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the freethinker

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Islam means submission!

Government caves in to Muslim fanatics by barring Dutch MP Geert Wilders over *Fitna*

"Prime Minister Gordon Brown is the biggest coward in Europe." With these words, Dutch MP Geert Wilders of the Freedom Party boarded a plane back to Holland last month after being denied entry to the UK, where he was scheduled to present his controversial anti-Islamic film *Fitna* at a private screen at the House of Lords. Wilders' ban came after he defied a letter he received days before the screening telling him not to travel to the UK.

After being questioned at Heathrow, the MP said he had been to the House of Lords two weeks ago and there had been "no problem". He added: "I'm not doing anything wrong. I'm not protesting or running through the streets of London."

Mr Wilders added: "Democracy means differences and debate. It's a very sad day when the UK bans an elected parliamentarian... Of course I will come back."

Wilders was invited to the House of Lords for a screening of *Fitna* by the UK Independence Party's Lord Pearson.

The peer said it was a "matter of free speech", telling the BBC "We are going to show it anyway because we think MPs and peers should see this film."

He added: "The film isn't offensive unless you are a violent Islamist. Most of my Muslim friends think it's a very good film."

The 17-minute film's opening scenes show a copy of the Koran followed by footage of the 9/11 attacks in the US and the bombings in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005.

Foreign Secretary David Miliband told the BBC's Hardtalk: "The Home Secretary (Jacqui Smith) made a decision on an individual case as she is required to do." He added that the film contained "extreme anti-Muslim hate and we have very clear laws in this country. We have profound commitment to freedom of speech but there is no freedom to cry 'fire' in a crowded theatre and there is no freedom to stir up hate, religious and racial hatred, according to the laws of the land."

Despite Miliband's words, and the fact that Wilders faces trial in Holland for "stirring up hatred" as a result of *Fitna*, the film was made purely to alert the West of the dangers it faces from Islamic fanaticism fuelled by passages in the Koran. Wilders has repeatedly stated that



his fight is not against Muslims, but against Islam, which has created an enormous number of social problems in Holland, as it has in other European countries.

When Lord Pearson originally invited members of the House to attend the showing, odious Muslim peer Lord Ahmed raised hell. He threatened to mobilise 10,000 Muslims to prevent Mr Wilders from entering the House and said he would take the organiser of the event to court. The result was that the screening had to be postponed.

Lord Ahmed is considered to be a "moderate" Muslim. The Pakistani born Nazir Ahmed was appointed by Tony Blair as the UK's first Muslim life peer in 1998. In February 2005, he hosted a book launch in the House of Lords for anti-Zionist author Israel Shamir. In 2007, he responded to the award of a knighthood to Salman Rushdie by stating that he was appalled, saying that Rushdie had "blood on his hands".

Lord Ahmed, who expressed his concerns to the parliamentary authorities about Mr Wilders' visit, told the BBC: "This man doesn't have any respect for law. He's doing this for publicity and he's seeking that and getting that."

He added: "If this man was allowed into this country it would certainly cause problems within communities around Britain."

Read the speech Wilders planned to deliver to the House of Lords on page 4

Christian 'victim' gets her just reward

BARRY DUKE HAS IT RIGHT UP TO HERE WITH RELIGIOUS WHINGEING

With things collapsing all around us one ought to welcome a burgeoning new industry. But a sudden spurt in Persecuted Christian stories, which must be generating a fortune for those twisting the truth to suit their own dubious ends, is both shabby and dishonest, and the media really should knock this trend on the head before it gets completely out of control.

Now we know that the *Daily Mail* is probably the worst offender – (a poll it recently conducted showed that around 87 percent of its readers thought Christians were indeed a persecuted lot) – but when the *Daily Telegraph* enthusiastically joins in the fun, we really ought to start worrying.

The latest example concerns a sniveling Christian mum called Jennie Cain, whose tearful picture in the *Telegraph* last month was meant to have us all weeping in sympathy with her plight.

So what was her plight? The headline above the *Telegraph* report read: *Primary school*



receptionist 'facing sack' after daughter talks about Jesus to classmate.

Her version of the story, which was supported by those devious fundies over at the Christian Institute, who just can't get enough of this sort of thing, was that her five-year-old daughter Jasmine – a pupil at Landscore Primary School in Crediton, Devon – had been told off for telling a classmate all about Jesus, God and the angels and stuff.

Cain, who is employed at the same school, was so upset that her little angel was told to put a sock in it that she blasted off emails to all and sundry saying how shabbily she and Jasmine had been treated for their faith. The story wild-fired through the media, and Cain instantly had victim status conferred on her.

Then it all went horribly wrong. In mid-February, the school revealed that sweet Jasmine was a bullying little tyro-evangelist who had terrified the classmate by threatening her with hell if she did not accept Jesus.

Quite rightly, she was told to can this crap, and her mother was threatened with disciplinary action and suspension.

Leaving aside the abuse Cain is guilty of by implanting such ideas in a five-year-old's brain, she has the added responsibility of her daughter terrifying another child.

So if she is booted out of the school, she has only herself to blame.

Fortunately, the good folk of Crediton are almost 100 percent behind the head teacher, Gary Read, on this one.

The local *Express and Echo* reported that parents and local residents were overwhelmingly backing the head teacher over his stance that no child should threaten another by saying she or he would "go to hell" if they did not believe in God.

They inundated the paper's website with comments supporting him. Even some Christians and a local religious education teacher were among those who spoke out, saying that the school had a fine record of respecting different beliefs and values, and of trying to be decent and fair in its treatment of pupils.

Readers of the *Express and Echo* also slammed the inaccuracy of the paper's

headline on February 13, when it declared: *Five-year-old girl is told off at school for talking about God.*

One Crediton commenter said: "For any five-year-old to make a comment about 'going to hell' is worrying, and it is something Mrs Cain should take responsibility for, rather than attempting to dirty this school's good name."

If nothing else, creationists are always good for a chuckle, especially when their antics include writing a letter of complaint to the National Trust, protesting that information on display around Ireland's most famous landmark, the Giant's Causeway, claims that the rock formation is about 550-million-years-old.

"It can't possibly be, when the earth is no older than 10,000 years," wailed nutjob Mervyn Storey, a biblical literalist.

The tale becomes a little less amusing when viewed in the light of Storey's position in life. This man is a Northern Ireland schoolteacher-turned-politician, and holds the post of Chairman of the NI Assembly's education committee.

A member of the Democratic Unionist Party, the imbecile came to our attention last month when he expressed outrage over the fact that the Ulster Museum in Belfast was mounting a series of events to commemorate Charles Darwin. Storey had threatened a legal challenge against the event unless it staged a creationist exhibition to counter-balance its evolution events. He said that, as the museum in Belfast's university district was publicly funded, it should be subject to the province's equality legislation.

We assume he wants the Christian creationist myth included, as opposed to – ooh, let's see – Egyptian creation myths? Or Norse ones? Shinto ones? "All," observed Rozi, a regular commenter on the *Freethinker* website, "are about as plausible as the Christian one. At least the Egyptian one's so insane that it makes Revelations look like a Ken Loach documentary."

Storey is, of course, not the DUP's only mad member. Last year Iris Robinson, DUP assemblywoman and wife of Northern Ireland's first minister, caused outrage when she condemned homosexuality as an "abomination" that could be "cured" with psychiatry.

Evolution clearly has a lot of catching up to do in Ulster before the province enters the 21st century.



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“Most women in this country have enough curbs on them without a whole new franchise cashing in with their bully boy tactics”

Hindu zealots get a ‘knickers to you’ Valentine’s message

We call them “knickers” but the term favoured by Indian women are “chaddis” – and thousands of the things, all pink, winged their way to the headquarters of a fundamentalist Hindu group on Valentine’s Day in reaction to a “morality” drive it had launched earlier.

The Army of Ram (Sri Ram Sena), outraged when members of the group attacked women in the Amnesia bar in southern India, and followed up the assault by warning Indian women that they would suffer a similar fate if they participated in Valentine’s day celebrations.

This was all too much for young Indian woman Nisha Susan, who immediately used the social networking website Facebook to set up “The Consortium of Pub-going, Loose and Forward Women.”

Within days, the group had swelled to over 45,000 members, whose first task was to deluge Sri Ram Sena with pink “chaddis”. Said Susan: “Most women in this country have enough curbs on their lives without a whole new franchise cashing in with their bully-boy tactics. Of course, a lot of men have joined the group as well.”

Television footage of Sri Ram Sena activists chasing, slapping and kicking the terrified women prompted widespread condemnation and outrage.

The vigilantes, who style themselves as guardians of traditional Hindu values, were briefly detained and then released on bail.

One of the “chaddi” contributors was

‘God’ ordered boy’s murder

A VIRGINIA Beach man, charged with stabbing his 5-year-old son to death, told reporters last month that he was trying to save the boy’s soul on instructions from God.

Joseph Joseph Henry Hagerman III, 33, was charged with murder following the fatal stabbing to death of his son, Joshua, in the family’s home. “If I didn’t do something, the anti-Christ would take his soul.” Hagerman also said God wanted him to warn people that “the anti-Christ” was coming.



a 55-year-old woman who said she had not been to a pub in her life or celebrated Valentine’s Day, but was joining the cause because she was horrified by what she saw on television.

In the wake of the pub attack, India’s Women and Child Development Minister Renuka Chowduri compared the SRS to the Taliban in Afghanistan, but the group’s leadership was unrepentant.

Not only did it defend the violence, but it also warned that any shops buying into the Valentine’s Day market would face attack.

Army of Ram general secretary V K Rajesh said: “Drinking, socialising, celebrating Valentine’s Day is all part of Western culture, which is corrupting our Indian culture. We are not against love. But we are against the loose morals we see among the younger generation which is blindly aping the West. And we will not spare these people and take whatever action is needed within the law.”

According to Asvini Shetty, a member of the group from Mumbai, the panty protest was about protecting women’s rights.

“Today they say ‘don’t go to pubs’. Tomorrow they will say ‘don’t go to work’. Then they can demand that we cover our faces. It can get out of control.

Williams re-ignites sharia row

ON the first anniversary of the interview in which Dr Rowan Williams said it “seems inevitable” that some parts of sharia would be enshrined in this country’s legal code, he claimed “a number of fairly senior people” now take the same view.

The Archbishop of Canterbury added that there is a “drift of understanding” towards what he was saying, and that the public sees the difference between letting Muslim courts decide divorces and wills, and allowing them to rule on criminal cases and impose harsh punishments.

The Archbishop, the most senior cleric in the Church of England, faced calls to resign last February when he said it was likely that elements of the religious principles based on the Koran, concerning marriage, finance and conflict resolution, would be enshrined in British legislation one day.

When asked at a recent conference of Anglican leaders in Egypt whether he feels he has been vindicated, Dr Williams replied: “It’s been quite interesting to see how a number of fairly senior people have observed that certain kinds of limited aspects of Muslim law are imaginable within a British legal framework, without upsetting the apple-cart of undermining human rights.

But Douglas Murray, the director of the Centre for Social Cohesion, said: “He has started a process which is deeply dangerous, damaging to Britain and to Muslim women in Britain.

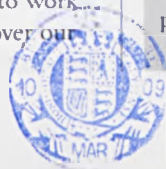
“It was a wicked move because it undermines the progressives and gives succour to the extremists.

“How does the Archbishop of Canterbury know, sitting in Lambeth Palace, that a woman in Bolton has volunteered to give up half her inheritance to her brother?”

Neil Addison, a barrister who specialises in religious discrimination cases, said: “I think the Archbishop has failed to give a justification for sharia law. What’s the advantage it would bring to British Muslims and to British law?”

“I believe his speech was deeply harmful to British Muslims because it helps the separation of them from the rest of society.

“What he was asking for was sharia dealing with wills and divorce, which are public areas of law, not private ones.”



Wilder's address that Britain never got to hear

Thanks to the disgraceful cowardice of Home Secretary Jacqui Smith and her supporters who caved in to Islamic bully-boy tactics, we were denied the right to hear a speech Geert Wilders MP intended delivering at the House of Lords last month at the showing of his film *Fitna*. This is an abridged version of the speech the Dutch Freedom Party Chairman prepared for the occasion:

The House of Lords is no ordinary place. This is a sacred place. This is the mother of all Parliaments, and I am deeply humbled to speak before you.

The Houses of Parliament is where Winston Churchill stood firm, and warned – all throughout the 1930s – of the dangers looming. Most of the time he stood alone.

Today, I come before you to warn of another great threat. It is called Islam. It poses as a religion, but its goals are very worldly: world domination, holy war, sharia law, the end of the separation of church and state, the end of democracy. It is not a religion, it is a political ideology. It demands your respect, but has no respect for you.

There might be moderate Muslims, but there is no moderate Islam ... Islam means submission, so there cannot be any mistake about its goal. That's a given. The question is whether the British people, with their glorious past, is longing for that submission.

We see Islam taking off in the West at an incredible speed. The UK has seen a rapid growth of the number of Muslims. Over the last ten years, the Muslim population has grown ten times as fast as the rest of society. This has put an enormous pressure on society. Thanks to British politicians who have forgotten Winston Churchill, the English

Catholics rail against birth control in the Philippines

ONE-third of the Philippines' population of 90 million people live in poverty – but a Government plan to promote artificial contraception methods has raised the fury of the Catholic Church.

Said Ed Sorreta of Pro-Life Philippines: "Why should we use contraceptives, or teach our children the use of contraceptives?"

"It's totally against the teaching of the Catholic Church. The poverty is really caused by other issues, moral values. When you talk about natural family planning, it needs discipline, that's where many couples fail. They lack the discipline".

now have taken the path of least resistance. They give up. They give in ...

For a moment I feared that I would be refused entrance. But I was confident the British government would never sacrifice free speech because of fear of Islam. Britain rules the waves, and Islam will never rule Britain, so I was confident the Border Agency would let me through. And after all, you have invited stranger creatures than

Whether or not I end up in jail is not the most pressing issue. The question is: will free speech be put behind bars?

me. Two years ago the House of Commons welcomed Mahmoud Suliman Ahmed Abu Rideh, linked to Al Qaeda. He was invited to Westminster by Lord Ahmed, who met him at Regent's Park mosque three weeks before. Mr Rideh, suspected of being a money man for terror groups, was given a security sticker for his Parliamentary visit.

Well, if you let in this man, then an elected politician from a fellow EU country surely is welcome here too. By letting me speak today you show that Mr Churchill's spirit is still very much alive. And you prove that the European Union truly is working; the free movement of persons is still one of the pillars of the European project.

But there is still much work to be done. Britain seems to have become a country ruled by fear.

I would not qualify myself as a free man. Four and a half years ago I lost my freedom. I am under guard permanently, courtesy to those who prefer violence to debate. But for the leftist fan club of Islam, that is not enough. They started a legal procedure against me. Three weeks ago the Amsterdam Court of Appeal ordered my criminal prosecution for making *Fitna* and for my views on Islam. I committed what George Orwell called a 'thought crime'.

You might have seen my name on *Fitna's* credit role, but I am not really responsible for that movie. It was made for me. It was actually produced by Muslim extremists, the Koran and Islam itself. If *Fitna* is considered "hate speech", then how would the Court qualify the Koran, with

all its calls for violence, and hatred against women and Jews?

Mr Churchill himself compared the Koran to Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Well, I did exactly the same, and that is what they are prosecuting me for.

The Court's decision and the letter I received from the Secretary of State for the Home Department are two major victories for all those who detest freedom of speech. They are doing Islam's dirty work. Sharia by proxy. The differences between Saudi-Arabia and Jordan on one hand and Holland and Britain are blurring. Europe is now on the fast track of becoming Eurabia. That is apparently the price we have to pay for the project of mass immigration, and the multicultural project.

Ladies and gentlemen, the dearest of our many freedoms is under attack. In Europe, freedom of speech is no longer a given.

What we once considered a natural component of our existence is now something we again have to fight for. That is what is at stake. Whether or not I end up in jail is not the most pressing issue. The question is: will free speech be put behind bars?

When my country was occupied by the national-socialists the BBC offered a daily glimpse of hope, in the darkness of Nazi tyranny. Millions of my country men listened to it, illegally. The words 'This Is London' were a symbol for a better world coming soon ...

What will be transmitted forty years from now? Will it still be "This Is London"? Or will it be "this is Londonistan"? Will it bring us hope, or will it signal the values of Mecca and Medina? Will Britain offer submission or perseverance? Freedom or slavery?

The choice is ours. We will never apologise for being free. We will never give in. We will never surrender. Freedom must prevail, and freedom will prevail.



Lord Ahmed

Australian abortion laws sparked deadly bush fires

A Christian pastor in Victoria last month outraged Australians by suggesting that the terrible Australian bush fires were God's way of condemning abortion.

Danny Nalliah, who heads the Catch the Fire evangelical group, issued a press release blaming the fires on abortion laws passed in Victoria.

Nalliah said he was not surprised by the bush fires due to a dream he had last October.

"In my dream I saw fire everywhere with flames burning very high and uncontrollably. With this I woke up from my dream with the interpretation as the following words came to me in a flash from the Spirit of God: That His conditional protection has been removed

from the nation of Australia, in particular Victoria, for approving the slaughter of innocent children in the womb.

"We at CTFM have spent the last few days in prayer and weeping, watching the news and learning that more than 170 people have perished and more than 750 houses have gone up in flames with much property and personal belongings of people all wiped out within hours.

"Australia is based on Judeo-Christian val-

ues. How far have we as a nation moved from these principles instilled in our nation's inception? How much does it take for a nation to return to God? The Bible is very clear, if you walk out of God's protection and turn your back on Him, you are an open target for the devil to destroy."

He added: "Can we stop the fires? Yes we can! But it will take God's children to rally together and repent

and cry unto Him ... In our prayer and fasting campaign, we are particularly repenting for the passing of the 'Decriminalisation of Abortion Laws of Victoria' in addition to other unrighteous, ungodly, and unjust laws and practices which have seen a



Bible-toting blowhard, pastor Danny Nalliah

holocaust of some of the most helpless members of the human race, the unborn."

Nalliah points out that, on February 9, "the front page of the *Herald Sun* newspaper reported 'The Darkest hour for Victoria'. A few months ago the news media should have reported 'The darkest hour for the unborn,' but unfortunately the 'Decriminalisation of Abortion bill' went through parliament and was passed, thus making many people call Victoria 'the baby killing state of Australia'."

Atheists 'misuse Darwin'

Half of the respondents in a British poll do not accept the theory of evolution as accounting for the world's existence, according to a new report – entitled *Rescuing Darwin* – by the religious thinktank Theos.

Published on the 200th anniversary of Charles

Darwin's birth on February 12, the report reveals that only 25 per cent of British adults think that evolution is "definitely true", with another quarter thinking it is "probably true".

According to this report, the director of studies at Theos and co-author of the report, Nick Spencer, said:

"The problem is that evolution has become mixed up with all sorts of ideas – like the belief that there is no God, or no purpose or no absolute morality in life – which people find very difficult to accept. The tragedy is that this was never Darwin's position. Three years before he died he wrote 'it seems to me absurd to doubt that a man may be an ardent Theist & an evolutionist'."

The director of Theos, Paul Woolley, said: "Unfortunately, [Darwin] is being used by certain atheists today to promote their cause. The result is that, given the false choice of evolution or God, people are rejecting evolution."

Cult leader jailed for sexual assaults

A SOUTH Korean cult leader who told followers to have sex with him to purge their sins has been jailed for 10 years. Jeong Myeong Seok, 65, also known as Pastor Joshua, was convicted of raping or sexually assaulting four women between 2001 and 2006. He is leader of the Providence cult, which broke away from the Moonies.

Mad fundie accuses police of 'grooming' kids for homo-sex

DOTTY British evangelist Stephen Green was off on another of his comical rants last month – this time against the Kent police who launched a gay essay competition for secondary school children

Timed to co-incide with Kent County Council's sponsorship of the national Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) history month in February, contestants were asked to pen essays entitled "All Different, Same Respect".

In an hysterical Christian Voice press release, Green complained "We have sadly grown used to educators trying to corrupt children, but now the police are doing it as well. There is no suggestion on the Kent Police website that the young children they are asking to enter should seek their parents' approval. It is all being done behind the parents' backs.

"And as a large number will be under the age of consent, some as young as 12, it is a monstrous exercise in nothing less than child sexual abuse.

"The competition might be headed 'All Different, Same Respect', but I have no respect for police officers who wish to corrupt young children by insinuating into them the idea that there is nothing wrong with homosexuality. I spent part of this morning mucking out a cattle yard. It brought home to me that a man who indulges in sodomy cannot be paddling with both oars in the water.

"Such men need compassion, help and deliverance from their destructive lifestyle, not more recruits.

Figures released last year showed that the number of sex offenders was on the increase. Is that any surprise, with the police encouraging children into homosexuality?

"Children of that age do not need to be told that homosexuality is acceptable. Some may be going through a phase where they experience crushes towards older people of the same sex. To convince them that such desires indicate an adult homosexual orientation is a disgraceful betrayal of adult responsibility ..."

Africa needs many things – but God

LEO IGWE RESPONDS TO COMMENTATOR MATTHEW PARRIS, AN ATHEIST WHO

I am an atheist and an African. I was born and brought up in a Christian home. I did most of my education in Catholic schools and seminaries. I taught for two years in a Catholic seminary. And on several occasions, I was sent to rural communities to preach and convert people. For over a decade now, I have been working for the freethought movement. And my work has taken me to Malawi and to a few other countries in Africa. So I think I am well informed about missionary work on the continent.

My attention was drawn to an article “As an Atheist I truly believe Africa needs God” published on December 27, 2008, in *The Times*. I found the piece deeply flawed, shallow, narrow and misleading. The article was a misreading of the situation in Africa, and a misinterpretation of what Africa needs to walk tall in this 21st century.

From his experience living with missionaries in Africa – and returning 45 years later to witness the work of a British Christian charity, Pump Aid, that helped rural Malawians install pumps and keep their village wells sealed and clean – Matthew Parris concluded that God, not education nor training, was what Africa needed in order to progress.

He maintained that Christian faith was what Africa required to conquer fear, anxiety, and a tribal belief system which has ground down individual spirit and curiosity.

Nothing can be farther from the truth.

Perhaps a “simple pump” in a rural community suddenly became evidence of God’s existence for Parris. Or the relative security he enjoyed near mission houses while travelling through Africa. Or the missionary schools and hospitals in African villages. If these missionary schemes were enough to shake Parris’s atheism, then he cannot claim to be a confirmed atheist.

If Parris has suddenly realised that God exists, which God did he think Africa needs that the continent does not already have?

Is it the tribal god? We have them in thousands. Or the Jewish god? Or the Christian god? Or the Islamic god? Which bloody deity does he think Africa lacks? None. In fact Africa is awash with gods. The black continent is a den of deities.

Obviously Parris meant the Christian god – the post-reformation and post-Luther Jesus God. Particularly that brand packaged and propagated by European missionaries through

the installation of pumps and building of schools and hospitals. At this point I want to point out that missionaries have been coming to Africa for centuries. In Nigeria, missionary work is over 200 years old. In fact some parts of Africa, such as Nigeria and Ghana, have started sending locals to go and re-evangelise Europe and America.

In his article, Parris failed to differentiate missionary God from missionary *good* or what *appears* to be missionary good. The missionary god, like all other gods, is a myth, a sacred fantasy and an illusion.

or challenge Christianity’s god, and Christian doctrines and dogmas.

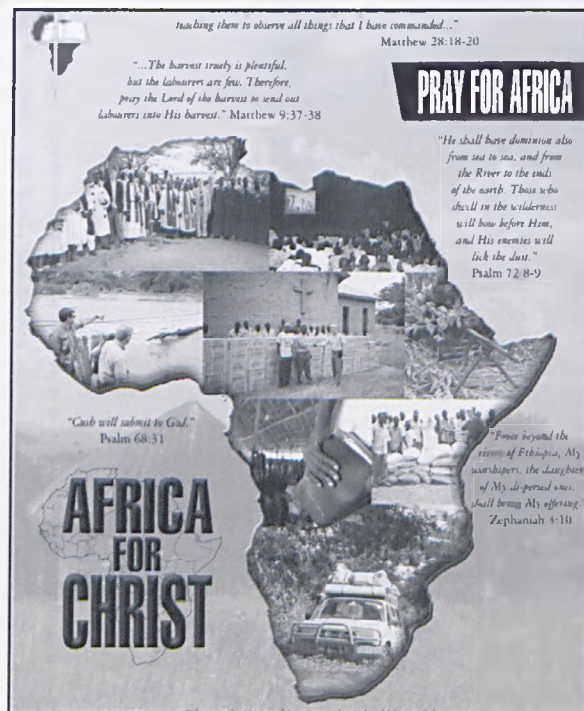
In most cases, missionaries locate their projects in rural areas. And these are places where people are desperately in need. These are places where people are very ignorant, very gullible, and prone to being exploited. In most cases, missionary schools and institutions are located on lands acquired and appropriated by force without compensation or under false pretences, such as furthering the work of God, from poor rural peasants.

It is true that at missionary hospitals they heal the sick. They also kill by denying women their rights to abortion and to reproductive health services. Missionary hospitals in Nigeria carry out forced baptism on infants and forced conversion on death beds and forced administration of sacraments to patients. It is important to note that, in these hospitals, missionaries heal the sick using scientific means – not prayers or the power of God. They provide water by installing pumps, not by striking the rock with a rod as Moses did in the wilderness. But they will not teach Africans these truths – the science behind their medicine or the technology of pump installation. Instead they attribute their work to God. So, the truth is that God has no hand and no place in the needs of Africa, and Parris was greatly mistaken to have thought otherwise.

I agree with him that African thought is driven by anxiety, fear of evil spirits, witches and wizard etc. But Christian evangelism is not the means to liberate the African mind or help cast off the crushing tribal group-think that hampers its development.

The removal of Christian evangelism will not turn Africa into a place of chaos, confusion and superstition. (The continent is already a basket case with missionaries everywhere.) What Christian evangelism has done and is doing in Africa is to replace one superstitious system with another, or reinforce the existing ones. Christian evangelism sanctioned and sanctified witch-hunts, sexism, the persecution of gays, oppression and discrimination against non-believers, and other atrocities and crimes against humanity.

To emerge in this 21st century, Africa does not need God or a re-invasion by missionaries. Africa needs the Good. Africa needs good governance, good infrastructure, good roads, good schools, colleges, and universities. Africans need



While the missionary good is real, I maintain that the missionary good is no evidence for the existence of God. Parris just allowed himself to be carried away – or be seduced – by what he witnessed as some missionary good. He refused to take a critical look at it.

No doubt missionaries have carried out many humanitarian projects on the continent which have impacted positively on the lives of Africans. But these projects, helpful as they are or may appear to be, are Trojan Horses. They are baits – evangelising traps which missionaries use to get Africans to embrace Christianity. Missionary schools are religious indoctrination centres. Missionaries do not educate Africans to think for themselves or to exercise and express their individual curiosity and thought. They educate Africans to become slaves to Christianity and to accept blindly and not to question,

God is not one of them

ST WHO BELIEVES AFRICA 'NEEDS GOD'

sound education and training system that would help them to think, create, criticise, debate, invent, and innovate freely. As Francis Bacon said, knowledge is power. Africans need an educational programme that empowers them to discover, express and actualise their potential.

Africa needs freedom. And this includes free mind, free society, free speech, free will, free expression of intelligence and free choice. Africa does not need a religion that shackles their minds and chains the intellect.

Africans need to rediscover and restore their humanity and human possibilities to the centre of their global perception, ethics, education and belief system.

So Africa needs humanism, scepticism, rationalism, positive atheism, and freethought. Africa needs reason, not religion, not Christian evangelism or Islamism or spiritualism or supernaturalism, to experience genuine rebirth, renaissance and transformation. A popular adage says "catch a fish for a child and feed the

child once, teach the child how to fish and feed the child forever". It would have been wonderful if Pump Aid had gone to Malawi not only to install pumps but also to teach young Malawians at the Polytechnics in Blantyre or at the University of Malawi how to install pumps.

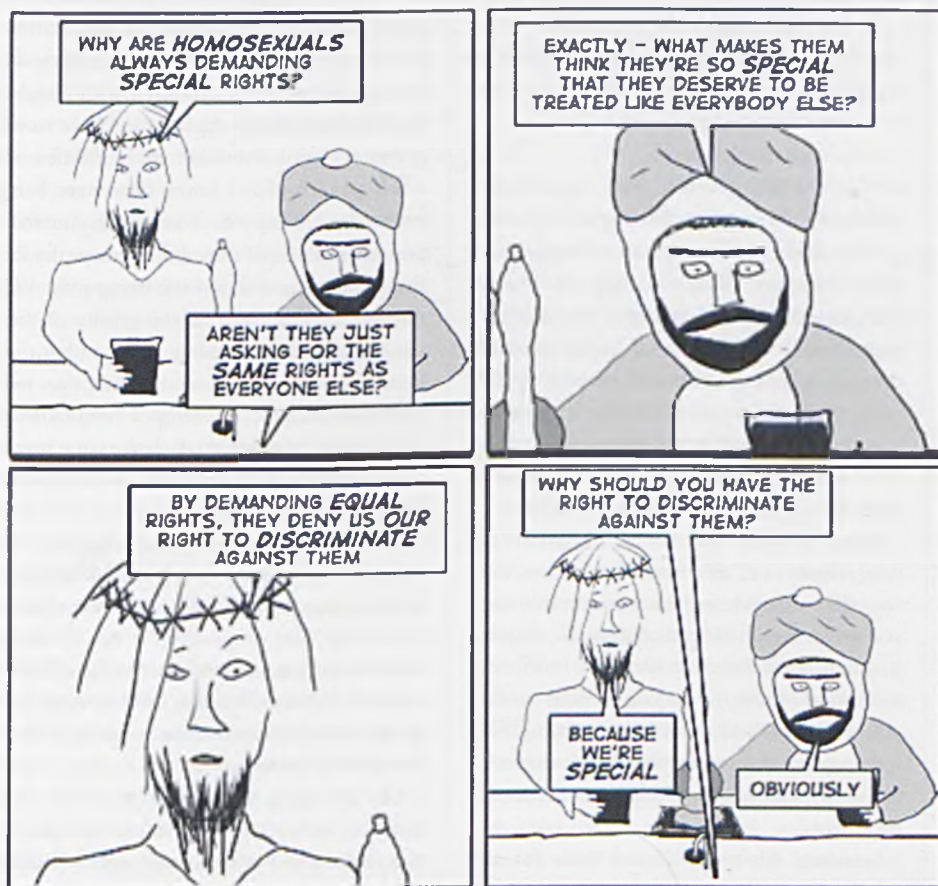
So, all development aid, projects and programmes in Africa must be such that they teach, educate, inspire and empower Africans so that they might eventually break free of a culture that believes that nothing can be achieved without the help of evangelists.

This, not God, is what Africa need. FT



Leo Igwe is Director for the Centre for Inquiry in Nigeria

Jesus & Mo



Matthew Parris' piece abridged

NOW a confirmed atheist, I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa: sharply distinct from the work of secular NGOs, government projects and international aid efforts. These alone will not do. Education and training alone will not do. In Africa, Christianity changes people's hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good.

I used to avoid this truth by applauding – as you can – the practical work of mission churches in Africa. It's a pity. I would say, that salvation is part of the package, but Christians black and white, working in Africa, do heal the sick, do teach people to read and write; and only the severest kind of secularist could see a mission hospital or school and say the world would be better without it. I would allow that if faith was needed to motivate missionaries to help, then, fine: but what counted was the help, not the faith.

But this doesn't fit the facts. Faith does more than support the missionary; it is also transferred to his flock. This is the effect that matters so immensely, and which I cannot help observing.

Anxiety – fear of evil spirits, of ancestors, of nature and the wild, of a tribal hierarchy, of quite everyday things – strikes deep into the whole structure of rural African thought. Every man has his place and, call it fear or respect, a great weight grinds down the individual spirit, stunting curiosity. People won't take the initiative, won't take things into their own hands or on their own shoulders.

Christianity, post-Reformation and post-Luther, with its teaching of a direct, personal, two-way link between the individual and God, unmediated by the collective, and un-subordinate to any other human being offers something to hold on to, so those anxious to cast off a crushing tribal group think. That is why and how it liberates.

Those who want Africa to walk tall amid 21st-century global competition must not kid themselves that providing the material means or even the knowhow that accompanies what we call development will make the change. A whole belief system must first be supplanted.

And I'm afraid it has to be supplanted by another. Removing Christian evangelism from the African equation may leave the continent at the mercy of a malign fusion of Nike, the witch doctor, the mobile phone and the machete.

The full article can be read online at http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/matthew_parris/article5400568.ece

Spiritual care on the NHS

Chaplains or charlatans?

An abridged address given recently by **Dr Robert Stovold** to the Brighton & Hove Humanist Society

The genesis of this article began on 7 August 2008, when I received an email from Richard Harlow, chaplain at the Princess Royal Hospital in Haywards Heath. He said, "We are currently consulting on the Spirituality Strategy for the mental health Trust that includes Brighton and Hove, and would be pleased for a response from the Humanist Society".

I read through the Strategy – a 13-page draft – and was at first unsure of how to respond. On the one hand, some of its definitions of spirituality were certainly broad enough to include humanists. For example, "[spirituality pertains to] the essence of human beings as unique individuals ... the power, energy and hopefulness in a person". On the other hand, to take part in such consultations can be futile and even counter-productive. Humanist views will rarely prevail against the religious majority, which, having got its own way, can exploit your presence by claiming to be inclusive and saying, "Well, we did consult you!" But, as I carried on reading, I became more and more disturbed.

The draft I received mentioned Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Paganism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and even Scientology. But not, of course, atheism, agnosticism or humanism. Right through the document ran the self-serving and unsubstantiated assumption that all religions deserve respect. I began my response by challenging that.

Humanists respect the rights of others to believe what they will, but draw a firm distinction between respecting a person's right to hold a belief and respecting the belief itself. The world's religions are mutually contradictory. It therefore follows that all religions, or all but one of them, have to be wrong. Why then, should they deserve our respect?

After a little research, I found a job description for an NHS hospital chaplain on the Internet, which contains the following passage:

10. Most challenging/difficult part of the job – To distinguish in the experiences people share between what is genuinely spiritual and what is delusional or hallucinatory.

A patient who feels he has been "saved" by accepting Jesus as his personal saviour is, if we are being honest, deluded from an atheist's or a Muslim's perspective, and sane from a Christian one. How does the Trust intend to resolve such serious contradictions – or does it intend to ignore them in the name of well-meaning but muddle-headed multicultural political correctness?

If the Trust takes the reasonable view that false beliefs should not be propagated or legitimised by state-funded chaplains, it has two options:

- Fund no chaplains at all.
- Identify the "one true faith" (good luck!), and fund only its associated chaplains.

How might the Trust achieve the second of these objectives? Well, I was relieved to hear that, according to the Strategy, "We will support research in the area of spirituality, with the same rigour as in other disciplines" (p 11).

Drugs that fail to pass clinical trials are rightly rejected by the NHS as a waste of money; if the Trust is being honest and consistent, it ought to apply the same rule to hospital chaplains.

When scientists like Richard Dawkins rip into religion or "alternative" medicine, they are often seen as being too critical. But once you understand how critical scientific enquiry is, you'll appreciate that Dawkins isn't being some kind of killjoy – he's only being consistent. He's only asking for a level playing field – that spiritual remedies should be subject to the same standard of testing as conventional treatments.

Scientists don't do clinical trials for the

fun of it, and these trials don't come cheap. Scientists do it because such critical testing can be crucial in weeding out false explanations. Does the NHS seriously intend to test the efficacy of chaplains "with the same rigour" as a pharmaceutical drug? Just imagine the trials! Some chaplains would dispense advice that genuinely reflects what their religion actually teaches, and others would have to give a kind of "dummy" religious advice as a placebo! Of course, such rigorous trials will never be carried out – and the Trust should not try to pretend otherwise.

A recent large-scale scientific study into the effects of intercessory prayer on patients of heart bypass surgery found that "intercessory prayer itself had no effect on complication-free recovery, but certainty of receiving intercessory prayer was associated with a higher incidence of complications". In other words, prayer was not associated with a difference when patients didn't know they were being prayed for, and may have actually hampered a person's recovery if they did! Perhaps the fact that people knew they were being prayed for caused them to dwell on the gravity of their condition, and made things worse rather than better. Has it occurred to the Trust that, religious or not, sick patients in a hospital ward may regard chaplains in much the same way as a sick animal regards vultures – as unwelcome harbingers of death?

The draft claims (p 1) that religion is "an essential part of many people's self definition", and proposes to "make spirituality a central aspect of the care we provide" (p 6). Yet as the draft Strategy acknowledges, the West Sussex audit of 2005 revealed that only a minority of people said they would like to talk to a chaplain or faith leader.

I'm not saying that religion is all bad. Religion provides a genuine sense of community and support for some people, and given

that, I would not be surprised to find that visits from religious colleagues or leaders could speed a person's recovery. But by exactly the same logic, people who are passionate stamp collectors would likely benefit from visits by fellow enthusiasts. I'm all for trying to make everyone, religious or not, as comfortable as possible in hospitals. But the idea that religious communities should be privileged above secular ones must be challenged. Again it comes down to consistency – to a rejection of double standards. Let's not have one rule for them, and one rule for us.

The draft speaks of “[moving] our organisation from a bio-psycho-social model of care to a holistic model that recognises people with mental health problems as whole persons with interrelated psychological, social, physical and spiritual needs” (p 6). This sounds awfully like moving from a scientific model that works to religious mumbo-jumbo that doesn't. And, sure enough, page 1 of the final draft openly acknowledges that spirituality is about “going beyond the scientifically verifiable, and entering the realm of belief or faith” (p 1). In other words, it's about believing in things for which there is no good evidence. So much for the Trust's empty promise to apply “the same rigour as in other disciplines”! The danger of a faith-based approach to the treatment of mental illnesses is encapsulated in the words of Friedrich Nietzsche: “A casual stroll through the lunatic asylum shows that faith does not prove anything.”

The Trust stressed the need for hospital prayer rooms. Given the horror stories we hear about patients left for ages in hospital corridors, I'm sure that the hospitals could put the space to better use. And there's also the cost – £4,159 in the case of the “sacred space” at Mill View Hospital. Although a multi-faith prayer room sounds inclusive in principle, it can lead to conflicts, as evidenced by headlines such as *No legal action will be taken against a hospital porter quizzed by police after a row over a crucifix being covered up in a prayer room*. If prayer actually worked, of course, religious people would be out of hospital in a jiffy.

Different patients in a hospital have mutually incompatible spiritual beliefs. Either a chaplain will be required to minister to those whose spiritual beliefs conflict with his own (in which case my earlier tongue-in-cheek remark about dispensing “dummy religious advice” might not be far off the mark after



all!), or the make-up of the chaplaincy must reflect the make-up of the local community. Hospital chaplaincies, it seems, are a muddled mixture of both. Consider the job description to which I earlier referred.

It has been estimated that
about 36 percent of people
in the UK are humanist in
their basic outlook, yet the
Trust currently funds
no humanist
chaplains whatsoever

It states that the chaplain will be sincerely committed to a particular faith community – indeed, ideally will be an ordained member:

13. Knowledge, training and experience required to do the job – The Chaplain will have a live faith commitment and spiritual practice and be in good standing with her/his faith community. Ordination is an advantage.

But the chaplain must also fit the following criterion: To be open to accept people as they are, and work with their theological and philosophical understandings of life, especially when hers/his differ from theirs.

So they must passionately hold one belief, and be especially open to people who hold beliefs that contradict it? So (for example) a Christian chaplain who sincerely believes that an unbeliever will be eternally damned should not intervene in order to try and save that patient's soul? I don't doubt the kindness of

many hospital chaplains, but with the best will in the world you could not regard their profession as being intellectually honest. Can we respect such dishonesty in a chaplain? Can a state respect the mentally ill by funding chaplains who lie to them?

The website of the Multi-Faith Group for Healthcare Chaplaincy states: “Modern chaplaincy works ecumenically and is inter-faith orientated, its prevailing culture and philosophy is predominantly humanistic”.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines “ecumenical” as *Belonging to or representing the whole (Christian) world*.

Although humanism can mean “pertaining to human interests”, most humanists use it in the sense of the

following Oxford English Dictionary definition: *Any system of thought or action which is concerned with merely human interests (as distinguished from divine)*.

So there we have it. A chaplain's work belongs to the whole Christian world, yet is supposedly inter-faith orientated and distinguishes itself from divine interests! A more absurd job description is difficult to imagine.

If, by “hospital chaplain”, you simply mean “Someone in hospitals who goes around being nice to people of all religions and none, lending a sympathetic ear”, I have no objection to such people. They're called nurses. They are in short supply, play a professional role far beyond mere bedside manner, and would doubtless be of more benefit to patients than chaplains.

The Trust's strategy begins with a definition of the word “spiritual” that is broad enough to apply to just about everyone, including those who have no religion. Perhaps tellingly though, by the time the actual number of chaplains gets discussed, the goalposts appear to have been moved, and people with no religious beliefs have been excluded: “Chaplaincy staff should be fairly employed and represent the religious diversity of the local population” (p 5).

The word “religious” must be replaced here, if the Trust is serious about being representative. But what should it be replaced with? The term “spiritual” is problematic, because it is so ill-defined. As the draft itself acknowledges, spirituality “has no single, clear philosophy” (p 1). Better, then, to omit words like “religious” or “spiritual”, and simply seek to represent “the diversity of the local population”.

Some of the draft's definitions of the word “spiritual” are compatible with a scientific

Spiritual care on the NHS

worldview. “The essence of human beings as unique individuals” (p 1), for example, can be expressed in solely natural terms, as a person’s unique set of psychological traits. But once again, the Trust moves the goalposts:

“[The Trust’s strategy] seeks to move our organisation from a bio-psycho-social model of care to a holistic model that recognises people with mental health problems as whole persons with interrelated psychological, social, physical and spiritual needs” (p 6).

Note that the term “spiritual” has now become something other than psychological. A fundamental characteristic of the scientific method is methodological naturalism – only natural forces are used to explain things. Once you take a scientific model (that is, physical, biological, psychological or social) and add a vague unscientific element like spirituality, the entire model becomes vague and unscientific. It’s a bit like saying “I took 347mg of copper sulphate crystals, and dissolved them carefully in a large-ish container of green stuff which, well, looked a bit like Fairy Liquid”.

It has been estimated that about 36 percent of people in the UK are humanist in their basic outlook, yet the Trust currently funds no humanist chaplains whatsoever. Presumably, 50 percent of hospital patients are women, some of whom will have gender-specific health concerns. The needs of such women are unlikely to be met by most faith leaders, who are almost always men. Again, how representative is the Trust in this area at present?

The draft Strategy states: “The NHS has traditionally recognised nine world faiths: Baha’i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism” (p 1).

If the Trust is serious in its desire to be representative, it needs to consider the following: according to the 2001 UK census, those of no religion are the second largest “belief group” (for want of a better phrase) – about three times as many as all the non-Christian religions put together. Jedi Knights had 390,127 followers, and thus formed a larger group than several of the “major religions” [Sikhs (329,358), Jews (259,927); Buddhists (144,453)] or minor religions such as Jainism (15,132), Zoroastrianism (3,738) or the Baha’i faith (4,645).

As a representative of Brighton and Hove Humanist Society, I am keen to ensure that the make-up of local chaplains reflects the make-up of the local community. According to the same census, Brighton and Hove has the lowest proportion of religious people in the country – although it does have the highest proportion

of Jedi Knights. “You will give the Jedi their fair share of hospital chaplains ...”

The Strategy notes that “This recognition and valuing of spirituality is not a licence for staff, service users or faith groups to impose their beliefs or practices on others. Any individuals or groups using coercive or manipulative means of influencing others on Trust property will be constrained from so doing. People experiencing mental illness can be at their most vulnerable.”

If telling a sick person they will be cured in an afterlife and re-united with their loved ones isn’t a manipulative way of influencing people, I don’t know what is! If only such comforting ideas were well supported by the evidence. Then I’d be all in favour of teaching them! As it is, however, such beliefs are at best unsupported by the evidence, and at worst flatly contradicted by it, which is why I think it wrong for the state to legitimise such beliefs. The Strategy notes that “Practices that have derived from religious traditions (eg. Yoga, Reiki and spiritual healing) are valued by some service users and carers. If such practices are to be offered in our premises they will need to be subject to the same ethical scrutiny that we would expect of any new therapy”.

But religion falls at the very first ethical hurdle. It’s wrong to offer people false hope, and most or all religions are false.

The Trust’s aims of being “positive about mental health”, and “challenging stigma and discrimination” (p 3) are certainly shared by humanists. The religious, however, have traditionally stigmatised disabled people, regarding disability as punishment for the immorality committed in a former life, or a punishment from God. The Old Testament states “Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord?” (Exodus 4:11). The New Testament states that epilepsy and blindness are caused by demons. This is not the kind of nonsense that the state should be legitimising in our hospitals. Neither is the Roman Catholic stance that jabs for cervical cancer should only be permitted if girls aren’t told about artificial contraception. As the draft Strategy acknowledges, religions practised in Sussex include the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Jehovah’s Witnesses believe, among other things, that yoga is the work of demons.

The Trust seeks to identify “Spiritual Champions” (members of staff who are more interested and “attuned” to spirituality than others). Given the numerous doctrinal flip-flops that Jehovah’s Witnesses have undergone regarding which blood products are allowed and which aren’t, perhaps the Witnesses could benefit from

the Champions to which the draft refers? On reflection, given the Witnesses’ track record in medical matters, the Trust may not like to work with them at all. And given that the Witnesses regard hospitals which perform blood transfusions as “bloodguilty organisations”, they may not fancy working with the Trust, either.

I recognise that religious beliefs are very important to a minority of people, and I have nothing against religious representatives coming into the hospital and ministering to such people – provided, that is, that they do not proselytise to anyone else. What I am against, though, is the use of state money to subsidise any such ministry. Atheists are constantly being told by religious people that a religious person’s faith inspires them to do good works. Why, then, do they expect the state to pay them for ministering to sick members of their own flock?

According to the website of the Diocese of London, there are 400 full-time equivalent hospital chaplains in the UK. And according to the Worcester Acute Health Care Trust, each chaplain costs £50,000 to maintain. If those figures are accurate, chaplains cost the NHS some £20 million a year! The number of deaths involving the bacterium *Clostridium difficile* in England and Wales rose by 28 percent between 2006 and 2007. Rationalists are also realists, and realise that the hard-pressed NHS will never be perfect. But they also know that the millions of pounds spent by the NHS on chaplains every year could and should be better spent.

I favour a secular solution to the question of chaplains. Don’t give us any money for humanist chaplains, and don’t give the religious people any money for religious chaplains either. Perhaps as a result of this, Richard Harlow, the person who had first contacted me about the consultation, never contacted me again. I’ve now seen the final draft of the consultation. It’s pretty similar to the earlier one, but now makes references to the need to provide “religious services” (p.5) in addition to religious prayer rooms.

The consultation states, “If recovery is about one thing, it is about the recovery of hope...” (p 5)

No it isn’t! *It’s about actually getting better!*

The consultation cites the words of a satisfied patient (sorry, “service user”) whose twisted logic sums up perfectly why spiritual healthcare is a recipe for disaster: “I now thank God for my illness as I am in a position to share my coping mechanisms with so many others.” (p 3).

• *The full version of Dr Stovold’s talk, complete with references, can be accessed in the features section of the Freethinker website: www.freethinker.co.uk FT*

Rib and let live

DAVE McKEEGAN interviews Stewart Lee, of *Jerry Springer: The Opera* fame

If Stewart Lee had already guaranteed himself a place in the eternal post-death inferno by co-writing the controversial *Jerry Springer: the Opera*, his subsequent stand-up routine probably had Satan and his minions excitedly constructing a whole new Circle of Hell for the comic's exclusive accommodation.

While *JS:TO* gently mocked the Christian messiah by making him swear like a trooper and publicly admit to being "a bit gay", the Stewart Lee 90s Comedian tour contained a dream-like sequence in which a drunken Lee utilises the willing Son of Man as a multi-holed receptacle for his piss and vomit.

It was all very messy – and very, very funny. Stewart, who like most discerning atheists is a *Freethinker* subscriber, kindly took time out from a busy touring schedule to answer a few questions about this and that.

DM: You are an honorary associate of the National Secular Society and a distinguished supporter of the British Humanist Association. What do you think comedy can do for these causes?

SL: It's important to engage with people who use religion as a covert way to curb our freedoms, using powerful tools like protest and lobbying and campaigning. It's also important to point at them and laugh.

DM: You have been described as a "militant atheist". Are you?

SL: I was described as a militant atheist by Stephen Green of Christian Voice at a point where he was trying to have me sent to prison for co-writing an opera he imagined was blasphemous. It's not surprising if I seemed militant. I thought it was a fight for survival. My wife is a church-going Catholic. We manage to make it work.

DM: Do you avoid the topic of religion with your wife?

SL: Not really. In fact, you probably have more common ground with someone who has thought about religion than with someone who hasn't at all. Also, it's quite interesting for a relationship to have to think our way to solutions around conflicts of belief.

DM: Have you ever been religious?

SL: From about the age of 13 to the age of 16. The usual story. There was one of those proto-Alpha course youth groups knocking around our area and they had meetings where you could argue about things. I did Religious Studies A-level with a marvellous Church of England priest called Peter Wren, and then

when I went to university in 1986 the unhelpful response of student religious groups to Michael Howard's Clause 28 legislation made me think that, even if there was a god, it was best to ignore him.

DM: How would you describe your personal philosophy?

SL: Live and let live, really. I'm less interested now in whether there is or isn't a God, and more interested in how you stop the belief that there is a God curtailing people's personal



freedoms and impinging on science and education, for example.

DM: Is there a contradiction between your living and letting live, and your pointing and laughing?

SL: Yes. But part of live and let live is to point and laugh at the people who don't want to live and let live.

DM: Last year a Christian group tried to prosecute an art gallery for displaying a statue of Jesus with an erection. "You wouldn't insult Muslims in this way, so why Christians?" is one of their arguments. The same question was asked of *JS:TO*. How would you respond to this?

SL: Well, I haven't seen the work. Politically, one thinks there needs to be a clear one-size-fits-all decision on things like this. Artistically, it is of course more blurred. The image of Christ went fairly swiftly into the public domain. If Christianity allows plastic Jesus ashtrays to be sold at holy shrines, it's a bit late to take the moral high ground when artists reappropriate the image. When missionaries aggressively introduce Christian imagery into cultures where it has no history, it's also then difficult to worry about it turning up in zones of culture where it may not be appropriate. My understanding of Islam is that it has rigorously policed its own use of the brand of Mohammed far more forcefully

than the brand of Jesus has been protected. If your theoretical artist has a theoretical point to make about sexuality in Islam then, given that the figure of Mohammed is not visually associated in physical form with the embodiment of Islam's beliefs in the same way as Jesus is with Christian beliefs, there is probably a way of making the theoretical point you are envisioning in a way that is more direct, more appropriate and probably more offensive, but without stepping on the concealed landmine taboo of depicting the prophet.

In Aberdeen, when I was answering this question, admittedly at some length, a woman from Christian Voice shouted, "Oh it's all just words, words, words with you isn't it." They weren't really interested in reasonable answers, just letting off misplaced anger, usually about gays and Muslims, against the broad target of *JS:TO*.

DM: Do you regret writing *JS:TO*?

SL: I co-wrote the words with the composer Richard Thomas, whose idea it was. I am very proud to have been invited to contribute, but the pride I had in the work at the National Theatre is lessened by its subsequent descent into the grubby world of commercial theatre, and by the fact that

it will be remembered principally, thanks to Christian Voice, for things that aren't even really in it.

DM: Have you met Stephen Green? What did you think of him?

SL: I was forced by the producers of *JS:TO* to go on a panel with him at the Edinburgh TV festival in 2006. I felt very sorry for him. He is obviously not well, genuinely, and I think in many ways it was cruel and irresponsible of the press to give him such a high profile. It is clear from a cursory read of his website that he is quite possibly unhinged. I don't think anyone emerges from the whole thing very well really.

DM: How long have you been a *Freethinker* subscriber?

SL: I began subscribing to the *FT* in about 1990 after I walked past the office in north London on a long aimless wander, and it looked interesting. 15 years later, who'd have dreamed, that the mag and the NSS would prove so significant, in all their help with our problems.

Since doing this interview, I learned that *JS:TO* is about to be resurrected by the Just So Musical Society at St Andrews University in Scotland in April.

Stephen Green reacted to the news with fury, and is threatening legal action to have the show stopped. Ho hum ... **FT**

Up the Pole

NEIL BLEWITT looks back on the godly antics of St Simeon Stylites who took mortification to previously unscaled heights

Simeon Stylites, passing his final days at the top of a pillar, set a new vogue for ascetics. Like others of his time he had, no doubt, been inspired to adopt a frugal and solitary life-style as a result of Jesus's teachings. They would all have known that the Son of God had said that those who forsake their families for his sake would inherit eternal life; that seeking the Kingdom of God was the most important objective; that no thought should be taken for one's food, drink, clothing or other bodily needs; and that those who came from their graves at the bodily resurrection who had done evil would go to eternal damnation.

And if those doctrines were not sufficient to put the fear of God into them, a reading of the Book of Revelation would have made up the deficit. Self-interest dictated that they remove themselves from society and dwell in solitary places where there would be no possibility of their doing evil, and where they could live in purity and practise their penances and deprivations in full view of the Almighty; for they would have been aware of what the Psalmist had written: that the Lord knew their thoughts and words and that he would be with them day and night, behind and before, sitting and standing, in heaven or in the nether world and even in the uttermost parts of the sea.

And so Eusebius elected to live in a dried-up well, Antony in a disused tomb, Bavo in a tree, Macarius in a marsh, Paul of Thebes in the desert (as did Marc of Athens but, in an early display of oneupmanship, naked) and Besarion in the middle of some thorn bushes. He may well have been naked too since it is recorded that he stayed there for only 40 days. Even Jerome lived as a hermit in the desert for a while, his only companions being, as he wrote, scorpions and wild beasts. He was also, he admitted, visited by some voluptuous dancing-girls but they proved to be no more than an hallucination. Whether Jerome judged this to be a matter of relief or regret is not known.

There is nothing to indicate that any of the ascetics chose to dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea to practise their bodily chastisements. This will only be revealed when the sea gives up its dead, as John visualised in Revelation, or on the day of the bodily resurrection – which ever comes earlier.

Like Jesus himself, very few of the ascetics

worked for their bread. They relied on hand-outs from those who did. Not that their dietary requirements were excessive. They fasted frequently, often for lengthy periods, and when they were not fasting they subsisted on very basic fare. Oman, it is recorded, lived on five figs a day (which would, at least, have prevented constipation from being added to his problems), another on barley bread and muddy water, a third on dates, while a group known as the Grazers ate only grass like cattle. There were reports that the Almighty made provision for those ascetics who could not or would not feed themselves and who were not given food by their fellowmen by arranging for them to be fed by other intermediaries, notably otters, lions and ravens.

But solitude and diet were not the only disciplines they conducted. Scourging was common; indeed, by a church on Mount Nitria, three whips were hung – one for the chastisement of monks, the second for thieves and the third for visitors – of whom there must have been but few.

Some ascetics bound themselves in chains, one fastening himself to a rock so effectively that when he eventually decided to move on, a blacksmith had to be sent for to free him; one stood in prayer for an hour every night up to his neck in water, a pool his favoured spot; others walked about bearing heavy weights of iron. Many neither washed nor cut their hair; Daniel's was six feet long at his death, while Mary of Egypt, who spent nearly fifty years in the desert living on dates and berries, was thought by an anchorite to be the very devil when he saw her naked, covered in filth and with long, white hair blowing in the wind.

And if that anchorite felt compromised by seeing a woman's nakedness for an instant (one assumes that he didn't stare) he may have felt easier in his mind if he had reflected that the omnipresent Almighty had also been viewing her in that condition – and, in his case, for half a century.

But Simeon Stylites must be the outstanding ascetic of them all and not simply for the novelty of his final choice of residence but also for the life of deprivation and self-abuse he submitted himself to before and after he ascended his succession of pillars. He was born about 390 and spent several years in a monastery, all the time increasing his mortifications until he almost killed himself by wearing a rope next to

his skin tied so tightly that it became embedded in his flesh which putrefied around it. His fellow-monks were unaware of his condition until they noticed worms dropping from his body as he moved about the monastery. After this, he lived for a while in a dry well, then chained to a rock at the top of a mountain (he it was for whom the blacksmith had to be summoned) and finally at the top of a succession of pillars, each one higher than its predecessor, in an effort, perhaps, to get ever closer to the Almighty. The last was some sixty feet high and "scarcely two cubits in circumference." He repeatedly bowed his body in prayer – for lengthy periods standing, often for days on end; and, on one occasion at least, on one leg.

A visitor counted over 1,000 bodily prostrations during one day and many marvelled at his lengthy fasts. His body became covered in ulcers and his biographer, who had ascended his pillar to gather material for a book, was requested by Simeon to collect up the worms that had fallen from him and replace them in his ulcers so that they might continue with their repast.

When he died, it was said that a bright star shone miraculously over his pillar, but that he contrived to stay alive for nearly 70 years seems to me to be the greater miracle. The fact that he was not a somnambulist must also have contributed to his longevity.

I have often wondered what reception the ascetics would receive when they reached the heavenly kingdom after the day of bodily resurrection in which, I imagine, they believed, as present-day Christians are required to by their creeds. Would the Almighty say "Well done, thou good and faithful servant"? Or "You silly sod"?

I know of two poets (there may be others) who have written of Simeon Stylites. One is Tennyson, whose portraits show him to be as lugubrious as most of the ascetics must have looked. He has his subject recalling the events of his life just before his demise.

The other is Ogden Nash, who described an event that I have not seen documented elsewhere. It is worth adding to the record:

*The saintly Simeon Stylites
When faced with a shortage of nighties
Sanctimonious and solemn
Reached up from his column
And quietly stole the Almighty's FT*

Harold Blackham (1903 – 2009)

DAVID TRIBE, former President of the National Secular Society and a past editor of the *Freethinker*, pays tribute to **Harold (H J) Blackham** who died in January

With the death on January 23 of Harold (who preferred the more austere HJ) Blackham, the freethought movement has lost one of its most interesting and influential personalities. He was a man of great personal charm, a mellifluous speaker, a copious writer and an organiser at the centre of humanist affairs for much of the 20th century.

Born on March 31, 1903, in Birmingham into a “very religious” family, where both father and grandfather were Congregationalist lay preachers, he later said he “loathed church”. He also “loathed school” – King Edward VI Grammar School – where he suffered from psychosomatic illnesses. Being “mad about horses”, he left at 16 to work on a farm. It was healthy but hard work, and moved him to write an article on the agricultural labourers’ activist, Joseph Arch.

After two years he left the farm to become an officer’s batman in Lloyd George’s territorial Army to fight bolshevism, and to gain an Honours English (with Ethics) degree at Birmingham University. Postgraduate studies yielded a secondary teacher’s diploma and the post of divinity master, previously held by clerics, at Doncaster Grammar School. After the “hyper-excitement of the university” he was “deeply depressed” at the school, where he seemed to be in a minority that “took religion seriously”. So after two years he left to become a tutor and journalist, and a worker in mining villages for Toc H, an organisation of Christian fellowship and social service.

Responding to an advertisement in *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1933, he was invited to London to work part-time for and live behind the idiosyncratic Ethical Church founded by Stanton Coit, then 76. Later Blackham confirmed what secularists had all along believed, that it was “founded on a mistaken idea: worship of the Ideal of Truth, Beauty and Goodness, the Platonic Trinity” and revealed that he “had in mind only to wind it up” when he succeeded Coit in 1935. When Lord Snell resigned as non-executive chairman of the Ethical Union, Blackham succeeded him.

He made contact with the positivists and the Rationalist Press Association, which he had known about through *The Literary Guide* (now *New Humanist*).

In 1938 he joined the organising committee, chaired by National Secular Society President Chapman Cohen, for the dramatic World Union of Freethinkers congress in London. During the war as an officer with the National Fire Service, he drove a fire appliance through the blazing London docks. In 1944 he began the admirable *Plain View*, a quarterly “think-shop” which so impressed Sir Julian Huxley that he agreed to become EU president and later invited Blackham to revise *Religion Without Revelation*, originally published in 1927. Unsuccessfully, Blackham tried to revive the Moral Instruction League, which flourished, but petered out in the first quarter of the 20th century; and it took 20 years for his dream to be realised in the establishment of the Campaign for Moral Education and the transformation of the Anglican Public Morality Council into the broadly-based Social Morality Council (now Norham Foundation).

After the war he resigned as EU chairman and became its part-time secretary with a “determination to enlarge the moral basis of the movement by recovering the whole ‘humanist’ tradition which derived from the Greek Sophists, the French Philosophes, and the British Utilitarians or Philosophical Radicals.” Together with Charles Bradlaugh Bonner he organised a 1946 London conference, “The Challenge of Humanism”, sponsored by the British section of WUFT (NSS, RPA, EU, South Place Ethical Society and Positivist Society), and went to Holland to meet Jaap van Praag, leader of the new Dutch Humanist League.

In 1950 Blackham contributed to and edited *Living as a Humanist*. He was anxious to establish himself as an author and philosopher, and in quick succession wrote *The Human Tradition*, *Six Existentialist Thinkers* (an “excursion of a confirmed empiricist” for sceptical Anglo-Saxons) and *An anthology of Existentialist Writers* which sold 150,000 copies to US colleges. Gilbert Murray meanwhile invited him to revise and update J B Bury’s influential, if somewhat scrappy *History of Freedom of Thought* (1913).

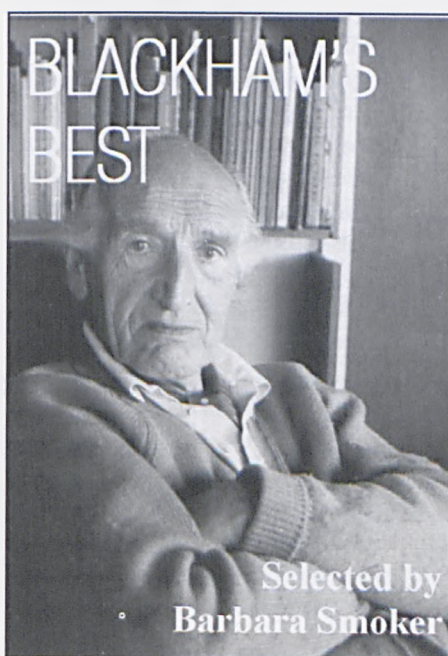
In the swinging sixties the pendulum swung his way. “Humanism” became a trendy word. In 1963 at his initiative the RPA, with its substantial assets and membership, joined with the EU to launch the British Humanist Association, of which he became executive director. In an age of “dialogue” Blackham was active in discussions with the BBC Religious Broadcasting Department, religious educators, international Marxists, Anglican and Catholic prelates and the Vatican *Secretariatus Pro*

Non-Credentibus (Secretariat for Unbelievers). During this time Blackham wrote *Political Discipline in a Free Society* (1961), contributed to and edited *Objections to Humanism* (1963) as a “companion volume” to *Objections to Christian Belief*, and wrote *Religion in Modern Society* (1966) and *Humanism* (1968).

Long-standing goals were achieved when he launched the *Journal of Moral Education* in 1971 and contributed to and edited *Ethical Standards in Counselling* (1974) and *Education for Personal Autonomy* (1978). His goals for the BHA were, predictably, not achieved. In 1977 he retired, became an honorary associate of the RPA and wrote that humanism “has become something almost that I would rather not talk about ... but at this stage I prefer an oblique approach, without the label.” In 1993 he was more specific: “My hopes for the BHA were dashed. I was very disappointed ... I didn’t want groups to be a talking shop, but groups of action. This never happened.”

In retirement overlooking the Wye Valley, he continued to write. His last published works were *The Fable as Literature* (1985) and what he regarded as his magnum opus, *The Future of Our Past*, edited by Barbara Smoker (1996).

• The third edition of an anthology of short extracts from Blackham’s writings (cover above), compiled by veteran freethought campaigner Barbara Smoker is available from the BHA – <http://www.humanism.org.uk/shop/46 FT>



points of view...

A DIG IN THE POST BAG... LETTERS FROM OUR READERS



DARWIN'S BURIAL

I UNDERSTOOD that Darwin himself wished to have his corpse buried in the local churchyard but that 'the nation' wished to honour his memory by claiming it for Westminster Abbey.

It seems to me completely in keeping with the traditions of the Established Church that honours anyone sufficiently famous, but I would expect British humanists to enjoy the joke of the Church praising the life and work of an atheist.

The Church or anyway the Royal Peculiar seems to agree that it is a joke.

Peter Arnold
Alderney

I WAS not surprised to learn that Westminster Abbey had refused to honour Charles Darwin. His genius did more to undermine religion than that of any other scientist. Speaking for myself, it was grasping what evolution implied that led me to atheism at the age of 15. Many others of course have reached the same conclusion.

Rather than asking Westminster Abbey to honour their most reluctant burial victim we should be campaigning to have his body removed to Downe. It is well known that he had repeatedly expressed the wish to be buried at there.

"The joiner had made his coffin just the way he wanted it, all rough, just as it left the bench, no polish, no nothin", but this was returned and replaced by one "you could see to shave in".

He added that "They buried him in Westminster Abbey, but he always wanted to lie here, and I don't think he'd have liked it." (Adrian Desmond and James Moore, Darwin. London: Michael Joseph, the Penguin Group, 1991). Now is the time to put that right.

Edward Tuddenham
London

JULIAN JAYNES

BECAUSE I believe they are of profound importance, I would like to promote the ideas of Julian Jaynes, as laid out in his *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*.

That Jaynes's ideas are ignored if not dismissed demonstrates, I believe, how disturbing they are for many people, for the implications of an evolving bicameral mind (Wikipedia: bicameralism) contradicts and threatens the received wisdoms of scientific orthodoxy: comprehension can necessitate a paradigm shift too far beyond intellectual comfort zones so, as in most original and revolutionary ideas, the logic

of the new has to be denied to defend the old – lest one go mad! I also believe that censoring Jaynes's scholarly work, as it is in many libraries, runs counter to an ethos of free inquiry.

Julian Jaynes's theory offers the only plausible explanation for the origin and prevalence of religion, and for mental phenomena that engender religious belief. Confirming evidence for his theory can be found in *Reflections on the Dawn of Consciousness* (2006), by Marcel Kuijsten.

Graham Newbery
Southampton

THE CLIMATE CRISIS

EDWIN Salter ("The Climate Crisis", *Freethinker*, January) is right to call for emergency action to cool the planet, although he should have pointed out that the reason is that there is no hope of greenhouse gas emissions being got under control in time to avert catastrophe.

He mentions "creating sea clouds" (the idea of Prof Salter in Edinburgh – is he related?), but there are other geoengineering ideas, such as deploying a huge mirror in space between the Earth and the Sun.

However, Salter seems too optimistic about

renewable methods of generating electricity; apart from hydropower they are all a waste of time and money. We will need to continue to rely on thermal methods of generating electricity, the most viable being nuclear (fission) power, which he mistakenly accuses of having future cost and safety problems. Nuclear is one of the cheapest and safest methods of generating electricity. Nuclear fusion is a pipe dream.

Stewart Campbell
Edinburgh

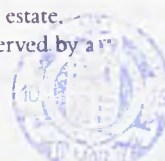
EDWIN Salter (*Freethinker*, Jan 09) does a good job in drawing our attention to the threat of climate change. Indeed, my own analysis of the possible consequences of the changes now taking place include two very unpleasant scenarios. My analysis is given at <http://climate-cassandra.blogspot.com/2007/11/scenario-planning-for-climate-change.html>.

In the Police World scenario the nations will unite to deal with the problems but do too little, too late. With temperatures rising four degrees or more refugees will flee the tropics in unprecedented numbers – only to find their way blocked by northerly nations defending their newly valuable real estate. Order, in this scenario, will be preserved by a global police state.

In the Hobbes' World scenario the failure of the nations to unite will lead first to catastrophic climate change and then to the collapse of those nations and of almost all human institutions.

Life will certainly be "nasty, brutish and short" for those that survive. Like Salter, I do not believe that either is inevitable. With sufficiently energetic action we can avoid them. However, most of those addressing climate change still concentrate on the better options. Even George Monbiot describes himself as an optimist! I believe we need to think hard about the worst possibilities – if only to strengthen our commitment to avoid them.

David C Flint
London



GEERT WILDERS AND THE FITNA AFFAIR

IN November of last year, Ibrahim Mousawi, a man who told *The New Yorker* that the Jews were “a lesion on the forehead of history”, was granted entry into the country, after which he began a tour, cheering on Hezbollah in speeches across the nation.

On February 12, Geert Wilders, a Dutch politician, was refused entry to the UK by Home Secretary Jacqui Smith because his views might offend. Lord Ahmed described Wilders’ film, *Fitna*, as “inciting religious and racial hatred”, the latter charge I find quite bizarre, because the film, although a crude critique of the Koran, has nothing whatsoever to do with race or ethnicity. It simply shows some of the more vicious passages of the Koran interspersed with clips and stills of 9/11, 7/7, the Madrid train bombings, female genital mutilation, hangings of homosexuals, executions and other horrors.

Now I hardly care for Mr Wilders’ technique, but I understand his politics. The point of the film is not to attack Islam or its practitioners as such, but at ways in which the Koran can be and is used as justification for evil acts.

What seems most interesting in this affair is not the cowardice of the Home Secretary for turning him away, but her justification of it. The argument goes that if we express the view that Islam can be violent then it might make Muslims get violent. She writes to Wilders that she is “satisfied that your statements about Muslims and their beliefs, as expressed in your film *Fitna* and elsewhere, would threaten community harmony and therefore public security in the UK.”

Threaten community harmony and public security? Surely this is a veil for what she really means: an Islamic backlash.

If I’m right about this, then our government appears to be bowing to pressure from a potentially violent minority. It all seems oddly familiar, such as when no British newspaper dared reprint the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed for fear of violent reprisals. And we should not forget the shameful 20th anniversary of Salman Rushdie’s Islamic death warrant.

A fundamental point seems to be constantly neglected: There is no such thing as the right to not be offended. In debate disagree all you like, but say “I’m offended” and I’ll wait to hear an actual point. Now, I’d be no gentleman if my intention were to offend, but if an argument is found to be offensive, still nothing has been said of its veracity.

I directly address the Islamic members of our community when I say that your views are exactly equal in worth to that of every other member. If you expect that commentary of the Koran will be any less severe than of any other religious text, you are utterly mistaken.

It might shock you to learn that William Gladstone, one of the most celebrated Prime Ministers of Britain, once held aloft a copy of

the Koran in parliament and said, “So long as there is this book there will be no peace in the world.”

You would think any elected official quite suicidal if they were to echo such a sentiment today. Accusations of “hate speech” and “incite-

THERE is a lot of fine talk about “freedom of speech” and “free expression” around the Wilders/*Fitna* issue but the fact is that nearly all politicians, of right, left and centre will sacrifice it when it is expedient to do so. The real reason that Wilders was banned from entering Britain, I suspect, is that it was a low-cost way for Gordon Brown’s dodgy Labour Government to curry favour with the Muslims they are so eager to appease and win votes from in Labour’s heartland urban constituencies.

Most politicians – including most atheist politicians I know – are willing to sacrifice freedom of speech for short-term political advantage. The Liberal leader, Chris Huhne, has supported the ban on Wilders too, but then the Liberals, while attractive in some ways (many of them supported the abolition of the Blasphemy Law, for example), are weak on issues like immigration and Islam. The Conservatives may be more supportive in the Wilders case, but it is likely they would deny entry to fundamentalist Muslim clerics like Yusuf Al Qaradawi (nice for us, admittedly, but free speech isn’t always a cosy and unchallenging affair).

Of course, you could argue that Wilders has never condoned violence against Muslims, whereas Al Qaradawi has condoned domestic violence against women, the murder of homosexuals and terrorism targeted at Jewish people. But in my experience, most people are prepared

DENYS DROWER

CONGRATULATIONS on the “new look” *Freethinker*. I was particularly pleased to see in it a piece by Denys Drower, a fellow founder member of the Isle of Man Freethinkers.

“Our Denys” has now appeared in two issues of the *Freethinker* in recent years, the one which covered the *Gay News* trial and now one with a great new makeover. An impressive double.

A couple of years ago I helped Denys get up a petition to Mark Damazer of Radio 4, asking for an “opt-out” (on the lines of that offered during cricket matches) from the dreaded Sunday Service.

More recently we both joined another campaign to make Damazer see sense, this time over *Thought For The Day*. We had a Manx example of “best practice” to offer on this, as over here we’ve managed to get the local radio version “rebranded” as an “ethical” rather than “religious” spot.

This means humanists and secular campaign-

ment to religious hatred” would fill the air. The freedom to criticise has been maimed and left limping, and we must do all we can to nurse it back to health – in spite of calls for its death

Peter Brietbart
Brighton

to sacrifice freedom of expression often very cheaply, cloaking their selfish political gains in so doing, by claiming that the Muslim cleric, the Holocaust denier, the Marxist twerp, or right-wing barm-cake, is some sort of threat to public order and community well-being. It’s all puffed-up nonsense, of course.

Perhaps we should just let them all in, scrutinise them and – if necessary – hold them up to ridicule before kicking them out of Britain after making an example of them to the world? Geert Wilders has said and done much that is commendable, but the truth is, his anti-Muslim propaganda is flawed by its crude, simplistic character (Koran = *Mein Kampf*) and by the unnecessary and insulting provocation that accompanies his basically sound arguments against Islam.

Tellingly, most people in opinion polls favour the entry into Britain of those with odious or contentious beliefs, not because they support those beliefs (they are usually kinder and more tolerant than the visiting loony), but because ordinary people resent being “nannied” by politicians who assume we are all gullible saps for any nutcase with an axe to grind.

So, let’s support Wilders’ right to speak in Britain, while at the same time qualifying our support for rather shrill anti-Muslim rhetoric.

Diesel Balaam
London

ers such as Amnesty International can each take a turn, which also means more interesting items and genuine public debate as a wider range of views are aired.

I was particularly glad for Denys as, at the grand age of 90, he no longer had to throw himself across his kitchen to turn off the ramblings of demented local lay preachers. Sadly he has now thrown away this hard-won privilege by moving back to England to be closer to his relatives.

On behalf of all his Manx friends may I therefore wish Denys all the best for the future, through the one magazine I know he’ll read from cover to cover.

In another decade we look forward to another great issue. The one where Denys offers us his thoughts on reaching his own century of freethought.

Stuart Harthill
Isle of Man

the freethinker

EVENTS & CONTACTS

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

Birmingham Humanists: **i** Tova Jones 021454 4692
w www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk. Friends Meeting House, George Road & St James's Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham 15. Wed. March 18, 7.45pm. Olga Farooqui: *Spirituality and Humanism – Do We or Should we Have it?*
Brighton & Hove Humanist Society: **i** 01273 227549/461404 **w** <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/robert.stovold/humanist.html>. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. Wed, March 4, 8pm. Peter Brietbart: *The Future of Belief*. Wed, April 1, 8pm. Tom Ruebens: *The Case for a Secular Society*.
Bromley Humanists: Meetings on the second Tuesday of the month, 8 pm, at Friends Meeting House, Ravensbourne Road, Bromley. **i** 01959 574691.
w www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com
Central London Humanist Group: **i** Jemma Hooper, 75a Ridgmount Gardens, London WC1E 7AX
e nupert@clarity4words.co.uk Tel: 02075804564.
Chiltern Humanists: Enquiries: 01296 623730.
Cornwall Humanists: **i** Patricia Adams, Sappho, Church Road, Lelant, St Ives, Cornwall TR26 3LA. Tel: 01736 754895.
Cotswold Humanists: **i** Philip Howell, 2 Cleavelands Close, Cheltenham GL50 4PZ. Tel. 01242 528743.
Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists: **i** Tel. 01926 858450. Roy Saich, 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth, CV8 2HB.
Cumbria Humanist Group: **i** Tel. 01228 810592. Christine Allen **w** www.secularderby.org **e** info@cumbria-humanists.org.uk.
Derbyshire Secularists: Meet at 7.00pm, the third Wednesday of every month at the Multifaith Centre, University of Derby. Full details on **w** www.secularderby.org
Devon Humanists: **i** Roger McCallister, Tel: 01626 864046
e info@devonhumanists.org.uk
w www.devonhumanists.org.uk
Dorset Humanists: Monthly speakers and social activities. Enquiries 01202-428506.
w www.dorsethumanists.co.uk
Ealing Humanists: **i** Secretary Alex Hill Tel. 0208 741 7016 or Charles Rudd 020 8904 6599.
East Cheshire and High Peak Secular Group:
i Carl Pinel 01298 815575.
East Kent Humanists: **i** Tel. 01843 864506. Talks and discussions on ten Sunday afternoons in Canterbury.
Essex Humanists: Programme available, Details: 01268 785295.
Farnham Humanists: 10 New House, Farm Lane, Woodstreet Village, Guildford GU3 3DD.
w www.farnham-humanists.org.uk
Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA):
1 Gower St, London WC1E 6HD. Tel: 0844 800 3067.
Email: secretary@galha.org **w** www.galha.org
Greater Manchester Humanist Group: **i** John Coff. 0161 4303463. Monthly meetings (second Wednesday) Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester.
Hampstead Humanist Society: **i** N I Barnes, 10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 0HP.
w www.hampstead.humanists.net
Harrow Humanist Society: Meets the second Wednesday of the month (except January, July and August) at the HAVS Centre, 64 Pinner Road, Harrow at 8pm. March 11. Don Liversedge: *A Brief History of SPES over 200 Years* **i** Secretary

on 0208 907-6124 **w** www.clarencewilson.cwc.net/nhs.htm
e Mike Savage at mfsavagemba@hotmail.com
Having & District Humanist Society: **i** Jean Condon 01708 473597. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgores Cres, Gidea Park. Thurs March 5, 8pm. Brian Evans: *History of Romford*.
Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern Ireland: **i** Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: 028 9267 7264 **e** brianmcclinton@btinternet.com.
w www.nirelandhumanists.net
Humanist Association Dorset: Information and programme from Jane Bannister. Tel: 01202 428506.
Humanist Society of Scotland: 272 Bath Street, Glasgow, G2 4JR, 0870 874 9002. Secretary: secretary@humanism-scotland.org.uk. Information and events: info@humanism-scotland.org.uk or visit www.humanism-scotland.org.uk Media: media@humanism-scotland.org.uk. Education: education@humanism-scotland.org.uk. **Local Scottish Groups:**
Aberdeen: 07010 704778, aberdeen@humanism-scotland.org.uk.
Dundee: 07017 404778, dundee@humanism-scotland.org.uk.
Edinburgh: 07010 704775, edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk
Glasgow: 07010 704776, glasgow@humanism-scotland.org.uk.
Highland: 07017 404779, highland@humanism-scotland.org.uk.
Perth: 07017 404776, perth@humanism-scotland.org.uk
Humanist Society of West Yorkshire: **i** Robert Tee on 0113 2577009. Tues Feb 10: *Richard Parker – Neo-Darwinism – Darwinism plus Genetics*.
Isle of Man Freethinkers: **i** Jeff Garland, 01624 664796. Email: jeffgarland@wm.im **w** www.iomfreethinkers.org
Isle of Wight Secular and Humanist Group: **i** David Broughton on 01983 755526 or **e** davidb67@clara.co.uk
Jersey Humanists: Contact: Reginald Le Sueur, La Petella, Rue des Vignes, St Peter, Jersey, JE3 7BE. Tel 01534 744780 **e** Jerseyhumanists@gmail.com **w** <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Jersey-Humanists/>
Lancashire Secular Humanists: Meetings 7.30 on 3rd Wed of month at Great Eccleston Village Centre, 59 High St, The Square, Great Eccleston (Nr. Preston) PR3 0YB. www.lancashiresecularhumanists.co.uk **i** Ian Abbott, Wavecrest, Hackensall Rd, Knott End-on-Sea, Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire FY6 0AZ 01253 812308 **e** ian@lanzere.demon.co.uk
Leicester Secular Society: Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB. Tel. 07598 971420.
w www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk
Lewisham Humanist Group: **i** Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. **w** www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com The Goose, Rushey Green, Catford SE6. Third Thurs, 8pm. March 19, Barbara Chandler: *How We Promote Humanism*.
Liverpool Humanist Group: **i** 07814 910 286.
w www.liverpoolhumanists.co.uk/
e lhghumanist@googlegmail.com. Meetings on the second Wednesday of each month.
Lynn Humanists, W Norfolk & Fens: Tel: 07811870215.
Marches Secularists: **w** www.MarchesSecularists.org
e Secretary@MarchesSecularists.org
Mid-Wales Humanists: **i** Maureen Lofmark, 01570 422648

e mlofmark@btinternet.com
Norfolk Secular and Humanist Group: **i** Vince Chainey, 4 Mill St, Bradenham, Norfolk IP25 7QN. Tel: 01362 820982.
Northants Secular & Humanist Society: For information contact Ollie Killingback on 01933 389070.
North East Humanists (Teesside Group):
i C McEwan on 01642 817541.
North East Humanists (Tyneside Group):
i the Secretary on 01434 632936.
North London Humanist Group: Meets third Thursday of month (ex.August) 8 pm at Ruth Winston House, 190 Green Lanes, Palmers Green, N13 5UE. Plus social events. Contact Sec: 01707 653667 **e** enquiries@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk **w** www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk **e** enquiries@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk
w www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk
North Yorkshire Humanist Group: Secretary: Charles Anderson, 01904 766480. Meets second Monday of the month, 7.30pm, Priory Street Centre, York.
Reigate & District Humanist Group: **i** Roy Adderley on 01342 323882.
Sheffield Humanist Society: **i** 0114 2309754. The SA-DACCA Building, Wicker,S2. Public Meeting first Wednesday of the month, 7.30pm. March 4, Michael Glanville: *Topical Issues*. April 1: Romy Robinson & Sally Goldsmith: *Edward Carpenter*.
South Hampshire Humanists: Group Secretary, Richard Hogg. Tel: 02392 370689 **e** info@southhantshumanists.org.uk **w** www.southhantshumanists.org.uk
South Place Ethical Society. Weekly talks/meetings, Sundays 11am and 3pm at Conway Hall Library, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Tel: 0207242 8037/4 **e** library@ethicalsoc.org.uk. Monthly programmes on request.
Somerset: Details of South Somerset Humanists' meetings in Yeovil from Edward Gwinell on 01935 473263 or **e** edward.gwinell@talktalk.net
Suffolk Humanists & Secularists: 5 Hadleigh Road, Elmsett, Suffolk IP7 6ND. Tel: 01473 658828.
www.suffolkhands.org.uk **e** mail@suffolkhands.org.uk
Sutton Humanists: **i** 0208 773 0631. **w** www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com **e** BrackenKernish@ukgateway.net.
Think Humanism: An independent discussion forum for anyone interested in humanism, secularism and freethought - www.thinkhumanism.com
The Thomas Paine Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, London WC1. Sat, March 28, 2pm. The Eric Paine Memorial Lecture. Speakers Profs John Keane and G R Claeys.
Welsh Marches Humanist Group: **i** 01568 770282
w www.wmhumanists.co.uk **e** rocheforts@tiscali.co.uk. Meetings on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at Ludlow, October to June.
West Glamorgan Humanist Group: **i** 01792 206108 or 01792 296375, or write Julie Norris, 3 Maple Grove, Uplands, Swansea SA2 0JY.

Please send your listings and events notices to:
Listings, the Freethinker,
PO BOX 234, Brighton, BN1 4XD.

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