up to one year in jail. Italy's largest press union, FNSI, slammed the court decision as an "unacceptable attack on critical and satirical freedom".

"Indymedia publishes without any form of censorship any kind of electronic message – that is the basis of its editorial policy," said the FNSI's secretary-general, Paolo Serventi Longhi. "I do not agree with the message's content, in fact I find it very serious, but press freedom cannot be called into question," he added.



The Sunday Schools the Churches hated

THEY were called Sunday Schools, but the churches loathed them, and wanted them closed down. They were the Socialist Sunday Schools, and I only learned of their existence last month when a spot was dedicated to them on BBC Radio 4's *Making History* programme.

It more or less coincided with Tony Blair, in the run-up to the election, promising to make education in Britain a top priority. My immediate thought was to send a transcript of the programme to the Prime Minister with a note saying: "You could not do better than use the Socialist Sunday Schools' Ten Commandments as the basis for *real* educational improvement!"

Here are the commandments:

1. Love your schoolfellows, who will be your fellow workmen in life.

2. Love learning, which is the food of the mind; be as grateful to your teacher as to your parents.

3. Make every day holy by good and useful deeds and kindly actions.

4. Honour good men, be courteous to all men, bow down to none.

5. Do not hate or speak evil of anyone. Do not be revengeful but stand up for your right and resist oppression.

6. Do not be cowardly. Be a friend to the weak and love justice.

7. Remember that all good things of the earth are produced by labour. Whoever enjoys them without working for them is stealing the bread of the workers.

8. Observe and think in order to discover the truth. Do not believe what is contrary to reason and never deceive yourself or others.

9. Do not think that he who loves his own country must hate and despise other nations, or wish for war, which is a remnant of barbarism.

10. Look forward to the day when all men and women will be free citizens of one fatherland and live together as brothers and sisters in peace and righteousness.

Sure, the words are quaintly old-fashioned – but these can we worked upon without fundamentally altering some very important messages, the ninth commandment especially, which I hope would leave Tony Blair feeling distinctly uncomfortable.

Making History homed in on the subject after listener Lynne Chalmers contacted the programme to ask about the schools that her grandmother attended in Scotland. In particular, Lynne remembered her grandmother describing a lovely "naming ceremony" for a baby that involved all the children in the Sunday school.

The Socialist Sunday School movement arose out of the London dock strike of 1892

when food kitchens and educational classes were set up for the children of striking dockers, who were taught the causes and results of poverty for working people. By 1912 there were over 200 Socialist Sunday Schools throughout Britain.

In their early days the schools encountered a great deal of opposition because they were "seen as subversive, poisoning the minds of the young people of the country with their political and anti-religious doctrines and teachings" and there were those who tried to discredit the schools by accusing them of blasphemy and revolutionary teachings.

Socialist Sunday Schools arose in response to a widespread feeling as to the inadequacy of the orthodox Sunday schools as a training ground for the children of socialists and of the need for some organised and systematic method of presenting the socialist point of view, and of teaching the ideals and principles of socialism to the children, youths and young women in the country. The main purpose was to supply the socialist movement with fearless, capable and conscientious thinkers.

Mrs Mary Gray, a member of the Social Democratic Federation, who ran a soup kitchen for the children of the Dock strike, initiated the Socialist Sunday School in 1892. Her aim, on realising they had little or no education, was to influence and educate them and make them aware of their socialist responsibilities

and provide what was lacking in their day schools. Twenty years later there were approximately 120 schools throughout the country, 20 of them in London.

But a national movement, the National Council of British Socialist Sunday Schools Union, formed in 1909, traces its origin to a school opened in Glasgow by Caroline Martyn and Archie McArthur. It was established as a protest against, and an alternative to, the perceived middle-class bias and assumptions of the regular churches. Its aims were to help the schools in their teaching of socialism.

The schools had 'hymns', but these were devoid of any theological content or Christian dogma.

There can be no doubt that these schools produced many leaders who set Britain on a far more secular, compassionate and caring path – one that was subsequently destroyed by Margaret Thatcher, who laid the foundations of a thoroughly uncaring, disrespectful and nasty society – one that Tony Blair now says he deprecates and wants to set right. He will not succeed if he insists on continuing to pander to the most intolerant sections of society, namely the religious.

A book about the movement is about to be published by Neil Rafeek of the Scottish Oral History Centre at the University of Strathclyde.

– Barry Duke

Robertson offends Muslims again

A PROMINENT American Islamic civil rights and advocacy group has called on mainstream political and religious leaders to repudiate "hate-filled" remarks by evangelist Pat Robertson who said last month that Muslims should not serve in the Cabinet or judiciary.

The Washington-based Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) said Pat Robertson told *This Week with George Stephanopoulos* he would be wary of appointing Muslims to positions in the US government, including judgeships.

"This type of hate-filled rhetoric deserves repudiation from all who respect America's long-standing tradition of pluralism," said Rabiah Ahmed, CAIR's communication coordinator.

Ahmed added that many Muslims already serve with distinction in many levels of government, including judgeships at the state and local level.

In the past, Robertson has made similar hateful comments toward Islam and Muslims, said CAIR. During a 2002 appearance on Fox

News Channel's "Hannity & Colmes" program, Robertson smeared both Islam and the Prophet Mohammed. About Mohammed, Robertson said: "This man was an absolute wild-eyed fanatic. He was a robber and a brigand. And to say that these terrorists distort Islam, they're carrying out Islam ... I mean, this man (Mohammed) was a killer. And to think that this is a peaceful religion is fraudulent."

Robertson also called Islam "a monumental scam" and claimed the Koran, Islam's revealed text, "is strictly a theft of Jewish theology." Robertson also called Islam the "religion of the slavers" and said Americans who converted to Islam exhibited "insanity."

Quotable quote

GIVE a man a fish, and you'll feed him for a day; give him a religion and he'll starve to death while praying for fish.

– Author unknown

Atheist action

A LETTER in the *Independent* last month said, *inter alia* "Christians and other people of good will..."

The implication is that all Christians are automatically people of goodwill (eg Northern Ireland?), and other people of goodwill such as you and I may possibly be scattered about in the dregs of humanity.

So let's try and attack this unthinking arrogance. I invite readers to contact me (fabianacker@aol.com) with a view to starting a charity called "Atheists Aid", or something similar.

I'm always hesitant to give money to a charity that has an implicit assumption that only believers can feel compassion or distress. I'd be much more willing if any whiff of religiosity were removed from a charity's appeal. I hope there may be others of this opinion.

FABIAN ACKER
London

Misleading graph

THE graph on page 8 of the April issue, perhaps unintentionally, gives readers the idea that the quoted statistics are reasonably accurate. That is far from the case. If one-sixth of respondents to a survey in countries with a theo-fascist majority, threatened with social and economic consequences if they acknowledged that they were not as mind-warped as the majority, were willing to admit that they are non-theists, the true figure must be at least twice that. And the sudden switch in religious propaganda between 1990 and 2000, from claiming one billion to claiming two billion Christians, could be true only if the human population increased from six billion to seven billion during that period.

The most reliable calculation of various belief systems is that there are one billion Christians, one billion Muslims, one billion Hindus, one billion adherents of all other religions, and two billion non-theists.

BILL HARWOOD
Canada

Scoffing cheese sandwiches

I WONDER if Barry Duke would be quite so dismissive of grilled cheese sandwiches and frying pans bearing the image of the Virgin Mary (*Freethinking Allowed*, May) if he had known about my recent experience.

While walking in the nearby woods I lost a favourite pair of gloves. As I had walked over a large tract of woodland my chances of finding them was slight. However, I returned to try to retrace my steps and I came across a massive slab of rock. I noticed that the lichen which encrusted the face of the rock was an image of the late Pope.

His rotund and unmistakable figure was

clothed in flowing vestments and one arm was outstretched with a pointing finger. I followed the direction of the finger and saw a tree, some distance away, with my gloves wedged in a branch where I had left them.

Two points arise from this. First, I think that Barry, having heard of my experience, will be a lot less sceptical in the future. Second, this could be the miracle needed to confirm that the Pope is eligible for sainthood.

DENIS WATKINS
Pembrokeshire

Secular campaigns

I READ Dory Lewis's letter about mounting campaigns against religious persecution and would like to suggest a technique which has worked for me. Coincidentally, it has been an excellent way to raise ethical questions which take the moral high ground away from your unfriendly local evangelicals and right-to-lifers.

Though I'm an Amnesty member I find their work on such issues patchy, so I use their methods on other cases I learn about through media sources such as the *Freethinker*.

I find that what works well is a letter to the local paper urging people to protest direct to the head of government or the UK embassy of the country involved. They always get printed because local papers like to run stories which can turn into local initiatives on international issues. There are several websites listing all the embassy contact details for the benefit of tourists, business people or potential guest workers.

For example, the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is at 16 Prince's Gate, London, SW7 1PT, e-mail info@iranembassy.org.uk, and President Mohamad Khatami's e-mail address is khatami@president.ir.

In Nigeria, the address for President Ousegun Obasanjo is 'The Presidency, Federal Secretariat, Sehu Shagari Way, Abuja, Nigeria', or e-mail either presidency@nopa.net. or president.obasajo@nigeriagov.org.

The Embassy of the United Arab Emirates is at 30 Princes Gate London SW7 1PT, or their fax number is 020 7581 9616, and in Pakistan you can e-mail General Musharef direct at CE@pak.gov.pk

Make sure that when you know the result of the case (especially a positive one) you write a follow-up letter thanking the paper and readers for their interest.

After a couple you may find the paper starts to approach you as an "expert" and asks for your comment on issues involving morality and human rights – surely something needed if we are to raise our profile at local, rather than just UK national, level.

STUART HARTILL
Isle of Man

Meat-eating

I AM astounded – and shocked – by Barbara Smoker's assertion that humans are omnivores because they "evolved the teeth required for meat-eating".

Humans have never had "meat-eating" teeth: we eat skinned, prepared and cooked meat and always have.

Frederick Bacon is, of course correct in saying that early humans were mostly – perforce – vegetarian. It was not until they had learned to make tools (bows and arrows, spears, knives), and to make fire that they were able to hunt, to skin and cook meat. Before that time at best we scavenged the remains – easily eaten offal – of carnivores' kills; we had neither the speed nor the skills to run down game, to say nothing of the lack of appropriate teeth to eat even a small mammal, should we have been lucky enough to catch one. Even with a knife it's hard to skin an uncooked mammal.

It is not teeth but tools and the ability to make fire and cook their game that have enabled humans to eat meat.

HELEN COX
Bath

Barbara Smoker replies: I would not call it vegetarian to eat the remains of carnivores' kills! Anyway, according to palaeontologists, more than half of the diet of Peking Man – before the invention of cooking – consisted of venison: presumably obtained by hurling rocks at deer or driving them over cliffs. And there were always lizards, porcupines, moles, tortoises, molluscs (oysters, clams, snails etc), fish nestlings, grubs and plump insects, all of which could be – and many are still today – eaten raw. On the other hand, the discovery of the uses of fire was a prerequisite for using root vegetables, cereals, rice and so on.

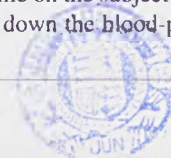
Cosying up to Islam

IN my *Freethinker* article of August 2004, I mentioned that the Catholic Church appeared to be cosying up to Islam. Without wishing to sound like the late Frankie Howerd with his dire predictions of "Woe,woe and thrice woe", proof of this intended alliance has now been given.

Cardinal Murphy O'Connor of the Catholic Church, after the late Pope's funeral, stated "Now the two greatest faiths, the Catholic Church and Islam must join forces to oppose secularism which is spreading across Europe".

As we now have an obedient member of the Catholic Church's group, Opus Dei, as Education Secretary, should we anticipate that the flogging of pregnant girls, the welcoming of suffering, especially self-inflicted, and the worship of saints who drank pus, will soon be regarded as the norm?

While on the subject of my piece, in order to bring down the blood-pressure of my critics, I



would like to stress that a line was edited out, perhaps due to lack of space. This stated that the Asian criminals were accompanied by women in Muslim dress. As no-one stood up and pointed a quivering finger at the criminals and shouted "They are Muslims", I decided not to label them. And I made a mistake about the sentencing of the fraudster who duplicated people's bank cards. He did not get 100 hours community service. This man received a caution; the same sentence given to anyone unfortunate enough to live in a police training area, caught swearing in the street.

As I have never signed a contract agreeing to "appease Muslims" I see no reason to do so, especially as I believe everyone should obey the law or get it changed through Parliament; not make it up as they go along.

BARBARA BARRETT
Berkshire

Whither British Humanism

A PATTERN of British Humanist Association involvement in inter-religious initiatives is gathering apace. A non-statutory national framework for religious education has been prepared by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. An advisory steering group consisting of faith and professional representatives endorsed the QCA's report. Religions represented included Roman Catholic, Church of England, Jewish, Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, Methodist and Greek Orthodox. The BHA participated in what could be charitably described as a "poor relation" capacity.

Of the QCA's 42-page report, "we" are merited about a quarter of a page with a reference to undefined "secular philosophies". Yet according to two huge surveys, two-thirds of secondary schoolchildren described themselves as atheist or agnostic. Hardly surprising, as Christianity is compulsory up to the age of 19, beyond the age of majority.

The BHA shared a platform with the Muslim Council of Britain at a House of Commons meeting which has been interpreted as support for the Government's misguided proposals on incitement to religious hatred legislation. Amendments were suggested which the Government gave no indication of contemplating. The National Secular Society, however, opposition parties and some religious groups held a press conference at Westminster Hall taking the opposite stance.

No opportunity is missed to perpetuate the myth that Britain is a Christian coun-

try. One tactic is to ensure that national ceremonies are held under the aegis of the Church. A cathedral is often the setting for a pantomime of genuflecting, processing and sermonising. The Queen, Supreme Governor of the Church of England, often attends, waving and smiling whatever the occasion. Broadcasting and televising these events guarantees record audiences.

It seems odd on two counts that a catastrophe like the Boxing Day tsunami was commemorated by a service in St Paul's Cathedral.

First, the recipient of praise and worship on such occasions is an all-powerful deity who stands, or floats, idly by while disaster overwhelms his creatures.

Secondly, while few would object to a commemoration of the tsunami victims, St Paul's Cathedral as the venue was insensitive to the point of crassness. Most of who died were of non-Christian or no faith. There are more suitable buildings in London and elsewhere to accommodate such ceremonies.

Needless to say, there was a predictable assembly of religious and political leaders in St Paul's Cathedral. However, members of the BHA maybe somewhat surprised to learn that their organisation was represented at the service. Few will be excited by the prospect of Humanist grandees exchanging bows and curtsies with the great and the godly.

BILL MCROY
Hove

Religious bullying

ELLEN Ramsey (*Points of View*, January), told how she was harassed and hounded out of her career at York University, Toronto, because she held firm to a secular teaching stance and would not bend to religious bullying by colleagues and students.

The subtext in her letter suggests a conspiracy involving high authority. That doesn't surprise me. What does surprise and dismay me is when she says that Canada, where I lived between 1965 and 1971 in Toronto and other cities, is a highly religious country. I don't remember it being so, but then, my only irreligious youthful brush with religion was soft and frustrating: the irresistible body chemistry of a good Catholic girl.

The suppression of Ms Ramsay's atheism is another example (in the UK the Establishment/BBC leads the way) that shows influential Christians are increasingly using unethical methods to stifle free speech. Why? Apart from their biblical injunction to proselytise, it is compensation, I guess, for their insecurity in the modern world as the valid sciences progressively undermine their beliefs, and to counter, they claim unabashed, the moral decline.

Since the liberating sixties, faith concerns and fundamentalism, intolerance of free speech, and surveillance (if you've nothing to hide, you've

nothing to worry about!), has grown proportionate to the globalisation of capitalism. No doubt there is a link: To function smoothly, globalisation has to accommodate the inherent differences between people. Best pretend there aren't any: all can benefit if they but adjust to the religion-neutral, allegedly amoral, economic rules. Traditional identities and values are coming asunder. Small wonder leading religionists worldwide are worried. We are all dishonestly led to believe there's a level playing field and that we can all be winners. Systems of delivery are the only failures permitted, not individuals or nation states. But many people lack the psychology to compete successfully, and lose out. And the seductive, hedonistic pleasures of consumerism for which we must all happily strive has heavy costs that future generations will have to bear. In the prosperous West the side effects from this coercion already belie the good: stress, anxiety, family breakdowns, depression and a host of social ills.

GRAHAM NEWBERY
Southampton

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Events & Contacts

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

Brighton & Hove Humanist Group: Information on 01273 461404. The Farm Tavern, Farm Road, Hove. Meetings first Tuesday of the month. July 5, 7.30pm. Annual General Meeting.

Bristol Humanists: Information: Margaret Dearnaley on 0117 904 9490.

Bromley Humanists: Meetings on the second Tuesday of the month, 8 pm, at Friends Meeting House, Ravensbourne Road, Bromley. Information: 01959 574691. Website: www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com.

Central London Humanist Group: Contact Jemma Hooper, 75a Ridgmount Gardens, London WC1E 7AX. E-mail: rupert@clarity4words.co.uk. Tel: 02075804564.

Chiltern Humanists: Information: 01494 771851. Friends Meeting House, 289 High Street, Berkhamsted. Tuesday, June 14, 7.30 pm. Antony Chapman: *Secular Coronation?*

Cornwall Humanists: Information: Patricia Adams, Sappho, Church Road, Lelant, St Ives, Cornwall TR26 3LA. Tel: 01736 754895.

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

Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists: Information: Tel. 01926 858450. Roy Saich, 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth, CV8 2HB.

Devon Humanists: Information: Roger McCallister, Tel: 01626 864046. E-mail: info@devonhumanists.org.uk. Website: www.devonhumanists.org.uk.

Ealing Humanists: Information: Secretary Alex Hill Tel. 0208 741 7016 or Charles Rudd 020 8904 6599.

East Cheshire and High Peak Secular Group: Information: Carl Pinel 01298 815575.

East Kent Humanists: Information: Tel. 01843 864506. Talks and discussions on ten Sunday afternoons in Canterbury.

Essex Humanists: Meetings on the third Sunday of each month. Details: 01268 785295.

Fens and King's Lynn. New group being formed. Information: Edwin Salter on 01553 771917.

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA): Information: 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth CV8 2HB. Tel. 01926 858450. GALHA Film Festival, July (see details on page 3)

Greater Manchester Humanist Group: Information: June Kamel 01925 824844. Monthly meetings (second Wednesday) Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester.

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

Harrow Humanist Society: Information: 020 8863 2977. Monthly meetings, December – June (except January).

Havering & District Humanist Society: Information: Jean Condon 01708 473597.

Humanist Association Dorset: Information and programme from Jane Bannister. Tel: 01202 428506.

Humanist Society of Scotland: Secretary: Ivan Middleton, 26 Inverleith Row, Edinburgh EH3 5QH. Tel. 0131 552 9046. Press and Information Officer: Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire. Tel. 01563 526710. Website: www.humanism-scotland.org.uk.

Humanist Society of Scotland – Dundee Group: Contact secretary Ron McLaren, Spiershill, St Andrews, Fife KY16 8NB. Tel: 01334 474551. E-mail: humanist@spiershill.fsworld.co.uk.

Glasgow Group: Information: Alan Henness. Tel. 07010 704776. E-mail: alan@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

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

Perth Group: Information: perth@humanism.scotland.org.uk

Humanist Society of West Yorkshire: Information: Robert Tee on 0113 2577009. Tuesday, June 7, 7.30 pm. Annual General Meeting, informal discussion and supper at 14 Foxholes Crescent, Calverley.

Isle of Man Freethinkers. Information: Muriel Garland, 01624 664796. E-mail: murielgarland@clara.co.uk. Website: www.iom.freethinkers.co.uk

Isle of Wight Humanist Group. Information: David Broughton on 01983 740421 or e-mail davidb67@clara.co.uk

Leicester Secular Society: Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB. Tel. 0116 262 2250. Website: <http://homepages.stayfree.co.uk/lss>. Public meeting: Sunday, 6.30pm.

Lewisham Humanist Group: Information: Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. Website: www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford. Thursday, June 30, 8pm. Graham Kemish: The Incompatibility of Funerals with Rationalism.

Mid-Wales Humanists: Information: Jane Hibbert on 01654 702883.

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

North East Humanists (Tyneside Group): Information: the Secretary on 01434 632936.

North London Humanist Group: Monthly meetings. Information: Linda Wilkinson. 0208 882 0124.

North Yorkshire Humanist Group. Secretary: Charles Anderson, 01904 766480. Meets first Monday of the month, 7.30pm. Priory Street Centre, York.

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

Reigate & District Humanist Group. Information: Roy Adderley on 01342 323882.

Sheffield Humanist Society: Information: 0114 2309754. Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street, Sheffield. Wednesday, July 6, 8.00 pm. Maggie Bishop: *Climate Change.*

Sheffield Humanist Society. Information: 0114 2309754. Literature and information stall at the following events. 11 am to 5 pm. Saturday, July 2, Yorkshire Festival, Wortley Hall, Wortley Village. Saturday, July 9, Sharrow Festival, Mount Pleasant Park, Sitwell Road and London Road. Sheffield. Saturday, July 16, Green Fair, St Mary's Community Centre, St Mary's Gate, Sheffield.

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: 020 7242 8037/4. Monthly programmes on request. Sunday, July 3, 11am. Professor Raymond Tallis: *Are Humans Free?*

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

Sutton Humanist Group: Information: 0208 773 0631. Website: www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com.

E-Mail: BrackenKemish@ukgateway.net.

Welsh Marches Humanist Group: Information: 01568 770282. Website: www.wmhumanists.co.uk. E-mail: rocheforts@tiscali.co.uk. Meetings on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at Ludlow. October to June.

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: Ken Allen. Tel: 01892 863002. E-mail: ken@kallen14.fsnet.com.

Ulster Humanist Association. Information: Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: 028 9267 7264.

E-mail: brianmcclinton@btinternet.com

website: www.ulsterhumanist.freesevers.com

Please send your listings and events notices to:
Bill McIlroy, Flat 3, Somerhill Lodge, Somerhill Road,
Hove, Sussex BN3 1RU.

Notices must be received by the 15th of the month
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