

3



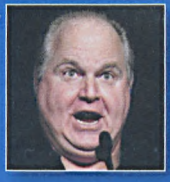
Farewell Bill:
Devoted secularist and past *Freethinker* editor Bill McLroy dies aged 85

6



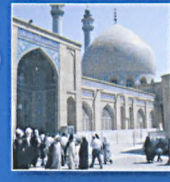
Tragic death:
Indian rationalist Narendra Dabholkar shot dead for opposing charlatans

7



Climate change:
Limbaugh: 'If you believe in God you cannot believe in man-made global warming'

8



Visit to Qom:
Canadian writer Zachary Kuehner on Iran's most pious city

the freethinker

the voice of atheism since 1881

£1.25 SEPTEMBER 2013 VOLUME 133 NO 9

REG2142



Z002535209

FREETHINKER.CO.UK

BOSTON SPA LS237BQ

Findings of new survey are described as snocking

Irish students do not regard religion as a force for good

A survey in Ireland of 1,146 third level-students across the country last month highlights how religion, and its place in society, has undergone dramatic changes in the country in recent years – with 78.7 percent expressing a negative view of the Catholic Church.

“Shockingly”, reported the Irish Central website, “while fewer than 60 percent of respondents considered themselves Catholic, the second largest group were atheists at 20 percent.”

Abortion is an extremely sensitive and current topic, and the results of the survey show that 83.5 percent of the Irish students believe that abortion should be allowed in Ireland while 76.8 percent think that the Catholic Church has too much power in the country.

When asked “Do you attend communal religious ceremonies and functions?” the highest response was “no” at 61 percent, and those who responded “yes” mainly attend only one to three times a year.

While 61.5 percent of the Catholic students who were asked if they take communion said “yes”, only 32.2 percent believe that it’s the actual body and blood of Christ.

When offered a number of choices for why students don’t follow a religion, the response that topped the scale was that they “don’t believe in the teachings” (77.8 percent).

Just over 45 percent of students only follow a religion because of their parents influence, yet 40 percent of those who took the survey wouldn’t want their children to follow the same religion they were brought up in.

Only 13.7 percent follow a religion due to a strong faith.

Furthermore, the students regarded “looking good” (fifth place) as more important than “religious beliefs” (which figured in sixth place on a list of things they considered important). Friends and family topped the list. When asked how

they would characterise their belief in God, only 37.5 percent stated that they believe in God with the top response at 41.5 percent being that students are unsure if there is a god.

When the students were asked “Do religious beliefs have a place in society?” 54 percent stated that they do not believe society needs the influence of religion and 65.6 percent said they did not believe that religion makes the world a better place.

Colman Byrne, Managing Director of Student Marketing Network and Oxygen.ie and former two-term president of Union of Students Ireland, said: “The survey brought up a lot of interesting information that people may have different views on but it certainly shows that there is a major disconnect between religion and young people in Ireland.”

The survey comes a year after the *Independent* reported that worldwide only Vietnam experienced a greater drop than Ireland in the numbers of those describing themselves as religious. This statistic was contained in a poll that covered 57 countries.

The survey confirmed that Ireland, once regarded as particularly devout, has been almost transformed from the days when the Catholic Church exercised both political power and strong social influence.

The paper pointed out that the Church’s standing “had taken a series of severe blows over the last decade, in particular suffering damage from a series of devastating sex abuse scandals. The sense is widespread that it has reacted sluggishly to the revelations and has been more concerned with defending itself rather than with the interests of victims.”

The survey showed that those Irish who considered themselves religious had fallen from 69 percent in 2011 to less than half today. Ireland was ranked seventh in the 57 countries for those describing



Thousands of young Irish people turned out to last year to support proposed legislation to liberalise the country’s abortion law

(Continued on back page)

One hundred and forty characters

OPHELIA BENSON: 'TWITTER IS A TERRIBLE MEDIUM FOR DISCUSSING COMPLICATED SUBJECTS'

Richard Dawkins has been getting a lot of heat over the past few days (it's August 10 as I write), even from people who are normally friends and allies. This time it's not the tedious, endlessly-recycled complaint about the rudeness of "New Atheism" in being more blunt and outspoken than the old, genteel kind of atheism. This time it's about his habit of saying things on Twitter that (in the view of critics) border on racism, or if not racism then something very like it. One such tweet, from August 7, goes like this:

MUSLIMS GAVE YOU ALCHEMY AND ALGEBRA!!!!!! Indeed, where would we be without alchemy? Dark Age achievements undoubted. But since then?

You will notice that "Muslims" doesn't literally name a race. Dawkins noted that, his fans noted that. I've been known to note that myself in the past. But it's not always a useful or relevant reply, and I don't think it is useful in this instance. Those four sentences are crude and sneery, and the group

they pick out really is an outgroup in the world where Dawkins is influential. He is, as the saying goes, punching down: he's not an underdog telling truth to power, but an overdog jabbing at people with no power.

But it's Twitter! Of course what he said is crude, because it's on Twitter. Well yes, but that's why he shouldn't try to discuss things like that on Twitter.

Twitter is a *terrible* medium for discussing complicated subjects. It's good for gossip and chat and jokes, among other things, but it's not a good place to make a complicated point that, if made clumsily, becomes a mere insult.

The funny thing is, Dawkins later wrote a post for his website, responding to the criticism, in which he acknowledged the difficulty of making an argument on Twitter – but apparently without drawing the conclusion that therefore he should stop trying.

You have surely heard something like the following two statements, often uttered with a measure of truculence:-

1. *"There are 1.6 billion Muslims, nearly a quarter of the world's population, and we are growing fast." There is even, sometimes, a hint of menace added. In the words of Houari Boumediene, President of Algeria, "Le ventre de nos femmes nous donnera la victoire" (the belly of our women will give us the victory).*

2. *"Islamic science deserves enormous respect." There are two versions of this second claim, ranging from the pathetic desperation of "the Qu'ran anticipated modern science" (the embryo develops from a blob, mountains have roots that hold the earth in place, salt and fresh water don't mix) to what is arguably quite a good historical point: "Muslim scholars kept the flame of Greek learning alight while Christendom wallowed in the Dark Ages."*

Twitter's 140 character limit always presents a tough challenge, but I tried to rise to it.

Wrong move. Don't try to rise to it. The problem is already apparent: there isn't room on Twitter to give the context that he gave in those first two paragraphs. Without the context, the tweet just looks like a gratuitous sneer. (It doesn't look much better with the context, but one can at least see what it was about.)

The next day, apparently (but who knows?)

still thinking about his critics, he tweeted a new thought.

Interesting concept: a simple statement of undeniable FACT can be offensive. Other examples where facts should be hidden because offensive?

Oh lord. It's really not difficult to think of examples of undeniable fact that it would be highly offensive to say. Has Dawkins never "hidden" undeniable facts about people he's talking to for the sake of not being offensive? One certainly hopes he has.

But perhaps he hasn't. There was the time he said about Nadia Eweida, the British Airways worker who wanted to wear a cross on the job, "I saw a picture of this woman. She had one of the most stupid faces I've ever seen." He apologized for saying it, I think, but that he allowed himself to say it in the first place seems to shed light on his proclivity for composing insults on Twitter now. Twitter is a terrible medium for subtle arguments, but an ideal one for brisk insults. Perhaps that's why he likes it.

I blame Stephen Fry for the mockery of the claim that a statement of fact can be offensive, or rather, I blame some of Fry's stupider fans. Fry said "So you're offended, so fucking what?" in a good cause, for a good reason. I do not believe he meant that to apply to taunts or mockery of all kinds in all circumstances.

It's a funny thing – I used to spend a lot of time arguing against complaints about "New Atheism" but I feel much less inclined to do that now. I still think atheists should be unapologetic and outspoken, but that doesn't mean I think they should take up recreational rudeness as a hobby. I'm very tired of Internet rudeness, not to mention Internet harassment and abuse, so I find myself less and less inclined to defend "provocative" tweets that are really more insulting than provocative.

People who make a big fuss of self-identifying as skeptics can sometimes end up being callous belligerent shits, who apply their "skepticism" to other people's emotions and sensitivities. They need to get over that.



OPHELIA BENSON
Picking fights with God

the freethinker

the voice of atheism since 1881

Founded in 1881 by G W Foote
UK ISSN 0016-0687
Editor Barry Duke

Views expressed in the magazine are not necessarily those of the publishers.

All correspondence to:
The Freethinker

Apt F, 31st Fl, Sol de Poniente II, C/
Presidente Adolfo Suarez 22, Benidorm 03502, Spain.

Email: barry@freethinker.co.uk
Tel: +34 603 823 243

Website: www.freethinker.co.uk

Annual postal subscription rates

12 months: UK £15.00 or £10.00
unwaged Overseas rate £25 sterling.
Special trial subscription for readers' friends and contacts: £5.00 for six months. Send name and address of recipient with £5.00 cheque or postal order made payable to G W Foote and Company to:

The Freethinker, Unit 8, The Old Silk Mill Brook Street, Tring Hertfordshire HP23 5EF.

Tel: 01442 820580.

Printed by Derek Hattersley & Son, Sheffield.

Bill McIlroy, three-times editor of the *Freethinker*, dies ages 85

By Barry Duke

BILL McIlroy was editor of the *Freethinker* for around 14 years in three separate stints spanning nearly a quarter of a century from 1970, and worked as a volunteer for a further decade.

I first met Bill in London in 1974, shortly after I arrived in the UK, and he commissioned me to write for the *Freethinker*. He was especially interested in accounts of my run-ins with the apartheid regime in South Africa, which, incidentally, had banned the magazine sometime in the 1960s. I penned several pieces excoriating the devout Calvinists who were running the country at the time, frequently using extreme violence to enforce their vicious, biblically-inspired brand of racial segregation.

Bill, then serving as secretary of the National Secular Society, also recruited me into NSS, and I worked closely with him on a number of projects.

In 1998 I was appointed editor of the *Freethinker* following the death of Peter Brearey, who has edited it from 1993 until 1998.

When I relocated from London to Brighton in 2002, Bill who had settled in Hove several years earlier, again recruited me – this time as a member of the Brighton and Hove Humanist Society (which recently changed its name to Brighton Secular Humanists) and I collaborated with him to produce a booklet, *Without The Faith – Freethinkers and Freethought in Brighton and Hove*.

In a tribute posted on its website on the day he died – August 22 – the National Secular Society reported Bill's lifelong devotion to the NSS its and allied causes.

He served as the secretary of the Society from 1963 to 1977 with a one-year break. In the 1960s, Bill and the then President David Tribe were responsible for a resurgence of activity resulting in the NSS becoming nationally prominent, attracting eminent supporters such as writer Brigid Brophy and philosopher Margaret Knight, who made groundbreaking radio broadcasts.

David and Bill spearheaded major campaigns including Secular Education Week and fought successfully for reform of the law on stage censorship, Sunday observance, male homosexuality and abortion.

In 1989, Bill, along with Nicolas Walter, reformed The Committee Against Blasphemy Law to protest at the threat to Salman



Bill McIlroy pictured with NSS Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood at the NSS's 'Bye Bye Blasphemy' celebrations in London in 2008 (Photo courtesy NSS)

Rushdie over his book *The Satanic Verses*. The Committee issued a Statement Against Blasphemy Law signed by over 200 public figures. Bill had been secretary of the original Committee Against Blasphemy Law, which was founded in the late 1970s to protest the trial of the editor and publishers of *Gay News*. When the blasphemy laws in the UK were finally scrapped, the NSS celebrated by staging a "Bye Bye Blasphemy" event in London in 2008.

Bill served on the NSS Council of Management for a few years in the early 2000s and was presented by the NSS with a lifetime achievement award in 2005.

He was born in Northern Ireland but escaped its religious sectarianism at the

earliest opportunity.

His wife Margaret died some years ago from multiple sclerosis. Bill, who had lived independently in Brighton for his last 15 years, was diagnosed with cancer around a year before his death.

In his final days he was cared for in Horsham, Sussex, by his daughters Helen and Ruth, who ensured he still had easy access to his many books on secularism.

Pride of place went to biographies of NSS founder Charles Bradlaugh, a cherished booklet celebrating of the NSS's centenary in 1966, which he helped compile, and a book by pro-blasphemy campaigner Mary Whitehouse, who named Bill as a major thorn in her side.

Atheists in UK more likely to get top jobs

A RECENT survey revealed that Christians are less likely than atheists to be promoted to top jobs in the UK. Nearly a quarter of people with no religious belief live in homes headed by someone with a senior executive position or a job in one of the professions.

When the findings of the survey – contained in a breakdown of employment and religious belief produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – were first published, it was suggested by economist Ruth Lea, of the Arbutnot Banking Group, that the reason for this might be that Christians lacked ambition and were lazy. "Jews and Hindus are proportionately so much more successful than Christians. The driven people tend to come from minorities. Christians are the majority group, and they do not seem so ambitious and hard working.

But Tim Pearson, of an evangelical outfit The Way, asserted: "The issues that these statistics hide is that some employers by default expect their senior management to bend the truth, perform duties that go against the Christian ethos and have dubious ethical standards, all of which precludes the Christian with a strong faith from progressing. It is not about hard work, as Ruth Lea would have us believe because the Bible tells us to go the extra mile be conscientious, hard working etc, so this is just another illustration that we are being persecuted."



Show us your face: W Australia drafts new law in response to burqa outrage

A NEW law requiring Muslim women to remove a burqa or niqab to prove their identity to West Australian police was introduced to the state's parliament last month.

The draft legislation came in the wake of public fury over the case of a burqa-wearing mother-of-seven Carnita Matthews, who had her conviction of knowingly making a false statement to police quashed.

Matthews was originally given a six-month jail sentence after being found guilty of falsely accusing a senior constable of forcibly trying to remove her burqa when she was pulled over while driving in Woodbine in Sydney's southwest in June 2010. "You are racist," she



Carnita Matthews pictured in 2010 outside court with a supporter

told the officer. "All cops are racist."

She appealed the conviction, and won because the prosecution could not prove she was the woman who signed a statement while wearing a burqa.

As part of WA's Criminal Investigation (Identifying People) Amendment Bill, the law will require "a person to remove headwear or do other things to facilitate the officer being able to confirm a person's identity".

It will apply to an item of clothing, hat, helmet, mask, sunglasses or "any other thing worn by a person that totally or partially covers the person's head".

The WA parliament was told the law was in direct response to the NSW case. Attorney-General Michael Mischin said: "Having regard to that case, the government has taken action to ensure that similar injustices do not occur in Western Australia.

"The amendments provide an explicit power ... where the subject person refuses to remove an obstruction that is preventing the officer from being able to identify the person's face."

There is strong antipathy in Australia towards face-concealing garments such as the burqa and the niqab. But when Australian glass sculptor and muralist Sergio Redegalli, the director of Cydonia, an art glass studio in Newtown, New South Wales, painted an anti-burqa mural on the wall outside his studio he received death threats and abuse.

Although the mural was vandalised 40 times by protesters who said it was "racist and inflammatory", Redegalli kept restoring it, saying bullies would not intimidate them.

The sculptor, who is a well-known figure in inner-suburban Newtown, said he had been visited by local police who asked him to take down the mural after learning of a threat to firebomb it.

He refused to do so in the interests of free speech and public debate. "I'm not going to let the bullies win," Redegalli told *The Australian*. "I don't believe bullies have the right to stand over people and deny us our freedoms."

The artist said his objective was to promote debate about the Islamic face veil, which he sees "as a symbol of repression and violent extremism".



Sergio Redegalli

US evangelist to face trial over crimes against humanity allegations

AN evangelical preacher who spearheaded a hate campaign against homosexuals in Uganda, and helped legislators draft a draconian anti-gay bill, is to stand trial in Massachusetts for alleged crimes against humanity

In mid-August Scott Lively was denied a motion to have the charge dismissed by a federal judge. Lively is accused of violating international law by inciting the persecution of LGBT individuals in Uganda. The lawsuit was filed by the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) on behalf of Sexual Minorities of Uganda (SMUG) in 2012.

CCR Attorney Pam Speas said: "We are gratified that the court recognised the per-

secution and the gravity of the danger faced by our clients as a result of Scott Lively's actions. Lively's single-minded campaign has worked to criminalise their very existence, strip away their fundamental rights and threaten their physical safety."

The lawsuit alleged that Lively aided the persecution of LGBT people in Uganda over the past decade and inspired the notorious anti-LGBT legislation known as the "Kill the Gays" bill.

Lively attended an anti-gay conference entitled "Seminar on Exposing the Homosexual Agenda" in 2009 in which he accused gays and lesbians of having genocidal tendencies. His lecture led to the introduction

of the bill, the lawsuit claimed.

Ugandan organisers of the 2009 conference admitted they helped draft the bill and Lively himself admitted to meeting with lawmakers to discuss it.

Lively has denied that he conspired with government officials or religious leaders in Uganda to craft specifics of the legislation. He has said the lawsuit against him "boils down to nothing more than an attempt to define my Biblical views against homosexuality as a crime. Clearly, this lawsuit is intended not only to silence me as an effective voice of opposition to the 'gay' agenda, it is also to intimidate everyone else who would dare to follow my example."

Tutu: 'I'd rather go to Hell than a homophobic heaven'

VETERAN South African gay rights champion, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 82, last month said that, if he had the choice, he'd rather go to Hell than to a homophobic heaven. In denouncing religions that discriminate against gays, Tutu said: "I would not worship a god who is homophobic and that is how deeply I feel about this. I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. No, I would say sorry, I mean I would much rather go to the other place."

He made the remarks during the United Nations' launch of its gay-rights campaign in Cape Town. Tutu also likened equal rights for gays to the fight for equal rights for blacks.

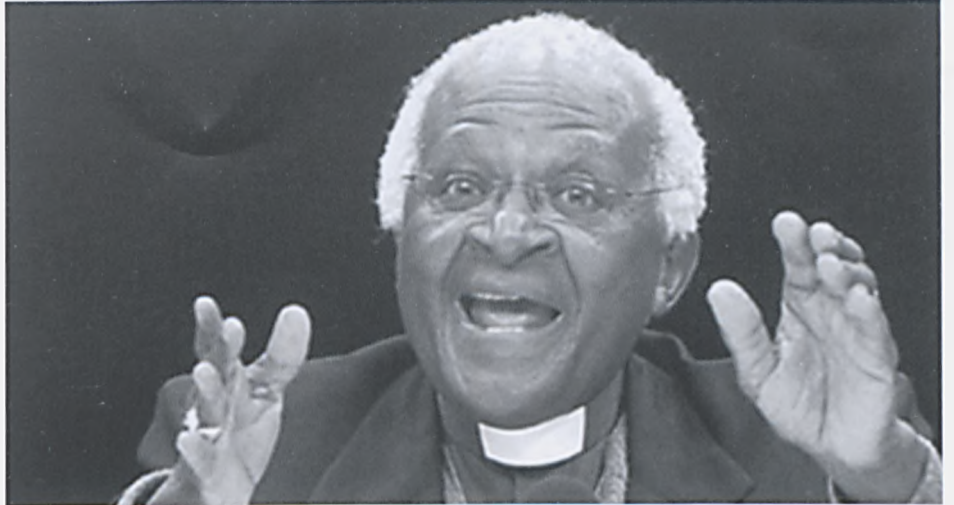
"I am as passionate about this campaign as I ever was about apartheid. For me, it is at the same level."

Tutu quotes

- When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said "Let us pray." We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land.
- We may be surprised at the people we find in heaven. God has a soft spot for sinners. His standards are quite low.

Last year, the Cardinal Newman Society in the US condemned the Catholic Gonzaga University for honouring the Anglican Tutu with an honorary doctor of law degree and hosting him as commencement speaker. The Society pointed out that Tutu "earned the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to subdue violence in racially torn South Africa during apartheid. But as admirable as that work has been, Tutu also endorsed a constitutional amendment in South Africa to legalise abortion and even endorsed the work of the abortion chain Marie Stopes. Tutu also said that contraception was an 'obligation' for Christians."

The Society was outraged over Tutu's remark that "planned parenthood is an obligation of those who are Christians. Our church thinks we should use scientific methods that assist in planning of families." He added that it was far better to have the "children that we want than to say you must have children, no matter what."



Brighton Secular Humanists

<http://www.brightonhumanists.org/>
<https://www.facebook.com/BrightonSecularHumanists>

present

Freedom – not Islamism – is my culture

A talk by

Maryam Namazie

ONE LAW FOR ALL

Maryam Namazie will be speaking about Islam, Islamism and women's rights. A resolute defence of secularism and solidarity with the revolutions and uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa – very often women-led – is a historical task and duty.



Wednesday 6th November 2013 7.30 pm
Sallis Benney Theatre

University of Brighton Grand Parade campus

Tickets: £5.00 on the door or from the Sallis Benney website
<http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/whats-on/gallery-theatre>

Muslim hate preacher injured in the wake of an acid attack in Zanzibar on two young British girls



Firebrand Tanzanian preacher Sheikh Ponda Issa Ponda, pictured above, was injured last month when he was hit by a gas canister fired by police when he reportedly tried to evade capture.

Sheikh Ponda, who had been arrested last October for stoking religious hatred that led Muslim fanatics to torch five churches, was reportedly sought by police in connection with an acid attack in Zanzibar at the beginning of August on British gap-year volunteers Kirstie Trup and Katie Gee, both 18, at the beginning of August.

Ponda, who had visited Zanzibar a week before the atrocity, is said to have gone to the East African island to raise the profile of his campaign to rid it of foreigners and impose sharia law.

He was suspected of having incited his supporters to carry out the attack.

The hate preacher has been linked to the radical Islamic group Uamsho, which is suspected of involvement in an acid attack on a

moderate imam, and the murder of a Catholic priest. In March, 52 of his followers were jailed for a year for violent riots last October in Zanzibar's commercial city of Dar es Salaam sparked by rumours that a 12-year-old boy at a Christian school had urinated on a copy of the Koran.

A manhunt was launched after suspicions arose as to his possible role in provoking the attack on gap-year volunteers who were flown back to the UK to receive treatment at the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital in West London.

The women were celebrating the end of their trip as volunteer teachers on the island when a corrosive substance was thrown at them in an apparently random attack. The girls, who had been working in Zanzibar City, suffered appalling burns and trauma.

International Business Times reported that it has since emerged that they may have been targeted for being Jewish. The island's population is overwhelmingly Muslim.

Zanzibar's assistant police commissioner Mkadam Khamis Mkadam said: "They were accosted by two men riding a motorcycle. They poured this liquid – we suspect it was acid – before they ran away."

The women had planned to return to the UK in time to collect their A-level results. Trup had been hoping to study history at the University of Bristol while Gee was considering the University of Leeds.

Both were said to be "devastated" by the extent of their injuries, which relatives fear will leave them with long-term physical and mental scars.

It has been suggested that at least one of the girls might need skin grafts. Marc Trup, a property investor, said his daughter and Miss Gee were "struggling to come to terms" with their burns.

"They are really not in any emotional or physical state to do anything," he said. "Since their arrival, the enormity of their ordeal is having a devastating effect on them as is the extent of the injuries. Each girl faces their own trauma, different but each equally important. These scars, mental and physical, (are) something they both have to live with

COMMENTARY

By EDWIN SALTER

FAITH can embrace much that is evil both by active wrongdoing and by the prevention of good. The history of religious wars and persecutions speaks for itself. The greatest present threat is to humanity as a whole.

Climate change, with global warming originating from greenhouse gases, could precipitate an irreversible feedback process. British weather, for example, is affected by jet stream shift probably linked to the astonishing reduction of Arctic sea ice. The melting of ice anywhere readily triggers other events: reduced reflectivity increases solar heating; tundra is exposed so releasing methane; sea water characteristics are changed so currents alter and eventually the level rises; and the cycle repeats. Change does not translate as an agreeable degree warmer but as uncertainty and extremes. It is worth remembering that northern Europe is on a latitude with Kamchatka and Alaska.

Why write about this in an atheist jour-

Indian rationalist murdered

A MAN who dedicated his life to exposing fraudulent "god men" who prey on the poor in India was shot dead on August 20 just days after the Government said it was planning to introduce a controversial anti-superstition law he was championing

Narendra Dabholkar, 71, was attacked by two gunmen on motorbikes while he was taking his morning walk and shot dead in the city of Pune.

Dabholkar was particularly well-known for openly criticising some of India's so-called "god-men", the self-styled Hindu ascetics who claim to perform miracles and are revered by many. He also campaigned against animal sacrifices used in certain rituals.

He founded the Committee for the Eradication of Blind Faith more than 20 years ago, and critics accused him of being against religion in a country where mysticism and spirituality is venerated. But in an interview with the *Agence France-Presse* news agency two years ago he rejected such charges, saying that the bill he was promoting was simply about "fraudulent and exploitative practices".

wake of an acid ritish women

for a long time.”

Dr Mohammed Jawad, a leading plastic surgeon who treated model Katie Piper after she had acid thrown at her, said it was “beyond question” that the teenagers would need skin grafts after examining a picture of one of the girls’ wounds.

A hospital spokesman declined to comment on the nature of their injuries but confirmed that the girls were “comfortable and in a stable condition” and that their families were with them.

Many hotels in Stone Town, the archipelago’s historic capital, face cancelled bookings in the wake of the attack, with tourists either avoiding Zanzibar altogether or heading straight for the island’s beaches.

The manager of one large hotel who did not want to be identified said: “We’ve had about 20 different groups cancel reservations. Clearly it would be ideal if the police could get on with it and make an arrest to put people’s minds at rest.

“The longer this goes on, the worse it can be for tourism.”

Bill Cash, Tory MP for Stone, Staffordshire, who sits on the All-Party Parliamen-



The last picture of Kirstie Trup, left, and Katie Gee before they left for Tanzania

tary Group for Tanzania, urged the Foreign Office to upgrade its travel advice for tourists visiting both Zanzibar and Tanzania, warning that the acid attack was “more than just an ordinary criminal event”.

The Foreign Office updated its Tanzania travel advice page with details of the attack and warned British nationals to “take care” and read its travel advice.

Ponda, who is the head of the Council of Imams, fled after being injured by a teargas canister fired by police as they tried to arrest him. But officers caught up with the cleric as he sought treatment for a shoulder wound in Tanzania’s capital, Dar es Salaam.

He was wounded as he tried to escape of-

ficers in Morogoro, 200 miles west of Dar es Salaam. Witnesses reported chaotic scenes as Sheikh Ponda tried to flee in a car. Police surrounding the cleric were pelted with stones by his followers.

Officers were seen shooting guns into the air as a warning and it is believed the preacher was hit in the shoulder with a teargas canister.

He is not being directly linked to the outrage but police believe his speeches could have encouraged followers to commit the atrocity.

Police in Dar es Salaam added that Sheikh Ponda was arrested for inciting religious hatred and organising illegal demonstrations.

ARY: Climate Change and the End of Times

nal? Because the resistance to essential measures is not only from ignorant politicians, the conservatism of privilege, and the greed of commerce based on carbon burning and the exploitation of the environment. Helpfully, there are many religious who respect creation, including humankind, and adopt an attitude of stewardship. But others turn their faith into a prime obstacle to saving a world they denounce as flawed and transitory. First there is the general incompatibility of religion with reason and evidence, especially with science. Second, the fatalist inertia of belief in a universe governed by gods. Third, and most virulent, is the active seeking of ‘the end of times’ that opposes useful action. All change can be opportunistically attributed to some divine purpose and many believe, absurdly, that it is their unique faith that is true, that they in particular will rejoice in eternity while all others will be condemned.

Wretched attempts to enlist all religious people in denying man-made climate change (god-made is fine) and so blocking action, include a feeble mockery that man

claims control over something he can’t create. (A current example, thanks to our editor, is one Rush Limbaugh who is entirely confused and presumably has never shaped a piece of wood or taught a dog). There is a seriously dreadful burgeoning of stuff, easily found on the net, that urges us to welcome the good news of the end, be “rapture ready”, and joyously greet the impending horrors. Be assured that you are among the few chosen, and donate now!

These views are very prominent in the USA, self-righteously Christian and a nation evading its special responsibility for our present peril. The true payoff matrix is that even if (astonishingly) climate fears are mistaken, action will merely result in an improved world with a less polluted and more sustainable environment, Conversely if the danger is real but not vigorously tackled, the outcome is likely to be catastrophic.

It actually doesn’t matter what the cause is; the climatological remedies available are unchanged. Our present world is also both overpopulated – on this too religion is a great

opponent – and vastly overexploited for our uncaring consumption, so there is no margin of safety.

As atheists we are bound to do our best for humanity and this world – it is what we and our children have. Climate change presents such a great and urgent risk to all that it is an issue on which the folly of faith must be most resolutely opposed.

Editor’s note: Limbaugh is a conservative American radio talk show host and political commentator, who said last month: “See, in my humble opinion, folks, if you believe in God, then intellectually you cannot believe in man-made global warming.”

He added: “You must be either agnostic or atheistic to believe that man controls something that he can’t create. The military (sic) environmentalist wackos say we are not as entitled to life on this planet as other creatures because we destroy it.

Limbaugh concluded: “We can’t even stop a rain shower, but we can destroy the climate. And how? With barbecue pits and automobiles, particularly SUVs. It’s absurd.”

Home sweet Qom

Toronto writer **ZACHARY KUEHNER** recently spent some time in Qom, the clerical capital of Iran. In this exclusive article for the *Freethinker*, he tells of the ‘putrid mix of Islamic piety and power politics’ he experienced there.

First of all, in case you’re wondering how clever I am, “home” and “Qom” do more or less rhyme – the Persian pronunciation of the letter “q” nearly makes them homophones. Located about an hour south of Tehran, Qom is Iran’s clerical capital and ground zero for much of the Islamic Republic’s current government policy.

Since the 16th century, the city has been one of the most important seminary centres for the minority Shia, superseded perhaps only by the Iraqi city of Najaf (though since the 2003 intervention Qom has gained some ground as the less bomb-ridden option).

My copy of *Lonely Planet: Iran* described Qom as the second holiest city in Iran, owing to the fact that the shrine of Imam Reza – the only Shia Imam actually buried in Iran – is located in the northeastern city of Mashhad. Having had the opportunity to visit both, I can tell you that what Qom may lack in necro-attraction, it makes up for in power. Qom is a city where Mosque and State – it was surprisingly difficult to avoid saying “Church” – not only meet, but also flirt, dance, fondle and...you get the idea.

There are many things that are difficult to do in Iran – like cross a road in the traffic lawless capital city – but travelling isn’t one of them. Once you get inside (visas can be a bit tricky) things are simple: Iranians are unbelievably helpful and many speak at least some English; transportation is cheap, clean, and efficient; signs are almost always written in English in addition to Farsi; and there is a decent hotel and tourism infrastructure with some locations catering to foreign backpackers.

It is also interesting to note that in a country where unsanctioned contact with foreigners (particularly Westerners) is seen as highly suspicious by the government, Iranian hospitality still reigns. Scarcely a day goes by when one isn’t invited, in all sincer-

ity, for dinner and, often, to stay the night. By the time my girlfriend, Kathryn, and I reached Qom we had been in Iran for almost a month. In that time we had seen much of the country’s diverse landscape (like Iraq, Iran is not just a desert) and “gotten a vibe” from a variety of cities from the Afghan border to the Persian Gulf. Some, like the previously-mentioned

claimed that his purpose in life was “deciphering God’s plan.”

Now, as an atheist or freethinker or anti-theist or whatever you want to call it, one of the most frustrating impediments to the proper criticism of religious beliefs is the unique respect they tend to be accorded. I am by no means the first to point out that in most aspects of daily life, we do not tolerate, much less praise, irrationality. But as many reading this will know all too well, religion manages to exempt itself from the kind of ridicule that would normally follow when, to paraphrase Sam Harris, someone claims to know things they cannot possibly know.

In the past, I have had little problem confronting the religious about their unwarranted certainty, and have dabbled a few times in the criticism, in print, of authors and academics intent on playing apologist games. But all of this was in the safety of my own home, or at least the relative security of my “own” legal system.

I often think of our time in Qom as something I had to grin and bear in order to glimpse how “the Party maintains itself in power”. In other, darker moments, I view my deference to our religious host as a cowardly display of the kind of appeasement I so revile.

Though I eventually confessed to being an atheist, I still committed the sin of equivalence. I still pretended as if our viewpoints were two equally-plausible perspectives of the world whose differences could be discussed rationally. Almost by definition, such discussions are impossible with the seriously religious. If you are a theist, of whatever stripe, your starting point must be that there is a creator, that there is a supernatural realm, and that you can know this creator’s mind – to claim anything else is just semantics.

But to take the presence of a supreme (and invariably masculine) being as a given and work backwards is to forfeit the game



An ancient Islamic manuscript in Qom

city of Mashhad, were quite conservative while others, like the southern city of Shiraz, at one time famous for wine, were much more liberal (by Iranian standards).

But nothing prepared me for Qom. To say that the city is “conservative” is to alter the political and social spectrum beyond recognition. To say that it feels oppressive is, I think, to miss the point. Rather, Qom is immersed in a putrid mix of Islamic piety and power politics, a combination that has been nurtured to the point where the two are effectively indistinguishable.

The majority of Iranians we met were at least anti-clerical – nominally Muslim but opposed to religious government – if not entirely irreligious. But I knew the chances of meeting many secularists in Qom were slim. Sure enough, we wound up spending most of our time with a young man who was studying Islamic philosophy and who



right away, and it is this fundamental reality that I was too afraid to point out. Instead, we discussed Einstein's alleged comments on the "truths" of Shiism and the writings of Henry Corbin (it never ceases to amaze me, by the way, how gleefully the religious will employ "evidence" when they feel they can furnish it). The point is, even though I likely wouldn't have made a dent no matter what I said, I failed even to try.

The question is, why? Clearly part of it had to do with etiquette. In spite of our differing beliefs, we were treated with exceptional kindness. We paid for nothing, were taken to mosques where non-Muslims cannot enter, and even secured a tour of the restricted National Islamic Archives, which house some of the world's oldest Korans as well as countless other gems of religious, spiritual, and even scientific, history. Repaying such generosity with contempt and ridicule would have been, well, impolite. Another potential reason I alluded to above: it is illegal to criticize Islam in Iran. While this didn't stop me from participating in some lively barrages of the government and its clerical authority with Iranians in other cities, there is something about Qom that makes you think twice.

At the Shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad, the holiest site in Iran, a pilgrim asked me about my religious affiliation and I said none; when he asked if I thought

the headscarf was rational, I said no. But when a bored, undersexed security guard called Kathryn a dog for failing to wear the full chador (the black cloak that shows only the face) into the aforementioned archives, I felt I had no choice but to bite my tongue.

On the second day of our stay, our host had errands to run and we asked him to drop us off in the desert city's only real park. Within twenty minutes of arriving, having had a chance to relax, I was hit with one of the worst headaches I can ever remember having. I had been clenching my jaw so hard and so constantly that my head and face finally rebelled. It took a few Ibuprofen and a couple of hours of lying supine in the grass before I regained my composure. The tension itself never really went away.

It may be difficult to understand without visiting the city, but you can almost taste the theocracy. The sea of turbaned gentlemen strutting confidently between mosque and government meeting places reminds visitors that religion and politics are long past conflation. In a country with lush mountains and a beautiful seacoast, it is here, in the dusty home of deluded mullahs, where Tehran's politicians choose to keep "vacation homes". It is hard to overstate the matter: Qom is the belly of the beast — a place where free inquiry and

secular politics go to die.

On the bus back to Tehran, I happened to sit beside a young gentleman who was studying (surprise!) Islamic law and was on his way home to the capital. When he inevitably asked for my opinion of his country, I replied with the same cautious answer with which I had been opening for weeks: "It's ok...the people are great...the government maybe not as much?"

Usually this sparks a rant about how the mullahs are destroying the country and should be sent back to the hell from whence they came. But, in keeping with our experience of the previous few days, the man looked shocked and replied defensively, "What is wrong with our government?!"

Given the number of secular and/or anti-clerical types we met in the first weeks of our time in Iran, it was easy to be more hopeful than was perhaps warranted. Qom was a reminder that the zealots remain and, far from constituting a fringe element, make up the very rotting core of the country.

The young man's response may seem relatively innocuous, but given Iran's current state of affairs, these must be seen as fighting words. Iranians will need a lot more courage than I was able to summon if reason and secularism are ever to have a chance of winning.

Liar, lunatic or lord?

JOHN RADFORD, Emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of East London, poses the question

This question about Jesus Christ is sometimes known as “Lewis’s trilemma”. I first met it from an old school friend who told me that Jesus must have either been what he claimed to be, or was the greatest charlatan that ever lived. Years later I realised that this no doubt came ultimately from C S Lewis, best known as author of the *Narnia* stories. It seems he did not invent the question but developed it. His statement (he may have given more than one version) is:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept him as God”. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level of the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He did not leave that open to us. He did not intend to.

– *Mere Christianity*, 1952.

This argument has been popular with Christian apologists. It strikes me as one of the silliest even advanced by them. First off, I wonder how Lewis knew what Jesus intended. More seriously it seems to embody the logical fallacy of *petitio principii*, assuming the truth of what is being asserted, in this case that Jesus was unique, and by implication “the Son of God”.

Arguments over who or what Jesus was rage unceasingly. At one end some accept as totally true all that appears in the Bible about him, even though some of it is plainly contradictory or provably false; at the other some assert he never existed at all and is a pure invention. There is little evidence outside the Bible to go on. It is well established that the Gospels are a patchwork selection of oral and written material originating at various times after the puta-



tive date of the death of Christ. A majority of scholars seem to accept that behind the biblical Jesus there was an original historical person at the beginning of the first century CE, who probably did and said at least some of the things attributed to him. He can plausibly be seen as a charismatic preacher and faith healer, who attracted large audiences and a small group of devoted followers. He fell foul of the religious and/or civil authorities and was executed. He may have believed that the world would soon end, and tried to call his fellow Jews back to their old or true religion. He may have thought himself in a special relationship to God, perhaps as being divine himself.

If this is approximately correct, such a figure is clearly in no way unique. All these features can be seen in multiple combinations and in every age. Many examples are doubtless quickly forgotten. Others are known to few but historians; some have a period of moderate fame. A few catch on and give rise ultimately to large movements. Typically the movements change fairly radically, over time, from the original ideas, so far as those can be established. Such is the history of Christianity.

The reasons for success may include the value or appeal of the original teaching, the personality of the teacher, the effectiveness of followers and proselytisers, and the prevailing social, political and economic conditions. Since we know only the teachings of the biblical Jesus rather than those of any

historical person, it is hard to assess the ideas of the latter. We can reasonably take it that he was not a “lunatic” if by this we mean a recognised mental disorder rather than the imaginary poached egg man. The Bible’s words do not indicate insanity.

But if he did think he had a message from God, or was himself divine, or that the world would soon end, he was at least deluded. Such notions were more widely accepted then than today. There is no reason to suppose that he was a deliberate liar. Some of the original teachings may well have been of moral value, though this depends on one’s view of morality as well as on distinguishing them from later additions and emendations. Similar teachings can be found in many other religious and non-religious sources. It is difficult to see what if anything is unique.

Similarly if we consider those features of the biblical Jesus that Christians may consider as God-like, they are all widely found. For example noble descent, birth from a union of god and human, the infant’s escape from dangerous enemies, the child’s astonishing performance in adult matters, a special relationship to a god or actual divinity, miracles, sacrifice and sacred meal, death and descent into hell or similar, followed by resurrection and immortality, and so on. Such myths cluster around remarkable figures whether or not these have some basis in historical fact. Many earlier ones provide clear precedents for the Gospel story.

On the other hand we can ask whether the biblical Jesus can be plausibly seen as God, taking this in the main Judaeo-Christian sense (itself by no means universally agreed even within these faiths). It seems perverse of God, given that he wished to come among us to “save” us, to do so only once and in such a remote and obscure place and social milieu. And for such a short time, and with such limited means of communication. My friend enthused on the appropriateness of Jesus being born of a humble carpenter rather than a rich man. In that case, I said, why was he not the son of a beggar. Oh no! he replied, rather shocked, that would have been too humble!

Why wait 30 years before starting to give

his message? If it was to experience life as a human, surely God already knows everything that can be known about this as about everything. If he wished to persuade us that he could survive death, why give such few and unconvincing (to the rest of us) demonstrations? If we accept the words of the biblical Jesus, when on the cross he exclaimed (in the King James version), "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" On the face of it this surely means that he did not expect to die but to be saved by his father in Heaven. That is a false hope often held by those who believe they have a divine mission. But of course there is no agreement about what the words in the Bible do mean.

Some hold that Jesus said that the world would end within the lifetime of his hearers, others that it will end when he returns at some unspecified date; and so on. There is a wonderful concept of "multiple fulfilment of scripture", which apparently amounts to saying that the Bible can mean anything you want it to mean.

Lewis's trilemma is in the form, "If A is true, then either B, C, or D, and nothing else, must follow". I have argued that A, Jesus said such and such, is at best speculative. There may have been a person, Jesus, who spoke the words in the Bible, or some of them. B, C and D, that Jesus was a liar, a lunatic, or lord, would not follow from A even if it

were wholly true. Even accepting the Bible words, they are far too varied and ambiguous to permit any such conclusion. In any case it is a false dichotomy as there are other possibilities. The most obvious and likely is that there was an itinerant preacher who believed he had a mission from his God, one of many in human history. C S Lewis for his part was certainly not a lord, and I have no reason to think he was either a liar or a lunatic. He was an intelligent and highly educated man whose irrational faith led him to make a ridiculous assertion. The trilemma is false in both premises and reasoning, and thus in its conclusion. It can be convincing only to those who already believe.

Base Considerations

DALE DEBAKCSY is a number lover – and this is his critique of Numerology

MATHEMATICS is the purest and most beautiful form of poetry available to the human mind. I not only say that to my students at the beginning of each new semester, but I actually happen to rather believe it too. A great proof can combine elegance and chaos, the eternal and the infinitesimal, within a few lines of text that make haikus look positively verbose. Savoring those lines is, for me, every bit as heady and breath-arresting as wandering through Wagner's harmonies or dancing with Diderot's impish devices. So, I understand where Numerology, with its deep and abiding love of number and pattern, comes from.

Mathematically, however, it is utter rubbish. Most critiques of this belief system focus on the weaknesses it shares with astrology – its lack of precision in defining its terms, for example, which allows everybody to come away from a numerology session feeling that their unique soul has been enumerated for the first time, when in fact selective memory is simply playing its usual role as hand-maiden to chart-filling hucksters. That is entirely true, but what really upsets me about Numerology is the thoughtless mathematical apathy that it exhibits when using the numbers it purportedly understands so well and reveres so much.

The fundamental principle of Numerological theory is an interesting one – it would make for a good bit of universe building in a comic book or episode of the *X-Files*. Basically, after we die, we survey our

lives, see the things we didn't accomplish spiritually or professionally, and then encode those unrealized goals within the name and birth-date of our future self. Upon being reborn, we forget everything that we knew as spirits, but so long as we know how to decode our name and date of birth, we can recover the information that was lost to us. It's our previous life's coded message in a bottle to our current selves. As a fictional premise, it's actually rather cool.

The problems start filing in quickly, though, once we go into the mechanism of Numerological decoding. Everything is based on all facets of humanity and the universe being reducible to the single digits 1 through 9, with 0 thrown in from time to time when the formulas force its presence. Each numeral has an associated character attribute that tells you not only your inner nature, but the goals you have to set for your future. This is a base 10 system, which is the one we happen to use in our day-to-day lives, but it certainly isn't a universal or necessary way of thinking about numbers.

The Babylonians used base 60, the Celts base 20, and, if we are to believe Voltaire, Charles XII flirted with the idea of making Sweden a base 8 system since ammunition cartridges contained eight shots. And computers, of course, represent all numbers with a base 2 system in which only the digits 0 and 1 exist.

Base 10 is only special because it's common, and it's only common because we

happen to have ten fingers at this stage in our evolution. Picking the numerals of this system as the foundational blocks of the universe makes perfect sense if you are a Westerner caught in your culture's base prejudice, but it is entirely arbitrary to anybody who actually cares about how numerals and numbers relate to each other.

More disturbingly, it means that the Fundamental Character Attributes of humanity will be different for different cultures, Brits having nine possible inner natures and life paths, while Babylonians somehow get 59. I love the Epic of Gilgamesh as much as the next fellow, but I don't think that those characters are six times more emotionally refined than those of, say, Shakespeare.

So, Numerology is a system of belief whose first step is based on an arbitrary but convenient whim. Where does it go from there? There are two widgets that do most of the heavy lifting, and these are the Alphabet Table and the concept of Numerical Reduction. The table tells you what numerical value to assign the letters in your name, and carries with it the base 10 prejudice we've come to know and love:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	

Pretty it isn't. Nine only gets two letters in the English system, while 8 is stuck with Q

(Continued on p12)



and Z. The only thing to say in its defense is it isn't as awkward as this system comes off in Cyrillic which, because of its 33 letters, ends up having three spaces left over at the end instead of one or the Greek, whose 24 characters also leave three to spare. And then, of course, this approach makes no sense whatsoever in a pictogram-based writing system...

The end result of this arbitrary shackling of the modern Roman letter system into groups of nine is that certain attributes which are generally well distributed amongst humanity are forced into artificial rarity for certain ethnic or cultural groups. Americans and Brits don't have the number eight come up a lot, the odd Quentin notwithstanding, and yet eight importantly represents Law, and so we are to believe that our nations uniquely tend towards collective lawlessness. What this alphabet table ends up doing is prejudicing the character traits that happen to line up with your culture's favorite letters, and so sacrifices the actual diversity of humanity in favor of a desperate clinging to numeral consistency.

If it were just the base 10 thing, or just the sloppiness of the alphabet table's assumptions, though, I'd have let it all go peacefully. It is in the operation known as Numerical Reduction, however, that Numerology's true indifference to mathematics makes itself ghastly obvious and quasi insulting. For example, in making one calculation, I have to find the sum total of the letter values for my first name. This assumes that there is a stand-

ard spelling of my name, something that has only been true for industrialized societies within the last few centuries or so, meaning that this supposedly universally applicable numerological method is entirely useless for the vast majority of historical mankind.

I'm lucky enough to be born in the modern era, and have a written record of my name's original spelling. It's DALE, so numerically I get $4 + 1 + 3 + 5 = 13$. But wait, that number is greater than nine! I'm not allowed to use numbers greater than nine, so Numerology has to find some way to break 13 down. The device that does this is called Numerical Reduction. All you do is take the digits of your name sum, and add them together. So, in my case, I'd go $1 + 3 = 4$, and THAT would be the number I use in the relevant calculations.

But of course that doesn't always reduce to a single digit either. RAHA, for example, has an initial sum of 19. When we "reduce" that, we get 10, which is still not acceptable. Numerology's answer? Reduce again! So that, finally, we arrive at one. What does that one really represent, though? What does it mean, mathematically, to add the digits of a number? In Raha's case, the initial reduction to 10 meant that there were 10 powers of 10 in his original name sum (9 ten to the zero powers and 1 ten to the first power). That's it. Then the next reduction down to one tells us the number of powers of ten in the number that represents the number of powers of ten in his original name sum.

deep breath

So, the number which is supposed to stand for the deepest content of your soul is basically just a running tally of powers of 10, a number which, I'll remind you, isn't considered significant enough to deserve a character attribute being associated with it. This disconnect between the insistence on the exclusive power of the numbers 0 through 9 and the constant hidden reliance on the rejected number 10 runs throughout the structure of Numerological analysis.

Faced with the problem of Name Sums producing answers that don't fit into their 1-9 scheme, the founders of Numerology just grabbed the easiest mathematical operation at hand, addition, and started running wild with it without stopping to consider just what adding digits together willy-nilly actually meant. When I add two normal numbers, say $6+8$, that tells me the number of total objects I have. When I add two digits of a number, it only tells me about the number of base powers that exist in the number, and so all of the information encoded in the order of the digits is lost. 312 comes out exactly the same as 123. Numerical Reduction as an operation blanches the diversity of the number spectrum, draining numerals of the meaning that comes with being placed in a given order, which is a victory for the dogmatic "1 to 9" hegemony of Numerology but tastes bland on the tongue of anybody who actually loves the spice of the numerical world.

Faced with a base 10 system in their culture, the early numerologists saw a chance

to make something philosophical of it. Nine character attributes seemed doable, so they pushed ahead. The number of letters didn't quite cycle in groups of nine, but, eh, close enough, and they kept going. The name and birthday sums they computed often resulted in numbers that were greater than

nine, but, heck, if you add the digits to each other enough times, eventually you will come out with something nine or smaller, so they continued to shamble forward, their gait catching on each half-considered compromise they left trailing behind them. The entire project of Numerology strikes me as

the work of a person aiming for perfection and stopping at Good Enough.

If you want to do due reverence to the power of numbers in nature, get yourself a copy of Roger Penrose's epic *The Road to Reality*. Numerology, however, is a game best consigned to the schoolyard of history.

Muslims are not a minority

Treating them as such is a mistake, argues DANIEL GREENFIELD

The most persistent myth of the Western *Dhimmi* narrative is that Muslims are a minority and must receive special protection and accommodation. But Muslims are not a minority. There are 1.5 billion Sunni Muslims worldwide, outweighing Catholics as the next largest religious faction at 1.1 billion and Hindus at one billion. They are still a minority of the overall population in Western countries, but a demographically trending majority.

In the UK more people attend mosques than the Church of England, which makes Muslims the largest functioning religious group in the nation. Mohammed was the most popular baby name last year, ahead of Jack and Harry. In France, in this generation, more mosques have been built than Catholic churches and in southern France there are already more mosques than churches. Mohammed-Amine is the most popular double name, ahead of Jean-Baptiste, Pierre-Louis, Leo-Paul and Mohammed-Ali.

In Belgium, 50 percent of newborns are Muslim and empty Belgian churches are being turned into mosques. The most popular baby name is Mohammed and of the top seven baby names, six were Muslim. A quarter of Amsterdam, Marseilles and Rotterdam and a fifth of Stockholm is already Muslim. The most popular baby name in Amsterdam, Utrecht, Rotterdam and The Hague is ... Mohammed.

Europe's Muslim population doubled in the last generation, and is set to double again. By 2025 a third of all births in the EU will be Muslim. The demographic writing is already on the wall. A third of Muslims in France and Germany are teenagers or younger, as compared to a fifth of the native population. A third of Muslims in the UK and Belgium are under 15 versus a fifth of the native population. Counting all age groups, they're a minority. But in generational demographics, Muslims are swiftly becoming a majority.

Looking at these numbers it is hard to ar-



Hordes of Muslim men pictured praying in Madison Avenue, New York, before the start of the American Muslim Day Parade in 2010

gue that Muslims are a minority. They are not a majority at the moment, but majorities are not just a statistical snapshot, but a cultural and demographic trend. Countries are not defined by the past, or even by the present, but by the future. By the direction in which they are headed. And Europe's future is a Muslim majority. Most European governments have accepted that and are acting on it. There may currently be more warm European bodies than Muslim ones, but the culture is being steered by the assumption of an Islamic future.

America is not nearly as vulnerable to the Muslim demographic bomb, because it is less socialist and more multicultural. It also has no former Muslim colonies, like England or France. Or at least it didn't have any before. But the liberation of Iraq has touched off a swarm of "refugees" moving to the United States. While some of them are Christian, the majority is Muslim. By law we are obligated to accept 5,000 a year. The 2008 target for Iraqi immigration was 12,000, far more than most of the former Soviet Union combined. Not significant numbers alone, but they are part of a bigger picture.

In 2005, almost 100,000 Muslims became legal residents of the US. In 2009, it was 115,000 and the numbers continue to rise each year. That means that already they make up around 10 percent of immigrants to the US. The number of Egyptian and Syrian immigrants has more than doubled since 9/11. The number of Turkish immigrants has

more than tripled. The number of Afghans has tripled. Somalis have gone up from nearly 3,000 to nearly 14,000 a year. Pakistan hit a high of 21,000 in 2009 and Saudis are up by 50 percent.

Not nation shattering numbers in and of themselves, but let's look at them in relation to birth rates.

The United States birth rate is 13.5. Pakistan's birth rate is 24.1. Egypt's birth rate is 24.6. The Saudi birth rate is 19.3. The Afghani birth rate is 37.3. The Somali birth rate is 42.7. What this means is that we are importing Muslim immigrants with a birth rate twice or even three times higher than

our own. The United States birth rate is already inflated by its own immigrants, including large numbers of Latinos and the million plus Muslims already in the US, so the baseline numbers are even worse.

But these numbers are bad enough, as the social services departments of Amsterdam or Malme could tell you. We are not importing 115,000 Muslims a year. No, we're importing as many as 2,500 Muslim babies a year into our demographic pool.

Compare that to the 25,000 Korean immigrants in 2009, from a country with an average birth rate of 8.5. Increase Korean immigration fivefold until they outnumber the annual number of Muslim immigrants, and you still aren't even importing a 1,000 babies a year. A thousand Somali immigrants are the demographic equivalent of 5,000 Korean immigrants because the Somali birth rate is five times the Korean birth rate. The 25,000 Korean immigrants represent a mere 212 babies a year, but the 14,000 Somalis represent 600 babies a year.

This is how demographic suicide creeps up on nations. And this also is an incomplete picture. The Korean-American intermarriage rate is at over 50 percent. There are no statistics for Somali intermarriage rates in the US, but Muslims do not leave their religion upon marriage. In Sweden and Norway, Somali intermarriage rates are very low, which means Little Mogadishu growing

(Continued on p14)

points of view...



A DIG IN THE POST BAG – LETTERS FROM OUR READERS
ADDRESS CORRESPONDENCE TO BARRY@FREETHINKER.CO.UK

THE SUNDAY ASSEMBLY: SANDERSON JONES RESPONDS

I SAW your letter from Lev Lafayette (*Points of View*, August) who very kindly got involved in setting up Sunday Assembly in Melbourne but then left because he did not approve of our structure. His principle objections being that the Sunday Assembly is being run for profit, while encouraging local chapters to start unincorporated associations that leave volunteers horrifically exposed.

In April I wrote a blogpost called “Notes on Transparency and Structure” where I explained that that The Sunday Assembly was initially setting up as a limited liability com-

pany, because it was the easiest structure. This would then lead to a Community Interest Company, and then, probably, to a charity.

I wrote: “We are going to set up a normal limited liability company, with the long-term goal of turning it into a social enterprise, using the C-i-C structure ... Apparently, setting up a C-i-C is a lot of paperwork, and regulations, and is generally a bit of a hassle for a very young enterprise, while the benefits, at our micro-scale, are small ... We discussed whether we should set up a charity but that is, apparently, even more work and really not

worth it until we are far bigger. Oh, and the social aim of the enterprise is this: The Sunday Assembly is a godless congregation that celebrates life. Our aim is to live better, help others and wonder more. Our mission is to help everyone first discover and then achieve their full potential. We meet because we know we are stronger together than on our own.”

This roadmap came from advice we received from the excellent Trudy Thompson, who runs Bricks and Bread, and specialises in consulting to start-up social enterprises. Her reasoning was that we should go for the easiest structure now, as the tax and governance benefits would not affect a high-on zero revenue organisation like ours. This would enable us to concentrate on our good work, and not on paper work.

Pippa and I are comedians, so we followed her advice. While we are technically a for-profit company believe you me, there have been zero profits, only costs. Every single pound that has gone into it has been ours, we have taken not one penny of salary. We have turned down offers of work to concentrate on this, all the while working every single hour available hour trying to help people set up their own Assemblies.

We are now moving towards the structure of Community Interest Company and Charity, the one I mentioned in our blogpost. In the UK the lawyers at Bates, Wells and Braithwaite were instructed on July 31st (I saw this letter from Lev on August 5th) to begin incorporating, in the US we have already filed for

Muslims are not a minority

(Continued from page 13)

across the United States are not going anywhere. And given time, there will be a Little Mogadishu in your city too.

Despite all this Mohammed won't be the most popular baby name in the United States any time soon. But a Muslim population boom will sneak up on us. It already is. Yet population-wise Muslims are a minority. But are they really?

There are two kinds of minorities. The first kind come from countries where they were a minority or under foreign rule. The Irish, Jews, Tibetans, Armenians and Norwegians are all examples of that. The second kind of minority isn't really a minority at all. This “minority” emigrates from countries where they are the ruling majority.

They are not persecuted and are not escaping anything except living in a failed state. These “Majority Minorities” are designated as minorities by political correctness, but they don't think of themselves as minorities or act like minorities. They are used to being the dominant culture and when they are hostile, it is not because of a sense of persecution, but xenophobia. While they are labeled minorities they actually behave like majorities.

They are acting like the majority culture – which in their minds they are.

Muslims are “Majority Minorities”, who act with all the entitlements and privileges of a majority. When Somali cabbies refuse

to carry airport passengers with duty-free liquor or almost half of Muslims in the UK want Sharia law they are behaving as if they already *are* the majority entitled to force their culture, their law and their religion on the minority. And in their eyes, we are the minority, because they have no cultural tradition of how to be minorities.

The Irish, the Jews and African-Americans have a cultural memory of being persecuted that they retain in song and story. But Muslims have rushed to wipe away the shame of briefly living under European colonialism by casting back to the golden age when they were the oppressors, reviving the Caliphate and lashing out violently at even the slightest criticism of their religion.

Muslims in America and Europe are still numerical minorities, but they act like majorities. And they are doing everything they can to become majorities. Treating them like minorities is a mistake that Europe has already come to regret and that we are only beginning to learn the folly of.

Muslims can either be a minority or a majority. If they choose to act like a majority, imposing their culture, religion and worldview on others then they should be treated like one.

• DANIEL GREENFIELD is an Israeli-born blogger and columnist who lives New York City. This article first appeared on his Sultanknash blog, and is reproduced with his permission.

Sunday Assembly launches in Brighton

SUNDAY Assembly Brighton will meet monthly to hear great talks, sing songs and generally celebrate life. It begins on Sunday, September 22, at 11am at St Andrew's, a (defunct) church in Waterloo Street, Hove. Each event will have a theme – the first one is “Beginnings” – with stories, readings and a final address on that topic.

For more information visit the Brighton Sunday Assembly's Facebook page: www.facebook.com/sundayassembly-brighton

incorporation as a 501(c)(3) called Sunday Assembly in America (funded by the very kind Jonathan Tobert). We have yet to do this in the Australia because we have not had time but it is on a to-do list (we have so many to do lists!).

Lev also claims that the unincorporated association is a ghastly structure that will lead only to woes. In fact, the unincorporated association is a very common legal entity used by sports clubs, university associations and all manner of community groups across the UK. These organisations then pay for public liability insurance themselves, so that their volunteers are not exposed to liabilities.

When Lev raised his concerns earlier in the year I was deeply saddened that I wasn't able to convince him that we aren't maleficent Macchiavelian hucksters. We are just two comedians that started a small monthly congregation in north London to celebrate life. We did not mean to start a movement, it just happened.

Every time I do a Sunday Assembly and see a crowd of faces beaming with joy at the ridiculous good fortune of being alive, I want to help other people start their own. Whenever, I hear back from someone who goes to our small group in London and finds it helps their life, I want to help other people start their own. Whenever I see a tweet from someone in Melbourne, New York or Bristol about how much they enjoyed an Assembly, I want to help other people start their own.

This is a crazy mission, and we don't have a roadmap, but we are working super hard to get there. We will definitely make mistakes along the way. We, however, don't feel this is one of them.

Sanderson Jones
Sunday Assembly co-founder

JIHADISTS

SIMILAR cruel asymmetric war tactics, but different motives: Donald Rook's equating ex-IRA terrorists with jihadists (*Points of View*, August) is, I think, too simplistic.

Quote: "Islamist violence may decline, like Romanist violence, if Muslims can be persuaded not to feel victimised". What will persuade them? More Muslim MPs and peers? Strengthened Islamic law courts? Bigger mosques? Loudspeaker calls to prayer? Increased Muslim immigration? A British caliphate? Can the demands of "victimised" Muslims ever be satisfied?

A lot of questions. That's because I don't have the answers. Trouble is, nor does the government. But it seems concerned enough about Islamic radicalisation and Muslim demographics to increase the Church of England's role in society and allow it to take control of thousands more schools. Future religious authority, then, will be determined by which faith can best indoctrinate children. Such a religious race for minds isn't going to

solve anything, least of all stop religious violence in Britain or Ireland.

National fertility rates portend Britain will be a majority Muslim nation by 2050 (Vincent Cooper, www.thecommentator.com, June 13, 2013). Mid century also is when Richard Lynn, Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Ulster University, predicts the UK's national average IQ will have fallen from today's 100 to about 95 (*Dysgenics*, p271). Government denial of these worrying trends won't solve anything either.

Graham Newbery
Southampton

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

STUART HARTILL in "Do it the Manx Way" (*Freethinker*, August) does more than demonstrate what *Thought for the Day* could offer its audience. He reveals, by the comparison with the vigour of the Manx alternative, that the BBC cling to the insipid and surely terminal *TFTD* for reasons that shame a public service broadcaster.

TFTD is lifeless and now, in its increasingly embarrassing efforts to sideline references to religion, has capitulated on air. It is a broadcasting zombie, dull, vapid and without inspiration. What minimal life left in it is there to satisfy a religious prejudice and because of the fear of exposure to an atheist opinion.

In their fear of an alternative voice the BBC

lose the "Premier League Version" of *TFTD* produced in Manx.

The BBC chose to deny their licence payers an interesting early morning few minutes in order to quiet their own fears of atheist encroachment. As Stuart Hartill shows, their timidity also damages the religion they purport to protect. Their defence of *TFTD*, where no challenge is allowed, enfeebles the programme that has become a few minutes producing ridicule rather than stimulation.

Denis Watkins
Wales

ENTRY TO HEAVEN

THE "debate" about who apparently gets in to Heaven, and who doesn't, baffles me ("Book Scene", August *Freethinker*).

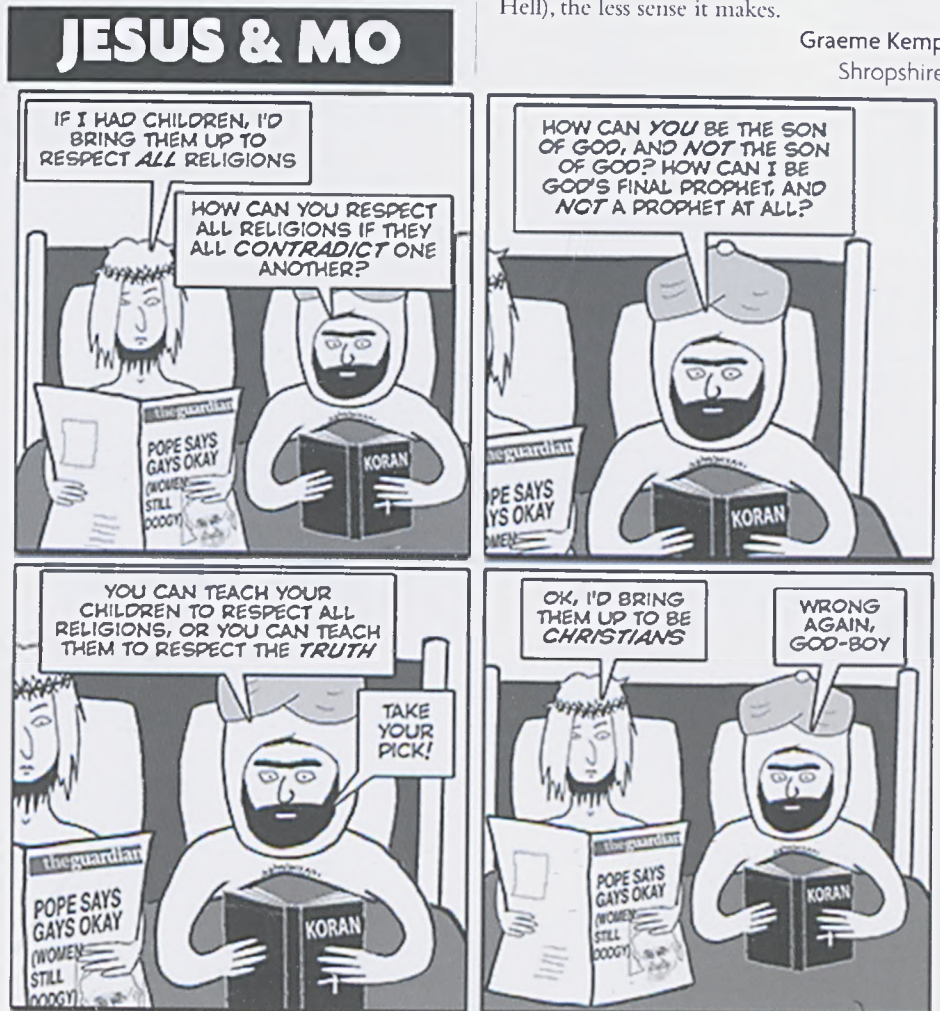
The thing that really intrigues me is this: will people have "free will" in Heaven? Will we be able to choose whether we do good or evil? I think we need to know.

If we can't choose to do bad things in Heaven, then our "free will" must be constrained in some way. Our ability to make moral choices would therefore have been withheld from us, somehow. So why not "design" the world like that in the first place?

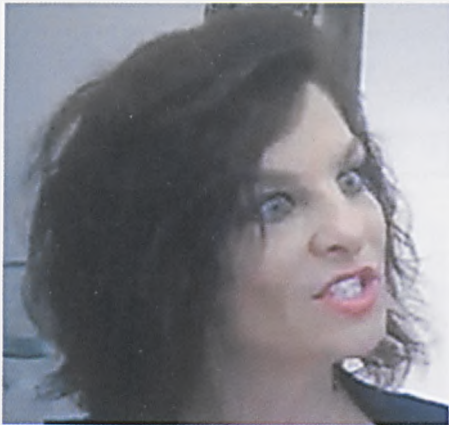
If we can do evil in Heaven, however, then surely the whole place would fall apart? It would be just like our present world.

The more you think about Heaven (or Hell), the less sense it makes.

Graeme Kemp
Shropshire



'We're persecuted' howls Williams. 'Oh, grow up' retorts Williams.



Andrea Miniciello Williams

FORMER Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Williams last month expressed irritation over crybaby Christians constantly banging on about how badly they are being treated – and immediately put himself at odds with another Williams: Andrea Miniciello Williams, the mouthpiece in the UK of “persecuted Christians”.

Speaking at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, he urged those who complain of ill-treatment for their beliefs in Britain to “grow up”, and said that their grizzling made him “very uneasy”.

He added the level of “not being taken very seriously” or “being made fun of” in Britain and the United States was not comparable to the “murderous hostility” faced by others in different parts of the world.

Lord Williams, who stood down from his role as Archbishop of Canterbury at the end of 2012 and is now Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, said his perspective had

been drawn from meeting believers from all faiths suffering around the world. When you have any contact with real persecuted minorities you learn to use the word persecuted very chastely. Persecution is not being made to feel mildly uncomfortable.”

He added: “I think we are made to feel uncomfortable at times. We’re made to feel as if we’re idiots – perish the thought! But that kind of level of not being taken very seriously or being made fun of; I mean for goodness sake, grow up.

“I think there’s also a general cultural habit of making light of religion which is reinforced by a lot of the press and by our entertainment. I don’t lose a lot of sleep over it.”

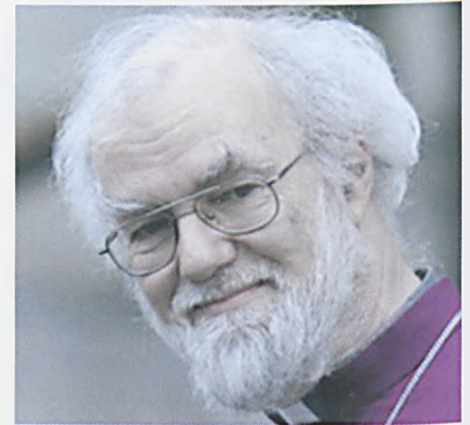
And he made the point that “you have to earn respect if you want to be taken seriously in society”.

Baroness Neuberger, Britain’s second woman rabbi who was chairing the discussion, added religious people may just “need to make their case better”.

Earlier, Andrea Miniciello Williams, a member of the Church of England’s General Synod and head of the Christian Legal Centre, commented on a poll that indicated that atheists were more likely to hold top positions in the UK than those who hold strong Christian positions (*see p3 report*).

Williams, a barrister and evangelical activist who founded Christian Concern, said: “If you hold views that are contrary to the prevailing orthodoxy you are seen as potential trouble. This is a real phenomenon. Christianity is now a bar to appointment or promotion.”

When the former archbishop’s words were



Lord Williams

reported on the *Freethinker* blog, one reader of the magazine, Denis Watkins, commented: “You have to earn respect if you want to be taken seriously in society” says Rowan Williams.

“They are not likely to be taken seriously when they depend on a supine BBC to provide them with endless tedious opportunities where they cannot be challenged. If they are so confident about their beliefs then let them have an open debate with those who do not believe.

“What do they really believe? How much credence do they give to what is in their inerrant Bible. Instead of cowering in fear they might earn a bit of respect if they emerged from their religious bunkers and at least engaged in a discussion.

“Far from being persecuted they are protected, privileged and allowed to present themselves as if they were pontificating to a population of Christians.”

Catholic Church in Ireland in rapid decline

themselves as convinced atheists. Archbishop of Dublin Dr Diarmuid Martin, who has previously warned that the Irish Church is in crisis, responded: “The Catholic Church cannot simply presume that the faith will automatically be passed from one generation to the next or be lived to the full by its own members.”

David Quinn, a staunch defender of the faith who heads the Iona Institute, said the findings indicated a significant amount of hostility towards institutional religion. He said this and other polls had found that a quarter of those surveyed “would be happy if the church vanished from Ireland completely.”

In addition to the sex abuse revelations Ireland has become a much more secular country as the Church has lost the religious and political authority it once wielded.

This was most strikingly demonstrated last year when, in an unprecedented attack, Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny shrugged

off decades of political deference.

He declared: “The rape and torture of children were downplayed or ‘managed’ to uphold instead the primacy of the institution, its power, standing and reputation.” He denounced “elitism, disconnection, dysfunction and narcissism in the Vatican”.

Previous polling has indicated that a majority of Irish Catholics is strikingly out of line with the Vatican’s attitude on issues such as priestly celibacy and the introduction of women priests.

Almost 90 percent believe that priests should be free to marry, with over 70 percent saying they believe married men should be ordained.

Rome’s reaction to criticism from Irish priests has been authoritarian. One priest with liberal views was ordered to a monastery to “pray and reflect” while another was prohibited from writing on such issues.