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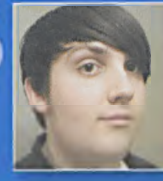
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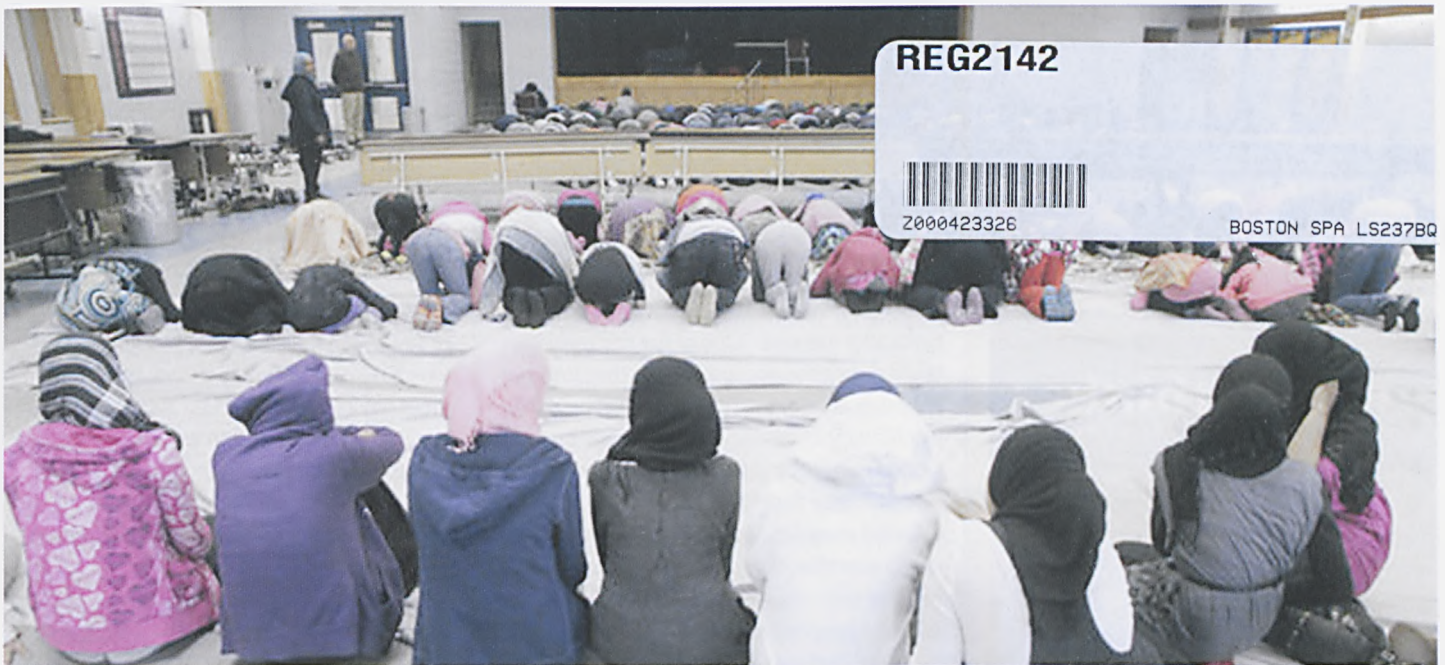
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Menstruating Muslim girls stigmatised at school prayers



The Toronto Star photo which shows a group of 'unclean' girls compelled to look on while others prostrate themselves in prayer

A photograph of a group of Muslim girls excluded from a school prayer service in Toronto, has sparked outrage and opened up an intense debate regarding gender rights and religion in public (ie state) schools in Canada. In addition to slamming the humiliation caused to the pupils by the exclusion, secularists and education experts point out that schools which allow formal prayer services during the day are in breach of Ontario's Education Act.

The Toronto District School Board found itself in the midst of a firestorm last month for allowing an imam to conduct Friday prayer services for Muslim students in the cafeteria at Valley Park Middle School. It defended the service on the grounds that freedom of religion under the Charter of Rights trumps the Education Act.

Board superintendent Jim Spyropoulos insisted that Muslims must pray at a certain time on Fridays so "we have the duty to accommodate them" and Education Director Chris Spence added: "As a public school board, we have a responsibility and an obligation to accommodate faith needs."

But constitutional lawyer Ed Morgan, of the University of Toronto, said: "You cannot accommodate the desire for prayers or religious

instruction in a public school." Something after school, or on weekends, would be fine, he added.

Ontario's Education Act states that "a board shall not permit any person to conduct religious exercises or to provide instruction that includes indoctrination in a particular religion or religious belief in a school." An exemption is allowed if conducted outside of school hours.

A spokesperson for Education Minister Leona Dombrowsky said while school boards must be "sensitive to religious beliefs . . . it is also important for them to continue the conversation with all parties involved to ensure the accommodations continue to work for both the school and the community."

Earlier this year, the *Toronto Star* visited Valley Park to observe the prayer service, which runs every Friday from November to March for 30 to 40 minutes during class time after lunch.

Barriers were erected to divide the cafeteria. Boys entered at the front, removed their shoes, forming rows four deep. Girls entered at the back, removed their shoes, donned head scarves and shawls to cover their heads and arms, and assembled behind the barrier.

Continued on page 7

Bravo Holland

BARRY DUKE SALUTES THE NETHERLANDS FOR BANNING RITUAL SLAUGHTER

More than half-a-century ago, when I was just 11, I stood watching in horror as a heifer lay bleeding to death on a patch of earth behind a synagogue in the small Transvaal town of Bethal in South Africa. I was among a group of youngsters who had been taken on an instructional tour of the synagogue to better understand Judaism, and the visit culminated with the young cow having its throat cut by a rabbi, who dispassionately explained to us why it was "necessary" for Jews to eat only meat from animals which had been dispatched in that cruel manner.

The spectacle appalled me, and as I watched the light fade from the animal's eyes, I vowed that I would never knowingly allow ritually-slaughtered meat ever to pass my lips. Sticking to that vow wasn't that easy, for I was a frequent visitor to the homes of Jewish friends in the neighbourhood, where the words "eat, eat" invariably followed much embarrassing cheek-pinching and the words "Hello Barry, how are you?"

Being a shy teenager, I tried to be diplomatic in shunning their kosher meat, but refused

to take refuge behind the excuse of being vegetarian, which I was not. Instead I would quietly recount seeing the death of the heifer, and explain that I had what one would nowadays call "issues" about inhumane slaughter.

The invitations, to my relief, soon stopped coming, and the only meat I have eaten in Jewish homes since was non-kosher. How would I know this? Simply because the "de-tribalised" Jews I know who have dispensed with all the ridiculous trappings of Judaism seem to take great delight in serving pork!

The memory of the heifer's death came back to me in graphic detail when I learned with delight last month that the Dutch Parliament had voted to ban the religious slaughter of animals, thereby incurring the wrath of observant Jews and Muslims. The new ban requires livestock to be stunned before being killed, contrary to Muslim and Jewish dietary laws that require animals to be fully conscious.

Binyomin Jacobs, the country's Chief Rabbi, went magnificently over the top, comparing the ban to anti-Semitic laws enacted during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands that led to the deaths of 104,000 Dutch Jews in the Holocaust. He said: "One of the first measures taken during the occupation was the closing of kosher abattoirs ... Those who survived the war remember the very first law made by the Germans in Holland was the banning of the Jewish way of slaughtering animals."

Earlier, Jonathan Sacks, Britain's Chief Rabbi, joined a campaign to prevent the Dutch ban. He said: "We are worried that it could spread. There has been non-stop pressure by animal welfare activists to have all forms of ritual slaughter banned. It has to be fought everywhere because if it's lost anywhere it has a potential domino effect."

Incidentally, if Jonathan Sacks is as concerned by events in Holland as he claims to be, he should be speaking out instead against the epidemic of Islam-inspired anti-Semitism in the Netherlands, where 60 percent of Dutch Jews are reportedly on the brink of leaving the country. According to data provided by the Dutch police, the number of anti-Semitic acts in the country increased by 48 percent in the last year alone. And 20 percent of history teachers in Dutch state schools have stopped giving lessons about the Holocaust to avoid offending the growing number Muslim pupils in their classes.

Banning ritually-slaughtered meat in Holland was first proposed by the tiny Animal Rights Party, but it quickly won cross-party support. Said Marianne Thieme, the party's

leader: "This way of killing causes unnecessary pain to animals. Religious freedom cannot be unlimited. For us, religious freedom stops where human or animal suffering begins." And Esther Ouwehand, another MP representing the party, added: "By getting this modification in the law, we hope to inspire other countries."

Dutch Muslims also complained of being stigmatised. Said imam Mahmut of the El Tawheed mosque: "There was no reason for passing this law. This is a political decision. Who has the authority to determine whether the way of killing animals is good or not?"

As idiotic statements go, this one was a real doozy. When I posted this quote on the *Freethinker* blog, a regular visitor to the site – John M White – responded thus: "This sort of confused response demonstrates the damage strict religious observance seems to do to the mental faculties. Clearly there was a reason for passing the law: to end the suffering of animals. But the speaker here cannot recognise the alternative point of view as a 'reason'. Then it is a political decision, which on the surface it quite obviously is, given that it was a decision come to by politicians in a political arena, but clearly this really is an inference that political enemies are to blame, and the speaker is being persecuted ... Finally the question is who has the authority to say whether killing animals is good or not, which is just profoundly stupid: the parliament obviously has the said authority, and just used it. The question was never whether killing animals is good or not, the question was always whether or not animals should be stunned before slaughter so that they do not suffer needlessly."

"The statement is an absolute mess, but is a goldmine for evidence of just what kind of warping religion does to someone's perspective of a situation. This is not just a faith v rationality type of argument, this is a case where slavish devotion to religiously inspired prescriptions has tied the speaker in knots, literally trying to defend the indefensible. And that defence is pathetic, doing more harm than good to his own position."

"Broga", another regular contributor to the *Freethinker* blog, had this to say: "If any of the rest of us tortured animals, outside the aegis of the ritual bullshit, we would be arrested. When is the UK going to have the courage and compassion to follow Holland?"

I could not have put it better myself.



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Russia is a land of believers according to a new survey

A VAST majority of Russians say they believe in God – more than in any other European country – according to a new opinion poll.

The survey, carried out earlier this year by the independent Public Opinion Fund (FOM), found that 82 percent of Russians say they are religious believers, while just 13 percent are atheists.

But a report in the *Christian Science Monitor* says the powerful Russian Orthodox Church will find nothing to celebrate in the survey's details. The church claims 70 percent of Russians as its adherents, and on the basis of that has successfully pressured the Kremlin to return most church property seized by the Bolsheviks almost a century ago, including vast tracts of land, churches, monasteries, and thousands of religious artefacts formerly held by state museums.

However, the poll shows that just 50 percent of Russians say they are Orthodox, while 27 percent did not associate themselves with any particular organised faith. Among young people between 18 and 24, the number of unaffiliated believers was 34 percent.

"It would be correct to describe Russia as a land of believers, but it cannot be called a country of religious people," says Mikhail Tarusin, head of sociology at the independent Institute of Public Projects in Moscow. "We were an officially atheist state for 74 years, and it may take some time to rebound from that. Right now, I don't think we could put the proportion of truly religious, church-going people at more than 20 percent."

Experts say that most Russians lead overwhelmingly secular lives and pay little heed to the Orthodox Church's increasingly frequent efforts to influence public morals, including a leading priest's recent call for a national dress code and a string of Church-instigated lawsuits against artistic "blasphemy".

"There is no doubt that Orthodoxy is the traditional confession in Russia, but only a small part of those who call themselves Orthodox actually go to church regularly, mark the festivals, or practise the rituals," says Vladimir Gurbolikov, deputy editor of *Foma*, a missionary magazine published by the Orthodox Church. "The problem is a lack of information in society. People do not have normal communication with the Church and are unable to establish it, and so they do not know the Orthodox Christian faith even if they identify themselves with it."



Metropolitan Kirill was appointed head of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2009 at a ceremony attended by political leaders including President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin

The poll also found that just four percent of Russians are avowed Muslims, far below the 15 percent figure most sociologists cite. One reason, experts suggest, is that the FOM survey – which polled 1,500 people in 44 of Russia's 89 regions – may have avoided the insurgency-torn, but mainly Muslim republics of the north Caucasus. The poll revealed too that one percent of Russians are Buddhists and less than one percent are Jewish. Roman Catholics, who are not recognised under Russian law and are sometimes subject to legal har-

assment, number seven percent.

The FOM results contrast somewhat with a global survey of religious beliefs conducted in April by Ipsos, an international market research company. According to the Ipsos poll, 56 percent of Russians are firm believers in a "divine entity", while a further 18 percent believe "sometimes". But that still puts Russia at the top of the list in Europe, where 51 percent of Poles, 50 percent of Italians, 27 percent of Germans, and just 18 percent of Swedes declared themselves definite believers in a divine entity.

Several countries, including Indonesia, Turkey, Brazil, Mexico, and the United States clocked in as significantly more religious than Russia.

"It's pretty hard to get clarity on religion, and there are a lot of variables that can lead to an erroneous picture," says Marina Mchedlova, a religion expert with the official Institute of Sociology in Moscow. "But the trends in the FOM survey are confirmed by other studies. Belief without religion is one; about a third of people are not satisfied with organised churches and choose to remain outside of them," she says.

Another is the lack of religious knowledge among the Orthodox Church's superficially huge public base.

"The majority of people who position themselves as Orthodox when asked to identify their faith cannot go on to answer even simple questions about it," she says.

Orthodox Jew charged over arson attack

AN 18-year-old Hasidic Jew, said to have been an acolyte of a dictatorial rabbi in the Jewish enclave of New Square, New York, has been charged with the attempted murder of a fellow Jew.

Shaul Spitzer was also charged with attempted arson and assault following an attack in May on "dissident" Aron Rottenberg, who suffered burns over half his body when he confronted someone carrying a flammable liquid outside his home.

Rottenberg's family said they had been on the alert for an attack. They had suffered broken windows and threats ever since Rottenberg began worshipping at a nearby nursing home instead of the main synagogue.

Police arrested Spitzer, who was also injured, and said he was trying to burn down Rottenberg's house.

Rottenberg's family has alleged in a lawsuit that the attack was directed by Grand Rebbe David Twersky because of Rottenberg's defiance. Twersky has condemned the attack and has not been charged.

But Rottenberg's lawyer, Michael Sussman, said: "This horrific act, evocative of the Ku Klux Klan and Nazi Germany, culminated months of bigotry, harassment, and violence toward the Rottenberg family, directed by the village's religious leadership headed by Grand Rebbe David Twersky."



The Great California Foreskin Fight

LATER this year – in November – San Francisco residents will vote on whether to ban circumcision in the city. If passed, the new law would make circumcision of a minor – for any reason other than a medical emergency – a misdemeanor, punishable by a \$1,000 fine and one year in county jail. The Bay Area Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) is currently leading a broad-based campaign against that proposition.

What the *Jewish Journal* dubbed “The Great California Foreskin Fight” got off to a predictably fiery start in Santa Monica, where Jena Troutman proposed a ballot initiative seeking to ban circumcision there. But last month she abandoned the initiative because of what she claimed was media distortion of her campaign.

“The religious opposition really rose up, and I never intended it to be about religion at all,” Troutman said. “Ninety-five percent of circumcisions carried out have nothing to do with religion – that’s what I was focused on. Once I discovered this Bill was not going to open up the conversation but was, in fact, closing it down, I wanted no part of it.”

One man who hopes for a circumcision ban in San Francisco is Matthew Hess, 42, who lives in San Diego. He has created an online comic called “Foreskin Man”, which features characters like “Monster Mohel” – a mohel being an accredited remover of foreskins. Several organisations, including the Anti-Defamation League, have condemned the comic, saying it uses anti-Semitic imagery.

Hess defended his comic, saying it was in-



The creation of Matthew Hess, Mohel Man has been slammed by organisations like the Anti-Defamation League as being anti-Semitic

tended to portray circumcision from a baby’s point of view. “It was designed to really evoke a response that talking about studies and statistics never does,” Hess said. “What would that baby be thinking other than ‘That man coming at me with a knife is a monster?’”

Hess is optimistic about the prospect of the ban passing in San Francisco.

Catherine Schneider, senior vice president of community engagement at the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, which had begun efforts to fight the plan, said she was relieved that the issue had been dropped in Santa Monica. But, she said, many leaders expect that similar efforts to ban circumcision will crop up in other cities.

“It’s scary to think that we would have had to launch a political campaign to maintain status quo,” she said. “To fight one of these campaigns, you need to raise around \$500,000, and in this economy we can all think of better ways to spend that money.”

Lawyers on both sides of the debate argue vociferously about what rights a parent should have *vis-à-vis* a child and whether cities should have any authority in matters of medical care. The foremost American medical authorities neither recommend routine infant circumcision nor explicitly discourage parents from mutilating their infant sons, leaving doctors and researchers to argue vehemently for and against the procedure and accuse one another of practising junk science.

While the overwhelming majority of religious leaders – particularly Jewish and Muslim ones – have spoken out against the proposed ban, a small band of Jews is working to make the decision not to circumcise one’s son into a legitimate Jewish choice.

Troutman was one of three main anti-circumcision activists – “intactivists”, as many call themselves – who became the faces of the campaign to circumcision in Californian cities. One of the other two is Hess, who has been a devoted intactivist for more than a decade. He was circumcised as a baby in hospital. In his late 20s, he began to notice a “slow, significant decline in sexual sensitivity.” He found his way to the websites of intactivist groups, and was shocked by what he found.

“It showed what a normal foreskin looked like and the nerve endings that it contained,” Hess said. He found the photographs of particular interest. “It showed all kinds of circumcision damage. It showed what’s lost when you’re circumcised.”

Hess, who is married and has no children, used a “nonsurgical foreskin restoration” technique that entails pulling the remaining skin over the head of the penis and keeping it there, which, Hess said, can reverse the keratinization, or toughening, of the skin on the head of the penis. Hess claimed his sexual experience improved dramatically as a result. Radicalised by his own experience and frustrated by the rate at which routine circumcisions were still taking place in the United States, Hess became politically active.

The third activist is Lloyd Schofield, the proponent of the San Francisco ballot measure that could ban circumcision in the city.

Raised as a Baptist, he said he didn’t think much about circumcision. “I just knew this was wrong all my life”. In May, San Francisco city officials announced that the ballot measure that Hess had written and that Schofield had put forward for San Francisco had qualified for inclusion on the November ballot.



‘Intactivist’ Matthew Hess restored his foreskin with the help of the two plastic cups he is pictured holding

Photo: Will Parson

Crybaby Christians get the support of the Human Rights Commission



Pictured from left: Nadia Eweida, Gary MacFarlane, Shirley Chaplin and Lillian Ladele. (No fun in fundamentalism!)

THE National Secular Society last month accused the Equality and Human Rights Commission of supporting special rights for Christians in the work-place, thereby putting the rights of others at risk.

In July the Commission rallied to support four high-profile “persecuted” Christians, saying that “judges have interpreted the law too narrowly in religion or belief discrimination claims”.

The four are Nadia Eweida, a British Airways worker who was prevented from wearing a cross with her uniform; Gary McFarlane, a relationship counsellor who was sacked by Relate because he said he could not provide sex therapy to a gay couple; Shirley Chaplin, a nurse who was banned from working on hospital wards after she refused to remove a cross from her neck; and former registrar Lillian Ladele, who was disciplined by Islington Council for refusing to conduct same-sex civil partnership ceremonies.

If given leave to intervene in their cases, the Commission says it will argue that the way existing human rights and equality laws have been interpreted by judges is insufficient to protect freedom of religion or belief.

It will say that the courts have set the bar too high for someone to prove that they have been discriminated against because of their religion or belief; and that it is possible to accommodate expression of religion alongside the rights of people who are not religious and the needs of businesses.

John Wadham, Group Director, Legal, at the Commission, said: “Our intervention in these cases would encourage judges to interpret the law more broadly and more clearly to the benefit of people who are religious and those who are not.

“The idea of making reasonable adjustments to accommodate a person’s needs has

served disability discrimination law well for decades. It seems reasonable that a similar concept could be adopted to allow someone to manifest their religious beliefs.”

In June, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg asked the British Government to clarify its position regarding the alleged violation of the rights of the four zealots.

The ECHR said it considered their cases to be of such legal significance as to warrant further examination. The Government was asked to clear up the “confusion” over what rights Christians have under equality laws introduced in recent years to prevent discrimination against minorities, including people of other faiths and homosexuals.

Andrea Minichiello Williams, founder and director of the Christian Legal Centre, insisted that “these cases are massively significant on every front. There seems to be a disproportionate animosity towards the Christian faith, and the workings of the courts in the UK has led to deep injustice”. She added: “If we are successful in Strasbourg I hope the Equalities Act and other diversity legislation will be overturned or overhauled so that Christians are free to work and act in accordance with their conscience.”

She also pointed out that “people with orthodox views on sexual matters are excluded from employment because they don’t fit in with the equalities and diversity agenda. It is this that we want to see addressed. Such injustice cannot be allowed to continue.”

But NSS President Terry Sanderson said: “The cases that have been referred to Europe are not as straightforward as we are led to believe by the campaigners running them. Some of them have been tested in court and repeatedly found to be groundless.

“In every case where they have been brought

to court they have been dismissed. This illustrates the emptiness of the claims being made by the likes of the Christian Legal Centre.”

He added: “Trevor Phillips, head of the Commission, should realise that by encouraging these worthless cases he is putting at risk the rights of gay people and others to live free from discrimination and injustice. For every privilege granted to religious people, someone else’s rights are diminished.”

Sanderson said religious believers were protected from discrimination – even though their beliefs were not. “Human rights are for human beings, not for beliefs or ideas.”

The NSS pointed out that the appeals to the European Court of Human Rights that the Commission is backing includes the influential McFarlane/Avon Relate case, where the judge, Lord Justice Laws, himself a senior Anglican, made the following comment:

“The promulgation of law for the protection of a position held purely on religious grounds cannot therefore be justified. It is irrational, as preferring the subjective over the objective. But it is also divisive, capricious and arbitrary.

“We do not live in a society where all the people share uniform religious beliefs. The precepts of any one religion – any belief system – cannot, by force of their religious origins, sound any louder in the general law than the precepts of any other. If they did, those out in the cold would be less than citizens; and our constitution would be on the way to a theocracy, which is of necessity autocratic.”

The NSS added: “Lord Justice Laws has been quoted approvingly by other judges. By setting themselves against this eminently reasonable line, the EHRC seem to have abandoned the ‘Equality’ element of their organisation’s title.”

America: home of the b

DENIS WATKINS reflects on the case of Damon Fowler, the student

Well, not quite. And especially not so when you live in the parts of the USA that are under religious *dictat*. A particularly ripe example of the bogus nature of “home of the brave, land of the free” is provided by the experience of Damon Fowler, student at Basrop High School, Louisiana – detailed in the July issue of the *Freethinker*.

Damon, perhaps somewhat optimistically, took the description of his country at face value. He actually exercised his right to freedom and contested a sponsored prayer in his school. Such a prayer is unconstitutional and legally forbidden in the USA. Damon told the school superintendent of his opposition.

You might think that in “the land of the free,” which is also a democracy, Damon’s action would be welcome.

Indeed, the USA is so passionate about democracy that it attempts to force its version, usually by military might, on other countries. Thousands of young Americans are dying or returning home severely disabled in its cause. Is Damon Fowler not also defending the democracy?

In return for his efforts he has become the victim of what might fairly be described as a community lynch mob. The good Christian citizens of Basrop have done all they could to terrorise him. In a supreme irony his persecutors destroy in Basrop the very freedom which their military are dying to preserve.

The Basrop Christian community have been pitiless in pursuit of this lone schoolboy. Damon was “hounded, pilloried, and ostracised by his community; one of his teachers publicly demeaned him, and Fowler was physically threatened”.

America is also the land of family values and quick to boast of this. Might Damon’s parents offer some support; perhaps a haven or a loving arm for their beleaguered son? What parents would not? Apparently not in god-fearing Basrop.

The *Freethinker* report continues: “Fowler’s parents cut off his financial support, kicked him out of the house, and threw his belongings on to the front porch.”

Family values, preached in a thousand American pulpits every Sunday, count for little when they come up against religion.

The persecution continued with insults, abusive letters in the local paper and aban-



Mob mentality: A group of almost 40 graduating seniors from Basrop High School turned out to oppose Damon Fowler and demand that their school should be allowed to have prayers during graduation ceremonies

Photo: Mark Rainwater

donment by his school. Again, you might think that a politician, a pastor (those preachers of the message of gentle Jesus), a teacher or a newspaper would defend Damon.

He is not a terrorist, he has not sexually abused a child and he has not done anything illegal. Yet the only support forthcoming so far has been almost entirely from atheists. So much for the claim that we need God to preserve our moral values.

The Basrop Christians are certainly not brave. They attack from the safety of the crowd, spurred on by a mob mentality, while their victim is alone. Nor is the USA free when a decent young man dare not say what he thinks.

The land of the free, or the religious part of it, permits only the freedom to agree with bigots who decide what is permitted. Debate, the introduction of contrary facts or the statement of an individual’s personal and deeply held convictions, are as nothing.

The Basrop community vent their fury on someone who dares to disagree with their Christianity. In their introverted and narrow lives they seem incapable of stepping back to offer even a little understanding. They appear proud of their tawdry success in driving out Damon Fowler.

But perhaps this success will have consequences unlikely to be welcomed by Basrop, Louisiana. What has happened to Damon, and is apparently not uncommon in the religion infected backwaters of the USA, chimes with another set of events in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925.

Dayton was the scene of the infamous 1925 “Monkey Trial” when John Scopes was prosecuted for teaching evolution. The town initially expected welcome and profitable publicity as a result.

The closed mindset of Christian bigotry in Basrop reflects the same mindset as that of Dayton in 1925. Dayton, with the funda-

brave, land of the free?

student who fell foul of the Christian community of Basrop, Louisiana

mentalist buffoon William Jennings Bryan as the expected star witness, soon came to regret its exposure to a wider public. Clarence Darrow, for the defence, left Bryan, who insisted on giving evidence, exposed as a fool. H L Mencken, in a series of scathing and brilliantly funny reports, entertained and appalled an audience far beyond the court room.

Mencken wrote: "The rising town of Dayton, when it put the infidel Scopes on trial, bit off far more than it has been able to chew – this melancholy fact must now be evident to everyone."

Dayton believed the trial would attract a great deal of money and a mass of free and profitable advertising. The money did not arrive and as Mencken writes, "As for the advertising ... I greatly fear that has quite ruined the town ... It will be a joke town at best, and infamous at worst."

As journalists from outside swarmed in to report the trial, "... their dispatches began to show the country and the world exactly how the obscene buffoonery appeared to realistic city men, then the yokels began to sweat coldly, and in a few days they were full of terror and indignation."

Unlike William Jennings Bryan, the persecutors of Damon Fowler have not answered for their opinions or their actions in public. Under similar scrutiny they would suffer the same ridicule and contempt as Bryan and Dayton. However, their behaviour has been exposed and deserves to be further publicised.

Damon Fowler has been left more vulnerable than the teacher John Scopes who dared to teach evolution in 1925. Scopes' trial was sought as a test case, he was defended by Clarence Darrow and a team of lawyers and the reporting included that by the foremost journalist of the time, Mencken. Damon Fowler has been supported only, in the main, by atheists who gathered to him in his plight.

Basrop, as a community, deserves to be held up as an example of fundamentalist religion as it operates in all its vindictive bigotry. To what fetid depths must a religion sink when it would cause parents to throw out their son? How could teachers turn against and abuse one of their pupils for his defence of his country's constitution? Where were the defenders from the church with their readiness

to preach about turning the other cheek and forgiving your enemies?

And the Basrop press, shamefully following the mob, was ready to open its correspondence to a pack of fundamentalist blockheads anxious to expel or visit hellfire on this young man. While Damon tried to defend the constitution against an illegal act, no politician spoke in his support.

This then is Basrop, small-minded and mean, imbued with religious passion and de-

void of all sign of charity or humanity. While Europe grows more secular and where free speech is valued, the example of Basrop is one of suffocating Christian conformity. The conformity is to a religion where the greatest good is to accept without question. The ignorant are respected as long as they believe what they are told.

While Basrop may not equal Dayton in infamy and ridicule, what we can say is that such a fate would be well deserved.

'Unclean' girls stigmatised in Canada

Continued from page 1

Menstruating girls sat at the back. They were permitted to listen but not take part. The services are conducted in Arabic and the school does not monitor what is said.

About 300 to 400 of Valley Park's 1,200 students take part in the Friday ritual, which parents requested three years ago. Before that, students left school to go to a nearby mosque, but some didn't make it there and many never returned to class. The school service was seen as a way to save the lost instructional time and address safety concerns.

Tarek Fatah, founder of the Muslim Canadian Congress, criticised the prayer service, saying "we believe Islam does not make Friday prayers compulsory in the middle of the day", and that they can be postponed until later.

Fatah added that his group was also opposed to the treatment of menstruating girls.

Education lawyer Stephen Birman said the school could easily comply with the Education Act by having students who want to attend the service do so during lunch or spare period at prayer sessions like these.

The services have also raised the issue of gender rights. One Toronto trustee voiced concern about girls being forced to sit at the back of the room, adding the board's gender equity policy "should be respected".

Commenting specifically on the exclusion of the menstruating girls, Tasha Kheiriddin, writing in Canada's *National Post*, said: "One is tempted to say: is this the Middle Ages? Have I stumbled into a time warp, where 'unclean' women must be prevented from 'defiling' other persons? It's bad enough that the girls at Valley Park have to enter the cafeteria from

the back, while the boys enter from the front, but does the entire school have the right to know they are menstruating?"

"These are impressionable young women, grade 8 students, who are being sent a very clear message: you are second-class citizens to the boys in your school, and third-class at certain times of the month.

"As the mother of a little girl who just celebrated her second birthday, the thought that she – or any girl – should be conditioned to believe this makes me physically sick. This is the same type of discrimination against which Canadian soldiers fought in Afghanistan, where, in the name of religion, women were shrouded in burqas and girls prevented from even going to school. It is the type of thinking which in its most extreme forms justifies female circumcision, honour killings, and men beating their wives."

She added: "Now, in a Canadian public school, religious leaders are being allowed to instil the same type of message. At least there are no burqas involved. Yet."

She concluded: "'Faith needs' should not supersede the right to equality in publicly funded institutions. In a pluralist society like Canada, parents are free to teach their children whatever beliefs they please – in private and on their own time, however offensive those beliefs might be to others.

"It is quite instructive, however, to be made aware of just how offensive some of those beliefs are. I therefore thank the *Toronto Star* for publishing the photograph of the prayer service at Valley Park Middle School. The picture tells more than a thousand words. It is a wake-up call."

The wrong sort of religion?

JOHN RADFORD, Emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of East London, analyses Karen Armstrong's *The Case for God: what religion real means*

Karen Armstrong is a well-known writer and broadcaster about religion. She was born in 1944 and brought up as a Roman Catholic. From 1962 to 1969 she was a nun, before taking a “congratulatory”, ie outstanding, first-class degree in English at Oxford. She tells us here that she spent several years disillusioned with religion before a study of world faiths gave her a wider view and brought her to her present understanding.

I have glanced into some of her books but this is the first I have read all through. Karen Armstrong writes well, and I enjoyed reading it, although it is quite repetitive. As other reviewers have pointed out, it is not a “case”, as there is little argument or evidence – indeed, these are not considered relevant. Nor is it “for God”, at least as that is usually understood. One might add that neither is it “what religion really means”, so much as what Karen Armstrong (and, to be fair, quite a few others) thinks it means.

The bulk of the book is in two equal halves, “The Unknown God (From 30,000 BCE to 1500 CE)” and “The Modern God (From 1500 CE to the Present)”. These are more or less chronological accounts, based on extensive reading, of the development of religions – mainly Judaism, Christianity and Islam – and more particularly their concepts of God. The main thesis is summarised in both an Introduction and an Epilogue.

It rests first on a distinction, which she has often made, between two modes of thinking, mythos and logos. Mythos is the intuitive, emotional kind of thinking engaged by, for example, the arts, especially music. It does not try to explain, but to understand through experience. Logos is, approximately, rational, logical thought. It is essential for practical progress, solving scientific and everyday problems and so on, but it is limited.

Religion essentially involves this sort of thinking. Until the modern period, before about 1500 CE, she argues, both types of thinking were practised – indeed, were considered complementary. With the growth of science, the Enlightenment, and other developments, rational scientific

thinking came to be considered the only way to truth and progress. This has had two unfortunate consequences, currently seen in extreme form. On the one hand, it led to a dogmatic atheism which denies any value to religion, and to polemicists who demolish an absurd personal god with patently contradictory and impossible characteristics.

To my mind, religions are what they are: saintly mystics and routine church-goers; terrorist bombers and parish fêtes; caring for the sick and cutting off bits of boys’ penises; ecstatic dancing and self-mortifying hermits; the certainty that Jesus Christ was God, and the equal certainty that he was not; hopes of heaven and fears of hell; and far more

On the other, it produced an attempt at a “scientific” religion which could be tested in the same way as a theory. Today we have fundamentalists who take their holy texts quite literally and defend the pseudo-science of creationism. In former times God was not an identifiable agent, rather he or it was an unknowable and literally indescribable “something” – so unknowable, indeed, that he was sometimes described as “nothing”. If you follow me. Now he is taken to be the origin of everything, whose existence can be proved (or not).

Both viewpoints, Armstrong insists, are wrong. (Incidentally she claims that “atheism” used to mean denying a particular god, rather than all gods, but this is not supported by the *Oxford English Dictionary*.)

What religion “really means” is that, in some way, behind or underlying what we perceive as reality, there is a reality that cannot be described in words, but can be partially glimpsed if reason is set aside and we commit ourselves to the quest for it. This quest can be pursued by pushing reason,

and language, to a point where they break down. It is a long and arduous process. It can be aided by such techniques as rituals, liturgies and meditation. It can lead to, or become, an ecstatic experience in which the practitioner seems to be one with the ultimate reality, which is simultaneously not something “out there” but identical with the deepest level of personal being.

This is marked by a transformation of the personality, with increased compassion and benevolence, though deliberate practice of these is itself a means of transformation. “God” is a sort of inadequate symbol of, or reference to, the transcendent dimension, and thus disappears as an agent who affects the world or us. Holy texts are not to be taken at face value as literally true, but to be worked at, interpreted and adapted to yield the religious truths behind them. Religious myths are not fiction, but nor are they intended as historical fact. They are accounts of something that may have happened, but in some sense happens all the time. They teach us how to live, how to be more human, but they can only be understood through experience, as in ritual, which enacts myth and is inseparable from it. Religious faith is not unthinking acceptance of beliefs, but confidence that a religious path will lead to transcendence.

I hope this does not distort Karen Armstrong’s views too badly. In many ways, they resemble Buddhism more than any other religion. For example, the rejection of a personal, creator god in favour of an unknowable “something” that is both ultimate reality and individual enlightenment. And the idea that doing good is in itself becoming a better person, a practical method for which there is actually sound evidence, though without the Buddhist belief in transmigration into subsequent lives.

Many comments can be made. The overview of these vast periods seems to me both selective and sweeping. It begins with the claim that prehistoric cave paintings demonstrate the “real” meaning of religion and specifically express the guilt our ancestors felt about killing and eating animals. This is just speculation. We can only surmise what the paintings meant to their creators or others. Many historical religions are far from fully understood, but it is clear that

“religion” is not a single simple entity. The hundreds, perhaps thousands, of what are called religions embrace a great range of behaviour and beliefs. To my mind, religions are what they are: saintly mystics and routine church-goers; terrorist bombers and parish fêtes; caring for the sick and cutting off bits of boys’ penises; ecstatic dancing and self-mortifying hermits; the certainty that Jesus Christ was God, and the equal certainty that he was not; hopes of heaven and fears of hell; and far more.

In many religions we certainly find spiritual quests, and the conviction that there exists some kind of super-reality of which we get glimpses. Probably all religions have some concept of the supernatural, and some ways of trying to contact this. Indeed, this is often considered to be the one defining condition of calling something “a religion”. But it is a very big jump to conclude that they are all the same, and another that they are what all, or indeed any, religions are really about.

This is just the point on which writers such as Karen Armstrong always fall back: it is not a matter of counting but of individual conviction. You cannot understand the ultimate intellectually, but only, and partially, experience it. Then you will know. But personal experience is not the same as demonstrable truth. What mystical experiences do have in common is that they are private, so that in the last resort it is impossible to compare them directly. Then again, it is hard to be sure that they all lead to personal change, and the same kind of change. Nor is it clear that long and strenuous effort is required, or that it produces the same outcome.

There is a tradition in Christianity which holds that there is nothing one can do to receive a revelation, God will simply grant it if he thinks fit. Conversely, Zen Buddhism, which is mentioned only very briefly, seems identical, in some forms at least, to the sort of pushing of reason to and beyond its limits that Armstrong describes. (Some of its insoluble problems have become clichés, such as “imagine the sound of one hand clapping”.) Zen does involve a faith-like commitment, but, as I understand it, not necessarily belief in the supernatural. And similar if not identical training and exercises can also be non-religious. Meditation, within or outside a religious setting, has measurable effects on the brain. As far as I know, there is no difference.

It has long been clear that we cannot apprehend reality directly. We can perceive



Karen Armstrong

only what our senses and nervous system give us. These are certainly fallible, but they must generally tell us what is actually there, as otherwise we would not survive. The supposition that we can reach another reality behind what we normally apprehend seems to depend on there being some faculty that by-passes the physical processes. There is no evidence for such a faculty, and it seems to come down to individual conviction: some people have reported that they are certain of it, and that is all.

There is some kind of analogy with states such as musical experience or being in love, or even the effects of drugs, which are hard to express and difficult if not impossible to appreciate if one has not experienced them. But here there are objective concomitants, observable by others. One can say, if you do this or take that, you may have such and such experiences, especially if you are looking for them (“Seek, and ye shall find”, Matthew 7:7). There is good evidence that unusual experiences are typically interpreted in terms of cultural or individual expectations. There is also evidence for individual differences in attribution of events to internal or external causes, that is, to ourselves or something outside ourselves.

Karen Armstrong does not say in this book whether she has had such experiences. But it is known that she is epileptic, and there is a well established link between temporal lobe epilepsy and mystical experiences. This may be one end of a dimension of propensity to “transcendental” experiences. Unless, that is, you think that these are somehow independent of the brain, which is of course how many religions conceive the “soul”, at least after death.

Karen Armstrong offers us “what religion really means”. The idea that all of anything is “really” one particular aspect of that thing is always suspect, and usually wrong. If religion were indeed really just about transcendent experiences, it might be harmless enough, even beneficial, whatever the status of those experiences. But an experience of “absoluteness” can all too easily turn into a conviction of certainty, and then into righteousness and then into compulsion.

One might argue that such a pattern is seen in many leaders of religions, including Islam, for which Karen Armstrong seems to have a particularly soft spot. Islam presumably began when Mohammed had an experience which he interpreted as being of divine origin. The Koran states that there is no compulsion in religion. But it also includes some quite vindictive verses about what should happen to apostates, and the terrible fate of those who deny the uniqueness of Allah, to whom, it is quite explicit, all humans must submit.

Christianity began, apparently, with the teaching of Jesus and the personal experience of St Paul. It became the cult of an often subordinate minority, but as soon as it reached a position of power, no effort was spared to suppress all other faiths, and indeed very often all variations within Christianity itself. This may not be what religion “really means”, but it is all too often what it really does.

Karen Armstrong states that “... in most pre-modern cultures there were two recognised ways of thinking, speaking and acquiring knowledge. The Greeks called them *mythos* and *logos*.” Pre-modern cultures run into hundreds, but let that pass. The authoritative *Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World* states that *mythos* meant originally word, speech or message, but by the 5th century BCE came to mean a tale, not necessarily true, with a secondary, partial reference to something of collective importance. *Logos* meant either the activity of speaking, or reasoning, in a wide sense or in the sense of argument. The great scholar G S Kirk, in his book on the Greek myths, agrees. Karen Armstrong seems to read much more into the distinction than was there. History suggests to me that in pre-modern times, at least in Western culture and probably others, it was not so much that there were two recognised ways of knowing, as that what we would separate out as science, religion, philosophy and magic were inextricably mingled

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in the attempt to understand our world and ourselves. For example, astronomy and astrology, or chemistry and alchemy, were not distinguished, and involved both empirical observations and assumptions that were magical or religious or even aesthetic (like the heavenly bodies proceeding in perfect circles).

Among religious thinkers there certainly has been, as Karen Armstrong describes, a tradition of “apophatic” theology which holds that “God”, or something, is unknowable and not describable (and sometimes, must not even be named). And there have been individuals who sought, and felt they had found, some glimpse of this. But many other theologians, probably the majority of Christian ones, have insisted that God is a person, a sort of super-human, who can be known. It is central to Christianity that he actually became a man for that very purpose. Karen Armstrong does not offer any reason, as far as I can see, why we should accept either view.

An important part of Karen Armstrong’s thesis is that her versions of mythos and logos have different functions and are complementary, rather like the “non-overlapping magisteria” proposed by Stephen Jay Gould. “Scientific rationality can tell us why we have cancer; it can even cure us of our disease. But it cannot assuage the terror, disappointment and sorrow that come with the disease, nor can it help us to die well. That is not within its remit.”

But over time, “people in all cultures discovered that by pushing their reasoning powers to the limit, stretching language to the end of its tether, and living as selflessly and compassionately as possible, they experienced a transcendence that enabled them to affirm their suffering with serenity and courage”

But even if this is true, transcending one’s personal suffering does not imply another sort of reality. One can be compassionate without abandoning reason, and suffer courageously without pushing language to the end of its tether. This seems to me more admirable. The confirmed atheist Sigmund Freud, far from a perfect character in many ways, suffering from terminal cancer, refused all pain-relieving drugs until almost the very end, saying he would rather think in torment than be unable to think clearly.

Of course religion in varied forms helps many people through their lives. Times of trouble invariably increase church attendance. And I think Karen Armstrong is quite right to stress that religion involves

far more than rational, logical thinking. One of the major things to explain about religion is (to me) why people who are quite rational in everyday work and life accept religious ideas that are patently contrary to logic, evidence and common sense. But I do not see scientific rationality as having a limited “remit” like a sort of job specification. I see it as the attempt to see more clearly, and understand better, the whole of existence, including ourselves. That includes our passions and deepest concerns. It includes the nature of reality itself.

Karen Armstrong tells the well-known story of the death of Socrates, and suggests that his calm acceptance resulted from a religious transcendence, achieved through his method of thinking through problems to the point of realising that he knew nothing. This was what he applied to others, so that “the Socratic dialogue was a spiritual exercise”. Others have regarded it as a way of clearing away misconceptions as the essential first step to rational understanding, though perhaps for Socrates and his disciples there was no clear distinction.

Karen Armstrong claims that myths “were never meant to be taken literally” but to convey religious truth. Meant by whom? Myths are folklore. There are not clear distinctions between them and folk-tales, legends, sagas and traditional knowledge (lore) of all kinds. Most of these are not composed by individuals with a specific intention, but grow and change gradually from who knows what beginnings. Some may have started from a real incident or circumstance. It has been suggested that some myths may have started from dreams. Some might have been, originally, simply good stories. Recent writers have offered evidence that stories can be more memorable if they incorporate some elements, but not too much, of the strange or apparently impossible, and that this characterises religious myths. Many folk-tales are like this, as is science fiction, which in some ways resembles myth.

Myths, according to Karen Armstrong, are “really” about our own psychology, they teach us, or used to, how to deal with the “aspects of the human predicament that lay outside the remit of logos”. But, she says, they can only do so if we not only “believe” them, but act upon them, making the “truth” of the myth a reality in our own lives.

“The myth of the hero, for example, which takes the same form in nearly all cultural traditions, taught people how to unlock their own heroic potential”. How on earth does

she know this? No evidence is offered. She seems to depend heavily on the works of Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell, and to some extent C G Jung, which are far from universally accepted by scholars. What does the myth of the Virgin Birth teach? If you find yourself unexpectedly pregnant, put the blame on God?

Anthropologists have suggested many functions for myths. Some do seem to be taken as history. This is found in other forms of folklore; for example, traditional singers would say, after a song widely found throughout Europe, “That’s a true story. It happened not far from here”. In a related way, some offer an explanation, for example of the origins of a people, or of humans in general, or of the two sexes, or of the world we live in, or of why things are right or wrong. Some seem to express how we relate to, but are distinct from, other beings, natural and supernatural. Yet others pass on traditional instructions about how to live.

Rituals too have various functions. Some, often involving music and dancing, can produce feelings of ecstasy, which may be interpreted as contact with the supernatural. This seems to be a major feature of the earliest religions, as far as we can judge. They also result in feelings of unity with the group, very practical for small communities in a hostile environment. With the development of settled and organised societies, such communal celebrations came to be more controlled and channeled.

The history of Christianity (and other religions) shows a shifting balance between spontaneous experience and set procedures, from the very beginning when the Apostles reportedly felt the spirit of the Lord and spoke in tongues. Methodists, Quakers, Shakers, modern Pentacostalists and many others have felt they were returning to the “true” religion of direct contact with the deity. But in Karen Armstrong’s view, these too are the wrong sort of religion, part of the over-reaction to rationalism. However, it is not easy to draw a clear boundary between a Toronto blessing, a pop music “rave” (often aided, like many religious events, by mind-altering drugs), and a “genuine” religious ritual experience. There seems to be a natural human tendency to seek altered states of consciousness. There is no obvious reason to think that they are anything more than that, or that some have a divine origin.

For many billions of people, religion does not seem to be very much like Karen Armstrong’s version. Often the supernatural and the natural are simply parts of the

same world, though with particular qualities. Most recorded religions centre on very personal gods (or saints), whom we can address, and who monitor our behaviour and can interfere for good or ill (What a friend we have in Jesus!).

Even Buddhism, in theory non-theistic, is replete with gods. Karen Armstrong quotes the ancient Eleusinian mysteries as an example of divine ecstasy. It does seem that these had some deep significance for individuals. But we do not know what really occurred during them, or why. They were only once a year, and for most, probably, once a lifetime (like the Islamic Hajj). The daily staple of classical Greek religion was sacrifice, directed towards very person-like gods. Nor does the Armstrong version seem to me much like religion as it was when Christianity was dominant in Europe, before her cut-off point around 1500.

Then, an unlettered and mainly ignorant populace participated in the rituals of the Church and more or less accepted its teaching, with an ample mix of superstition, magic and older religions (of which we retain traces in Easter eggs, holly and mistletoe, days of the week, etc). Faith for them,

and for the Church itself, contrary to Karen Armstrong's view, meant orthodox belief, frequently enforced by punishment in this world or fear of it in the next. For many, it still does.

Many religious movements, and their originators, have seen themselves as returning to a truer, more genuine or original version of their faith. This is the case (as far as one can judge) with Jesus, Mohammed, Luther, Wesley, Joseph Smith, Abd al Wahhab and many more. The version to which they feel they are returning, however, is just as much a construct as the current one that they reject. All religions at any point are samples from ongoing processes of adaptation. Karen Armstrong herself seems to fit into this pattern.

I have not read her autobiography, but it seems that here we have a person of both considerable intelligence and spiritual longing, who was brought up in a rigid faith and at first followed it into a religious order. Her intelligence disillusioned her with the RC claptrap, a not uncommon happening. But she retained her longing for "something", and eventually found it in apophatic theology and a personal quest for enlightenment,

which she sees as characteristic of a previous age; in effect, before Luther determined that the Bible was the inerrant word of God, or even back to the origins of humanity.

Like others, she has drawn together whatever elements she can find that help to make sense of it all and, it seems to me, ignored or altered those that do not. Overall, I thought her account interesting, but not convincing. She has described what religion means to some people. She has not, as far as I can see, given us any reason to think this account more "real" than others, nor indeed to think that there is a "real" meaning behind the multiplicity of religious beliefs and practices which, in my view, can be accounted for entirely in non-supernatural ways.

Karen Armstrong's books sell well, but I finally find myself falling back on a cliché. For those who like this sort of thing – this is the sort of thing they like.

The Case for God: What Religion Really Means is published by the Bodley Head, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA, 2009, ISBN 9781847920348 (HBK), 97818479920355 (TPB), 376 pages, £20.00 HBK.

Vatican savaged in Irish abuse scandal report

THE Vatican was left reeling last month after the Irish Prime Minister unleashed a blistering attack on the Roman Catholic Church.

Enda Kenny's verbal assault, which just fell short of labelling the Church a criminal organisation, followed an official report into clerical abuse in the Diocese of Cloyne. In an address to the Irish Parliament Kenny said that the rape and torture of children had been deliberately "downplayed" in order to protect the Vatican's primacy and power.

His attack was followed by a call for the expulsion of the Papal Nuncio by the Chairman of the Fine Gael parliamentary party, Charlie Flanagan, who accused the Vatican of being guilty of "a massive deceit".

Earlier, Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore told the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Guiseppe Leanza, that he wanted a "response" and an explanation from the Vatican as to why Irish church guidelines were ignored and allegations of abuse went unreported in the dioceses. He said it was "absolutely unacceptable" that the Vatican had intervened in Ireland and discouraged priests from reporting crimes against innocent children.

He added that what happened in Ireland was "a totally inappropriate, unjustified, unacceptable intervention. This is modern Ireland and this was a recent occasion of abuse of children and this was a recent intervention by Vatican authorities," he said.

Kenny's attack on the Vatican for at-



Irish PM Endo Kenny, left, and Papal Nuncio Guiseppe Leanza

tempting to frustrate the Cloyne inquiry contained language never before used by a politician against the Catholic Church in modern times.

Kenny told Parliament that the Cloyne Report highlighted "the dysfunction, disconnection, elitism and narcissism that dominate the culture of the Vatican to this day.

The rape and torture of children had been downplayed or "managed" to uphold, instead, the primacy of the institution, which are its power, standing and "reputation".

The hierarchy had proved either unwilling or unable to address what he called the horrors uncovered in successive reports.

Kenny added that the Catholic Church needed to be truly and deeply penitent for the wrongdoing it perpetrated, hid and denied. "Instead of listening to evidence of humiliation and betrayal," Kenny pointed out that the Vatican's reaction had been to parse and analyse it, with the eye of a canon lawyer.

Making clear that the days of Church

dominance over the state were long gone, Kenny declared: "This is not Rome... (but) a republic of laws, of rights and responsibilities, of proper civic order, where the delinquency and arrogance of a particular version, of a particular kind of 'morality', will no longer be tolerated or ignored."

Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin said what was done was not just to avoid scandal – it involved the wilful refusal to respect basic moral and legal responsibilities.

Colm O'Gorman, founder of One in Four, the abuse victim support group, said there were insufficient superlatives to describe Enda Kenny's speech.

Meanwhile, the Dáil has passed an all-party motion deploring the Vatican's intervention as outlined in the Cloyne investigation, which, it says, contributed to the undermining of child protection guidelines.

But Vatican spokesman Fr Federico Lombardi, speaking in a personal capacity, said that there was nothing in the advice given by the Papal Nuncio in 1997 to encourage bishops to break Irish laws and that the Vatican's advice to Irish bishops on child protection policies could not be interpreted as an invitation to cover up abuse cases.

Minister for Justice Alan Shatter immediately dismissed Lombardi's comments as "disingenuous", and said he expected a more considered, formal response from the Vatican.

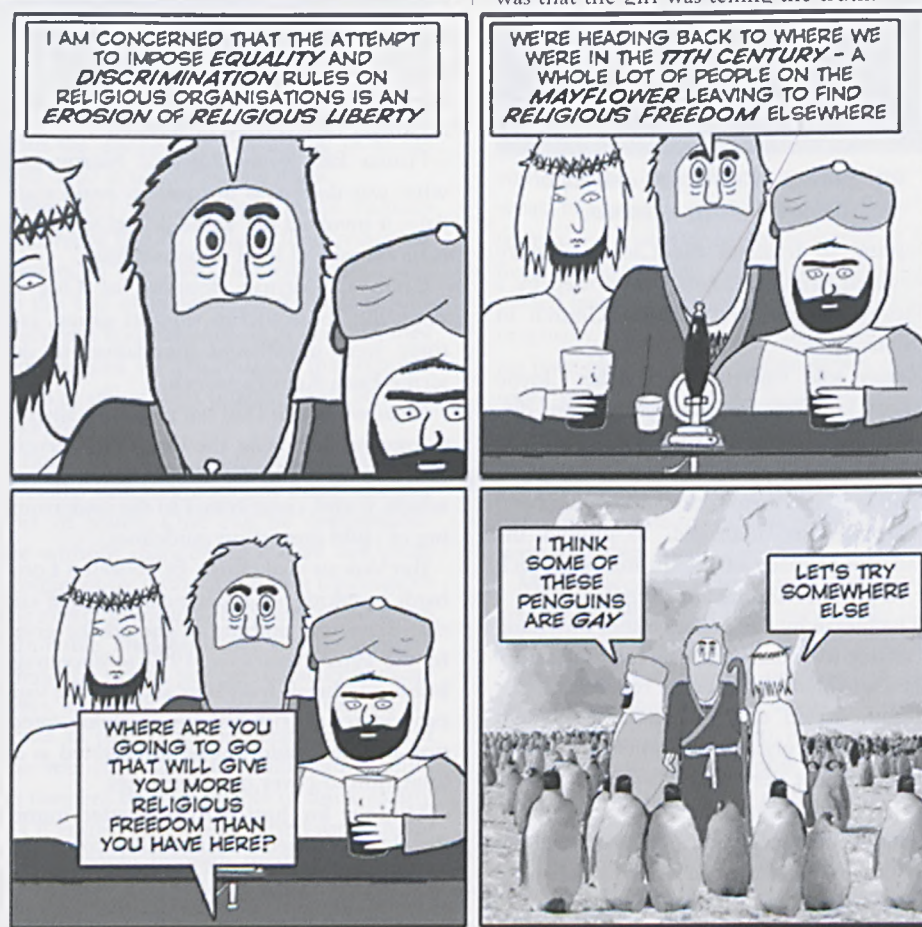
The strange persistence of crypto-humans

WILLIAM HARWOOD reviews *Tracking the Man-Beasts: Sasquatch, Vampires, Zombies and More* by Joe Nickell

Nickell's *Tracking the Man-Beasts* is not a debunking book. While it cites the evidence published by previous investigators, including the author, it offers no new arguments for conclusions treated as already adequately established. Rather, it is a compendium of past and present hoaxes, delusions, and speculations involving allegedly unclassified humanoid species. As such it constitutes a complete course in Cryptozoology 101, but has nothing to say to persons who already know that the creatures named in the title do not exist.

In reporting that "the old mythologies (including the great religions) are in decline," Nickell observes that "many of the man-beasts we have looked at seem headed for extinction. Two types – Bigfoot and the humanoid alien – still thrive as powerful mythic beings." As he summarizes, "Perhaps some of us have not advanced very far after all."

Jesus & Mo



He points out that, while mythical creatures were originally so incompatibly described that no two depictions could have been taken for the same species, they tended to move toward an archetype capable of being taken seriously. He explains the role of conformity in preserving delusions: "Artists who render the creature's image ... know instinctively to proceed like artists who portray other mythic likenesses (of Jesus, Santa Claus, etc): stay within accepted parameters if you wish the image to be easily recognized and appreciated."

As "wild man" sightings increased, "hoaxes became increasingly common." A hoaxer photographed in a Bigfoot suit (with a zipper down one side) continues to be cited by True Believers, even though the man who sold photographer Roger Patterson the gorilla suit and the man who wore it have publicly confessed. A True Believer named William Weber said of a girl who reported seeing a Yeti, "What motive could there possibly have been for a hoax? My conclusion was that the girl was telling the truth."

A True Believer claimed of Yeti sightings, "It has been seen too often for it to be dismissed as nothing more than a myth." By that reasoning, the thousands of Elvis sightings since his death cannot be dismissed as a myth. But when Edmund Hillary spent many weeks searching for Yeti, and concluded that he had found nothing because there was nothing to find, the Yeti myth did not disintegrate.

And when a True Believer accepted the legitimacy of Yowie (Australia's Bigfoot) footprints, on the ground that they were found in a remote region where a hoaxer could not reasonably have expected them ever to be discovered, Nickell points out "It seems not to have occurred to the credulous monsterologist that a given 'discoverer' might actually be the very hoaxer."

On extraterrestrials that resemble humans in Star Trek makeup, Nickell quotes an earlier debunker that, "While it seems incredible that life does not exist somewhere else in the universe, it is equally incredible that it should resemble man."

Among arguments offered for the reality of vampires is the "incorruptibility" of bodies buried in sandy soil. ("However, just such characteristics are frequently said to describe the 'incorruptible' bodies of saints.... Roman Catholics would not appreciate the suggestion that their saints were actually vampires.")

I must mention Nickell's reporting that, "in 1717 men were tortured into confessing involvement in werewolf attacks". I have yet to encounter a supporter of the Supreme Court's insane *Miranda* ruling who realizes that the Fifth Amendment was not composed to give criminals a sporting chance of deceiving juries. It was composed to put an end to the practice of torturing suspects until, guilty or innocent (or does anyone believe that the confessors really were werewolves?), they confessed for the purpose of putting an end to the torture.

Tracking the Man-Beasts is something less than an encyclopedia. But as a concise précis of beliefs about crypto-humans, ranging from mermaids to less familiar entities, and the facts behind them, it fills a vacancy in the available literature.

Tracking the Man-Beasts: Sasquatch, Vampires, Zombies, and More is published by Prometheus Books. ISBN 978-1-61614-415-9, 240 pp, pb, \$19.00

Bible Thumper to Atheist

Recovered street preacher **TOM CRAWFORD** took Jesus into his life at the age of 18, and, in his own words, became 'a fanatical fundamentalist Christian'. His newly-released book, *Bible Thumper to Atheist*, is a fascinating account of his cross-over to atheism

Tom Crawford, born in Lurgan, Northern Ireland, in 1950, is a retired former senior manager in the health service. Self-taught in theology, this "child of a mixed marriage between a Catholic and a Protestant" became an evangelical "born again" Christian at the age of 18.

"For five years," he writes, "I walked the streets, knocking on doors, giving out gospel tracts and preaching about Jesus Christ. I was a fanatical fundamentalist Christian, to such an extent that when people saw me coming, they would say, 'Here comes the Bible thumper!'"

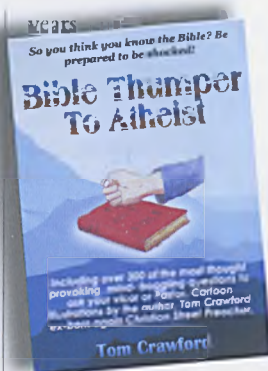
He preached his first sermon from a church pulpit when he was 21, but within two years had abandoned the church. "I now regard myself as atheist regarding the biblical God," he says.

As part of his research for his book, he spent several years visiting just about every church denomination in Belfast he could find. He spoke to, debated with, and befriended many preachers, pastors and ministers of religion – including the Rev Ian Paisley, First Minister of the Northern Ireland Assembly and leader of the Free Presbyterian Church.

He recalls: "We met on numerous occasions, and I have to say I found him a warm and welcoming human being, unlike the television image he portrayed throughout the history of the 'Troubles'. Even though he knew I was an unbeliever, he treated me with respect, and always endeavoured to answer my questions."

His book, essentially, is a compilation of a list of questions "for which there are no satisfactory answers". It also questions the many "silly statements" one hears from public representatives regarding moral and religious matters, especially in Northern Ireland.

Says Crawford, now a member of the Humanist Association of Northern Ireland: "Many of our political leaders are devout Christians. Believe it or not, a substantial number of them, including the present First Minister, believe that the earth is only 6,000 years old, which is in direct conflict with mainstream science. This mentality sometimes filters down to influence certain political debates. It is not too many years



ago that I can remember when children's swings were locked up with huge chains on a Sunday, and leisure centres closed because our religious politicians said it was against God's law. The

only activity not frowned upon was walking! Although children's playgrounds and leisure centres are now open on a Sunday, there are still difficulties organising other events on the 'Sabbath'. There is still an element of 'Taliban' type mentality in this country."

Crawford does not necessarily want to turn everyone into an atheist. "I know that many people get comfort from religion. Those people will probably have no interest in reading my book or looking at my website. They will remain locked in their own little cocoon. I have no problem with that. The people I would like to influence most are those individuals who are torturing themselves because of the fear of everlasting punishment in hell. Many of these people are putting themselves under unnecessary duress because they feel they have sinned against some imaginary god in the sky. I personally know such people, and because they can't get satisfactory answers from their church or prayer, they are falling into bouts of depression and despair. They think they are unworthy wretched sinners, when in fact, they are normal human beings.

"I would like such people to realise that they can live a normal happy life, without the fear of eternal punishment. These people have been indoctrinated from when they were little children, when they were sent to Sunday school or told they had to confess their sins to a priest.

"The sooner they realise that this is the only life we have, the sooner they can start to enjoy themselves. To punish or deprive oneself of the things you have always enjoyed in the past is foolish, especially if it never harmed friends or family. Many religions throughout the world work on the same principles as Christianity: penance

now, for the hope of greater reward in the life to come."

He adds: "Some religious families try to 'browbeat' non-religious family members into believing in God. For example, a good friend of mine, who had lost both her 'born-again' parents within a short period of time, was told, quite bluntly, that if she didn't become a 'born-again' Christian, she would never see her parents again. Such actions are nothing short of psychological blackmail, even cruel. Unfortunately, in this instance, it drove my friend to fear and depression, and then an urgency to 'get saved'. "This same individual is now in the process of being 'brainwashed' and doesn't want to know anything about anything which casts doubt on Christianity. She has been advised to associate only with like-minded Christians. Although we are still good friends, she has made it clear she will not discuss the Bible with me. I have accepted her wish, though she is still suffering bouts of depression and feels she has no alternative but to believe or be 'lost' in hell."

The other people Crawford would like to influence are those whose actions cause splits and division among families and friends because of their strict fundamentalist interpretation of scripture in relation to religious differences – for example, intermarrying between Protestants and Roman Catholics.

"Sometimes, when a person becomes a Christian, they are told by their church leaders, or members, that they should not be, 'unequally yoked' with an unbeliever. They are encouraged to find new friends and partners who are also believers.

"I believe if evangelical Christians can be given reason to doubt that they know, and possess the absolute truth, they may just become a bit more tolerant towards others, resulting in less friction in our community," he insists.

Bible Thumper to Atheist (paperback) is available via Tom Crawford's website (<http://www.biblethumpingatheist.co.uk>). Currently it is available only in the UK (£12.00 inc p&p) and Ireland (£14.00 inc p&p). It should now also be available as an e-book from Amazon at £5.00.

points of view...

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ADOPTION BY GAY AND LESBIAN COUPLES

WHILE drawing a parallel between priestly paedophilia and gay adoption is ludicrous, as stated in the editor's reply to David Rogers' letter (*Points of View*, July), David's concern about gay adoption has some justification.

Has enough thought been given to the feelings of those most affected by adoption, ie the children?

I reckon that the vast majority of children would prefer to be cared for by an adoptive mother and adoptive father rather than by two adoptive parents of the same sex.

It seems that the adoption agencies are concerned too much about "political correctness" and bend over backwards not to antagonise homosexuals, even if that is not the best solution for the child.

What is more important: the happiness of children or gay and lesbian demands for equal treatment?

Alex Hill
Austria

DAVID ROGERS asks: "Just because the Roman Catholic Church opposes same-sex marriage, does that mean that the *Freethinker* has to support it?"

Well, I would say yes. Considering all the problems the Roman Catholic Church has caused in that regard – funding "treatment" for gay people, encouraging homophobia, etc, etc – I think we should support gay people.

David Rogers seems to think that all gay people are paedophiles, abusers, and freaks, purely on the basis of their sexuality. Hasn't it occurred to him that it's like me saying to him, "Right, you are a (presumably) straight man, that means you are automatically someone who abducts and molests little girls."

This would be completely untrue, and an unfair judgment for me to make about him.

Can't he see that it works both ways?

Also, why would all gay/lesbian people try to abuse every child they meet? There are straight child-abusers too, and the odds are that they are the great majority. Why does David immediately draw a parallel between gay adoption and paedophilia/abuse? (For that matter, will someone raised in a home with heterosexual parents be straight automatically, or *vice-versa*? No. They might be gay, straight, or bisexual. I am an example – I have straight parents, they are happily together, and I'm bisexual.)

As to "priorities" – well, universal, non-discriminatory human rights would be a good starting point. Teaching tolerance – that would be good too. I think a better question would be: where are David's priorities?

Sarah Palmer (aged 14)
London

DAVID ROGERS' letter on same-sex unions (July *Points of View*) and the editor's response raise issues regarding child adoptions by homosexuals which are of paramount importance to all concerned.

If memory serves, Barry Duke, in an editorial, revealed that he considered suing his parents for having had him circumcised, and I applaud the editor's stance in regard to that issue.

However, in contrast, how is it that Barry "champions universal human rights" for adults but apparently ignores the rights of defenceless children who are not only without their natural parents but also deprived of either an adoptive mother or father?

What would he have said or done about it, if he had been adopted and raised by lesbians because of their human rights rather than his?

In my opinion, unless there is a genuine

medical necessity, circumcision (whether male or female) is child abuse and abuse of the child's human rights.

But for me it pales into insignificance compared to being deprived of a mother or father throughout childhood and life, whether to satisfy political correctness, to appease do-gooders, or any other barmy excuse.

John Hunt
Camberley

EDITOR'S reply: A consensus has developed among the medical, psychological, and social welfare communities that children raised by gay and lesbian parents are just as likely to be well-adjusted as those raised by heterosexual parents. The research supporting this conclusion is accepted well beyond mere debate in the field of developmental psychology.

For example, based on the robust nature of the evidence available in the field, the Third District Court of Appeal in the State of Florida was satisfied in 2010 that the issue was so far beyond dispute that it would be irrational to hold otherwise; the best interests of children, it found, are not preserved by prohibiting homosexual adoption.

Among a number of professional organisations which have made statements in defence of adoption by same-sex couples is the American Psychological Association. It noted that, while social prejudice was harmful to the psychological health of lesbians and gay men, there was no evidence that their parenting caused harm.

Moreover, the APA notes that an on-going longitudinal study found that fears of a heightened risk of sexual abuse by gay parents were not supported by any research.

The American Medical Association has taken a similar position supporting same-sex adoption.

Although I was born into a conventional, two-parent family, my father was about as much use as a chocolate fire-guard when it came to parenting (and much more besides), and in my formative years I sought support and guidance from a much stronger individual: my mother's brother, who was a far more powerful and influential father figure. It was only after his death that I learned that my uncle Charles was gay.

SAM HARRIS & MORALITY

SURELY morality has to be much simpler than Sam Harris's *The Moral Landscape* (July *Freethinker*) if it is to appeal to the ordinary person.

Morality is to do with human nature; with those problems of behaviour and relationships that arise when people live together in complex changing societies.

The criterion of morality is motivation: whether our thoughts and acts have goodness or badness, are life supporting or life denying, creative or destructive, lawful or criminal, trustworthy or deceitful, selfish or altruistic. Altruism is our being aware of and concerned for the needs of others, even those we think are not of our own kind, to whom we may respond with empathy, understanding and enfolding love – "your need is greater than mine".

The four aspects of the person are the intellectual, the emotional, the sensuous and the physical; and the satisfaction of the needs of these is the work/vocation of man- and womankind. These needs are for understanding, well-being, beauty and health.

W K Harper
Stoke-on-Trent

ISLAM IN TOWER HAMLETS

YOUR report on the "Islamic Republic of Tower Hamlets" (June issue) is really shocking – but not all that surprising to me, remembering the reactions I experienced when, nearly 30 years ago, as the then President of the National Secular Society, I used to address audiences of Muslim students on secularism.

I would be invited by university colleges, mainly in east London, to take part in debates on the subject, and, though the event was officially sponsored by the college administrators, it became obvious that it was engineered by an unsupervised group of Muslim extremists.

My opponent was invariably an imam with the gift of the gab, my covert function

apparently being to spur him on to further flights of Islamic rhetoric.

The students were always polite to me on the surface and would ask my permission before making a video film of the proceedings, but I noticed they sometimes saved film by switching off the apparatus when my turn came to speak – for no more than half the time allocated to the imam.

Disliking the fact that the audiences were sex-segregated, I tried writing to the college faculty beforehand, requesting unsegregated seating arrangements, but the only response I received was that I should take a vote on it at the start of each meeting. Since the overwhelming majority of students attending was Muslim, the invariable result of the vote was almost unanimous in favour of sex-segregation, among males and females alike – although the fact that they voted at all was ironic, since they claimed that democracy was against the will of Allah. So, of course, was freedom of speech, as that could result in blasphemy. They often used to boast that Britain would be the first Western Islamic state – and they had grounds for thinking so.

I therefore agree to some extent with the Home Secretary's recent statement that the universities are to blame for Muslim "radicalisation". But only to some extent: more blame must rest with the politicians and social workers, who, in the early days of mass Asian immigration, insisted on politically correct multiculturalism, rather than the "melting-pot" advocated by humanist organisations and other rationalists.

I particularly blame those Labour MPs who, often representing constituencies with a large Muslim Labour vote, leaned over backwards to legislate for multicultural demands and to voice apologetic regrets for any alleged "Islamophobia" on the part of more clear-sighted residents.

Two of the most conspicuous of the appeasing MPs were Jack Straw and Roy Hattersley – although the latter, after his promotion to the upper unelected House, changed his tune and began criticising the extremes of multiculturalism.

When I wrote about it in those days, I was denounced (by Ken Livingstone, for one) as a racist.

A further contribution to the Islamification of Tower Hamlets, as described in the article, is the introduction of a publicly elected executive mayor in place of the traditional figure-head appointed annually by the council. A public vote may seem more democratic, but it can result in the successful candidate remaining in office for years on end and becoming an autonomous local dictator.

Having been awarded religious exemption from several hard-won laws of this

country, such as those governing the slaughter of farm animals, the Muslims are now demanding their own misogynist sharia law – and even the Archbishop of Canterbury supports them in this. No one would deny the right of newcomers to Britain to retain their own life-style – but not the right of imposing it on others, whether or not of their own background; nor of having state-funded separate schools so as to prevent their children's full integration with the host community.

Barbara Smoker
Bromley

DISCLAIMER

IN his review of my *House of Hippo* novel, Richard Bozarth questions my disclaimer, "Pope Abel I is NOT Pope John Paul II," on the ground that he sees no reason why anyone might think otherwise.

I depicted Pope Abel as wearing long dresses in even the hottest weather to hide the triple-strength diaper he was obliged to wear 24/7 because, as a chronic retard, he had never been potty trained.

The book is fiction, but that conjecture struck me as surely needing a disclaimer.

William Harwood
Canada

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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, July 6: AGM. No meeting in August.

w <http://homepage.nfworld.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.

i Secretary on 0208 907-6124

w www.harrow.humanist.org.uk

e Mike Savage at mfsavagemba@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.

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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.

www.lancashiresecularhumanists.co.uk **i** Ian Abbott, Wavecrest, Hackensall Rd, Knott End-on-Sea, Poulton-le-Fylde,

Lancashire FY6 0AZ 01253 812308 **e** ian@lanzere.demon.co.uk

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. July 21, members' AGM. No meeting in August.

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 Copey, 1 Thistledown Road, Horsford NR10 3ST. Tel: 0160 3710262.

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

North East Humanists (Teesside Group):

i C McEwan on 01642 817541.

North East Humanists (Tyneside Group):

i the Secretary on 01434 632936.

North London Humanist Group: Meets third Thursday of month (ex. August) 8 pm at Ruth Winston House, 190 Green Lanes, Palmers Green, N13 5UE. Plus social events. Contact Sec: 01707 653667

e enquiries@nondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk

w www.nondonhumanists.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 SC042124. Next meeting Sept 4, Old Course Hotel, Prestwick.

i 07935272723

Sheffield Humanist Society: **i** 0114 2309754. University Arms, 197 Brook Hill, Sheffield. Wed, May 4, 8.00 pm: Iain 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 Brockway 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.

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

Sutton Humanists: **i** Brian Dougherty 07913 734583. **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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