

3



**Spreading joy:** Jones and Evans report on the massive growth of their Sunday Assemblies

4



**Enduring appeal:** Barbara Smoker, 90, launches her sixth edition of *Humanism*

7



**Poles meet Coyne:** Outspoken US evolutionary biologist gets a warm welcome from Polish atheists

11



**Godless kids:** Bwambale Robert expands his humanist school in Uganda

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## Gangs of evangelists ratchet up their efforts to indoctrinate UK youngsters

**A** new report published by the National Secular Society has revealed that publicly funded schools are being targeted and exploited by evangelical Christian groups as part of their missionary work.

The report, *Evangelism in state schools – the role of external visitors in publicly funded education*, reveals a determined push by evangelical churches and organisations to gain access to state schools with the intention of proselytising among young children.

The report finds that the activities of external visitors are often undertaken in schools without parents' knowledge and with little, if any, opportunity for withdrawal.

According to the report, the motivations and aims of religious groups, either out of complicity or naiveté are going unquestioned by head teachers, governors, Local Education Authorities and the Department for Education.

The National Secular Society has written to Education Secretary Michael Gove, calling for national guidance setting out best practice for working with external visitors and contributors and particularly religion and belief groups.

The report also calls for all schools to publish and adhere to an

external visitor's policy that forbids proselytising and evangelism and makes clear that parents should be given prior and relevant information about school visitors.

One parent, Saul Freeman from Sheffield, said: "Having sent our child to a non-religious state primary school, we never expected to find ultra-conservative evangelical activity. Our son's school has never been open with parents about its close links with a local evangelical church despite our best efforts to get clarity.

"Adults who come in and lead school assemblies are seen by the children as authority figures in the local community – and this means that the school has conferred a status of trust and respect on a group of individuals who preach hate and a fundamentalist, literalist and creationist approach to religion and life."

Stephen Evans, National Secular Society campaigns manager, said that the educational purpose of religious education is so vague that it is open to exploitation by aggressive religious groups that are determined to reach children in schools.

He said: "The legal obligation on all schools to provide religious education, and a daily act of worship provides a foot in the door to

(Continued on p6)



# Striking a balance between education and faith

**OPHELIA BENSON** WONDERS WHETHER OPPOSING AGENDAS CAN EVER BE RECONCILED

Let's think about this for a minute. Who should be shaping the curriculum at state-funded schools, people with knowledge in the relevant disciplines, or priests and imams and rabbis? It's a hard one, isn't it. Lots of reasons on each side of the equation. People with relevant knowledge are a good choice because they can figure out what children need to learn about any particular subject, in order to be prepared to learn more if they decide they want to specialize in that subject. Priests, imams and rabbis are a good choice because they know what they find "offensive" and therefore what they want to prevent children from learning.

Take for example the Yesodey Hatorah Jewish Voluntary Aided girls' secondary school. The National Secular Society reports that the school has been caught blacking out questions on science exam papers.

*The Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Exam board (OCR) launched an investigation into exam malpractice at the Yesodey Hatorah Jewish Voluntary Aided girls' secondary school after the National Secular Society formally asked it to follow up unconfirmed reports that teachers had redacted questions in this year's GCSE science exam.*

*The precise questions that were blacked out has not been revealed by OCR, but earlier this year a Jewish education consultant warned that evolution in the new GCSE science curriculum could pose problems for strictly Orthodox schools.*

*The investigation confirmed pupils were left disadvantaged by being unable to access 3 marks out of 75 for a unit in a higher GCSE science exam, and 1 mark out of 75 for a unit on a lower paper.*

*Earlier this year, Rabbi Avraham Pinter, principal of Yesodey Hatorah, admitted "sometimes Charedi schools, if they find anything in the paper which could be offensive to parents, advise children to avoid that question".*

That's obviously fair, right? It's a generous compromise. The principle of allowing people who know something about science to set science questions on exams gets to prevail almost all the time, and then in the very few instances where there is something in the paper which could be offensive to parents, the school is allowed to redact it. That's democratic. Parents who are offended by science are citizens too, after all.



*In Kentucky, these T-shirts are given free to pupils at Owensboro Catholic schools*

Then there's Al-Madinah school in Derby, which has been so prominently in the news lately for being told to stop making girl students sit in the back of the classrooms and to stop forcing women teachers and staff to wear hijab. On page 13 of its prospectus it explains how it adjudicates between the two ways of deciding on the curriculum.

*In each and every department, all efforts will be geared towards ensuring the books and resources conform to the teachings of Islam. Sensitive, inaccurate and potentially blasphemous material will be censored or removed completely. If and when teachers are required by the curriculum to convey teachings that are totally against Islam\*, the Director of Islamic Studies will brief the relevant teachers and advise accordingly.*

*\*Darwinism, for example*

It's not spelled out exactly how the Director of Islamic Studies will brief the relevant teachers, or what the Director will advise, but given that in each and every department, all efforts will be geared towards ensuring the books and resources conform to the teachings of Islam, it seems safe to think that "Darwinism", or to put it less tendentiously evolutionary biology, will not be taught.

Again, a fair and democratic compromise. There's plenty of science that can be taught without having to wade into the controversial swamps of evolution. Yes, that may be a handicap for children who later want to study biology at A level and university, but those children live in a democracy and they have to learn to compromise like everyone else.

The US provides inspiration in these matters, with endless wrangles over textbooks and curricula that dare to mention evolution. There are the Christian groups in the great state of Kansas, for instance, who are suing to challenge the state Board of Education's decision to implement a state-wide set of science standards. One such group, the Pacific Justice Institute, explains its thinking

in a press release on its website.

*Families across Kansas became one step closer, today, to protecting their children from forced atheistic teaching in their public school system. Pacific Justice Institute filed a complaint in Federal District Court challenging the State Board of Education's (BOE) adoption of certain science standards which would create a hostile learning environment for those of faith.*

These are all different – but equally valid and compelling – ways of stating the clerical objection. We have "parents find offensive" and "totally against Islam" and "forced atheistic teaching." The Pacific Justice Institute continues:

*In addition to citing numerous areas of law that the standards violate, the complaint cites that the standards cause the state "to promote religious beliefs that are inconsistent with the theistic religious beliefs of plaintiffs, thereby depriving them of the right to be free from government that favors one religious view over another."*

It's somewhat confusing to cite in one paragraph "forced atheistic teaching" and "a hostile learning environment for those of faith" and in the next to say the standards cause the state to promote religious beliefs, but they have to do that in order to claim that by teaching evolution, the state is favoring one religious view over another. Which is a reasonable, fair ....

This is the part where I rip off the mask and plead guilty to sarcasm. I'm appalled by all this theocratic meddling with public, state-funded education. I think education should be education, not indoctrination, and I think priests, mullahs and rabbis should be kept firmly out of it.



**OPHELIA BENSON**  
Picking fights with God



# UK Students launch 4th annual Non-Prophet Week

THE National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secularist Student Societies (AHS) has launched its 4th annual Non-Prophet Week (NPW) on October 28.

Lauded by Lord Harrison in the House of Lords as “an example of atheist and humanist public service”, NPW 2013 is being staged at multiple locations across the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland to continue its annual tradition of irreligious fundraising for charity.

The Non-Prophet week has become an annual fixture in non-religious students’ calendars, and this year the NPW’s focus will again be on emphasising the point that you don’t have to believe in a god to be good.

By co-ordinating affiliated student societies, and building on successful fundraising campaigns in previous years to donate to Survivors Voice and Children In Need charities, the AHS has earmarked NPW 2013 as an excellent platform to help raise money for the Against Malaria Foun-



The AHS affiliated University of Edinburgh Humanist Society fundraising stall during NPW 2012

ation. This will be done by giving affiliated student societies a chance to be part of a nationally coordinated charity drive aimed at raising money via local student body-run sponsored events such as bake sales, runs,

swims, Cadbury Crème Egg eatathons and, of course, personal donations.

“We’re extremely proud of the thousands of pounds our members have raised in past years to support vital organisations both here and abroad. Too often the myth that religious people are more charitable than the non-religious goes unchallenged. This is our chance to show students being good without god,” said Rory Fenton, President of the AHS.

The AHS is an umbrella organisation of non-religious student societies. It provides a network for societies to collaborate, with a shared voice in public life, helping its members to contribute to and be part of the wider national and international movement.

• See **Giving without God** fea-

ture on page 10.

## ‘Atheist church’ sells ‘miracles’ to raise £500,000 for international expansion

LAST month marked the official launch of the Sunday Assembly crowdfunding campaign which aims to raise £500 000 by selling “Miracles”. The money will fund “The Start Your Own Sunday Assembly Toolkit” – a powerful, custom built, digital platform that will facilitate the launch of thousands of godless assemblies across the globe.

Sunday Assembly’s Sanderson Jones explained that “these miracles are not supernatural, but lovingly designed collectables containing samples of water, air and earth – the elements that make the daily miracle of life possible”. Other products include t-shirts, mugs and tea towels created by designer Georgia Hardinge and limited edition prints by Andrew Rae – all ideal gifts for Christmas.

On the same day the Sunday Assembly team announced new assemblies in Belfast, Atlanta, Dallas and Nashville. Jones said: “Hopefully the campaign will be as popular as the Sunday Assembly itself, which has added ten towns to its ‘40 Dates and 40 Nights Roadshow’.”

The number of Sunday Assemblies had risen to 35 by mid-October. (The first Sunday Assembly was launched in London in January, 2013).

After his trip to Belfast Jones remarked: “Everyone I met seemed keen for a little more community, and a little less religion. The appetite for celebrating life seems limitless: The Los Angeles Assembly has 700 people signed up to its November 10 launch and are having to always look for a larger venue. While Chicago, Silicon Valley, Cambridge and Sydney are at capacity (though in Sydney organisers are looking to add a second service).”

The other new Assemblies are Portland, and San Francisco in the US, in the UK, Newcastle, Nottingham and Plymouth and Canberra in Australia. “There’s still place for a few more in the US and the UK before the campaign ends on December 15,” added Pippa Evans. “So get in touch if you’re keen.” Pippa Evans co-founded the Sunday Assembly with Sanderson Jones.

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# Aggressive evangelical tactics in UK schools slammed

(Continued from p1)

organisations with evangelistic intentions. The ambiguity about the specific aims and purpose of religious education, and its low status in schools, provides an ideal environment for evangelical groups to exploit.

“Given the diminishing interest in religious observance amongst young people and their parents, it’s easy to see why evangelical groups are so keen to access schools. But we have to question the appropriateness of state schools being used in this way. The presence of such groups undermines the rights of parents who rightly expect a state education for their child that doesn’t run counter to their own religious and philosophical convictions.”

Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, said: “The targeting of our schools in this way by such dubious organisations must be tackled by the Department for Education. Most parents have absolute-

ly no idea that such groups are present in their children’s school until the child comes home and starts repeating the messages they’ve been given – sometimes about creationism, sometimes manipulative evangelical messages or literature that reinforces a very conservative religious outlook on life.”

Sanderson said the whole issue of religion in schools must be urgently reassessed.

“Our schools are becoming playgrounds for religious interests who are exploiting their opportunities to the full. The increasing number of faith schools is not going to make this any better. With fewer and fewer people regarding themselves as religious, it is clear that faith groups see schools as their

best hope of reviving their fortunes. Children have to be there by law, they are a captive audience.”

Research into the activities of evangelical groups in schools is ongoing. If you have information or concerns about external visitors in a particular school, please contact the NSS.

The NSS is calling for religious education to be replaced with a new National Curriculum subject that allows pupils to take a more objective and religiously neutral approach to the consideration of moral and ethical issues. A briefing paper setting out the need for comprehensive reform of religious education is on the NSS website.



## EVANGELIST

(noun): Person who wants to share their religious views with you, but never wants you to share yours with them.

## Barbara Smoker launches her sixth edition of *Humanism*

LIKE Barbara Smoker herself (she celebrated her 90th birthday in June of this year) her book *Humanism* has remarkable staying power, and its sixth edition was relaunched last month with a new title, *Humanism for Enquiring Minds*.

*Humanism* was first published in 1973 by Warde Lock Educational in its Living Religion Series.

Reviewing it for the *Gay and Lesbian Humanist* in 1998, Denis Cobell wrote: “One of the major attractions of this book is its conciseness, clear verve, and ease on the reader. So much of our humanist literature is discursive, which makes for less popularity. Although written mainly for young readers, this book will surely be acceptable to a wider audience of adults who are looking for a simple explanation of the history, meaning and practical values associated with humanism and being a humanist.”

The 80-page book is priced at £6.50 and is available post-free from the Conway Hall Ethical Society, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1 4RL.





# A Nobel Peace Prize for Malala would have done much to raise awareness of the oppression of women in Islam

A NEWS release announcing that Malala Yousafzai – the teenage Pakistani schoolgirl shot last year by militant Islamist – had won this year's Nobel Peace Prize would have sent a very important message to the Muslim world: "Start treating your womenfolk with respect!"

But Malala did not get the award, a fact lamented upon by Fouad Ajami, writing in Australia's *The Age*. He said that if Malala had been given the Nobel Prize, "it would have hailed the schoolgirl's courage and resilience."

Ajami added: "Tranquil, wealthy Oslo would have done a world of good for modern Islam, because Malala had come to embody the cause of freedom for young Muslim girls. Upon reaching puberty, girls throughout the Muslim world enter into a kind of bondage. What freedom they knew is taken away. They become temptresses, the enforcers of misogyny maintain, and social virtue demands their seclusion."

Ajami then pointed out that "there is something odd about the place of women in the Islamic world today. Things were a good deal better for them in the early and middle years of the last century. This repression, this phobia, has come with the rise to power of the Islamists – half-educated men who take the faith literally and employ the techniques of modernity in their war against it".

"The tale repeats from one Muslim country to the other: the journey towards modernity broken in the 1980s. Religious bigots rose, mainly in the crowded cities, newly urbanised men who weaponised the faith and bent it to their needs.

"Malala's birthplace, Pakistan, was once freer than it is today. The first three decades of its national life (1947 to the late 1970s) were dominated by a secular culture. The nation's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, had meant Pakistan to be a state for the Muslims but not an Islamic state – a crucial distinction. A stern soldier, Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, seized power and imposed a stultifying mix of despotism and religious conformity.

"Malala matters. Onto her, untold millions can project their hopes for a dignified life within the faith. If Islamic modernity is to have a chance, Malala should be embraced by Muslims from Morocco to Indonesia. In



*Malala Yousafzai raises the RAW (Reach All Women) in War Anna Politkovskaya Award after receiving it at the Southbank Centre in London last month*

her modesty and dignity, she should be Islam's beloved daughter, her journey a return to the early promise of Muslim modernism."

But according to Adam B Ellick, writing for the *New York Times*, few in Pakistan will even acknowledge her existence. A class of 10th graders at an all-girls school was asked by a district official in the Awat valley how

many of them had heard of her. The students stared at the official, Farrukh Atiq, in silence. Not a single hand was raised.

Atiq, speaking as world speculation was growing that Malala would win the Nobel Peace Prize, said "Everyone knows about Malala, but they do not want to affiliate with her". Worse, there is a sense of smouldering animosity towards her in the Swat Valley and conspiracy-minded citizens are loudly branding her a CIA agent, part of a nebulous Western plot to humiliate their country and pressure their government.

Muhammad Asim, a student standing outside the gates of Punjab University in the eastern city of Lahore, dismissed the Taliban attack on Malala as a made-for-TV drama. "How can a girl survive after being shot in the head?" he asked. "It doesn't make sense." Even fellow students seemed to resent the recognition Malala has received.

At another school, a group of female students, assembled by their headmaster, agreed that Malala did not deserve a Nobel Prize. But she does have some high profile supporters in Pakistan. Imran Khan, the former cricketer who heads the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party and has regularly faced criticism for his views on the Taliban, said Malala represented "the struggle of girls and women everywhere against tyranny and oppression."



*Brave words: Pakistan-based Taliban spokesman Shahidullah Shahid, centre, last month explained why the teenager was shot: 'We targeted Malala Yousafzai because she attacked Islam and make a jokes on Islam, if we found her again then we would definitely try to kill her and will feel proud on her death. We didn't target her for spreading education in her area, we targeted her for making jokes of Islam, and that was enough reason for attacking her.'*





# Jerry Coyne's message to Poles: 'You

Report by  
SLAWOMIR BUDZIAK

**T**he arrival of Professor Jerry Coyne to Poland came as a surprise to many local rationalists. The outspoken champion of evolutionary biology with little sympathy for claims of the supernatural came to visit a couple of his friends but wound up giving lectures and interviews as well as partaking in debates.

Coyne's travel destination has long been labelled as one of the strongholds of Catholicism in the Western world which is partially, but only partially, justified. While catholic faith is by far the prevailing religious denomination and the God squad may be a noisy and tiresome group in the public discourse, the situation isn't as black as it's painted.

For example, the stunning 95 percent of population classified as Catholics in the Statistical Yearbook of 2012 stems from the fact that the sufficient criterion of being counted as "adherent" is simply being baptised. The number of purely nominal Catholics is another, undetermined part of the equation. Still, Poland is a relatively religious country where sacred monuments and sculptures of saints are scattered all over the landscape, the church is a political force to be reckoned with, religion is a part of the school curriculum for most children and a form of blasphemy law is effectuated from time to



*Jerry Coyne was greeted at Warsaw airport by a biology student, Justyna, who studies primates at the local zoo. "Having heard of my fondness for felids," wrote Coyne, "she prepared a lovely greeting (the balloons have cat faces drawn on them)."*

time by zealots of every hue.

Given all that, the visit by not only an ardent Darwinian but in addition a vocal proponent of atheism seemed like going to the lion's den but Coyne's stay in Poland turned out to be a great experience for all involved.

Firstly, the Chicago-based professor headed towards the capital of Poland where the Polish Rationalist Society and the Polish Skeptical Club organised two open meetings for all interested in evolutionary biology, scientific research and the interface between science and faith.

During the first meeting Coyne professed

that there is a fundamental disparity between the scientific approach and the religious perspective and criticised efforts aiming at reconciling these two cognitive models. He spared neither accommodationist views nor the stance of faithism. He disclosed also that he was in the process of writing a new book raising among others the issue of incompatibility of faith and scientific cognition.

During his second day in Warsaw, Coyne engaged in a partly heated debate at the department of biology at Warsaw University where his views on matters of faith met with resistance by a Christian apologist and

## Muslim women's groups in Canada say

IN 2007 Canada decided to set aside funds for a campaign to investigate and combat the growing number of killings of mainly Muslim women in the country. Until recently, religio-cultural violence – universally known as "honour killings" – were virtually unknown in that country. Only three known victims were killed between 1954 and 1983. But since 1999, 12 women have perished in honour killings.

Every year, according to UN reports, 5,000 women worldwide are killed for reasons of "honour" that relate to matters of modesty and obedience, though most experts maintain the numbers are far higher. And the number of victims of honour violence, which can involve beatings, acid attacks, or locking a woman in her home, is literally incalculable.

In the UK alone, more than 3,000 such honour crimes occurred just in 2010, according to a study by the Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO). The vast majority of those crimes, the organisation states, were committed by Muslims, though Sikhs and Hindus have also been known to commit honour-related crimes.

But Canada's efforts to stop this form of violence is being opposed ... by Muslim women! They are claiming that the term "honour killing" is racist, with many speaking out against the government's new focus on these crimes.

One outspoken opponent is Itrath Syed, who is pursuing a PhD in Islamophobia in Vancouver. She said: "When women of colour are killed, we ask these larger questions around their culture. We ask what's wrong

with their entire people – their culture, their religion – instead of a particular person."

Writing for the Investigative Project, Abigail R Esmen said: "What is so tragic about this remark is not just the half-dozen or so ways in which it is patently untrue, but that it seeks to nullify the horror that is honour violence, to deny the profound distinctions between honor crimes and other forms of domestic violence and femicide."

And she pointed out: "What Syed really was referring to was religion, not race. Or rather, the implication that domestic abuse in Muslim families is related to Islam, and that Muslim families are therefore treated differently than everybody else. It's a common accusation, and an ongoing question: are honour crimes culturally-based, or founded in interpretations of the Koran?"



# You'd be better off without religion'

a biology professor in one person. Needless to say, the sympathy of the audience was with Coyne.

After the two public appearances and a fair amount of sightseeing, professor Coyne left the capital and set course for Krakow, the historical capital of Poland and a city of countless church towers where he was to give a lecture at the university.

The topic of his lecture at one of the departments of the 649-year-old Jagiellonian University was identical with the title of his immensely popular book *Why Evolution is True*. Coyne delivered what he promised – a brief presentation of the irrefutable evidence for evolution to the delight of the audience. Denialists were either absent or kept a low profile.

In the second part of the lecture Coyne went on to answer the obvious question of why all this tangible evidence in favour of the theory of evolution fails to translate into the increasing acceptance of evolution among others in the United States and why there are still chunks of the populations in most European countries rejecting this widely accepted pillar of modern biology. The conclusion was, rather unsurprisingly, that it was religious faith – and especially exposure to religious doctrines in one's childhood – that was to be blamed for this situation. That reasoning was illustrated with slides showing, for example, a correlation between religiosity and acceptance in evolution in different populations.

Debunking the ludicrous creationist ideas

doesn't cause much uproar among more enlightened people of faith but labelling religious faith as such as a phenomenon which should be consigned to the scrap heap of history is a different matter altogether. It was around that point that the undersigned spotted a few spectators shaking their heads unable as they were to accept the relentless message.

After a short series of questions we were reminded that the next lecturer was already waiting impatiently to take over the rostrum and after a short series of questions we had to leave the auditorium. The good news was that all enthusiasts of science and rationalism – as well as opponents of the views presented by the lecturer – had the opportunity to meet Coyne in a cosy little café near the old Jewish neighborhood.

Dimmed lights, the small size of the place and smell of coffee along with Coyne's unassuming way of being encouraged a lively discussion that touched on genetics, faith, the Beatles, miracles, and the position of the Catholic Church in Poland to name just a few. The issue of evolution being both a theory and a fact – raised during the lecture – occurred once again.

Coyne agreed that we had lost the word "theory" to the colloquial language and replacing it with the notion of "model" was not a bad idea. After all, the latter is equally fine but free for the kind connotations that make it possible for many people to perpetuate the terminology and logical error underlying the hackneyed "but evolution is

just a theory" argument.

Two hours of "intellectual delight" were over only too quickly but Coyne's stay in Poland was to continue and bring a surprise in form of an interview in one of the biggest TV channels in Poland. The broadcaster was more interested in Coyne as a famous 'godless science guy' than as a renowned biologist which was reflected in the number of questions pertaining to the issue of faith. Of course, Coyne was pretty blatant about his views on religion while on primetime TV which gave many a sense of *schadenfreude*. His message to Poles was straightforward – the world would be better without religion so have the courage to dispose of it the way you said goodbye to Santa Claus.

At the end of his stay, Coyne visited the place where the Nazis perpetrated some of the worst atrocities in the history, a place that has become symbolic of their endeavour to wipe out entire populations. Coyne's visit was symbolic too.

The wooden barracks of the camp are remnants of an utterly dogmatic ideology and a genocide fuelled by an irrational world-outlet. But instead of being a warning against the dangers of irrationality, the Nazis and their crimes are now used to bash Darwinists and godless people over the head by those who believe – *believe* being the keyword here – that the armies wearing the *Gott mit uns*-inscription were carrying out the atheist agenda and that the most murderous visions of the Nazi ideologists drew inspiration from Darwinism.

## say the term 'honour killing' is 'racist'

It's a bit of both, according to Carla Rus, a psychiatrist in the Netherlands who specialises in working with victims of both domestic abuse and honor violence.

She says honour violence "involves a kind of ideology, which you don't find in domestic violence. In [Islamic] cultures, where church and state are not separated, it's difficult to distinguish whether honour violence comes through cultural or religious motives – culture and religion are inseparable in those cases".

Esman pointed out that understanding how dramatically honour violence differs from other domestic abuse is, however, critical and that Westerners rarely kill their young daughters, nor do Western families of origin conspire or collaborate in such murders. Similarly, domestic abuse in Western

families does not involve brothers murdering their sisters, as happens in cases of honour killings. To the contrary, siblings most often protect one another.

Esman said that two other critical points that opponents to Canada's focus on honour killings apparently do not wish others to see – "or perhaps are too culturally blinded to see is that ordinary domestic violence is nearly always spontaneous, while honour violence (and especially honour murder) is almost always calculated, often planned out over time through numerous family meetings. And the horrific reality is that, these women simply have nowhere to run: no mothers who will shelter them from the husbands they are trying to escape, no sisters or brothers to protect them from their fathers – no one.

"(Indeed, the sisters and brothers are often

recruited to assure a girl hiding from her family to come home, that all is forgiven. But this assertion is almost always a ruse; once she returns, the child is usually killed within days.)

"Which is precisely why funding for, and attention to, understanding and preventing honor violence is so very critical, not only in Canada, but everywhere in the West. It is why women – and especially Muslim women – should be welcoming it, even demanding more."

Esman concluded: "And yet, countless Canadian (and other) Muslim activists and apologists remain far more devoted to shaping public vision of their culture – even if it means disguising the truth – than to protecting the lives of their Muslim sisters."



# Hateful expats

**STUART HARTILL** argues that close vigilance of hate-spewing fundamentalist Christian groups is needed

**Y**ears ago I did some college courses on how organisations function, in particular learning to look for how businesses succeed or fail because of the ways they are managed and employees function within them. More recently, I revisited some of the textbooks to see what happens if you study churches purely as business organisations.

While this was just a mixture of idle curiosity and fun, one thing I immediately found is that the larger traditional churches have been thinking along the same lines. In fact Charles Handy, a leading academic in the organisation studies field, has advised the Church of England for some years now.

Fundamentalist churches, I would argue, go much further, being formed first as businesses and operating only coincidentally as religious organisations because the entrepreneurs involved have identified a “niche market” (based as surely as any major commercial product on human insecurities) and then gone after it aggressively. Actually, as I will mention later, sometimes so aggressively that they are closer to the Cosa Nostra than Coca Cola in their business practice.

Regular readers may have picked up that I live on the Isle of Man, which makes an excellent study site, as it follows the patterns of other English language countries but on such a tiny scale that everything, from national politics to parochial trivia, happens right on my doorstep and is easily observable. As with a previous *Freethinker* piece, I have closely observed local examples and invite others to see how the findings compare to patterns of activity in their area.

One phenomenon peculiar to the island is the migration of Ulster Protestants here over the last 30 years, bringing with them their fundamentalist evangelical organisations. At the height of the Northern Irish ‘troubles’ this would be understandable, as people sought a quieter place to raise their families, but close enough to their roots to go back and visit the relatives. What is noticeable is firstly that far fewer Catholics resettled here, and that secondly as that province’s conflicts were resolved none of the evangelicals went back; in fact censuses show the migration has increased.

I have also lived in Northern Ireland – I was there for a couple of years between the start of the hunger strikes and the sabotaged Stalker investigation into alleged collaborations between security forces and Loyalist paramilitaries – so I also have some first hand knowledge of that place. Putting the two together I think I might have spotted something significant.

At the time I lived there, the British government poured huge amounts of money into both job creation and peace and reconciliation schemes. The upshot was that any bright spark with a modest community-orientated project that emphasised ‘bridge-building’ could get short term funding, and as soon as that ran out there would be another scheme along to jump on. Some 80% of small, government-aided business start-ups failed within two years, as any bank manager from that time could tell you. But that never mattered, as any politician would tell you. The point was that whole communities were unemployed and, quite literally, killing each other, so any short term relief was worth a go.

Because the root of the violence was religious, it was also understandable that religious organisations that claimed an interest in peace making and applied for such schemes went to the head of the queue. With the honourable exception of something called the Corrymeela Community, I know of no serious attempts by religious groups on both sides to collaborate on a single project.

In addition, while I know of one or two well-meaning urban Catholic priests starting small community business schemes, the vast majority of such schemes funded were run by evangelical churches and employed what were euphemistically termed “youth and community workers”. To any sceptical outsider, these would be seen as pastors, Sunday school teachers and their support staff. In effect, missionary work by any Northern Irish fundamentalist church which could not be directly linked to paramilitary violence was subsidised by the British government during the 1980s, and most have never learnt to get by without it since. But they did learn how to work with civil servants, how to influence gov-

ernment policy and how to keep tapping public funds.

My finding is that as peace of a sort came to Northern Ireland and the obvious excuse for such funding dropped away, these churches started to look further afield for income. In addition, their business methods have spread to other religious hard-liners.

We first started seeing aggressive evangelical groups here led by Ulster ex-pat pastors in the 1980s. One in particular flourished because it had the island’s Chief Constable – a protégé of ‘God’s Cop’ (James Anderson) himself – as a church elder. This eased open the doors to Manx government, which stayed open despite homophobic, sectarian and sexist sermonising far beyond the extremes of native preachers and that, these days, would actually invite police attention. Even worse, such views were taken as typical Manx backwardness by off-island critics.

These churches differed from home-grown variants of, say, Anglicanism or Methodism in that, far from “winning souls”, the ultimate aim seemed to be to actually put rival churches out of business, and by any means possible. For example, the island has one of those churches together groups where church leaders meet and plan joint campaigns. The newcomers were invited, but one insider tells me that they regularly rang ahead to check in case they had to share the room with a Catholic priest. Even when the priest was replaced by a lay Catholic woman they still cried off if she was expected.

Similarly, I know from other clergy that evangelicals never attend the standard government liaison committees with faith groups (at least not in their capacity as church members) and have sought no place on the local equivalent of an Education Department SACRE (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education). Yet they still picked up (and continue to pick up) on all government grants and schemes where public money might be available to churches and religious charities.

They achieve this (and again I have this from insiders) by asking church members in public service to tip them off to confidential government plans (eg outsourcing



of or changes to youth or social care) or even influence them, then the church effectively nabs the contract even before the public announcement of the scheme.

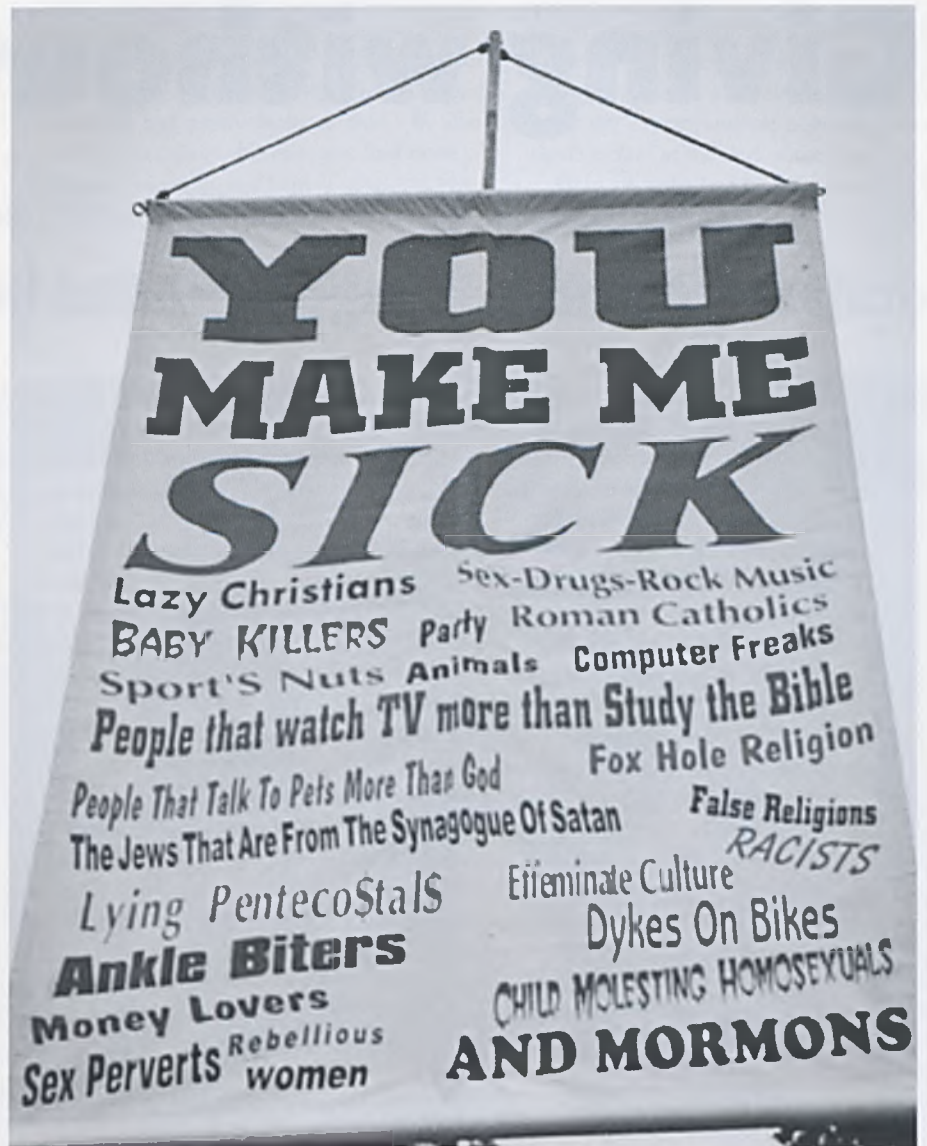
In the legitimate business world this would be considered insider trading. If this were a standard business tendering for government contracts or trading shares with prior knowledge of imminent government policy change it would be penalised, and probably excluded from future bids. Religious organisations (though engaged in commercial activity) somehow evade any requirement to play fair, and any gentlemanly appeal to such louts to do the right thing would be ignored.

I also seem to recall that one evangelical role model, Billy Graham, started out as an insurance salesman, so perhaps it is no surprise to see his emulators use the scare tactics of the door-to-door insurance agent - frightening the elderly, preying on the lonely and housebound and, in general, persuading the insecure that it would be in their best interests to pay a little protection money to powerful friends in case anything "unfortunate" happens. While this sounds a little more like a protection racket than religious compassion I can offer an astonishing example, related by a work colleague with an elderly, housebound mother.

One of the little earners dreamt up by the most hard-line group (and now inviting government subsidy) is a "befriending" scheme whereby (in theory) churchgoers help out pensioners and the disabled with their shopping or other needs. Some nice young men visited my friend's mum and "assessed" her (in practice doing little more than inviting her to church and offering to pick her up). She went along once or twice, but found the loud music and over-emotional antics of the worshippers too overpowering (not to mention the pressure to throw nothing smaller than a fiver into the collection) so made her excuses politely. But the young men continued to visit her, and pressure her into coming back to church.

It was at this point that one came out with the classic line "We wouldn't want you to have an accident and be lying on the floor for days because nobody came." And it was at that point that my friend contacted both the pastor and the police, pointing out to both parties that at least the Kray Twins picked on other criminals, and offered some genuine protection to the public from the same.

As I said in a previous piece, it might be that the examples I have looked at are particular to one community, but I think it worth comparing to what happens in your own neighbourhood. It might be there is a general pattern, or it might even



be that, rather than my findings, you find something peculiar to your area, in which case that would be worth sharing here too and as such studies grow we gain a better understanding of 21st century Christian fundamentalism. The alternative is to rely on standard media accounts which may be gathered hurriedly by less than motivated journalists and miss the most significant detail.

Certainly, I am convinced that a Northern Irish model of tub-thumping, money-grabbing, intolerant evangelism, well fed since infancy by government funding, is now expanding to the UK in general (and even more recently to Eastern Europe) and needs watching.

I suspect Scotland is particularly worth looking at. For example, I note some evangelical charities that were founded in Northern Ireland and are now seen here setting up separate Scottish operations. Sometimes this is by registering independently as Scottish charities, sometimes by vaguely referencing the Ulster parent charity and hoping nobody will ask awkward questions.

While UK company law has changed, so that companies originally registered in Scotland or Northern Ireland now file documents through the same registry as those in England and Wales, Scottish and Northern Irish charities, to the best of my knowledge, are still directly overseen by charity commissions in those countries. In addition, as I understand it, it is technically an offence for an organisation to hold itself out as a charity (and certainly to solicit funds from the public) in a country where it is not registered, or to fail to declare branches in other countries to the charity commission in the country where it is registered.

It may be that such commissions are reluctant to investigate religious charities (as an interesting comparison, I can state that in the much maligned offshore finance world any religious charity starts by being considered a potential criminal or terrorist front), or it may simply be that nobody looks or reports potential breaches to them. If it is the latter, I humbly suggest that anybody who wants to stop the export of hate should consider doing so.



# Giving without God

**DALE DEBAKCSY** identifies three groups smashing the 'atheists don't do charity' myth

One of the few remaining lifeboats jettisoned from the sinking ship of world theism is the idea that theists are, person for person, more charitable than non-theists. It is a patchwork and over-crowded craft, filled with desperate and wild-eyed people looking for anything to distract them from the fact that, just behind them, their worldview is slipping irrevocably beneath the waves.

For a while, whether out of pity or because we had other things to do, we let them get away with this "non-theists are uncharitable" refrain. The efforts of secular organizations over the last half decade have made such claims demonstrably silly, however, and an update is in order.

Really, though, the claim was just as silly two decades ago as it is today, though for different reasons. It is relatively easy to gather resources towards the common good when you make up over 90 percent of the population. If world Christianity lets just one percent of its mostly ill-gotten wealth slip through its fingers into charitable work, that still represents a truly massive amount of money. And money attracts organization, so that Christian charitable groups have been self-sustaining and easy to find in a way that atheist organizations couldn't be given the dispersion of our numbers and our relative paucity of resources. To say, "Christians give more than non-Christians," was therefore just a transmogrified gloss of the statement, "There are a lot of us and not many of you."

Or there were. Slogging through the undulating virtualscapes of the Internet, atheists have at long last found each other, building up a critical mass that can finally support our biggest dreams for helping humanity. In 2010, Dale McGowan founded Foundation Beyond Belief, and just a few months ago it announced having collected one million dollars in charitable donations. It is a beautiful organization that chooses five charities a quarter to support, and allows its donors to determine how their money gets divided up amongst the chosen services.

So, if you really love the environmental charity they've selected for the quarter, but aren't a fan of, say, the human rights one, then you can make sure that your donation gets parsed accordingly. Further, all donations go

directly towards the indicated charities, the FBB taking no percentage for itself.

In addition to this regular work, the FBB has raised funds for individual emergency causes ranging from the \$45,000 it raised in support of the victims of the recent Oklahoma tornadoes to the over \$9,000 it has drummed up for Syrian refugee relief. As if all of that weren't enough to have accomplished from scratch in the last three years, it is currently organizing the incredibly exciting Pathfinders Project, a structure that will allow secularists to volunteer at sites the world over engaged in human rights, poverty, and education projects. People will be able to get the help that they need without having to bend their knee (and mind) to any haughtily proffered deity to obtain it, and it's high time that became the rule rather than the exception.

On a community level, the FBB, through its Beyond Belief Network project, is also acting as the nerve centre for 75 secular service groups spread out over 60 cities. They offer advice and direction for people wanting to start local charity organizations, and foster the growth and coordination of existing groups. To date, the members of the Beyond Belief Network have contributed over 27,000 hours of community service.

In short, Foundation Beyond Belief provides the structure to allow humanists and atheists to be the people we've always known we are, and it's definitely worth a bit of support each month. To read more about the other projects they are firing up, and the charities they're supporting this quarter, check out [www.foundation-beyondbelief.org](http://www.foundation-beyondbelief.org).

Equally enticing in a rather different way is The Apostasy Project, the brainchild of *New Humanist's* former editor Caspar Melville and *The Young Atheist's Handbook* author Alom Shaha. It is currently in the initial fundraising stages and has the goal of developing resources and professional support for people who are struggling with their doubts about God in societies that are massively intolerant of non-belief. They are creating coming-out guides that are targeted to different religions and the social difficulties faced by apostates in each. More ambitiously, and this is where the need for funding comes in, they aim to work with professional counselors to offer care-

fully researched advice, therapy, and support on call to anybody wrestling with their own convictions and desperately worried about the practical ramifications of their doubt.

This is one of those causes that is crucial to support but far too easy to shrug off. Sitting as I do in California, where I have never suffered so much as a cross word for my lack of belief in gods, souls, and other such whimsical phantoms, it is devastatingly tempting to slouch into the conviction that people the world over have a similar luxury of non-belief, even when I know it's not the case.

These people, making that first tenuous step towards intellectual emancipation, are brave in ways I can only abstractly comprehend, and deserve more from us than, "good on you, chum." The Apostasy Project will give them something beyond just helpful links to furtively click on, it will give them a human being interact with. Person by person, that contact will bring profound changes to far-flung societies. You can help out The Apostasy Project at [apostasy.org.uk](http://apostasy.org.uk).

Finally, something a bit off the beaten path that has been amassing small miracles into something quite awe-inspiring, the Kiva Lending Team: Atheists, Agnostics, Skeptics, Freethinkers, Secular Humanists and the Non-Religious isn't so much a charity as an online association of like minded secularists using the power of Kiva to directly impact the lives of folks everywhere. For those who don't know, Kiva is a site that lets people in impoverished nations apply for micro-loans for specific needs. Farmers buying seeds or livestock, tailors buying sewing machines – things of that nature.

The AAS (to shorten their acronym somewhat, and because I love Angle-Angle-Side congruence) is a hub where secularists can gather to share worthy causes and shake up a few dollars to help people in need. The great thing is that you know precisely who the money is going towards and precisely what they are going to use it for. To date, the 26,000 members of the AAS team have donated over \$12 MILLION to help ordinary people attain self-sufficiency. They are the all-time number one lending group on the site, and are a testament to us all about what our tiny percentage of the population can do if we help each other out in finding and



drawing our mutual attention to deserving causes and individuals. To see what the group has accomplished, and what people they are supporting right now, just hop on over to [www.kiva.org/teams/atheists](http://www.kiva.org/teams/atheists) and maybe you'll be inspired!

This has been just a small sampling of the various and incredibly clever ways that secu-

larists have figured out how to give back to the world in spite of our scanty (but growing!) numbers and limited resources. What we have so long wanted to be able to do we now can, and pretty easily at that. If, after mulling over these charities, you find none of them to your taste, just look at what the atheist clubs in your own region are doing, and

you'll probably find all manner of food drives, beach clean ups, and school technology fundraisers that will have an immediate impact on the world directly around you, none of which carry the caveat "and we only did it through God's grace" at the end of the day.

All in all, not a bad bit of progress for a few years' work.

## Non-religious aid benefits Uganda humanist school



THE children pictured above, writes BARRY DUKE, are pupils at the Kasese Humanist Primary School in Uganda which was recently able to buy their own plot of land thanks to generous worldwide support of non-believers.

But some aren't too pleased by this development. Commenting on the Causes.com website on the money raised for the school, Ugandan Paula Aguti wrote: "Please get out of my country. We do not need your atheism. We do not need you to come and bring your Western ideas. We are now independent from Westerners. We do not need you meddling anymore, leave us in peace with our God. If you do not believe than woe to you. My people are Christian and religious and they aren't complaining. Please, leave us alone."

The site reported that a subsequent fundraiser had secured the funds to

bring electricity to the land, and added: "We are now at the most exciting and challenging point – raising funds to build the classrooms on the new property that will make up the new school and allow it to move to rent-free land of its own. This fundraiser will allow the school to take this next important step to self-sufficiency."

Causes added: "The school faces an extra challenge due to its secular nature in a very religious part of the world. Local funding is hard to come by and although there is a plethora of religious charities out there, secular charities are still few."

The school plans to use the land it acquired to construct new, more permanent school facilities. Ten new classrooms will be built by a local contractor: three nursery and seven primary. Washroom facilities will also be built.

Causes have set a target of \$35,000.00 for the project. The pro-

ject is largely supported by a former Roman Catholic-turned-atheist. Calling himself "Godless Poutine", this Canadian – a former member of the fundamentalist Society of St Pius X – runs the My Secret Atheist Blog ([www.mysecretatheistblog.com](http://www.mysecretatheistblog.com)) where more information on the school and regular reports on how previous fundraisers for the school have helped are published.

The school, headed by Bwambale Robert, is the first of its kind in the Kasese district to be set up based on humanist values and ethics, offering basic subjects as stipulated by the Uganda Primary School Curriculum and in addition humanism lessons are conducted. In all subjects taught at school, emphasis is put on the application of a scientific approach and critical thinking. The school encourages pupils to be rational, innovative, creative, skilled, compassionate and tolerant.



# The cult that flourishes while th

## JOHN CEDARS, Senior Editor on the tactics used by Jehova intimidate anyone who dares



**M**ost people don't understand cults – and who could blame them? In the rare instances where they are reported on by the media the very word “cult” is used sheepishly, as though it is some sort of swear word. Nobody wants to cause offence by banding around a label with such negative connotations.

Journalists also seem to have an unfathomable logic when it comes to choosing which cults they should report on. A perfect example of this is their apparent obsession with Scientology.

Don't get me wrong – Scientology is a dreadful cult. The manner in which it shamelessly extracts money from its adherents during their road to “enlightenment” makes it one of the most obvious contemporary examples of religious charlatany. And then there are those unfortunate enough to be duped into signing the “billion year contract” binding them to the Sea Org, only to be potentially subjected to brutal and degrading treatment if some reports are to be believed.

But let's try and get some perspective here. Tony Ortega writes an excellent blog covering all developments in the world of Scientology. In one article, a well-positioned source estimates the actual number of practicing, card-carrying Scientologists to be a mere 40,000. You have to ask yourself, given that Scientology is numerically such a faint blip on the religious radar – why so much exposure?

To answer that question, you need look no further than the Hollywood star who shares so many headlines with Scientology. Of course, I may be over-simplifying

by suggesting that Tom Cruise is the only reason journalists fixate over such a tiny religion – but I struggle to find more compelling reasons given that there are much larger faith movements doing the same if not more damage to considerably more people.

This brings me to Jehovah's Witnesses, the religion of my birth – now approaching eight million practicing members. Few people realise that there are more Witnesses in countries like Portugal and Romania than there are Scientologists on the entire planet. Numerically at least, there is simply no comparison.

I am now in my mid thirties, but it was only two years ago when the penny dropped and I realised that many of the things my Witness parents had raised me to believe as unquestionable fact were based on mere delusion.

You see, like most cults, the organization behind Jehovah's Witnesses (known as the Watch Tower Society, or “Watchtower”) uses fear, stigmatisation and paranoia to prevent worshippers from doing objective research about their beliefs using external sources. So masterful is Watchtower at this that those like me who were born into the religion become almost sick with worry at the very thought of glancing at a so-called “apostate” website.

When I finally awakened, one of the most disappointing revelations for me was, not the fact that I had been lied to since childhood, but the virtual vacuum of media exposure surrounding the Watchtower's abuses. I thought, “How are they getting away with it?”

Forgive my bluntness, but if certain reporters could bring themselves to redirect their infatuated gaze from Scientology for just a moment, they would find in Watchtower an organization rife with scandal and the very worst physical and emotional abuse affecting, not thousands, but millions throughout the civilised world.

For example, right now cases are popping up both in the United States and the

UK where Witness elders, at the behest of their Watchtower leaders, have been caught deliberately covering up paedophiles, thus allowing their abuse to continue. One US lawyer, Irwin Zalkin, now has 11 lawsuits against Watchtower at various stages, but the world's media barely utters a whisper.

Add to this the psychological abuse routinely heaped upon those who are shunned by family members as “mentally diseased” simply for daring to leave the Witness faith. Watchtower officials have attempted to deny that the organization practices shunning, but videos continue to be uploaded to YouTube testifying beyond doubt that shunning is both compulsory and rampant among the Witnesses, and is causing very real damage and heartache.

Then you have the blatant indoctrination of Witness children, which hits a raw nerve with me as a former victim. One Watchtower cartoon in particular recently caused a stir among atheists when it was uploaded to YouTube. Entitled “Become Jehovah's Friend,” it portrays a Witness boy named Caleb being reprimanded by his mother. His crime? Caleb had brought home a plastic wizard toy in violation of Watchtower's views on magic and witchcraft. Without offering any logical or coherent explanation, Caleb's mother forces him to throw his new toy in the trash.

Despite such damning material, which is so clearly aimed at turning young children into mindless drones, the media mostly turns a blind eye and Watchtower gets clean away with it. Worse still, Watchtower profits financially from the public's ignorance of its harmful practices by claiming tax-exemption in many countries, including the US.

In Britain, legal entities used by the Witnesses are even classed as “charities” and receive gift aid on all donations – effectively subsidising the abuse. Their official charity paperwork waxes lyrical about the Witnesses' contribution to “public benefit” by providing free Bible education. No clue is



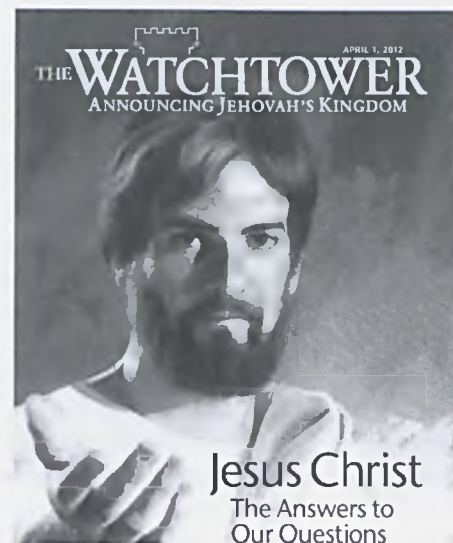
# the media looks the other way

tor of JWSurvey.org reports  
 ovah's Witness leaders to  
 res to investigate their cult

given that this "education" is really propa-  
 ganda aimed at stifling reason and imposing  
 unquestioned obedience to a group of men  
 in America.

Who do I blame for all this? It's hard not  
 to look at some investigative reporters who,  
 despite having a duty to inform the world

of such injustice, instead drool over the lat-  
 est Scientology gossip. Sadly, so long as the  
 heads of these ones are so easily turned, the  
 reign of cults like Watchtower will continue  
 unabated – allowing yet more young peo-  
 ple to be robbed of the ability to think for  
 themselves.



A Watchtower magazine cover from 2012

## Book review: *Psychic Blues: Confessions of a Conflicted Medium*

By WILLIAM HARWOOD

TRY TO imagine *Nightmare Alley* written  
 by the character played by Tyrone Power in  
 the movie, but with the difference that the  
 author had already seen the movie based on  
 his life and was thereby forewarned to avoid  
 ending up the same way. There you have  
*Psychic Blues*.

Mark Edward warns that his book *Psychic  
 Blues: Confessions of a Conflicted Medium* "is  
 not an episode of *The Ghost Whisperer*, *Me-  
 dium*, *The Mentalist*, or even a hilarious rerun  
 of *Bewitched*." Certainly it has no resemblance  
 to the other cited TV series, all of which  
 presented supposedly paranormal magick as  
 something other than the confidence swin-  
 dle it really is. But he does echo *The Men-  
 talist*, in which a former psychic conman  
 (tautology) repeatedly informs viewers that,  
 "there is no such thing as a psychic."

Like the fictitious Patrick Jane, Edward  
 recognizes psychic phenomena as "a very  
 disappointing con". Edward asserts that, "I  
 could never outright lie ... by making up  
 only what I sense they want to hear. Instead,  
 I have consistently opted to tell people what  
 I feel in my gut is what they need to hear."

A distinction without a difference? Not  
 necessarily. While mental magicians such as  
 Kreskin and Yuri Geller readily acknowledge  
 to other magicians that they simply "make it  
 up," they carefully conceal that reality from

the general public. That *Psychic Blues* is more  
 an autobiography than a textbook on "how  
 it's done" does not make it any less useful, as  
 James Randi's foreword recognizes.

"In the 1990s, when it was at its peak, the  
 Psychic Friends Network logged an esti-  
 mated three million minutes per month.  
 Their gross income was approximately \$144  
 million annually."

"As PT Barnum once said, there's a sucker  
 born every minute. And in the 900 business,  
 every minute counts". The connection be-  
 tween those two observations should be  
 self-evident.

Edward denounces less ethical psychics for  
 "crossing the line into absurdity by purport-  
 edly having the ability to speak to the dead."  
 He cites Shakespeare's *Henry V*, in which  
 one character claims that "I can call spirits  
 from the vasty deep," only to have another  
 character respond, "Why, so can I, or so can  
 any man. But will they come when you call  
 them?" He then devotes a whole chapter to  
 present-day confidence swindlers who claim  
 to communicate with the dead. And as a re-  
 minder that there could be no humbugs if  
 there were no suckers, he describes believ-  
 ers in "Bigfoot, Elvis sightings, UFO abduc-  
 tions, crop circles, and every other oddball

fad imaginable ... house haunting, bleed-  
 ing statue, or Virgin Mary manifestation" as  
 "shut-eyes", and adds that, "Shut-eyes were  
 often the first people to engage in a feeding  
 frenzy of sycophantic adulation over the lat-  
 est flavor-of-the-month psychic."

Nonetheless, I cannot escape the impres-  
 sion that Edward is at some level as credulous  
 of the superstitions he peddles as any of his  
 marks. How else does one explain his un-  
 feigned hostility to skeptics who recognized  
 his psychic readings as the confidence swin-  
 dle they in fact were? He once responded to  
 a magician, who equated passing off mental  
 magic as a mind power that does not exist  
 with "selling out", with the words "How  
 do you know I'm not really a psychic in my  
 spare time? Being a magician and having  
 psychic abilities are not mutually exclusive,  
 you know". When he writes "Self-analysis  
 was like performing surgery on your own  
 eye; it just couldn't be done if you were truly  
 psychic", that does not read like the inten-  
 tional absurdity of "if there truly was a God."

Similarly, when he writes of a competi-  
 tor "He might have been ... an astonish-  
 ingly accurate psychic; I just didn't like him,"  
 he could have been using a metaphor for  
 "astonishingly accurate cold reader," but I am

(Continued on p14)



far from convinced. And when he describes a husband and wife drawing the same three tarot cards and declares that “It was evident that they were true soul mates”, I can only wonder whom he thinks he is kidding: *Me* (as a random reader of his book), or himself?

Edward denounces the world’s most successful cold-reading humbugs, psychiatrists, for “reeling someone like Danielle in, repeating, ‘We will take off where we left off next week’, but doing something like that wasn’t in me”. But he endorses the most prevalent nonsense belief on this planet when he declares (*ibid*) that, “it’s up to a higher power to convince people like Danielle to clean up her act”. In his defense, he does not capitalize “higher power”, as a true believer would have done. And one does not have to be a god addict to recognize that “Hiding behind a shield of religion has got to be one of the lowest of the low ways to

# Psychic Blues

(Continued from page 13)

persuade the public to buy any product.”

I cannot decide what is the right word – amazement? shock? disgust? disappointment? – to describe my reaction to Edward’s information in his epilogue that he is still earning his living as a cold reader posing as a psychic. Uri Geller turned to the psychic scam, passing off kids’ conjuring tricks such as bending spoons with his fingers as a magical mind-power, because he was a fifth-rate magician whom Lance Burton would not have pissed on if he was on fire.

Is Mark Edward equally untalented? Is it because he can do nothing else that he is half-willing to believe that his powers of

observation and extrapolation make him somehow a “real” psychic, enabling him to assure himself that he is not really a no-talent parasite preying on the gullible?

As a show promoter who refused to recognize the reality that hypnotism does not exist until hypnotism had ceased providing my bread and butter, I can understand that. But I don’t have to like it. Perhaps he should write more books? He is clearly not untalented at that.

*Psychic Blues* is an extremely useful “how to” manual for anyone planning on entering the cold-reading business, whether in the guise of a tealeaf reader, a magician, a recruiter for a religion or analogous scam, or a psychiatrist. If a patter works, he has used it. And if it does not work, he has the expertise of the “once bitten” to warn wannabes to avoid it. For anyone interested in “Psychics for Dummies,” this book is for you.

# points of view...

A DIG IN THE POST BAG – LETTERS FROM OUR READERS  
ADDRESS CORRESPONDENCE TO [BARRY@FREETHINKER.CO.UK](mailto:BARRY@FREETHINKER.CO.UK)

## TOO EASY A RIDE FOR GRAY’S *THE SILENCE IF THE ANIMALS*



JOHN Gray gets a rather easy ride in the review by David James of his most recent book *The Silence of the Animals* (*Freethinker*, October). I think a more critical look is needed. Gray makes so many unfounded assertions in this and all his books, it is difficult to know where to start.

Gray is scathing towards secular humanists for what he considers their Panglossian belief in the inevitability of progress. But this is a caricature of humanist thought. Of course progress is not inevitable, but what the majority of humanists and rationalists do believe is that our species has at least the capacity for making progress, through the use of reason and a scientific approach, and that we ought to be striving to do so. Or else why should we bother to produce progressive journals such as *The Free Thinker*?

James, in his concluding sentence, appears to be fully supportive of Gray: “The fact is that man’s dreams of progress are but make-shifts, stages in a perpetual cycle that has no purpose or meaning.” Gray denies that moral progress has been achieved, and can ever be achieved. For him the world is in a bad way, and there is nothing we can do about it. I find such nihilism and pessimism puzzling. It is also a denial of history. Would Gray like

to return to a time, 60 years ago, when the great mathematician and code-breaker Alan Turing, whom Churchill suggested helped to shorten the war by as much as two years, had to choose between prison and chemical castration for his homosexuality. He chose the latter, and committed suicide soon after. Or, in the same decade, when top scientist Rosalind Franklin had to eat her sandwiches in the kitchen at Cambridge University, since the common rooms were men only?

Or to a century before that, when we were forcing a bitterly reluctant China to buy our opium, and sending children under 10 down coal mines for 12 hours a day. Go back another century and some Jacobite prisoners were being hung drawn and quartered. We could talk about the burning and torture of heretics under Mary Tudor, and the killing of witches, the terrible tortures in the Middle Ages and under the Catholic inquisition, throwing Jews off the Tower of York in the 12th century, or our attitudes to slavery, the insane (punishment from God) and so on. We have moved forward.

Going further afield, not long ago every single Latin American country was ruled by a repressive military junta, but now all are democracies. The number of pluralist de-

mocracies in Africa, with freedom of expression, is also growing fast, having numbered only one or two just 35 years ago.

The above examples refer to progress in moral awareness, and not medical and other technological advances.

The European Enlightenment thinkers of the 18th century are also favourite targets for Gray, for their belief in the inevitability of progress and “the essential goodness of man”. He goes further, however, and blames the Enlightenment for totalitarian ideologies such as Nazism and Stalinism (because the latter also tried to create the perfect world, or “golden age”) If Gray were not so well esteemed by otherwise sensible people, such silly ideas would hardly warrant a response.

Can it be that Gray genuinely does not understand that totalitarian ideologies such as Nazism and Stalinism, with their techniques of thought control and enforced conformity, were essentially counter-Enlightenment projects? They demanded total submission, just as religions had done for many hundreds of years, and still do to some extent (think Papal declarations about the sinfulness of condoms and of homosexuality, Jihadism etc.) It is the opposite of progressive secularism.

Secular humanism just “another religion”



For Gray secular humanism is not only “just another religion” or another narrative, it is the logical product, the child of religion. By blurring the distinction between a religious and a humanist/rationalist outlook Gray appears unaware of the huge gulf between them.

The latter, in following a broadly scientific approach, is characterised by doubt, and does not claim the certainties of revealed wisdom or a monopoly on “truth”. This is why we, and the Enlightenment thinkers, believe in pluralism and tolerance. Devout believers, on the other hand, “know” the truth, and those who questioned their doctrines of faith, whether Christian, Muslim or Hindu have, in many historical periods been killed, exiled or forcibly converted. In the words of AC Grayling:

“Most of what was achieved in..... the West from the 16th century onwards was wrested from the bitter reactionary grip of religion inch by painful and frequently bloody inch. How can Gray so far ignore this bald fact of history as to make the modern secular West the inheritor of the ideals and aspirations of what it fought so hard to free itself from (and is still bedevilled by)? His accordingly is a bizarre fantasy-version of history.”

The horrors of Nazi Germany and of Stalinism are examples given by Gray to show how illusory are the hopes for moral progress. Germany after all had produced the likes of Bach, Beethoven, Schiller, Einstein and innumerable other great people. What a fall!

However, it could be argued that in neither of these countries, had the Enlightenment values of secular democracy, pluralism, and freedom of expression taken root. In Russia there was no democratic tradition at all, while in Germany the Weimar Republic introduced its Bill of Rights, universal franchise and so on only in 1919. This did not give it enough time to take root, before the Nazis were able to sweep it all away. Taking a longer view, however, if we compare Germany today with any other period of its history, considerable progress is undeniable.

Steven Pinker's book *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (2011), is the perfect antidote to John Gray. In it he presents persuasive evidence for the long-term decline of violence, and corresponding progress in moral awareness. This is despite the major wars of the 20th century, and despite a common perception that we are living in unprecedentedly violent times.

One reason for this, according to Pinker, is that, as more and more people have become accustomed to rational thinking, (in other words have taken on the values of the Enlightenment) and have rejected irrational prejudices and superstitions, the justification for violence against our fellow human beings has receded. This recalls Voltaire's famous

maxim: “Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities”. Many of us may agree with some of Gray's views, for example on atheism, cruelty to animals, the way science is used to make ever more terrifying weapons, and so on. But,

with his attack on the European Enlightenment and his insistence that any thought of progress is illusory, I believe he seriously weakens his case.

David Simmonds  
London

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### APPLAUDING HALEY'S CALL FOR THE USE OF 'EVIDIST'

ALTHOUGH Jeff T Haley's article in the October *Freethinker* was too verbose to my taste, I applaud his concluding neologism “evidists”, to supplant the too equivocal “sceptics”, the solely negative “atheists”, the inexplicit “secular humanists” and the distastefully arrogant “brights”. His new coinage establishes the all-important fact that scientific evidence, as opposed to revelation, superstition and wishful thinking, is the source of our freethinking perspective.

My preferred declension of “evidist” for the person would be “evidistic” as the adjective and “evidism” the noun describing our down-to-earth philosophy. Hopefully these meaningful new words will eventually become part of the common language.

Barbara Smoker  
Bromley

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### RELIGION AND MENTAL ILLNESS

ANY linkage – many are proposed – between religion and mental illness should I think get better publicity. Such knowledge would better inform debate about extremism. And better understood if researched more, as science writer Kathleen Taylor, specialising in neuroscience at Oxford University, said when speaking at the 2013 Hay Literary Festival “with the hope that religious fundamentalism may one day be treated as a curable mental illness”. (*Freethinker* blog, June 4, 2013.)

Many writers have speculated on this linkage. Barbara Smoker suggests the term “religious OCD” be used as a synonym for the pathology of repetitively performed rituals – Jews head-bobbing at the Western Wall, Catholics swinging smoking thuribles, Muslim's five-a-day prayers, tambourine banging, whatever.

More seriously, psychologist Richard Bentall (2003) says psychiatrists have proposed that religious experiences should be regarded as a symptom of mental illness; neuroscientist V S Ramachandran words it differently: that brain disorder resulting from trauma and strokes or epilepsy can cause neurotic religiosity and delusions of grandeur.

Maybe it's a matter of degree. Spiritual experiences range across a spectrum, from the tingles of uplifting music at one end through euphoria to flashes of light and hearing God's voice at the schizotypy end – ubiquitous in self-elected prophets (in or out of mental hospitals) whose god- or angel-dictated wisdoms guide their gullible followers. This form of religious control is as ancient as ancient can be. Dr David Horrobin (2001) reckons that schizophrenia was a bi-product of early Homo sapien's large creative brains which, cerebral suffering the familial downside of of genius, shaped humanity; an evolutionary change of mind is echoed by David Lewis-Williams (2002, 2005), and by Daniel B Smith (2007). Julian Jaynes (1976) hypothesised that auditory hallucinations were the gods themselves and their cessation millennia ago, by a change in mentality wrought by metaphorical language, the birth pangs, evidenced by insane sacrificial cruelty, of god-belief – the theory of the lost voices, as Melvyn Bragg called it.

Psychologist M D Faber (2004) has described how religions infantilise their followers, exploiting a fear of death and fostering a regression to childlike dependency on external father-like authorisation. John F Schumaker (1995) says that altered states of consciousness are corruptions of reality that believers voluntarily want to experience, inducing them with drugs, or by rhythmic dancing and chanting (the attraction for primitives and Pentecostals), or more subtly by collective prayer, sonorous sermons, psalm and hymn singing. The need to dissociate from the difficulties of reality is explained compassionately by the neurologist Oliver Sacks (2012).

Religion is a group bonding reality-dissociative phenomenon. Science writer Tor Norretranders (1999) says religion is the relation between consciousness and nonconsciousness. Perhaps between the brain's linguistic left hemisphere and the inexpressible right hemisphere, connections made not with the cosmos but across the *corpus callosum*.

Thankfully science is gradually making sense of the mysteries: Victor Stenger's books bring an astrophysicist's debunking of a sky god; Richard Dawkins' an evolutionary biologist's perspective; A C Grayling a moral dimension. Too numerous to mention are the atheist polemicists and commentators, all doing a sterling job.

I can't keep up with it all. For anyone looking for answers, this is mind boggling stuff. Which didn't bother a young Woody Allen: “How can I believe in God when just last week I got my tongue caught in the roller of an electric typewriter”.

Graham Newbery  
Southampton



# Bed and breakfast bigots take their case to the High Court



Peter and Hazelmary Bull pictured last month at the Supreme Court

**F**ive Supreme Court judges are expected to rule by December whether the Christian owners of a B&B had the right to refuse accommodation to a gay couple.

Peter and Hazelmary Bull, who own the Chymovah bed and breakfast in Cornwall, were sued by Steven Preddy and Martyn Hall and were ordered to pay the two men £3,600 in damages.

Last month the Bulls, supported by the Christian Institute, took their case to the Supreme Court where Aidan O'Neill QC told the judges that the Bulls' decision was based on their "religiously informed judgment of conscience".

He commented: "They believe the Bible to be God's word, which reveals God's perfect standards".

"They take this responsibility very seriously and always strive to keep their consciences clear before God", O'Neill added.

The Bulls' policy was not to allow unmarried couples to share a double bed.

The QC also warned against the state enforcing "particular moral or religious views". He said the Government should not be "seeking uniformity and imposing it by law". O'Neill noted that the European Convention on Human Rights, "allows for a plurality of competing beliefs and voices".

The Bulls' policy had been in place since the business opened, and was well-advertised. But as soon as new equality laws were introduced in 2007, the Government's tourism board for England struck the Bulls' B&B off their approved list.

In 2009, litigation against the Bulls' marriage policy began, resulting in a County Court ruling against them in 2011.

Last month it was revealed that Mr and Mrs Bull have put their bed and breakfast up for sale. The decision to sell the property – which is also their home – was not taken suddenly, Mrs Bull said.

"It was a gradual process; we just noticed more and more that we couldn't make the mortgage repayments", she said.

The couple, who claim to have suffered death threats, say they spent parts of last winter shivering and sometimes going hungry.

Shortly before the Bull's Supreme Court appearance, the pair were allegedly subjected to "a hostile" interview on TV.

They appeared on ITV *Daybreak* and – according to the Christian Institute – faced hostile questioning from Lorraine Kelly and Aled Jones.

When Hazelmary Bull said her beliefs about marriage were based on the Bible, Kelly retorted, saying: "It's 2013!"

Viewers took to Facebook and Twitter to complain about the way the interview was handled. On Facebook, viewer Emma Boyd said: "I don't entirely agree with the B&B couple. But I don't think Aled and Lorraine would speak so rudely to a Muslim."

Another viewer, Eileen Hook, said: "Shame on *Daybreak* and Lorraine. Having said that, the couple stayed calm and presented their views in a confident and polite manner."

Preddy told ITV News that he believed the Bulls had brought their woes onto their own heads. Earlier in September a national newspaper columnist said the Bulls had suffered a "campaign of hatred, vilification and intimidation" under the guise of tolerance.

Richard Littlejohn wrote: "Not for the first time it's obvious that those 'liberals' who preach 'tolerance' are themselves the most vile, intolerant bigots imaginable."



Welcoming presence: Hazelmary Bull lurks in waiting for customers behind her Jesus Christ is Lord reception desk

Photo:  
SWNS.COM