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# the freethinker

the voice of atheism since 1881

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# Tick the right box in the upcoming Census

Further harm may be inflicted on the country's sizeable population of non-believers if their numbers are not accurately recorded in the upcoming Census, due to take place in England and Wales on March 27, 2011.

This warning was sounded by the British Humanist Association, which has launched a campaign to draw attention to the Census, under the banner, *If you're not religious, for God's sake say so!* The campaign seeks to

raise awareness of the issues involved, and the BHA points out that the previous census in 2001 in England and Wales – the first to ask a question on religion – produced inaccurate and misleading data on religion, grossly undercounting the number of non-religious people and greatly inflating the number of Christians.

Because the Census provides official figures about various aspects of the population, data is used by government both locally and centrally to justify their policy decisions. If the number of people who appear to be religious is inflated, policies regarding service delivery, equality work and many other areas will be affected.

For example, the previous government used Census figures in the preamble of their document *Face to Face and Side by Side*, which set out a number of policies which disadvantaged non-religious people and secular groups in the voluntary sector.

Local authorities use Census data when making decisions about resource allocation and the types of organisation which they want to deliver services.

The 2001 figure stating that 72 percent of the population are "Christian" has been used in a variety of negative ways, such as to justify the continuing presence of Bishops in the House of Lords, to justify the state-funding of faith schools (and their expansion), to justify and increase religious broadcasting and to exclude the voices of non-religious people in Parliament and elsewhere.

## Non-believers Count!



If the 2011 census delivers a similarly inaccurate figure, it may lead to further discrimination against non-religious people and greater privileging for religious groups and individuals, the BHA warns.

Announcing the new campaign, BHA Chief Executive Andrew Copson said: "There were more Jedis than Jews counted in the 2001 census, but just as inaccurate a result was the conclusion that 77 percent of us are religious and only 15 percent of us are not. These misleading statistics are used to support policies that entrench religious privilege and increase discrimination on grounds of religion in our society, and it is vital that the 2011 census results in accurate

data for that reason alone.

He added: "The flawed wording and the positioning of the religion question in the Census in the context of ethnicity encourages people to respond as if they have a religion, and especially over-inflates the "Christian" category. People are counted as Christians who may never have been in a church, who don't

*Continued on p4)*



# The 2010 War on Christmas

**BARRY DUKE** PROVIDES A SNAPSHOT OF LAST YEAR'S BATTLES

The War on Christmas 2010 is over, folks – but in about ten months' time intense hostilities will be resumed, and the tabloids will again be filled with blow-by-blow accounts by paranoid Christians of how mean-spirited, joyless secularists are doing all in their power to "air-brush" Jesus from the mid-winter festivities, or, worse, insult the memory of the Baby Saviour's birth with various forms of irreverence.

The 2010 War on Christmas saw passions – and lunacy – rising to hitherto unscaled heights. In the run-up to the festivities I counted dozens – nay, hundreds – of reports of "assaults" on the season. But none amused me more than the account of one American Christian's fury over a lamp.



Granted, the object – a replica of a lamp seen

in the movie *A Christmas Story* – takes tastelessness to new heights. But was it so bad as to warrant this crazy email to the store selling it?

"Today I went into your store, and I was appalled and disgusted that you blasphemed Almighty God Jesus Christ and His Most Holy Nativity Christmas by selling from your store shelves a filthy pornographic lamp that said 'Christmas' Story on it.

"REMOVE THAT PIECE OF FILTHY, PORNOGRAPHIC BLASPHEMY FROM YOUR STORESHELVES AT ONCE! Christmas is the Most Holy and Sacred Birthday of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ of the Most Holy Perpetual Virgin Mary. It is MOST SACRED!

"How dare you blaspheme Jesus Christ with a filthy, disgusting, pornographic product by daring to put the Holy Name of Christ in Christmas on your filthy disgusting product!

"REMOVE THAT FILTHY, DISGUSTING, PORNOGRAPHIC, BLASPHEMOUS PRODUCT FROM YOUR SHELVES AT ONCE! Repent! And go to confession AT ONCE, and get down on your knees and beg Almighty God Jesus Christ to forgive you for your filthy pornograph blasphemy of the Sacred and Holy Name of Christmas, which is the Holy Nativity of the One and Only God, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Almighty God will not let go unpunished those who blaspheme His Holy Son, or His Holy Nativity Christmas. It is Most Holy and Sacred, and you must always treat it in a Holy and Sacred manner.

"I will NEVER shop in your stores again. And as long as you continue to sell that blasphemous filth of yours, I will encourage others to not to shop at 'Your Retail Store' because of your anti-Christ blasphemies, and will promote a BOYCOTT of 'Your Retail Store'."

It was signed: "In Deepest Adoration, Reverence and Respect for Almighty God Jesus Christ and his most Sacred Nativity Christmas."

Another rant, all be it a tad less hysterical, came from Christian Voice's principal clown, Stephen Green, who worked himself into a froth over the dearth of religious Christmas cards in British supermarkets.

"The situation", railed the swivel-eyed Green, "is caused by managers subscribing to political correctness and the idea that in some way Christian cards are offensive to other religions. This is simply not true."

This trend away from cards with a religious theme has bugger-all to do with "political correctness". What this pea-brained loony – and many like him – fails to understand is that

most people in the UK today simply won't buy religiously-themed cards, and that no sensible stockist will ever stockpile products that are unlikely to shift.

The 2010 Christmas War was particularly intense over in the US, according to "The Christmas Christian Lady". Brenda Verna, a numpty who writes for the fundie *WorldNetDaily* site – penned a lengthy column in which, among other things, she howled that "in New York, the American Atheists organization posted an anti-Christian billboard at the New Jersey entrance side of the Lincoln tunnel that depicts a silhouette of the Nativity with the three wise men approaching on camelback and the star of Bethlehem hovering above. It says: 'You KNOW it's a myth. This season, celebrate REASON!'"

But she took some comfort from the fact that Bill Donohue, the deranged head of the Catholic League, "using the contribution of an outraged donor, posted a 'counterpunch' – an even larger billboard on the New York exit side of the Lincoln tunnel that depicts a real Nativity scene and says 'You know it's real. This season celebrate Jesus! – Merry Christmas from the Catholic League'."

When I predicted that the 2011 War on Christmas would be more bitter than all previous battles, I clean forgot that there *won't be a Christmas this year* because the world will have ended around eight months earlier.

Well, that's what Harold Egbert Camping says. Camping, 89, is the "brains" behind a US fundie radio station – Family Radio – and the silly old fossil has predicted that May 21, 2011, will produce the the long-awaited Rapture. To mark the occasion, Camping has erected a forest of billboards in Nashville, Tennessee, which state: "He Is Coming Again". And when He (presumably Jesus) comes again the world will be no more. The purpose of the billboards is to iget unbelievers "to turn around quickly". Said Allison Warden, 29, who orchestrated Nashville's billboard campaign: "The Rapture is going to be a great day for God's people but awful for everyone else."

And Tom Evans, a Family Radio spokesman added: "This is the day, this is really the day, this is not a joke." Evans said the date was carefully calculated from specific biblical dates, years and numbers referenced in the Bible.

I think it would be such a wheeze if people around the globe were to send an email to Family Radio on May 22, simply stating: "Go back to your calculators, idiots!"



**BARRY DUKE**  
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## the freethinker

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# 'Machiavellian' nature of the Catholic Church is starkly exposed

DESPITE the fact that the Vatican, "in alliance with some of the most odious regimes on the planet", has conspired to subvert human rights, political leaders continue to exhibit a craven deference to the Roman Catholic Church.

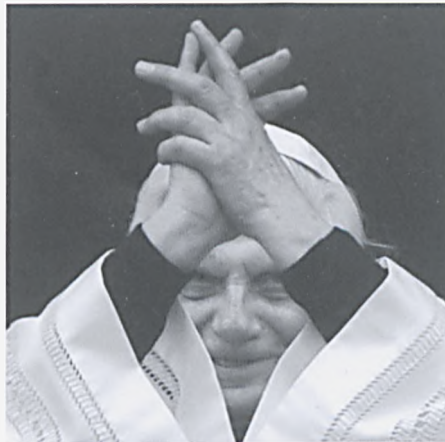
That's the view of Kenneth Houston, a researcher at the University of Ulster's Incore Institute. Writing last month in the *Irish Times* under the title *Vatican could give master classes when it comes to Machiavellian power play*, Houston referred to a remark once made by the American author Stephen L Carter who said that if churches are to be a moral bulwark in society they must avoid being "seduced by the lure of temporal power".

Houston said that recently-leaked revelations that the Vatican had blocked moves to permit the Murphy Commission from investigating senior Vatican officials regarding the rape of children by priests in Ireland – confirmed by cables from the US ambassador to the Holy See – "come as no surprise to seasoned and critical observers".

"What the leaks confirm is that the Holy See/Vatican views itself simultaneously as two distinct entities: the centre of a 'global community' and as the head office of an international legal entity with sovereign status. Its deliberately selective embodiment of one or the other of these is something invariably contingent upon particular circumstances.

"This shape-shifting allows the Vatican to capitalise on the advantages afforded by both international status and transnational community. While bargaining for privileges with national governments, the Vatican utilises a benign language of religious 'community', protected by the freedom of thought, conscience and belief clauses of the main human rights instruments. Demands for separate schools, tax privileges as a charitable organisation and access to mechanisms of policymaking relative to its perceived interests are predicated on the notion of benign religious fraternity."

Houston added: "Yet, when the Machiavellian nature of the institutional church's corporate behaviour is scrutinised, the drawbridges are raised. 'Sovereignty' – not 'community' – becomes the dominant language of the church. Hence the invocation of the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act in the face of US legal action into abuse allegations by Catholic priests there. Here the



Pope Ratzinger, head of a 'Machiavellian' global organisation

commission of inquiry and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs were both given short shrift by the princes of the church when asked to explain their role in the most serious and systematic breach of human rights in any peacetime European state. Inquiries were rerouted via 'diplomatic channels' or ignored.

"Institutional Catholicism's ambiguous international legal status, which most nation-states recognise unilaterally, affords it a special position at the United Nations. The Vatican's privileged 'observer status', which was upgraded significantly in 2004, permits the Holy See's diplomatic representatives to use its influence over member states to ensure that UN objectives are not antithetical to its ideological position on a range of issues.

"This is why the goals of the International Conferences on Population Development have not been fully realised, and why targets to improve the empowerment of women have been significantly diluted in the UN's millennium development goals programme."

Houston pointed out that the Vatican, in alliance with some of the most odious regimes on the planet, has conspired to subvert and obstruct the provision of greater access to reproductive health for women. "What is disappointing, but still not surprising, is the continued craven deference to the church displayed by our own political representatives. What should have happened following the Vatican's failure to co-operate fully with the inquiry, indeed what was argued for by some commentators, was the expulsion of the Papal Nuncio pending an adjustment in the church's attitude.

"The Vatican has played the international system with masterful adroitness; morphing from 'sovereign' city state to moral guardian of national identity to beleaguered minority to global community as and when it is appropriate or advantageous to their institutional and ideological interests."

Houston concluded: "There are two possible ways to respond: either call time on the Holy See's strategising and demand it face up to its moral responsibilities; or, very quietly, start sending our own political class for courses at the Vatican school of law and diplomacy."

## Sticking caffeine where the sun don't shine

JEWS throughout Williamsburg in New York recently snapped up caffeine suppositories, hours before the start of the Yom Kippur fast that would deprive them of the jolt – and hunger suppression – that coffee typically provides.

The day-long fast is the centerpiece of the holiest day on the Jewish calendar – but some religious Jews see a Talmudic loophole that allows them to ingest their daily dose of caffeine, albeit through a different orifice.

"It helps — you know, it's hard to concentrate when you're fasting and also addicted to caffeine," said Baruch Herzfeld, an Orthodox Jew who owns a bike store in Williamsburg. "Some take it before sundown, but most take it throughout their fasting. These guys love a good loophole," said Herzfeld (who is pictured on the front page).

But is it kosher? There's some controversy over whether Jews observing the biblical fast should be taking an easy out (or, more accurately, in).

Some Jewish leaders said that consuming anything – through the body's traditional entrance or its exit – is against the spirit of the ritualistic fast.

"We're supposed to do it the old-fashioned way – I wouldn't advise [suppositories]," said Rabbi Simcha Weinstein, a Hasidic leader. "We wanna keep Jews in the synagogue and not in the bathroom."





# THE CENSUS CAMPAIGN

## IF YOU'RE NOT RELIGIOUS FOR GOD'S SAKE SAY SO



believe in God and who, if asked, "Do you have a religion?" would say, 'No'.

"That would be fine if policy-makers accepted that the results from the census are merely an indicator of broad cultural affiliation. But what people do not realise is that by ticking the 'Christian' box rather than the 'No religion' box – which would more accurately reflect their identity – they have contributed to data used to justify an increase in the number of 'faith' schools, the public funding of religious groups, keeping bishops in the House of Lords as of right, and the continuation of compulsory worship in schools. The flawed census data on religion is used to justify these and a whole host of other such policies that are damaging, divisive and, importantly, do not reflect the real demographics of our society.

"2011 may be the last census and so it is more important than ever to make sure that the data it produces on religion is as accurate as possible. We want everybody to be talking about this and encouraging others to tick 'No religion' when they fill in the census, and we'll be supporting people to do this in different ways as the campaign proceeds."

Speaking on the misleading question on religion, Census expert and Professor

*Continued from page 1*

of Population Studies at the University of Manchester, Professor David Voas, commented: "We have good data from sample surveys about the amount of religion and non-religion in the country, but the census receives far more attention. In 2001 people tended to treat the census question on religion as a question about ethnic heritage. Their answers were interpreted very differently, though, by churches, journalists and policy-makers. Which box you tick on the census form may seem trivial, but the results do make a difference in public life.

The Census Campaign was launched with a new, interactive website [www.census-campaign.org.uk](http://www.census-campaign.org.uk), and with a Facebook page [www.facebook.com/censuscampaign](http://www.facebook.com/censuscampaign) as well as appearing on Twitter ([www.twitter.com/censuscampaign](http://www.twitter.com/censuscampaign)). The Census Campaign website sets out the key arguments why people who are non-religious should respond to the voluntary question on religion, and why many of those who responded as Christians in 2001, so-called "cultural Christians", should respond by ticking "No religion" in 2011. It also provides downloadable materials and suggestions for ways that people can

become involved in their local areas.

Last October, national statistician Jil Matheson was quoted as saying: "Statistics form the backbone of democratic debate... Every day in the UK, decisions are made and money invested based on official statistics."

The BHA points out that, after the 2001 census, the figures collected were used to justify the following policies:

- An increase in the number of faith schools
- The continuation of collective worship in schools
- Public funding and support of "inter-faith" and faith-based organisations above the support offered to secular organisations
- Suggestions of an increase in the role of faith in Britain under the coalition government
- The appointments of government advisors on faith
- Contracting out public services to religious organisations
- Keeping the 26 bishops in the House of Lords as of right
- Continued high number of hours dedicated to religious broadcasting
- Specific consultation at government and local level with "faith communities" over and above other groups within society
- Continued privileges for religious groups in equality law and other legislation.

All this, despite the fact that the British Social Attitudes Survey 2010 showed that:

- In the UK, those who profess no-religion as an identity have risen from 31 percent to 43 percent between 1983 and 2008
- 59 percent did not describe themselves as religious when asked about how they would describe their religiosity level
- In 1983 66 percent identified as Christian, in 2008 the number was 50 percent
- 62 percent of people in the UK never attend a religious service and only 8 percent attend a weekly church service.

And an Ipsos Mori Poll in 2007 showed that 36 percent of people – equivalent to around 17 million adults – are in fact humanist in their basic outlook.

In the 2007-08 Citizenship Survey, participants were requested to select factors that they regarded as important to their identity from thirteen options. Whilst family was top with 97 percent, followed by interests (87 percent), religion ranked bottom at 48 percent.

## Fascism raises its ugly head in Israel

TENSIONS are rising in the Israeli city of Safed, following a recent edict issued by Safed Chief Rabbi, Shmuel Eliyahu, forbidding Jews to let apartments or sell property to non-Jews because "It causes evil and makes the public commit the sin of intermarriage."

The edict issued by the state-funded rabbi sparked a chilling racist campaign. Following news late last year of a plan to establish a medical school in Safed which would admit Arab students, flyers were circulated by some sort of "campaign headquarters", declaring: "The smokescreen called a medical school obscures an evil scheme "to establish a refugee camp for psychotic, sadistic and debased Arabs, whose deceptiveness is, and always has been, aimed at tempting [Jewish women] and cruelly abusing them. On orders of the great rabbis of Safed, may they be blessed with a long life, we declare our protest and vehement resistance, and reiterate that it is forbidden under the law of the Torah to offer these people apartments for sale, rent, work or any form of entry. Our city will not succumb to wanton behavior – go back to your own locales and do not defile our camp."

Soon after, Israeli psychology student Osama Ghanaim was woken by a mob of 60 ultra-orthodox Jews chanting "kill the Arabs" outside his apartment. They stoned his house. After the crowd dispersed, Ghanaim, one of 1,400 Arab Israeli students enrolled at the Safed Academic College, found a poster on his front door warning him to move out, or else his house would be torched.

Only 70 Arab students are living in private accommodation in Safed, a city of 32,000 Jews – a third of them ultra-orthodox. Another 120 are living in dormitories provided by the college, while the remaining 1,200 commute from nearby Arab villages.



# Deeply flawed Islam report is an 'embarrassment' to Exeter University

AN academic study into "Islamophobia" – launched last month under the auspices of the University of Exeter – has been comprehensively rubbished by Andrew Gilligan, London Editor of the *Daily Telegraph*.

*Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime: UK Case Studies 2010* was authored by Robert Lambert and Jonathan Githens-Mazer and focuses on "the experience of Muslims as victims of violence, intimidation and discrimination in the UK".

Gilligan's response to the report was both swift and damning: "Reading it, I felt almost embarrassed for Lambert and his co-author, Jonathan Githens-Mazer, at having produced something so hopelessly weak. Far from being an academic or even pseudo-academic work, it is a political rant, and not a sophisticated one."

Gilligan pointed out that Bob Lambert "is a former policeman who has turned himself into one of Britain's most important fellow-travellers of Islamism ... He is now an academic, generously funded by various Islamist groups and specialising in pseudo-scholarly defences of his clients."

Gilligan described that study as "semi-degraded, the stuff of *Private Eye's* Dave Spart", adding that "the research report's core findings are equally preposterous. They are, *inter alia*, that there is at the moment an outbreak of what the authors quite seriously call 'terrorism' against Muslims in Britain. They say: 'Terrorism and political violence against Muslims is our deliberate and considered choice of description for a range of serious threats faced by Muslim communities in the UK ... Threats of political violence from a diverse extremist nationalist milieu are every bit as credible as those that fall under an al-Qaeda umbrella... the government should treat both terrorist threats with equal importance and in the same way.... Violent extremist nationalists in the UK have a present capacity to inflict death and destruction on a scale that is broadly comparable to their UK counterparts who are inspired instead by al-Qaeda'."

Gilligan thinks that "broadly comparable" in this context must mean "not comparable at all," and pointed out that "the number of Muslims killed by 'violent extremist nationalists' in Britain is nil, or very close to it. The number of people killed by al-Qaeda is 52."

He added: "Over the last ten years, half a dozen or so white right-wingers have in-



Robert Lambert pictured receiving an award from the Islamic Human Rights Commission in 2007

deed been convicted of possessing explosives and other weapons. But all were loners who were not acting in concert with any group, nor in most cases did they have any specific plans or targets. By contrast, there have over the same period been 127 convictions for Islamist-related terrorism in the UK, plus a number of other British subjects or residents convicted in other countries, and a number of further cases currently going through the British courts. Many of these convictions relate to serious and carefully-organised plots against specific targets involving substantial numbers of people.

"The authors get round this little problem by redefining terrorism. In their words: 'Terrorism cannot be understood only in terms of violence. It has to be understood primarily in terms of propaganda. Violence and propaganda, however, have much in common. Violence aims at behaviour modification by coercion. Propaganda aims at the same by persuasion. Terrorism can be seen as a combination of the two.'"

Gilligan said that "Lambert and Githens-Mazer are undeniably well-qualified to talk about propaganda – but to equate, say, the anti-Muslim frothings of the English Defence League with the murder of people on the London Underground is an abuse of language that would not be tolerated in a tabloid newspaper, let alone an academic report.

"Even on the actual violence side of their argument, there's a problem. Lambert and Githens-Mazer claim in their report that

there has been 'an alarming rise in what can best be described as anti-Muslim hate crime'. They say that 'violent attack[s]' against Muslim women wearing the niqab, burka or hijab 'have become commonplace in parts of the UK'. They say that 'intimidation and violence against Muslims has become warranted and routine' and that many Muslim communities are under a 'state of siege'.

"Though these are described as 'research findings', the report gives no research or evidence whatever to back any of them up, and no figures. Indeed, there are none to give.

"Buried deep in Lambert and Githens-Mazer's report is the coy admission that, for all the authors' inflammatory claims about waves of Islamophobic terrorism and communities under siege, there is, ahem, 'insufficient data to establish [the] scale of anti-Muslim hate crimes'.

"Even Britain's Muslims themselves have, it seems, been distressingly reluctant to furnish the authors with the longed-for apocalyptic picture. Quite the funniest part of the report is where Lambert and Githens-Mazer complain that with many Muslims they interviewed 'anti-Muslim hate crime was implausibly denied or demonstrably neglected by Muslim interviewees who had direct knowledge of it', accusing them of 'wilfully burying their heads in the sand'."

He adds: "The reason Islamists need to claim a rising tide of 'anti-Muslim hatred', however slender the evidence, is three-fold. First, it furthers their agenda of promoting distance between Muslims and non-Muslims. Second, it is aimed at frightening Muslims into their camp. Third, it enables them to stifle criticism; any attacks on Islamists can be dismissed as 'Islamophobic' attacks against all Muslims."

Gilligan concluded: "The report is so transparently shrill and dishonest that I really don't think the Islamists have got their money's worth. Even the usual suspects online and in the press seem to have ignored it and the report is no longer available to download from the Cordoba website. Perhaps they've realised what an own goal it is.

"The more important financial question is for Exeter University. I know universities need to get income from wherever they can these days, but the price of this particular funding in terms of political pain, media attention and academic credibility could turn out to be rather high."



# The RC Church would have 'serious operati

Within the depths of Pope Ratzinger's new book, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times*, is a reference to homosexuality among Roman Catholic priests. The Pope acknowledges that this is a vexing problem, and intimates that the only solution is to keep even celibate homosexuals out of the priesthood.

The extract from his book, based on a week-long series of interviews conducted last July by German journalist Peter Seewald, reads: "The Congregation for Education issued a decision a few years ago to the effect that homosexual candidates cannot become priests because their sexual orientation estranges them from the proper sense of paternity, from the intrinsic nature of priestly being. The selection of candidates to the priesthood must therefore be very careful.

"The greatest attention is needed here in order to prevent the intrusion of this kind of ambiguity and to head off a situation where the celibacy of priests would practically end up being identified with the tendency to homosexuality."

But significantly, a few months before the publication of *Light of the World*, a former Italian MP and gay activist, Franco Grillini, said: "If all the gays in the Catholic church were to leave it at once – something we would very much like – they would cause it serious operational problems."

Grillini spoke out after an Italian magazine published an investigation into what it termed the double life of gay priests in Rome.

Using hidden cameras, the weekly magazine *Panorama*, owned by Italy's Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, captured priests visiting gay clubs and bars and having sex.

The diocese of Rome lashed out at the magazine, saying its aim was "to create scandal [and] defame all priests". But it also urged gay clerics to leave both the closet and the priesthood. It said: "Consistency would require that they come into the open", but that they "ought not to have become priests".

One priest, a Frenchman in his 30s identified as Father Paul, attended a party at which there were two male prostitutes. He then said Mass the following morning before driving them to the airport, *Panorama*

reported.

A photo on its website claimed to show the priest in his dog collar but without his trousers with a gay man who acted as decoy for the magazine. In other shots, priests were shown apparently kissing *Panorama's* collaborator.

A member of the clergy quoted by the magazine put the proportion of gay priests in the Italian capital at "98 percent". The Rome diocese insisted the vast majority of priests in the city were "models of morality for all", while adding that the number of gay clergyman was "small, but not to

ister had procured male prostitutes for a papal gentleman-in-waiting.

Commenting on Ratzinger's reference to gay priests, *Guardian* columnist Andrew Brown said that the pontiff's statement was "utterly unambiguous, and only about 100 years too late to be effective. What he is saying is that the priesthood must consist of men who have renounced the love of women, not those for whom it has never been a major temptation."

The Pope's words were: "Sexuality has an intrinsic meaning and direction, which is not homosexual. We could say, if we wanted

to put it like this, that evolution has brought forth sexuality for the purpose of reproducing the species. The same thing is true from a theological point of view as well. The meaning and direction of sexuality is to bring about the union of man and woman and, in this way, to give humanity posterity, children, a future. This is the determination internal to the essence of sexuality. Everything else is against sexuality's intrinsic meaning and direction. This is a point we need to hold firm, even if it is not pleasing to our age ...

"Homosexuality is incompatible with the priestly vocation. Otherwise, celibacy itself would lose its meaning as a renunciation. It would be extremely dangerous if celibacy became a sort of pretext for bringing people into the priesthood who don't want to get married anyway."

"This," said Brown, "is ironic in view of the widely-held view that he himself is not a man for the ladies (as a gay Catholic once said to me). It's also obviously unworkable. But his reasoning is interesting, for it shows that he understands one of the problems that compulsory celibacy

has brought to the church in the West. As it became less and less common for men not to marry – and perhaps this was a result of increasing prosperity as much as anything else – the Church was one of the few professions in which a gay man could remain 'respectable', even to himself. The consequence is a widespread and rather poisonous culture of camp. This is well-known and admitted by anyone who has made a serious study of it. And once seminaries are known to be predominantly gay places, the mothers of straight sons become unwilling to send them there. A tipping point is reached – as it seems to have been in the



*Panorama's cover story, 'Nights out of Gay Priests' sent shudders through the Diocese of Rome*

be written off as isolated cases". A review eight years ago of research on the American church concluded that between a quarter and a half of seminarians and priests there were homosexual.

Another well-known spokesman for the gay community, Aurelio Mancuso, condemned *Panorama's* investigation as a "horrible political and cultural operation", but agreed that if priests were to follow the advice given to them by the Diocese of Rome, it would "paralyse" the diocese.

Four months earlier, the Pope's own household was rocked by scandal when court documents revealed a Vatican chor-



# rational difficulties without its gay priests'

USA – from which the Church finds it almost impossible to recover.”

Even Peter Seewald, who interviewed Ratzinger for the book, responds to the Pope's remarks by saying:

“But there is no doubt that homosexuality exists in monasteries and among the clergy, if not acted out, then at least in a non-practised form.” To which Benedict replies: “Well, that is just one of the disturbing problems of the Church. And the persons who are affected must at least try not to express this inclination actively, in order to remain true to the intrinsic mission of their office.”

Brown asks: “What will all this matter in practice?” “Pope wrong again” is hardly a headline to set the secular world on fire. But it will certainly encourage the Catholic Right to attempt to weed out gays from

seminaries. This is, as I have said, impossible, but it is also likely to lead to further nasty and bitter infighting. Until now, liberals have held the line by referring to the passage in the earlier denunciation about “deep-rooted” homosexual tendencies. This allowed seminary directors to pretend that men whom they thought could stay celibate were not deep-rootedly gay at all.

Brown then points out that the following remarks in the book by the Pope drop that qualification:

“The issue at stake here is the intrinsic truth of sexuality's significance in the constitution of man's being. If someone has deep-seated homosexual inclinations – and it is still an open question whether these inclinations are really innate or whether they arise in early childhood – if, in any case, they have power over him, this is a

great trial for him, just as other trials can afflict other people as well. But this does not mean that homosexuality thereby becomes morally right. Rather, it remains contrary to the essence of what God originally willed ... For, in the end, their attitude toward man and woman is somehow distorted, off centre, and, in any case, is not within the direction of creation of which we have spoken.”

Brown concludes: “Benedict does also say that gay people ‘are human beings with their problems and their joys, that as human beings they deserve respect, even though they have this inclination, and must not be discriminated against because of it. Respect for man is absolutely fundamental and decisive’.

“But if I were gay, I wouldn't think that he thought I was a proper human being at all, whether or not he treated me like one.”

## Catholic Church in Poland prays that a new Jesus statue will stem the tide of secularism

A STATUE of Jesus, said to be the tallest in the world, stands on the flat frozen fields of Swiebodzin, a small western Poland town.

Its arms are outstretched and its gaze is fixed straight ahead at a community trying to push back a rising tide of secularism.

The stark, white, 187-foot-high figure was erected towards the end of 2010, in part to serve as sentry against a force already churning through Poland.

“I hope this statue will become a remedy for this secularisation,” said the Rev Sylwester Zawadzki, the priest who inspired the construction of the figure, which is 42ft higher than Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro. “I hope it will have a religious mission and not just bring tourists.”

Poland is still an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic nation, still conservative and still religious, especially when compared with its European neighbours. But supporters and critics of the Roman Catholic Church all acknowledge that the society is changing. They agree that church representatives in Poland have lost authority and credibility, and that much of the population is moving toward a more secular view of life, one with a greater separation between church and state, and a rejection of church mandates on individual morality.

“We are considered the European museum of Catholicism, but let me tell you



Workmen prepare to place Jesus' head on the giant statue

we are no longer,” said Szymon Holownia, programme director for Religia TV, a relatively new station that aims to convince Poles that faith can and should be relevant in modern life with programmes like a cooking show led by a nun.

“The relationship between faith and state is changing; it is changing dramatically in Poland,” Mr. Holownia said. “It is really huge.”

“Twenty years of freedom and religion is evaporating,” he said. “This is the crisis of Christianity in Poland.”

Church supporters said the trend was

evident in the numbers: 95 percent of Poles identify themselves as Catholic, but only 41 percent attend Sunday Mass regularly.

In the big cities of Warsaw and Krakow, only about 20 percent attend Mass regularly on Sundays, according to the Institute of Statistics of the Church.

Supporters of the Church also said that the numbers dropped far below the 41 percent when it came to accepting moral mandates about issues like divorce and *in vitro* fertilisation, both of which the Church opposes and a majority of people appear to support.



## RELIGIOUS LUNACY

# Speaking in Tongues

**TINA LANGDOWN** on the incomprehensible drivel that some describe as the language of God

*Humphrey, a fellow much given to piety,  
Subscribed to his local religious society.  
This, he felt sure was where he could  
shine  
In ritual involving the spirit divine.  
It moved him one evening to fill up his  
lungs,  
And startle the people by speaking in  
tongues!  
One thought he spoke Hausa, another,  
Chinese.  
It included weird sounds, like the buzzing  
of bees.  
Some thought it was Uzbek, Guarani, or  
Greek  
Or some ancient dialect no one could  
speak.  
Sweating profusely, he clearly looked  
feverish,  
Fervently spouting his version of gibberish.  
Exhausted at last, he sank back in his  
chair,  
While the others agreed: "That was better  
than prayer!"*

— Denys Drower

THE passionate, sometimes rhythmic, language-like patter that pours forth from religious people who "speak in tongues" reflects a state of mental possession, many of them say. And they have some neuroscience to back them up.

Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania took brain images of five women while they spoke in tongues and found that their frontal lobes – the thinking, willful part of the brain through which people control what they do – were relatively quiet, as were the language centres. The regions involved in maintaining self-consciousness were active. The women were not in blind trances, and it was unclear which region was driving the behaviour.

The images, appearing in a 2006 edition of the journal *Psychiatry Research*, pinpoint the most active areas of the brain. The images are the first of their kind taken during this spoken religious practice, which has roots in the Old and New Testaments and in Pentecostal churches established in

the early 1900s. The women in the study were healthy, active churchgoers.

"The amazing thing was how the images supported people's interpretation of what was happening," said Dr Andrew B Newberg, leader of the study team. "The way they describe it, and what they believe, is that God is talking through them," he said.

Dr Newberg is also a co-author of *Why We Believe What We Believe*.

In the study, the researchers used imaging techniques to track changes in blood flow in each woman's brain in two conditions, once as she sang a gospel song and again while speaking in tongues. By comparing the patterns created by these two emotional, devotional activities, the researchers could pinpoint blood-flow peaks and valleys unique to speaking in tongues.

Donna Morgan, a co-author of the study, was also a research subject. She is a born-again Christian who says she considers the ability to speak in tongues a gift. "You're aware of your surroundings," she said. "You're not really out of control. But you have no control over what's happening. You're just flowing. You're in a realm of peace and comfort, and it's a fantastic feeling."

Inspired by Denys Drower's sonnet, submitted last month to the *Freethinker*, I decided to look more closely into the phenomenon, and uncovered the following description on the internet in *Yahoo! Answers*: "The Bible says that speaking in tongues is only from God if one person in the room is speaking and one person – only one – will interpret what the other is saying. If you go to a church and everyone in the room is speaking (murmuring, talking a bunch of gibberish, and no one is interpreting what is being said) you can know without a doubt the service is being run by evil, instead of God."

The contributor to YA added: "I have seen churches where the children come away from the service scared for life. This is a true story: a man from Korea who moved into a new neighborhood here

in America was looking for a church to attend. He chose one fairly close to his home. During the service the people in that church started fainting, everyone started yelling and jumping up and down, and speaking in tongues. The man decided to leave. Asked by the deacon why he decided not to stay, the man replied: "I am from Korea, and if the lady who was sitting beside me knew how bad she was cussing God in Korean she would never open her mouth again."

While rational folk rightly regard speaking in tongues as freaky, funny, or just downright daft, there are many religious leaders who regard glossolalia, as the phenomenon is known, as something bordering on the demonic, and advise their congregations to avoid it like the plague.

An article written by Maurice A Meredith, of Coolidge, Arizona, and posted on the internet by the Church of Christ in Belfast, states that "speaking in tongues is nothing new, but the thrust it has made into some of the mainline denominations has been wholly unexpected. For years it has been identified as a phenomenon with Pentecostal Churches. It has now crossed the railroad tracks, moved uptown, and has manifested itself in Episcopal, Lutheran, and even Catholic churches as well as appearing on some of the big name college campuses. Thus it has become one of the leading issues of the day."

He points out that glossolalists use this verse as a major defence of their loony behaviour: "For he who speaks in a tongue speaks not unto men, but unto God; for no man understands; but in the spirit he speaks mysteries." (1 Cor. 14:2.)

"All tongue speakers admit that neither the speaker nor hearer knows what is said, they only know they feel better. There is no edification unless speaker and hearer have both been built up."

Meredith says that the whole question of tongues might best be summed up in the experience of D Robert Lindberg, a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, missionary to China, and minister for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He tells





*Hysteria at Pentacostal and similar fundamentalist church gatherings is often accompanied by speaking in tongues*

how he sought and experienced speaking in tongues ... He soon became convinced that tongue-speaking is not of God, but "has at its heart a false mysticism which is contrary to the Word of God". He gives seven reasons for his judgment, concluding that the tongue-speaking we observe today is not a gift of God but the result of "auto-suggestion, self induced – piously, yes – but wrongfully and unscripturally".

Meredith also refers to the findings of Dr W A Criswell, who pointed out that no known language is used by glossolalists. Criswell says tape recordings were submitted to the Toronto Institute of Linguistics and these experts in the science of phonetics concluded: "This is no human language". A similar experiment was conducted in Washington, DC, before a group of government linguists, who found: "What they speak is meaningless to the human ear".

Criswell, pastor of the First Baptist Church, in Dallas, Texas, indicts speaking in tongues on six charges. He writes: "The basic doctrine that lies back of glossolalian practise is wrong. That doctrine is that speaking in tongues is necessary evidence of the filling of the Holy Spirit. This doctrine is in direct opposition to the distinct and emphasised teaching of the Word of God." Further, he adds: "Wherever and whenever glossolalia appears it is always

hurtful and divisive. There is no exception to this. It is but another instrument for the tragic torture of the body of Christ."

Meredith asks: "Does this sound like the work of the same spirit who led Paul to say, 'Let all things be done unto edifying' (v 26); or, 'If there is no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church' (v 28)?"

And he concludes: "In their clamour for speaking in tongues, some have rejected the teaching of Christ and have made light of the word of the Holy One of Israel. May God have mercy on their souls."

In a fanatically anti-Semitic piece entitled *Speaking in Tongues, the Deadly Dialect of the Zionist Language*, Mark Glenn writes: "We all see them some time in our lives, but certainly with more frequency these days as events become increasingly heady. In virtually every city in America on some street corner there is some self-appointed preacher standing there, oblivious to how he or she appears, hollering like some Old Testament prophet at the top of his or her lungs that 'the end' is near, whose message is almost invariably some version of 'Best listen up what I'm sayin' here sonny n' missy, lest you find yourself a-swimmin' for your life in a lake o' fire'..."

"And then, inevitably (and in short time) they lose it... Like an old, worn out combustion engine whose ball bearings

went bad years ago, a performance that started off as just mildly insane breaks down into total madness. A religious epileptic seizure of sorts takes over, complete with all the shrieking, babbling, shaking, convulsing and quivering as 'the spirit' comes over Mr or Mrs Self-Appointed Prophet who has now become God's bullhorn for the truth.

"Generally speaking, as unsettling as they are to be around, nevertheless our Pentecostal neighbors these days are basically harmless. True, their families usually have some substantial 'issues' and once in a while someone needs to get some medical attention after that rattlesnake they were God's honest sure wouldn't bite them did, but rarely do they do something REALLY crazy, like get hold of a few hundred nukes and threaten to blow up the world with them."

Shamefully, what starts out as an entertaining and informative piece about glossolalia quickly descends into an irrational rant in which the former US high school teacher and Islamist apologist equates speaking in tongues with what he sees as the duplicity and mendacity of "Zionism, Judaism and Jewish interests".

Perhaps one of the most fascinating examples of glossolalia in a non-religious

*(Continued on p11)*



# Slacktivism (the art of feeling really good about doing virtually nothing worthwhile)

**PETER BRIETBART** argues that prayer does nothing other than deliver self-satisfaction to those who engage in it

Last month saw a large number of Facebook's users swap their profile pictures on the social networking site for images of cartoons from their childhood. This was part of a well-intentioned, but ultimately superficial campaign to reduce child abuse by drawing attention to the issue. So effective was it, I was prompted to comment, "I was about to punch a child, but then I saw Fred Flintstone and I reconsidered."

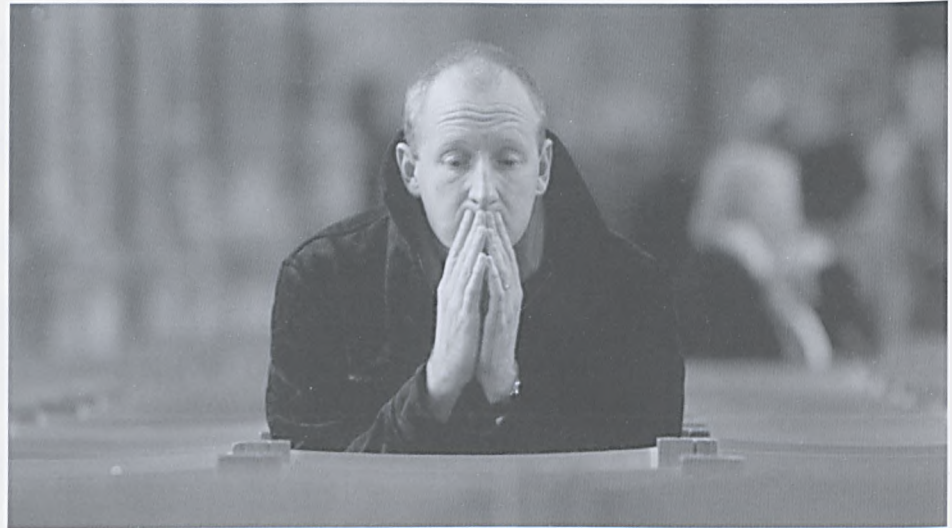
The campaign had the effect of making people feel like they were contributing (whilst allowing them to compete on who knew the coolest/most obscure cartoon character) without their actually having to make any effort whatsoever: slacktivism at its finest.

But the Facebook campaign utterly pales in comparison to the ultimate in slacktivist action. Imagine, if you will, hundreds of thousands of people sitting at home, feeling smugly satisfied that they're contributing to the relieving of the world's problems whilst in reality they're accomplishing nothing. Imagine that these people gather together to bask in the warm glow of shared altruism, whilst living without any form of altruistic action. Imagine that these people see terrible things around the world, and believe that they can contribute to fixing these things without doing anything at all tangible.

You don't have to stretch your imagination very far. Prayer is all these things and less. Prayer manages to instill a sense of accomplishment when nothing valid has been achieved by relieving the faithful of any burden of duty.

The effects of this can vary from simple laziness to fatal neglect. In February 2010, a couple in Oregon were jailed for criminally negligent homicide after their son died of a simple and easily treatable infection. The parents were members of the Followers of Christ Church, who preferred prayer to medicine and acted on their conviction, holding prayer vigils over their dying son.

Another case from early 2008 involved an eleven-year-old girl in Wisconsin whose parents ignored the symptoms of diabetes and chose instead to – you guessed it – pray for her recovery. When the girl died



of such easily curable ailments, the Police Chief commented, "They believed up to the time she stopped breathing she was going to get better. They just thought it was a spiritual attack. They believed if they prayed enough she would get through it."

Needless to say, prayer is an absurd and futile occupation – simply people making requests to empty rooms. Money wasted on medical studies of intercessory prayer have discovered that prayer has no positive effect on the world. Indeed, the Templeton Foundation, the nefarious pseudo-science academy (tagline: "insights at the boundary between theology and science"). What next? "Insights at the boundary between clairvoyancy and psychology"?) discovered in 2006 that in some cases prayer makes things worse. Dr Charles Bethea, who worked on the study, found that there was no change in recovery for those who were not prayed for and for those who did not know they were being prayed for, but that there was a higher incidence – 59 percent – of recovery issues for those who knew they were being prayed for. Bethea had to consider that being prayed for makes people anxious: "Did the patients think 'I am so sick that they had to call in the prayer team'?"

Prayer too has a significant problem for the theologically inclined. It is said by way of explanation when bad things happen to good people that 'God has a plan'; some mysterious plan that will make everything work out well in the long run.

Late great comedian George Carlin explained how pompous prayer looks in relation to the Divine Plan: "Suppose the thing you want isn't in God's Divine Plan. What do you want him to do? Change His Plan? Just for you? Doesn't that seem a little arrogant? It's the Divine Plan! What's the use of being God if every run-down shmuck with a two-dollar prayer book can come along and fuck up your plan?" And Carlin continues that, if the prayer isn't answered, the faithful can commiserate with recourse to the Plan. But wait, he says, if it's God's will, and He's going to carry out the Plan regardless, what's the point of praying in the first place?

Another important question we can ask is "Why won't God heal amputees?" This marvellous website deals with that very question. I'm sure we've all heard the anecdotal evidence from a believer who just knows prayer works because they once prayed over some trivial matter and it came true! Sam Harris sets a challenge to the faithful: Gather the legions, have them pray in unison over the lost leg of a war victim, and see if God grows the leg back. Of course, we know it couldn't happen, because there's no recipient of the prayers and the laws of physics are indifferent to lost legs or their recovery.

Being grateful for prayer during or after a successful medical recovery is another twisted piece of thinking. By all means be grateful to friends and family for their



keeping you in their thoughts if it comforts you. but when medical staff have poured genuine bravery, skill and effort into you and the thanks go to God, something is badly awry.

Philosopher Daniel Dennett authored a piece called *Thank Goodness* after he was rushed to hospital, in which he makes note of all those whose scientific and medical

abilities went into the process of saving his life. He notes that he can be directly grateful to those whose goodness benefited him, and that he can endeavour to be good and kind to others. Contrarily, gratefulness to God is useless even if you're a believer – it won't make a jot of difference to him whether you're thanking him or not. How could a mere human ever hope to repay

the creator of the universe? Especially, notes Dennett drolly, after he sacrificed his son for us. Prayer, it seems, is the pinnacle of intellectual laziness. It is feeling accomplished whilst accomplishing only a feeling.

Someone said: "Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day; teach a man to fish and he will eat for a lifetime." Give a man religion and he will die praying for a fish.

context was the language of Mars, spoken and written by Hélène Smith 1861-1929), a late-19th century French psychic who claimed to be able to communicate with the inhabitants of the Red Planet. She would write out the Martian communications on paper, thereby popularising automatic writing. In 1900, Mlle Smith became famous with the publication of *Des Indes à la Planete Mars (From India to the Planet Mars)* by Theodor Flournoy, Professor of Psychology at the University of Geneva. The book was a sensation.

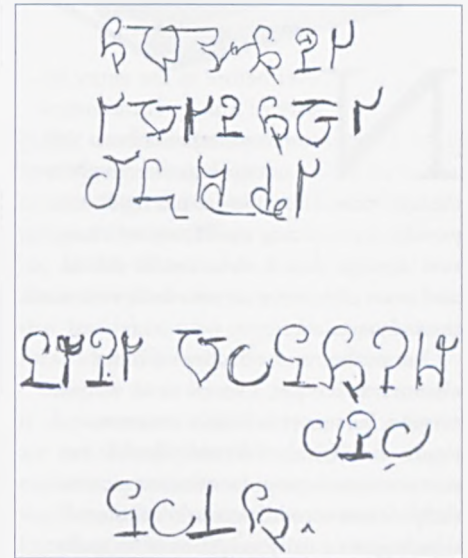
Smith (real name Catherine-Elise Muller) heard voices which she attributed to spirits, and clairaudiently repeated messages from Mars in a Martian language of which she later furnished the translation. Prof Flournoy contended that all her voices were of subconscious origin. The Martian language was spookily close to French.

Smith also provided vivid descriptions

## Speaking in Tongues

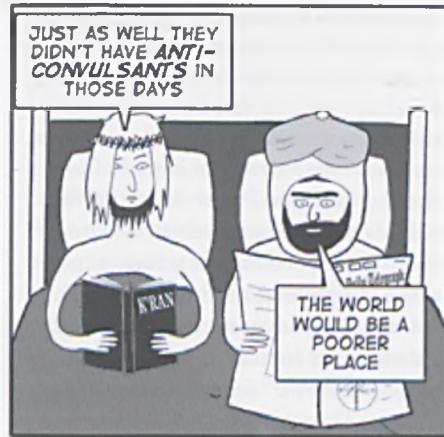
of Mars, which included carriages without horses or wheels, emitting sparks as they glided by; and houses with fountains on the roof. Oddly, the Martian people were exactly like the inhabitants of Earth, save that both sexes wore the same costume formed of trousers, very ample, and a long blouse, drawn tight about the waist and decorated with various designs.

"We are struck by two points," wrote Prof Flournoy in his analysis: "the complete identity of the Martian world, taken in its chief points, with the world in which we live, and its puerile originality in a host of minor details ... One would say that it was the work of a young scholar to whom had been given the task of trying to invent a world as different as possible from ours, but real, and who had conscientiously applied himself to it, loosening the reins of his childish fancy in regard to a multitude of minor points in the limits of what appeared admissible according to his short and nar-



The first Martian text, written by Hélène Smith at a seance on August 22, 1897. Unfortunately, nowhere could we find a translation, so for all we know it might have been a note to the milkman.

## Jesus & Mo



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row experience. All the traits that I discover in the author of the Martian romance can be summed up in a single phrase: its profoundly infantile character."

Owing to Prof Flournoy's critical remarks, the subliminal romancer apparently resolved to correct the defects of her Martian revelations. She then made an attempt to depict life on Uranus, and began speaking in a language significantly different to Martian. On her new fanciful, grotesque world, the tallest people were three feet high, with heads twice as broad as high, living in low, long cabins without windows or doors but with a tunnel about ten feet long running from it into the earth.

Prof Flournoy saw no reason to change his opinion as to the earthly origin of both the Martian and the Uranian language and writing. Of the still later Lunarian phase, he obtained no first-hand material, as Smith, in a fit of pique, broke off all communication with the author.

Then in August, 1895, Hélène Smith found a rival in America. Mrs Smead made several revelations of the planets Mars and Jupiter, and, after an incubation period of five years, burst forth in detailed descriptions which, according to Flournoy, exhibited "the same character of puerility and naive imagination as those of Mlle Smith".



# The Internet is fast becoming the most valuable resource in the world for atheists

**PHILIP MACINTOSH** is convinced that modern communications are fast diminishing the power of religion around the globe

**N**ever before in the entire history of human communication have atheists been able to network as effectively as they do now. The internet has made this possible by opening up numerous channels through which ideas can be shared and news of interest to non-believers made instantly available.

One of the most effective of these channels is Reddit, a social news website on which users post links to interesting content on the Internet. Reddit has an enormously popular atheism section (<http://www.reddit.com/r/atheism/>) which gives a daily snapshot of virtually every report in even the most obscure publications of the absurdities and atrocities associated with religion. Reddit, I am pleased to report, recently acquired an ex-Muslim section (<http://www.reddit.com/r/exmuslim/>), which simply states: "If you used to be Muslim, but somehow escaped the tight grip that religion has on people's minds, then come join us, there are many like you."

The best known and most popular social networking site, as most readers will be aware, is Facebook, and it too is increasingly being used by non-believers to spread the message that a person need never feel alone with his or her disbelief.

But what you probably don't know – I certainly didn't – is that Mark Elliot Zuckerberg, 26, an American computer programmer named in 2008 by *Time* magazine as one of the World's Most Influential People, has no time whatsoever for religion. He was born into the Jewish tradition, yet now self-identifies as an atheist.

I learned about Zuckerberg on a website called Brainz, under the title of *The 50 Most Brilliant Atheists of all Time*.

The list, which makes for a fascinating read, kicks off with Democritus, an ancient Greek philosopher, the most prolific and influential of the pre-Socratics, whose atomic theory is regarded as the intellectual culmination of early Greek thought. For this atomic theory, which echoes eerily the theoretical formulations of modern physicists, he is sometimes called the "father of modern science." He was well known to



*Atheist and Facebook founder  
Mark Zuckerberg*

Aristotle, and a thorn in the side of Plato – who advised that all of Democritus' works be burned.

A better recognised name is Epicurus. Born in 341 BCE in Athens, Epicurus established the school of philosophy known as Epicureanism. He was an important figure in the early development of scientific methodology, insisting that nothing which cannot be tested through direct observation and defended through logical deduction should be believed.

The site then concentrates on more modern atheists, such as Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919), a noted American industrialist, businessman and philanthropist. He wrote many books on the subjects of wealth and its responsibilities, on social issues and on political philosophy. He self-identified as a Positivist, and kept away from organised religion due to his distaste of sectarianism. Carnegie preferred naturalism and science, saying in his autobiography that "not only had I got rid of the theology and the supernatural, but I had found the truth of evolution."

Sigmund Freud comes in at no 7. Born Sigismund Schlomo Freud (1856-1939), Freud was an Austrian psychiatrist who founded the psychoanalytic school of psychology. His philosophical writings established his strong advocacy for an atheistic world view, and he was eulogised as "the atheist's touchstone" for the 20th century.

Clarence Darrow (1857-1938) is 8th on the list. An American lawyer, a leading

member of the American Civil Liberties Union and a notable defence attorney, he starting out as a corporate lawyer for a railroad company, but soon jumped the ideological tracks and represented the leader of the American Railway Union in the Pullman Strike of 1894.

His most famous case was the defence of Tennessee teacher John Scopes in the "Monkey Trial" against the state law that barred the teaching of evolution, the prosecution side being argued by William Jennings Bryan. The trial served as the story for the play and later film, *Inherit the Wind*. Darrow wrote essays with titles like "Absurdities of the Bible" and "The Myth of the Soul," suggesting that his professed agnosticism was strong enough to be considered atheism.

Others on the list include Ayn Rand (1905-1982), the Russian-born writer and actress Katherine Hepburn. In a 1973 interview on *The Dick Cavett Show* Hepburn said that while she agreed with Christian principles and thought highly of Jesus Christ, she had no personal religious beliefs nor any belief in an afterlife. "I am an atheist and that's it. I believe there's nothing we can know except that we should be kind to each other and do what we can for other people."

One name on the list took me a bit by surprise, probably because I only ever knew Bruce Jun Fan Lee (1940-1973) as an American-born Chinese martial artist. I had no idea that Lee had majored in philosophy at the University of Washington and kept an extensive library of philosophy. His first book expressed a well-developed philosophical outlook and was entitled *Chinese Gung-Fu: The Philosophical Art of Self Defense*. As he developed Jeet Kune Do, he cited influence from Taoism, Jiddu Krishnamurti and Buddhism, but was himself an atheist who expressed disbelief in God.

A list like such as this, which also includes Mick Jagger, Stephen Jay Gould, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Stephen Hawking, Douglas Adams, and Jodie Foster, is useful in a number of ways, not least being its ability to inform those fresh to atheism that they are in excellent company, and that they should never need to apologise for absence of belief.



# Introducing atheism to younger readers

**G RICHARD BOZARTH** reviews *Disbelief 101: A Young Person's Guide to Atheism* by S C Hitchcock



"OH, to have found this book when I was thirteen" begins Tom Flynn's introduction to *Disbelief 101*. I agree, except it would have been more like 14 or 15 for me. The atheist writing that I started on was not written for beginners. In high school it was the Marquis de Sade, who loaded his famous pornography with atheist essays.

Frankly, I remember most the sexual events described instead of the arguments for atheism, which I didn't fully appreciate until I read de Sade again around 20 years later. They did have their influence, though, because I was a convinced atheist by the time I graduated.

Three years later I read Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in 1971 – and was blown away again, but for a different reason. I could appreciate its magnificence as a literary masterpiece, but I wasn't intellectually prepared to get the most out of it. Nevertheless, after I finished reading it, I was a militant atheist – and still am one today.

*Disbelief 101* is the book I needed back in the 1960s and it did not exist. Did anything like it exist then? I've never heard of such a book. The need was there. When I worked for Madalyn Murray O'Hair from December 1978 to July 1980, she expressed several times a desire to have American Atheist Press publish books for children and adolescents, but she didn't have much success finding atheists who had written or would write such books, and she couldn't manage her time so that she could write a book like *Disbelief*. She was right about there being a need for it. It's wonderful that S C Hitchcock (a pseudonym) has finally satisfied that need.

I started reading *Disbelief* with no expectation of enjoying it because I believed I was too experienced to enjoy an introduction to atheism aimed at adolescents who are closer to puberty than graduating high school. I was surprised and delighted to discover the book is worth reading by a person who has been reading atheist literature for decades. It is loaded with sophisticated content and presented in a smooth, often humorous style that achieves the hard task of writing so a nescient adolescent can understand it, and

an experienced adult can enjoy it.

*Disbelief* does not present a soft atheist message in an effort to be more seductive or to avoid excessively hurting religious feelings. Here are some fine examples:

- "No one is listening to your prayers. If you hurt, it's not for a reason. God does not have a plan for you. He doesn't exist."

- "What irony! After centuries of priests and shamans praying for signs and praying that a god or gods interfere with human lives, the only thing that has worked in the real world is to assume that god doesn't exist! To assume there is no god is to get off on the right foot every time ... Not a single profession in the entire world achieves results by assuming there is a god. That is, except the religious profession, which exists only to perpetuate its religious beliefs."

- "It is absence of evidence, of logic, of reason, that forces all religions to put a premium on faith. Because they have no evidence for their claims, they have to make it a virtue to believe in things that are illogical – even though in any other area to have faith in something without evidence is crazy."

- "Religion is the only force in the world that lets a person have his prejudice or hatred and feel good about it."

- "Religious indoctrination of children is child abuse."

Like any book, some parts are more excellent than others. Chapter 4 is one of those superior parts. In this chapter *Disbelief* admirably tackles three popular arguments for the existence of a supreme supernatural entity: the First Cause/Prime Mover Argument; the Necessary Watchmaker (aka Design) Argument; Why There Is Something Argument. Hitchcock shows that these are suicidal for religionists because they are so flawed. For example, he points out that the way watches came into existence – parts designed for other purposes, such as gears for machines that do heavy lifting – were recognised by clever humans to have the capability to do other tasks, such as moving the hands of a watch at constant speeds that correctly represent units of measure of time. In other words, our machines, even the most sophisticated high-tech ones that dazzle us today, evolved out of

earlier machines and were not created out of nothing by a flash of genius. Chapter 5 is an outstanding rebuttal of Creationism and Intelligent Design. There was nothing new for me in this chapter, but I truly admire how the writer presents complex ideas on a level that teenagers, who might be experiencing these ideas the first time, can understand.

Chapter 6 is equally impressive in how it demonstrates that science and religion are not compatible. Wonderfully, it simply explains how science is superior in every way to religion because it is evidence-based knowing, instead of faith-based believing. I like the way that *Disbelief* emphasises in this chapter and others that religion is dangerous and should not be inflicted on immature, ignorant children.

Chapter 10 is superb at taking on the Meaning Of Life Argument and Morality Argument and demonstrates convincingly that religionism fails where it likes to present itself as being uniquely successful compared to atheism.

I can't end this without saluting the book's charming sense of humor that also has some serious bite power. This is my favorite example: "Why is god always communicating with humanity through earthquakes, disease, explosions, and suffering? Hey, god! We have e-mail now! You can stop sending your messages via dead children!"

*Disbelief 101* triumphantly accomplishes its mission of being an outstanding first atheist book for a person who is 12 to 14 years old and having his or her first doubts about the muck of religionism that has been splattered all over her or him since birth. Atheist organizations that participate in public events where they sell or give atheist literature to interested attendees should offer *Disbelief 101*.

I also highly recommend this book to atheists who have been reading atheist literature for decades, because they will enjoy it. *Disbelief 101* is so good that I wish I had written it!

*Disbelief 101: A Young Person's Guide to Atheism* is published by See Sharp Press, PO Box 1731, Tucson, AZ 85701-1731, 2009. ISBN 978-1-884365-47-8. 130 pages, paperback. \$9.95.



# points of view...

A DIG IN THE POST BAG – LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

ADDRESS LETTERS TO [BARRY@FREETHINKER.CO.UK](mailto:BARRY@FREETHINKER.CO.UK).  
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## GOVERNMENT & RELIGION

PROMISES, promises! Will politicians ever honour them! When the coalition formed the government last May, I had high hopes they would. I had just read Elkhonon Goldberg's *The New Executive Brain*, where he explains the importance of the (pre)frontal lobes in cognition, emotional control, moral integrity, planning and decision-making (so the bigger they are, allegedly the better the brains) and there in Parliament (courtesy TV coverage) confidently stood David Cameron sporting the best Prime Ministerial frontal lobes since Stanley Baldwin or even Pitt the Younger, flanked on his front bench by impressive high brows of no less cerebral power.

With such intelligent leadership, I thought, the promised economic and social reforms would quickly be enacted; and when considering the promised constitutional reforms, the government would even listen to the National Secular Society, which might eventually lead to the democratisation of the Lords and the ending of religious privilege. Surely in the national interest Cameron would override his Christian beliefs to progress common-sense rationalism?

And Nick Clegg – he, like many ministers, had admitted to being an atheist, hadn't he? – would use his powers as Deputy Prime Minister to control extremist Islamic preachers, maybe even close the radicalising madrassahs and mosques and make fundamentalist malcontents conform to traditional British mores. My optimism was reinforced when Education Secretary Michael Gove vouchsafed the priority of teaching science and evolution in the schools' curriculum.

But my hopes have unravelled. Maybe I misunderstood the Tory's Big Society

modernising agenda, because under its auspices religious influence in public life has increased. Not only have more schools been given faith status and religious charities created to evangelise vulnerable groups, but religious issues are now reported by the popular media without any critical analysis of their divisive dogmas, as if faith – any faith – is the cure-all for society's ills. Counter-argument is curtailed by laws restricting speech; and for all the pledges of greater openness and transparency about the way we are governed, covert surveillance by ever more sophisticated means is increasing, as are the surreptitiously collected data banks about citizens' lives (ref. Heather Brooke's *The Silent State*). Political correctness – which the government has also done nothing to reverse – is now so embedded in society its requisite denial of discomfiting truths has corrupted public debate (ref Anthony Browne's *The Retreat of Reason*), thus further precluding discussion about religious bigotry, multiculturalism, immigration, race, genetic determinism, and even intelligence.

The suppression of public inquiry into religion and un-PC issues suggests an intellectual unease in the Establishment and sycophantic complicity in the media: one of the BBC's hidden agendas in its religious programming and censoring of atheist opinion seems to be to nurture in the public the naïveté on which religion thrives. Perhaps the last thing the political class wants is to defend religious motive (especially Israeli expansionism): question one person's biblical beliefs and you have to question all. And in the impossibility of any rational religious argument, such questioning would expose the ancient and modern neurological basis of "revelatory" or "spiritual" experiences which, as psychiatrists have suggested, could be evidence of mental illness. (Richard P Bentall, 2004: 99).

Perhaps I was expecting too much from the government in too short a time. So if there's a moral to this point of view it could be that appearances, like pre-election pledges, can be deceptive. Or, more positively, that patience is a virtue – although I'm not holding my breath that the secularisation of society will occur anytime soon.

**Graham Newbery**  
Southampton

GRAEME Kemp (*Points of View*, September) wants a republic so that able people can be elected as heads of state. We should be so lucky. The elected people would be those best able to get themselves elected and would only by chance be those best able to govern.

Consider some notorious foreign elected presidents. Consider also two pointers from recent UK history. Tony Blair was able to get himself reinstated as prime minister even after involving the country in the unwinnable Afghanistan war and the wickedly unjustified Iraq war.

Nick Clegg managed to become deputy prime minister by looking good in a few television debates. What talent! Would you want either of those as your president?

Hereditary monarchs are unlikely to be the brightest sparks but they preserve us from some ghastly alternatives. God (or good fortune) save the Queen, Prince Charles and Prince William.

**PeterGatenby**  
Warwick

## HISTORICITY OF JESUS

RESPONDING to my comments on his views on the myth hypothesis of Christian origins, Stuart Campbell (*Points of View*, December) writes, "Let's get this straight: Tacitus referred to "Christus" while Suetonius referred to "Chrestus", going on to state that it was clear to him that the same





person was intended. Well, that is an opinion not a fact, and one with which I differ.

Mr Campbell then expresses bewilderment that I should attack him “merely for believing that the gospels contain some historical material relating to a real person”. This is not the case for it would be foolish on my part to deny that historical data is to be found in the gospels.

However, it is also a fact that writers of historical fiction set in the first century experience no difficulty in weaving purely fictional characters and events into a historical setting.

It is my belief that those who concocted the gospels were as capable as their modern counterparts of doing this. What their motivation is in doing so is another matter, as is their sincerity, as also if in creating their characters they drew upon the lives and activities when doing so.

**Robert Morrell**  
Nottingham

SOMEWHAT worryingly for a freethinker, Stuart Campbell (*Points of View*, October and December) behaves in a manner reminiscent of religious apologists. His statement, “The conventional view is that he [Jesus] existed, the burden of proof must be on those who claim otherwise” is a clear appeal to orthodoxy. And it’s an inherently unlikely orthodoxy at that, given the miraculous claims that many (though not Campbell himself) make concerning Jesus.

In response, I acknowledged that while the burden of proof lies with sceptics from a practical perspective, from a philosophical perspective it lies squarely with those who make an ontologically positive claim – ie those who claim that a particular thing (Jesus in this instance) exists.

How does Campbell respond? Again in the manner of a religious apologist. He constructs a straw man. He says his claims about Jesus are not “ontologically positive ... ie not plucked out of no-where”.

Where did I (or anybody else) define “ontologically positive” as meaning “plucked out of no-where”? I didn’t! Stop misrepresenting me! Claims that Jesus existed certainly aren’t “plucked out of no-where”, they are plucked from sources such as the gospels and the epistles. These in turn must have been plucked either from the life of a real man (Jesus was historical) or from Jewish and Pagan and Jewish myths (Jesus was mythical) – or possibly from some combination of the two.

The first option is too miraculous, the evidence too weak. The third option is not intrinsically unlikely, but by the time you’ve stripped the New Testament of its miracles, absurdities and events with Old Testament precedents, the credibility of what’s left has been severely undermined.

How then can we penetrate the fog generated by early religious apologists, and hope to recover what the real Jesus said, if indeed the “real” Jesus existed at all? Especially given that apologists for religious figures are not above appealing to orthodoxy and misrepresenting their opponents?

**Robert Stovold**  
Brighton

## AN ATHEIST MANIFESTO

“AN Atheist Manifesto” (*Freethinker* November and December, 2010) is a splendid account of contemporary religious belief in the USA. But I respectfully draw attention to a trivial error.

Sam Harris makes the surprisingly common mistake of supposing Hitler’s regime to be irreligious, like the regimes of Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot. In fact, Hitler and his regime were deeply religious. In the 1920s, when he was elected Leader of the Nazi party, he expressed its aim as “We want to fill our culture again with the Christian spirit”.

On March 24, 1933, the first day of his legal dictatorship under the Enabling Act, he issued a law banning the existence of freethinking societies. A month later he said in a speech that secular schools could never be tolerated, “because such schools have no religious instruction, and a general moral instruction without a religious foundation is built on air”.

The pseudo-scientific theory which Hitler embraced, that “the Jewish race” is conspiring to destroy “the Aryan race,” is secular. But his response to it was wholly religious: “In boundless love as a Christian [I see] how terrific was His fight against the Jewish poison ... It was for this that He had to shed His blood upon the cross.”

**Donald Room**  
London

## DR JASSER’S VIEWS

THE views of the American, Dr Jasser, are, I assume, fairly represented in the December issue of the *Freethinker*.

But, if I said there were a Catholic peer who disbelieved in virgin birth, papal supremacy and original sin, I would be expected to give more detail.

All we get is that this prominent Muslim has no time for shariah, jihad, ummah (the *communitas fidelium* in ordinary language). When the Koran and hadiths are plotted on these notions, what, apart from prophet-hood and marriage regulations, is left for the ex-naval commander to keep afloat with?

For, despite the requirement in the manual that citizenship has to be in alignment with magic – it is, in principle, on unalter-

able steerage – this citizen is saying, as if he doesn’t trust the sacred manual, “Look! Think! Both hands on the wheel.”

Humphrey Bogart won an Oscar for playing a captain in agonies over this sort of fix. These days, normally, it’s a fatwa.

**Keith Bell**  
Wales

WHILE it is excellent news indeed that Dr Jasser had the courage to speak out against Islamic fundamentalism, I do believe he is wasting his time – and risking his life.

For according to a new poll from the Pew Research Center in the US, a majority of Muslims around the world want the introduction of laws to allow stoning as a punishment for adultery, hand amputation for theft and death for those who convert from Islam to another religion. About 85 percent of Pakistani Muslims said they would support a law segregating men and women in the workplace.

This does not bode well for Dr Jasser, or for the civilised world as a whole, for the poll indicates that, far from leaning towards the reforms Jasser would like to see implemented, Islam is fast sinking into a bog of backward thinking.

**Andy Taylor**  
Belfast

## ISRAEL & THE PALESTINIANS

THE anti-Semitism of David Anderson (*Points of View*, December) impels him to invent facts worthy of Goebbels.

The state of Israel was formed because in 1969 the United Nations felt it necessary in conscience after six million Jews had died, and because there was no place for the survivors on the surface of this planet. Its authenticity is unique. Have your correspondents no shame?

I have a slight sympathy for David Simmons’ plea that it would be better if there were no unwelcome settlements, but one must bear in mind that Israel has always been home to more than a million fully enfranchised Arabs.

Before 1969 there were no settlements on the Arab territory, yet in those days the Palestinians refused to speak to the Israelis, let alone talk peace.

The thought of Jews living in Palestine was as intolerable to the racist Arabs as the idea of Africans living in Britain is to the British National Party.

If Palestinians dislike heavy casualties, all they have to do is recognise their neighbour Israel and make peace.

Judge Goldstone reminds me a little of the former Nazis who complain of the bombing of Dresden.

**Derek Wilkes**  
London



# the freethinker

## EVENTS & CONTACTS

**i** information **w** website **e** email

### **Birmingham Humanists:**

**w** [www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk](http://www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk). 0845 2015135.

**Brighton & Hove Humanist Society:** **i** 01273 227549/461404. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. Wed, Jan 5, 8pm: Bob Charleswood: *What is Your Religion? – the Census Question*. Wed, Feb 2, 8pm. Robert Stovold: *"Spirituality" and Palliative Care*.

**w** <http://homepage.nflworld.com/robert.stovold/humanist.html>.

**Bromley Humanists:** Meetings on the second Tuesday of the month, 8 pm, at Friends Meeting House, Ravensbourne Road, Bromley **i** 01959 574691.

**w** [www.sfhg.adm.freeuk.com](http://www.sfhg.adm.freeuk.com)

**Central London Humanist Group:** **i** Chair: Alan Palmer. Sec: Josh Kutichinsky. **e** [info@centrallondonhumanists.org](mailto:info@centrallondonhumanists.org).

**w** [www.meetup.com/central-london-humanists](http://www.meetup.com/central-london-humanists)

**Chiltern Humanists:** Enquiries: 01296 623730.

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

**Cotswold Humanists:** **i** Phil Cork Tel. 01242 233746.

**e** [phil.cork@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:phil.cork@blueyonder.co.uk).

**w** <http://www.cotswold.humanist.org.uk>.

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

**Cumbria Humanist Group:** **i** Tel. 01228 810592. Christine Allen **w** [www.secularderby.org](http://www.secularderby.org) **e** [info@cumbria-humanists.org.uk](mailto:info@cumbria-humanists.org.uk).

**Derbyshire Secularists:** Meet at 7.00pm, the third Wednesday of every month at the Multifaith Centre, University of Derby. Full details on **w** [www.secularderby.org](http://www.secularderby.org)

### **Devon Humanists:**

**e** [info@devonhumanists.org.uk](mailto:info@devonhumanists.org.uk)

**w** [www.devonhumanists.org.uk](http://www.devonhumanists.org.uk)

**Dorset Humanists:** Monthly speakers and social activities. Enquiries 01202-428506.

**w** [www.dorsethumanists.co.uk](http://www.dorsethumanists.co.uk)

### **East Cheshire and High Peak Secular Group:**

**i** Carl Pinel 01298 815575.

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

**Essex Humanists:** Programme available **i** 01268 785295.

**Farnham Humanists:** 10 New House, Farm Lane, Woodstreet Village, Guildford GU3 3DD.

**w** [www.farnham-humanists.org.uk](http://www.farnham-humanists.org.uk)

### **Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA):**

1 Gower St, London WC1E 6HD. Tel: 0844 800 3067.

Email: [secretary@galha.org](mailto:secretary@galha.org). **w** [www.galha.org](http://www.galha.org)

### **Greater Manchester Humanist Group:** **i** John Coss:

0161 4303463. Monthly meetings (second Wednesday, 7.30pm) Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester. Phone John Coss for details.

### **Hampstead Humanist Society:** **i** N I Barnes,

10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 0HP. Tel: 0207 328 4431 **w** [www.hampstead.humanist.org.uk](http://www.hampstead.humanist.org.uk)

### **Harrow Humanist Society:** Meets the second Wednesday of the month at 8pm (except Jan, July and August)

at the HAVS Centre, 64 Pinner Road, Harrow. No evening meeting January, but on January 12 we will meet for lunch at Wetherspoons in the O2 Centre, Finchley Road. Non-members welcome.

**i** Secretary on 0208 907-6124

**w** [www.harrow.humanist.org.uk](http://www.harrow.humanist.org.uk)

**e** Mike Savage at [mfsavagemba@hotmail.com](mailto:mfsavagemba@hotmail.com)

**Humanists of Havering:** **i** Natalie Kehr 01708 442161

**e** [humanist@kehr.co.uk](mailto:humanist@kehr.co.uk)

### **Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern**

**Ireland:** **i** Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: 028 9267 7264 **e** [brianmccolinton@btinternet.com](mailto:brianmccolinton@btinternet.com).

**w** <http://www.humanistni.org/>

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

**Humanist Society of Scotland:** 272 Bath Street, Glasgow, G2 4JR, 0870 874 9002. Secretary: [secretary@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:secretary@humanism-scotland.org.uk). Information and events: [info@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:info@humanism-scotland.org.uk) or visit [www.humanism-scotland.org](http://www.humanism-scotland.org).

**uk** Media: [media@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:media@humanism-scotland.org.uk). Education: [education@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:education@humanism-scotland.org.uk).

**Local Scottish Groups:**

**Aberdeen:** 07010 704778, [aberdeen@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:aberdeen@humanism-scotland.org.uk). **Dundee:** 07017 404778, [dundee@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:dundee@humanism-scotland.org.uk).

**Edinburgh:** 07010 704775, [edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk). **Glasgow:** 07010 704776, [glasgow@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:glasgow@humanism-scotland.org.uk). **Highland:** 07017 404779, [highland@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:highland@humanism-scotland.org.uk).

**Humanist Society of West Yorkshire:** **i** Robert Tee on 0113 2577009.

**Isle of Man Freethinkers:** **i** Jeff Garland, 01624 664796. Email: [jeffgarland@wm.im](mailto:jeffgarland@wm.im). **w** [www.iomfreethinkers.org](http://www.iomfreethinkers.org)

**Humanists4Science:** A group of humanists interested in science who discuss, and promote, both.

**w** <http://humanists4science.blogspot.com/>

Discussion group: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/humanists4science/>

**Isle of Wight Secular and Humanist Group.** **i** David Broughton on 01983 755526 or **e** [davidb67@clara.co.uk](mailto:davidb67@clara.co.uk)

**Jersey Humanists:** Contact: Reginald Le Sueur, La Petella, Rue des Vignes, St Peter, Jersey, JE3 7BE. Tel 01534 744780

**e** [Jerseyhumanists@gmail.com](mailto:Jerseyhumanists@gmail.com). **w** <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Jersey-Humanists/>

**Lancashire Secular Humanists:** Meetings 7.30 on 3rd Wed of month at Great Eccleston Village Centre, 59 High St, The Square, Great Eccleston (Nr. Preston) PR3 0YB.

[www.lancashiresecularhumanists.co.uk](http://www.lancashiresecularhumanists.co.uk) **i** Ian Abbott, Wavecrest, Hackensall Rd, Knott End-on-Sea, Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire FY6 0AZ 01253 812308 **e** [ian@lanzere.demon.co.uk](mailto:ian@lanzere.demon.co.uk)

**Leicester Secular Society:** Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB. Tel. 07598 971420.

**w** [www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk](http://www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk)

**Lewisham Humanist Group:** **i** Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. The Goose, Rushey Green, Catford SE6. Meetings on third Thurs, 7.30pm. Jan 20, Peter Vlachos: *Town Hall Religion*.

**w** [www.lewisham.humanist.org.uk](http://www.lewisham.humanist.org.uk)

**Liverpool Humanist Group:** **i** 07814 910 286.

**w** [www.liverpoolhumanists.co.uk/](http://www.liverpoolhumanists.co.uk/)

**e** [lghhumanist@googlemail.com](mailto:lghhumanist@googlemail.com). Meetings on the second Wednesday of each month.

**Lynn Humanists, W Norfolk & Fens:** **i** Edwin Salter Tel: 07818870215.

**Marches Secularists:** **w** [www.MarchesSecularists.org](http://www.MarchesSecularists.org)

**e** [Secretary@MarchesSecularists.org](mailto:Secretary@MarchesSecularists.org)

**Mid-Wales Humanists:** **i** Maureen Lofmark, 01570

422648 **e** [mlofmark@btinternet.com](mailto:mlofmark@btinternet.com)

**Norfolk Secular and Humanist Group:** **i** Chris Copsey, 1

Thistledown Road, Horsford NR10 3ST. Tel: 0160 3710262.

**Northants Secular & Humanist Society:** For information contact Ollie Killingback on 01933 389070.

### **North East Humanists (Teesside Group):**

**i** C McEwan on 01642 817541.

### **North East Humanists (Tyneside Group):**

**i** the Secretary on 01434 632936.

### **North London Humanist Group:** Meets third Thursday of

month (ex.August) 8 pm at Ruth Winston House, 190 Green Lanes, Palmers Green, N13 5UE. Plus social events. Contact Sec: 01707 653667 **e** [enquiries@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk)

**w** [www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk](http://www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk)

**e** [enquiries@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk)

**w** [www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk](http://www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk)

### **North Yorkshire Humanist Group:** Secretary: Charles

Anderson, 01904 766480. Meets second Monday of the month, 7.30pm, Priory Street Centre, York.

**Oxford Humanists:** Chair: John White, 77 High St, Chalgrove OX44 7SS, 01865 891876.

**e** [jdwhite@talk21.com](mailto:jdwhite@talk21.com)

**Peterborough Humanists:** **i** Edwin Salter Tel:

07818870215.

**Sheffield Humanist Society:** **i** 0114 2309754. University

Arms, 197 Brook Hill, Sheffield. Wed, Jan 13, 8pm. Social Evening, quiz and buffet.

**South Hampshire Humanists:** Group Secretary, Richard Hogg. Tel: 02392 370689 **e** [info@southhantshumanists.org.uk](mailto:info@southhantshumanists.org.uk)

**w** [www.southhantshumanists.org.uk](http://www.southhantshumanists.org.uk)

**Somerset:** Details of South Somerset Humanists' meetings in Yeovil from Edward Gwinnett on 01935 473263 or

**e** [edward.gwinnett@talktalk.net](mailto:edward.gwinnett@talktalk.net)

### **South Place Ethical Society.** Weekly talks/meetings,

Sundays 11am at Conway Hall Reockway Room, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Tel: 0207242 8031/4

**e** [programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk](mailto:programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk). Monthly programmes on request.

**Suffolk Humanists & Secularists:** 25 Haughgate Close, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 1LQ. Tel: 01394 387462.

Secretary: Denis Johnston.

**w** [www.suffolkhands.org.uk](http://www.suffolkhands.org.uk) **e** [mail@suffolkhands.org.uk](mailto:mail@suffolkhands.org.uk)

**Sutton Humanists:** **i** Alan Grandy: 0208 337 9214. **w**

[www.suttonhumanists.co.uk](http://www.suttonhumanists.co.uk)

**Watford Area Humanists:** Meet on the third Tuesday of

each month (except August and December) at 7.30 pm at Watford Town and Country Club, Watford. **i** 01923-252013

**e** [john.dowdle@watford.humanist.org.uk](mailto:john.dowdle@watford.humanist.org.uk) **w** [www.watford.humanists.org.uk](http://www.watford.humanists.org.uk)

**Welsh Marches Humanist Group:** **i** 01568 770282

**w** [www.wmhumanists.co.uk](http://www.wmhumanists.co.uk) **e** [rocheforts@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:rocheforts@tiscali.co.uk).

Meetings on the 2nd Tues of the month at Ludlow, Oct to June.

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

## Listing & Event Deadlines

**Listings, the Freethinker,**  
**PO BOX 234, Brighton, BN1 4XD or preferably by**  
**email to [barry@freethinker.co.uk](mailto:barry@freethinker.co.uk)**

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