

3



School prayer:
National Secular
Society says
collective
worship abuses
childrens' rights

4



Nadine Dorries:
'Pro-abortion'
media blamed for
the collapse of her
high-profile
campaign

5



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Mormons target Stagecoach passengers in Lancashire

363

Young Mormon missionaries get everywhere – and if they're not pestering people in Mongolia, they are harassing passengers on coaches in Lancashire. But Robert Preston, President of the England Manchester Mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints – to give the church its full name – sees nothing wrong with this sort of behaviour.

Preston was quoted in the *Guardian* last month as saying that he considered the 140 young people in the north west of England actively engaged in trying to convert people as "persistent and courageous".

He added: "They will sit next to someone, and they will introduce themselves and try and have a good conversation to explain a point of view that someone might never have heard before. We do encourage this, but we would not want people to feel intimidated."

The paper reported on September 15 that the Stagecoach bus company – ironically part of the transport empire owned by evangelical Christian and rabid homophobe Sir Brian Souter – has asked the Mormons to stop using its buses as a platform for their "missionary" work.

According to the *Guardian* report, passenger Rick Seymour was travelling on the 2A bus service from Lancaster to Morecambe recently, and heard a conversation between three young men.

Two of the men, he said, were Mormons using the bus as a way

to engage members of the public to tell them about their love for Jesus.

Seymour claimed to have been "engaged" by Mormons on two previous occasions while travelling on a bus, and in a letter to Stagecoach Bus Company said: "I firmly believe that the Mormon Church is using your service as a place where the public cannot escape the attempt to indoctrinate them."

The 31-year-old, of Heysham, Lancashire, added: "Whilst I respect that everyone is entitled to their own beliefs or none, telling others that their beliefs are misguided or plain wrong is wrong in itself. Practice your own personal beliefs in your own home and do not ram it down others' throats. I hope that Stagecoach will write to the Mormon Church in Chorley and tell them their behaviour is unacceptable."

Stephie Barber, operations manager for Stagecoach in Lancaster said that bus drivers had recently reported similar incidents.

"We do not permit any commercial or other organisation to promote their products, services or views through direct engagement with passengers on our services," he said. "In cases where we are made aware of any activity of this nature, we follow it up with the organisation involved. We are also doing so in this particular case to make our position clear."

Six years ago the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported that, following the collapse of communism in 1990, Mongolia became a target for proselytisers from around the world.

The paper reported that among those seeking converts among the mainly Buddhist population, "the Mormons are perhaps most visible as they travel from house to house in their distinctive white shirts and black pants."

Incidentally, Stagecoach's Souter made the headlines himself last month when he complained that the internet search engine, Google, had made his website "disappear". The tycoon – a member of the evangelical Church of the Nazarene – said that his website used to be one of Google's top listings when the term "Brian Souter" was searched. But since August 13 it has "mysteriously disappeared" from the list of results.

Gordon Beattie, Souter's public relations and web media adviser, said: We find it unacceptable that Google can simply remove an information site like Sir Brian's from its listings and give no helpful information as to why it has disappeared.



A young Mormon pictured in Mongolia

Continued on page 4

Prejudice and Prayer

BARRY DUKE UNEARTHES MORE WEIRD CHRISTIAN STUFF ON THE INTERNET

There are days I think my head will explode trying to keep abreast of new words and phrases concocted by Christians in a bid to keep on top of contemporary issues.

The latest phrase I uncovered was “pro-gay revisionist theology” – invented by a horrid little American outfit called Focus on the Family, which uses the term to attack believers who don’t believe that being gay is a sin.

I first found it in a report about American actress Kirsten Chenoweth, who recently sent the religious right into a tailspin by saying “I don’t think being gay is a sin. Period.” Chenoweth said this in an interview with the gay publication *The Advocate*, which asked the TV and theatre star: “What would you ask people who cite Christianity as their justification for passing laws that discriminate against people?”

I gagged over Chenoweth’s cheesy reply: “I would ask, ‘What would Jesus do?’ It sounds so cliché and Pollyanna-ish, but I

have a feeling if he were on the earth today, he wouldn’t be walking around saying, ‘You’re going to hell’ and ‘You’re wrong, you’re wrong, you’re wrong, you’re wrong.’ I think he’d be accepting and loving.”

Chenoweth’s heart is in the right place, even if her brain isn’t – and she has suffered quite a kicking for her views. In 2005, she was fired from a “Woman in Faith” concert for her support of gay rights.

In covering the story, *The Christian Post* quoted the Christian Research Institute’s Joseph P Gudel as saying: “I realise that it is not ‘politically correct’ to speak critically concerning any person or group. Nonetheless, true Christian love does not ignore immorality and the lives ruined by it, but speaks out in the hope of helping those individuals.”

Focus on the Family defines “pro-gay revisionist theology” thus:

Pro-gay revisionist theology takes the movement for the legitimisation of homosexuality a step further by attempting to redefine homosexual behaviour as God-ordained and morally permissible. Leaders of the “gay-Christian” movement defend this position arguing that:

- Christians’ prejudice against homosexuals leads them to misread biblical texts about homosexuality.
- Christian leaders speak out against homosexuality merely to raise funds and increase their visibility.
- Scriptures that supposedly condemn homosexual behaviour have actually been mistranslated.
- Scriptures that supposedly condemn homosexual behaviour have been taken out of context and do not apply to our present society.

The website *Pure Intimacy* – how on earth do fundies arrive at these daft names? – elaborates by saying: “When God is reputed to sanction what He has already clearly forbidden, then a religious travesty is being played out in bold fashion. Confronting it is necessary because the pro-gay theology asks us to confirm professing Christians in their sin, when we are biblically commanded to do just the opposite.”

I happened across the Chenoweth story purely by accident. I had, in fact, set out to do some research into the effects of prayer



Kirsten Chenoweth

on children, but the internet has an irritating way of diverting one into all sort of irrelevant – though often amusing – nooks and crannies.

My research was prompted by our page three report this month on collective worship in schools in England. This set me wondering whether any in-depth research had ever been done regarding kids and prayer. If any such do studies exist, Google sure as hell didn’t locate them. Instead I found hundreds of sites advising parents, guardians and educators on how best to encourage children to talk to God and Jesus and the angels.

One enthusiastic supporter of prayer – Vijay, in an essay published by *Share Your Essays.com* – summed up the benefits of prayer in these words: “Prayer works wonders. Faith-healing has cured many patients miraculously. With prayers, we get the power within us to make our world, our environment, just what we want it to be.”

Oh really? Evidence please, Vijay.

But what made me really smile was the mess Christian fundie John Piper got himself into while trying to promote prayer for children. On his silly *Desiring God* website Piper wrote: “We should teach our children to pray as soon as they can say anything. The first words they should say are, ‘Dear Jesus, thank you.’”

Thanks for what? Piper doesn’t say.

He then goes on: “I can’t discern when a child is being spiritually wrought upon by the Lord. I don’t put much stock in children’s professions of faith. They seem to come and go. What matters is whether or not they have been born again.”

How does Piper know when a child is “born again”?

He doesn’t – and says as much: “I don’t know when a child is born again. I don’t assume that a child must become a blatant rebellious unbeliever before he is regenerated. (*Regenerated?*) He can start to believe at a young age. And because he can believe at a young age, and because I can’t tell precisely when his faith becomes his own and authentic, I don’t want to wait too long before I start treating him as a believer.”

This is nonsensical guff, made worse by his use of “he” throughout his article.

But what else would one expect but stupidity and sexism from a fundamentalist numpty like Piper.



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Collective worship infringes kids' human rights, NSS insists

ENGLAND is the only country in the western world to enforce participation in daily religious worship in community schools – but new research by the BBC indicates that almost two-thirds (64 percent) of parents said that their children did not attend such an activity and over two-thirds (67 percent) do not support enforcing the law.

Following the release of these findings, National Secular Society Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood called for the law on collective daily worship to be repealed, saying it infringed pupils' human rights. "As the BBC survey confirms, the law requiring daily collective worship is being widely flouted, which shows that it is time for it to be reviewed – and, in this case, repealed," he said.

He added: To enforce daily collective worship goes beyond the legitimate function of the state and is an abuse of children's human rights, especially those who are old enough to make decisions for themselves."

The NSS was prominent in the public debates that followed the release of the poll and took part in over a dozen radio and TV shows, making the point that, in addition to being an abuse of children's human rights, it was divisive in the sense that some children from minority religions were exempted from the morning school assembly because of the specifically Christian nature of the worship.

The NSS also pointed out that there were



School prayer: a useless and unwanted activity

fewer teachers who were willing or able to conduct religious worship because, like the majority of other people in this country, they aren't religious themselves.

Terry Sanderson, President of the NSS, said: "Collective worship is an unjustifiable imposition on schools. The BBC poll confirms what previous research has found – that schools just don't want to provide collective worship and pupils don't want to take part in it. It is amazing how the religious proselytisers who have got such a stranglehold on the education system can bully the Government

into retaining it against all the evidence."

At the request of the NSS, supporters in the House of Lords had already put down amendments to the Education Bill currently going through Parliament calling for collective worship to become an entirely optional activity in community schools. It led to an excellent debate, the NSS reports.

"Lord Avebury and NSS staff followed this up with a meeting with senior staff at the Department for Education. We will be raising the issue vigorously again at the next stage in Parliament."

Most in Canada see no hope of reconciliation between the Western and Islamic worlds

A MAJORITY of Canadians believes differences between Western nations and the Islamic world are "irreconcilable".

A new national survey conducted last month exposed a strong strain of pessimism in the country. The survey of 1,500, conducted for the Montreal-based Association for Canadian Studies, showed that 56 percent of respondents see Western and Muslim societies locked in an unending ideological struggle, while about 33 percent – just one-third of the population – held out hope that the conflict will eventually be overcome.

Another 11 percent of those polled failed to answer the question.

The finding, says ACS Executive Director

Jack Jedwab, has "serious ramifications" for Canadian policies aimed at bridging divides between cultures.

The pessimism expressed in the survey "contradicts a fundamental idea in multicultural democracies like ours, that conflicts between societies can be resolved through dialogue and negotiation," said Jedwab. "This is also a key element in multiculturalism, where Canada is often seen elsewhere in the world as a model in conflict resolution."

He added: "If a majority of Canadians feel it is irreconcilable, what does this imply for the various projects and programmes in place that aim to bridge gaps?"

The results, according to the *National Post*,

"also confirm the findings of other recent surveys highlighting Canadians' ongoing anxiety about the state of security in the post-9/11 world and their deep doubts about whether the long and bloody war in Afghanistan has done much to thwart the threat of terrorism".

Jedwab said the "pessimistic feeling" about what the war has accomplished is likely linked to the "widespread hopelessness" about the prospects for ever resolving the deep-rooted, "ideological" conflict between Muslim and Western societies.

Many Canadians have come to believe "nothing will work" to end that conflict, said Jedwab.



'Mad Nad' Dorries: her bid to prevent abortion providers from counselling women fails utterly

NADINE Vanessa Dorries, 54, the Conservative MP for mid-Bedfordshire, came badly unstuck last month after the House of Commons rejected her amendments to the Health and Social Care Bill 2011 which would have blocked abortion services such as BPAS and Marie Stopes International providing counselling services.

She argued that these organisations had a vested financial interest in encouraging abortions, and suggested that "independent" faith-based anti-abortion counselling services would be better placed to advise women.

Prime Minister David Cameron's coalition government at first supported the proposal, but later changed its mind, reportedly because LibDem leader and deputy prime minister Nick Clegg was opposed to the change. Her amendments were subsequently defeated by 368 votes to 118, a majority of 250.



Nadine Dorries

Ahead of the vote, according to a report in the *Guardian*, Dorries – often referred to as "Mad Nad" – was urged to reveal her campaign's funding sources after she admitted that one of the organisations supporting it runs a faith-based crisis pregnancy centre (CPC). Dorries told the paper that her campaign was being advised by Dr Peter Saunders of the Christian Medical Fellowship, a lobby group which claims its members include more than 4,000 doctors. She said she was also advised by "a number" of other organisations, including "one that runs crisis pregnancy centres", but refused to name them or describe their role.

Dorries was supported by the Right to Know campaign, established to lobby for support for the amendment in Parliament and outside. But neither Dorries nor the Labour backbencher Frank Field, who co-sponsored the amendment (but later withdrew his support), nor Right to Know would reveal the details of who was involved and who has funded it.

CPCs are organisations independent of the NHS that offer some form of counselling around pregnancy choices for pregnant women. Sometimes they also offer free pregnancy testing and other services.

The government's Pregnancy Advice Bureau, said the *Guardian*, advises women to be careful about attending private pregnancy counselling centres such as CPCs, warning that they do not refer women for abortion.

The *Guardian* also revealed that "one of the most vocal public supporters of Dorries' campaign was the lobby group Christian Concern, which, along with the UK-based Christian Legal Centre (CLC), is linked to a wealthy US evangelical organisation, the Alliance Defence Fund (ADF)."

In the run-up to the vote, much attention was focused on Evan Harris, who was accused by Dorries' supporters of being the

key figure in wrecking the campaign. Writing on the *Tory Diary* blog ahead of the vote, Paul Goodman asked: "Why should a failed LibDem candidate hold sway over the Department of Health?"

He pointed out: "Like Dorries, Harris has been all over the media. Like her, he is ill-disposed to compromise. Like her too, he attracts enemies. Indeed, the two might have designed as warring opposites for some Harry Potter franchise. One is blonde, female, Conservative, Christian and broadly pro-life; the other dark, male, Liberal Democrat, atheist, and nicknamed Dr Death ... However, there is one big and important difference between them. Dorries won her seat at the last election, while Harris lost his. But while the elected Tory cuts no ice with Downing Street, the unelected LibDem seems to cut a great deal. He seems to have leaned on Nick Clegg who leaned on David Cameron who leaned on the Department of Health."

The magazine *Christian Today* laid the blame for the lost vote on a hostile media. "It was a modest proposal that was unfortunately hit hard by ideologues supportive of abortion (no matter what) in politics, journalism and the media during the last weekend of parliamentary recess. The *Guardian* and BBC's *Newsnight* ran stories that inaccurately linked the amendment to pro-life crisis pregnancy centres that offered (unfortunately in some cases) erroneous information – propaganda – to women seeking help in making a decision about whether they should have an abortion. Reporting by the *Guardian* and *Newsnight* was in this instance despicable."

However, the magazine added that "the whole fiasco shows the fractured nature of the pro-life lobby, and the unreliability of Nadine Dorries and the lack of trust people have in her and how she and her co-conspirers operate".

It added: "Despite the pressure from the pro-choice lobby, at the end of the day it was Dorries' inaccuracies and lack of communication with supportive colleagues that lost the vote by a majority of 250. Of course, it was the campaign journalism which helped persuade the Conservative leadership that they could not afford to back one of their own against the campaigning of a failed former Lib Dem MP, Evan Harris – labelled by some as Dr Death for his strident support for abortion and euthanasia – against the modest proposal."

Mormons, Stagecoach and Souter

Continued from page 1

Outrage was expressed from a number of quarters this summer when the notorious homophobe, who orchestrated a vicious anti-gay hate campaign in Scotland in 2000, was awarded a knighthood this summer, and a petition has been set up on the internet to have him stripped of the honour. It can be accessed at <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/notosoutersknighthood/>

Souter's Keep the Clause campaign was a reaction to a move by the Labour/Liberal Democrat administration in the first year of the new Scottish Parliament to scrap the hated Section 2A (or Section 28 for those south of the border) which prevented schools from discussing homosexuality in a positive light.

The Keep the Clause Campaign was set up by Souter to stop the Scottish Parliament from removing this discriminatory piece of legislation from law. This campaign saw posters and leaflets distributed across Scotland making all sorts of insinuations about the risks posed to children by gay men and women.

The Equality Network reported a marked increase in homophobic abuse and violence during the months of the campaign, which proved a failure.

Christian counsellor charged with attempted rape of a boy aged 10

A 52-YEAR-OLD director of a faith-based substance-abuse recovery centre was charged last month in Seattle with attempted first degree rape of a 10-year-old boy.

David Scratchley, the prominent Christian head of Matt Talbot New Hope Recovery Centre – who is frequently described as a “child safety” expert in various online biographies, of him.

He was remanded in jail on \$1 million bail.

Scratchley is alleged to have told a patient at the center that he planned to have sex with the boy. The woman told police, who arrested Scratchley and found the boy at the director’s Belltown apartment.

The arrest follows a long career in which Scratchley built a solid reputation for treating children and adults with addictive behaviors. An online biography credits him with treating thousands of people for drug addiction.

Police were called to Scratchley’s home after a woman told officers he invited her over: “So they could both sexually assault a child.”

The boy told officers that his mother knew Scratchley through the recovery centre, and that he had been allowed to spend time alone with him on several occasions.

In an affidavit the boy said Scratchley



David Scratchley

had promised “they were going to do fun things”, but that first they were going to wait for the woman to arrive at Scratchley’s home. The boy said Scratchley asked questions about sex that day and also promised to take him to an athletic-clothing shop to get him a birthday gift.

The boy also told police Scratchley had asked him about sex in the past.

Scratchley sent the boy down the elevator to meet the woman, where officers found the youth, according to court documents. While the woman and the boy were talking

with officers, Scratchley texted the woman to find out if she was “getting to know” the boy because they hadn’t immediately returned to the apartment.

The woman showed police a stream of sexually explicit text messages she said she had received from Scratchley that day regarding the youth. In the messages, police said, the woman talked to a man named “Dave” about what they planned to do to the child, acts that included handcuffs and rape. The woman “led Scratchley to believe that she was a willing participant in the events he was planning with the victim,” police said.

The woman told police that she had a relationship with Scratchley for nearly two years and knew him from drug treatment. She added that she and Scratchley had an intimate relationship and had used crack cocaine and other drugs together. She said that he “talked about sexual fantasies that he had about children and told her that he had sexually abused children in the past”.

Police searched Scratchley’s home and found pornography that appeared to depict minors. They also found what was suspected to be cocaine.

The boy told police that Scratchley asked him about drugs. He also told police that he saw “little white rocks” on the counter in Scratchley’s home that day.

Big boost for FT Fund

THE *Freethinker* Fund has received a generous bequest of £3,000 from the estate of loyal subscriber, Owen Dumbleton, who died earlier this year.

Mr Dumbleton had subscribed to the magazine for many years, and we would like to express our gratitude for this generous legacy.

Legacies and donations have helped the *Freethinker* – now entering its 131st year of unbroken publication – to keep going despite rising costs without increasing the subscription fee, and we would like to thank the following who have made donations this year: Neil Gallagher, Steve Lakey, Philip Matthew, Iraj Derakhshan, Fernando Safont Fuster, George Wright, Major O Crocombe, Peter Hamilton, Jim Hayes, Ian Heath, Paul Instrall, L Jackson, Jennifer Jaynes, Jane King, P Bayliss, T D Beaton, J W Murray, A Newton, R Omasta-Milson, Ian Payne, R Sharman, and D Watkins

Banned Books exhibition well worth seeing

EDINBURGH-based subscriber R M Atkinson has drawn our attention to an exhibition in the city that he thinks will be of considerable interest to freethinkers.

The landmark exhibition – simply called *Banned Books* – is currently at Edinburgh’s National Library of Scotland and runs until October 30.

The exhibition examines the long history of religious interference in accessing information. It highlights the burning of “superstitious” books; the great expansion in censorship during the Protestant Reformation, and recent restrictions by Muslims and Christians on what can be read.

Items on display include a modern translation of possibly the world’s oldest banned religious book (a sacred 1000-1500AD Mayan text burned by 16th Century Spanish missionaries), a copy of the last edition of the Catholic Church’s *List of Prohibited Books*, Tyndale’s Bible, *Zoomania* by Erasmus Darwin, and James Kirkup’s poem *The Love that Dare Not Speak its Name* that led to the prosecution of Gay News for blasphemous libel.

Also shown are *The Satanic Verses* and *Harry Potter* – books that are still under attack by religious fanatics. Making the biggest visual impact, however, is a 1575 Spanish “heretical” book with line- after- line of its pages violently crossed out with black ink by the Inquisitor.

The exhibition, says Atkinson, “is a frightening reminder of attempts – both past and present – to suppress ideas in the name of religion, and emphasises the continuing need to be on guard against religious censorship.”

Near-bankrupt Greece to fund a mosque

A CONTROVERSIAL plan by the Greek government to build a large mosque – at taxpayers' expense – was given approval this last week. The move came amid thinly veiled threats of violence by thousands of Muslim residents of the city.

Rather than face a possible uprising, the Greek Parliament voted on September 7 to meet demands for a publicly-funded mosque. The vote was supported by 198 out of 300 deputies from the left, right and centre of the political spectrum.

The plan commits the Greek government (by way of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs) to pay for the construction of a temporary mosque which will be built within the next six months. A larger 1,000 square meter (3,300 square feet) mosque with enough space for 500 worshippers at a time will be built in the same area by the end of 2012, at an estimated cost of around £14 million).

Analysts say the Papandreou government is pushing the mosque project out of fear that Muslim demands will become violent sooner rather than later.

Athens – like many other European cities – has suffered Muslim-related violence over the past few years. Last May more than 1,000 Muslims clashed with police in downtown

Athens after a police officer was accused of vandalising a Koran at a coffee shop during a police check.

Almost 50 protesters were arrested during a violent demonstration, and a total of 14 Muslim immigrants and policemen had to receive hospital treatment. Over 70 cars were set ablaze and around a dozen businesses were destroyed in the clashes. A day earlier, a protest by 1,500 Muslim immigrants descended into violence, and police were forced to use tear gas to disperse the crowds.

Muslims in Greece have said that the violence proves their need for an official mosque. However, Greek public opinion is set against the mosque plan, and those who oppose it say their government should not be financing religious institutions.

Greece is mired in a severe recession which has left almost one million Greeks out of work, and mosque opponents say this is another reason not to invest public funds in a mosque project.

According to a report last month in *Hudson New York*, Greece officially has a Muslim population of around 500,000, mostly of Turkish origin. But in recent years, tens of thousands of Muslims have migrated to Greece from Africa, North Africa, the Middle East and Central and Southeast Asia.

Many of the estimated 200,000 Muslims living in Athens are illegal immigrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Nigeria and Pakistan. It is now estimated that Greece – which is the number one gateway for illegal immigration to Europe – has an illegal immigrant population of around two million; this in a country where the total population is only 11 million.

The on-line paper said that the Greek Parliament's decision to approve the mosque is the latest chapter in a long-running story that dates back to the 1930s and centres on the question of whether Greece – which is predominantly (97 percent) Christian Orthodox – should officially cater to followers of Islam.

Athens has not had an official mosque since 1833, when the Ottomans evacuated the city after nearly 400 years of Turkish rule. Today the Turkish-dominated Muslim enclave of Thrace in north-eastern Greece is the only place where the Greek government officially supports Islamic sites and shrines.

The publication said that in the run-up to the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, the late King Fahd of Saudi Arabia offered to finance a mega-mosque in Paiania, a suburb about 20 kilometers (12 miles) east of downtown Athens, near the international airport. But that plan was abandoned in the face of opposition from the Greek Orthodox Church.

In 2006, the government undertook to spend £13 million for an Athens mosque by 2009. But that plan was also shelved.

In 2007, Muslims used a donation of £2.2 million from a Saudi businessman to turn an old textile factory in Moschato, a southern suburb of Athens, into a 6,000 square meter (19,500 square foot) prayer site that would accommodate more than 2,000 worshippers at a time.

Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou and his supporters in Parliament decided to push ahead with the mosque scheme after the Muslim Union of Greece – an organisation that claims to represent all Muslims in Greece (and which is said to have links to the Muslim Brotherhood) staged a series of provocative mass public prayer sessions across Athens aimed at pressurising the government into building a mosque.

In November 2010, for example, Muslims held open-air prayers in 15 locations across Athens. In one instance, over 1,000 Muslims occupied the square in front of the main building of the University of Athens and held public prayers inside the portico on the first day of the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha. More than 7,000 police officers were required to keep the peace.

Opposition to sharia law mounts in the UK

THE One Law For All campaign, headed by Maryam Namazie, turned out in force last month for the Secular Europe march and rally held in London to demonstrate, along with other organisations, its opposition to the growth of sharia law in the UK.

The aim of the One Law For All is the protection of the rights of women, children and minority groups. The campaign insists that sharia law does not accord with the principles of equality enshrined in UK law.

It says the use of religious law in family proceedings deprives women of rights that are available to them in the civil courts, and seriously questions whether a woman's consent to such arbitration is freely given.

One Law for All says that, while religious freedom is a private affair and should be protected, such protection must be subject to the fundamental human rights principles in UK law.

Last year, a report published by One Law for All revealed that sharia councils and Muslim arbitration tribunals were in violation of UK law, public policy and human rights.

On winning the National Secular Society's Secularist of the Year award in 2005, Namazie said: "We need an uncompromising and shamelessly aggressive demand for secularism – but again this is only a minimum if we are to ensure that human values are safeguarded and that the human being is put first and foremost. Today, more than ever, we are in need of the complete de-religionisation of society as well."



Maryam Namazie

a mega-mosque to appease Muslims

In August 2011, the government gave Muslims permission to celebrate the Islamic “holy” month of Ramadan at the Olympic Stadium of Athens. This move was intended to avert gatherings of large crowds of Muslims in downtown city squares.

Last month saw a clash between Muslims celebrating the end of Ramadan and members of Chrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn), a far-right nationalist group. Muslims engaged in open-air prayers in public squares near the city centre were harassed by local residents who pelted them with eggs and yogurt.

... and Germany experiences an alarming spread of sharia

A GERMAN legal expert and former investigative journalist has just published a book which claims that the spread of Islamic sharia law in Germany is far more advanced than previously thought – and that German authorities are “powerless” to do anything about it.

Joachim Wagner, who worked for ARD German public television, says in *Judges Without Law: Islamic Parallel Justice Endangers our Constitutional State* that sharia courts are now operating in all of Germany’s big cities, and the “parallel justice system” is undermining Germany’s rule of law.

Muslim arbitrator-cum-imams, he says, are settling criminal cases out of court without the involvement of German prosecutors or lawyers. This means that settlements reached by Muslim mediators result in perpetrators avoiding long prison sentences. He claimed that victims are compensated with large payments if they ensure that the evidence they offer in court does not lead to a conviction.

German police do investigate cases involving serious crimes. But parallel to that, special Muslim arbitrators, also known as “peace judges,” are commissioned by the families concerned to mediate and reach an out-of-court settlement, he said.

In an interview with the German broadcaster *Deutsche Welle*, Wagner said political correctness in Germany was contributing to the problem: “I’ve studied 16 recent



Muslims demonstrating in Athens

crime cases here with Muslim citizens involved. In almost 90 percent of all cases where Muslim arbitrators were commissioned, the perpetrators were acquitted by German courts or the cases were dropped altogether by the prosecution for lack of evidence. It’s an alarming finding, and it throws a bad light on our courts.”

According to a *Hudson New York* report, German judges are now referring (or deferring) to sharia law. The Federal Social Court in Kassel, for example, recently supported the claim of a second wife for a share of her dead husband’s pension payments, which his first wife wanted to keep all to herself. The judge ruled they should share the pension.

The paper revealed that, in another case in March 2007 – Judge Christa Datz-Winter, a judge at Frankfurt’s family court referred to the Koran in a divorce case involving a 26-year-old German woman of Moroccan origin. She was terrified of her violent Moroccan husband, a man who had continued to threaten her despite having been ordered to stay away by the authorities. He had beaten his wife and he had allegedly threatened to kill her.

Judge Datz-Winter refused to grant the divorce, arguing that a woman who marries a Muslim should know what she is getting herself into. In her ruling, the judge quoted Sura 4, verse 34 of the Koran. She wrote that the Koran contains “both the husband’s right to use corporal punishment against a disobedient wife and the establishment of the husband’s superiority over the wife.”

In February 2011, Germany’s Federal Labor Court ruled that a Muslim supermarket employee can refuse to handle alcohol on religious grounds. The case in question involved a Muslim man who was employed in a supermarket in the northern German city of Kiel. He refused to stock shelves with alcoholic drinks, saying that his religion forbade him from any contact with alcohol, and was dismissed as a result in March 2008.

In an interview with the German news-magazine *Der Spiegel*, Wagner described the Islamic shadow justice system in Germany as “very foreign, and for a German lawyer, completely incomprehensible at first. It follows its own rules. The Islamic arbitrators aren’t interested in evidence when they deliver a judgment, and unlike in German criminal law, the question of who is at fault doesn’t play much of a role.”

When *Der Spiegel* asked why it was wrong for two parties to try to resolve a dispute between themselves, Wagner replied: “The problem starts when the arbitrators force the justice system out of the picture, especially in the case of criminal offences. At that point they undermine the state monopoly on violence. Islamic conflict resolution in particular, as I’ve experienced it, is often achieved through violence and threats. It’s often a dictate of power on the part of the stronger family.”

Wagner’s findings largely confirm a report published by the German Interior Ministry in 2009 which warned that Islamic groups in Germany want to live under sharia law in Germany.

The Toxic World of Cults

US writer **SUSAN ALLEN PERNA** examines brainwashing organisations and spells out the dangers they pose to vulnerable people

Religion is like chemotherapy, it may solve one problem, but it can cause a million more – *John Bledsoe*

Religion has sparked many fiery controversial political debates. This is especially true when certain laws impact the way a person practices his or her religion. In the US religious freedom can be defined as “the right to practice any religion you choose, or to live without any religion at all”. In addition, it requires that a wall of separation be maintained between Church and State. The constitution guarantees that every person is entitled to their own beliefs, as long as they do not harm others, but religious zealots have taken freedom of religion to extremes by spreading their brainwashing dogma far beyond their churches.

Our European ancestors fled England and came to America to escape from religious persecution – but here we are 400 years later facing the same dilemma as they did. Fundamentalists spend their time trying to convert anyone who will submit to their propaganda. Prime targets are school children. Christians have found their way into the public school system, using creationism as a gateway. By perpetuating their lies in this manner they are corrupting the minds of future generations. The Bible belongs in churches, not in public schools. That is why the law of separation of Church and State was put into place. It is obvious that the creationists are not looking out for the welfare or concern of the children but to serve their own pathological needs. Creationism is basically a cult – just one of many.

What is a cult? Cults have been around for at least two millennia. In our modern world the word “cult” has become largely overused and often distorted. A cult, by modern standards, is any group that incorporates mind control to deceive, influence and rule its followers. Although most people think of cults as being religious, they can also be found in political, athletic, philosophical, racial or psychotherapeutic arenas, but religious cults are the most danger-

ous due to the influence of their powerful, narcissistic leaders. The mind control, or brainwashing, exerted by cults often takes the form of at least several of the following elements:

- A totalitarian control over the lifestyle and time of its members
- A charismatic, self-appointed leader with complete authority. Cult members are taught not to question teachings, practices, or ideas of the leader.
- A focus on withholding truth from non-members – many cults teach their fol-

lowers are thought control and isolation. Thought Control involves controlling information by taking away a person’s ability to think and make decisions on their own. Cult leaders do this by limiting the amount of information that reaches their members by controlling what their members read, listen to on the radio, see on television, or receive any information that runs contrary to their doctrines.

Cult leaders keep their victims dependent on them by using extensive fear and guilt tactics by prohibiting communication with non-cult members, and threatening expulsion if the rules are violated. Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons, for example, are notorious for excommunicating wayward members.

Most people don’t realize how dangerous cults are, and are unaware of the powerful effect leaders can have on a person’s mind. Once cult members fall under a leader’s control many become delusional, at times even psychotic to the point they cause harm to themselves or to others. Devoted followers of cults become so dependent on their leaders that they will do anything to gain the leader’s approval, as was the case with the mass murderer and ex-cult leader Charles Manson, and charismatic leader Jim Jones who blindly lured thousands of his victims to their deaths.

Some of the most religious extremists willingly commit suicide, and even kill innocent people all in the name of their God. Never underestimate the potential danger of cults. They have the power to inflict an incredible amount of damage on a person’s life, or even corrupt a nation.

Most people have a great deal of difficulty recognizing cult members because they blend into society so well. Many also have a misconception that cult members are uneducated and mentally disturbed. On the contrary, the majority of cult followers are hardworking-educated members of society who fill our churches, schools, and neighborhood.

Equally, many are unaware of what to look for in a cultist because the majority



“..We frown on outside activities, we don’t want you getting any right ideas...”

Cartoon by Matt Bissett-Johnson, of Melbourne, Australia. It was originally created for the Australian Rationalist

lowers to be completely open and truthful within the group, while at the same time they are encouraged to be secretive and evasive when questioned by people outside of the group. This is another form of mind control – instilling guilt in members if they hold anything back within the group.

Cult leaders commonly use psychological weapons such as fear tactics and guilt to control their victims. Other tools they use

of them look the same as you and I, but if you examine them closely, concealed underneath their facade you will find psychopathology working at its best.

Listed below are the most common cult characteristics – interestingly the list was taken from a site with an anti-Alcoholics Anonymous agenda.

- The guru is always right
- No exit
- No graduates
- Cult-speak
- Group-think
- Personal attacks on critics
- Denigration of competing sects, cults, religions ...
- Indoctrination of members
- Instant community
- Instant intimacy
- Instant friendship
- Surrender to the cult and its ways
- Cloning – You must redefine yourself and your life in cult terms
- Confusion, contradictions, hypocrisy, and out-right lies
- Personal testimonies of earlier converts
- The creation of a sense of powerlessness, covert fear, guilt, and dependency upon the group
- Black-and-white thinking
- Circular reasoning
- Thought-stopping language and thought-terminating clichés and slogans
- Disturbed leaders and mentally ill followers
- Mentoring /sponsoring
- Intrusiveness
- Different levels of truth
- Appeals to “holy” or “wise” authorities
- Insistence the cult is “the only way”
- The cult and its members are special

One of the most common reasons why people are attracted to cults is because of the sense of belonging and false sense of security they provide. Many of the victims of cults come from broken homes and struggle with self-esteem issues. To compensate for the love that they never received growing up, victims try to fulfill that need for approval via the church or organization where the leader and its members make them feel loved and part of a surrogate family. This makes the cult leaders substitute father/mother figures, which in turn reinforces the leaders’ narcissism.

Never underestimate the damaging effects a cult can have on one’s life. Victims of cults suffer long lasting adverse effects including low self-esteem, trust issues, damaged relationships, and impaired judgment due to years of brainwashing. It is very difficult; almost impossible for most to leave a cult; and the longer a victim remains involved in a cult, the harder it is for them

to break free. When a person does finally decide to leave a cult he or she has to learn how to think for him or herself again which involves de-programming to help the victim function in life on a healthy level again without a cult. It is important that the victim has a strong support system, including trusted friends and family to make sure he or she does not fall back into a cult. It can take years for a former cult member to readjust to life on the outside.

Some people never completely return to their pre-cult level of functioning. But in most cases, counseling and support groups can benefit the victim. Leaving a cult is not an easy process, but if one desires freedom and peace of mind then it is essential to break free from the cult world. If you know of someone who needs help breaking from a cult there are many organizations that offer support and information that may assist you in recovery.

In the UK, the main source of help is the Cult Information Center (CIC). CIC is an educational charity providing advice and information for victims of cults, their families and friends, researchers and the media. CIC was founded in 1987 and became a registered Charity (No 1012914) in 1992. It was the first educational organization focusing critical concern on the harmful methods of the cults to be granted charitable status in Britain.

CIC is concerned about the use of deceptive and manipulative methods used by cults to recruit and indoctrinate unsuspecting members of society. It believes that these cult methods present a threat to the well being of the individual and the family.

Consequently CIC sees the need for gathering and disseminating accurate information on cultism and aims to meet that need.

The CIC website is <http://www.cultinformation.org.uk/home.html>

Contact can also be made via BCM Cults, London WCIN 3XX. Tel: 0870 777 3800. Fax: 01689 830 860.

The main contact is Ian Haworth.

You will find numbers, websites, and the phone numbers of other organisations at this link: <http://www.box.net/shared/nyoykax2frtxsgy6asra>

Susan Allen Perna is a freelance writer who lives in Maine. She is married to a neuropsychologist who has written several research articles for scientific journals. She knows how dangerous cults can be as she grew up in the “born-again” movement. Her family exposed her to the brainwashing techniques of the cult, and that experience, she says “warped my mind”.



Cults have killed thousands

HERE is a list of the most dangerous cults the world has ever seen:

• **Jim Jones’s People’s Temple in Jonestown, Guyana:** On November 18, 1978, more than 900 people died in the largest mass murder/suicide in American history. Most of the deaths occurred in a jungle encampment in Guyana, South America, where members of a group called the Peoples’ Temple, led by James Warren “Jim” Jones, lived in a utopian community and agricultural project known as Jonestown.

Most perished after drinking a cocktail of fruit punch spiked with cyanide and tranquillisers, although some may have been injected; two followers died of gunshot wounds. Earlier that day a few other members of the group had assassinated a US congressman, along with three members of the media and a departing Jonestown resident. And in Guyana’s capital city of Georgetown, yet another member of the group killed her three children and then herself after receiving word of the deaths in Jonestown. In all, 918 Americans died that day.

Oddly, while Jones banned sex among Temple members outside of marriage, he

himself enthusiastically indulged in sexual relations with both male and female Temple members. Jones, however, claimed that he detested engaging in gay sex and did so only for the male temple adherents’ own good, purportedly to connect them symbolically with him.

Yet on December 13, 1973, Jones was arrested and charged with soliciting a man for sex in MacArthur Park in Los Angeles. The incident took place at a movie theatre known for homosexual activity. The man he propositioned was an undercover Los Angeles Police Department vice officer.

• **The Branch Davidians** originated from a schism in 1955 from the Davidian Seventh Day Adventists, themselves former members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who were disfellowshipped during the 1930s.

They are best known for the 1993 siege of their centre near Waco, Texas, by the US Treasury Department’s Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) and the FBI, which resulted in the deaths of 82 of the church’s members, including head figure

(Continued on p10)

David Koresh. On February 28, 1993, ATF conducted a raid on Mount Carmel, a property of the Davidians. The raid resulted in the deaths of six Davidians and four ATF agents after a gun fight broke out.

- **Heaven's Gate** was a dangerous, doomsday cult centred in California, and headed by Marshall Herff Applewhite, Jr, also known as "Do". Twenty-one women and 18 males followers of "Do" voluntarily committed suicide in three groups on three successive days starting on March 23, 1997. Most were in their 40s; the rest ranged from 26 to 72. Two months later, two more members committed suicide.

Thirty-eight of the cultists, plus Applewhite, were found dead in a rented mansion in the San Diego community of Rancho Santa Fe, California, on March 26, 1997. The mass death of the Heaven's Gate group is said to be one of the most widely-known examples of cult suicide. In preparing to kill themselves, members of the group drank citrus juices to ritually cleanse their bodies of impurities. The suicide was accomplished by ingesting phenobarbital mixed with vodka, along with plastic bags secured around their heads to induce asphyxiation.

- **The Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God** was a breakaway group from the Roman Catho-

Dangerous cults

lic Church that formed in Uganda in the late 1980s. As the name implies, the cult laid strong emphasis on the Ten Commandments. This meant that they even discouraged talking. They also believed that their strict adherence to the Ten Commandments would be advantageous after the Apocalypse.

In March of 2000, around 300 followers died in a fire in what is considered a cult suicide. Investigations conducted after the fire discovered mass graves, raising the death toll to over 1,000. This may mean it was larger than the Jonestown murder/suicide in 1978, but some speculate the death toll was around 800. There are also allegations that the event was more of a mass murder by the leadership.

- **Aum Shinrikyo** is a Japanese religious group founded by Shoko Asahara. The group gained international notoriety in 1995 when it carried out a Sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subways. On the morning of March 20, 1995, Aum members released sarin in a coordinated attack on five trains in the Tokyo subway system, killing 12 commuters, seriously injuring 54 and affecting 980 more. Some estimates claim as many as 5,000 people were injured in the sarin attack.

- **The Order of the Solar Temple**, also known as *Ordre du Temple Solaire* (OTS) in

French, and the International Chivalric Organization of the Solar Tradition (or simply as The Solar Temple) is a secret society based upon the new-age myth of the continuing existence of the Knights Templar. OTS invented by Joseph Di Mambro and Luc Jouret in 1984 in Geneva as *l'Ordre International Chevaleresque de Tradition Solaire* (OICTS) and renamed *Ordre du Temple Solaire*.

In October 1994 Tony Dutoit's infant son, Emmanuel Dutoit, aged three months, was killed at the group's centre in Morin Heights, Quebec. The baby had been stabbed repeatedly with a wooden stake. It is thought that Di Mambro instigated the killing because he believed the baby was as the Anti-Christ. He was convinced that the Anti-Christ was born into the order to prevent him from achieving in his "spiritual" aims.

A few days later, Di Mambro and 12 followers performed a ritual Last Supper. Shortly after that, apparent mass suicides and murders took place at two villages in Switzerland, and at Morin Heights – 15 inner-circle members committed suicide with poison, 30 were killed by bullets or smothering, and eight others were killed in other ways.

The buildings were then set on fire by timer devices, purportedly as one last symbol of the group's purification.

It is believed that The Solar Temple group continues to exist, with 30 surviving members in Quebec and 140 to 500 members remaining worldwide.

- **The Church of Bible Understanding** (formerly known as the Forever Family) is a destructive cult started in 1971 by former atheist and vacuum repairman Stewart Traill in Allentown, Pennsylvania. The cult targeted teens as young as 13 by focusing on their weaknesses. Throughout the 1970s, the cult expanded to many other parts of the United States.

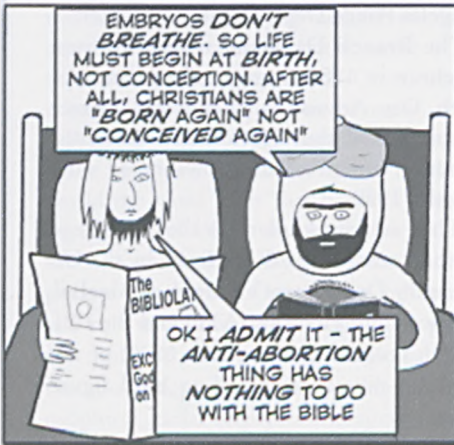
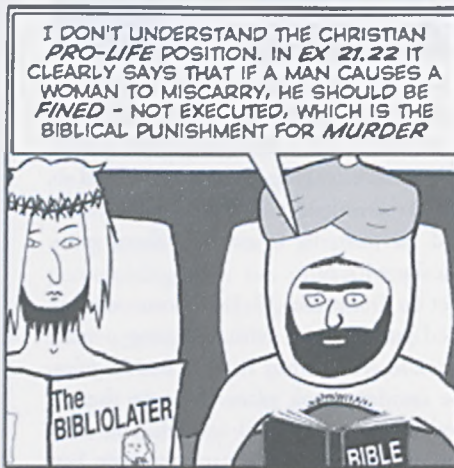
Traill, born in Quebec in 1936 is the son of a Presbyterian minister, who teaches that he is the reincarnation of Elijah, and that he knows the date of the return of Christ.

Members of the cult live in a commune and donate 90 percent of their income to the The Church of Bible Understanding. Traill amassed a fortune and owns four planes and a sumptuous mansion. According to former members, Traill controls every aspect of members' lives through harsh criticism, shame, and public humiliation.

Ron Burkes, a staff member at a residential treatment center for former cult members said this: "[Traill] has one of most effective means of shutting down critical thinking I've ever seen. Of the hundreds of people I've treated, COBU is definitely in the top five in terms of harm and psychological damage."

- Source: Listverse (<http://listverse.com/2007/09/15/top-10-cults/>)

Jesus & Mo



© JESUSANDMO.NET

The Rainbow Knight

PETER BRIETBART comes face-to-face with human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell

In *Famine, Affluence and Morality*, philosopher Peter Singer argues that it is our moral obligation to help those less fortunate than ourselves, and that to fail to do so is to be guilty of the good we do not do. Critics of this moral approach argue that this is far too demanding, and that if we spent our lives helping others we would be forced to forgo the sorts of things that make life worth living.

Human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell – best known for championing the rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual community – is living proof of the contrary. He is, as Johann Hari once wrote, “the human rights movement made flesh”. And this is no mere poetic hyperbole: Tatchell has, in his days, fought neo-Nazis in Moscow in defence of LGBT rights, attempted a citizen’s arrest on brutal Zimbabwean tyrant Robert Mugabe on two separate occasions (and has the scars to show for it), interrupted a sermon by the Archbishop of Canterbury to protest homophobia spewed from that pulpit, co-founded the direct action LGBT rights group OutRage! and launched the Equal Love Campaign, to name but a few of his achievements.

I met with him in Brighton just before he joined a public forum discussion on the impact of civil partnerships. He is tall, thin and tidy, with just a residual hint of Ozzie in his voice, and charmingly apologetic over his mild lateness.

We settle, and I ask him about how it all began. He was brought up in an extremely homophobic and verging-on-the-fundamentalist Christian household in Australia, he tells me. Coming out to his family in his teens, however, he met an accepting response. “To me it all felt totally natural and normal”, he says, “and that overrode all the religious prohibitions that I’d been brought up to believe in.”

He received his first experience of homophobic abuse up-close and personal whilst out walking with his partner at the time. The couple were yelled at by four bigots on the streets of Melbourne. But it wasn’t simply frightening experiences



Peter Tatchell runs into some opposition in Moscow

such as these that spurred Tatchell towards his human rights work. Aged just 15, he campaigned against the death penalty, convinced that an innocent man was being put to death.

I ask him about his experiences with the religious in relation to his human rights activities – and he doesn’t mince his words: “Organised religion is probably the single greatest threat to the human rights of women and gay people world-wide.” He continues, “Fundamentalists of all faiths threaten human freedom on many different levels. The Catholic Church is marginally less misogynistic and homophobic than Islamist extremists, but that’s about it.”

“Everywhere, from the British Parliament to the United Nations,” he insists, “the religious lobby threatens civil and human rights. They constantly demand privileged exemptions from equality laws and affirm the right to discriminate on religious grounds. There have been successive attempts at the United Nations to get statements and resolutions passed condemning violence and discrimination against lesbian, gay and transsexual people, but even there the Catholic Church, in alliance with the Islamic states, have opposed, and in some cases successfully vetoed, such

endeavors.” The political actions of these religions, he argues, are driven by deeply ingrained patriarchy and homophobia.

And when homophobia and misogyny are institutionalised, and when religions have such a strong grip on the political and moral complexion of a region, I ask, how can an organised resistance take root? Firstly, he says, by distinguishing between religious leaders and grassroots believers. The senior clerics are often those who are most hostile to women and gay rights. He cites that only 5 percent of British Catholics actually support the Vatican’s opposition to contraception, while only 11 percent support the Church’s condemnation of homosexuality.

But Christianity need not be the enemy, he explains. “The Old Testament describes homosexuality as an abomination and even says that gay people should be put to death, but then it could be argued that Jesus came to bring the New Testament, by which many of the barbarities in the Old Testament are said to be overturned. Leaving aside the particulars, the overriding essence of the Christian gospels is one of love and compassion. That doesn’t square with homophobia or any other form of prejudice or discrimination.”

The main explanation for homophobia, says Tatchell, is fear and ignorance – and those who least understand the diversities of human sexuality seem to be the most intolerant. Or, I comment, they might be like the virulently homophobic next-door neighbour in the 1999 film *American Beauty*, who turns out to be a self-loathing, closeted homosexual. And indeed, Tatchell cites work by Henry Adams, of the University of Georgia, whose 1996 study found that eight out of ten aggressively homophobic men were marginally dysfunctional sexually when watching straight pornography, and were very strongly aroused when watching gay pornography. Adams concluded that homophobia was a displaced form of homosexuality whereby a person deflects their own fears, insecurities and

(Continued on page 12)

Remembering Aikenhead and Hume

We are reminded by Edinburgh freethinker **PETER SUTHERLAND** that 2011 marked the 300th anniversary of the birth of David Hume. In honouring Hume earlier this year, Scottish Humanists also commemorated Thomas Aikenhead, who was executed in Scotland for blasphemy in 1697.

Earlier this year, Scottish Humanists commemorated the martyrdom of Thomas Aikenhead, the last person in the West to be put to death for blasphemy. The event was recreated outside the Scottish Parliament by professional actors, against a background of bagpipes and drums.

Members of the humanist group then walked up the Royal Mile to the statue of David Hume, where they celebrated the 300th anniversary of Hume's birth.

A Scottish philosopher and historian, Hume was born on May 7, 1711. He professed a belief in God. But when he applied the scientific method to determining how knowledge was acquired, he formulated the theory that all knowledge was subjective, thus pretty much undercutting even deism. In his *Natural History of Religion*, he wrote, "Examine the religious principles which have, in fact, prevailed in the world, and you will scarcely be persuaded that they are anything but sick men's dreams."

Hume was a friend of Adam Smith and James Boswell. It was Boswell who attended Hume as he lay dying in 1776 and, hoping to convert him at last, was frustrated when Hume said flatly that "the morality of every religion was bad" and that "when he heard a man was religious, he concluded that he was a rascal".

Said group member Peter Sutherland: "We freethinkers owe him a great debt for his insistence that every claim must be substantiated by evidence." Among others, popular Scottish author Christopher Brookmyre spoke in Hume's honour.

On January 8, 1697, Edinburgh University student Aikenhead was hanged after he was found guilty of blasphemy. The student was born in March 1676 and baptised on the 28th.

In 1693, aged 17, he was a medical student at Edinburgh University. According to on-line *Freethought Almanac*, "the University library may have been his undoing, because it is clear that Thomas read books by Descartes, Spinoza, Thomas Hobbes and other freethinkers, such as the pantheist Michael Servetus (executed for his opinions in 1553) and Irish rationalist John Toland, whose

1696 book, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, was burned by the hangman."

Aikenhead was 20 when he was arrested. His "crime," according to the Lord Advocate of the Crown, was "irreverence toward the sacred state religion of England and its many sacred elements".

The student had observed that "theology was a rhapsody of ill-invented nonsense" and he called the Old Testament "Ezra's fables". He also dubbed the New Testament "the history of the imposter Christ"; and said that "the Holy Scriptures were stuffed with such madness, nonsense, and contradictions, that he admired the stupidity of the world in being so long deluded by them". Furthermore "he rejected the mystery of the Trinity as unworthy of refutation".

"There is no indication that the injured party – God – appeared to claim injury. The clergy wanted him dead. The law allowed the punishment. God was silent," says the *Freethought Almanac*.

The accounts of his trial say that Aikenhead had no counsel and the only witnesses were those appearing against him, including classmates that had heard his drunken blasphemies while partying with him.

The Lord Advocate, impelled by the clergy, "called for blood" and Thomas was ordered hanged. As described by historian Thomas Babington Macaulay, "the preachers who were the poor boy's murderers crowded round him at the gallows, and ... insulted heaven with prayers more blasphemous than anything he had uttered".

A book entitled *The blasphemies of Thomas Aikenhead: boundaries of belief on the eve of the enlightenment*, written by Michael F Graham, was published by Edinburgh University Press in 2008.

The book brings together many of the critical themes in Scottish and British history in an era of transition from the revolutionary upheavals of the highly confessionalised 17th century to the more open civil society which came to characterise the Enlightenment.

Aikenhead's views, which questioned the origins of scripture, the historical aspects of Moses and Jesus, and the assumed superiority of Christianity over other doctrines,

would later appear in the mainstream of Enlightenment discourse. But in 1696-7 they were toxic.

The book's publishers say Graham's micro-history, the first of its kind, places his story "firmly in the social and political context of Edinburgh and Scotland in the 1690s while at the same time identifying the influences on his thinking, the legal issues raised by his trial and the ways it was viewed by contemporaries in Scotland and England".

The Aikenhead case illuminates a number of themes in late 17th-century history. These include the influence of books and reading; the growth of higher education; the nature of "public opinion" in Britain more generally, as the case was covered in newspapers published in London; the ways legislation was drafted and used; and the fissures in the religious politics of Britain after the "Glorious Revolution".

Peter Tatchell

(Continued from page 11)

self-loathing in the form of homophobic hatred. In short, then, Freud was right.

I attempt to compliment on Tatchell on his life's work so far, but he's visibly uncomfortable with the praise. "I walk in the shadow," he says "of the heroes and heroines fighting for democracy and human rights in countries like Iran, Russia, Zimbabwe and Uganda. My efforts are quite small scale by comparison."

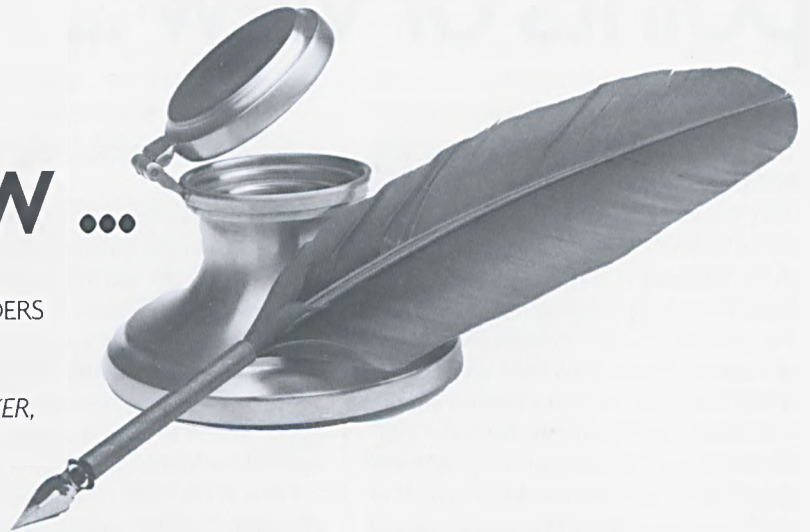
Many people feel appalled at human rights abuses but are not motivated into real action. How does he keep going? "My fundamental motivation is a love of people and a love of justice. I don't like to see other human beings suffering. I put myself in their position and feel that if I were being tortured or unjustly jailed I would want someone to help me.

"I therefore feel an obligation to help others who are suffering oppression and persecution. If we all worked for human rights and social justice, no matter how small our contribution, we would cumulatively and collectively overturn many of the injustices in the world today."

points of view ...

A DIG IN THE POST BAG – LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

ADDRESS LETTERS TO BARRY@FREETHINKER.CO.UK.
THE POSTAL ADDRESS IS POINTS OF VIEW, FREETHINKER,
PO BOX 234, BRIGHTON BN1 4XD.



MORE ON GAY AND LESBIAN ADOPTION

PRESUMABLY in a vain attempt to strengthen his case – such as it is – Diesel Balaam's invective rant (*Points of View*, September) grouping Alex Hill and me with David Rogers (whose diatribe was well disposed of by the editor) is not only offensive but, to say the least, economical with the truth.

And that trend continues as the rambling twaddle grinds on with "statistics" of one, or a few (in a population of tens of millions!) which are said to "prove" something. Well, if they do, it is only to the intellectually challenged. Proof is defined as evidence that convinces the mind and for the rest of us this stuff is not even close.

So, who is it that's irrational, prejudiced, bigoted and bizarre? It seems to me that Balaam has displayed the very same characteristics that he claims to see and vehemently despises in others. Physician, heal thyself". Luke 4:23 (King James Version)

My only issue here has been for mixed sex parentage, regardless of their status. Perhaps my letter, which immediately followed Balaam's, has given him a better understanding of the majority view. If not, rid yourself of that chip on your shoulder and get well soon, there's a good chap.

John Hunt
Camberley

IN Diesel Balaam's bitchy response to three letters about gay adoption (in two previous issues of the *Freethinker*) he accuses us of anti-gay prejudice. In the case of David Rogers, who wrote "same-sex marriages are perverse and unnatural", he has a point, but I see no such prejudice in John Hunt's and my letters, merely different opinions.

It appears that DB did not just read my letter but that he added some imaginary lines to it, for nowhere in it did I write or suggest or imply that parenting skills

depend on gender or sexual orientation, or that gay people are "hard-nosed self-obsessed monsters".

I merely emphasised the importance of considering the feelings of the adopted children. I don't deny that homosexual parents may be as good as heterosexual parents, and I have no objections to gay and lesbian parents (or carers) as long as the child is happy with it.

But I still think that most children prefer to have a good mother and a good father rather than two good parents/carers of the same sex, not because of their sexual orientation or parenting skills, but perhaps because they see that this is what most other children have and possibly for fear of being teased at school for having "two gay uncles" instead of a "normal family". Any such worries and wishes of children should be taken into consideration (once they are old enough to express an opinion).

For the record, Mr Balaam, I have advocated decriminalisation of homosexual acts since before the Sexual Offences Act 1967 was passed and well before the trendy lefties jumped on the Gay Lib bandwagon. I have subsequently supported various amendments to the act and generally those changes promoting more freedom and equality for all persons regardless of age or gender or sexual orientation or race or appearance.

For half a century I have argued with all sorts of reactionary types who claimed that homosexuality was sinful or sick or perverse or unnatural or decadent. So I do find your fabricated wild accusations rather insulting and believe that your aggressive defamatory style does more harm than good to a worthy cause and to the free-thinking movement in general.

Alex Hill
Austria

MUSLIM SCHOOLS AND ISLAMIC INTEGRATION

TO Iftikhar Ahmad's credit he not only reads the *Freethinker* but is prepared to write to it (*Points of View*, September).

He writes that Muslim schools give young people "an understanding of Islam's teaching of tolerance and respect."

I ask, in a spirit of open-mindedness and a wish to understand, how that claim can be reconciled with the following:

"Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal rigorously with them. Hell shall be their home: an evil fate." (Koran 9:73)

"Believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around you. Deal firmly with them." (Koran 9:123)

Iftikhar Ahmad wants hundreds of state primary and secondary schools to become Muslim academies. The result he says

would be "balanced citizens, more tolerant of others."

I cannot understand how this aim can be reconciled with the excerpts from the Koran I have quoted. I hope Mr Ahmad will help here and I look forward to hearing more from him.

Denis Watkins
Wales

I THINK that I will never read anything that explains more fully how the Islamic religion is, and always will be, incompatible with the Western world than the letter from Iftikhar Ahmad in the September edition.

He starts by saying that the article about menstruating Muslim girls in the August edition is misleading, but does not say why.

(Continued on p 14)

points of view ...

Instead he just adds more reasons why Muslim girls and women are marginalised simply because of a biological function. He goes on to insult half of the world's population by implying that they are unclean and impure because his religion tells him so.

He adds that Muslim children feel isolated and confused about who they are (I wonder why?) and this can make them criminals. By criminals does he mean that these children might start to question why they feel isolated and conclude it is Islam which of course, is a crime? Now we come to his real fears. Without the understanding of Islam they might become susceptible to teachings of fundamentalist Christians like during the Middle Ages (really?) or, or Jews. This means that without being sufficiently indoctrinated, they might realize there are other religions as ridiculous as their own. Irony meters explode when he says that fundamentalism has nothing to do with Islam.

Next up, he says there are hundreds of primary and secondary schools where Muslim pupils are in the majority (why do they feel isolated then?) and these schools should be turned into Muslim academies. So if you happen to be a non-Muslim in one of these schools, tough luck and don't worry if you feel isolated. The bit about Muslim schools turning out balanced and more tolerant citizens made me laugh out loud. This is exactly what Ahmad is afraid of.

Muslim children will continue to feel isolated for as long as people like Ifikhar Ahmad continue to indoctrinate and brainwash them and prevent them from integrating within the society in which they live.

David Anderson
Spain

MY response to Ifikhar Ahmad: What colour is the sky in your world?

William Harwood
Canada

FREETHINKER STRATEGY

A "RADICALLY changed religion that responds to people's needs" is suggested by John Linsie (September *Points of View*) as a strategic goal for our enduring *Freethinker*.

He cites Durkheim who, writing in 1912, described religion as functional, "a unified system ... relative to sacred things" underpinning social cohesion.

But too many advocated ideals – the "American way of life" for example – become a menace precisely when given the

righteous gloss of holiness that takes them beyond criticism.

It is, however, certainly worth considering if the focus of the *Freethinker* in exposing the current faults and follies of religion is sufficient (partly because this aspect is nowadays also provided by e-communications).

Many readers no doubt enjoy the knock-about polemics, but devotedly seeking opportunities to assail the godly may not be optimal for health and effectiveness.

There is the more considered and thoughtful task of eroding the fundamentals of religion – not just its malpractices.

And, with the evidence of contrasted societies, we have to construct an alternative understanding of social values that will indeed satisfy the needs so ill met by harmful ideologies.

Edwin Salter
King's Lynn

IN HIS missive to the *Freethinker* John Linsie appears – in not the most cogent of letters – to be calling for the publication to become a sort of ginger group which can "contribute to a radically changed religion that responds to peoples needs in the here and now. For what is needed is not the perpetuation of a religion of 2000 years ago but a religion that is fit for purpose within a post-industrial society".

Absolutely not!

In a situation where many so-called secularists seek "dialogue" and approval from various religious authorities and engage in the utmost circumlocution in order not to "offend" anybody the *FT* is a welcoming breath of fresh air.

I, for one, positively welcome the *Freethinker's* penchant for "attacking religion and exposing its absurdities".

No doubt Linsie considers this to be simplistic reductionism, but that is really his problem. The *FT's* strategy of not "respecting" religion and/or getting involved in its internal debates is what makes it a distinctive and ultimately valuable publication.

Dr Ted Hankin
Nottingham

JOHN Linsie says that magic is now in the hands of the "white coated psychiatrists and psychologists playing the part of doctors". I don't know how many of these people wear white coats but I am pretty sure it is not general.

If "playing the part of doctors" means falsely claiming to be medically qualified,

then psychiatrists normally are so qualified.

Psychologists are normally not, and would not claim to be. After 50 years in the latter profession, I can hardly be expected to agree that it is something "far worse" than religion. It seems to me that the attempt to understand human behaviour as objectively as we can manage, by the well-tried methods of science, offers considerable advantages over religion.

That aside, John Linsie raises important issues. Personally, I think there is still a great need for the *Freethinker* to show up the falsities of religion and the damage it all too often does. This may even contribute to religions changing for the better. Whether what is needed is "a religion that is fit for purpose within a post-industrial society" depends, perhaps, on what you mean by "religion". I don't myself think that it can ever be satisfactory to base our lives and morality on unsupported faith or belief in non-existent deities. For most religions, these are fundamental. Whether a rational religion is possible, or could even be called a religion, I do not know.

With regard to Stuart Campbell's letter saying that it is not true that Jesus was the founder of a religion, who saw himself as returning to a purer (etc) faith, I would say it is very difficult to be sure of anything about Jesus, as we effectively only have the unreliable Bible to go on.

But taking this more or less at face value, Jesus of course did not found a new religion called Christianity. However, he was taken, by Paul and subsequently by others, as the origin of that religion.

And it seems to me not unreasonable to regard his attitude to his own faith as, at least in some respects, something like "back to basics".

John Radford
London

ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

JUST as it is not anti-Semitic to say that where characters such as Adam, Abraham and Moses are presented as persons there is fable, it is not "Muslim-baiting", to use Colin Mills' phrase (*Points of View*, September) to say that the Koran – unless one is to take seriously the so-called *Satanic Verses* – hardly goes off-manifesto.

It is pretty consistent about predestination and only a little less so with what is to be done "if they will not convert". Whether or not belief in the alleged truth-claims

makes one a “fanatic”, it certainly puts one in the same category as Jehovah’s Witnesses and the like. With this difference: the killing of the unwilling is promoted in the Koran. Otherwise one has to understand such as Muqtada al-Sadr, Osama bin Laden, Sheikh Stumpy of Finsbury Park, not to mention the really big fellas of the recent past, like Djamel al-Din al-Afghani, to have been what is hardly conceivable in Islam – heretical.

Of course the devoted Muslim is fundamentalist. Whether he or she has the nerve to act on the fundamentals is something else. (Even more nerve needed publicly to deny them as such as the scholarly pseudonymous Ibn Warraq does.)

The policy of our rulers is to pretend that the dedicated person will have no incentive to be jihadist – that the problem will go away – but that is nothing to do with the truth-claims of the Koran or what is in the minds of the faithful.

One must be clear about this, alternatively imagine that being laid-back about it will inoculate people against shock when there are further atrocities. Certainly, the CIA, MI5 and the Russian and Chinese secret services know they cannot mess about.

Keith Bell
Wales

BURQA OR BUST

I READ with interest (as I always do) the *Freethinking Allowed* section of the September *Freethinker*, and I smiled at the level of hypocrisy that the burqa-clad women showed over their disgust at the topless sunbather.

It reminded me of the debates that I’ve been having for several years now about the improper use of the word “liberty” when the question over banning the burqa comes up.

Liberty doesn’t mean that we can do whatever we want, regardless of the people around us. To wrongly define it like that actually devalues the very principle that allows many different individuals to live within one society. There are many things that we find unacceptable in the public domain and therefore, occasionally, we all have to sacrifice a part of our liberty for the sake of a cohesive society; that is the responsibility inherent within liberty. Why should Muslims be exempt from that responsibility?

The proper debate we should be having is whether the burqa is harmful or offensive enough to join the list of things that we already find unacceptable. I would argue that it is, and if that means that a small percentage of Muslim women had to sacrifice a part of their liberty for the sake

of a cohesive society, then wouldn’t they be integrating with the rest of us?

Inspired by the editor’s experience, I suggest that we start a campaign called “Go Naked Britain”. We should urge every nudist and naturist in the country to exercise their liberty and “wear their skin with pride”.

I wonder what would happen if a gay couple decided to walk naked down Brick Lane in Tower Hamlets, London? How long would this twisted version of liberty last then?

Thank you, yet again, for another fascinating edition.

Richard Francis
London

Editor’s note: I don’t know how many readers know this, but Brighton annually hosts a naked bike ride, which I think is a charity event. A couple of years back the cyclists rode past a Muslim-owned provisions store in St James’s Street, outside of which an abomination of burqa-clad women had congregated.

When the cyclists appeared in all their glory, the Muslim menfolk roughly bundled the women into the store, and, with much finger-wagging and shouting, ordered them to stay put until the danger had passed. The men then came out to ogle the naked riders with a combination of lust and disapproval stamped on their bearded faces. It was hilarious.

RITUAL SLAUGHTER

THANK you so much for your editorial “Bravo Holland” (*Freethinker*, August).

The Jewish and Muslim custom of so-called ritual slaughter is an abomination, as it inflicts sickeningly cruel pain on helpless animals quite deliberately, quite unnecessarily since the invention of electro-stunning. Which is why civilized countries should not allow it.

Is Great Britain then so scared of its Muslims that it dare not follow the example of not only Holland, but also Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland and parts of Austria? For shame!

By the way, New Zealand, the world’s number one exporter of “halal” meat, has totally banned ritual slaughter without stunning, yet... the meat it exports to Muslim countries gets eaten!

Indeed, a number of highly respected spiritual leaders in Islam are in favour of stunning, eg the famous Al-Akhbar University in Cairo, Ayatollah Khamenei in Iran, the Veterinary Medicine Faculty of Istanbul as well as the Great Mufti (judge) of the Mosque of Lyon (France) and the Rector of the Mosque of Paris, Dalil Boubakeur, who has openly supported Brigitte Bardot in her

struggle against the abomination.

Ritual slaughter did not cause much criticism in the general public as long as only Jews were known to kill their animals thus, they and their victims being relatively few. Moreover, they killed for exclusively religious purposes and, unlike today’s Muslims in Europe, did not make a big business out of the sale of such meat to unbelievers. (“Halal” and “kosher” meat ought at least to be labelled clearly, so that opponents to ritual slaughter are not forced to help and finance the gory business unawares.)

Also, until the arrival in Europe of Muslims in great numbers, ritual killings (again, by Jews mainly) were carried out discreetly, whereas nowadays, in France for example, throat-slitting of animals goes on all over the place, either illegally in open fields or in the bathtubs of private homes, or authorised by spineless authorities.

The European laws on animal protection were hard-won and are an admirable step forward in the moral progress of Western societies. The abolition of such protection because of the archaic customs of certain immigrants is a shameful betrayal of important values.

Nelly Moia
Luxembourg

HOT CROSS BUNS

THE hot cross bun, once only eaten at Easter, has become a regular item offered all year round in supermarkets.

My son has just brought me a really tasty hot cross bun from my daughter-in-law with no cross on top.

“It’s a non-religious hot cross bun,” explained my son. I had never thought of that as an issue, but why must Jews, Muslims, the great mass of the non-church going public, rationalists and secularists have to put up with an article of food with a religious symbol on top?

Christians may also object to the special emblem of their faith being chewed-up by unbelievers.

Why not make this a campaign issue like the humanist bus ads? Get readers to write to the managers of their local stores, to local newspapers, etc to demand the removal of this religious symbol from their food?

A silly, trivial, if tongue-in-cheek thing to make a fuss over? Of course, but no sillier than airlines stopping employees from wearing little gold crosses round their necks, or a Muslim objecting that a neighbour has a china pig on her windowsill. This might be a newsworthy item to make a fuss over.

Donald E W Howells
Shropshire

the freethinker

EVENTS & CONTACTS

i information w website e email

Birmingham Humanists:

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

Brighton & Hove Humanist Society: i 01273 227549/461404. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton.

Wednesday October 5: *The Case for Secularism* – Speaker: Peter Vlachos.

w <http://homepage.nflworld.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 Pintel 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 0HP. Tel: 0207 328 4431.

w www.hampstead.humanist.org.uk

Harrow Humanist Society: Meets the second Wednesday of the month at 8pm (except Feb, July and August) at the HAVS Centre, 64 Pinner Road, Harrow. October 12: *Time to Test Animal Tests*. Speaker: Rita Donovan, of the Safer Medicines Campaign.

i Secretary on 0208 907-6124

w www.harrow.humanist.org.uk

e Mike Savage at mfsavagamba@hotmail.com

Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern

Ireland: i Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: 028 9267 7264 e brianmccinton@btinternet.com.

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

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

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

uk Media: media@humanism-scotland.org.uk. Education: education@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

Local Scottish Groups:

Aberdeen: 07010 704778, aberdeen@humanism-scotland.org.uk. **Dundee:** 07017 404778, dundee@humanism-scotland.org.uk

Edinburgh: 07010 704775, edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk **Glasgow:** 07010 704776, glasgow@humanism-scotland.org.uk

Highland: 07017 404779, highland@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

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

Isle of Man Freethinkers: i Jeff Garland, 01624 664796. Email: jeffgarland@wm.im. w www.iomfreethinkers.org

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

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

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

Isle of Wight Secular and Humanist Group: i David Broughton on 01983 755526 or e davidb67@clara.co.uk

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

e Jerseyhumanists@gmail.com. w <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Jersey-Humanists/>

Lancashire Secular Humanists: Meetings 7.30 on 3rd Wed of month at Great Eccleston Village Centre, 59 High St, The Square, Great Eccleston (Nr. Presfon) 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@ianzere.demon.co.uk

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

w www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk

Liverpool Humanist Group: i 07814 910 286.

w www.liverpoolhumanists.co.uk/

e lhghumanist@googlemail.com. Meetings on the second Wednesday of each month.

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

Marches Secularists: w www.MarchesSecularists.org e Secretary@MarchesSecularists.org

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

Norfolk Secular and Humanist Group: i Chris Copsey, 1 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 (except August) 8 pm at Ruth Winston House, 190 Green Lanes, Palmers Green, N13 5UE. Plus social events. Contact Sec: 01707 653667

e enquiries@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk

w www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk

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

Oxford Humanists: Chair: John White, 01865 891876. e jdwhite@talk21.com

Peterborough Humanists: i Edwin Salter Tel: 07818870215.

Scottish Humanists:

w www.ScottishHumanists.org.uk. Free membership. Charity SCO42124. Next meeting Sunday, December 4. Market Inn, Ayr. 2PM. All welcome

i 07935272723

Sheffield Humanist Society: i 0114 2309754. University Arms, 197 Brook Hill, Sheffield.

South East London Humanist Group (formerly Lewisham Humanist Group): i Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. The Goose, Rushey Green, Catford SE6.

w www.lewisham.humanist.org.uk

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

Listing & Event Deadlines

Please send your listings and events notices to barry@freethinker.co.uk or to PO Box 234, Brighton BN1 4ND. Notices must be received by the 15th of the month preceding publication.