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## The time is right to strike a mortal blow against the Catholic Church

**T**he arrest and detention in May of the Pope's butler for allegedly exposing the activities of a coterie of criminals nesting in the Vatican presents an ideal opportunity for secular and atheist groups to finally bring down the Catholic Church.

That's the view of US research writer and artist Greg S Paul, who circulated an email in the wake of Paolo Gabriele's arrest, calling for a concerted worldwide campaign against the Vatican.

Said Paul: "The advantage is ours. The Catholic Church has never been more weak and vulnerable than it is right now. If we seize the moment we can do much to finally and fully expose the Roman Church for the perfidious criminal dictatorship that it has been for the last two thousand years, and destroy much of the hold it still has over so many. And hopefully reduce the Vatican from a sovereign nation to church property in Rome."

Paul pointed out the documents Gabriele is accused of leaking exposed "the highest ranks of the Holy See as shady underhanded conspirators and conniving rivals so corrupt that J P Morgan announced it will no longer deal with the long notorious Vatican Bank on suspicions of nefarious money-laundering. The butler affair has hit the international media big time; it made all the major US network news broadcasts. Making the Dan Brown novels look tame by comparison, it's the story that will keep on giving forever."

He added: "The Mother Church is now in extreme danger, far more than it was when the paedophile scandal started to really break out in 2001 after simmering for decades." Paul said that, just as the world media felt free in 2001 to give the Catholic Church a thorough going-over for "the cover-up of priests bugging kids", in 2012 the press is "finally going to feel free to chase down Rome for its financial crimes. It's just too juicy for them not to play for all its worth. And it is the sort of thing that promises to strip the last of the aura of legitimacy from



*Whistleblower Paolo Gabriele, left, pictured with Ratzinger and Georg Gänswein, the Pope's personal secretary*

the damn church. We need to help the process play out."

"Of course," he said, "the Holy See is going to do all it can to downplay the 'Vatileaks' and try to minimise the fallout, and much of the mainstream will be tempted to go along and continue the idea that the Church is a moral force. We need to abort that. And that requires getting ahead of the game and being the first to set the bar high when it comes to the ground rules for the future investigation of the criminal Vatican mob."

He suggested that, separately and/or jointly, atheist-secular organisations immediately needed to release declarations demanding that the Pope cease persecuting the house steward of the Pontifical Family and any other whistle-

blowers, and release him at once. "Gabriele has committed no actual crime; he is a classic whistleblower. Any trials, secret or otherwise, held within the dictatorial Vatican are automatically invalid and to be opposed as violating human rights. If any trials are held they must be through the Italian courts."

Paul suggested that groups also "demand full exposure, in particular that the Vatican abandon its chronic self-serving secrecy and immediately open the files of the super secretive Vatican Bank and the Vatican itself to investigation by international law organisations and a neutral commission, as well as journalists and historians".

Paul said that "if the atheosecular community does not act fast to set the bar high, the mainstream community and press will go along with the usual suggestions for mild reforms, including perhaps the resignation of Benedict, leaving the church little touched and ready for the further corruption a national dictatorship will invariably slip into."

Commenting on the "Vatileaks" scandal, Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, said: "It's always a pleasure to read that the Pope is upset. Nobody deserves to be upset more than His

*(Continued on p3)*

# EROTICISING GENITAL MUTILATION

**BARRY DUKE** FINDS A DISTURBING LINK BETWEEN CIRCUMCISION AND PORN

Of all the topics I posted to the *Freethinker* website in the past month or so, the one that ignited the most passion was a report that a group of "senior medical experts" had got together to lobby the Australian Government to end the ban on elective male circumcision in public hospitals, and to substantially increase Medicare benefit for the operation.

Their argument is that there is now strong evidence that circumcision reduces risk of infectious diseases and cancer, which is absolute tosh.

The Federal Government withdrew Medicare benefits for circumcision in the 1980s but quickly restored them after an outcry from the Jewish community. Now, with a burgeoning Muslim population, the authorities, I would imagine, are under even greater pressure to bless and even subsidise male genital mutilation.

The Circumcision Foundation of Australia is led by Professor Brian James Morris, a professor of molecular medical sciences at the

University of Sydney, Australia, who claims that about half of uncircumcised boys will suffer "an adverse medical condition as a result of their foreskin over their lifetime". But those opposed to genital mutilation say there is no need whatsoever to circumcise infant boys, and that it should be withdrawn from Medicare coverage unless found to be medically necessary. There are some who even say that most circumcisions carried on medical grounds are unnecessary, and that conditions such as phimosis can be treated in a non-surgical manner.

Morris is the most vocal of Australian circumcision promoters and has stated that circumcision "should be mandatory". According to Circleleaks, a website that provides "a place to learn about those who fund, promote, and profit from circumcision", he regularly uses scare tactics in attempts to frighten parents into circumcising their sons.

Circleleaks also revealed that Morris is a member of a peculiar group called the Gilgal Society, a UK-based not-for-profit organisation administered by Vernon Quaintance. Gilgal is Hebrew for "hill of foreskins", and groups such as the Gilgal Society, the Acorn Society and the Cutting Club "openly admit to a morbid fascination with circumcision to the point of sado-masochistic fetish. These groups advertise that doctors are among their members. There are those on the Internet who discuss the erotic stimulation they experience by watching other males being circumcised, swap fiction and about it, and trade in videotapes of actual circumcisions".

Quaintance, 68, is a devout Roman Catholic who was employed as a sacristan and server for something called the Order of Malta's Mass. (The Catholics don't half devise some daft names.) In April this year, Quaintance became a member of another "exclusive" club when he was put on the Sex Offenders' Register.

He was convicted in the Old Bailey of possessing three videos with nine-hours' worth of clips showing boys as young as 11 engaging in sex acts. The movies seized included graphic footage of child abuse ranked at the second-highest level of severity. But the retired telephone engineer avoided jail. His 40-week sentence was suspended for two years. He was ordered to complete a sexual offenders rehabilitation course, and told to pay £300 costs.

The man who drew my attention to Morris' dangerous quackery, and to Quaintance's sick promotion of "circumcision porn", was Glen Poole, Strategic Director of The Men's Network. He alerted me to the fact that a conference is to take place in the UK this month to discuss the issue of unnecessary circumcision. Delegates concerned with issues covering child protection, health, equality and diversity, human rights and medical ethics will gather at the conference on Thursday, July 26 at Keele University, Staffordshire, to explore how boys might be protected from being unnecessarily damaged by the practice.

According to a statement issued by Poole, a baby boy from Oldham bled to death after a religious circumcision. "The fatality," the statement said, "raises major concerns for everyone working to safeguard children in the UK."

The Oldham death will be the subject of a manslaughter trial later this year.

Meanwhile, an Oxford report revealed that 45 percent of botched circumcisions at an Islamic school led to complications, and that research from the charity NORM-UK reveals that as many as nine out of ten therapeutic circumcisions could be avoided.

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AND now some excellent news. You may have noted that, over the past few months, a number of new writers have joined our editorial team, and, from August the noted US author, blogger and commentator Ophelia Benson will be contributing a regular column.

Seattle-based Benson is the editor of the Butterflies and Wheels website, and a columnist and former associate editor of *The Philosophers' Magazine*. She is also a columnist for *Free Inquiry*. Her books and website express her desire to defend objective and scientific truth against the threats to rational thinking posed by religious fundamentalism, pseudoscience, wishful thinking, postmodernism, and relativism.

To accommodate her column, and the increasing number of contributions we are receiving from mainly new young atheist writers, we have decided to transfer the Events & Contacts page to the *Freethinker* website. With so many people now turning to the Internet for information, the transfer is a logical move, and has the benefit of being instantly updated.



**BARRY DUKE**  
FREETHINKER  
EDITOR

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All correspondence to:  
The *Freethinker*  
3 Queens Road, Beckenham, Kent BR3 4JN  
Email: [barry@freethinker.co.uk](mailto:barry@freethinker.co.uk)  
Tel: 01273 782 111  
Website: <http://www.freethinker.co.uk>

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## justplaincrazy

### VACCINATION JIHAD

A MUSLIM cleric in Pakistan's Punjab province last month warned that a *jihad* would be launched against polio vaccination teams at a time when the World Health Organisation has expressed concern at the emergence of new cases of the disease across the country.

Maulvi Ibrahim Chisti of Muzaffargarh district declared the anti-polio campaign as "un-Islamic" and announced at the local mosque that "holy war" should be carried out against the polio vaccination team. Residents said the cleric had tried to convince them that the polio campaign was a "Western conspiracy" to render the population impotent.

Chisti made the remarks after finding out that a vaccination team had entered Khan Pur Bagga Sher area of Muzaffargarh and asked families to cooperate with the campaign.

### FUNERAL DISRUPTED

A CHRISTIAN zealot, who took exception to a sermon preached at his grandmother's funeral service in North Carolina, had to be bundled out of the First United Methodist Church last month.

John McGlone, wearing a "Trust Jesus" shirt, launched into a tirade against the pastor and his family, repeating loudly from the back of the church that they had to repent of their sins or face eternal damnation.

After being forced out of the church, the hysterical McGlone tried to barge back in, but was prevented from doing so by family members.

### MUSLIMS TARGETED

A GROUP of Christian missionaries hijacked an Arab-American festival in Dearborn, Michigan last month, bearing signs criticising Islam and carrying a pig's head mounted on a pole.

According to the *Detroit Free Press*, several Christian missionaries protested the Arab International Festival, shouting at attendees and holding signs which read: "Islam is a religion of blood and murder" and "Mohammed is a ... liar, false prophet, murderer, child molesting pervert".

One missionary also carried a pig's head on a staff – a provocative gesture because Muslims do not eat pork.

The annual festival, the largest such celebration of the Muslim faith in the US, has been targeted by Christian groups for several years now.

# The Vatican: a nest of vipers

Holiness. This time Mr Ratzinger is wailing about the publication of a book, *His Holiness: The Secret Papers of Benedict XVI*, by Italian journalist Gianluigi Nuzzi. It is based on documents leaked from the Vatican by un-named sources. The documents reveal a web of corruption and cronyism within the walls of Vatican City that would put a Dan Brown novel to shame.

"The Vatican launched an investigation into who could have passed the documents on to the journalist and eventually pinpointed the Pope's valet, Paolo Gabriele. Yes, the butler did it!"

He added: "In a damage limitation exercise, the Pope's aides say that the book represents 'a brutal personal attack' on the Pontiff. And if that piece of emotional blackmail doesn't work, His Holiness blames 'the media' for exaggerating and lying about the affair.

"But that has always been the last resort of the guilty – blame the messenger for bearing news you don't want people to hear. Nobody likes to have their dirty laundry aired in public, but the Vatican is not a private individual and Ratzinger is a public figure. Both present themselves as the founts of all that is good and moral and dictate to the world how they should live.

"But this book illustrates (yet again) that the Vatican and all it represents is the opposite of moral. In fact if only half this is true, the place is a nest of vipers, a refuge for liars, cheats, thieves and those who cover up the repeated abuse of children.

"The Vatican is already trying to cover its misdemeanours by sacking the head of the Vatican Bank who has been under investigation by the Italian authorities for money-laundering. The US state department now includes the Vatican in its list of countries considered vulnerable to money laundering. The Vatican now hopes that it can quench this latest scandal by hitting out at those who would bring its dirty secrets into the light.

"But the days when a Pope could raise his eyebrow in disapproval and everyone would immediately obey are gone. The book has become a bestseller in Italy over the week since it was published. Let's hope it is soon translated into English so the truth about the Vatican's profound corruption can be revealed to an even bigger audience."

## Mayor of UK's most godless city launches a prayer initiative

IN MAY, Brighton – officially Britain's most godless city – acquired its first Green mayor. And one of Bill Randall's first acts to declare a "multi-faith" year in which Brighton and Hove City Council will have a hodge-podge of religious leaders conducting council prayer services.

In February a High Court ruling said local authorities lacked legal powers to hold religious services "as part of a formal local authority meeting". But a number of Sussex councils, including Brighton and Hove City Council, pledged to continue inviting a priest and asking members to bow their heads before sessions.

Mayor Randall said the new multi-faith services would be legal because councillors would not be "formally summoned to attend" although they would take place in the council chamber.

He added: "This is to better reflect the many faiths in our city and about promoting love and peace. During the year we will have one faith for every council meeting



Former mayor Anne Meadows helps Bill Randall into his ceremonial robes. Photo: The Argus

and the reaction to the idea has been terrific.

The mayor announced the move after a civic service at the Brighton Unitarian Church, which was attended by a Buddhist, a leading imam and Christian leaders from different denominations. He was immediately challenged by Bill McLroy, from the Brighton and Hove Humanist Society, who said

the decision to introduce multi-faith prayers into council meetings was "completely out of order. Councils are elected to do civic business, not for part-time worshippers to turn public buildings into religious buildings. It's no good saying these prayers are fine because they are not on the agenda. They are just looking for loopholes because they know people will object.

"It's a total waste of time. Brighton is one of the most secular cities in the UK so I think they've got a nerve."

Conservative councillor Dawn Barnett said: "If they just took the prayers away without a vote then I think many people would be furious."



# How to make Mormons sweat

ON SEPTEMBER 12, 1960, presidential hopeful John F Kennedy spoke to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association about his Catholicism and views on the separation of church and state.

He spoke the following: "I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish; where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source; where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials; and where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all."

Voters throughout the United States, and people throughout the world, were concerned, and rightly so, about the prospect of pontifical authority in government, as it is every Catholic's duty to uphold all teachings of faith and morals, according to doctrine reinforced in the Vatican II Constitution *Lumen Genium*, which states: "The bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent."

With American presidential candidate Mitt Romney, a lifetime Mormon cultist, leading in the polls, I felt it would be in my best interest to get a flavor of his religious shortcomings. I filled out a form on Mormon.org to get a free copy of the *Book of Mormon* – because obviously I wasn't going to pay for it. To my surprise, after submitting the form, I was notified the book would be hand-delivered to me by an elder. "What fun!" I thought. Less than 20 minutes later, my phone rang and, sure enough, it was Mor-

## REPORT BY PAUL KARAFFA

mon missionaries asking when they could come by and drop off my free copy of their holy book. Being American, and not wanting to pass up free stuff, I quickly complied.

When I opened my front door days later, two male Mormon missionaries greeted me. One was quite young, the other in his early thirties. I sat down with them in my living room and pulled out my smartphone. "May I record you?" I asked. They were hesitant at first, not expecting to be documented, but accepted my invitation nevertheless.

Over the next hour and a half, my couch was soiled by their profuse sweat while side-stepping my questions – most of which were never answered. I broached several controversial topics, such as homosexuality, and racism; as well as some of their wacky doctrines, such as finding golden plates in upstate New York and ruling a planet in the afterlife, for which I got the answer: "I don't know if it is a singular planet ... I don't know a lot of the details". This answer, to my surprise and disappointment, was typical to our conversation. They just didn't know, and in some sense, didn't care.

Frustrated I inquired about who *would* be able to speak for the church and answer my questions. They explained they were the official representatives of the church. "How can a representative not answer these questions?" I asked. To which they responded, they had answered to the best of their ability, but would need to research it further and get back to me. They, of course, never did.

After they left, I reflected on our conversation. Was there anything that made these coffee-hating religionists dangerous? It

could be argued that any false doctrine is harmful to the intellect of the youth, which I would claim as true, but there were a couple issues that were much more troubling, both of which are reflected by those that adhere to it.

The first is their lack of knowledge but, most importantly, their apathetic disposition toward knowledge. As Richard Dawkins put it, religion "teaches us to be satisfied with not understanding the world". I would go farther and claim that religion teaches people to be satisfied with not understanding at all, as many religionists are not only apathetic to worldly knowledge but also to understanding their own belief systems. The Mormon missionaries were no different, having little understanding of their own faith and the history behind it.

The second major issue, and probably the most important, can be summed in one word: control. It could be argued that all religions control, at least to some extent, the actions of their followers. But their overseer, the Mormon President, at the highest echelon of their ponzi scheme, controls all Mormon drones.

Much like the Catholic Church claims in the Constitution *Lumen Genium*, Mormon followers must adhere completely to the divine prophesy of the president and the claimed living apostles that operate directly below him. It must be stated that in terms of doctrine, Catholicism is just as off-the-wall as Mormonism. They are both cults, tyrannical, and laughably ridiculous; so what makes the Mormon religion so much worse than other forms that are just as ignorant and bigoted?

Catholicism and Protestantism at least make an attempt to rationalize scientific and social evidence with their dogmatic claims, and in some cases divorce themselves from incompetent Bronze Age canon; but the Mormon Church breeds and controls a different type of religionist – one that has been completely domesticated. By giving little knowledge and teaching to reject outside knowledge, the individual is reduced to little more than complacent machinery.

Though I queried the missionaries about Romney, they refused to give a response. The US media has been hands-off about Romney's Mormon apologetics, and so has Romney. But this has not stopped the layperson from questioning it and deciding to vote against him based on his faith alone.

So if you want to know more, get your free copy of the *Book of Mormon*, and have a good laugh when the Mormons come to visit.



Two young American Mormons pictured doing house calls

# Margate GP Richard Scott warned by GMC to stop proselytising

THE Christian Legal Centre suffered yet another humiliating defeat last month when it lost a case played out before the General Medical Council.

The CLC was championing the cause of Christian zealot Richard Scott, who stood accused of distressing one of his patients by trying to evangelise him. The patient, a non-Christian, was allegedly threatened with hell if he did not accept Jesus.

The National Secular Society revealed that the case proved particularly humiliating for Andrea Minichiello Williams, CEO and chief propagandist of the CLC, who was barred from attending proceedings because she had orchestrated a distorted media campaign ahead of the hearing.

She and Scott embarked on a misinformation campaign in which the GP was portrayed as yet another “persecuted Christian”. Newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph* told his story from a distorted and one-sided perspective. Scott gave radio interviews in which he admitted he had told the young man that Christianity was a better religion than his own.

The NSS drew the GMC’s attention to these interviews and provided transcripts.

The hearing ended with Scott being warned that if any further complaints are made about him, he risks being struck off the medical register. GMC chairman Dr Christopher Hanning told Scott: “While the allegations relate to what occurred on a single occasion your actions nevertheless constitute a significant departure from the principles in good medical practice. The Committee considers that it is appropriate, proportionate and in the public interest for the protection of the reputation of the profession to issue you with a warning.”

The warning attached to Scott’s registration reads: “During a consultation with a patient in August 2010 you expressed your religious beliefs in a way that distressed your patient. You subsequently confirmed, via national media, that you had sought to suggest your own faith had more to offer than that of the patient.

“In this way you sought to impose your own beliefs on your patient. You thereby caused the patient distress through insensitive expression of your religious beliefs. Your actions were in direct conflict with the GMC’s supplementary guidance: *Personal Beliefs and Medical Practice*.

During the hearing Scott gave prolonged



Dr Richard Scott and Andrea Minichiello Williams of the Christian Legal Centre

testimony as to the efficacy of Christianity in the treatment of medical conditions. Furthermore, his Margate surgery, the Bethesda Medical Practice, is described as “an expressly Christian doctor’s surgery” – even though it is paid for by the National Health Service to serve the whole community.

Reacting to the findings, Dr Antony Lempert of the Secular Medical Forum said: “We welcome the GMC’s determination making it clear that doctors – whether religious or not – must set aside their own personal beliefs and not evangelise when treating patients, far less suggest that they adopt a different belief. Doing so needlessly puts patients in a difficult position.

There is no reliable evidence – whatever may have been claimed at this hearing – that any belief system has benefited health. Basing treatment on this premise is therefore potentially harmful to the patient and to the doctor-patient relationship.

Patients consult their doctors for their professional expertise and not for their religious beliefs. For GPs to share their own religious beliefs during consultations is almost always inappropriate; attempts to proselytise or to claim one or other religion as somehow better than another is unprofessional and should never take place. Doing so puts often-vulnerable patients into the uncomfortable position of feeling the need to take account of their doctor’s beliefs.

He added: “Some patients may feel unable or unwilling to contradict the doctor because of the power imbalance between doctor and patient. Should a patient raise religious matters during a consultation, the doctor must not take this as an opportunity to evangelise, but if appropriate may explore the patient’s own ideas and concerns.

“The allegation made by Dr Scott that the GMC has specifically targeted Christian-

ity is perverse. We would fully expect the GMC to take similar action against doctors of all faiths or none who behaved in a similarly inappropriate fashion and who risked undermining the confidence of the public in the professionalism of medical practitioners.

“We also oppose publicly funded NHS general practices being labelled as being of any religion or belief. Labelling general practices as being of any one belief system risks giving patients the impression that only such patients will be welcomed, and that other patients are, at best, tolerated.

“This puts unacceptable pressure on some patients to decide whether to actively opt out of spiritual care, as they are invited to do in Dr Scott’s practice, or go along with the religious element for fear of alienation. Forcing such a dilemma on patients undermines the doctor-patient relationship – a relationship based primarily on trust. Particularly where there is a limited choice of GPs, this compromises patients’ entitlement to publicly funded medical treatment.

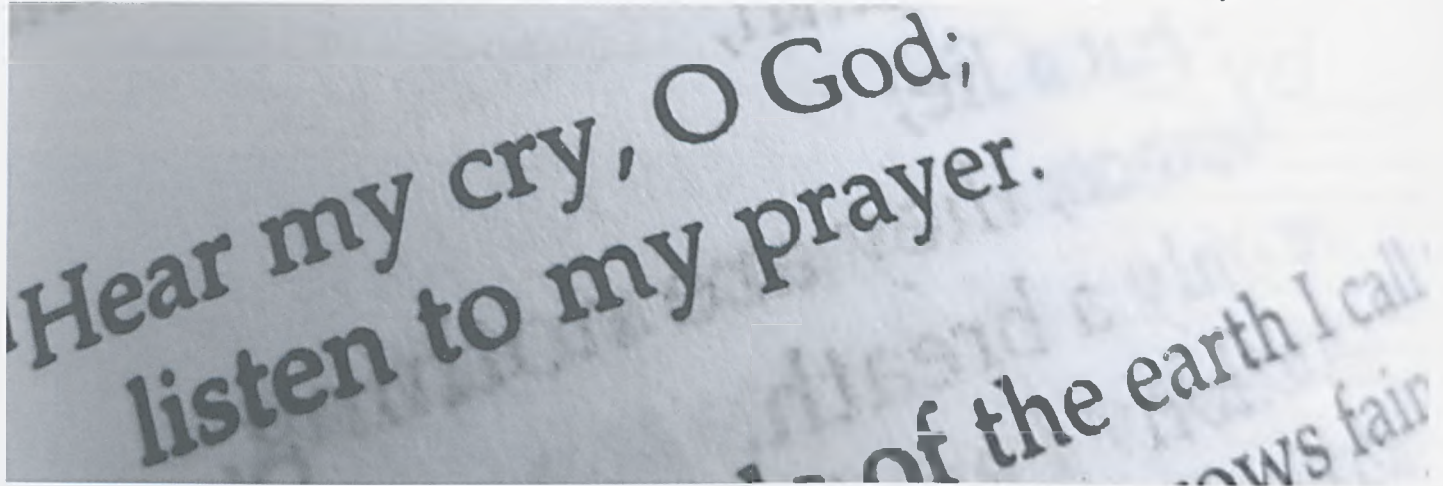
Keith Porteous Wood of the National Secular Society, said: “We are also concerned at the description of the Bethesda Medical Practice in Margate ... This is a practice set up for the use of the whole community using public money, it cannot be hijacked by any particular religion and used – as in this case – for evangelical purposes.

“All aspects of the National Health Service, whether hospitals or GP practices, must be clearly open to all members of the community, regardless of their faith.

“Nobody should feel that they are not welcome because the practice has put a religious label on itself.”

The NSS will consider making a complaint to the local health authority about this.

# Does God appreciate our prayers?



MARK J SULLIVAN poses the question

**W**e're taught to believe that God, or at least his son, Jesus Christ, is made in our own image and likeness.

One would assume that if that's the case, he probably possesses human emotions as well. I mean, look at how Jesus acted when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane. He acted like a pathetic, weak human being. He whined and cried like a little girl when God the Father issued him instructions for the next day. Yes, he'd have to undergo some pain and die, but it was only going to last for about three hours, and in exchange, he'd be redeeming all of mankind for our sins.

Of course, nobody likes the idea of being tortured, but when you think of what others have had to go through, it wasn't going to be all that bad. Consider what the American soldiers went through when the Japanese were torturing them for years on end during World War II. What about the Union soldiers who suffered for years and years at Andersonville?

Now compare those horrific experiences to a mere three hours of carrying a cross, getting nailed to it, and then getting to bleed to death relatively quickly, and then it was going to be all over! Compare those experiences, and one will quickly see that what the Old Man was ordering him to do wasn't going to be all that bad. Especially because Jesus knew in advance how short a period of time it was going to be that the pain would last, and that from that point on, it was going to be nothing but honor and glory! And yet Jesus made it clear that he didn't want to endure the suffering.

So, it appears that God has human emotions and human feelings. Wouldn't one also expect that he would dislike the same types of things that human beings dislike? I'm talking specifically about people bothering

him, annoying and pestering him to change his mind about decisions that he's made.

Take, for example the case of Jim Jeroff. Jeroff is an ordinary God-fearing guy from upstate New York who had testicular cancer. His wife, Jessica would constantly pray that God either cure her husband, or at least lessen the pain he's in.

The problem, however, is that Jeroff didn't acquire cancer because God had forgotten about him, or because he had somehow neglected to protect Jim. Quite the opposite. It was God who saw to it that Jeroff acquired the disease. And no amount of praying or pleading or whining or bitching was going to get God to change his mind about it. After all, he's God. He knew what he was doing when he gave Jeroff the cancer. It was the right thing to do under the circumstances. He was going to allow Jeroff to suffer during his lifetime so that he could avoid being condemned to hell for eternity. So why would anyone expect the Big Guy to go back on that decision if he knew it was right when he made it?

Still, Jessica Jeroff would pray every night, begging and pleading that her husband be cured of the disease.

And what did she get in exchange? Nothing. So, then she enlisted her kids to pray every night for their dad. Still nothing. Then her family. *Nada*. Finally, she went to her church and asked all the parishioners there to pray for her husband.

"Please God," members of the congregation implored, "please understand that Jim Jeroff is a really good man. He doesn't deserve the pain he's in. He loves his wife, and he's never cheated on her. He's kind. And he loves God."

In heaven, God reacted by biting his lip. As a rule, the Big Guy doesn't talk to living people. If not for that prohibition, however,

he'd have loved to shut the entire congregation up.

"Jim Jeroff? Never cheated? Who do you think I am? And what exactly do you know about it? I don't usually tattle on members of my flock, but if you must know, folks, Jim Jeroff certainly did cheat on Jessica in the past. Yes, and he did so many times.

"Of course, not that it's any of your business, but that's not why I'm punishing him. He already went to confession on the adultery. And he did all of his penance. So that's a red herring.

"And I know he was sorry. He didn't have to persuade me, because I already knew what he was feeling. I'm God, after all.

"So, no, I'm not punishing Jeroff because of the adultery. The reason I gave him cancer is because he also broke my Ninth Commandment — and he did so on four different occasions, all in the last three years. For a while there, it seemed as if practically every time he'd have occasion to be in the company of his neighbor's wife, he'd covet. Not always, but most of the time. And he never once acknowledged his impure thoughts in the confessional.

"Now, just one instance of coveting thy neighbor's wife is enough for me to send Jeroff to hell for eternity, so clearly he's getting a very good deal with just the cancer. I'm allowing him to do his penance here on earth. Sure, he has to endure some pain, but at least it stops at some point, and that's when he gets to go to heaven. In hell, the torture lasts for eternity!

"Still, his family and fellow parishioners have the audacity to accuse me of doing him wrong for having stricken him with cancer. They keep arguing that he's a really good guy and doesn't deserve the pain. Who do they think they are, questioning my decision? Exactly what do they know about

it? Why would they think that I don't understand how badly he's hurting? Still, they constantly annoy me, interrupting me while I'm working, praying and begging and trying to out-think me. I can hear them now, 'Please, please, please, please, please!'

"Oh, I wish they'd all just shut up and mind their own business! It makes me sick! I've had it with all of them. What in the world makes them think that I enjoy being pestered by a bunch of know-nothings who beg and plead and threaten – yes, *threaten* – to get me to give this guy a special break. And why him? Why shouldn't I give a break to some other guy in some foreign land whom they don't know? I've got half a mind to give every single one of them cancer for spending all of their time pestering me about this.

"Who came up with this idea that I like it when people bother me at all hours of the day and night, constantly questioning my decisions? This is a decision that I made years ago, calmly and deliberately. And it

just now that they have the nerve to suggest that their wants and needs should be superior to mine? And it is not just one person belaboring the point, they get all of their friends and family and sometimes even strangers, to interrupt what I'm doing and beg me to change my decision on this. They're unrelenting!

"They train their kids to annoy me every night right before they go to bed. And the kids do exactly as they're told. Every night, it's the same damned stuff. 'God bless Mommy and Daddy; God bless Grandma and Grandpa; God bless Aunt Shaniqua and Uncle Rolondo; God bless baby Khalif; God bless my dead brother, Jamarcus; God bless ...'

"What? Wait a second! You want me to bless your dead brother? Your *dead* brother? You're too late, numb-nuts, there's no need for you to pray for your dead brother because he's already dead! And, if you must know, he's serving eternity in hell, so you can kiss any hope of redemption for him goodbye!"

"Bless my dead brother ... I don't believe it. Enough already! That kid said the exact same prayers last night. What's with that? Do they think that I don't remember?"

"And that's not the worst part. The worst part is when they go behind my back and pray to my mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and ask her to intercede to get me to change my mind. The nerve of them, trying to make me feel guilty for saying no to her. Everyone knows how hard it is for me to say no to my mother. But damn it! I can't allow a precedent to be established on this.

"Stop this nonsense, or I'll send down plague and pestilence the likes of which you've never seen or heard of before – in either the New or the Old Testament!"

• Mark J Sullivan is a lawyer based in Palm Springs, and is President of the Criminal Law Committee of the Desert Bar Association, and has served as a lecturer, author, arbitrator and judge *pro tem*. He has written articles for legal magazines such as *Forum*, *California Defender* and *Crime, Justice & America*.

## Hiss and hearse: snakehandling pastor gets bitten, dies

**FLAMBOYANT** Pentecostal pastor Mark Wolford died on Sunday, May 27, following a rattlesnake bite. The West Virginian pastor was known for his snake handling, and his outdoor homecoming service on his fateful day was hoped to be a "homecoming like the old days", with people speaking in tongues, holding snakes and generally having a "great time".

The 44-year-old pastor had a reputation as a man of unshakable belief, who thought that the Bible dictated that Christians should handle serpents to test their faith in God. If bitten, he believed God should heal them, despite losing his father in 1983 as a result of a snakebite.

The reason for his belief in handling snakes was Mark 16:17-18, where it is written that "these signs will follow those who believe: in My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." Wolford's conviction was such that he would fearlessly sling poisonous snakes around his neck, dance with them, and even lay on top of them. He had scars on his hands where copperheads had bitten him previously, but he had always recovered without the use of anti-venom. His spare bedroom contained at least eight venomous snakes, consisting of rattlesnakes, water moccasins and copperheads. Not only did he practice snake handling himself, he also wanted to "help" other churches be-

### RICHARD WHITE reports on a West Virginia tragedy

gin their own serpent-handling services: "I promised the Lord I'd do everything in my power to keep the faith going. I spend a lot of time going a lot of places that handle serpents to keep them motivated. I'm trying to get anybody I can get involved."

And so it can be said that Wolford is the latest victim of religion. Of course, his actual death was the result of being bitten by a poisonous snake, but it was a practice he would not have undertaken had it not been for the ludicrous writings of the Bible. Moreover, had he for whatever reason decided to handle snakes anyway, he would certainly have opted to be treated for his bites rather than have faith that God would heal him.

The story is tragic in that Wolford's family lost a cherished person in their lives, but also a stark warning against blind faith. So convinced was he in God's loving care that he not only handled snakes himself, and not only persuaded others to do so, but during the service in which he got bitten he handed a rattlesnake to a church member and his own mother to hold. His sister, Robin Vanover, said Mark "laid it on the ground and he sat down next to the snake, and it bit him on the thigh."

Wolford's death also highlights the tragedy in religion being passed through family; he was not a serpent-handler as a result of reading the biblical passage himself and thinking it a worthy pursuit, but because he was raised

in a family of people who were convinced Christians should handle venomous snakes. His father died at the age of 39 in tragically similar circumstances as Mark himself, and Robin said that "At one time or another, we had handled [snakes], but we had backslid". In any other area of life, one may learn from the death of the father not to engage in such a dangerous activity, but religion has tirelessly shown that followers deviate from this common sense, and so the fate for Wolford was a nine-and-a-half hour period of pain and suffering between being bitten and his inevitable death.

Such conviction in God's ability to heal us of illness is not uncommon; stories abound of parents who refused their children medical treatment in the belief that God would make them better. While this is tantamount to child abuse, there is something more disturbing about a grown man who believed that wild animals prone to attack only do so as a warning against living a non-Christian way, and that God can purge the toxic venom from the system to have a full recovery. Talk of an invisible man in the sky overlooking our lives aside, can we truly expect good from anything that makes a grown man believe an omniscient being can protect him from a physical, deadly wild animal?

Wolford then became the latest victim of religion, with a strong irony considering he devoted his life to it. He joins those killed in war, honour killings, attacks on abortion clinics and sufferers of child abuse, and – hopefully – leaves a stark warning to all.

# The birth of the Heresy Club

BARRY DUKE interviews ALEX GABRIEL, a founder member of a new group of 'brilliant' young atheist writers

Earlier this year, I received an email, asking whether I would consider putting a link on the *Freethinker* site to a new group called the Heresy Club. I immediately visited [heresyclub.com](http://heresyclub.com), and, after briefly checking it out, gladly granted their request. More than that, though, I decided at once to make contact with Alex Gabriel, one of the club's founder members, after reading his impressive introduction to the community blog.

Gabriel, 20, a student of English and German at Wadham College, Oxford, described himself as "an atheist, freethinker and fan of dissent" which means, he asserts, having "a close and meaningful relationship with reality".

He once ran "a godless student group" in Oxford and now works as a graphic designer and fundraiser for various groups, including Camp Quest UK, a voluntary organisation that runs a series of secular summer camps for youngsters aged nine to 16.

Alex helped organise One Law for All's "Rally for Free Expression" in 2012, attracting several hundred people; he's criticised prayer on national TV, and his blog posts from UCL's Jesus and Mo fiasco are some of his most widely read. This summer he's planning to attend Soul Survivor, the UK's leading youth festival for evangelical Christians with a view to writing a series of articles on the experience.

This is a (slightly abridged) version Gabriel wrote in his introduction to The Heresy Club:

In rightist politics, there's a wonderful phrase: flag, faith and family. It's uttered less often in Britain today than in the eighties and nineties, but the ideals it describes – patriotic devotion to the state; religious diligence; normative sexuality and gender – still lie at the heart of our government. Even when used from day to day, the phrase bore a nostalgic ring, transplanting Victorian values from the 1880s to the 1980s.

Traditionally, it's along these lines that our society's been organised: compulsory deference, compulsory Christianity and compulsory straightness. They're all ill-founded tendencies, of course, based on questionable premises (the legitimacy of our rulers, the claims of religion

and the need for gender policing), and for much of European history it's been a heresy to criticise these. No surprise, then, that the European freethought movement targeted all three in the 19th and 20th centuries, and no surprise that suspicion of all three is a recurring theme at atheist meetings today.

For me at least, to be a skeptic is more than ghostbusting and blasphemy cartoons. (Though of course, we'd be far worse off without those.) It's about a much more primary cognitive instinct, a cautious distrust of those who claim knowledge we lack and superior status. That was true when Krafft-Ebing ad-



vanced his career with bullshit claims about sexuality, as it is now when politicians make bullshit claims about our "democratic" system.

If freedom and fairness have ever meant anything – and I realise I'm shifting into Westminster mode here – the value of reality should be asserted, the ability to discover it by science and reason claimed unapologetically by people everywhere, and the burden of proof placed squarely on the shoulders of those who make unfounded or untestable claims. That's why I'm here as an atheist writer, a queer writer and a political writer – but above all else, it's why I'm a freethinker and a skeptic.

Heresy is a beautiful thing, in all its forms. To say what we're told we can't, and especially to question privileged dogmas, is a rebellious obligation for

anyone who values the truth and wants to live their life acting on it. More than that, it should be a pleasure. And it's worrying that in the 21st century, enquiring voices are being silenced – especially by preachers and practitioners with an eye on indoctrinating the young, and by educational bodies which should know better than pandering to superstition.

That's why we need secularism, why we need science, why we need better discourse on politics, society and gender which isn't hindered by bullshit beliefs – but most of all, it's why we need heresy.

I'm a heretic. That's why I'm here.

He then explained that the Heretic Club was established by a core group of five young writers – himself, Siana Bangura, Rhys Morgan, Richard Nicholl and Hayley Stevens. The youngest is 17, the oldest 25. Describing his fellow writers as "brilliant young doubters," Gabriel said: "Over time, our plan is to recruit more. We're founding this site partly to become better writers, and partly to gain a wider audience for ourselves and each other, but mainly because young people throughout the freethought movement need that audience right now."

Here is the interview with Gabriel:

**BD:** You state that you come from an evangelical background. Where were you brought up, at what age did you and religion part company, and why?

**AG:** My hometown's Keswick, in the far north of England – also home, of course, to an international Christian convention every summer.

Your second question is the million dollar one, isn't it? I called myself a Christian when I turned 14 and an atheist when I turned 17; pinpointing one moment in between when theism let go is a difficult task. I do recall my "road from Damascus" moment though when I started calling myself an atheist. I was standing in Cologne cathedral, one of the world's most stunning medieval buildings, and it suddenly struck me that the thousands who worked to build it had sweated for a lie; that the building ought to be a monument to them, not an imaginary ruler. That Marxist outrage at faith is still with me now.

**BD:** I gather that you are gay. Did this fact shape your atheism in any way?



That's not how I'd describe myself. The gay community now is a pathetic, depoliticised commercial shadow of what it hoped once to be. Why challenge social norms when you can vote for David Cameron and drink colourful shots?

If anything, opposing religion sets me at odds with the contemporary gay agenda. I'm worried when I see Stonewall, hardly radical to begin with, working with faith schools rather than campaigning against them. I'm worried when I see LGBT groups on campus encourage freshers not to give up their religions. In general, I think there's a frightening tendency now – and one that's on the increase – to lionise believers who aren't rabidly queerphobic, rather than supporting secularism. It's as if they deserve a medal for what elsewhere is a minimum expectation, and it forgets that churches shouldn't have the privileges – political, financial, social – that allow them to police sexuality in the first place.

Praising faith schools who don't teach queerphobia is like staring down the barrel of a gun pointed at your head, and telling your assailant they're a hero for not shooting you. They shouldn't be in a position to do it at all.

**BD:** Which books, writers, commentators or other public figures do you most admire?

*The God Delusion* was certainly as important for me as for a lot of people, and no one contests what a tragic loss Christopher Hitchens was. But a lot of my favourites are "second generation" writers who emerged when the community was still forming – Greta Christina, J T Eberhard, Natalie Reed, Ophelia Benson... most people at freethoughtblogs.com, actually!

If you're after "great thinkers", Marx goes without saying. So does Nietzsche. So do Emma Goldman, Rosa Luxemburg, Noam Chomsky, Judith Butler, Jean-Paul Sartre and Bertrand Russell. Many more too ...

**BD:** And whom do you most detest?

**AG:** I'm a blogger. I survive in part by tearing into idiots, so I don't need to detest them.

**BD:** Why do you think that, of all the admonishments and threats of punishments contained in the Bible for a whole range of transgressions, the only thing evangelical Christians focus on is homosexuality?

**AG:** I don't think they actually do. Churches today are queerphobic and sex-negative much more broadly. (I remember in my church, the preacher's wife vocally disapproved of oral sex.) It's just not just gay sex, it's non-reproductive sex, underage sex, sex with more than two people, sex with fewer than two people, sex be-

fore marriage, sex after marriage, sex for money, sex in the wrong position, sex with the wrong objects, sex at the wrong time of the month.

**BD:** I have to admit that my age (I have just entered the twilight world of pension-dom) I am separated from the thinking of much younger people and have no inkling what's going on in schools and campuses. I do know, though, that the evangelicals aggressively target young people. How active are these people?

**AG:** Extremely. Speaking only from experience at Oxford, the Christian Union can post their literature into every pigeonhole at the university, put posters up on every other building and can be seen handing out flyers on the high street too. There's no reason we should stop them doing this, of course, but it reveals, if nothing else, how well financed they are.

People underestimate how extreme the Christians can be, too. The Muslims at UCL who walk out of Darwin lectures cause a hell of an uproar, but I've met young earth creationists from the Christian groups at Oxford. It's especially worrying because the groups that are bucking the trend of declining church attendance are charismatic, right-wing evangelical ones – Newfrontiers, Alpha, Soul Survivor, Ignite – which specifically target the young.

That said, we do have a particular issue with Islam and Islamism. LSE's union just passed a motion banning speech deemed Islamophobic, including (their example) the statement that the Koran is a manual of hatred. Atheists I know from Queen Mary got threatened with death at one of their events for being critical of Mohammed. Leeds Atheists had death threats too a couple of years back, and student unions in Southampton and Warwick have taken action against students simply for posters criticising faith and debates that were planned.

**BD:** How strong is opposition to these activities?

**AG:** Well organised, certainly. I know people from atheist student groups all over the country, many of whom now know one another too. How much we've actually achieved so far is something else: I think we sometimes lapse into seeing ourselves as social societies holding interesting discussions, arguing about our constitutions and going to the pub, not affecting real change or fighting battles.

I'd certainly criticise the AHS (a national body of godless student groups) in that regard – it's been around since 2008, but affected very little actual change. It's also not much more than the student wing of the BHA now, which for me is a problem. But I do think progress is happening; the

recent Jesus and Mo controversy made a lot of people wake up, including me, to the issues we face on campus, and we ended up holding a rally with hundreds of people. That was great.

**BD:** Would you say that more young people are of a skeptical mindset than previous generations, and if so why?

**AG:** Yes and no. Statistics certainly show that we're less religious, but I often find my generation more apathetic about religion. Many of us have grown up with secular norms, and I think a lot of people my age are oblivious to the harsh realities of world religion.

In the circles in which I move, it's often not atheism people lack, but a grasp of why it matters. (Though I also wouldn't minimise radical religion's presence among the under-25s, as I mention above.)

**BD:** The *Freethinker* recently published a letter from a reader suggesting that the Internet has parallels with penicillin, which saw off many dangerous bacteria, and that the Internet is the strongest weapon we have to combat the "virus" of religion. Would you agree, and would you like to add your thoughts on this?

**AG:** That sounds more like Darrell Ray's area. He wrote *The God Virus*. I'm not sure how qualified I am to comment, except to say I think the Internet has done great things for the atheist movement. But we need to remember the real world matters too; that we have to go form activist groups and challenge religious people face to face.

**BD:** In the May 2012 issue of the *Freethinker* I published details of a book – *Born Believers* – that suggests we are all come into the world with an inbuilt belief in the divine. What's your take on that?

**AG:** "Belief" requires a socially communicated concept of something. We're not born with beliefs at all. There's certainly evidence we're intuitively inclined to believe in God, but that doesn't make it true. (We're intuitively inclined to believe whatever our parents tell us, after all.)

Actually, the notion that religion has deep-rooted cognitive causes goes a long way to explaining its success from an atheist's perspective.

**BD:** Finally, what inspired you to launch the Heresy Club?

**AG:** I got to know a lot of other young atheists and sceptics at the start of this year, some of them very impressive indeed. (Rhys and Hayley, my fellow bloggers, have both made headlines. Siana was on Channel 4.) We think our generation is going to see religionists become far more confident than they have been. It's also, as I said, often been young people they're most keen to target.

# My life, my death, my choice

DAVID SIMMONDS responds to the latest Catholic attack on euthanasia

I was pleased to see the front page coverage in the June 2012 *Freethinker* of the Catholic attack on voluntary euthanasia (VE) and assisted dying (AD). I believe that this sentiment is shared by all religions – life is not ours to dispose of as we like, as “only God has that right”.

I would of course defend their right to live and die by their own beliefs. But why should that same freedom of choice not be granted to all? This was a view eloquently expressed by John Stuart Mill, but our society has still not caught up with one of our greatest thinkers.

Nowadays we have autonomy in almost

every aspect of our lives, so long as we do not harm others – except when it comes to that most final and personal of choices: the manner of our dying. It is the state that decides for us. Surely only the most zealous of collectivists would continue to insist that intensely suffering people should be kept alive against their will.

Nevertheless we should take the objections of the anti-AD lobby seriously. A common myth that they encourage is that the great advances in palliative care today have made AD unnecessary. Yet for many, there are ways of suffering other than pain. An inability to swallow or breathe properly,

for example, can cause considerable discomfort that cannot be relieved adequately with painkillers, while a loss of control of bodily functions, total dependence on others, and a loss of dignity, may weigh more heavily than physical pain, and for them no amount of excellent palliative care is acceptable.

There is a glaring mismatch between the wording and the application of the law. Since 1998, 200 or more Britons have broken the law by helping relatives go to the Dignitas clinic in Switzerland, where AD is legal. On each occasion the Criminal Prosecution Service has decided against prosecution. To add to the confusion, the law allows people,

## Teach good citizenship, not religion

BY MOHAN CHAUHAN

CAN good and moral behaviour be taught only through religion?

Given that religion is at the root of so many problems in the world, and is often cynically manipulated by land grabbing and power hungry leaders to further their own needs, why do so many believe that religion can teach moral behaviour?

Instant knowledge, through the Internet, and mass migration has made this a small world. So, in a country where you have a mixture of faiths, using religion as a tool for teaching morality is less than inadequate; it is useless.

Religious education can only bring cohesion if 100 percent of the population adheres to the same faith (which is impossible). If not, it brings havoc. Not because the *core* teachings of a religion is bad, but because politicians and religious leaders will misuse religion to further their personal gains or for their churches or political parties.

Furthermore, recent migration has tended to be for economic reasons. As the Western economies improved, they needed migrant workers to do the menial tasks. People from poorer countries filled these jobs, but this brought an imbalance in the level of education between the newly arrived and the indigenous populations.

One only needs to look at the problems in the UK, France, the Netherlands and Belgium, to name but a few, caused by different cultures, colour and faiths. To combat these differences, governments

embarked on a policy of multiculturalism.

The problem with this approach is that schools cannot focus on any one religion, thereby creating a gap in moral teaching. Neither can it address the needs of the non religious.

There are instances where people practise the same religion and yet are subjected to terrible injustices and atrocities due to differences in race, such as the past treatment of blacks in USA, in apartheid South Africa or indeed Rwanda.

I believe such inhumanity happens because there is a dangerous gap in teaching morality. It is also obvious that religious teaching does not address these shortcomings in humans.

Therefore, to leave such a gap in teaching proper upbringing is dangerous, and I suggest that the *state* must take the responsibility to teach children to be upright citizens. Indeed, It should be compulsory for every child to learn about citizenship from junior level to university.

Relying on parents and religions to teach children to be good citizens is outdated and is not working.

Religious teaching should become a very private issue and should not be mixed with state teaching. At the same time we should not leave a vacuum in our schools curriculum so that the children come out of the schools and universities without proper understanding of how one should and should

not behave in a society.

So we should *modernise* the way we teach morality to our children.

Compulsory citizenship lessons for every child in all educational establishments should include topics such as:

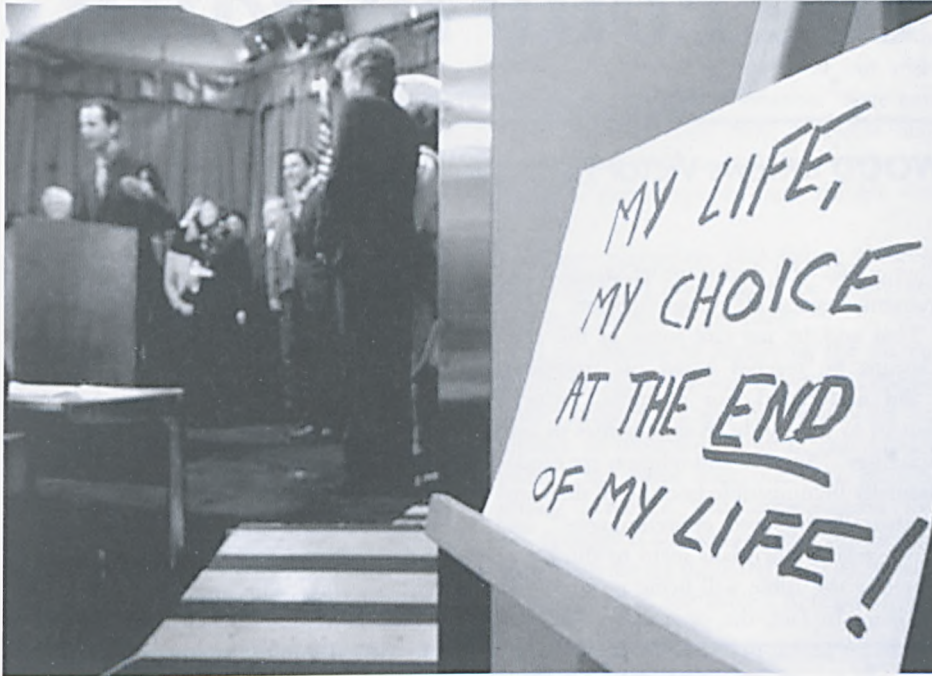
- Responsibility
- Striving for high standards
- Self-respect
- Search for truth
- Self discipline
- Self confidence
- Healthy eating and living
- Cleanliness and good hygiene
- Manners
- Respect for the environment
- Personal finance

Children should also be taught to:

- Guard against greed on personal, national and international levels
- Guard against hate and jealousy
- Guard against unhealthy and anti-social habits of intoxicating oneself with drugs, alcohol, smoking, gambling etc.

The higher the child moves up in his or schooling, the more detailed and deeper understanding of the above should be taught. Key universities should be tasked to constantly research and update the school citizenship curriculum, so it does not become obsolete, irrelevant and divisive as religious teaching has become.

I suggest that this model could be taken all the way to the United Nations, and used as a basis for education in all the member states.



on the one hand, to take their own lives (the Suicide Act of 1961), while on the other, defines as a criminal anyone assisting another to die. Thus it is a crime to help someone do something that is not a crime!

Moreover, according to Emily Jackson, a law professor at LSE, a third of all deaths in Britain today is by morphine overdose, administered by doctors, which allows patients to die painlessly and with dignity, while the removal of life support by medical staff is responsible for another third. Both these life-terminating actions are premeditated and legal. Yet anyone found guilty of assisting a competent person to die could get 14 years in prison, and for euthanasia, voluntary or otherwise, they could be charged with murder. Such inconsistencies discredit the law. If some laws can be ignored without consequences, then why not other laws? Such anomalies cry out for the laws to be brought into line with practice, and with public opinion. (Roughly 80 percent of the public are in favour of AD).

The legalisation of AD, it is also argued, may lead to some patients seeking to die for the wrong reasons, or may increase the likelihood of bullying and even murder by greedy and unscrupulous relatives.

But evidence from those countries where AD or VE is legal does not support this fear. The experience in Belgium, where euthanasia was legalised in 2002, shows how safeguards against abuse may be set up. Among the strict conditions which must be met are that a doctor must explain fully to the patient the possibilities and benefits of palliative care, while a second doctor must examine the patient's medical history and confirm the degree of the patient's suffering.

A doctor must also confirm that the re-

quest is freely and competently made, and in many cases that a month or longer has elapsed before the final request is made. (A "conscience clause" could of course release any doctors from having to participate in AD if this was against their principles.)

Could legalisation lead to some patients being helped to die who may simply be temporarily depressed? The finality and irreversibility of AD or VE, coupled with the risks of misinterpretation of the patient's state of mind should, it is argued, stop us in our tracks. Assessments by doctors or relatives are subjective and discretionary, and so could be wrong. The risks are too great. Again, evidence from other countries suggests that this fear is groundless. An extensive report in Oregon (AD is legal in Oregon and Washington State) found, for example, that the overwhelming number of patients who had died as a result of AD had not suffered from depression or related disorders<sup>1</sup>. A number of surveys, for example John Griffiths with reference to Holland, and Dahl and Levy re. Oregon, have also suggested very little evidence in support of the "slippery slope" arguments<sup>2</sup>.

Many terminal patients would feel greatly reassured in the knowledge that there could be someone available to help them to die if their lives became unbearable. Without this reassurance some patients may commit suicide earlier than they may have wished, in case they lose the physical capacity to do so later. The same applies to those who travel abroad to die: some may do so before they become too ill or incapacitated to travel. It is ironical, therefore, that legalisation of AD may have the effect of lengthening the lives of some patients. One could speculate also that some patients may refrain from jumping

off a bridge, or killing themselves in some other violent way, if they had the option of dying peacefully in the company of loved ones, at the moment of their choosing. For Emily Jackson "to die quickly and painlessly, perhaps at home and surrounded by people we love, is obviously preferable to a lonely, protracted, and frightening death"<sup>3</sup>.

It has to be conceded, however, that even with strict safeguards in place, it is theoretically possible that a tragic mistake could be made – for example if someone chooses AD who might otherwise, with time, have pulled through. However, when individuals have freedom of choice in any sphere, mistakes will inevitably be made. With freedom of choice comes the freedom to make wrong choices. But the fact that wrong choices may be made does not mean that the freedom to do so should be denied. To use an analogy, we have a right to drink alcohol, even though some will inevitably abuse that freedom, leading to the deaths of others – whether as a result of violence in the home or street, or driving over the limit. But it would clearly be absurd to ban alcohol to reduce the loss of innocent lives. Similarly, a few thousand deaths occur each year on British roads as a consequence of selfish or careless driving. Yet few are calling for a halt on the right to drive a car. Clearly, the fact that a right might be criminally abused, resulting in deaths, is not always a good enough reason for denying that right.

The Suicide Act of 1961 could be seen as one step along a path to a more compassionate and rational society (even though there is something inherently illogical in decriminalising suicide). Assisted dying could be seen as the next step along this progressive path. In the words of the columnist Simon Jenkins, writing in 2008, "there cannot be a human freedom so personal as ordering the circumstances of one's death. Yet Britain is ... enveloped in prejudice, religion, taboo and prohibition. We are told how to die by the state, with no consideration for individual choice". For Jenkins those who stand in the way of "this final and quintessentially personal freedom", such as the Archbishop of Canterbury and the chief rabbi, along with most MPs and members of the House of Lords, may be seen in years to come as not just illiberal, but cruel.

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# God and the Folly of Faith

WILLIAM HARWOOD reviews Victor J Stenger's latest book

It annoys me immensely whenever a media person cites a list of "Four Horsemen" of superstition-debunkers that does not include Victor Stenger. Stenger's bestselling *God: The Failed Hypothesis* guarantees that he will eventually be credited alongside Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens with wiping the god fantasy from the face of the earth. That does not mean that I think he can do no wrong. Even Dawkins, author of the incomparable *The God Delusion*, has written books I could not give an unequivocal endorsement.

The same is true of Stenger. I wrote of his *The Fallacy of Fine Tuning*, that the physics in the book was "so far beyond my expertise that the only endorsement I am able to give is by saying that his previous books give me the confidence to take his word for it."

The same is true of *God and the Folly of Faith*. Anyone who has not at least passed

Physics 101 will find some of Stenger's arguments beyond his comprehension.

That said, let me cite some of the conclusions he reaches based on arguments I did understand. For example, "Science flies us to the moon. Religion flies us into buildings", "Science and religion are fundamentally incompatible because of their unequivocally opposed epistemologies", and "Evangelical Christians seem to think that teaching the Bible will bring more people to Jesus. In fact, the opposite is likely to happen. A recent poll showed that the more people know about religion, the less likely they are to be religious. The best way to become an atheist is to read the Bible from cover to cover."

That echoes Isaac Asimov's observation that, "Properly read, the Bible is the most potent force for atheism ever conceived." And my own reading of the Bible led to the recognition that it is the most obscene paean to evil ever written, with *Mein Kampf* not even a serious challenger.

Stenger contrasts faith with trust. Scien-

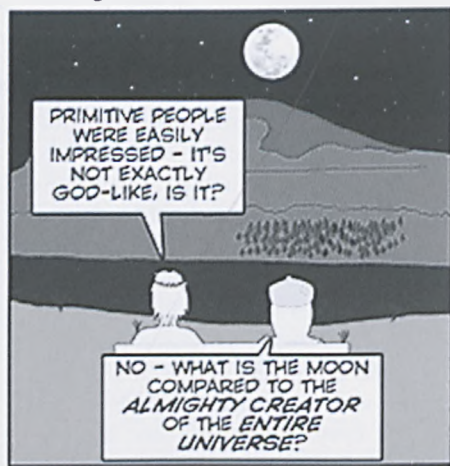
tists trust the findings of other scientists that are supported by evidence and not falsified by contrary evidence. But "faith is belief in the absence of supportive evidence and even in the light of contrary evidence". He also contrasts religious hypothesis with myth: "Science does not conflict with religious myths any more than it does with Harry Potter. Although sometimes based on actual events and personages, myths are basically fictions." But: "The argument I presented in *God: The Failed Hypothesis* that God does not exist beyond a reasonable doubt is a scientific one. It is based on the fact that the theist (as opposed to the deist) God should be detectable by his actions in the world, and has not been." In other words, since the myth that Jesus rose from the dead is fiction, it cannot be subjected to scientific evaluation. It is when theists claim that Jesus' resurrection is a fact of history rather than an incident in a work of fiction, that it becomes testable by the methodology of science and fails to overcome the falsifying evidence.

Stenger does not share the view of some non-theists that religion is no more dangerous than belief in Santa Claus or the Great Pumpkin: "Those who rely on observation and reason to provide an understanding of the world must stop viewing as harmless those who rely on superstition and the mythologies in ancient texts passed down from the childhood of our species."

What makes that admonition vital is that even moderate theists are conditioned to believe that right and wrong are whatever their imaginary Sky Führer or its self-appointed scriptwriter says they are: "If God defines what is good and what is evil, then those who follow God's commands are morally justified to commit similar atrocities. History shows the result: holy wars, burning of heretics, the Crusades, the Inquisition ... eventually leading to the Holocaust." For the benefit of persons who swallow the Big Lie that the Holocaust was atheist-inspired, Stenger points out that Hitler and his heretic-hating fellow thugs were committed Catholics.

Stenger responds to the doublethink to which apologists have resorted in order to defend their position in the face of what has been called the problem of evil. He cites a Templeton Prize winner (awarded

## Jesus & Mo



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to rationalizers who can harmonize A and not-A), that “the only way to justify evil and suffering and maintain belief in God at the same time is to relax at least one of his traditional trinity of attributes: omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence ... Of course no one wants to believe in a non-omnibenevolent God, but either omnipotence or omniscience can go.”

He also draws attention to myth-makers’ free use of their imaginations to explain away inconsistencies in their allegedly historical narratives: “The claimed prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem was fulfilled after the fact by the Gospel writers inventing implausible, inconsistent, and historically disprovable scenarios by which Jesus could have been born there.” Since Stenger is not a biblical historian, he does not mention that Jesus was actually born in Capernaum, since that

is an issue on which he would have to take my word for it.

While liberal theists acknowledge that the universe is billions of years old, but argue that the “seven days of creation” were eons rather than 24-hour days, inflexible dogmatists have tried to explain away the evidence of a cosmography incompatible with *Genesis*.

Stenger recognizes that failing to rebut the dogmatists might give the impression that they cannot be rebutted.

So in addition to dignifying the incompetent ravings of apologist Dinesh D’Souza with a rebuttal, he also paraphrases the defenders of biblical literalism, “that God is pulling the wool over our eyes, planting phony evidence that carbon-dated fossils, geological formations, and galaxies are older than the six thousand years since creation implied in the Bible”. Actually literal-

ists argue that it was Satan who planted the false evidence, apparently unaware that they are thereby implying that the god Yahweh gave him permission to do so – either that or Yahweh is not omnipotent. Stenger continues (*ibid*): “And if religion doesn’t work in the sphere of nature, why should we expect it to work in the moral or other spheres?”

My argument has long been that, if we cannot believe the Bible’s 15 assurances that the earth is flat, why should we believe its description of a god revealing its existence? And if we recognize the moral bankruptcy of the philosophy, “Cheat those who are no longer useful to you, and use the stolen money to bribe those who are in a position to do you good” (Luke 16:9 paraphrased), how can we simultaneously believe that a Bible advocating such a policy is anything but a paean to evil?

## Enter our caption contest and win a copy of *The Young Atheist’s Handbook*

EVIDENCE that more and more young people are learning that they can live life untrammelled by religious belief emerges virtually every week in reports on falling church attendances, surveys showing religion heading for oblivion in many Western countries, and in books aimed at clearing paths to a more rational outlook on life.

The latest of these is *The Young Atheist’s Handbook*, written by Alom Shaha, a physics teacher at a comprehensive school in London who escaped the clutches of Islam. When he is not teaching, he works as a filmmaker, writer and science communicator.

Shaha grew up in a strict Bangladeshi Muslim community in south-east London in the 1970s and 80s. He spent his teenage years juggling two utterly different worlds: a chaotic, sometimes funny, sometimes tragic family life on a council estate, and that of a student at a privileged private school set amongst the idyllic green playing fields of Dulwich.

In a charming blend of memoir, philosophy and science, Shaha explores the questions about faith and the afterlife that we all ponder. Through a series of loose “lessons”, he tells his own compelling story, drawing on the theories of some of history’s greatest thinkers and questioning the fallacies that have impeded humanity for centuries.

He recounts how his education and formative experiences led him to question how to live without being tied to what his parents, priests, or teachers told him to believe, and offers insights so that others may do the same.

Robin Ince, writer and comedian said of



*The Young Atheist’s Handbook*: “A book that destroys the cliché of the atheist as joyless rationalist and shows the humanity, love, and concern that often lies behind godless thinking.”

And atheist comedian Tim Minchin said: “More than just a great handbook, this is an honest and often very moving story about valuing truth over hope, even in the face of grief.”

Shaha passionately believes that a largely white (and male) atheist movement has to do a great deal more to engage with non-believers in ethnic groups.

In the *Guardian* in 2010 he stated: “There are issues that black and Asian atheists face that white atheists do not, for example,

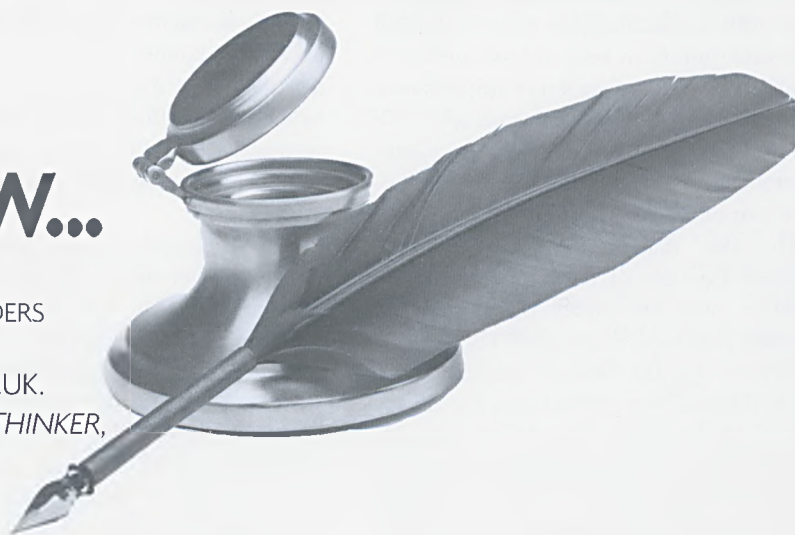
greater pressure to adhere to the religion of the communities in which they live. Since first writing about my atheism in public, I have been contacted by a number of Asian people who don’t believe in God but feel they have to carry on the pretence of being a Muslim because they genuinely fear that the consequences of “coming out” would be unbearable.

Send your caption entries to: FT Mag caption contest, and email them to [barry@freethinker.co.uk](mailto:barry@freethinker.co.uk). Postal entries should be sent to 3 Queens Rd, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 4JN. Closing date is July 31. The winner will receive is/her prize direct from Biteback Publishing. There is a runner-up prize of a year’s free subscription to the *Freethinker*.

# points of view...

A DIG IN THE POST BAG – LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

ADDRESS LETTERS TO BARRY@FREETHINKER.CO.UK.  
THE POSTAL ADDRESS IS POINTS OF VIEW, FREETHINKER,  
3 QUEENS ROAD, BECKENHAM, KENT BR3 4JN



## DOCTOR-ASSISTED SUICIDE

NOW that I am 81 years old (with the expectation of death within the next few years), I can happily ignore Fr Frank Pavone when he says that “We do not have a ‘right to die’...We do not have a claim on death. Rather, death has a claim on us!” (Catholic Church steps up its attack on euthanasia, June *Freethinker*).

Having been a chairman of Dignity in Dying (1996 to 1999, and 2001 to 2003), I have had a very strong belief for very many years that the only entity which controls my life is myself. And, although it is unfortunate that a law in the UK, to permit legalised doctor-assisted suicide, will still not happen for several years, I have control of my death by having been a member of Dignitas (in Zurich) for the past decade. When the time comes, I can now easily go there for a dignified and quick doctor-assisted suicide (something which I have now witnessed on four occasions).

Fortunately, while considering “rights”, the European Court of Human Rights thinks differently to the Catholic Church. In April 2002, regarding the appeal made to it by Diane Pretty (who suffered from motor neurone disease), it stated that “In an era of growing medical sophistication, combined with longer life expectancies, many people are concerned that they should not be forced to linger on in old age or in states of advanced physical or mental decrepitude which conflict with strongly held ideas of self and personal identity”.

That legal statement provided a solid basis for the establishment, by several Humanists, of the Society for Old Age Rational Suicide (SOARS) in 2009. I invite your readers to look at its website ([www.soars.org.uk](http://www.soars.org.uk)), and to become its supporters (there is no membership fee!).

**Michael Irwin**  
Hove

stood them as he says, then I understand his anger. But as an intelligent man, he should admit they are not representative of those of the Church at large, nor of historical Biblical Christianity.

**Stephen Green MS**  
National Director  
Christian Voice

## ISLAMOPHOBIA

THE LETTER from Colin Mills (*Points of View*, May) argues that the preponderance of moderate

Muslims invalidates criticism of Islam. But Muslim fundamentalists, even if a minority, are the ones that live by the Koran, just as far-right fundamentalist Christians are those who adhere to the Bible. And both cases of fundamentalism result in atrocities. Moreover, very few of the moderate Muslims actually oppose Muslim extremism more than moderately. In the aftermath of the violence that followed the Rushdie fatwa and the Danish cartoons, I quizzed every Muslim I came across for their reaction. Though they all said they were against the violence, most of them added “Still, people should respect religion” – as though mockery, or even criticism, of religion can justify murder

Mr Mills goes on to vindicate “aspects of sharia” being introduced into this country – meaning, presumably, that corporal punishments and the death penalty are to be excluded. But there could be no exclusion of misogyny, since that is an inherent attribute of sharia – inevitably revoking the civilised principle of equality before the law.

In another letter, Maggie Atkins defends the wearing of the burqa, which she likens to the veiled hats worn by Victorian women. My own grandmother (born in 1860) wore a veiled hat till the end of her life, explaining that it protected her from the wind – but

## THE FREETHINKER ‘MISREPRESENTS’ CHRISTIANITY

I KNOW the *Freethinker* likes to attack Christianity, and I guess misrepresenting it is a useful tool. Mr Duke is kind enough to waste a stamp on me every month, and I usually grin and let the propaganda pass me by, but for some reason I need to correct Phil Greer’s article (The Mother I Never Knew, *Freethinker* April 2012, especially the following comment: “Jesus, of course, can pave your way into heaven and keep you out of hell. Well maybe, maybe not. You can never be 100 percent sure.”

Authentic Christianity teaches that we can and should indeed have what we Christians call “the sweet knowledge of salvation”. In Acts 2:21 the Apostle Peter tells the Jews “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” The Apostle Paul tells the Christians in Rome (Rom 5:9) “Much

more than, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.” “There is no hedging about, no ifs or buts, just “shall be saved”, 100 percent sure.

I have something in common with Phil Greer. My mother also suffered from dementia, although by the grace of God I was able to ensure she lived in her own home rather than a nursing home in her declining years.

Also like Mr Greer, I knew only some things about my mother, and not others. She had a quiet non-conformist faith, but it was only after her death, reading her diaries, that I found out its real depth.

I don’t know anything about the “Church of Christ” Mr Greer says his mother belonged to. If he was accurately transmitting their beliefs, and if his mother has under-

the veil was made of lace, through which her face was perfectly visible, whereas the opaque burqa renders the wearer faceless. It is thus a denial of identity.

**Barbara Smoker**  
Bromley

## LIBERTARIANISM

I WAS sorry to hear Mark Taha was bullied at school (*Points of View*, May) Perhaps his teachers were too worried about being intimidated by the National Front. Fortunately, local education authorities paid no heed to this bunch of racist bigots.

As socialism teaches the unity of workers regardless of race or ethnic origin, I can't see how apartheid, which taught racial separation, could have been socialist.

Libel on the Internet is an occupation of political involvement. Threats of violence become dangerous when they are transformed into action. At a public meeting, BNP thugs beat me with a chair and broke my finger. Previously, a car full of NF supporters had driven straight into an anti-racist march in Croydon

The law can't dictate who is loved and beloved but it can protect people from discrimination on the grounds of age, ethnic origin, ability, etc.

Instead of erecting signs saying no to this group or that group, in a humane world we should be erecting signs saying there are no strangers, only friends we have not yet met. All modern humans are descended from a group which developed in Africa around 150,000 years ago.

The world has a larger population than it had in Paine's day but it is not beyond the ability of humans to deal with this and through education and persuasion to seek to reduce human numbers where these threaten environmental stability.

Immigrants were not imported. As Commonwealth citizens they had a right to settle here as EU citizens do today. Rather than slam the door in their faces, we should be combating the reactionary, religious ideas to which some still adhere. Government policy in waging war in the Middle East doesn't help.

Malcolm Skeggs had no chance to misuse information he had on clients or customers. Thanks to swift action by the union, he was sent to an office where he could not access such information.

Drug dealers are not social servants. They are criminals who profit from exploiting the weak and vulnerable. There may be a case for reforming the law but this should be based on solid scientific evidence not misguided sentiment.

**Terry Liddle**  
London

## HELP GET UNELECTED BISHOPS OUT OF THE LORDS

I WOULD like encourage *Freethinker* readers to support the British Humanist Society's recently launched campaign for the removal of Church of England bishops from the House of Lords.

In launching its Holy Redundant Campaign ([www.holyredundant.org.uk](http://www.holyredundant.org.uk)), the BHA pointed out: "At present, the Church of England is granted privileged access to our Parliament. Anglican Bishops sit alongside Peers in the House of Lords, they have the right to vote and debate, they influence our national way of life. They acquired this right solely by virtue of their religion, their gender and their position in the hierarchy of one particular denomination of one particular Church. They are unaccountable to the public."

A fresh reason to support the campaign was provided last month when *The Independent* revealed that a great deal of taxpayers' money is used to pay attendance allowances to the bishops. Peter Forster, the Bishop of

Chester, for example, claimed £27,600 for attending the House on 97 days, and a further £7,309 in travel expenses. The Bishop of Liverpool attended on 60 days, claiming £15,600 for attendance and £4,220 in expenses.

Despite ongoing attempts to reduce their ranks or introduce representatives of other faiths, there are still places in the Lords for the 26 "Lords Spiritual".

However, under government plans, the number of bishops allowed to sit in the House of Lords would be reduced to 12 – with a view to allow other faiths a presence in the Upper House.

This suggestion from the House of Lords Reform Committee has been slammed by the National Secular Society, which warned in April that the move: "Will not create the intended diversity but risks turning the Upper House into a religious battleground."

**Gary Sutherland**  
Cambridge

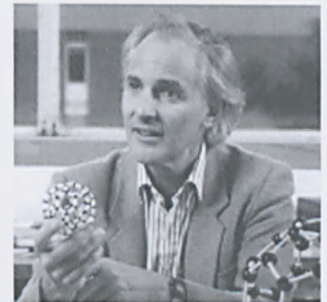
The Brighton and Hove Humanist Society presents

# The Ethical Purpose of Education

A talk by Nobel Prize Winner  
Sir Harry Kroto

*Sir Harry spent a large part of his career at the University of Sussex, where he holds an emeritus professorship. He is currently the Francis Eppes Professor of Chemistry at the Florida State University.*

“ I would argue that we are honour-bound to teach our children how to recognize what is true and what is false among all the things that they are told! ”



**Wednesday 1st August 2012 7.30 pm**  
**Sallis Benney Theatre**

University of Brighton, Grand Parade campus  
*Just a few minutes walk from the seafront and city centre.*

Tickets: £3.00 on the door or from the Sallis Benney website:

[arts.brighton.ac.uk/tg/tickets](http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/tg/tickets)

# the freethinker

## EVENTS & CONTACTS

i information w website e email

### Birmingham Humanists:

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

**Brighton & Hove Humanist Society:** i 01273 227549/461404. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. July 4 – AGM. Wed, August 1: Sir Harry Kroto, at the Sallis Benney Theatre 7:30pm *The Ethical Purpose of Education*.

w <http://homepage.nitworld.com/robert.stovold/humanist/>.

**Bromley Humanists:** Meet second Thursdays at 3pm at the H G Wells Centre e [asad.65@hotmail.com](mailto:asad.65@hotmail.com).

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

e [info@centrallondonhumanists.org](mailto:info@centrallondonhumanists.org).

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

**Chiltern Humanists:** Enquiries: 01494 726351.

w [www.chilternhumanists.webs.com](http://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](mailto:phil.cork@blueyonder.co.uk).

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

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

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

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

w [www.secularderby.org](http://www.secularderby.org)

### Devon Humanists:

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

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

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

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

### East Cheshire and High Peak Secular Group:

i Carl Pinel 01298 815575.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 OHP. Tel: 0207 328 4431.

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

**Harrow Humanists:** meet the second Wednesday of the month at 8pm (except Feb, July and August) at the HAVS Centre, 64 Pinner Road, Harrow. July 11. No evening meeting, but a daytime outing to Rochester.

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

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

**Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern**

**Ireland:** i Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27

4HE. Tel: 028 9267 7264 e [brianmcclinton@btinternet.com](mailto:brianmcclinton@btinternet.com).

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

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

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

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

### Local Scottish Groups:

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

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

**Edinburgh:** 07010 704775, [edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk)

**Glasgow:** 07010 704776, [glasgow@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:glasgow@humanism-scotland.org.uk)

**Highland:** 07017 404779, [highland@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:highland@humanism-scotland.org.uk).

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

**Isle of Man Freethinkers:** i Jeff Garland, 01624 664796.

Email: [jeffgarland@wm.im](mailto:jeffgarland@wm.im) w [www.iomfreethinkers.org](http://www.iomfreethinkers.org)

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

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

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

**Isle of Wight Secular and Humanist Group:** i David

Broughton on 01983 755526 or e [davidb67@clara.co.uk](mailto:davidb67@clara.co.uk)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Marches Secularists:** w [www.MarchesSecularists.org](http://www.MarchesSecularists.org) e [Secretary@MarchesSecularists.org](mailto:Secretary@MarchesSecularists.org)

**Mid-Wales Humanists:** i Maureen Lofmark, 01570 422648 e [mlofmark@btinternet.com](mailto:mlofmark@btinternet.com)

**Norfolk Secular and Humanist Group:** i Chris Copsey, 1 Thistledown Road, Horsford NR10 3ST. Tel: 0160 3710262.

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

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

i C McEwan on 01642 817541.

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

i the Secretary on 01434 632936.

**North London Humanist Group:** Meets third Thursday of month (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](mailto:enquiries@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk) w [www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk](http://www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk)

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

**Oxford Humanists:** Chair: John White, 01865 891876. e [jdwhite@talk21.com](mailto:jdwhite@talk21.com)

**Peterborough Humanists:** i Edwin Salter Tel: 07818870215.

**Pink Triangle Trust:** The PTT is the only registered gay charity in the UK and publishes *The Pink Humanist* ([www.thepinkhumanist.com](http://www.thepinkhumanist.com)) i Secretary George Broadhead. Tel 01926 858 450 e [secretary@pinktriangle.org.uk](mailto:secretary@pinktriangle.org.uk) w <http://www.pinktriangle.org.uk>

### Scottish Humanists:

w [www.ScottishHumanists.org.uk](http://www.ScottishHumanists.org.uk). Free membership. Charity SCO42124. Next meeting September 2, Station Hotel, Ayr, 2pm. Free admission. Guest speaker Robin Wood. All welcome i 07935272723.

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

**South East London 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.selondon.humanist.org.uk](http://www.selondon.humanist.org.uk)

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

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

**Somerset:** Details of South Somerset Humanists' meetings in Yeovil from Edward Gwinnett on 01935 473263 or e [edward.gwinnett@talktalk.net](mailto:edward.gwinnett@talktalk.net)

**South Place Ethical Society:** Weekly talks/meetings, Sundays 11am at Conway Hall Brockway Room, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Tel: 0207242 8031/4 e [programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk](mailto:programme@ethicalsoc.org.uk). Programmes on request.

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

Secretary: Denis Johnston.

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

**Sutton Humanists:** i Brian Dougherty 07913 734583. w [www.suttonhumanists.co.uk](http://www.suttonhumanists.co.uk)

**Watford Area Humanists:** Meet on the third Tuesday of each month (except August and December) at 7.30 pm at Watford Town and Country Club, Watford. i 01923-252013 e [john.dowdle@watford.humanist.org.uk](mailto:john.dowdle@watford.humanist.org.uk) w [www.watford.humanists.org.uk](http://www.watford.humanists.org.uk)

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

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

Please send your listings and events notices to [barry@freethinker.co.uk](mailto:barry@freethinker.co.uk) or to 3 Queens Road, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 4JN.

Notices must be received by the 15th of the month preceding publication.

Please note that, from August 2012, this Events & Contacts page will only be published online at [www.freethinker.co.uk](http://www.freethinker.co.uk)