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Prophesy fails: Judgment Day on May 21st did not happen. What went wrong this time?

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Too sexy?: Orthodox Jewish newspaper cuts Hillary Clinton from front-page photograph

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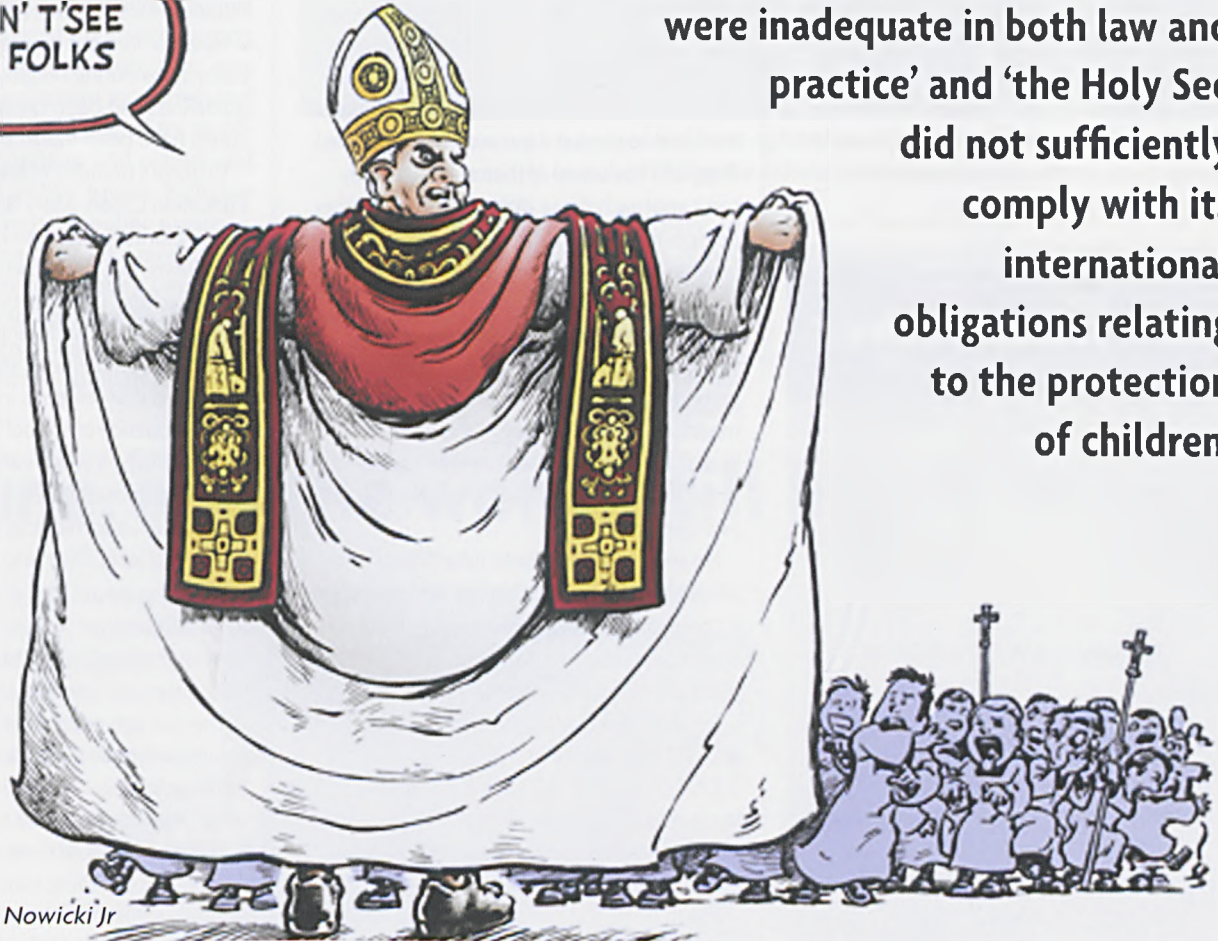
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Vatican and Ireland slammed in Amnesty International report

NOTHIN' T'SEE
HERE, FOLKS



Cartoon: Terrence Nowicki Jr

In Ireland, 'child protection standards were inadequate in both law and practice' and 'the Holy See did not sufficiently comply with its international obligations relating to the protection of children'

The Vatican and Ireland were criticised last month in connection with child protection issues in the Amnesty International Report 2011: *The State of the World's Human Rights*, published on the eve of AI's 50th anniversary.

The 400-page report examined human rights in 157 countries and, for the first time, also included the Holy See.

It found that the Irish Government "failed to implement a number of commitments it made in 2009 following the report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse. This included a failure to introduce draft legislation to give child protection guidelines a

statutory basis."

It said that "in February [2010], the all-party Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children proposed a new constitutional provision on children's rights. However, the Government did not schedule the required referendum in 2010 as promised."

It continued that "there were serious concerns about the lack of adequate investigation and transparent reporting by the Health Service Executive on deaths of children in State child protection

Continued on page 4

Christian knaves and government fools

BARRY DUKE WONDERS WHY OZ IS OPENING SCHOOLS TO EVANGELICALS

If I had a euro for each time I am left gasping at the naivety and sheer stupidity of government officials when it comes to religion, it would take a team of weightlifters to bundle my outsized piggy bank into a security van.

Take, for example, a row that has broken out in Australia over a Christian outfit which receives taxpayers' cash by the bucketload to provide religious instruction to children via an extensive schools chaplaincy programme.

Access Ministries last month stood accused of trying to convert kids to Christianity after its Chief Executive Evonne Paddison told the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion national conference in Melbourne: "In Australia, we have a God-given open door to children and young people with the Gospel. Our federal and state governments allow us to take the Christian faith into our schools and share it. We need to go and make disciples."

Government officials and educationalists then expressed surprise and dismay that AM should want to enter schools to embark on possible conversion campaigns.

Paddison's "God-given open door" spiel rather let the cat out of the bag. It was a bit of gloating triumphalism that basically said: "Hey guys, we've succeeded in pulling the wool over gullible officials' eyes so effectively that they are now even throwing big bucks at us."

Not surprisingly, Paddison finally got rumbled – though it took three years before concerned parties sat up and took notice of the contents of her speech. Reservations were then voiced when it became clear that AM had gleefully charged through the "open door" and reportedly began breaking guidelines.

But what on earth did officials expect AM to do? Provide salsa lessons with a spiritual twist?

It's the very nature of the beast to evangelise, and former NSW Labour Premier Bob Carr hit the nail squarely on the head when he said: "There is enough feedback now to show that, quite understandably, chaplains cannot confine their activism. Evangelical work is their lifeblood and it's naïve to expect them not to pursue it around young people. They can't because of their training. They can't approach these matters from any other perspective. As a result we have got breaches of what should be a very thick wall between church and state."

Carr went further, and demanded that school chaplaincy programmes should be immediately scrapped to prevent religious meddling in state schools. "It is indefensible that all taxpayers are required to support a programme that is gradually becoming church evangelism."

He also attacked *atheist* Julia Gillard's administration for extending the scheme, saying it compromised separation between church and state. Carr said the money would be better spent on increasing teacher numbers.

So, how much dough are we talking about? Victoria's government announced an extra A\$200,000 a year to AM in last month's budget to fund 196 chaplains. This brings the total state government contribution to A\$500,000 a year for four years.

Meanwhile, the national school chaplaincy programme, introduced by the Howard government, received a A\$222-million boost in last month's federal budget to fund chaplains for up to 3,700 schools by 2014.

That's a heck of a lot of dosh to fund tosh.

Still, officials naïvely believe that they can let these scoundrels waltz into schools without guidelines being breached. Schools Minister Peter Garrett said he would look closely at Dr Paddison's remarks and that he would ask his department for advice on any

action that might need to be taken. He said: "The guidelines for the National School Chaplaincy Programme are very clear; any breach of those guidelines will be investigated. If there is any evidence of a breach it should be referred to the department for investigation."

And Education Minister Martin Dixon said the Government did not "in any way, shape or form condone proselytising. We will be talking to AM and seeking an assurance from them that their instructors abide by this requirement."

Oh, *come on!* That's like asking a bull to carefully tread on hoftips around the goods in a china shop.

Even AM itself admits that it is "difficult" to draw a distinction between religious education and proselytising. While AM Chairman Bishop Stephen Hale flatly denied that AM was a proselytising outfit, he added that teaching children Christian stories and "values" without pressuring them to adopt Christianity was "a pretty tricky exercise". "Tricky"? Downright bloody impossible more like.

Hale pointed out that teachers remained in classrooms during religious instruction and if guidelines had been breached there would surely have been more complaints.

Victoria's branch President of the Australian Education Union, Mary Bluett, agreed that most volunteers *appeared* to adhere to the guidelines, but there had been some shocking breaches. "Comments such as 'Buddha is Satan's friend' and things like that clearly breach the guidelines," she said. Bluett sensibly added that religious instruction should be offered *outside* of school hours.

Incidentally, a week earlier the lunacy of AM was exposed when it began distributing an obnoxious comic strip regarding bullying in schools. The strip suggested that victims should not report bullying incidents to "indifferent" or "callous" teachers, but to turn instead to God for help, and everything would turn out just fine and dandy.

The outrage that followed forced AM to hastily withdraw it, and to issue a grovelling apology for any "damage or emotional distress" that the strip may have caused.

This alone should have resulted in AM having all its funding summarily axed. But no! Officials still stubbornly cling to the barmy notion that outfits such as AM can be induced to follow an "acceptable" path and behave in a socially responsible manner.

What frightful fools they are!



BARRY DUKE
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EDITOR

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Catholic Philippines gets its first official atheist and agnostic group

A GROUP of enthusiastic young secularists have launched the first official group for atheists and agnostics in the largely Catholic Philippines,

News of the launch of the Philippine Atheists and Agnostics Society (PATAS) reached us just as Pope Ratzinger was berating people in Western countries over their widespread abandonment of faith.

The pontiff said it sometimes seemed as if people in Western countries had grown bored of their own history and culture and the heartlands of Christianity were rejecting religion.

At the same time the head of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, Cardinal Keith O'Brien, delivered an Easter sermon in which he said: "Perhaps more than ever before there is that aggressive secularism and there are those who would indeed try to destroy our Christian heritage and culture and take God from the public square. Religion must not be taken from the public square."

The *Freethinker* then received a most heartening email at Easter from young Levi Chui Monton, corporate secretary of PATAS.

Wrote Levi: "Our main goal is propagating atheism and agnosticism through education and awareness.



Levi Chui Monton is pictured second from right with enthusiastic fellow members of the recently launched Philippine Atheists and Agnostics Society

"Our group was established February 14, 2011, and our first activity was a 'Good without Religion' feeding programme ... Our organisation is also aiming for unity of all atheists in the whole world."

Since its launch, the society has hit the ground running. It has held two Atheists

Come Out weeks, and the society also had a large presence at a March gay pride event. Last month members turned out in force to attend an International Day Against Homophobia rally.

In the July edition we will be carrying an exclusive interview with Monton.

It's June, and the world still hasn't ended

A NEW YORK lunatic with a great deal more money than sense blew his entire life savings on advertisements predicting that the world would end on May 21.

Robert Fitzpatrick, a 60-year-old Staten Island resident, said he spent at least \$140,000 on 1,000 placards and posters on bus kiosks and subway cars.

The ads proclaimed: "Global Earthquake: The Greatest Ever! Judgment Day May 21, 2011."

In a self-published book, *The Doomsday Code*, Fitzpatrick said the Bible offered "proof that cannot be dismissed".

"Judgment Day will surprise people. We will not be ready for it," Fitzpatrick said in an interview with the *New York Post*. "A giant earthquake will render the earth uninhabitable."



If you want to set an alarm clock, the quake will happen just before 6:00pm local time, he said.

"God's people will be resurrected. It is also the day that God stops saving anyone," he added.

Fitzpatrick hoped that he would be one of the chosen ones, but he could

not be really certain.

"There's just a little doubt," he said. "Most churches teach that if you just believe, you will be saved. It is not our choice. It is God's choice."

But Fitzpatrick's outlay is a mere drop in the ocean compared to the cash splashed out by a senile old fool called Harold Camping, head of an American fundie station, Family Radio.

The 89-year-old spent \$3-million dollars on billboards and vehicle ads

across the US that proclaimed May 21 as Judgment Day.

This follows his earlier failed prediction that the world would end on September 6, 1994. The next predicted world ending, according to the Mayan calendar, will take place on December 21, 2012.



Amnesty International's report

services. In March (2010), the Government established an Independent Child Death Review Group to review the executive's investigations into the deaths of children in care."

Where the Vatican was concerned, the Amnesty report says that "in May (2010), the Holy See submitted its initial reports on the optional protocols to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which, at the end of the year, had yet to be considered by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child."

However, it continued, "by the year's end, the Holy See had again failed to submit its second periodic report on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, due in 1997, and the initial report on the UN Convention against Torture, due in 2003."

It found there was "increasing evidence of widespread child sexual abuse committed by members of the clergy over the past decades, and the enduring failure of the Catholic Church to address these crimes properly, continued to emerge in various countries".

Such failures "included not removing alleged perpetrators from their posts pending proper investigations, not co-operating with judicial authorities to bring them to justice and not ensuring proper reparation to victims".

Continued from page 1

It recalls that "the Pope acknowledged the abuses during visits to countries where they had been reported ... and expressed regret.

"He affirmed that 'just penalties' should be imposed to exclude perpetrators from access to young people and stressed that to prevent abuses, education and selection of candidates for priesthood should be improved."

Meanwhile it was reported last month that the President of the High Court in Ireland has cleared the way for the publication of most of the Cloyne Report on clerical abuse in the Catholic Diocese.

But Mr Justice Nicholas Kearns prohibited until mid-July, at the earliest, publication of references to one priest so as not to prejudice the man's trial.

It follows an application by counsel for the Minister for Justice for the court to rule that a portion of the report not be published because it might prejudice criminal proceedings pending against one priest named in it.

The 26-chapter report by the Commission of Investigation into the handling of allegations of abuse against 19 priests in the Catholic Diocese of Cloyne had been ordered by the Government in January 2009 and was

completed last December.

Justice Minister Alan Shatter said he and the Minister for Children, Frances Fitzgerald, would make the necessary arrangements for the publication of the report as soon as practicable.

In a statement, Mr Shatter said he understood that counsel for the parties at the hearing would now move to agree what deletions must be made to give effect to the Judge's order. He said that once that process had been completed the two ministers would arrange for publication.

Support group One in Four has said Mr Justice Kearns' decision will come as a relief to the people who were sexually abused as children in the diocese, many of whom have been waiting for years to learn how it was that so many allegations were mishandled.

Executive Director Maeve Lewis said the organisation – a charity that supports men and women who have experienced sexual violence during childhood – regretted the postponement of the publication of one chapter, but accepted that it was necessary to ensure that current criminal proceedings were not prejudiced.

Noting that very few survivors of child sexual abuse engage with the criminal justice system, she said it was important that the cases which came before the courts were not jeopardised in any way.

However, she said the charity was concerned that the omission of certain sections might undermine the integrity of the report and might also mean that the full picture of how children were endangered in the Cloyne diocese would not emerge.

Judge Yvonne Murphy, who headed up the Commission of Investigation, was asked to extend her inquiry to the Co Cork diocese in January 2009.

A spokesman for the Archbishop of Cashel and Emly, Dermot Clifford, who has been running Cloyne since before Bishop Magee's resignation over the scandals, said he had no comment to make on today's ruling.

The investigation followed a damning report by the National Board for Safeguarding Children.

That board, which was established by the Catholic Church itself, found that child protection practices in the Diocese of Cloyne were inadequate and in some respects dangerous.

Judge Murphy's report deals with allegations of abuse made against 19 priests over a 13-year period to 2009.

But some of those from whom she took evidence had carried the memory of their abuse from as far back as the 1970s.

Orthodox Jewish paper edits Hillary Clinton out of front-page picture

THE New York-based Hasidic newspaper, *Der Tzeitung* has had to apologise for removing Secretary of State Hillary Clinton from a front-page photograph. Clinton, as well as Audrey Tomason, the Director for Counterterrorism and the only other woman in the picture, were "disappeared" in accordance with the paper's "religious beliefs".

Its policy is: "Not to intentionally include any pictures of women in the paper because it could be considered sexually suggestive."

The picture, taken by a White House photographer on May 1, showed the US President and his national security team watching the killing of al Qaeda leader, Osama bin Laden.

In a statement issued shortly after, the paper said: "We should not have published the altered picture, and we have conveyed our regrets and apologies to the White House and to the State Department."

But it then complained: "The allegations that religious Jews denigrate women or do not respect women in public office, is a malicious slander and libel." And it added: "We respect all government officials. We even have special prayers for the welfare of our Government and the government leaders, and there is no mention of gender in such prayers ...

"In accord with our religious beliefs, we do not publish photos of women, which in no way relegates them to a lower status. Publishing a newspaper is a big responsibility, and our policies are guided by a Rabbinical Board.

"Because of laws of modesty, we are not allowed to publish pictures of women, and we regret if this gives an impression of disparaging women, which is certainly never our intention. We apologize if this was seen as offensive.

"We are proud Americans of the Jewish faith, and there is no conflict in that, and we will with the help of the Almighty continue as law-abiding citizens, in this great country of ours, until the ultimate redemption."

Big push to get more religious education into British schools

PRESSURE on the Government to include Religious Education in the new English Baccalaureate was intensified last month after a petition calling for it gained 110,000 signatures – including those of 100 MPs.

The petition was organised by the RE.ACT campaign. Before last year's election, Prime Minister David Cameron said any petition with more than 100,000 signatures would be eligible for debate in the House of Commons.

The Coalition's new English baccalaureate was introduced in an attempt to stop pupils opting for "soft" subjects instead of traditional academic subjects. In order to gain a baccalaureate, students have to score A to C grades in the five core subjects of English, mathematics, science, languages and humanities.

According to the National Secular Society's *Newsline*, from the moment the Baccalaureate was announced, the religious establishment started pushing for the inclusion of RE as one of the core subjects.

"Wildly exaggerated claims about the importance of RE have been repeatedly made by those with a vested interest in keeping it at the centre of the curriculum. Self-serving leaders of Sikh, Buddhist, Roman Catholic, Muslim and Hindu organisations have also joined the campaign.

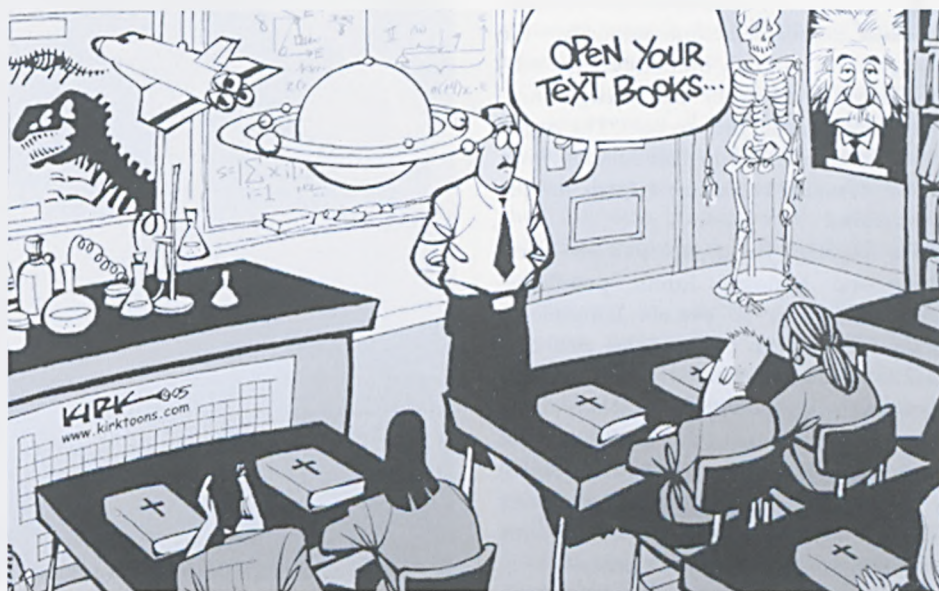
"Each of them realises the importance for the continuation of their religions of gaining access to children at the earliest opportunity and continuing the indoctrination throughout school life," the NSS said.

Meanwhile, the NSS has announced its support for the launch of the CrISIS Campaign – Creationism In Schools Isn't Science. The campaign was started by Laura Horner, a parent of pupils of St Peter's state secondary school in Exeter after a creationist was introduced to the children as a scientist and allowed to "teach" for an hour and a half.

When challenged by Mrs Horner, the school insisted that it had done nothing wrong within the current guidelines, despite presenting creationism on equal terms with scientific evidence.

The Department of Education guidance on the teaching of creationism is clearly not working, says the NSS, and the CrISIS campaign is calling for the Department of Education to tighten up the national guidelines.

NSS Senior Campaigns Officer Tessa Ken-



dall said, "State-funded schools must not sell children short by allowing beliefs to be promoted as 'facts' of equal value with scientific evidence. It should be made clear that science is not an 'alternative' and that there are not other 'truths' of equal value. Believers who dismiss evolution as 'just a theory' don't know the difference between a theory and a hypothesis."

CrISIS have written an open letter to the Secretary of State for Education. Michael Gove, signed by both eminent scientists and theologians, as well as the British Centre for

Science Education (BCSE), religious think tank Ekklesia and the NSS.

The following petition can be signed online at <http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/crisis-creationism-in-schools-isn-t-science/sign.html>. It states: "Creationism is known, and officially acknowledged, to be contrary to scientific fact. We therefore demand that creationism should not be presented as a valid scientific position, nor creationist websites and resources be promoted, in publicly funded schools or in any youth activities run on publicly funded school premises."

Dancing on the Graves of Gods: How Science Kills Faith

P Z MYERS, Associate Professor of Biology at the University of Minnesota Morris and author of the world's most widely read science blog *Pharyngula*, will be in London next month to present a lecture organised by Atheism UK, established to advance atheism in the UK.

The title of Myers' talk – to be delivered at South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL, on Wednesday, June 8, at 7pm – is "Dancing on the Graves of Gods: How Science Kills Faith."

Says Myers: "I think you can guess from the title what it will be about. I'll be discussing how science works, what we know, and the folly of trying to find compatibility between science and religion."

Advance tickets are £8.00 each, tickets at the door £10 each. Full members of Atheism get in free or charge. If you are not a full member of Atheism, now could be a good time to join and attend this event for free as part of your annual subscription. You can become a member of Atheism at <http://www.atheismuk.com/join-us/full-members/>.



P Z Myers

Women intimidated, gays attacked in the

Like a number of London boroughs, Tower Hamlets is a multicultural mix. But more so than in other areas, for one ethnic minority – the Bangladeshis – heavily outnumbers the others. They arrived in the UK in large numbers mainly during the seventies. The largest concentration settled in East London, with Tower Hamlets becoming a focus for the community.

The borough has a 49.4 percent Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic population (BAME) – with 33 percent Bangladeshi. Soon the borough will become one of a handful of council areas where the BAME grouping will outnumber the white population. On their own, the figures are not exceptional, the *Daily Mail* pointed out in a report last month. But what sets Tower Hamlets apart is the huge amount of political power wielded by Islamist groups.

For several decades, Bangladeshis have been heavily involved in local politics, particularly in the ruling Labour Party, and concerns have grown recently that the Islamists have begun to dominate the political process. The fear is that instead of governing in the interests of the whole community, their power is being used to promote sectarian interests.

In a Channel 4 *Dispatches* documentary last year, an IFE (Islamic Forum of Europe) activist and Tower Hamlets councillor told an undercover reporter: “We’ve got a lot of influence and power in the council ...” In view of some of IFE’s more extreme policies, that “influence” is worrying.

For example, IFE leaders were recorded expressing opposition to democracy, support for sharia law and mocking black people. According to one of its leaflets, IFE wants to change the “very infrastructure of society, its institutions, its culture, its political order and its creed ... from ignorance to Islam”.

Recently, it was reported that a 31-year-old Asian woman who works in a local chemist’s had received death threats for refusing to wear a veil, even though she’s not a practising Muslim. Four weeks ago, the woman’s boss was apparently approached by an Asian in his 40s who told him his employee must cover her head and wear longer robes.

“If she keeps working here and continues to dress like that, we will boycott you because this is a Muslim area,” the shop’s owner was told.

Subsequently another, younger, Asian man came into the pharmacy and started shouting at the employee.

He said: “If you keep doing these things,



Veiled Muslim women pictured in Tower Hamlets

we will kill you,” recalls a Bangladeshi-born man who witnessed the scene.

It is not the first time such death threats have been issued, nor are they confined to issues of dress and deportment. Some have compared their behaviour to that of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Homophobic abuse and physical attacks against gay men and women are also reported to be on the increase. Those familiar with life in Tower Hamlets are not surprised. They say that such attitudes are commonplace. Residents have grown used to the fact that the council-run libraries are stocked with books and DVDs containing the extremist rantings of banned Islamist preachers.

There is a Muslim faith school where girls as young as 11 have to wear face-covering veils. There are plans to spend hundreds of thousands of pounds of municipal money to build a set of Islamic arches – the so-called “hijab gates”, which would look like a veil – at either end of Brick Lane, which is packed with Indian restaurants and clothes shops.

What many struggle to understand is how mainstream politicians are ignoring the corruption that is going on in the heart of the capital.

In October, Bangladeshi-born Lutfur Rahman became the first directly elected mayor of Tower Hamlets. He originally stood as the Labour candidate but was deselected by the party amid allegations of his links with IFE.

The fundamentalist group believes in jihad and Islamic sharia law, and wants to turn Britain and other European countries into

Islamic republics. Leaders of the group want to impose hardline views on local communities. With bitter irony, it is said to have pocketed £10 million from the taxpayer by attracting state grants designed to “prevent violent extremism”.

Dumped by Labour, Rahman ran as an independent (allegedly with the help of the IFE) and romped to victory in what the London *Evening Standard* described as “one of the nastiest campaigns in recent London political history”. Now in power, he has control over a £1.3 billion municipal budget.

“You basically have a large umbrella Islamist group that appears to have almost a stranglehold over a major council in the East End of London,” said one local resident.

“The concern is that this Islamist group has an ‘us versus them’ mentality. Their ideology is basically that Muslims are in the trenches, being assailed by the rest of the world. But they are convinced the Muslims will ultimately triumph. It may sound dramatic, but they are trying to impose Islam on Britain.”

Councillor Peter Golds, leader of the Tory opposition in Tower Hamlets, says that since Mr Rahman’s election there have been worrying changes in the way the council is run.

“When we submit our routine members’ inquiries, which should be confidential, they are being leaked,” he says. “I have had telephone calls and solicitors’ letters threatening me with legal action for making perfectly proper inquiries that have an Islamic angle.”

On the streets, evidence of Muslim ex-

n the 'Islamic Republic of Tower Hamlets'

tremism is not difficult to find. "Sharia law for the UK" is a slogan popular with the extremists, who also hand out leaflets proclaiming that, in the name of Allah, the area is a "gay-free zone".

Fears over the number of homophobic incidents in Tower Hamlets at the hands of Islamic extremists have grown in recent years. But there is also the concern that no one is prepared to speak out about what is happening for fear of being branded Islamophobic.

Paul Burston edits the gay section in the London listings magazine *Time Out*. "In the past few years there have been more and more reports of homophobic incidents in Tower Hamlets, often involving attacks on gay men by gangs of young Bangladeshis," he said.

"A large number of people have contacted me to tell me about all kinds of incidents, ranging from being stopped outside mosques and handed literature that is really horrible, to being verbally abused and physically attacked. But if you talk about it publicly then you are accused of fuelling Islamophobia. It is the idea that a potential thought-crime trumps a real crime that I find difficult to understand."

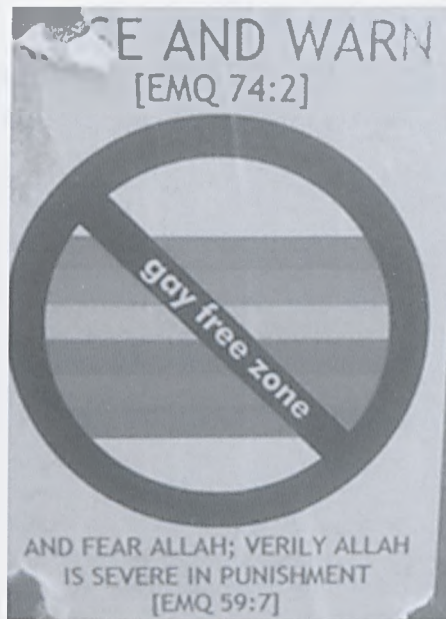
Everywhere you look, you can see advertising hoardings "censored" with thick black paint – particularly those that show women in swimwear or people kissing. But it is the cases that involve the intimidation of individuals that are of most concern.

Shiria Khatun, a Muslim Labour councillor in Tower Hamlets, has endured a similar experience to the one faced by the chemist's assistant who was threatened because she refused to wear a veil. Last year she, too, was subjected to a barrage of threats relating to the way she dressed.

"They would talk about my Western clothes, my tight jeans and my body," she says. "There were also some very, very nasty leaflets distributed about me to the mosques and to key community households. They were saying people should not vote for me because I was not a good role model for their daughters."

Mrs Khatun says that, subconsciously, she found herself dressing more conservatively – wearing loose-fitting, traditional Asian clothes. "If you are subjected to any type of intimidation for a lengthy period of time, you end up adjusting your behaviour without realising it," she said. "My advice to any women facing intimidation about the clothes they wear is to report it to the police immediately."

Some say such incidents are rare and that



An anti-gay poster in the borough

the cases highlighted are simply evidence of a few wrong-minded individuals. However, others warn that if the perception grows that an extremist agenda is being followed in Tower Hamlets, Far Right groups such as the British National Party will use it to ap-

peal to the non-Muslim vote.

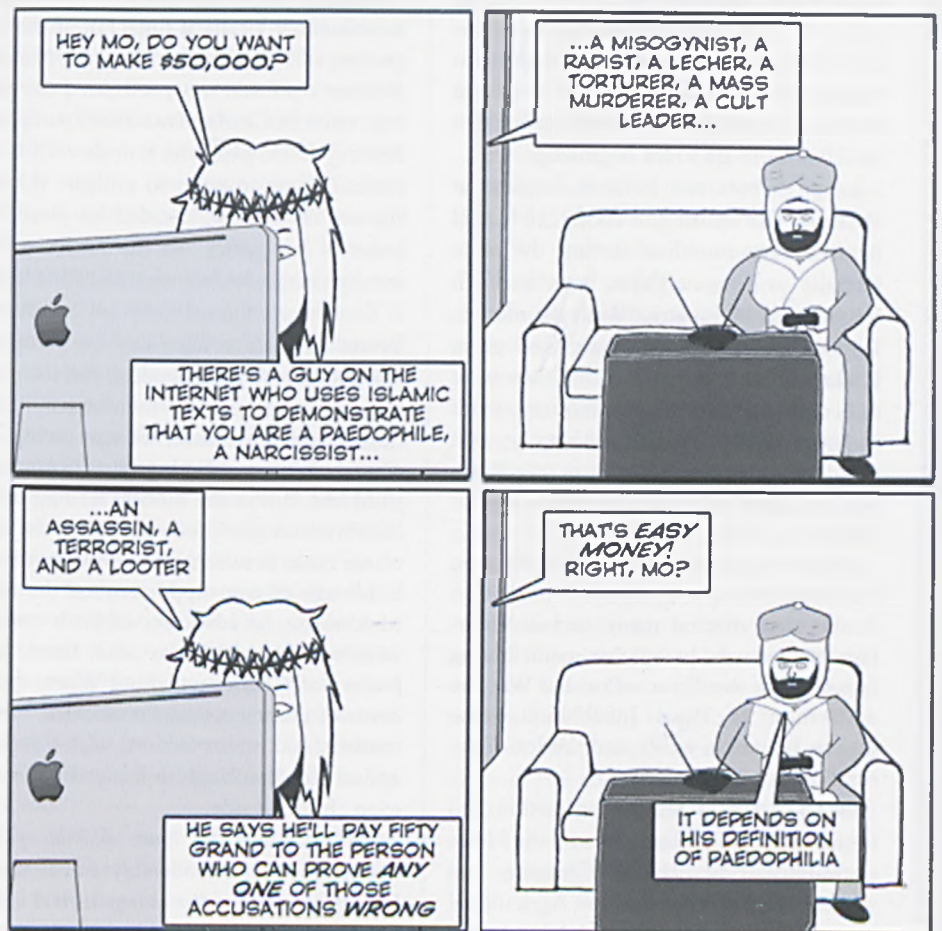
"To an extent, the IFE and the BNP are mirror images," explains James Brandon, director of research at Quilliam, the counter-extremism think-tank.

"Both aim to represent one community to the detriment of all other groups. Both have a deeply ambiguous attitude to minorities such as Jews and homosexuals. Both feed their followers propaganda that only sows suspicions between the UK's different communities."

Following his election as mayor, Lutfur Rahman promised to work with "every member of the community, whether they are Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, Jew, Christian or people of no faith".

But this pledge is being jeopardised by evidence of threatening behaviour directed at the non-religious, discrimination against women and gays, hostility to whites and censorship of Western fashion – all of which is to be expected in Islamic areas of Afghanistan run by the Taliban, but not in a borough at the heart of Britain's capital.

Jesus & Mo



© Jesusandmo.net

Remembering Joseph Symes

NIGEL SINNOTT, who edited the *Freethinker* in the early 1970s before settling in Australia, confesses to being 'haunted' by a man described as an 'atheist evangelist'

JOSEPH SYMES, as you might expect, did not believe in ghosts: he disapproved of ghosts! I don't believe in ghosts. So why has the fellow been haunting me for 29 years – driving me to spend countless hours on researching his life, then writing about him and speaking about him?

Joseph Symes was tall, with a sallow complexion and a wispy beard. He wore glasses, and usually addressed public meetings in an old black frock coat. He was an archetypal nineteenth-century popular lecturer in public halls and mechanics' institutes, and a dedicated editor and writer who was prepared to work 15 hours a day and travel to the ends of the earth.

He sometimes sounded like a mixture of a demagogue, a tragi-comedian and an Old Testament prophet. Like a lot of earnest radicals and reformers, he tended to take himself too seriously, but he was also capable of a wry sense of humour. An example of this is a quip he made in writing in November 1884: "Don't be too severe on my foes. Remember 'God hath made them so.'" But let us go to his beginning.

Joseph Symes was born in England at Portland, Dorset, on January 29, 1841, and became very proud of having the same birthday as Thomas Paine, born in 1737. Encouraged by his strict Wesleyan mother, Symes entered the Wesleyan College at Richmond, Surrey, in 1864, and then went to Scotland to start his probationary circuit in 1867. In 1871 he married his first wife, a widow named Matilda Wilson (née Weir). She was about eight years his senior: he was 29, she was 37.

Symes's eager, serious temperament soon succumbed to the epidemic of religious doubts that affected many earnest Victorian intellectuals. In his case, contributing factors were the Franco-Prussian War, the declaration of Papal Infallibility, exposure to Unitarian views, and the lot of the rural poor.

In 1872 Symes refused ordination and found employment for a time on the Newcastle-upon-Tyne *Weekly Chronicle*, and while in that city assisted the Agricultural Labourer's Union and became a lecturer to

the Northern Union of Mechanics' Institutes. In 1876 he found the cause for which he had been searching; and on December 17 of that year he spoke for the first time as its official lecturer in Newcastle.

Symes's cause was the National Secular Society, founded in 1866 by Charles Bradlaugh. In May 1876 he started writing for Bradlaugh's *National Reformer* (under a *nom-de-plume*), and he was soon appointed an official NSS lecturer in the provinces, a task which Symes undertook with frightening energy:

"A score of times have I gone from Newcastle, Leeds or Birmingham to London, lectured morning and afternoon in the streets, parks, and other public places, often in the rain ... At night I have lectured in the Hall of Science [in Old Street, London] ... and then home by the night mail train."

Joseph Symes had joined the secular movement at a critical time. For at the beginning of 1877 Charles Watts, the *National Reformer's* printer, was prosecuted for selling copies of Charles Knowlton's pamphlet, *Fruits of Philosophy*, which dealt with birth control. Watts, in order to mitigate the full rigours of the law, decided to plead "in point of law guilty" to the resulting obscenity charge. As they regarded Watts's plea as faint-heartedness, Bradlaugh and Annie Besant decided to republish the pamphlet as a test case for press freedom and the right to popular information on contraception.

Bradlaugh and Besant were in turn prosecuted for republishing the Knowlton pamphlet. But in the months leading up to their trial a major rift developed in the secularist ranks between, on the one hand, the Bradlaugh-Besant supporters and the neo-Malthusians (as advocates of birth control were called) and, on the other hand, supporters of Charles and Kate Watts, opponents of contraception, "respectable" freethinkers, and minor factions with a grudge against the Bradlaughite leadership. Symes soon chose his side:

"When I read the *Fruits of Philosophy* it opened my eyes considerably: and although I disagreed with a few things in it, I could not help thinking that it was written with

a thoroughly good intention, and was well calculated to be a useful thing. I never for a moment hesitated; and so sprang into the fight and defended the action of Mr Bradlaugh and Mrs Besant with what ability and earnestness I could command."

So he promptly joined Bradlaugh and Besant's "Defence Committee", and, in addition, travelled and lectured in an effort to rally secularists in the provinces to Bradlaugh's cause. The showdown came in May 1877, at the NSS Whitsun conference at Nottingham. Symes, representing the Northern, Sedghill and Plymouth Branches (all solidly pro-Bradlaugh), spoke in favour of retaining the presidency (and subsequently Bradlaugh as President); but when the time came for taking a vote, tempers were so heated that counting hands proved unreliable and uproar ensued. George Jacob Holyoake, who had coined the term secularism, was in the chair, but seemed unable to restore order, and Bradlaugh was about to walk out (which would have been disastrous for his side).

Symes at this point got up and managed somehow to make himself heard. He proposed that the members and delegates should file between two chairs to be counted. The meeting agreed, and with Harriet Law (editor of the *Secular Chronicle*) and Symes as tellers, the vote was taken. The Bradlaughites won by a margin of seven votes! Their success did not prevent a schism in the secularist ranks, but it ensured that the mainstream movement was firmly behind the leadership when the *Fruits of Philosophy* trial came to court. The eventual success of the publishers enabled the Malthusian League (established largely by members of the NSS, South Place Institute and the Dialectical Society) to flourish, and, according to Bradlaugh's Australian biographer David Tribe, "from that date the large Victorian family began rapidly to dwindle". Nearly 30 years later Symes looked back on the incident with touching pride:

"We have succeeded in our neo-Malthusian crusade, opened in London in 1876 [sic] . . . We have given women the lamp of knowledge ... and have taught them to

use their own judgment as to whether they will be mothers or not. It is too late for fools and tyrants to reverse that ... We have wrought the greatest revolution ever known in domestic life, and all in 27 years or so. I am proud to have been mixed up in it from the beginning and to have borne my share of rotten society's condemnation and punishment."

The 1880s marked the beginning of Charles Bradlaugh's long "parliamentary struggle". Symes, who was still writing for the *National Reformer* and had risen to the rank of vice-president of the Society (1877), realised the need for diversity on the publishing front. The story had best be told in his own words:

"In the summer of 1880, I resolved to start a paper on my own account. I had no fault to find with Mr Bradlaugh's paper ... but I saw that, after Mr Bradlaugh was elected to parliament, the *National Reformer* must necessarily be devoted more exclusively to politics than heretofore ... Something more sledge-hammerish was needed, more jocular, more dashing, more fun-poking. And I was wondering how to get it started. I mentioned my dream to a few London friends, and they told me that they had the same project in view, and would start at once if I would remove my residence from Birmingham to London and edit the paper! Agreed! I dropped a note to Mr Bradlaugh to apprise him of the scheme, and he very graciously wished me success, and offered to give me a note respecting the new paper in the *National Reformer* as soon as I let him know I was ready."

Symes, however, was unable to leave Birmingham after all. (He does not explain why, but I suspect it may be connected with the secular boarding school Symes and his wife were planning, and which certainly opened in Birmingham in 1882.) Anyway, at this point, George William Foote, who had fallen out with Bradlaugh in 1877, "happily returned to the fold", and, says Symes, "I was asked if he might take the editorship; and, if so, would I contribute to the new journal. I was very glad to fall in with this suggestion." So Foote became founding editor of the *Freethinker*, and to the first issue, published in May 1881, Symes duly contributed an essay on "Bible Biography".

The *Freethinker* soon became everything that Symes wished of it. Blasphemy prosecutions commenced, and in 1883 prison sentences of twelve, nine and three months were imposed on Foote, W J Ramsey and H A Kemp respectively.



Symes felt that "my articles were amongst those which got them into trouble" and wrote to Bradlaugh and Foote offering to surrender himself to the rigours of the law. Symes's martyrdom complex was much appreciated, but he was strongly urged that he might be "wanted for another occasion". When Foote was carted off to Holloway jail Symes expected to be given the interim editorship (as Foote would have wished). But the editorial committee had other ideas and Symes was horrified when Dr Edward B Aveling "by downright chicanery and most unblushing lying, diddled me out of it; stepped into the post; [and] softened down the gallant *Freethinker* into gruel and homoeopathic medicine".

Symes could be gullible at times, but on this occasion he was faster than Bradlaugh at spotting a con man.

Symes's urge for action did not remain frustrated for long. In the middle of 1883, Bradlaugh received a letter from the Melbourne branch of the Australasian Secular Association, asking for a lecturer to be sent out to them. He forwarded the letter to Symes, suggesting that he write back to Melbourne if he was interested. He was; he did. A send-off present of £139 was raised by the British freethinkers and presented by Bradlaugh. In December 1883 Symes, eager as ever, sailed off to Australia in the *Lusitania*.

After a brief stop in Adelaide, Joseph Symes reached Melbourne in February 1884. Here he set to work giving regular lectures on behalf of the Australasian Secu-

lar Association; on a fine evening people soon needed to arrive half an hour early in order to be sure of a seat.

Not content with his success as a lecturer, Symes decided that the Association needed a literary mouthpiece. Funds were raised with remarkable rapidity, a printing press was purchased, and on June 1, 1884 (the day of the National Secular Society conference back in England) the first issue of the *Liberator* made its appearance in Melbourne. The same week the Victorian authorities seized a batch of *Freethinkers* destined for the ASA; if this was meant to intimidate Symes, it was singularly unsuccessful.

"This paper," Symes announced in the first issue of the *Liberator*, "is started in the interests of freedom, not licence, not lawlessness, but such freedom for very one as is consistent with the rights of all."

A little further on he wrote:

"Every man has a natural, and ought by this time also to possess the political and social right to criticise any

opinions known to the world. And yet even to-day men are sent to prison like felons for laughing at the superstition known as Christianity; hundreds of lies and volumes of slander are incessantly used by Christians against their opponents; and when they find an opportunity of doing us harm they most devoutly embrace it."

He included an article entitled: *Is the Liberator to be a Blasphemous Publication?:* "That depends on the nature of blasphemy ... If blasphemy is the equivalent of fearless truth and the exposure of consecrated shams and pious imposture, our course is clear. We shall crowd our paper with all the blasphemy its pages can carry." And he closed with the ringing challenge: "But we prefer conscience to pelf, and will do what we deem our duty to mankind in spite of the bigots and hypocrites. We mean warfare, and quarter will neither be begged nor granted."

Symes was as good as his word, and the *Liberator* soon raised the wrath of the religious and establishment press of the colony: "A flagrant outrage upon public decency"; "a cesspool of moral (or immoral) filth ..."; and the *Gippsland Mercury* lamented "Would that we had a law which would consign such ruffians to the hangman's lash."

Symes, of course, thrived on it all, despite violence real and threatened.

The *Liberator* became, in the late 1880s, one of the most successful freethought papers in Australasia, if not in the world. In

(Continued on p12)

Joseph Symes remembered

its heyday it reached twice the circulation of the *National Reformer*. Each week it carried reports of Symes's lectures and debates, cartoons, poems; Australian, New Zealand, British and other news. Symes used it to lambaste the clergy, orthodox Christianity, monarchy, Sabbatarianism, racialism, and Victoria's ruling élite; and to air his views on republicanism, radical politics, birth control (Neo-Malthusianism) and even abortion.

Other contributors debated the merits of socialism and anarchism in the paper's columns, and protagonists of Christianity were allowed to defend their religion or oppose the principles of secularism. In 1887, the 50th anniversary of the accession of Queen Victoria, the *Liberator* and ASA announced a "Republican and Atheistic Jubilee Fund"!

Symes was an advocate of the franchise for women, early marriage (combined with family limitation) and no-fault divorce. He was also surprisingly outspoken on another matter:

"When is the utterly brutal law relating to abortion to be modified or abrogated? Not till the priest and parson are kicked to Jericho. They have started the lie that god made the foetus, that it is endowed with an immortal soul, and to destroy it is a crime. This is the sole ground of the law as it stands. Besides, there are in many cases, the best of reasons for a woman to procure abortion if she can ... Large families, abortions, illegitimacy, and the manifold evils of celibacy might all be banished at once and for ever, if people would but adopt Malthusianism."

This was written and published in February 1890!

Those of you with a taste for fine art may be interested in Symes's views on this subject. Here he is at full throttle in November 1884: "The Melbourne Art Gallery is worth a visit; but I am shocked and disgusted by the prudery there exhibited. Nude statues are plentiful; but in most instances the sex of the males is indicated by a senseless flower! In the British Museum they manage things far better; and there I have often seen young gentlemen and ladies with their easels, making copies of the beautiful marble statues, the young ladies with perfect naïveté sketching the genitals as coolly as any other parts; and who but a beast would think worse of them for so doing? To receive as gifts entire statues or statuettes, as Melbourne has, and then to mutilate them in the interests of disgusting prudery may be a sign of piety; but it is neither honest nor artistic. As if everyone did not know the dif-

ference between a man and a woman! As if there were anything shameful in being either the one or the other! ... Art and morals require truth; it is only hypocritical piety that is served by a lie ... The art that tells a lie, is not properly art. Genuine art is truth. The person who cannot gaze modestly upon a beautiful nude figure is not to be trusted."

Well, at least the fig leaves and phoney flowers have long ago wilted away!

'When is the utterly brutal law relating to abortion to be modified or abrogated? Not til the priest and parson are kicked to Jericho. They have started the lie that god made the foetus, that it is endowed with an immortal soul, and to destroy it is a crime.'

Symes was soon elected president of the Victorian branch of the Australasian Secular Association. In September 1884 he was elected president of the Australasian Freethought Congress at Sydney, which he addressed on "Secularism, the Life and Light of the World." Delighted at the success of their Mephistopheles in Melbourne, the National Secular Society sent out another lecturer in 1885. He was William Whitehouse Collins, and had an interesting and, on the whole, successful career in Australia and New Zealand. For a while he was co-editor of the *Liberator*.

Symes was soon prosecuted under an old law (once used on Bradlaugh in England) for publishing a newspaper without first depositing financial securities against blasphemy and sedition. This, of course, was manna from heaven! He offered to pay the resulting fines and costs "at the resurrection, if you make the demand". The Victorian customs authorities also tried seizing parcels of the *Liberator* and the *Freethinker*, and for six months the *Liberator* was boycotted by the Victorian post office. None of these tactics dampened Symes's spirit or his paper's circulation.

All went well with the ASA, Symes and the *Liberator* until the early part of 1888, when the Association was rent by an exceedingly bitter split. The details of the two factions are highly complicated, but basically an anti-Symes group emerged which consisted of a

mixture of overlapping elements: opponents of birth control, "milk and water" freethinkers who objected to Symes's "extremism", one or two people jealous of Symes's leadership, and finally a group of anarchists. Australian writers have, on the whole, blamed Symes for the split, saying that he was difficult, autocratic and paranoid. Little, however, has been published about the malice of Symes's opponents. Symes claimed, of course, that he was defending the ASA from a coterie of extremists who were out to wreck it and misappropriate its funds. Eventually the Association split into two rival factions, resulting in a badly weakened secularist movement in Melbourne.

On March 31, 1889, Symes laid the foundation stone for the ASA's Hall of Science in Victoria Parade, Fitzroy. The building was officially opened on May 15 the same year. In 1890, however, the anti-Symes faction started legal action to obtain legal title of the land, coupled with an initially successful attempt to seize the hall by force. However, the loyal caretaker, Joseph Skurrie, managed to lock himself in one room. Symes rallied his supporters and, with access to Skurrie's room, managed to retake the building.

The legal case was eventually heard and, to Symes's horror, the court found in favour of the renegade trustees. Symes and his supporters were ejected from the Hall of Science in 1891 and had to make do with meetings in a building that had once housed the Young Men's Christian Association.

In his articles "Joseph Symes and the Australasian Secular Association", published in *Labour History* in 1963, and "Symes the Secularist", published in the *Australian Humanist* (first series) in 1969, Dr Barry Smith says of the Hall of Science, "But the opposition faction . . . could neither fill the Hall for a lecture nor hire it out. . . . So it stood empty during the depression with its windows broken and its doors nailed. In 1897 it was sold for recovery of debt and in 1913 it passed to St Vincent's Hospital, which had grown up round it."

From about 1897 the *Liberator* ran at a loss, but the Symeses kept it going for another seven years. Finally, with Joseph's ill health (he had mild heart disease), the lack of a sound financial base for the paper, and the added responsibility of baby Stella Bradlaugh Symes, who was born on 18 February 1894, Joseph and Agnes (his second wife) decided to close the paper with the issue of March 12, 1904. The *Liberator* ended as it began:

rumbustious, militant and defiant! Symes might have run out of financial ammunition but, as he reminded his readers, "I am still an absolute atheist." Back in 1884, the *Bendigo Evening News* had given the *Liberator* "a month's existence"; but, despite everything ranged against it and against him, Symes's paper had lasted 20 years.

Besides being a lecturer and editor, Symes was also a great writer of pamphlets, both in England and Australia. Titles include *Christianity at the Bar of Science*; *Christianity Essentially a Persecuting Religion*; *From the Wesleyan Pulpit to the Secularist Platform*; *Hospitals and Dispensaries Not of Christian Origin*; *If Jesus Came to Melbourne*; *Philosophic Atheism*; *Universal Despair (or, who will be damned if Christianity be true?)* and *The Scamp's Directory and Sinner's Handbook*.

But perhaps Symes's most controversial, most interesting, and least known pamphlet was his *Ancient and Modern Phallic or Sex-Worship* first published in Melbourne in 1887. It has, I think, never been published in Britain.

After the demise of the *Liberator*, Symes's friends found the family a small farm called Rose Cottage. Here Symes rested from his intellectual and political labours, followed Voltaire's advice and cultivated his garden; but, of course, after about two years he became restless: "I felt like a fish out of water. My brain was ever busy with the old problems and with new ones of a kindred nature ... Here was I skulking, away out of the Free-thought battle, while my comrades were in the thick of the fight."

So in May, 1906, G W Foote, now President of the National Secular Society, received a letter saying that Symes was returning for a visit to Britain.

Symes left Melbourne on 19 June aboard the *Runic*, and arrived back in England with his family on August 5, 1906. He was warmly received by Foote (whom he had last seen in Holloway Jail) and the NSS gave him a formal reception in September. I suspect he had been busy writing on board ship, because from September 23 to November 18, 1906, the *Freethinker* carried a 9-part article entitled "My Twenty Years' Fight in Australia". Symes's old energies flooded back: he was soon dashing round the country to lecture in Glasgow, Manchester, Nelson, Liverpool, Birmingham and Leicester. He was offered a job as resident lecturer to the Liverpool branch of the NSS, on a three months' trial, starting in the new year.

But first he had a tryst with destiny on Tyne-side, where 30 years earlier he had delivered his first official freethought lecture, on December 17, 1876, when he had spoken on "The Biography and Character of Jehovah, the Jewish and Christian God."

The freethinkers of Durham and Northumberland received Symes warmly, and

during the afternoon of Sunday, December 16, 1906, he was given a reception by the Newcastle Branch of the NSS at the Cordwainers Hall. And that evening, at the Palace Theatre, he delivered his thirtieth anniversary lecture back in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. His subject was exactly what you might expect: "My 30 Years of Storm and Struggle for Freethought".

It is not hard to imagine the crowd, the warmth and excitement, with Symes on an emotional "high"; and outside the cold, and the gaslights glimmering through the drizzle and the fog drifting off the Tyne!

It was his swan song. For while in Newcastle Symes caught bronchitis, and then pleurisy. He already had cardiac valvular disease. He returned to London, and died on December 29, 1906, a month short of his 66th birthday. The funeral took place at Golders Green crematorium on January 4, 1907, with speeches by Foote and Chapman Cohen.

In an obituary, Foote said of Symes: "He was bold and brave and fearless; he went straight to his aim; he was a staunch fighter and a staunch comrade; he was incapable of treachery and could not understand it in others; and he hated lies and superstition with every drop of blood in his veins."

Foote soon discovered that Agnes Symes was almost destitute. A Symes Memorial Fund was established and £302 was presented to Agnes before she and Stella returned to Melbourne in March. And in Melbourne there was a generous tribute in the April 1, 1907, issue of the spiritualist paper, the *Harbinger of Light*, from a letter writer using the name "Cosmopolite":

"Dear madam, Joseph Symes is 'dead'; he 'died' in London on December 29th, aged 65 years. He was a bitter opponent of Spiritualism and its votaries. He was erratic, vituperative, unpractical, impossible. Yet Symes was an honorable man; honest beyond challenge; in private, courteous, kindly, charitable. In Freedom's cause he struck many a valiant blow. He has died penniless. There must be not a few readers of *The Harbinger* who, cherishing no ill-will toward the departed, would like to stretch out a helping hand to the brave little woman, now a widow, who through long years of 'strained circumstance',

helped along the Freethought movement in Melbourne. A fund on behalf of Mrs Symes and her daughter is being raised in England. Subscriptions should be sent to Mr G W Foote, 2 Newcastle Street, Farringdon St, London, EC, or to the editor of *Harbinger of Light*."

"Cosmopolite" may have been William Henry Terry, founder of the paper in 1870, whose dealings with Melbourne's secularists and freethinkers in the 1880s may have unwittingly led to Symes's arrival in Australia.

"I have", Symes wrote, "spent my best years in trying to substitute knowledge for faith and self-reliance for bogies and impos-tors." He always stood up for the emancipation of women; and he, in turn, obviously owed much to the loyalty, assistance and hard work of Agnes.

Despite his faults, for example, being a driven, obsessive workaholic, Symes was the epitome of the secularist virtues – virtues that are by no means out of date: Bravery, defiance, loyalty and honesty. "The only thing I regret is that I have not been able to do more in the way of emancipating men and women from the thralldom and corrupting influence of religion."

I would be very hard pressed to argue that tact and charm were among Joseph Symes's virtues. Indeed, the National Secular Society has, over the years, had leading figures who were more imaginative, diplomatic and influential than he was. But I do not believe the Society has ever had a member who was more doggedly loyal for many years under often very trying circumstances.

Symes was one of the cantankerous, noisy band of eccentric nineteenth-century radicals who were very often a trial for their close relatives to live with, but who motivated and inspired those who heard and read them, greatly enriched the social history of Britain, Australia and New Zealand, and illuminated the path of human freedom. Antiquated as some of his opinions were, even in his lifetime, others were brave and far-seeing.

• This is an abridged version of a talk given by Nigel Sinnott to the Atheist Society, Melbourne, 12 December 2006 to mark the centenary of Symes's death.

God really loves you

RELIGION has actually convinced people that there's an invisible man -- living in the sky -- who watches everything you do, every minute of every day. And the invisible man has a special list of ten things he does not want you to do ... And if you do any of these ten things, he has a special place, full of fire and smoke and burning and torture and anguish, where he will send you to live and suffer and burn and choke and scream and cry forever and ever till the end of time! ... But he loves you.

– the late George Carlin, America atheist comedian

The Fall and Rise of the House of H

G RICHARD BOZARTH enjoys the savage sa

THE Fall And Rise Of The House Of Hippo: An Alternate Reality Novel is another in the long and ancient tradition of fiction that has cultural analysis as the primary mission the author wants to accomplish.

Fiction of this kind seems to come mostly in three categories: 1) satire of contemporary culture that is often full of sharp, merciless edges designed to brutally expose cruel or ludicrous faults; 2) the presentation of what the author believes is the perfect culture the Establishment could become if its cruel and ludicrous faults were cured by the medicine the author recommends; 3) warning of the dreadful future that can become reality if the present Establishment is not reformed.

All three categories have the goals of making those who are the victims of the Establishment want reformation or revolution, and persuading the people who are the leaders of the Establishment that they should reform it if they want to be thought of as moral, humane people.

Satire should be considered as a form of tough love; perfect culture as a form of seduction; and warning is naturally a form of prophecy. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is one of the greatest classics of satire. Plato's unfinished *Critias* (the one describing the perfect culture of Atlantis) and Thomas More's *Utopia* are undeniable classics of the perfect culture. George Orwell's *1984* still stands as the undisputed champion of warning.

The common feature of this kind of fiction is that the scene of the action takes place in an alternate reality. Before the invention of the telescope allowed humans to begin to imagine life on other planets, the alternate reality was usually some distant land in unknown or little explored parts of Earth. *Gulliver's Travels*, *Critias*, and *Utopia* use this form of alternate reality.

The future is just as unknown and distant from us as any remote, unexplored or barely explored region of Earth; hence it is naturally the ideal alternate reality for a warning story. After learning that Earth is part of a solar system of planets, moons, and smaller objects, and that the stars are actually suns, other planets became ideal locations for satire and the perfect culture.

In Western culture's 20th-century, quantum physics provided strong evidence to support viable hypotheses about other universes existing simultaneously with our universe – some calling this startling and fascinating possibility the Landscape, while others call

it the multiverse – (the older term “dimensions” seems to be fading away).

Because at least some of these other universes are thought to be almost identical to ours, placing a perfect culture or satire of contemporary culture in one of these not-quite-identical universes is ideal. *Hippo's* alternate reality is in one of these universes.

Hippo is mostly satire mixed with a lesser portion of warning. The Western culture in this other universe has become much more thoroughly secular than Western culture is in our universe, so it would seem to be an ideal opportunity for a freethought writer like Harwood to present how much better human lives become as greater separation of culture and religion is achieved.

There is nothing perfect about *Hippo's* highly secularized culture. Even though the major religions have been greatly reduced in size and the majority of average people think they are just repulsive cults, the culture Harwood describes is in many ways more repulsive than contemporary culture in our United States, which is the most religious of the First World nations.

If religious writers become aware of this novel, they will find it useful in their campaign to vilify secularization. That can't be helped; part of Harwood's mission in the novel is to warn about secular trends in our present culture that, if not terminated or reformed, could lead us into a very unpleasant future.

To what degree will atheists, freethinkers, and secular humanists, the most likely readers of this book, agree with him? Using myself as an example, I don't agree with him about how detrimental labor unions are, and entirely agree with him about the evils the degradation of public school education will cause if it is allowed to continue to corrupt children and adolescents in the coming decades.

Harwood begins with a clever, seductive “Disclaimer”. It lists several characters in the novel to insist they are not people in our universe. For examples, “Rosanne Chamberlain IS NOT Rosanne Barr”, “Pope Abel 1 IS NOT Pope John Paul II”, and “Nim Chimpsky Bonzo IS NOT George H W Bush”. The disclaimer ends with “Any resemblances are purely coincidental”. He should have written “accidental”. None of the characters on the list would make any reader think of the real people they are not supposed to be. It is not a good idea to raise

expectations in readers and then disappoint them; people typically like to get what's promised to them. Harwood should have dropped the disclaimer since it makes no positive contribution to *Hippo's* story.

Hippo's style of storytelling is synoptic, which means most of it is a summary of the story that is occasionally interrupted by more fully developed scenes. I've read synoptic novels that have persuaded me the synoptic style was the perfect one for them. This is not one of those novels.

Hippo's story seems emaciated because the reader can't help imagining what a wonderful tale it would have been if it had been given abundant nourishment by its author. This novel needed to be something like 700 to 1,000 pages long and printed in a smaller font size to keep it contained in that page-count range. Imagine *Gone With The Wind*, *Of Human Bondage*, *Hawaii*, or *The Grapes of Wrath* told synoptically so they could be published in a little over 200 pages with a large font size. That would suck, to put it mildly.

Well, it sucks that *Hippo's* story isn't fully developed. Since it is really a series of stories, James Michener's style of telling multi-generational stories would have been an excellent style for *Hippo*.

Harwood's saga starts with Rosanne Chamberlain (aka the hippopotamus and Mrs Hippo) and Rupert Kennedy (who “IS NOT Rush Limbaugh”). They become registered cohabers and have four children. It ends with their grandson Danforth Kennedy (who “IS NOT Dan Quayle”) becoming the North American President by the same corruption that gave Election 2,000 to G W Bush. In between these two events is merciless cultural satire of the Roman Catholic Church, UFO lunacy, the child sexual abuse hysteria's two pernicious tools (recovered “repressed” memories and facilitated communication), Scientology, labor unions, our Establishment's sexual code of conduct, politics, degradation of public school education, and more.

The story he tells is really just a device to set up targets he wants to blast with precisely aimed bullets of often brutal satire. The clever, subtle *bon mots* and innuendoes that made Oscar Wilde's stories and plays famous and enduring are not Harwood's style; he shoots to kill. His shooting position is solidly located in the freethought movement among the sexually-liberated atheists and secular humanists, who will enjoy seeing him hit his

f Hippo: an Alternate Reality Novel

average satire in William Harwood's latest novel

targets' bull's-eyes almost every time. If any of the people involved in the targets read *Hippo*, they will not be amused at all.

What atheists, freethinkers, and secular humanists will wish he had included is more of the philosophy they share with Harwood. The only sparkling gem of our philosophy that I found – meaning a truly excellent expression worthy of being included in a book of classic, definitive freethought/secular humanist quotes – is on pages 109–110: “Morality is the unconscious avoidance of all behavior that unnecessarily hurts a non-consenting victim.” This ought to be seriously considered by all atheists, freethinkers, and secular humanists as a candidate for our philosophy's Golden Rule.

This absence of a strong presentation of our philosophy should not be perceived as a flaw in *Hippo*. The novel is primarily satire

and secondarily warning, thus the kind of content that is suitable for a perfect culture story would not have been suitable for it. However, every person in the freethought movement who reads this book will finish it hoping Harwood does write a perfect culture novel for us.

The Fall And Rise Of The House Of Hippo: An Alternate Reality Novel is an enjoyable reading experience. The alternate reality Harwood describes is fascinating. The cultural satire is wonderfully savage. I know there are plenty of kinder and gentler people in the freethought movement who will be appalled by how relentlessly militant it is, but there are also plenty who, like me, enjoy kill shots, and we deserve to have novels that satisfy our craving for literary meat that bleeds when we slice off a bite.

The warnings in the novel should be dis-

turbing to all readers in the US because the trends he is warning about are already transforming the US into a Third World nation. (If any person doesn't believe that, just look where the US stands on every list that compares America with other First World nations, then look at the history of those lists to see the steady downward movement the US is making).

I recommend *Hippo*. Its flaws are compensated by its virtues. Harwood has definitely added another good book to freethought's bibliography.

The Fall and Rise of the House of Hippo is published by World Audience, Inc, 303 Park Avenue South, Suite 1440, New York, NY 10010-3675, ISBN 978-1-935444-01-5, \$20.00, paperback, 223 pages.

The Origin of Species: 150th Anniversary Edition

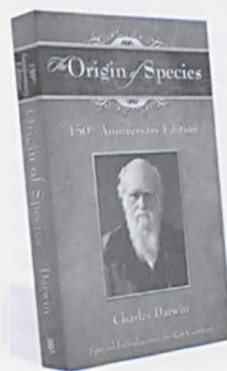
MORE than 100,000 copies of this book were given away at schools in the USA in 2009, and a lot more were distributed free in British universities in the second half of 2010, writes DONALD ROOUM.

The subtitle “with a special introduction by Ray Comfort” was printed on the cover of the first 30,000 copies of this book, but dropped from the cover of subsequent print runs. In copies given out in Britain, the name of Ray Comfort, prolific author of more than 60 creationist books, is only mentioned once, at the end of the 50-page special introduction.

Creationists have often attempted to prohibit the teaching of evolution in American schools, but this is ruled unconstitutional. So now creationists campaign for “both sides of the argument” to be taught in biology classes. This is the first book presenting creationist arguments alongside the *Origin* to be given away free in large quantities, but not the first ever published. The blurb quotes from an earlier (1971) such work: “Belief in the theory of evolution is thus exactly parallel to belief in special creation – both are concepts which believers know to be true, but neither up to the present has been capable of proof”.

Why have such quantities of money and energy been spent on this and other

creationist campaigns? The question is answered in a quotation from the atheist writer Penn Jillette (of the Penn and Teller magic act): “If I believed without a shadow of doubt that a truck was coming at you, and you didn't believe it ... there is a certain point where I tackle you”.



may be mistaken, nevertheless the motive for saving you from danger is wholly commendable.

But in pursuance of this honest intention, Ray Comfort spoils his thesis by resorting to some dishonest arguments, commonly used by creationist proselytes. For instance he quotes only the first of two contiguous sentences from *The Origin*: “To suppose that the eye, with all its inimitable contrivances ... could have formed by natural

selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree”. Darwin continues: “Yet reason tells me, that if ... [summary of evidence] ... then the difficulty ... though insuperable by our imagination, can hardly be considered real”. But the second sentence is omitted to give the false impression that Darwin doubted the validity of his theory. Of course, readers have the chance to check the quotation in the same volume, but this is not encouraged. There is no reference to the page number (174).

Comfort goes on to remark that Darwin “was right on one point. If a Designer is left out of the equation, such a thought is absurd in the highest degree”, but this looks like another dishonest argument. Darwin accounts for the complexity of the living world by saying it developed within “the external conditions of life ... whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity”, while Comfort purports to account for the complexity of an eye by saying it is produced by something infinitely more complex, a Designer (who also produced the law of gravity).

A careful thinker like Ray Comfort must surely be aware that pretending to explain astounding complexity, in terms of incredible complexity, is to offer no explanation at all.

points of view..

A DIG IN THE POST BAG – LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

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DEFEATING THE AGEING PROCESS

WHILE I suppose “Defeating the ageing process” might, one day, be a possibility (*Freethinker* feature, May), I suggest we still focus on the present and the immediate future, when growing old and suffering from various health problems will continue to be a definite fact. That is why the Society for Old Age Rational Suicide (SOARS) was established in December 2009.

SOARS wants to start a serious discussion on allowing very elderly, mentally competent individuals, who are suffering unbearably because of poor health (although none of their medical conditions is “terminal”) to receive a doctor’s assistance to die, if that is their persistent request.

Generally, public opinion agrees with our main objective. Three ICM opinion polls have been commissioned by SOARS. The first was limited to 1,000 adults in Brighton and Hove (where SOARS was initially founded) in February last year.

The second poll was done in July 2010 and involved 1,009 individuals throughout the UK. And, the third – also on a national basis, of 1,008 adults – occurred in March 2011.

All these ICM telephone polls had a similar result, showing a 66 to 67 percent support for old age rational suicide.

Copies of our six-monthly SOARS newsletter can be seen on our website (www.soars.org.uk).

If someone wishes to support our campaign, an appropriate form can be downloaded from this website (no membership fees are required).

Finally, it should be noted that our logo is the derelict West pier in Brighton, once a place of great excitement and pleasure.

Michael Irwin
SOARS Co-ordinator
Brighton & Hove

PETER Brietbart’s interview with Aubrey de Grey, “Defeating the ageing process”, seems to depict another version of the religious wishful thinking that posits an after-life of one kind or another. And de Grey seems to see himself as a sort of Messiah, promising his followers eternal life. But the traditional after-life closest to his defeat of death is, in my opinion, Hell.

As an oldie, living as it were on borrowed time, I am fortunate to be in comparatively good health, though suffering from several of the minor ailments of old age. Of course I would like to shed them, but that would not be enough to make me want to live on indefinitely.

Having had a good life, I feel it is just about complete. Most of my near contemporaries (around the age of ninety) often say “I’ve had enough”. One simply gets tired – which ultimately means tired of living: tired of getting dressed every morning and forcing oneself to keep going.

But that is only the selfish side of it. Socially, even those of us without children of our own must surely be ready to make way for future generations and their new projects. Without death there would be no evolution, no progress of any kind.

In fact, I am strongly in favour of Michael Irwin’s Society for Old Age Rational Suicide.

Barbara Smoker
Bromley

ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

COLIN Mills, in discussing Islamic fundamentalism (*Points of View*, May) rightly calls for evidence to support secularist polemic arguments.

Regarding the topic he raises, by way of providing it, the psychology of Islamic

fundamentalists, ex scriptural doctrine, can be understood – diving in at the deep end – by the observation that they, like all religious fanatics, are neurologically right-brain-dominant (I McGilchrist, 2010), regressively bicameral-minded (J Jaynes, 1976), sensory deluded (T Norretranders, 1999), who regularly prayer-dissociate from reality to better corrupt it (J Schumaker, 1995).

In the same vein, to progress my earlier argument, that Islamophobia is a legitimate response (*Points of View*, April), I’d like to provide evidence by contextually qualifying “Islam” and “-phobia”.

Islam means “submission to God”; it also means “peace” (C Hitchens, 2007, *et al*). The problem is that millions of Muslims believe this “peace” should be imposed throughout the world by any means. The West, to mollify religious sensibilities, adopt the word “Islamist” to isolate malign Muslims from the allegedly benign. But as exemplified by events in Pakistan, where circumstantial evidence strongly suggests its army gave sanctuary to Osama bin Laden whilst the authorities denied it, Muslim sympathies are not trustingly overt (*Time*, May 20, 2011), are volatile and can turn on an emotive speech or insult (TV news). This is why there are scholars who hold that Islam, whatever the tribal version, is an inherently coercive ideology and that “Islamist” is a meaningless word that creates a false distinction (M Phillips, 2010). Islam, after all, is the ideology in whose name all the fighting and bombing is done, and is thus a legitimate subject of concern.

Phobia, as a pathology (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 2000), is a diagnostic description of anxiety, or irrational fear, whose severity can range from a medicalised neurosis (panic attacks, PTSD, OCD) to edginess (“Will the wings fall off; is there a bomb onboard!”). The term has



been hijacked by cultural movements to pathologise dissent, where “phobia” is used as a synonym for fear, prejudice or hatred. Xenophobia, homophobia – where once oppositional opinion was allowed, now it is intolerable. As with Islamophobia, a word so embedded in the public discourse that it cannot be ignored

From a safe distance, I neither fear Islam nor hate Muslims, but I do fear Islamic ideology spreading in the UK, whereby its influence would threaten to further erode my way of life, which is why, in the absence of an alternative word, although inaccurate, Islamophobia in my opinion makes eminent sense.

Graham Newbery
Southampton

THE CRUCIFIXION

BARBARA Smoker’s article on Crucifixion as sado-masochism (*Freethinker*, April) reminded me of when I saw Lindsay Anderson’s film *If...* about a rebellion at a boys’ public school.

I viewed the movie after the Calvinist South African censors had taken their scissors to it. A totally harmless and very brief scene showing bare backsides in a shower was cut out while a prolonged and brutal flogging scene was left totally intact.

I would suggest that this casts more light on religious puritanism than all the books on theology ever written combined.

Graham Livingstone
London

ANTI-SEMITISM

DAVID Anderson (*Points of View*, March) asks if Jews are anti-Palestinian.

As the Palestinians (Philistines) are a Semitic people, then the Jews are themselves being anti-Semitic.

In fact, it might be said that the Jews, still being a tribe, are anti everyone. To quote from C M Doughty’s *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (p34, 1875): “Islam and the commonwealth of Jews are as great secret conspiracies, friends only of themselves and to all without, of crude, iniquitous heart, unfaithful, implacable ...

That’s about right!

W K Harper
Stoke-on-Trent

JESUS’ EXISTENCE

I HAVE no problem with scholars who, on the basis of a reasonable examination of the evidence, conclude that no such person as Jesus the Nazirite ever lived. But I am sick and tired of fatuous oafs who assert that historians who argue that there was a real Jesus are obligated to prove such a

conclusion, while those who assert that there was no such person are not similarly obligated.

Historians who claim that there was once a historical nobody named Jesus, onto whose biography the Christian myths were posthumously grafted, take upon themselves the onus of explaining why contemporary historians did not mention him. And those who insist that there was not a Jesus of history take on the obligation of explaining why Jesus’ sycophantic biographers wrote tales that portrayed their hero in an extremely unflattering light, if they were not stuck with the reality that those particular events had really happened.

Persons who believe they can impose on their disputants conditions they fail to accept for themselves should immediately enroll in Logic 101.

William Harwood
Canada

CHARLES BRADLAUGH

CHARLES Bradlaugh took the oath and his parliamentary seat in 1886, not 1885 as stated in Jim Herrick’s review of *Dare to Stand Alone* (February), and certainly not in 1881 as was misprinted in my April letter. A little background may be of interest.

Liberal Speaker of the House of Commons (1880-84) Henry Brand was personally sympathetic to Bradlaugh but deferred to the traditions and formalities of the House. In June 1885, Liberal Prime Minister W E Gladstone lost a vote of confidence and resigned. As a Redistribution Act hadn’t taken effect, the Conservatives took office without an election. Though Conservative, new Speaker A W Peel was also sympathetic to Bradlaugh, but had been obliged to accept an exclusion motion against him by the Leader of the House.

The Conservatives (with Irish Nationalist support) won the November 1885 election and a new Parliament was sworn in the following January. Letters from the Leader and other members, saying the Court of Appeal had decided Bradlaugh was unable to take the oath, had been sent to Peel, but he declared: “We are assembled in a new Parliament. I know nothing of the Resolutions of the past. They have lapsed, they are void, they are of no effect in reference to this case.” Despite an attempted intervention by the presumptive Leader (who hadn’t yet been sworn in), Peel allowed Bradlaugh to take the oath as his “legal statutable obligation”.

Some pragmatic freethinkers said a lot of time, worry and money would have been saved had Bradlaugh taken the oath without fuss in 1880. He himself was a pragmatist and before 1869-70, when he

successfully agitated for the right to affirm in courts of law, had taken the oath there. (This earned the scorn of G J Holyoake, who said he was too honourable to do so. Fortunately, his junior business partner and younger brother Austin swore on his behalf. Incidentally, a well-known 1960s humanist, often called on as an expert witness in court cases, told me that, so as not to prejudice a client’s case, he habitually took the oath, swearing “by Almighty Od” – and nobody noticed.) Bradlaugh asked to affirm in Parliament only because he thought he was entitled to.

David Tribe
Australia

NEED FOR THE FREETHINKER

YOU pose the question, “Is there still a need for the *Freethinker*?” (“Taking the *Freethinker* into a new era”, May).

The answer is emphatically “yes,” and not simply for the general reasons advanced by the business promoter you quote.

Britain today faces a much more malevolent expression of religious belief than anything the Victorians had to contend with, in the form of a fundamentalist strain of Islam, which is shielded from criticism by a mixture of political correctness and the fear of targeted terrorism. Where, outside the pages of the *Freethinker*, would I find “any weapons of ridicule or sarcasm that may be borrowed from the armoury of common sense” being systematically applied to Islam?

For this reason alone there is still a need for the *Freethinker*.

Jack Hastie
Scotland

Subscription inquiries and events notices

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Events notices for the back page of the magazine should be sent directly to barry@freethinker.co.uk, or by post to PO Box 234, Brighton, BN1 4ND

the freethinker

EVENTS & CONTACTS

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

Birmingham Humanists:

w www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk. 0845 2015135.

Brighton & Hove Humanist Society: **i** 01273 227549/461404. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. Wed, May 4, 8pm: Wed June 1, 8pm: Lorna De Smidt: *Choosing to Live without Religion*. Wed, July 6: AGM.

w http://homepage.nlworld.com/robert.stovold/humanist/.

Bromley Humanists: Meet second Thursdays at 2pm at the H G Wells Centre **e** asad.65@hotmail.com.

Central London Humanist Group: **i** Chair: Alan Palmer. Sec: Josh Kutchinsky.

e info@centrallondonhumanists.org.

w 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.

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 **e** 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

Devon Humanists:

e info@devonhumanists.org.uk

w www.devonhumanists.org.uk

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

w 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

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA):

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

Email: secretary@galha.org **w** 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 OHP. Tel: 0207 328 4431.

w 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. June 8, David Pollock, President of the European Humanist Federation on the work of that organisation.

i Secretary on 0208 907-6124

w www.harrow.humanist.org.uk

e Mike Savage at mfsavagamba@hotmail.com

Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern

Ireland: **i** Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: 028 9267 7264 **e** brianmcclinton@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. Information and events: info@humanism-scotland.org.uk or visit www.humanism-scotland.org.uk **Media:** media@humanism-scotland.org.uk. Education: education@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

Local Scottish Groups:

Aberdeen: 07010 704778, aberdeen@humanism-scotland.org.uk. **Dundee:** 07017 404778, dundee@humanism-scotland.org.uk. **Edinburgh:** 07010 704775, edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk **Glasgow:** 07010 704776, glasgow@humanism-scotland.org.uk **Highland:** 07017 404779, 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. **w** 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

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

w www.lancashiresecularhumanists.co.uk **i** Ian Abbott, Wavecrest, Hackensall Rd, Knott End-on-Sea, Poulton-le-Fyde, Lancashire FY6 0AZ 01253 812308 **e** ian@lanzere.demon.co.uk

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

w 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.

w www.lewisham.humanist.org.uk

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

w www.liverpoolhumanists.co.uk/

e lhghumanist@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 **e** Secretary@MarchesSecularists.org

Mid-Wales Humanists: **i** Maureen Lofmark, 01570 422648 **e** mlofmark@btinternet.com

Norfolk Secular and Humanist Group: **i** Chris Copsey, 1 Thistle-down 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 5UJ. Plus social events. Contact Sec: 01707 653667

e enquiries@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk

w 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, 01865 891876.

e jdwhite@talk21.com

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

07818870215.

Scottish Humanists:

w www.ScottishHumanists.org.uk. Free membership. Charity SCO42124. Next meeting June 5, Old Course Hotel, Prestwick.

i 07935272723

Sheffield Humanist Society: **i** 0114 2309754. University Arms, 197 Brook Hill, Sheffield. Wed, May 4, 8.00 pm: Iaian Crowe: *Ethical Issues in Dealing with Violent Criminals*.

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

w www.southhantshumanists.org.uk

Somerset: Details of South Somerset Humanists' meetings in Yeovil from Edward Gwinnell on 01935 473263 or **e** edward.gwinnell@talktalk.net

South Place Ethical Society. Weekly talks/meetings, Sundays 11am at Conway Hall Recockway Room, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Tel: 0207242 8031/4

e 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 **e** mail@suffolkhands.org.uk

Sutton Humanists: **i** Alan Grandy: 0208 337 9214 **w** 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 **w** www.watford.humanists.org.uk

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

w www.wmhumanists.co.uk **e** 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.

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