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Free Expression rally warns of encroaching censorship

Reacting to increasingly militant attempts by fanatical Muslims to shut down all forms of criticism of Islam, One Law for All staged a rally in central London last month. The event attracted around 500 people who heard a number of high-profile speakers warn that attacks on free speech were reaching critical levels in the UK.

Among those who addressed the Rally for Free Expression opposite Parliament was Professor Richard Dawkins, who said that people should "stop being so damn respectful". Without freedom of speech, Dawkins added, society would be "in a scientific, technological, moral dark age."

Dawkins also slammed the decision by the organisers of a literary festival in Jaipur, India, for "kowtowing to a violent threat" by rescinding an invitation to the author Salman Rushdie, a decision based on a demand by "some local Islamic scholar". Dawkins joked about how, unlike Islamic scholars "A true 'scholar' studies more than one book".

Another speaker, Anne Marie Waters from the One Law for All group, which protests against sharia law in the United Kingdom, said that freedom of expression was "the greatest freedom we have" and that included "the freedom to offend".

As reported in last month's issue of the *Freethinker*, One Law for All had to cancel a sharia law meeting at Queen Mary College after threats of violence.

Accusations of Islamophobia against those who reposted a Jesus and Mo image were one of a number of incidents highlighted by speakers. Susan Zhuang from the University College London's Atheist, Secularist and Humanist society spoke of the reaction to the posting of the cartoon to their Facebook profile, saying "maybe we were naive but we never thought it would come to this."

The university's student union demanded that the group remove the cartoon, but the group declined and launched an Internet petition to defend freedom of expression.



Philosopher A C Grayling addresses the rally in London.

Photo: Andy Brown.

The blogger and activist Rhys Morgan, who had been previously threatened with libel for saying that a clinic operated in Texas by Stanislaw Burzynski was charging hundreds of thousands of dollars to cancer patients for unproven treatments, also spoke of being threatened by his sixth-form college to remove the Jesus and Mo cartoon from his Facebook page.

He said that the staff at his college "implied that I would be suspended or expelled", saying that the image was offensive to Muslims. He also said that he had received threats of violence including being told that his house would be burned down, and he was called a "God-hater".

Complaints by Islamists against what most of people would regard part of their normal freedom of speech are not new, but organisers of the rally

emphasised that they are seeing a disturbing trend in "the support received from universities and other bodies in the name of false tolerance, cultural sensitivity and respect". They also say that "the right to criticise religion ... is a fundamental right that is crucial to many, including Muslims".

The rally was also a part of a wider international Day of Action For Free Expression, with other events held in Melbourne, Brazil, Paris, Gambia, Germany, Warsaw (and elsewhere in Poland), Portugal, South Africa and the US.

In the UK, the Day of Action was endorsed by nearly 100 groups and individuals including Richard Dawkins, Equal Rights Now, the Bangladeshi writer, Taslima Nasrin – who campaigns to build support for secular humanism, freedom of thought, equality for women, and human rights – the National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies, the National Secular Society, Salman Rushdie, Southall Black Sisters, and Peter Tatchell.

The Richard Dawkins Foundation sponsored the protest, and the final speech of the rally was by Maryam Namazie of One Law for All and the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain.

The Geller Effect

BARRY DUKE KICKS HIMSELF FOR NOT ENTERING A TELEPATHY COMPETITION

But for the fact that I decided to treat Talk Radio Europe's recent "telepathy competition" with the contempt it deserved, I would today be in possession of a "million-year-old crystal with unique healing qualities".

Furthermore, it would have been sent directly to me by a man TRE insisted was the world's most famous "psychic" and "paranormalist", Yuri Geller, the Israeli-born spoon-bender who now lives in the UK. Geller has since ventured into the lucrative New Age self-help/personal growth industry, flogging "Mind-Power Kits" to idiots.

Just two days before he came on air to tell listeners of how, as a young child, he gained his supernatural powers "from a brightly-glowing visitor from outer space", I had sent TRE an exasperated email – my second in a year. In it I said: "Ever since moving to Spain in October, 2010, I have been a regular listener to TRE. One thing I have noted is the complete absence of sceptical comment on the station. You appear to give a

disproportionate amount of airtime to New Age nutters, 'spiritual' healers, fortune-tellers, horoscope-readers, conspiracy theorists, angelologists, UFO dingbats, and a variety of other fools and charlatans. But rationalists, atheists and humanists rarely, if ever, get a look in.

"As editor of the oldest atheist magazine in the world, the *Freethinker* which has been published without a break since 1881 (and whose founder was jailed for 12 months for blasphemy) I would be more than happy to redress the balance, and come on air periodically to discuss matters that would be of interest to the increasing number of people who hold no religious belief whatsoever."

To my surprise, I received a prompt reply, taking me up on my offer – but before I engaged on air a few days later with TRE's Steve Gilmour, the Geller interview was aired – and it left me fizzing with fury because the female interviewer, whose name now escapes me, had clearly done no digging whatsoever into Geller's background.

Had she done so, she would have challenged the charlatan's claim to have supernatural powers. After all, he himself dropped claims to such powers several years ago. In the November 2007 issue of the magazine *Magische Welt (Magic World)* Geller stated: "I'll no longer say that I have supernatural powers. I am an entertainer. I want to do a good show. My entire character has changed".

But back to that "magic" crystal. At the end of the interview, Geller "projected" a mental image of a drawing he had just done. He challenged listeners to use their "telepathic powers" to identify what it was, and to contact the station with their entries.

I concluded at once that Geller had drawn a house – but stupidly did not dignify the silly exercise by submitting an entry.

Had I done so I would not only have won the prized crystal, but would have had the satisfaction of letting TRE readers know that my identification of the image had *nothing whatsoever to do with telepathy*.

Rather, it was merely an educated guess, based on a snippet of information once provided by the man who did the most to expose Geller as a fraud: the American sceptic James Randi, whose research showed that 80 percent of people who are asked to draw a picture will produce a house.

By the way, no one who entered the contest hit on the right answer, so the prize went to someone who came closest by sug-

gesting a square shape. Go figure!

Incidentally, Randi and Geller were at daggers drawn for years. On numerous occasions Randi publicly exposed Geller's trickery, and Geller responded by trying unsuccessfully to sue him. This animosity was best expressed by Randi in 2009 after he had been diagnosed as having intestinal cancer. Believing his life would soon end, the 81-year-old atheist – and once one of America's most accomplished magicians – said he did not want his fans to bother with a museum of magic named after him, or to bury him in a fancy tomb. Instead, he said: "I want to be cremated, and I want my ashes blown in Uri Geller's eyes."

Randi, I was pleased to learn, has since been given a clean bill of health.

It should be pointed out that one of Randi's biggest problems with Geller was not so much the fact that he was a fraud, but that he once played a major role in duping some of the most influential figures in the US military into spending millions of taxpayers' dollars on useless "psychic warfare" research. They were convinced that "The Geller Effect" was real, and could be militarily exploited.

In 2004, Jon Ronson published *The Men Who Stare at Goats*, a book about the US Army's research of psychic theories and the possible military uses of the paranormal. Its title alluded to efforts to kill goats by staring at them. The book was subsequently made into a movie of the same name, starring George Clooney – and, not surprisingly played out as a comedy. In a November 7, 2009, Twitter post, Geller referred to Clooney, saying, "His latest film is about my work". Five days later, Geller added: "I believe I ignited the story when I told Jon Ronson about some of my adventures with a certain intelligence agency."

My interview with Gilmour amusingly came immediately after a spiritualist was on air, and he was still in the studio when I pointed out that the James Randi Educational Foundation (JREF) currently offers a prize of one million US dollars to eligible applicants who can demonstrate a supernatural ability under agreed-upon scientific testing criteria. No one has progressed past the preliminary test, which is set up with parameters agreed to by both Randi and the applicant.

The spookster lamely retorted that "no-one will ever get the prize" as the test was too "heavily stacked against applicants". I did not need to be psychic to see *that* answer coming.



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justplaincrazy

WARSI'S MAD VATICAN VISIT

A BRITISH delegation's St Valentine's Day visit to the Vatican last month has been slammed by the National Secular Society.

Baroness Warsi, the first female Muslim in the Cabinet, headed the delegation of senior British Government Ministers to the Vatican to have a 20-minute chat with Ratzinger. She wanted to assure him that religion would be returned to the centre of public life in the UK, just as he called for on his recent trip to this country.

Asked NSS President Terry Sanderson: "Why is the British Government courting the Holy See in this way? Why should the last absolute theocracy in Europe be invited to participate in the affairs of the British Government?"

MUSICAL DIRECTOR SACKED

ST GABRIEL Catholic Church in North Carolina has fired its music director, Steav Bates-Congdon, because he went to New York and married his same-sex partner of 23 years. Bates-Congdon was open about his sexuality while he worked for the church, and even resigned as artistic director of Charlotte's One Voice Chorus, a gay and lesbian vocal group, to placate the Church. It was only upon his marriage last October that church leaders sought to fire him for violating Catholic doctrine. Given the recent Supreme Court decision upholding the "ministerial exception" that gives religious organisations in the US free reign over hiring and firing, there are no protections that would give Bates-Congdon recourse in the matter.

WOMEN NEED NOT APPLY

A CHURCH in Coal Township, Pennsylvania is advertising for a pastor. In a no-nonsense ad, the church said applicants must be "the husband of one wife. We believe that divorce is biblically unacceptable." Applicants must also accept that "women are to have NO PART in the Teaching at church! A woman is to keep SILENT during the Teaching and Preaching. This DOES NOT forbid a woman from singing. Women can and should be preaching the Gospel through soul winning, and [at] any chance she can get. She is only forbidden from doing so during church!" and it cites 1Timothy 2:11 "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection." The unnamed church has a congregation of six.

'Carry on praying' is Eric Pickles' message to councils

WITHIN days of the National Secular Society winning its prayer case against Bideford Council, Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles gave local councils a major new power that will allow town halls to continue to hold prayers.

Pickles, in a statement issued on February 17, declared: "Local councils now have a power that should enable them to continue to include prayers as part of the formal business at council meetings, if they wish, and thereby maintain the common practice in council meetings across the country."

His move followed the previous week's High Court ruling against Bideford Town Council. The court's decision, said Pickles, was based on an interpretation of Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 "rather than on equality or human rights grounds".

He added: "This major new legal power is contained in the Coalition Government's Localism Act 2011, which creates a 'general power of competence' that will allow councils to legally

do anything an individual could do unless specifically prohibited by law. This should give councils that want to continue holding formal prayers the confidence and legal standing to do so."

Pickles fast-tracked a Parliamentary Commencement Order so all major local authorities in England could exercise the new power. He said his intervention "builds on the speech by the Prime Minister in Christ Church, Oxford, in December, where he asserted: 'We are a Christian country and we should not be afraid to say so'. It also follows the official Ministerial delegation to the Holy See this week led by Cabinet Minister, Baroness Warsi; in her speech, she criticised the intolerance of 'militant secularisation'."

Pickles added: "The High Court judgement has far wider significance than just the municipal agenda of Bideford Town Council. For too long, faith has been marginalised in public life, undermining the very foundations of the British nation."

He said that the Parliamentary order should "effectively overtake the ruling, and it also shows that greater localism can give local councils the strength and freedom to

act in their best interests. We will stand for freedom to worship, for Parliamentary sovereignty, and for long-standing British liberties".

Reacting to Pickles' move, Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director of the National Secular Society said: "A number of senior lawyers have expressed doubt whether the Localism Act will, as Mr Pickles hopes, make prayers lawful, and the Act was clearly not passed with that express intention. His powers to pass legislation are not, as he implies,

untrammelled. Council prayers increasingly look set to become a battle between the Government and the courts at ever-higher levels.

Immediately after Mr Justice Ouseley ruled that there was no "lawful" place for prayer during formal proceedings after an atheist parish councillor, Clive Bone, objected that the tradition excluded non-believers, Pickles said he was "chilled" by the ruling, that freedom to worship was a "fundamental and hard-fought British liberty" and that "We are a Christian coun-

try, with an established Church in England, governed by the Queen".

This drew a sharp response from *Freethinker* contributor James Merryweather, who immediately emailed a letter to Pickles, which read: "You insist that Britain is a Christian country, so what is to prevent others claiming with equal petulance that, for instance, we are a nation of biologists? Neither is true and - please note - we botanists do not claim special privilege under any circumstances; we just want the right to study and enjoy biology.

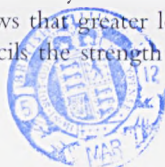
"Neither do we claim any special privilege as atheists (for an awful lot of biologists are atheists) or as atheist biologists, as happens to be what I am.

"Please take notice of what Clive Bone (Bideford) is saying when he fairly states: 'Religious freedom is an absolute right, and so is freedom from religion'.

By all means follow whatever religion you please, but don't for one moment think you have any right to impose that religion on others, particularly in places where democracy is a fundamental tenet, as in town council chambers. That is not fair."



Community Secretary Eric Pickles was 'chilled' by the High Court ruling



Atheism is gaining a promising foothold in Islamic Pakistan

IN A surprising development for a country as fundamentally Islamic as Pakistan, a group of atheists and agnostics has been set up to promote the separation of state and religion and spread awareness of atheism by providing an Internet-based forum for the country's growing number of non-believers.

The Pakistan Atheists and Agnostics (PAA) is affiliated to Atheist Alliance International (AAI), an international community that aims to educate its members and the world at large about issues related to secularism and atheism.

According to a recent report in *Pakistan Today* the site got more than 17,000 hits from people in 95 countries, including Saudi Arabia, in a mere 48 hours after its launch.

The paper said of group members: "They realise that they belong to a country where apostasy means inviting the risk of death – even if spared by government authorities and courts, a fanatic mob would certainly not. But they have still chosen to tread a perilous path in their attempt to reach out to other Pakistanis sharing similar beliefs and more importantly, to let the world know they exist."

The group first tried to make its presence known two years back by creating a Facebook page. On August 14 last year, they launched their website, www.e-paa.org, which proved an instant hit.

Hazrat Nakhuda, one of the founding members of the group, was quoted as saying: "When I became an atheist, I honestly thought there were no others like me in Pakistan. Through discussions on various social networking groups and forums, I found a few others like me. So we decided to form this group to find out how many more were out there." For obvious reasons, PAA members go by pseudonyms to protect their identity.

When the PAA first appeared on the Internet, the Indian media ran a piece about the group, which gave the impression that Pakistani youth were turning away from Islam due to the rising extremism and militancy. However, the PAA rebutted that report, saying that members are not solely former Muslims, but people who have left Christianity, Hinduism and other faiths.

Nakhuda, a former Muslim and young computer programmer from Lahore who personally believes that "religion does not make sense", added that "extremism is not



Pakistani Islamists shout slogans in support of the Blasphemy Act. PHOTO: AFP

the primary reason why people leave Islam. But looking at recent converts, I can say that it has become one of the reasons why people start questioning the religion of their forefathers. Most people are following the beliefs of their parents and have no reason to proclaim that what they have is the truth. Once one realises that, it is fairly simple."

He also says that the Internet and social media has played a major role in exposing Pakistanis to atheistic ideas. "We are now connected as never before. A boy in a small town outside Lahore can watch a lecture by Richard Dawkins, Carl Sagan and Christopher Hitchens. Ten years ago it wasn't that easy."

Another member, Maliha, thinks that apart from extremism, which is "repugnant to anyone who has not been brainwashed into accepting it," disillusionment is also one of the reasons people turn away from their faith. "We live in a troubled society. Often enough, we are taught that if only we turn to god, to religion, we will find answers and peace. When people, especially young ones, do that, and find that this is merely rhetoric, they feel rather disillusioned with religion, and that consequently pushes them away," she said, adding that "another reason is that we are living in a progressing society. The whole world is undergoing a slow change in which it is leaving behind old religions and turning towards fixing a world, the problems of which are solely ours, not to be solved by a divine hand.

Zaeem Kalm attributes the rise of atheism to the "injustice we see everywhere that leads us to believe that there cannot possibly be a just omnipotent being".

Last month, Nakhuda – interviewed by UK-based counter-extremism expert, Ghaffar Hussain, for *The Commentator* – pointed out that atheist groups and movements are a global trend. "PAA is a part of that, but it is different. The problem is that most of the groups for freethinkers are in secular countries. In my view the battle for reason, rationality and freethinking doesn't need to be fought in England, Holland or Canada. It is here, in countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, where we need to fight the battle for reason. It is here where the battle will be the most hard-hitting, it is here where reason needs to triumph, and it is here where we can't afford to lose."

He added that "almost every Muslim-majority country is under-developed economically or socially. I believe that when a religion is adopted by a state it stifles progress. Pakistanis are running 40,000 Madrasas but 30 percent of the children under the age of five are malnourished.

"We missed our millennium goals to eradicate polio because we couldn't run the refrigerators that housed the vaccine, but we spent a fortune on the 'Islamic bomb'."

Nakhuda concluded his interview by saying: "Right now most Pakistanis aren't even aware that there is an option to not believe in God; they don't question the existence of God and generally don't believe that atheists exist. What is more, according to a Gallup poll, 78 percent of Pakistanis believe that a person who leaves Islam should be killed. And finally, Pakistan has very strict blasphemy laws. If I get to change these three things in my lifetime, I would die a happy man."

Oklahomans to vote on a Bill that would criminalise birth control and abortion

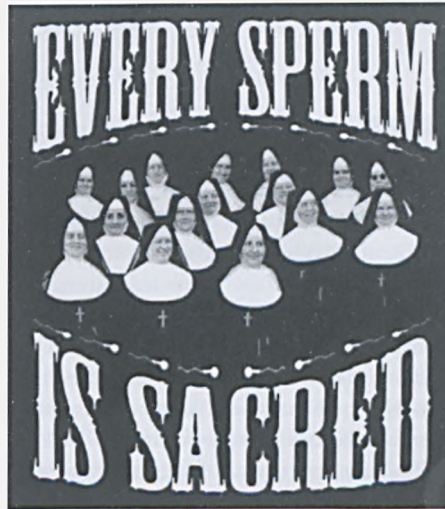
AN ATTEMPT by right-wing Christians in Oklahoma to bestow rights on fertilised human embryos left them with egg on their faces after Senator Constance Johnson filed a facetious amendment to a Bill that, if passed, will make things like birth control and abortion illegal in the state.

Last month she proposed that the following wording be added to the Bill: "Any action in which a man ejaculates or otherwise deposits semen anywhere but in a woman's vagina shall be interpreted and construed as an action against an unborn child."

Johnson filed the amendment in jest. According to the website *The Lost Ogle*, "apparently she just wanted to point out the absurdity of the Personhood movement and its sexist undertones".

The Bill, known as the Personhood Act says:

- The life of each human being begins at conception;
- Unborn children have protectable interests in life, health, and well-being; and
- The natural parents of unborn children have protectable interests in the life, health, and well-being of their unborn child.
- The laws of this state shall be interpreted and construed to acknowledge on behalf of the unborn child at every stage of development all the rights, privileges, and immunities available to other persons, citizens, and residents of this state.



• As used in this section, "unborn child" or "unborn children" shall include all unborn children or the offspring of human beings from the moment of conception until birth at every stage of biological development.

• Nothing in this section shall be interpreted as creating a cause of action against a woman for indirectly harming her unborn child by failing to properly care for herself or by failing to follow any particular program of prenatal care.

Last year, Mississippi voters rejected Initiative 26. Called the Personhood Amendment, it would have defined a person as "every human being from the moment of fertilization, cloning, or the functional equivalent

thereof".

The Oklahoma Bill is similar to the proposal that was rejected by Mississippi voters, but its author, Republican Mike Reynolds, says he's modified the language to specify that the measure does not apply to miscarriages or to cases where the pregnancy threatens the life of the mother.

Reynolds said: "I am absolutely for saving every unborn child. I think without question it would limit the number of abortions."

But while the measure would not apply to miscarriages or medical treatments to save the life of a mother, it would ban birth control methods or in vitro fertilization that "kills a person". The measure also states there would be no exceptions for pregnancies that occur as a result of rape or incest, a provision that Martha Skeeters, the head of the Oklahoma Coalition for Reproductive Justice, finds troubling.

"I think most people in Oklahoma would be horrified by the idea that a state legislator is trying to force women made pregnant by rape to carry their rapist's child," Skeeters said.

She added: "Women live their lives knowing what their own circumstances are, knowing what their own values are, and [they] are perfectly capable of making their own moral decisions. They don't need the government making those decisions for them."

Oklahomans are due to vote on the Bill in November.

Papal power sends 'possessed' pair flying

STARTLING claims about the power of the Pope are contained in a new book by the Vatican's "Chief Exorcist", Father Gabriele Amorth, 87.

In *The Last Exorcist - My Fight Against Satan*, Amorth claims to have witnessed two men - allegedly possessed by the Devil - "thrown three metres backwards" when they were exposed to the presence of Ratzinger in St Peter's Square in May 2009.

According to a report last month in the *Telegraph*, Amorth "gives a bizarre account" of how he and two assistants brought a pair of "possessed" Italian men to one of the Pope's weekly audiences, and claims the mere presence of the pontiff cured them of their demonic afflictions.

Amorth said his two female assistants escorted the two men into the square as the Pope was driven between crowds of faith-

ful in his white "Popemobile" jeep. As the Pope approached them, the men, identified only as Marco and Giovanni, began to act strangely: they trembled and their teeth chattered.

When one of the assistants asked Giovanni to control himself, he said "I am not Giovanni" in a voice that was not his own. As soon as the Pope stepped down from his "Popemobile" the two men flung themselves to the floor. "They banged their heads on the ground. The Swiss Guards watched them but did nothing. Giovanni and Marco started to wail at the same time, they were lying on the floor, howling. They were trembling, slobbering, working themselves into a frenzy.

"The Pope watched from a distance. He raised an arm and blessed the four of them. For the possessed it was like a furious jolt - a

blow to their whole bodies - to the extent that they were thrown three metres backwards.

Amorth added: "They stopped howling but they cried uncontrollably. It is no mystery that the Pope's acts and words can enrage Satan...that simply the presence of the Pope can soothe and in some way help the possessed in their fight against the one who possesses them."

Federico Lombardi, the Vatican's spokesman, disputed the account, saying Benedict was not aware of the men's afflictions and had not intended to carry out an exorcism.

Father Amorth is a controversial figure whose outspoken views have embarrassed the Vatican in the past.

In November he branded yoga as "evil", claiming that it leads to a worship of Hinduism and other Eastern "false" religions.

bits&bobs

GOOD NEWS FOR SECULARISTS

RESULTS of a poll carried out by Ipsos MORI for the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science (UK) show that UK Christians are overwhelmingly secular in their attitudes on a wide range of issues.

The study also reveals that Christianity has become a minority activity and even those who defined themselves in the Census as Christian have very little attachment to or desire to practice their claimed faith.

The research was carried out in the week after the 2011 Census and focused on the beliefs, attitudes and practices of UK adults who say they were recorded as Christian in the 2011 Census (or would have recorded themselves as Christian had they answered the question).

The poll contradicts claims that Britain is “a Christian country”.

MUSLIM HOMOPHOBES JAILED

THREE Muslims were jailed last month after being found guilty of stirring up hatred against homosexuals. Legal history was made when the three extremists became the first Britons to be convicted of inciting hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation after they handed out a leaflet calling for gay people to be executed.

Ihjaz Ali, Kabir Ahmed and Razwan Javed distributed the pamphlet, entitled *The Death Penalty?*, that showed an image of a mannequin hanging from a noose.

MORMONS APOLOGISE

THE Mormon Church last month apologised for posthumously baptising the parents of Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal. Asher and Rosa Rapp Wiesenthal were baptised in proxy ceremonies in the US states of Arizona and Utah in January.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints spokesman Michael Purdy said the Church’s leaders “sincerely regret” the actions of “an individual member”.

A BBC report said the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center denounced the news. “We are outraged that such insensitive actions continue in the Mormon temples,” said Rabbi Abraham Cooper, a spokesman at the centre.

The Mormon religion allows baptism after death, and believes the departed soul can then accept or reject the baptismal rites.

US Presidential campaign p

With Mormon Mitt Romney as Republican front-runner in the 2012 election, many Britons are convinced that the US is ready for a President who shares their faith. An expat Brit living in the US, decided to lend a helping hand by creating a

The image on this page is very important to Mormons, although most people will recognise it as an image from the ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead. Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, acquired the scrolls containing this image along with some mummies in 1835 from a travelling curiosity show.

Smith claimed that the scrolls were written by Abraham, the man that all monotheistic religions trace their lineage back to. Smith’s interpretation of the text has been proven factually wrong. The scrolls are nothing special – a shoddy copy of the Book of the Dead, dating from the Roman period in Egypt. Smith claimed that Abraham himself wrote them thousands of years earlier.

Joseph Smith said this image showed Pharaoh, Abraham, a prince, Pharaoh’s servant, and The prince’s slave. According to his interpretation, which he said was inspired by God, Abraham is lecturing the group on astronomy. It is interesting that Joseph Smith looked at this image and saw what he wanted himself to be – a powerful man wielding authority over others. Joseph Smith put himself forward as God’s chosen one, a holy warrior, and a political leader with libido to spare.

In reality, this image is something completely different. It’s a very ordinary copy of a funeral document that everyone was buried with in ancient Egypt. You don’t even need to read the findings of the numerous experts on ancient Egyptian writing who have agreed that Mormon scriptures are a fabrication. Even a very simple understanding of ancient Egyptian religion makes this image easy to interpret.

The first figure is the goddess Hathor. She’s easily identified by the cow horns and solar disk on top of her head. She’s also wearing a woman’s dress and wig. One of her many roles was to help welcome newcomers to the afterlife.

Second is Osiris, the god of the underworld. He is recognised by his mummy wrappings, crook and flail, and the double crown of upper and lower Egypt. He is seated on his throne to greet a recently deceased and mummified man to his realm.

Third is Ma’at, the goddess of justice. She wears a feather on her head representing truth. She helps to supervise the judgment



of whether or not a dead person is worthy to enter the afterlife, and is seen here escorting a virtuous man to his reward.

The lucky man shown here is named Hor. His name is written in the cartouche above his head, and this drawing was made for him as part of his funeral scrolls. In ancient Egypt, everyone needed their own custom set of funeral documents to ensure their proper passage.

The last figure is Anubis, the god of embalming. Normally Anubis is shown with his jackal-headed mask, but he removes this once his work is done to help escort the righteous to the presence of Osiris and Hathor. He is depicted with black skin to represent the rebirth that comes from the rich black earth surrounding the Nile.

This image is one of the most common scenes found in Egyptian funeral documents. The dead man, being found just and righteous, is being presented before Osiris for acceptance into the afterlife.

Once again, Joseph Smith claimed that this image shows Pharaoh, Abraham, a Prince, a servant, and a slave. He looked at this scene and saw a powerful man preaching to his male inferiors. Women didn’t even register in his view of things. In reality, this is a scene that includes both genders and depicts people coming together.

Smith’s interpretation of the image is

It propels Mormonism into the spotlight

In the 2012 presidential campaign, 56 percent of Mormons – according to a recent survey – say they are proud of their faith. But because so many Americans are utterly clueless about the religion, **STELLA QUINN**, an atheist, created a video about Mormonism for YouTube – and kindly gave us permission to reproduce her script.



It is so incorrect that any kid with a decent Egyptology picture book would be able to point out his mistakes. Can a man who was so far off the mark really be trusted as the greatest prophet who ever lived, the man who is second only to Jesus Christ as the Mormons claim?

The racism and sexism in Mormon doctrine, scripture, and rituals is extensive and well documented. In the temple, women make their oaths to their husbands, and the men make their promises to god on their behalf. There have never been women or people of colour in the LDS church's ruling group. The LDS church has never repudiated its past teachings regarding the Curse of Cain on people of African descent. Mormonism continues to claim that Native Americans were originally white-skinned Jewish immigrants who arrived from Jerusalem only 1500 years ago and were cursed with dark skin because they made God angry with them.

Believing this claim is the key to believing in the Book of Mormon, and Mormons continue to teach this skewed version of history despite overwhelming DNA, archaeological, and historic evidence showing that dark skin is perfectly natural and that Native Americans crossed from Siberia tens of thousands of years ago.

The Book of Mormon even teaches that

if dark-skinned people repent and believe in Mormonism, their skin will become white. With Mormons reaching unprecedented levels of power and acceptance in society, how long will these racist and sexist teachings go unchallenged under the pretence of respect for religious belief?

The things people believe are reflected in their actions, which can affect us all. If a candidate for President of the United States claims to cherish Mormon teachings, shouldn't American voters ask themselves how they feel about someone who believes that dark skin is an unnatural curse and that women are subordinate to men? Shouldn't it matter that Mormons have never repudiated their teachings that people of mixed race, such as the current US present, are

abominations? Shouldn't it matter that Native Americans, who have suffered enough under US policy, have had their true ethnic and cultural heritage deleted and rewritten by Mormons?

The idea that faith systems should be given unquestioning respect is false. A person's right to believe whatever they want should and will always be protected. But those beliefs, however well established, should always be open for examination. The modern world values facts, honesty, and ethics. Mormonism doesn't.

• Stella Quinn's video can be seen at <http://youtu.be/ggrTrrM6ImA> or simply Google Mormon scripture is racist and sexist.

Young Saudi journalist faces death for 'sacrilegious' comments about Islam

SAUDI Arabia's Information Minister, Abdul Aziz Khowja, reportedly wept last month after reading the "sacrilegious" writings of a young journalist, who was subsequently arrested in Malaysia. Hamza Kashgari, 23, fled from Saudi Arabia after his arrest was ordered by the Saudi King, Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz. Kashgari could now be executed for articles he wrote, and for remarks he posted on Twitter.

Khowja said: "When I read his articles, I wept and got very angry ... I have instructed all newspapers and magazines in the kingdom not to allow him to write anything and we will take legal measures against him."

A statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency revealed that "the Monarch issued orders to arrest and try Kashgari for his offences against the deity and the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) ... The order came after many scholars, dignitaries and citizens in the kingdom sent messages to the Monarch expressing indignation at Kashgari offences."

Kashgari fled the country as devout Muslims began baying for his blood, but he was seized as he arrived in Kuala Lumpur. The Saudi Arabic language daily *Al Youm* reported: "The Malaysian authorities are coordinating with Saudi Arabia to hand Kashgari over."

In separate reports, newspapers quoted a statement by the kingdom's Islamic Fatwa Committee calling for Kashgari to be punished "in line with Islamic law, which means he could be executed".

King Abdullah's order to arrest the writer, a columnist in the Saudi Arabic language daily *Al Bilad*, followed public furore in the kingdom over some of his articles, considered as abusive of Islam and the Prophet. One paper reported that the order came after many scholars, dignitaries and citizens in the kingdom sent messages to the Monarch expressing indignation at Kashgari's offences.

Other papers reported that thousands of readers and schools sent letters to the local media and posted online messages demanding Kashgari's prosecution.

After the arrest order, many Saudi newspapers carried a letter written by Kashgari on his Twitter page apologising for any offence, which he said was "inadvertent".

Doctor Who, humanist hero?

After nigh on 50 years opposing irrational, dogmatic and conformist foes, does Doctor Who offer us the atheistic hero we've always wanted? **PAUL F COCKBURN** poses the question

"TO the rational mind, nothing is inexplicable, only unexplained." Not necessarily the kind of philosophy you'd expect in a child-friendly family drama on a Saturday evening, but that's *Doctor Who* for you.

It's nearly 50 years since "the Doctor" first appeared on British television screens. He has become as iconic a character in British culture as Robin Hood, Sherlock Holmes and James Bond; yet, while those characters have necessarily been redefined over the years, *Doctor Who* is surely unique in incorporating the process of re-interpretation into its own DNA. It's now an accepted part of *Doctor Who* that its main character will physically change his appearance and overt characteristics every few years, whenever a different actor takes on the role.

The uncharitable might suggest that consistency, therefore, isn't likely to be one of the show's strongest points; arguably, they'd be right! In his time, the Doctor has brought down oppressive regimes (often within 24 hours, without even breaking into a sweat) yet he's also supported absolute monarchies against revolution. He's thwarted the machinations of despots, military leaders, free-market businessmen and self-described freedom fighters with equal vigour. Although religious belief is usually dismissed as primitive superstition, he has equally opposed the most perverse extrapolations of science. The Doctor is no one-trick pony, imposing the same solution on every situation.

What does remain true to this day, however, is how the Doctor remains a hero who prizes knowledge and individuality in thought and action, who abhors despots, conformity and the external imposition of control – whether it's on a planet, a people or a single mind. Such an innately liberal slant should hardly be surprising, given the similar cultural position of the institution

that makes it – the British Broadcasting Corporation.

From sun-worshipping cavemen in its first broadcast story (*100,000 BC* in 1963) to the "fish people" of Atlantis (*Enemy of the World*, 1967); from the murderous religious wars in 16th century France (*The Massacre of St Bartholomew's Eve*, 1966) to the Exxilons worshipping the sentient city built by their own space-travelling ances-

which the advanced technology was recognised for what it really was.

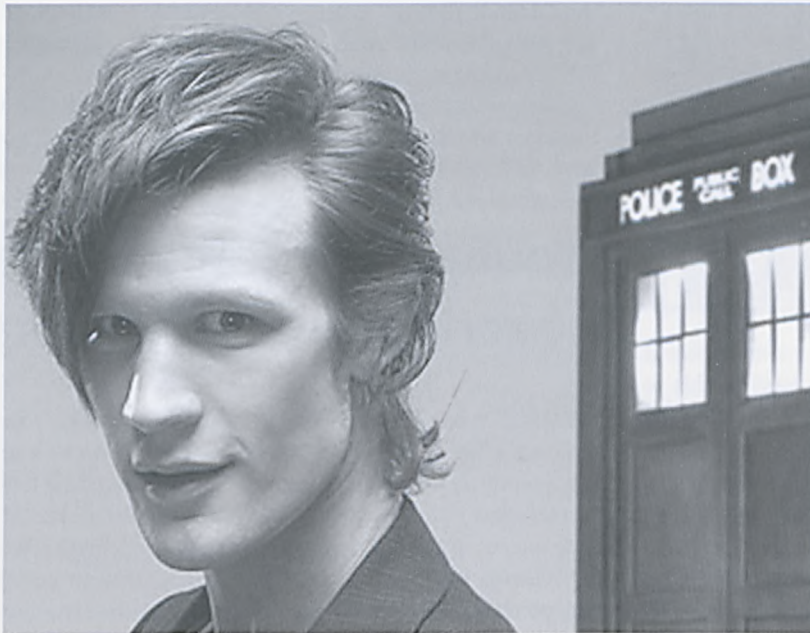
No wonder the writer and academic Una McCormack highlights what she describes as 20th century *Doctor Who*'s innate "technocratic humanism".

21st century *Doctor Who* has continued to cast religion in a poor light; from seemingly throwaway lines – a space station forbidding the use of "weapons, teleportation and religion" (*The End of the World*, 2005) – to more recent episodes in which future faiths have evolved into active military forces. Chief writer and self-described atheist Russell T Davies also wrote *Gridlock* (2007) in which religious beliefs expressed through communal hymn-singing, while bonding and comforting thousands of people trapped in an endless traffic jam, also helped ensure that nothing changed – it took the arrival of the questioning Doctor to trigger a resolution which saw everyone escape. Earlier, in *The Parting of the Ways* (2005), Davies even went as far as suggesting that the

only thing worse than a xenophobic Dalek is a xenophobic Dalek whose "dislike of the unlike" is founded not on political, cultural and genetic programming, but religious belief.

All of which suggests that the Doctor is the kind of hero atheists should admire. Some might be put off, however, by the fact that Davies and his successor as "show-runner", Steven Moffat, have often chosen to apply the iconography and narrative templates of religion and belief directly on to the Doctor himself; after all, when you think of it, what better way is there to describe a benevolent, messianic being who usually comes down to Earth to save us all?

This process has ranged from the simple twisting of images usually associated with Christianity – killer Christmas trees, or robot angels carrying the Doctor into the



Matt Smith is the 11th incarnation of 'the Doctor'

tors (*Death to the Daleks*, 1974), it's arguable that religious belief has never been shown in a favourable light in *Doctor Who*.

At best, it's presented as the misinterpretation of technology and science (for example, *Face of Evil*, 1977); at worst, faith is shown to be a potentially fatal weakness (*The Curse of Fenric*, 1989 and *The God Complex*, 2011) while dogma is frequently a source for brutal social oppression and control (*Planet of Fire*, 1984).

Not only that, but time and again, 20th century *Doctor Who* described the move from superstitious belief to rational science in positive terms of progress, growth and advancement. On those occasions when technologically superior aliens were misinterpreted by more "primitive" cultures as gods or demons, the Doctor usually inspired a conceptual breakthrough after

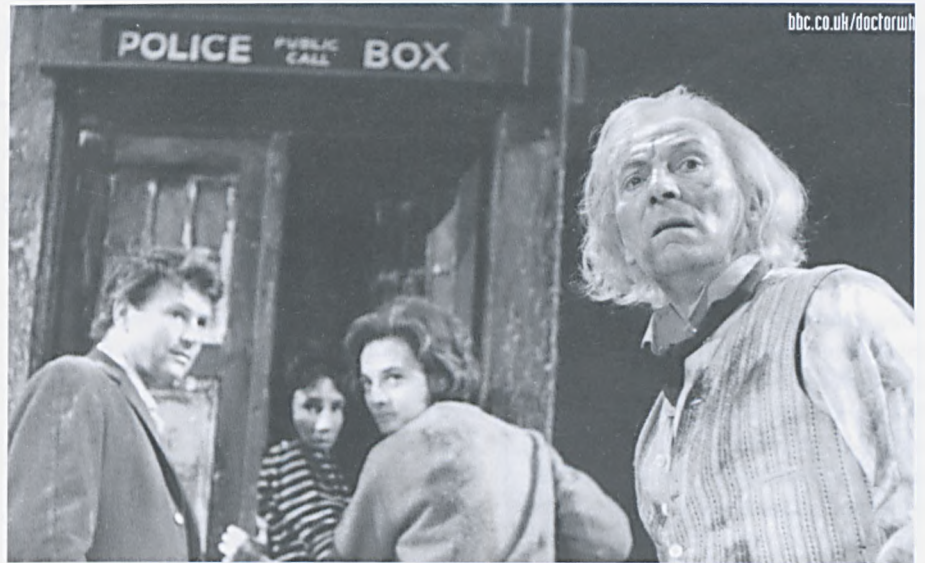
air (*The Christmas Invasion*, 2005 and *Voyage of the Damned*, 2007) – to the Doctor's overt effect on his companions' lives once they've left his side.

The quintessential *Doctor Who* companion was Sarah Jane Smith (played by Elisabeth Sladen) who in her own spin-off show, *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, explained how she was “left behind with his legacy ... to help and to protect, to make a stand and to never give up”. A disciple, or what?

Moffat's other current job is the BBC's critically acclaimed modern-day update of Sherlock Holmes. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's consulting detective was certainly a significant antecedent for the Doctor, but Moffat is quite clear on the fundamental narrative difference between the two characters; the Doctor is “like an angel who aspires to be human”, whereas Sherlock Holmes “is a human being who aspires to be a god”. This distinction is most obvious in *Doctor Who*'s “traditional” festive specials which – thanks to their larger, more diverse, Christmas Day audiences – Moffat believes need to be a “simpler ... more sentimental ... most iconic” version of the show in which the Doctor is “like an angel who comes to help”.

Groups such as Christian Voice have, on occasion, expressed offence at the messianic portrayal of the Doctor on such occasions; arguably, that's precisely why the Doctor should be seen as an atheist's hero. For modern *Doctor Who* isn't afraid to critique the idea of its own hero as source of ultimate authority and the dangers arising from his behaviour.

While the words may be placed in the mouths of the show's “villains”, that does



The first Doctor, William Hartnell, (right), and his original companions make it back to his space-time machine, the TARDIS.

not deny their power. For example, Margaret the Slitheen in *Boom Town* (2005): “From what I've seen, your funny little happy-go-lucky life leaves devastation in its wake; always moving on because you dare not look back. Playing with so many people's lives, you might as well be a god.”

The Doctor isn't a god, however; indeed, he wouldn't even describe himself as a good man, as he explained to one opponent: “Good men don't need rules. Today is not the day to find out why I have so many.” (*A Good Man Goes to War*, 2011.) *The Waters of Mars* (2009) was promoted as being one of the scariest *Doctor Who* stories ever, but arguably this wasn't down to the water-streaming aliens – it was when, at the story's conclusion, we saw the Doctor

beginning to believe he was the ultimate authority over history itself, the “Time Lord Victorious”. It took the noble sacrifice of one human to bring him back to his senses; to remind him (and us) of the dangers of absolute power and an abandonment of responsibility. A secular hero, or what?

• Paul F Cockburn, an Edinburgh-based freelance writer who specialises in arts and culture, disability issues and military resettlement, is one of several new contributors to the *Freethinker*. His recent articles and reviews have appeared in regional and national publications including *Able*, *Disability*, *The Herald*, *PinkPaper.com*, and *Scotland on Sunday*.

A COLLECTION of essays examining religion and *Doctor Who* is being planned by Dr James F McGrath, Associate Professor of Religion at Butler University, Indianapolis.

In January, Dr McGrath used his blog (www.patheos.com/blogs/exploring-ourmatrix/2012/01/cfp-doctor-who-and-religion.html) to call for abstracts on the subject, saying: “*Doctor Who* is a cultural phenomenon in both the UK and the United States, continuing to go from strength-to-strength as it approaches its 50th anniversary in 2013.

“Over the show's long history on television – and in various spin-off TV shows, audio adventures, novels and comic books – religion and religious themes have consistently been a subject of interest. In recent years the show has attracted everything from Church of England conferences dedicated to its use in preaching to guest appearances by

US academic calls for *Doctor Who* essays

Richard Dawkins.

“Abstracts of 300 words are therefore invited for a proposed edited collection examining religion and *Doctor Who*. The collection will consider the subject in its widest sense, examining portrayals of religion on the show, in spin-off media (including TV, audio, Internet, comic books and video games); fan cultures, and the use of *Doctor Who* in religious debates.

McGrath says the book will be aimed at popular-academic readership. Possible subjects include, but are not limited to:

- Religious or mythic themes (salvation, return, ritual etc) in the series.
- Critiques and deconstructions of religion in *Doctor Who*.
- The use of *Doctor Who* to chart British religious history from 1963 to the present.

- Death and the afterlife in *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood*.
- The Doctor as a Christ figure.
- Portrayals of non-Christian religion in the classic series or BBC revival.
- Fan response to “religious” episodes.
- The use of *Doctor Who* by religious organisations.
- Religion in audio adventures, comic books and video games.
- Canonicity and *Doctor Who* as a surrogate religion.
- *Doctor Who* as a tool for theological reflection.
- Using *Doctor Who* to teach Religious Studies.

Abstracts should be 300 words in length, and include a short biography of the author. Abstracts should be sent to DrWhoReligion@gmail.com. Deadline for receipt of abstracts: 20th April 2012.

– Barry Duke

Rising to the creationists' challenge (Pt 2)

The concluding part of **JAMES MERRYWEATHER'S** essay addresses the final ten questions posed by Creation Ministries International

Q5. *How did new biochemical pathways, which involve multiple enzymes working together in sequence, originate?*

A5. **The question is wrong.**

The CMI inquisitor goes on to ask: "How did lucky accidents create even one of the components, let alone 10 or 20 or 30+ at the same time, often in a necessary programmed sequence?" There is no need to engage in an argument about enzymes. This is one of a suite of ID objections to evolution to which the proper answer would again be that evolution science never suggested any such thing. It does, however, say that the accumulation of characters and change occurred by gradual stages, not suddenly, all at once.⁹ This question reflects the questioner's adherence to the Irreducible Complexity argument,¹⁰ which for every case the ID proponents invent, breaks down as soon as science is applied.¹¹

The next part of the argument is likely to be, "How can that all have happened in the 6,000 years since the creation of the universe?" but this questionnaire avoids reference to Bishop Ussher's quirky chronology of 1650, still tenaciously adhered to by CMI.

Q6. *Living things look like they were designed, so how do evolutionists know that they were not designed?*

A6. **The question is wrong.**

It is impossible to ignore the naughty quote mining associated with Question 6 because CMI has used passages from Richard Dawkins and Francis Crick to show how perplexed scientists are by the appearance (as in apparent) of design in nature. Neither scientist is at all perplexed or considers apparent design an intellectual stumbling block.

The questioner goes on to pose: "Why should science be restricted to *naturalistic* causes rather than *logical* causes?" Scientists deal with both sorts of cause. Is a god, who made the entire universe in six days, six thousand years ago, necessarily a logical cause? CMI would presumably claim yes.

Scientists, not invoking a god and mostly not acknowledging the existence of one (though a few do), would claim no, it is not logical at all.

Q7. *How did multi-cellular life originate?*

A7. **A good question, one often asked by scientists.**

There is a disingenuous motive embedded in this, and the next excellent question, to stump the respondent with a perfectly reasonable enquiry for which the answer will necessarily be conjectural. Anyone who asks this probably has not read what scientists have been considering for some time

pounced on the unwary. No worries. That is answerable too: "The Cambrian 'explosion' of biodiversity is a spurious concept. The diversification of multicellular organisms began long before the Cambrian, took place over many tens of millions of years and exemplifies the evolution of hard parts that markedly enhanced the probability of fossilisation."

Q8. *How did sex originate?*

A8. **Another good biological question.**

The origin of sex is a topic about which my knowledge is limited, though I have read about it and could soon get revising if I need to prepare for proper discussion. However, I

will save myself the trouble for the time being because again I expect this question has not been posed with the desire to find an answer. The intention will be to expose embarrassing uncertainty which can be followed up with proselytising. Confuse and convert. I would reply, "I'm not sure. Let's look it up. There's bound to be something about sex in Ridley's book."¹² Reading on:

"And how could mere physics and chemistry invent the complementary apparatuses needed at the same time (non-intelligent processes cannot plan for future coordination of male and female organs)?"

Does the questioner really think that "mere" is an ap-

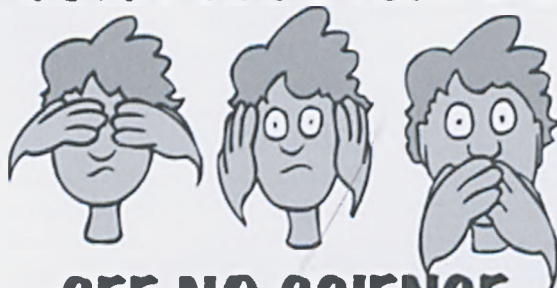
propriate adjective to describe physics and chemistry? OK, they may be considered relatively mere if set against the fabulous mathematics upon which the universe is founded, but they are still no less mere than biology which – it is evident from this questionnaire and the abundant heat evolved (as in definition #1) by creationist propaganda – so vigorously exercises CMI's core religious convictions.

Q9. *Why are the (expected) countless millions of transitional fossils missing?*

A9. **The question wrong.**

This question has been countered time and again, backed up by heaps of evidence from fossil sequences of ancestral amphibians, horses, whales, birds, the evolution of the mammalian jaw and inner ear and the

CREATIONISTS



**SEE NO SCIENCE
HEAR NO SCIENCE
SPEAK NO SCIENCE**

about clumping and symbiosis among single-celled organisms and implications about the origins of multicellularity obtained from algae, slime moulds, choanoflagellates and sponges, and speculations about the origins of the Ediacara and later fossil faunas.

To all that add a bang up-to-date idea published online in August 2011 at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.1001122>. Firmly oblige them to discuss the matter with reference to current scientific opinion. Ask if they've read about the controversial ideas of Margulis, introduce them to symbiogenesis and together explore its role in the origins of multicellular organisms.

One can sense the "Cambrian Explosion", surprisingly absent in this questionnaire, lurking behind Question 7, ready to be

ancestry of *Homo sapiens*, yet the questioners simply disregard all that and persist, "That may be so, but why are there no transitional fossils?"

And anyway, now we have a massive database of DNA sequences, the fossil record has become unnecessary for illustrating evolutionary relationships (though fossils retain their value as parallel evidence and for anatomical comparisons).

Let us explain again. Countless gazillions of fossils are indeed missing and there are as many gaps where transitions have occurred, but enough transitional fossils have been found to illustrate some really key transitions to our satisfaction. Fossils, though apparently abundant, are rare because a dead individual rarely gets fossilised. As palaeontologists hunt for fossils, more and more significant transitional ones are being found.

Good scientists do not expect hoped-for results, but they certainly predict what they might find when they have good reason to do so. It was a chancy business, but Ted Daeschler (Pennsylvania) and Neil Schubin (Chicago), using their existing palaeontological and geological evidence-supported experience, worked out that a certain rock stratum on Ellesmere Island in Arctic Canada *might* contain fossils of a creature that *might* illustrate the transition from fishes with characters seen in amphibians to amphibians with fish-like characteristics. For fun, they nicknamed their unknown a "fishbian". After several seasons of disappointing searching, they did find several examples of an eminently suitable candidate. *Tiktaalik roseae* is the archetypal transitional fossil, providing information that in numerous features links ancestral fishes with descendant amphibians. In common with all other transitional organisms, it is not the descendant of a known fish species and the ancestor of known amphibian in an exact sequence: 1–2–3. It represents a range of evolutionary 'experiments' that probably all wound up extinct, but one of its kin did eventually give rise to the line that led to amphibians as we know them today. Sorry it seems a bit complicated, but it's not (very) really.

In *The Greatest Show on Earth*,¹³ Dawkins goes to a lot of trouble to explain clearly the similarities of forensic crime investigation (which we all trust) and scientific deduction (of which creationists noisily spit out the bits they find distasteful). Dawkins' comparison is persuasive and dissenters gain no brownie points for sensible thinking.

Q10. How do "living fossils" remain unchanged over supposed hundreds of millions of years?

A10. The question is wrong.

Creationists witter on *ad nauseam* about how the coelacanth, wollemi pine, horse-tails and other curiosities are "living fossils",

unchanged since the year dot. They are not. Though their appearance may seem to have changed little if at all to the layperson, living versions are as up-to-date as you and me and are certainly not the same as what remains of their ancestors in fossil form. Turkish creationist Harun Yahya – why does he hide his identity behind a pseudonym and then tell everyone he really is Adnan Oktar? – has published three lavishly printed colour volumes showing how (he has decided) fossils and extant species are the same, unchanged over millions of years. It doesn't take much expertise to see that his fossils, though superficially resembling their modern equivalents, are not the same at all.

The first lobster-like crustacean evolved a long time ago and lobsters today look quite like them, but they are not the same. The squashed remains of the outsized Jurassic horsetail *Equisetites columnaris* at Hayburn Wyke in Yorkshire is a bit like an overgrown version of *Equisetum* ... I really can't be bothered to compare it with extant *E. giganteum/hyemale/fluviatile* in this ridiculous exercise. Ditto *Ginkgo huttoni* and *G. biloba*.

A fossil consists of the mineralised remains of the skeleton or plant cuticle and a few other bits if you're lucky. Sometimes it is no more than a bas-relief imprint. At best, Yahya's examples are impressions of remnant hard parts in rock, a mere fraction of the parts that define a species, and there is no way anyone can say whether or not his fossils and living creatures are the same. Critical examination of his pairs shows exactly the opposite: they are decidedly different.

CMI peddles Yahya's fake biology no more compellingly. When CMI audiences are told by CMI "experts", affecting a confident air of authority, that a living coelacanth is the same as a Devonian fossil coelacanth, they slavishly agree. Teacher goes on to assert that that "therefore" disproves evolution, and the audience absorbs that too, even though the conclusion was reached through blatantly bogus reasoning. Look at the pictures, people: they're different!

Revision: Q10 is not just wrong, it's *stupid*. **Q11. How did blind chemistry create mind/intelligence, meaning, altruism and morality? "If everything evolved, and we invented God, as per evolutionary teaching, what purpose or meaning is there to human life?"**

Q11. is two questions, so one at a time.

Q11a. How did blind chemistry create mind/intelligence, meaning, altruism and morality?

A11a. The question is devious.

Actually, we are chemistry, though "blind" is an odd adjective to describe its automatic processes. The "How" that opens the question can, however, be answered methodically in terms of chemistry, neuroscience, evolutionary and behavioural biology. However, this question actually has little to do

with the evolutionary creation of mind/intelligence, meaning and altruism. Morality is the key word here. How often have we been told that we humans are incapable of "morality" without carrot and stick religious coercion to conform to Bronze Age moral/legal directives in the Old Testament? Although reality belies the presumption, it is consistently alleged that all atheists must be, *per se*, immoral.

I can sense accusations rumbling in the background of this question that include reference to Hitler and Nazism, Stalin and Communism, Pol Pot and genocide, the Satanic religion of Atheism and, a monumentally idiotic connection in this context, the Columbine High School massacre. For instance:

"Natural Selection, Eugenics (Social Biology) and Social Darwinism, all products of the Darwinist theory of Evolution which has been the number one cause of all High School shootings through-out the United States and more recently Finland." – Anon, Facebook.

Apparently, because some people interpreted Darwin's conclusions to mean that eugenics was a good wheeze, then Darwin and his theory should be blamed ever after for the evil behaviour of tyrannical despots. Nuclear science gave us the atom bomb. Was it Marie Curie's fault that the allies nuked Japan? Such things are widely believed, even that one of the youthful perpetrators of the Columbine atrocity who wore a T-shirt proclaiming *Survival of the Fittest* was, "therefore", intellectually an evolutionist. Can reasoning get any sillier?

Q11b. If everything evolved, and we invented God, as per evolutionary teaching, what purpose or meaning is there to human life?

A11b. The question is wrong.

Biologists do not set out to tackle existential questions. Their interest is in how life on Earth functions. Anxious seekers of purpose/meaning in life who gain even a rudimentary understanding of natural processes soon discover that evolution has no direction or purpose and is completely unconcerned about anything. This makes some people very uneasy.

Q12. Why is evolutionary "just-so" storytelling tolerated? Evolutionists often use flexible story-telling to "explain" observations contrary to evolutionary theory.

A12. The question is made-up and wrong.

Only quack scientists would use flexible story-telling to "explain" observations contrary to (or in line with) evolutionary theory. Proper scientists, including those who study or employ evolutionary theory, are trained in and bound to the scientific method, which does not permit fanciful conclusions; only evidence and disciplined evidence-based speculation.

Q13. *Where are the scientific breakthroughs due to evolution? [W]hy do schools and universities teach evolution so dogmatically, stealing time from experimental biology that so benefits humankind?*

Q13. is two questions, so one at a time.

Q13a. *Where are the scientific breakthroughs due to evolution?*

A13a. The question is silly.

Q13a is very odd and is probably there in order to set up Question 13b that gets to the heart of what really gets creationists going (and serially trounced in the law courts). It is qualified by quotations from the *Boston Globe* and *Forbes Magazine*, publications to which we do not usually turn for scientific opinion. The second, by Dr Philip Skell, is presented as though he is a mainline “Evolutionist.” However, he was a signatory to the creationist Discovery Institute’s *A Scientific Dissent from Darwinism* (2001) which states that:

We are skeptical of claims for the ability of random mutation and natural selection to account for the complexity of life. Careful examination of the evidence for Darwinian theory should be encouraged.

Dr Skell is clearly not a passionate Darwinian! Question 13b (see below) leads straight from Skell’s opinion that: “It is our knowledge of how these organisms [unspecified in quote] actually operate, not speculations about how they may have arisen millions of years ago, that is essential to doctors, veterinarians, farmers ...” to CMI’s bizarre conclusion that “Evolution actually hinders medical discovery.” It is by understanding relevant aspects of evolution that we have been able to comprehend multiple drug resistance and take action to protect ourselves (so far) from its ravages.

Q13b. *[W]hy do schools and universities teach evolution so dogmatically, stealing time from experimental biology that so benefits humankind?*

A13b. Leading question, My Lord!

The required answer is embedded within the question, which clearly makes answering it without going “round the houses” impossible. Do “schools and universities teach evolution so dogmatically”? Does apportioning time to the teaching of evolution “steal time from experimental biology that so benefits humankind” to the detriment of that teaching? The CMI presumption is that evolution contributes no benefit to humankind, which is the point at which any discussion of this question could begin if we could be bothered. Next, is evolution dogma? Scientists would emphatically (but not dogmatically) disagree. The main questions cannot be answered until these basic presumptions have been verified or invalidated.

The term experimental biology is nested in this complicated question, a foretaste of

Question 14b in which it will fall within the creationist term operational science.

Q14. *Science involves experimenting to figure out how things work; how they operate. Why is evolution, a theory about history, taught as if it is the same as this operational science?*

A14. The question is made-up and very silly.

Unilaterally reclassifying evolution as history/non-science/religion is an idiotic red herring. CMI qualifies Question 14 with: “You cannot do experiments, or even observe what happened, in the past.” Biologist or crime detective methods are the same: We have evidence; what can we deduce from it? It works. Only when somebody invents a spurious dichotomy such as historical science versus operational science and then shoehorns evolution into the former, can this spurious question arise.

John Mackay (Creation Research, Australia) in conversation with Richard Dawkins impatiently opined, “You haven’t seen [evolution] and I haven’t seen it, so please stop calling it science.”

Stephen C Meyer (Discovery Institute) has his own version of Mackay’s mantra. He invented a distinction between what he has termed historical science and operational science. Creationist “scientists” who find evolution distasteful now consign evolution to historical biology (ie a non-experimental science), deeming it to be pseudo-science. The other proponents of Intelligent Design and creationism have also gleefully boarded this bandwagon.

Conversely, having never needed to consider such a preposterous dichotomy, proper scientists have failed to recognise the distinction, inadvertently allowing the opposition to crow loudly about Meyer’s devastating revolutionary idea that, apparently, fatally impairs evolution methodology. Creationists made it up out of prejudice and scientists, referring to a vast library of non-made-up evidence, confidently disagree. I do not foresee a change in this conflict of views, but science, as ever, is provisional and up for revision – if reality so dictates.

“Why is evolution ... taught as ... operational science?” See A15b below.

Q15. *Why is a fundamentally religious idea, a dogmatic belief system that fails to explain the evidence, taught in science classes?*

Q15. raises two separate points, so one

at a time.

Q15a. *Why is a fundamentally religious idea, a dogmatic belief system that fails to explain the evidence ...*

A15a. Evolution is not a religion, is never reliant on beliefs, avoids dogmatism and does its utmost to explain a vast array of evidence. This is another leading question.

It is standard creationist practice to equate evolution with religion (almost to the point of denigrating religiosity, the accusers’ core value) and claiming that it requires *faith* in order to believe in it. How should we reply? We can resort to the *Oxford English Dictionary* for a definition of religion, but remember, creationists have already decided that evolution is not *experimental/operational biology* but *historical pseudo-science*, for which faith has to be a requirement. At that point they are in danger of disparaging their own acts of faith.

Q15b. *Why is evolution [a fundamentally religious idea, a dogmatic belief system that fails to explain the evidence], taught in science classes?*

A15b. Because evolution is good science.

Evolution is taught in science classes because evolution is biology and biology is science. To discover why, first read Jerry Coyne’s book *Why Evolution is True*.¹⁴ Then read Richards Dawkins’ *The Greatest Show on Earth* and then compare it with Jonathan Sarfati’s *The Greatest Hoax on Earth?*¹⁵ Of that pair, you should be able to determine quite easily which contains sense and which, in the light of real science, is nonsense. Still wondering? Carl Zimmer’s *The Tangled Bank* contains all you need to know about evolution as understood by scientists and it’s beautifully presented too, but if you really need convincing, then I recommend Dr Farid Abou-Rahme’s *and God said ... Science confirms the authority of the Bible*¹⁶ or Tom deRosa’s *Evidence for Creation*.¹⁷ If you find yourself persuaded by that pair, rather than overcome with paroxysms of mirth, then you had better join CMI.

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Quotable quote

EVOLUTION should be one of the first things you learn at school... and what do they [children] get instead? Sacred hearts and incense. Shallow, empty religion.

– Prof Richard Dawkins, in an interview with the *Sunday Telegraph*, September 26, 1999

Hinduism: re-issued 1988 book is a coherent and iconoclastic critique

DAVID SIMMONDS reviews the late V R Narla's *The Truth About the Gita: a Closer Look at Hindu Scripture*. It was first published in 1988 – three years after the author's death – and re-issued by Prometheus Books in 2010

PEOPLE who base their ethics on ancient texts of dubious provenance, will find their ethical systems straight-jacketed by the mores and superstitions of the past. Once a mistake has been elevated to the status of 'word of God' there is no room to admit the error, remedy it, and move on.

– Dr Stephen Moreton

The Truth About the Gita [Bhagavad Gita] graphically brings to life the force of this quotation. Narla, who died in 1985, was a prominent rationalist and humanist in India, and his book is one of the few coherent and iconoclastic critiques of Hinduism and its holy texts I have come across. The *BG* is possibly the most revered of the Hindu texts, and its fame is worldwide.

The *BG* consists of a dialogue between Krishna, an all-powerful deity in human form, and Arjuna, a soldier, just before a big battle is about to begin. Arjuna is refusing to fight because he does not want to kill the enemy, many of whom are his kin. Krishna persuades Arjuna that, as a member of the warrior caste, he has a duty to fight.

What Narla brings out clearly is that the Hindu religion has a potential for fundamentalist bigotry and violence as great as any religion, thanks to their scriptures.

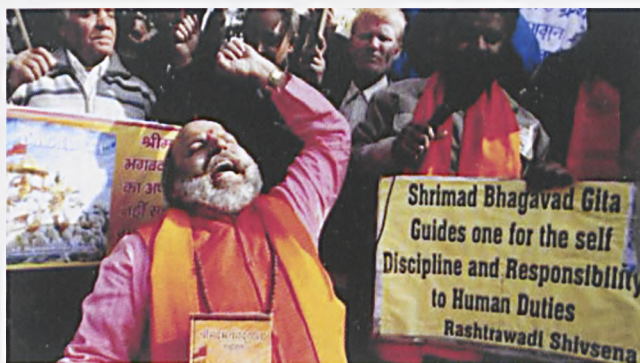
Narla is scathing, for example, about the *BG*'s support for the infamous caste system in India. (A system which, according to Nick Cohen, writing in the *Observer* on June 26, 2011, is also flourishing in Britain, and not only amongst Hindus, but in other communities originating in India, including Sikhs, Muslims and even Christians.)

Even though the system has been outlawed in India, the practice is still widespread, and vast numbers of Dalits, or "untouchables", still suffer humiliation and oppression. The very Sanskrit word *Dalit* means "ground", "suppressed", "crushed", or "broken to pieces".

In the book's foreword a convincing case is made that the *BG* was written and built up mainly to counter the growing popularity of Buddhism in India in the years 400 – 200

BCE. Buddhism had thrown out the caste system and its message of equality was gaining ground, and considered a grave threat to Hindu doctrine. This led to Buddhists being "so ruthlessly persecuted ... that all were either slain, exiled or made to change their faith. Some historians think that those converts were relegated to the untouchables".

Today there is no significant Buddhist presence in India. For Narla, moreover, "the emergence of the *BG* as a national scripture



A suggestion last December by Russian prosecutors that the Bhagavad Gita be banned was met by outrage by Hindus in that country. Seeking to avert a diplomatic spat, Russia's Foreign Ministry stressed that prosecutors had not attacked the 'holy' book itself but its 'controversial' preface written in 1968 by a founder of the Hare Krishna movement, A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

and the emasculation of the national mind and spirit are closely linked."

Krishna claims responsibility for the creation of the caste system: "The four estates [castes] were created by me ... I alone am the one who did this" (4.13). Membership of a particular caste accords with natural law, and it is a serious transgression to cause an "intermingling of the four estates." The Brahmins, or the "priestly caste", the highest, have a nature which is characterised by "serenity, self-restraint, purity, patience, honesty, knowledge, religious faith", and are born to rule.

Narla also expresses contempt for the doctrine of karma, which, in the *BG*, is closely bound up with the caste system (your sinful or virtuous actions in this life, your karma, affect your fortunes in the next). Krishna asserts that all women and all those from the

lower castes are born "out of the womb of sin" (about 90 percent of Hindu society, according to the author). It is of course Krishna who assesses your karma and decides whether or not, as a punishment, you should be born a woman, or into one of the lower castes; and it is at this point that the author's anger boils over: "What a scandalous thing to say! No, it is much worse than that. It is insolent, contemptuous, outrageous, filthy".

Narla is equally uncompromising about those scholars and supporters of Hinduism who argue that modern science contains nothing that was not envisaged by their ancient holy texts. He gives many examples of "nonsensical things which are set down as scientific truth [in the *BG*]": "Brahma created men through sacrifices, and after creating them told them that the only way in which they could propagate themselves was by performing sacrifices" (3.10); "... for getting good and timely rains they should carry out sacrifices" (3.15); "Now what is the moon? ... it is the greatest of stars"; "What is the highest speed, the ultimate speed? ... the wind" (10.31), and so on.

Narla correctly emphasises the violent and warlike message of the *BG*. "I can think of nothing more shocking, more despicable than the doctrine 'kill, kill one and all, kill without the least constraint, because it is your caste duty.' Krishna asserts that '...there is nothing better for a warrior than a duty-bound war. It is a door to heaven opened fortuitously' (2.32)".

Narla, however, misses certain contradictions in the *BG*. Krishna tells Arjuna, for example, not to mind whether he is praised or blamed, or whether he finds "honour or dishonour" (12.18-19), and yet also tells Arjuna that to refuse to fight would bring disgrace upon him, and "disgrace is worse than death for the man who has once been honoured." (2.34).

Don't be put off by having to contend with countless Hindu terms, mythical figures and other names, without the help of a glossary or index. *The Truth About the Gita* should be much more widely read.

points of view...

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THE BURQA, THE KORAN AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

I HESITATE to reply again to Richard Francis (*Freethinker*, February 2012) lest it become tedious to other readers or indeed the editor. But if I may I would make a few points, admittedly not dealing with everything he says.

I certainly did not mean to be facetious in simply remarking that a ban here in Britain would not apply elsewhere. I did say that I was quite aware that the burqa can be an instrument of oppression, but also that other garments can be so. As can many religious/cultural practices, some doing physical damage such as circumcision.

It is oppression to which I object, not any particular piece of clothing. As far as I can tell, burqa is not an exact term. I have not found any precise definition of it (as precise as, for example, military uniform or academic dress), though it is generally considered as a loose all-enveloping garment, covering the body and most of the face. Islam has no central authority that could specify such a garment. The ultimate authority is the Koran, but that does not insist on any particular clothing. Observation in a heavily Islamic area shows that Muslim women in Britain wear a wide variety of clothing. The most usual item is probably a headscarf, which is indeed compulsory in many Islamic girls' schools. Long dresses are also common. The virtually total covering I described in my article is rare; even burqa wearers usually show at least their eyes and hands.

But without evidence it is impossible to say whether any particular dress is enforced. Evidence is also needed to show the purposes for which it is worn, which appear to be varied. As I mentioned, some women say the burqa is essential to their Islamic identity, which they strongly wish to preserve, and some that it affords protection. There may be good quantitative evidence, but I have

not found it.

Richard asks whether any form of dress should be allowed, or women be able to walk around naked. Extreme libertarians would say yes, certainly, to both. Extreme Muslims would say certainly not to both, and add that women must cover the whole body and face.

Most people in this country would draw the line somewhere between these two, but there are wide disagreements, and views are always changing. It is only quite recently that women have been able to wear trousers, while men in skirts are looked at askance. It is reported that even in Pakistan the burqa is declining.

Personally I would always wish in principle to see more rather than less freedom. The original question I posed for myself was whether there should be a law in Britain forbidding the use of a certain garment (defining it would be a matter for the legislators). I concluded, on balance, no, and I hold to that. That is only my opinion, and some polls suggest it is a minority one, but I don't think it in any way condones or justifies oppression.

It may be that Richard Francis and I cannot agree. If he wants to respond once more, subject to the editor, I shall let him have the last word. I wonder what other people think?

John Radford
London

KAREN Armstrong – “one of the handful of wise and supremely intelligent commentators on religion” – in her book *The Case for God* (2009, p103) quotes from the Koran as follows ... “in one remarkable passage (Koran 3:84) God insists that Muslims must accept indiscriminately the revelations of every single one of God's messengers: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Jesus and all

the other prophets.

The Koran is simply the confirmation of the previous scriptures. Nobody must be forced to accept Islam because each of the revealed religions has its own 'din'; it was not God's will that all human beings should belong to the same faith community (Koran 5:48).”

And “The divine light could not be confined to a single lamp, belongs neither to the East or to the West but enlightens all human beings (Koran 24:3)”

And “Muslims must speak courteously to all the people of the book, debate with them only in the most kindly manner and not engage in pointless aggressive disputes. It is more important to reform one's own society and one's own heart (Koran 29:46).”

It would seem, from the news, that some Muslims, as happens also with other religions, excepting Buddhism, do not always follow these precepts.

One wonders, would any imam dare to comment, publicly, on these texts?

W K Harper
Stoke-on-Trent

THE understandings which make the British Constitution work are no longer, as they say, “tacit” following the freedom of expression debacles at University College London and Queen Mary college (report *Freethinker*, February). They are questionable. So letters to MPs and the press on Islamic subversion are a waste of time.

Useless also are the critiques from such as Roger Scruton and Patricia Crone and the wonderful calls to clear thinking by Dawkins – as the last-named implicitly concedes in *The God Delusion*.

The koranic message is not only about SUBMISSION, it insists upon it to which end any kind of violence at any time is justifi-

fied, and our ruling class is not going to offer a frontal challenge to that.

Keith Bell
Wrexham

LIFE, THE UNIVERSE

NOT to disagree with Barbara Smoker (*Freethinker*, February), but perhaps to add a couple of points.

As Bertrand Russell points out in *An Outline of Philosophy*, if God exists, then by definition, God is part of existence. Therefore to explain the physical universe as God's creation is not to explain existence as a whole, but only to explain part of existence in terms of another (hypothetical) part.

Besides Voltaire's fly in the Palace of Versailles thinking "All this has been created just for me", another metaphor for hubristic self-deception is Aesop's fly on the wheel of a chariot thinking "What a dust I am making".

There are mundane beliefs like "There was a battle in 1066" and "Barbara Smoker wrote this article", and religious beliefs like "Christ died for our sins" and "The Koran is infallible", which may seem similar as long as they are accepted without question. The difference becomes apparent in cases of doubt. A mundane belief may be confirmed, modified, or refuted by reference to available data, while a religious belief may be enforced by threats of punishment, in this world and/or after death.

Donald Room
London

'PATRONISING' LETTER

I WOULD like to tell the patronising Diesel Balaam – is that really his name? – that I am 53. What does he mean by "being round the block"?

I am also a supporter of legalising soft drugs but not the other things he mentions. I would rather close our borders than open them. However, I do basically favour a "free for all" society. People have the right to do whatever they choose as long as they don't violate the valid rights of others.

They do not have the right to force themselves where they're not wanted – that's no better than bullying. Yes, I do support the right to put up "No Blacks" signs or turn away gays. The only minority whose rights matter is the smallest one of all – the individual.

Nor do I care for Diesel's claim that people have the right to speak out or campaign "within reason". That reminds me of the "no platform for racists/fascists/sexists/homophobes/whatever" witchhunt by politically correct hypocrites against anyone who

can be said to fit any of these descriptions, even hounding them from jobs totally irrelevant to their beliefs. The rights of Rabbi Ralbag, the jailed Muslim homophobes (I am an Islamophobe and proud of it), and the football fan facing sentence for expressing a racist opinion on Twitter do not seem to have been respected.

I would have the US First Amendment apply throughout the world. All laws restricting free expression relating to such issues as obscenity, blasphemy, racism, religion, xenophobia or homophobia should be repealed.

I agree that married Christian couples should have more sex. So should we all! A new commandment – thou shalt not have a headache. And freethinkers like Jessica Ahlquist are too intolerant and prone to antagonise people. If people are satisfied with having a religious symbol, why not just leave them to it? Are we to be like the Americans who apparently can't sing Christmas carols at school because some nitpicker uses a minority interpretation of the law to stop them? Being a freethinker should not mean being a killjoy – let's leave that to the Bible and Koran brigade.

Mark Taha
London

'AFFECT' AND 'EFFECT'

THERE were two long words in medieval Christian theology concerning the nature of the Trinity, spelt the same ex-

cept for a single letter. After a long, bitter dispute, one came out eventually on the side of orthodoxy, the other heresy – but now I cannot remember details of the conflict, and I doubt if many *Freethinker* readers can.

I am reminded of it, however, by my conformist feeling of annoyance whenever "affect" appears in your pages though "effect" is the word intended. This howler has occurred several times in recent issues. Unfortunately, computers are not yet reliable grammarians

Barbara Smoker
Bromley

CELIBACY

READING letters to *Point of View* I find Denis Watkins, (*Points of View*, February) misses the point. When celibacy was belatedly imposed on Catholic clergy in 385 (by the Directa Decretal of Pope Siricius), its motive was not to create sexual frustration. It was to prevent the emergence of a hereditary feudal class in possession of Church wealth (including land).

Ted Goodman
Redhill

Jesus & Mo



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the freethinker

EVENTS & CONTACTS

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

Birmingham Humanists:

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

Brighton & Hove Humanist Society: **i** 01273 227549/461404. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. Wed, March 7: *God in Public Life*. Speaker: Denis Cobell. Wed, April 4: *School Religion and Religious Schools*. Speaker: Andrew Edmondson. Wed, May 2: Subject and speaker to be announced.

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: 01494 726351.

w www.chilternhumanists.webs.com

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.

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Derbyshire Secularists: Meet at 7.00pm, the third Wednesday of every month at the Multifaith Centre, University of Derby. Full details on

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e info@devonhumanists.org.uk

w www.devonhumanists.org.uk

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w www.dorsethumanists.co.uk

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w www.farnham-humanists.org.uk

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Email: secretary@galha.org **w** www.gaiha.org

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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. On March 14 at 8pm the topic will be *Working with, and for, older people in Harrow*. The speaker will be Avani Modasia, Chief Executive, Age UK, Harrow. **w** www.harrow.humanist.org.uk **e** Mike Savage

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Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern Ireland:

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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.

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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

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w www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk

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

w www.liverpoolhumanists.co.uk/

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

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

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

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North East Humanists (Teesside Group):

i C McEwan on 01642 817541.

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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.nondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk

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

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w www.ScottishHumanists.org.uk. Free membership. Charity SCO42124. Next meeting Sunday, February 26. Market Inn, Ayr. 2pm. All welcome **i** 07935272723.

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South East London Humanist Group (formerly Lewisham Humanist Group): **i** Denis Cobell. 020 8690 4645. Meets on the 3rd Thursday each month at 7.30 pm at The Goose, Rushey Green, Catford SE6.

w www.lewisham.humanist.org.uk

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

w www.southhantshumanists.org.uk

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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@ethicalsc.org.uk. Programmes on request.

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

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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

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w www.wmhumanists.co.uk **e** rocheforts@tiscali.co.uk. Meetings on the 2nd Tues of the month at Ludlow, Oct to June.

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

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