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Sharia? Stuff it, say protesters

Islamic law must be stopped in its tracks demands National Secular Society President

A strong message that Islamic law (sharia) is wholly unwelcome in the UK and other Western democracies was conveyed to the Government last month when around 600 people joined One Law for All's first rally in London on March 7.

Despite the support it has garnered from deluded Islamic apologists such as the Archbishop of Canterbury, sharia is seen by large numbers of people in Britain – many Muslims included – as a dangerous threat to community cohesion in the UK.

The rally, organised in defence of citizenship and universal rights, started in Trafalgar Square where a number of speakers, including National Secular Society President Terry Sanderson, denounced the policy of accommodation and appeasement of the political Islamic movement.

Sanderson said: "We do not need another legal system running in parallel... sharia is creeping into our legal system and society and we must stop it in its tracks now!"

Professor A C Grayling, Professor of Philosophy at Birkbeck College, University of London, told the crowd: "Once you start fragmenting society, once you start allowing different groups in society to apply different standards, you get very profound injustices – and it is almost always women who suffer these injustices. We have to fight hard to keep one law for everybody."

The rally was followed by a march to Red Lion Square, then the protesters attended a public meeting in the Conway Hall to discuss and debate sharia, sexual apartheid and women's rights.

The panel of distinguished speakers at the meeting included chairperson Sohaila Sharifi (of Central Council of Equal Rights Now – Organisation against Women's Discrimination in Iran); Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, journalist and chairperson of British Muslims for Secular Democracy, Naser Khader (Democratic Muslims founder), Kenan Malik (writer and broadcaster); Yasaman Mollazadeh (One Law for All Legal Coordinator); Maryam Namazie (Equal Rights Now – Organisation against Women's Discrimination in Iran, One Law for All and Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain spokesperson), Pragna Patel (Southall Black Sisters and Women Against Fundamentalism founding member), Fariborz

Pooya (chairperson of the Iranian Secular Society and Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain), and Carla Revere (chair of the Lawyers' Secular Society).

"Our protest met with widespread support and left many feeling inspired and invigorated. It was also covered by the mainstream media, including BBC Radio 4, BBC 5 Live, BBC Wales, and the *Times*," reported Maryam Namazie, a past winner of the NSS's Secularist of the Year award.

She added: "We won't stand idly by whilst the British government relegates a huge segment of our society to sham courts and regressive rules and appeases the Islamists here or elsewhere. And we will bring the political Islamic movement to its knees in Britain in much the same way as people are doing in Iran and elsewhere.

"We will keep growing in numbers and strength until we get rid of sharia councils and religious tribunals altogether."



Maryam Namazie pictured with a fellow protester at the anti-sharia rally in London last month

A fanatic by any other name

BARRY DUKE SUGGESTS A NEW DESCRIPTION FOR ULTRA-ORTHODOX JEWS

Stephen Schwartz is an American with a mission. He is a New Jersey lawyer who wants the term "ultra-Orthodox Jew" banned in the media, saying that "ultra" suggests "fanatical" and is therefore a pejorative description.

So far his campaign has met with limited success. As far as I can ascertain, the only publication which has yielded to his demand is the Newark-based *Star-Ledger* – New Jersey's largest daily newspaper. From last December, the paper began describing Ultra-Orthodox Jews such as the Haredi or Hassidic groups as "a sect of Orthodox Judaism" or "an Orthodox sect."

The term "ultra-Orthodox", Schwartz told *The Jewish Standard* earlier this year, "implies that the person the label is applied to is fanatical or extreme. The term 'ultra' denotes those things. I don't think it's a benign term at all."

Let's examine, shall we, just how "benign" these creepy men in black, with their



ridiculous ringlets and their deep-seated loathing of women, really are.

Last month, a sick individual – a member of Jerusalem's ultra-Orthodox Haredi community – received a four-year jail sentence for attacking a woman.

The woman had been identified by an Haredi "modesty patrol" or "chastity squad" – gangs of vigilantes who have taken it upon themselves to enforce "purity" – as having "defaulted" on the proper Haredi lifestyle.

So Elhanan Buzaglo and four other gang members decided to force the 31-year-old divorcee her from her home. They broke into the victim's house, gagged her, beat her and warned her that if she did not move she would be killed.

Buzaglo was convicted of aggravated assault, extortion, aiding extortion and intimidation. He was also ordered to pay the women the equivalent of £1,200 in damages.

A month before, a group of ultra-Orthodox Jews began screaming abuse at group of around 100 Jewish women who had gathered in Jerusalem's Western Wall area to pray.

The group, including some North American Reform movement rabbis, were in Israel for a gathering of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

By wearing prayer shawls and skull caps, which according to Orthodox Jewish custom should be worn only by men, they broke with custom and caused great offence. This outrage was compounded by the fact that they chanted from the Torah – the Jewish "holy" book – which, in the Orthodox tradition, is also reserved for men.

Rabbi Jackie Ellenson, the 52-year-old director of the Women's Rabbinic Network based in Manhattan, New York, said their prayers were interrupted when a man in the men's section of the praying area began shouting at them that "a woman's voice is lewd" and two women in the women's section began shouting at them too.

Orthodox Jewish law prohibits women from praying or singing in public where a female

voice can be heard by men. In traditional Orthodox synagogues, as well as at the Western Wall, men and women have separate prayer areas.

Western Wall Rabbi Shmuel Rabinovitch explained that women usually hold their prayers near the wall, and not at the Western Wall Plaza itself.

"Unfortunately, they severely offended the holy place ... and stirred violence and division," he said. "The High Court barred them from acting in a way that is not in line with local custom, and the local custom is that women don't wear a prayer shawl ... or read out from the Torah."

Ellenson said, however, that she rejected the monopoly of one version of Judaism accepted in Israel. "All people should have equal access to places of holiness. The Wall right now is being treated as an Orthodox synagogue and it should be a place where all people who want to pray have access," she said. "The values of religious Judaism which I practise are about equal access and participation."

If this does not convince you that ultra-Orthodox Jews are the very antithesis of "benign", let's look at the Great MP4 Riot that took place in Jerusalem in the summer of 2008 when ultra-Orthodox Jews went on the rampage in Jerusalem in protest over the arrest of Shmuel Weisfish, a "chastity squad" member who was allegedly involved in the torching of a store selling MP4 players "in violation of a ruling of the Orthodox Court of Justice". Demonstrators set garbage bins on fire.

The Haredim had earlier distributed posters and leaflets railing against stores selling the digital music players, saying "a terrible plague is upon us, claiming victims every day... these sinful devices were banned by all the great rabbis, but are still common in the Haredi world... their devilish distributors want nothing more than to drive the people of Israel to sin through movies and other abominations. This little device is the devil's way to try and gain entrance to our protected homes and yeshivas [religious schools] disguised as something you can listen to during Torah lessons."

If the term "ultra-Orthodox" is scrapped, then perhaps we should find some other way of describing these fanatics. Personally, I can't think of a better description than "flaming bloody nutters".



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Vatican struggles to limit damage to its reputation

A senior Vatican official has criticised the excommunication of a Brazilian woman whose nine-year-old daughter had an abortion after being raped, as well as the medical team who acted to save the girl's life

Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, said last month: "Unfortunately the credibility of our teaching took a blow as it appeared, in the eyes of many, to be insensitive, incomprehensible and lacking mercy."

The Academy for Life is tasked with promoting the Church's doctrine on bioethics.

Fisichella recently hit the headlines when he attacked President Obama's decision to allow stem-cell research to be resumed in the US, reversing the ban imposed by George W Bush.

In a frantic backtracking exercise, Brazilian bishops said that the excommunication of the mother and doctors of the girl, who was pregnant with twins after having allegedly been raped by her stepfather, was wrong and would not be applied.

The National Conference of Bishops of Brazil decided that the child's mother acted "under pressure from the doctors" who said the girl would die if she carried the babies to term.

Dimas Lara Barbosa, the body's secretary-general, told reporters the mother therefore could not be excommunicated. "We must take the circumstances into consideration," he said.

As for the doctors, there was no clear case that they should be expelled from the Church either, he said, contrary to the position taken by Archbishop Jose Cardoso Sobrinho, who announced the excommunications.

Barbosa said only doctors who "systematically" conduct abortions are thrown out of the Church.

Sobrinho's sick decision that the abortion "was more serious" than the rape brought worldwide condemnation of the Catholic Church. Many commentators denounced his lack of compassion.

But Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, the head of the Church's Congregation for Bishops, supported Sobrinho, telling the Italian daily *La Stampa* the twins had had a right to live and that the attacks on Sobrinho were "unjustified."

Abortion is illegal in Brazil except in cases of rape or if the woman's health is in danger.



Rino Fisichella

The girl was found to be four months' pregnant after being taken to a hospital suffering stomach pains. Officials said she told them she had been abused by her stepfather since the age of six.

Her 23-year-old stepfather was arrested and was being kept in protective custody.

Earlier, Pope Ratzinger was forced to write to bishops worldwide to explain the Church's much-criticised handling of the case of a Holocaust-denying bishop, whose excommunication was recently lifted by the pontiff.

British-born Bishop Richard Williamson denied in a Swedish TV interview in January that six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust. Williamson told Swedish TV that about 200,000 or 300,000 were murdered but that none were gassed.

Rome daily *Il Foglio* said that the Pope acknowledged in the letter that the Vatican made "mistakes" in the handling of the entire case.

The paper said, without citing sources, that the Pope had written that the Vatican should have been aware of Williamson's Holocaust-denying statement, which was widely covered on the internet.

Williamson has apologised for the "hurt" that his remarks caused, but didn't recant what he said. The Vatican has called his apology inadequate. Bowing to criticism from Jewish groups, historians and others, the Vatican demanded that Williamson "absolutely and unequivocally distance himself" from his Holocaust denial.

As the *Freethinker* was going to press, the Holy See was struggling to contain international anger over the Pope's idiotic claim on his first official visit to Africa that Aids "cannot be overcome through the distribution of condoms, which even aggravates the problems".

Barbaric blasphemy sentence upheld

THE Supreme Court in Afghanistan has upheld a 20-year prison sentence for an Afghan university student journalist accused of "blasphemy".

The case has outraged news media and human rights organisations in Afghanistan and across the globe.

The family and lawyers of Parwiz Kambakhsh, 24, said last month that they had learned only recently about the court decision, which was arrived at in secret on February 12. They called the procedure illegal.

The student, from northern Afghanistan, was arrested in 2007 and sentenced to death for blasphemy after accusations that he had written and distributed an article about the role of women in Islam.

Kambakhsh denied having written the article, saying he had downloaded it from the internet. His family and lawyers say he has been denied a fair trial.

In 2008, an appeals court in Kabul commuted the death sentence to 20 years' imprisonment, a decision that was upheld by a tribunal of the Supreme Court last month.

Yaqoub Ibrahim, Kambakhsh's brother, said: "Unfortunately the Supreme Court has confirmed the 20-year prison sentence for my brother. We did not expect it at all."

The decision came to light only when the Attorney General's office issued orders to the northern province of Balkh to enforce the sentence, Afzal Nooristani, Kambakhsh's defence lawyer, said in an interview: "I was not allowed to talk with the judges and officials, which is a complete violation of law."

Kambakhsh's brother and his lawyer said they were dismayed because they had seen the Supreme Court as their last resort. Kambakhsh was originally sentenced after a trial lasting only minutes in which he was not allowed to defend himself. In the appeals court, an important student witness against him retracted his statement, but was ignored.

Kambakhsh's brother said: "This is the tragic level of justice in Afghanistan today. It is just a make-believe system of justice and humanitarianism. The reality is that the Afghan government and judiciary, although supported by the US, the UN, the EU and other democracies worldwide, is morally bankrupt."



Forty lashes and jail for a 75-year-old woman who 'mingled' with two men

ISLAM and barbarity are inextricably linked – and nowhere is this more apparent than in Saudi Arabia, where a court recently sentenced a 75-year-old Syrian woman to 40 lashes, four months' imprisonment and deportation from the kingdom for "mingling" with two men.

According to the Saudi daily newspaper *Al Watan*, Khamisa Mohammed Sawadi's woes began last year when a member of the religious police entered her house in the city of Al-Chamli and found her with two unrelated men – Fahd and Hadian.

Fahd told the policeman that he had the right to be there, because Sawadi had breast-fed him as a baby and he was therefore considered to be a son to her in Islam. Fahd, 24, added that his friend Hadian was escorting him as he delivered bread for the elderly woman. The policeman then arrested both men.

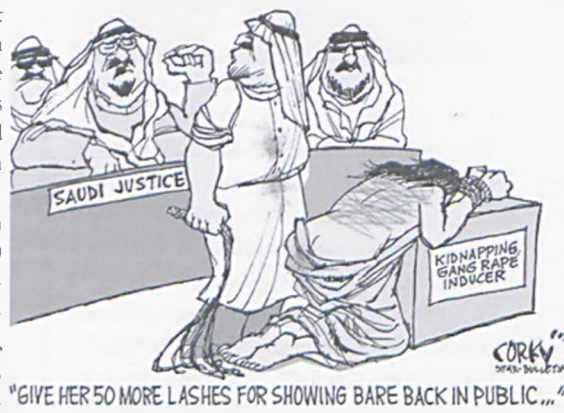
In 2007, a 19-year-old gang-rape victim in the Saudi city of Qatif was sentenced to 200 lashes and six months in prison for meeting with an unrelated male. The seven rapists, who had abducted the woman and man, received sentences ranging from ten months to five years in prison. The case sparked in-

ternational outrage, and Saudi King Abdullah subsequently pardoned the woman and the unrelated male.

Saudi Arabia follows a strict interpretation of Islam called Wahhabism and punishes unrelated men and women who are caught "mingling".

Al Watan obtained the court's verdict and reported that it was partly based on the testimony of the religious police. In his ruling, the judge said it had been proved that Fahd was not Sawadi's son through breastfeeding.

Fahd was sentenced to four months in prison



and 40 lashes; Hadian was sentenced to six months in prison and 60 lashes.

Sawadi told the newspaper that she planned to appeal against the sentence.

The case has sparked anger in Saudi Arabia. Saudi women's rights activist Wajeha Al-Huwaider told CNN "It's made everybody angry because this is a grandmother. Forty lashes – how can she handle that pain? You cannot justify it."

The actions of the religious police have come under increased scrutiny in Saudi Arabia recently, as more and more Saudis urge that the commission's powers be limited.

Earlier this year, the religious police detained two male novelists for questioning after they tried to get the autograph of a female writer, Halima Muzfar, at a book fair in Riyadh, the capital of the kingdom.

Al-Huwaider added: "This is the problem with the religious police ... watching people and thinking they're bad all the time. It has nothing to do with religion. It's all about control. And the more you spread fear among people, the more you control them. It's giving a bad reputation to the country."

BT shuts down barmy anti-Semitic website

A website operated by a bunch of crackpot Catholics has been shut down by BT for its anti-Semitic content. It is understood to be the first time that a website in Britain has been shut down for inciting religious hatred.

The site, www.catholicvoice.co.uk, is the brainchild of Timothy Johnson from Sheffield, a radical Catholic, who told the *Sunday Herald* last month that he had been the subject of a "smear" campaign. He and his supporters say the action highlights a growing campaign against critics of the actions of extremist Jews and is a breach of free debate in a free society.

In this respect he is absolutely right. Mediawatchwatch, the internet blog established to monitor attacks of freedom of expression, observed that Catholic Voice (catchy strapline "Combating the antichristic conspiracy of the Khazar 'Jew' supremacists in honour of the Sacred Head of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Seat of Divine Wisdom") "is indeed amazingly anti-Semitic – but in such an extreme fashion that it is more likely to provoke gales of laughter, rather than hatred."

One article on the site is entitled *Various*

Nations Will be Annihilated, and begins "So spoke Our Lady of Fatima in 1917, warning us of the many temporal punishments that would ensue should the ecclesiastical hierarchy spurn Her heavenly requests. Ninety years have now passed. Our blind, apostate hierarchy considers the Message of Fatima even more irrelevant to this century than to the last.

"As a consequence, all the nations of Christian Europe, long since internally corrupted by Ashkenazi-Jew supremacism (via its gentile arm Freemasonry), are now set for extinction. Nations formed by Divine Providence over hundreds of years will formally fall to these Judeo-Mongols from Khazaria and their satanic federal Europe. Since these nations have rejected Christendom, Heaven will now give them over to Satandom."

The site was shut after John Mann, chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Committee on anti-Semitism, raised an early day motion supported by other MPs, including Glenda Jackson and Labour MP for Livingston Jim Devine.

Mann said the website was "vile and anti-Semitic" and "seeks to inspire hate against

the Jewish community amongst others."

He complained to BT subsidiary Plusnet, which hosts the site. BT would not discuss the specifics of why it had closed Catholic Voice, but confirmed it was the result of the complaint.

Mann said: "Those who are writing, commissioning and uploading vile hate speech should face the full force of the law."

He complained in particular about two statements on the websites. The first – "To call Jesus a Jew is blasphemy" – was the heading for an explosive theological essay on Christ's origins.

Mr Johnson claims the second – "Jews are followers of Satan" – has never appeared on the site.

The website recently defended Bishop Richard Williamson, the Catholic bishop who questioned whether millions of Jews died in Nazi gas chambers.

BT said in a statement: "We have a clear policy of refusing to work with people or businesses carrying out illegal activities or who make offensive statements. This is clearly the case with Catholic Voice and when we became aware of this site we terminated the hosting agreement."

“ We appeal to you to use this opportunity to advance your vision of a more inclusive and less divided America ”

Barack Obama urged to teach tolerance to US Boy Scouts

The Secular Coalition for America has written to President Obama, urging him to end discriminatory practices within the Boy Scout movement in the US.

Last month when the Obamas were set to formally accept the Honorary Presidencies of the Boy Scouts, and the Girl Scouts, respectively, the SCA urged him “to treat this as a teachable moment for the Scouts, and the country”.

The letter, signed by Ron Millar, Acting Director of the SCA, said:

“You and the First Lady have been invited to become Honorary Presidents of the Boy Scouts and Girls Scouts of America, respectively; this gives each of you an opportunity to advance our national conversation about diversity and tolerance.

“In recent months, many civil rights groups, ours included, have asked you to decline the traditional role of Honorary President of

the Boy Scouts because of the group’s official policies that discriminate against Americans who do not conform to its ‘traditional values’.

“In fact, in response to requests from Scout troops around the country to expand inclusion, the Boy Scouts’ Executive Board resolved in 2002 to formally prohibit participation by gays and non-theists, effectively institutionalizing discrimination against countless thousands of American children.

“Because the Secular Coalition’s mission is respect and visibility for non-theistic viewpoints and those who hold them, our concern is particularly the Boy Scouts’ exclusion of young Americans who do not hold a god belief or have questions about faith.

“At the Boy Scouts’ Legal Issues website (which responds to all the litigation their anachronistic policies invite) the organization states: ‘Boy Scouts of America believes that an atheist or agnostic is not an appropriate role model of the Scout Oath and Law for adolescent boys. Because of Scouting’s methods and beliefs, Scouting does not accept atheists and agnostics as members or adult volunteer leaders’.

“By contrast, the Girl Scout promise reads, ‘On my honor, I will try: To serve God* and my country’. The asterisked note explains that ‘God’ can be replaced, in the spirit of religious

tolerance, with ‘whatever word’ these girls and young women feel represents their beliefs. Further, rather than discourage questions, the Girl Scouts celebrate an annual World Thinking Day; the current triennial theme is how to change the world!

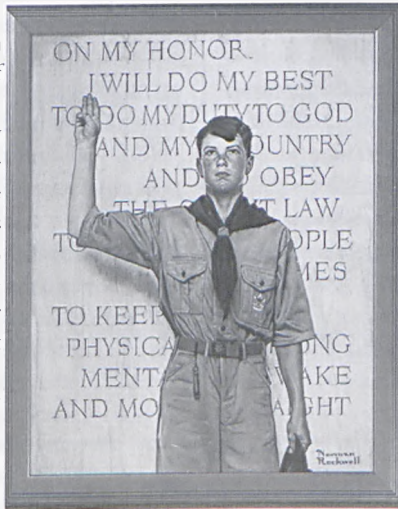
“Mr President, you have spoken repeatedly and eloquently about ending discrimination, perhaps most famously in your Philadelphia speech on race. You have also decried inequality based on gender, once saying the idea of your daughters suffering gender discrimination made your blood boil. At your White House website, you identify discrimination – against gays and lesbians in the armed forces, women and seniors in the workplace, people with disabilities in schools and even small farmers in the agricultural sector – as a scourge your administration will work to eliminate.

“And yet by all accounts, you will soon become the symbolic leader of an organization which unapologetically discriminates against American citizens based on its backward and inaccurate view that those of us who have no religion have no values. This is a view we are confident you do not personally hold.

“We therefore appeal to you to use this opportunity to advance your vision of a more inclusive and less divided America. You could begin by accepting the honorary role only on the condition that the Boy Scouts agree to review their discriminatory policies. Additionally, perhaps you and the First Lady, in your respective capacities as Honorary Presidents of the Boy and Girl Scouts, could arrange for a summit in which leaders from the two organizations discuss expanding access to their valuable programs so more young Americans might benefit from them.

“Finally, we hope the First Lady would use her position to spotlight the Girl Scouts’ tremendous success in actively embracing diversity.

“We understand that, as President, you must choose your battles carefully. But we also hope you will choose, in the end, to lead the Boy Scouts as you lead our nation, with the vision and courage and ideals that earned you the office you now hold.”



US rabbi faces long jail sentence for abusing his daughter

AN ultra-Orthodox rabbi who cross-examined his own daughter at his sex-abuse trial in the US last month has been convicted of molesting her as a child.

A Brooklyn federal jury convicted 59-year-old Israel Weingarten of five counts of traveling outside the country to have sex with a minor. He faces up to 50 years in prison when he’s sentenced by Judge John Gleeson on April 3.

The 27-year-old victim said she had been molested while living with her family in Hasidic communities in Belgium, and on trips to England and Israel.

Weingarten, a member of the ultra-Orthodox Satmar community in suburban Monsey, acted as his own lawyer during the trial, delivering a rambling opening statement in which he claimed he was being falsely accused by a daughter who rebelled against a strict upbringing.

Jurors sided with the victim, who turned her head and wept during cross-examination, but then lashed out at her father, saying from the stand: “My feeling from your molesting me was utmost fear and blackmail and years of torture ... Didn’t I get hit enough?”

After the verdict, the daughter said being questioned by her father was “like being molested again. I wish he wasn’t my father”.

The woman told jurors that once she grew up she left the faith and hoped “to forget everything that happened to me,” mindful that her father had warned her she “would never be able to prove it”.

But she went public at the urging of her mother, who was embroiled in a custody dispute with her father.

She told the FBI in 2003 that she was victimised since age 9. Prosecutors alleged Weingarten sexually abused her, sometimes on a daily basis, and moved the family around to help conceal his crimes.

Weingarten complained to the judge that he did not have time to prepare for the trial.

All unteachables are equal – but some are

WILLIAM HARWOOD ARGUES THAT ABANDONING A BELIEF IN THE LIGHT OF NEW EVIDENCE MAY BE EMOTIONALLY STRESSFUL, BUT IT IS BY NO MEANS IMPOSSIBLE – EXCEPT FOR UNTEACHABLES.

All humans resist attempts to refute or change their security beliefs. Not for three years after learning that 50 other virgin-born savior gods rose from the dead on the third day centuries and even millennia before Jesus, could I bring myself to acknowledge that what I now knew to be true was incompatible with what I was emotionally addicted to believing was true. Only then did I abandon the Cloud Cuckoo Land of religion for the real world of non-theism.

Of the world's 2.2 billion non-theists, I would guess that more than one billion are recovered god addicts. So abandoning a belief in the light of new evidence may be emotionally stressful, but it is by no means impossible – except for unteachables.

The factors that make one-sixth of the human race unteachable are varied and multifarious. If the exigencies that make Flat Earthers unteachable were prevalent among the general population, there would be far more than the 50 or 60 hardcore Flat Earthers who actually exist. The basis for the Flat Earthers' position is that they are biblical literalists. They are aware that their Bible states unequivocally in 14 places, and implies in 50 or 60 other places, that the earth is as flat as a dinner plate; so in order to believe that the Bible is revealed truth they have to brainwash themselves that the earth is flat.

Yet 99 percent of Bible addicts who likewise tout their fantasy novel as revealed truth are able to harmonize that belief with the reality that the earth is not flat. In contrast, proponents of Intelligent Design have to rationalize that, since the discoveries of three centuries of scientists are incompatible with the cosmology of the opening chapters of Genesis, it is the scientists who are wrong. As intellectually handicapped as such thinking is, it at least avoids the doublethink of the Flat Earthers.

All contrary-to-fact belief systems have their unteachables. Incurable believers in homeopathy, naturopathy, acupuncture, and various other forms of placebo therapy, whose symptoms diminished after receiving an "alternative" medicine, cannot be told that they got better either because the patient's belief in the treatment cured him (placebo), or because 80 percent of all ailments heal spontaneously

with no treatment whatsoever. Trying to tell a believer in pseudomedicine that it was not a dose of distilled water diluted to the point where it contained not even a single molecule of the allegedly therapeutic substance that cured him, is like trying to tell an infant that it was not Mommy's "kissing it better" that made a pain go away.

Believers in the paranormal are not all unteachable. I once believed, on the basis of the published claims of Dr Joseph Rhine of Duke University, that ESP had been proven to exist. Only when I took my first statistics course as an undergraduate did I realize that Rhine's incompetence in statistics had caused him to claim better-than-chance results for experiments whose results were in fact equal to chance. Since then, critical examinations of the

heads it's a sin and tails it's a virtue, and all god worshippers are equally unteachable – unless they learn to recognize religion itself as fantasy. But while every religion has its share of unteachables, it is an observable reality that the reason an addict is unteachable varies from sect to sect, cult to cult, and religion to religion (pardon triple tautology).

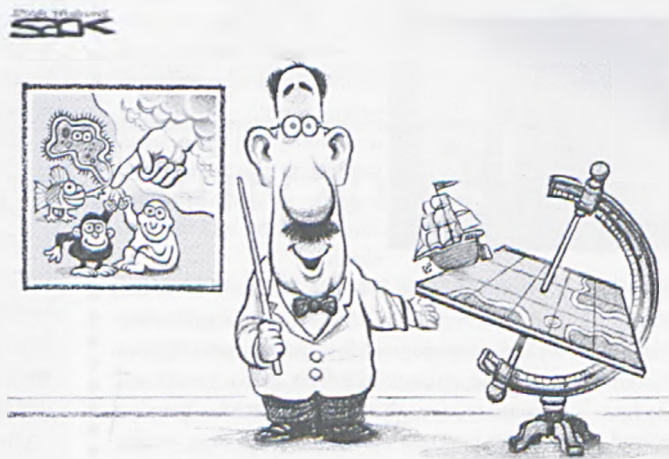
It has been my observation that Catholics, adherents of the largest contrary-to-fact belief system on earth, with 0.6 billion addicts, have the same percentage of unteachables as the smallest such system. But the reason they are unteachable differs from the reason a Seventh Day Adventist, for example, is unteachable. Trying to teach a Catholic priest that no god whose moral evolution exceeds that of Adolf Hitler would require him to permit a

preventable homicide rather than pass on information obtained under a vow of confidentiality, would be like trying to teach a war-dog that killing designated targets is no longer permitted. Trying to teach any Catholic that a book featuring a talking snake and a talking donkey is as much a fantasy novel as *Wind in the Willows*, can be compared with trying to teach a mule-jack to mount a she-ass. In contrast, trying to teach the same thing to a Seventh Day Adventist is better compared with trying to teach Helen Keller the color of water. In the former case, there is at least a degree of stubborn cuss-

edness. But in the latter, even the ability to grasp what is being taught is absent.

Does that mean that SDAs are stupider than Catholics, or more brainwashed? It does not. It means simply that the auto-reinforced brainwashing of SDAs, as well as Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Amish and other Anabaptists, comes as close as can be achieved to the level of the *Manchurian Candidate*, although of course the Pavlovian conditioning depicted in that science-fiction book and movie simply does not exist (the CIA has tried it, with no success whatsoever).

A Canadian politician was laughed out of the office of Leader of the Opposition, not because of his creationist belief that *The Flintstones* was a documentary, a belief shared by all of the Americans who voted to make Mike Huckabee the Republican presiden-



—So MUCH FOR TODAY'S BIOLOGY LESSON ON "INTELLIGENT DESIGN." TURNING NOW TO THE SUBJECT OF "INTELLIGENT GEOGRAPHY..."

claims of parapsychologists by the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) have shown that every single allegedly better-than-chance result was achieved by incompetent methodology that did not eliminate non-paranormal explanations. Given how long parapsychologists have been seeking and not finding the single replicable positive result that would prove the reality of ESP beyond dispute, the point has been reached where absence of evidence is indeed evidence of absence. Nonetheless, hardcore believers, particularly those whose bread and butter would be threatened if they acknowledged that ESP does not exist, remain as unteachable as any Flat Earther, homeopath, or theologian.

All religions teach that right and wrong are whatever their paramount deity says they are,

are more equal than others

BE EMOTIONALLY STRESSFUL BUT IT IS BY NO MEANS IMPOSSIBLE

tial nominee, and a significant percentage of those who voted to make Sarah Palin Vice-President, but because of his observable behavior motivated by that belief. The firewall the politician has installed around his brain to lock out reality is not intrinsically more impenetrable than the similar reality-blocker auto-installed in the current Catholic pope. But whereas Pope Ratzinger could overcome his unteachable status if circumstances made it politically expedient, the politician has for all practical purposes undergone an irreversible brain amputation. Both are unteachable, and all unteachables are equal. But as a George Orwell oligarch in *Animal Farm* pontificated, some are more equal than others.

All moral cowards are equal, regardless of their specific religion, because without an afterlife belief to overcome their terror of death, they would have to be institutionalized and diapered.

Trying to teach them that the character mistranslated as "God" in English Bibles is the most sadistic, evil, insane serial killer in all fiction, would be like trying to teach Uncle Tom

that Simon Legree was not a nice man. All unteachables are equal, but moral cowards are more equal than any others.

As for Scientologists, a far lower percentage are unteachable than in any other form of mind slavery, as can be deduced by comparing the observable reality that the cult's membership has never exceeded 50,000, with its First Prophet's admission that the number of potential recruits the cult attempted to brain-wash amounted to seven million.

But trying to make incurable Scientologists realize that Ron Hubbard's science-fiction scenario, invented because its founder recognized that religion is "where the money is", has no more reality than the world of *Dune* or *Oz* or *Wonderland*, is like trying to teach the author of a book authenticating alien abductions that an interviewee who keeps a straight face while describing how she was diddled by an extraterrestrial is capable of lying. Unteachable Scientologists and unteachable UFOlogists are equal. But some are more unteachable than others.

Blasphemy-busters win Secularists of the Year prize



Dr Evan Harris, left, and Lord Avebury

THE National Secular Society's annual prize for Secularist of the Year has been awarded jointly to Dr Evan Harris MP and Lord Avebury for their success in getting the blasphemy law abolished.

The prestigious prize was handed over by Professor Richard Dawkins at a glittering awards ceremony at the Imperial Hotel in central London on February 7.

Terry Sanderson, President of the NSS, said: "The abolition of the blasphemy law in 2008 was a major coup for the NSS and a great victory for everyone who values free speech. The ancient laws had not been used successfully since the 1970s, but there were efforts by Christian evangelicals to revive them, and a case was being considered even as the law was abolished."

Sanderson said that Dr Evan Harris and Lord Avebury – both Lib Dems – had engineered a clever parliamentary pincer movement that resulted in the Government being forced into bringing forward its own amendment to abolish the law.

Having elicited the promise from Ministers in the House of Commons that the law would be abolished, Lord Avebury, who has been campaigning against the blasphemy law for decades, then brought forward his own amendment to ensure that the Government could not renege on its commitment.

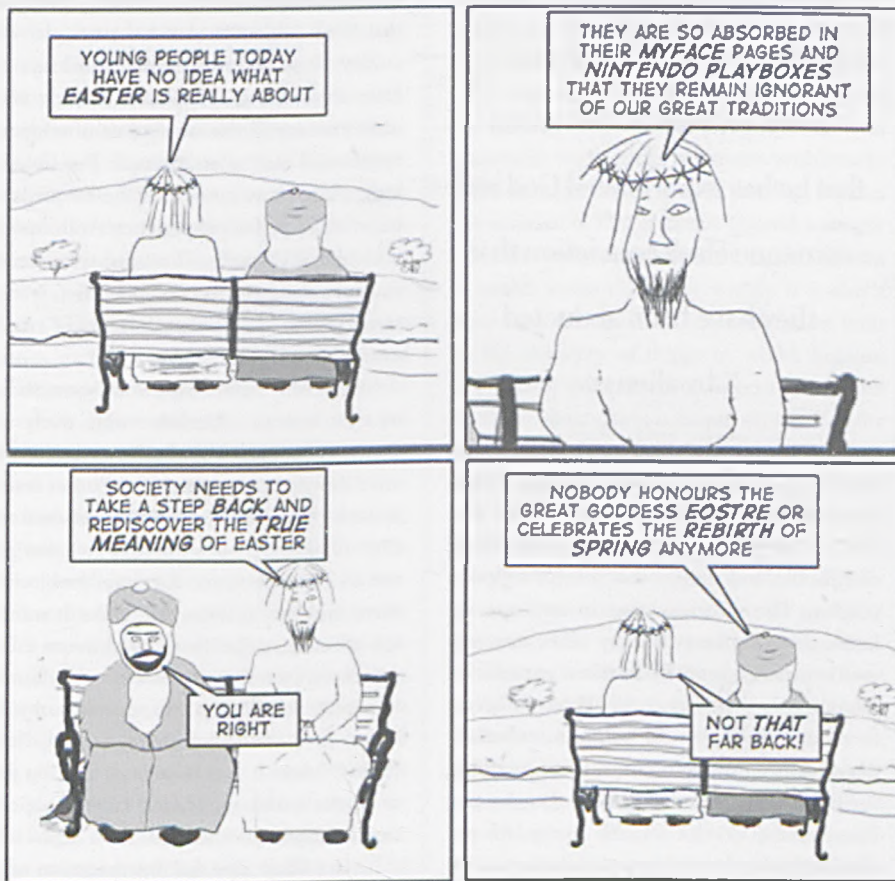
The ancient law was called the common law offence of blasphemous libel, and was widely thought to be incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.

Despite this, the Government had not been keen to abolish it, we believe because of fear of discomforting the Established Church. They see abolition as an attack on their privileged position and a possible first step towards disestablishment.

Ariane Sherine, the young journalist who inspired the atheist bus campaign, was also given a special award for her high-profile achievement.

When blasphemy was finally abolished last year, the NSS organised a fun-filled "Bye-Bye Blasphemy" party in central London to celebrate its passing.

Jesus & Mo



REVIEW

The Big Questions in Science and Religion

Professor John Radford examines the views of ‘moderate and courteous’ theologian Keith Ward

Those criticising religion are often accused by theologians of not understanding “modern theology”. Keith Ward is Regius Professor of Divinity Emeritus at Oxford, an ordained C of E priest, author of more than 20 books, and presumably a modern theologian. He is quoted by *Wikipedia* thus: “I am a born-again Christian. I can give a precise day when Christ came into my life with his power and love. He did not make me a saint. But he did make me a forgiven sinner, liberated and renewed, touched by divine power and given the immense gift of an intimate sense of the personal presence of God. I have no difficulty in saying that I wholeheartedly accept Jesus as my personal Lord and Saviour”.

One’s natural reaction to this is to dismiss the fellow as a nutter, but, fortunately perhaps, I did not see it before I read his book. Having done that, it seemed worthwhile to attempt an analysis.

The big questions are, briefly: 1. How did the universe begin; is there an ultimate explanation for it? 2. How will it end, does it have a goal or purpose? 3. Is evolution compatible with religion, and the “cruelty and waste” of it with a good God? 4. Do the laws of nature exclude miracles? 5. What is the nature of space and time, and can temporal actions be free? 6. Can we still talk of a soul, and is life after death possible? 7. Is science the only sure way to truth, and can religious experience count as evidence? 8. How does morality relate to religion? 9. Are there any good science-based arguments for God? 10. Does science allow for revelation and divine action?

The author claims that while putting a case favourable to a religious point of view, he has also “presented the problematic points and the main opposing views as fairly as I can”. I think this is true. He is moderate and courteous in manner, as befits his church. But I find what I have often found in members of that body, a sort of modest, un-aggressive conviction that in the last resort is impervious to contrary reason

and evidence. I found myself frequently scribbling in the book, something I never normally do, noting what I considered *non-sequiturs*, false dichotomies, special pleadings, selective uses of evidence, attacks on straw men. I’ll mention just two, wrapped up in one claim. This is that those who report religious experiences, as in hearing the voice of supernatural beings etc, show no signs of mental abnormality. This is qualified by specifying “true” reports. Reports from those who do show such signs are presumably not true. This is a circular argument. But if it is accepted, it would appear that the religious persons do show such signs, namely hearing or seeing when there is no apparent external source. Both these are examples of *petitio principii*, the fallacy of assuming the truth of what is asserted.

There seems little difference,
as far as proof is concerned,
between Ward’s conviction
that he has experienced God and
someone else’s conviction that
they have been abducted
by aliens

Each “big question” is argued in detail, and there is no space to treat them individually, but underlying them all are two main themes. The first is that science and religion are entirely compatible, and indeed that science supports religion. The second is that in any case we know that religion is true by other than scientific means, essentially by direct experience. Ward argues that science, by which he seems to mean mainly physical science, is essentially materialistic, insisting on objective, observable, verifiable facts, and nothing else. But, he says, first, scientists do not actually do this, for example physics depends on postulating unob-

servables to explain what is observed. Second, there are facts, such as historical ones, that cannot be directly observed. Third, there are other kinds of facts, especially those of personal experience such as with music, which cannot be measured, or verified by others. Such experiences imply an “other reality”, which can be conceived as “Ultimate Reality”, or God. My first comment is that I myself do not regard science as an agent which can insist on anything. Rather, it is an approach to knowledge, which has found objectivity, replicability, testability and so on the most productive way. Scientists certainly accept unobservables (such as gravity), but try to tie them to what can be observed, not postulate them unnecessarily (Occam’s famous razor), and to derive testable conclusions from them. This is not confined to the physical sciences. Historians, psychologists, anthropologists, prefer it, while recognising that their subject matter has particular difficulties. It is noteworthy that Ward says very little about these disciplines. History, which must encompass the whole past of religion, is mentioned only as an example. Psychology is little more than surveys of the frequency of belief and religious experience. Anthropology, which of all disciplines has most systematically studied religious practice and belief, is effectively restricted to a curt dismissal of two papers by one author.

All of these do attempt, with some success, to treat human experience objectively. Further, it is questionable whether artistic experience shows the existence of an “other reality”. It could just as well be a purely personal reaction. The art (visual, musical, etc) that gives rise to the experience is certainly objectively there, and the qualities that make it more or less effective can be investigated, as can the experiences, even though these remain ultimately private. It is difficult to see what objective events give rise to an experience of “other reality”. And if it does exist, it is a big jump to equate it with the Judaeo-Christian God or the multitude of other gods.

In fact Ward says that interpretation of the

experience is culture-bound. Non-theistic religions regard it quite differently, presumably with just as much justification. This seems at odds with his own profession of faith, and with the doctrines of the church he serves. Is the enlightenment Buddhists seek somehow Jesus in a different hat, or halo? His answer is apparently yes. However different they seem, the experiences are all of the same "Ultimate Reality".

This leads us to the second theme. Ward says that without religious experience, that is a personal conviction of contact with God or Ultimate Reality, there would be no religion. This may in some sense be true, but it raises a host of questions. Religions involve far more than specific experiences of the "divine". For the vast majority of people, religion has always been simply part of a total social structure, one which accepts gods as part of the world we live in, and which provides rules and solutions for everyday life and its problems. It is not clear that any of this depends on anything like Ward's "sense of the personal presence of God". His answer is that it derives from that sense, given to exceptional individuals whom the rest trust and follow. Which leads to, second, estimates of the frequency of such experiences, generally about a third of the population, though this depends on the questions asked. The reason, according to Ward, is that most humans are flawed, which perhaps derives from the idea of original sin. But the "flaw" is argued merely from the absence of the experience, another circular argument.

Third, there is in fact very little systematic data about such experiences. There are collections of many thousands of personal anecdotes, but there is no agreement that all experiences are basically the same, for example the spirit journey of a shaman, the Hindu Brahman and St Teresa's (or Keith Ward's) relationship with Christ. There are frequently reported characteristics, such as a conviction of certainty and importance, but some of these tend to make objectivity more difficult, for example the experiences are typically brief, often unexpected, not replicable to order, and said to be ultimately inexpressible. There is often strong disagreement as to whether the experience is a "true" one (especially in the Roman Catholic Church). Ward's argument here is that true divine experiences result in a personality dramatically changed for the better. But, fourth, this too is questionable. No data are offered on the frequency of such changes. There is no real evidence that the experience is causal; it might be a side effect of the changes, if such there are. Or it might be that particular personalities are prone to moral development and to mystical



experiences. (One wonders whether Ward's friends noticed him morally much better after he met Jesus.) Then again, what is "better"? Looking at some of the more famous religious leaders, they actually seem a pretty mixed bag – Jesus, Mohammed, Joseph Smith, John Wesley, Savaronola, assorted saints, one might add Aleister Crowley (who certainly reported analogous experiences and came to regard himself as a god), David Koresh of Waco notoriety, and numerous others – they don't appear to me as all paragons of what I would term virtue. Of course Ward can easily refute this by arguing (a) that the bad ones are not true and (b) only God can say which is good. And fifth, while one can readily accept that the individual has experienced something dramatic and personally convincing, it remains problematic what the experience is of. If you like, what is the cause of it. The evidence quoted is simply what the individual feels it to mean, and this, as noted, varies extremely widely. It is also a poor basis for certainty. There seems no limit to the absurdity of things in which humans can believe with absolute sincerity, and even everyday observation is frequently false (eg the well demonstrated fallibility of eye witnesses). Ward acknowledges all this but rejects the conclusion. Some people have experienced God and that is that.

Following from the "good" effects of religious experience, and the intangible nature of both scientific variables and human qualities of thinking and feeling, Ward argues that God or "Ultimate Reality" is non-physical and unembodied, a "spirit" which is "pure goodness", or "pure intelligence". I have great difficulty in seeing to what such terms could refer. As a psychologist, I do not think of goodness, intelligence and so on as entities, but as quali-

ties or descriptions. Describing a person as intelligent, or good, is an evaluation of their thoughts and behaviour. Intelligent thought, for example, achieves its aims quickly and efficiently, grasps relationships, and adapts to changing circumstances. It is not a "thing" that the individual possesses. "Pure intelligence" is a meaningless phrase. One might as well speak of "pure speed". Further, while thoughts and feelings can certainly be said to exist, and are not to be simply equated with activity of the brain and body, no-one has yet shown that they can exist without such activity. Ward, in common with most religious theory, claims that they do. Second, what is the evidence that this God/Reality is good? By "good" Ward seems to mean something like "beneficial to human beings", while also fulfilling a divine purpose.

But then there is the ancient problem of theodicy: many things that happen, presumably by the will of God, or at least not stopped by it, are clearly terrible, such as natural disasters. Ward's answer here is twofold. One is that God is constrained by the nature of the universe he has created, the other is that we cannot know how things will turn out in God's own time. What seems to us evil may be "redeemed", and in some way ultimately good (the model, I take it, is the Crucifixion). I don't find these arguments very convincing. I think that young children drowned by a tsunami is bad, full stop. It was bad if there was a harmless preacher who died on a cross 2,000 years ago. But there are further complications. One is, who decides what is good? How can we say that God is good unless we think he is? God seems subject to human judgment. If the answer is that God has given us the capacity to judge "correctly" then the thing seems to become circular

The Big Questions in Science and Religion

(again). God is good because he does good things, as defined by himself, and as judged by us according to his will, and good things are those done (or approved) by God.

God is also the creator of everything that is (in passing, what we call a "miracle" is simply God behaving in a way we don't expect). Presumably this is also true of Ultimate Reality, though in what sense I don't understand. But this seems yet another circle. Why do things exist, and are as they are? Because God wills it so. How do we know he wills it? Because they are as they are. Indeed, the concept of God is infinitely adaptable to fit any circumstances or objections. To me, this is because it is the creation of human minds, and not linked to any observable facts or testable conclusions. That seems to leave us with a hypothesis of which we have, like Laplace, no need. But for Ward, as for many theologians, God is outside the scope of science. Indeed God (or Ultimate Reality) is essentially unknowable by the human mind, which to me compounds the uncertainty. But to Ward, it provides the certainty that God exists.

I would also suggest that while scientists may not be able to disprove the existence of a non-testable Creator, scientific knowledge does make extremely unlikely some concepts, such as life after death, which are intrinsic to most religions. Resurrection and reincarnation are impossible without it. Ward falls back on the "soul" which (like God) is supposed to exist independently of any material substrate.

Keith Ward has had certain experiences which he feels profoundly are of God or Ultimate Reality, whatever these are. The problem with this is that while it is certainly evidence, it is not very good evidence by the usual criteria of evidence as accepted in common usage, or technically in law or science. Ward discounts this on the

grounds that revelatory experience is a different form of, or route to, knowledge. But this, as far as I can see, reduces it to mere individual assertion. There seems little difference, as far as proof is concerned, between Ward's conviction that he has experienced God and someone else's conviction that they have been abducted by aliens. An unknown number of other people have had experiences which may or may not be the same, even though many of them are certainly described quite differently. They may or may not have had an effect on the behaviour of some of these people, which may or may not have made them morally better, in the opinion of Keith Ward and some others.

At the same time, many other people, lacking such experiences, are equally morally good, while some in both categories are less so. It all seems a rather convoluted attempt to justify personal convictions. A basic one is that life and the universe must somehow have a purpose, and that this is the ultimate explanation of them. Ward specifically claims that a teleological explanation of the universe is the only real one. We must say what it is all for. What the human race is for, is to advance towards union with God or the supreme goodness. Research suggests that for many people, this and a "scientific", non-purposive, explanation are alternative preferences. The more strongly the one is held, the less strongly the other, and vice versa. What causes the individual preference is not yet clear. As I see it, purpose is one sort of explanation, which is appropriate to some phenomena, for example a good deal of human behaviour. To the question "why did you go to the shop?" the answer, "to buy some eggs", is a sensible explanation (though it might not be the true or full explanation). To the question "why were you late for work?" the answer "because the train broke down" is a perfectly adequate non-teleological

explanation. Most natural phenomena do not have purposive explanations. To the question "why do human beings exist?" the answer "to advance towards an ultimate reality of supreme goodness" seems largely a personal bias. It satisfies some people, but not others. And it does seem rather selfish of God to create suffering humanity just to watch us struggle.

It has been plausibly argued by anthropologists that there is a natural tendency to seek explanations in personal terms, that is both with reference to ourselves (we see the sun move across the sky when actually we are moving as the earth revolves), and in attributing intention to natural events (God sends the rain, or Poseidon the earthquake). Psychologists, for going on a century, have studied the way in which children progress from a self-oriented, subjective view of the world and themselves, limited to immediate appearances, and infer purpose where there is none, to a more objective one. Scientific method enables us to see which sort of explanation is better in each case. I think it also shows that there is, so far, no evidence for a purposive or non-natural explanation of the universe and ourselves, and this line of thought seems to me preferable to depending on faith or revelation. Keith Ward thinks the opposite.

As for all this being "modern theology", the notion of religious experience as unique and requiring no justification is relatively recent, emerging in the 18th century. But much of the book seems older theology in modern dress. Instead of the robes of the Church Fathers, or of mediaeval scholastics, it wears a (perhaps ill-fitting) laboratory white coat. The scholastics in particular devoted immense energy and intelligence to finding reasoned proofs of what they already knew to be true. This was actually their undoing, since reason in the end showed the inadequacy of belief as a foundation for knowledge.

Keith Ward's arguments are much less elaborate than those of the scholastics; he quotes science and religions unknown to them, but the basic themes are essentially the same. In Ward's version, science and religion are at one. This can be shown, if you select the science, but particularly because you can adapt the concept of God to suit, since there are no objective criteria to test him against. Religion is true, if you rely on individual convictions that it is, equate widely varying reports of experiences as meaning the same thing, and discount wild variations in doctrine.

I am aware that I have neglected many of Keith Ward's arguments, but there I must leave it, perhaps not soon enough.

Religion on the wane in the US

AMERICA is a less Christian nation than it was 20 years ago, and Christianity is not losing out to other religions, but primarily to a rejection of religion altogether, a recent survey found.

According to the American Religious Identification Survey from Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. 75 percent of Americans call themselves Christian – a drop from 86 percent in 1990.

In the survey, one in five Americans said they have no religious identity or did not answer the question, and more than one in four said they do not expect to have a religious funeral.

Many Americans, it seems, have been completely turned off religion as a result of a rise in evangelical Christianity. That's the view of Mark Silk of Trinity College.

"In the 1990s, it really sank in on the American public generally that there was a long-lasting 'religious right' connected to a political party, and that turned a lot of people the other way", he said. He was referring to the link between the Republican Party and groups such as the Moral Majority and Focus on the Family.

Dilutions of grandeur

JANE KEANE reports on the latest row about homeopathy

In Oscar Wilde's fabulously funny *The Canterbury Ghost*, the apparition haunting Canterbury Chase is both mortified and angry when the new owners of the property – American clergyman Hiram B Otis and his family – flatly refuse to be fazed by his antics. The ghost of Sir Simon de Canterville is particularly miffed by Mrs Otis offering him a bottle of Dr Dobell's Tincture when he appears to her looking distinctly off-colour.

"If it is indigestion, you will find it a most excellent remedy," says Mrs Otis – and the ghost "glared at her in fury, and began making preparations to turn himself into a large black dog ..."

A more recent case of fury over quack medicine came last month with the launch of Prince Charles' Duchy Herbals Detox Tincture, a snip at just £10 a bottle.

Nicknaming the range "Dodgy Originals" after the Prince's Duchy Originals brand, Professor Edzard Ernst, Britain's top expert on complementary medicine, said the tincture relied on "superstition and quackery" rather than science.

He added that using herbal potions to detoxify the body was "implausible, unproven and dangerous".

The tincture was launched in February as part of the Prince's range of luxury organic products. Customers are advised to add a few drops of the dandelion and artichoke solution to a glass of water twice a day.

Combined with a balanced diet, it is claimed, the product will help the body cleanse itself of "toxins" and aid digestion.

But Prof Ernst, a complementary medicine researcher at Exeter University and a former homeopathic doctor, said there was no evidence that the tincture works.

He said: "I know everything about artichoke that there is to know. There is a hint it might lower cholesterol to a very minor degree, but that's all. And there is nothing to know about dandelion. They say they have produced it to the highest standards, and that may be so. But high quality nonsense is still nonsense."

He went further: "Prince Charles contributes to the ill-health of the nation by pretending we can all over-indulge and then take his tincture and be fine again."

"Under the banner of holistic and integrative healthcare he promotes a 'quick fix' and outright quackery. Prince Charles and his advisors seem to deliberately ignore science and prefer to rely on make-believe and superstition.

"Prince Charles thus financially exploits a gullible public in a time of financial hardship. This comes from somebody who should

know better and from somebody who arguably should not be deluding the nation and contributing to its ill-health."

Prof Ernst added that those who do over-indulge should simply drink lots of water, take exercise and get some rest.

The Duchy Originals website states: "HRH The Prince of Wales... believes poor health does not exist in isolation, but is in fact a direct consequence of our lifestyles, cultures, communities and how we interact with our environments.

"He is passionate about adopting an integrated approach to health, as well as exploring how



safe, proven complementary therapies can work in conjunction with mainstream medicine."

A Duchy Originals spokesman said the tincture satisfied "all of the relevant sections of both UK and European food laws". Andrew Baker, the firm's chief executive officer said: "It is a natural aid to digestion and supports the body's natural elimination processes. It is not – and has never been described as – a medicine, remedy or cure for any disease."

He added: "Duchy Herbals Detox Tincture contains globe artichoke and dandelion which both have a long history of traditional use for aiding digestion."

Nelsons Organic Pharmacy, which makes the tincture for Duchy Originals, said that artichoke and dandelion had been used for hundreds of years to aid digestion.

The Prince has also drawn flak for his dotty support of homeopathic medicine. In 2006, Gerald Weissmann, American Editor-in-Chief of the *FASEB Journal*, wrote that "homeopathy – a therapeutic regimen unchanged since the Age of Mesmer – is making a comeback in the Age of Oprah".

In 1810, the founder of homeopathy, Christian Friedrich Samuel Hahnemann (1755–1843) rebuked Enlightenment medicine in a treatise called *The Organon of the Rational Art*

of Healing:

"The partisans of the old school of medicine flattered themselves that they could justly claim for it alone the title of 'rational medicine', because they alone sought for and strove to remove the cause of disease ... [but] the greatest number of diseases are of dynamic (spiritual) origin and dynamic (spiritual) nature, their cause is therefore not perceptible to the senses."

Weissmann's article – *Homeopathy: Holmes, Hogwarts, and the Prince of Wales* – pointed out that in May 2006, Prince Charles addressed the World Health Assembly in Geneva to argue for

homeopathy and its kindred therapies. He urged a return to remedies "rooted in ancient traditions that intuitively understood the need to maintain balance and harmony with our minds, bodies and the natural world." The Prince complained about modern biomedicine:

"It seems to be that in our ceaseless rush to modernize, many tried and tested methods which have shown themselves to be effective have been cast aside as old-fashioned or irrelevant to today's needs." News flashed around the world: "Charles at war with doctors". The Prince of Wales, whose oddball habit of "talking to plants" is widely mocked, has been at war with medical science for some time. In 1985,

he caused a stir by warning the British Medical Association that "the whole imposing edifice of modern medicine, for all its breathtaking successes is, like the celebrated Tower of Pisa, slightly off balance." Last year, said Weissmann, he funded a commission headed by a bank executive, "as lacking in scientific credentials as the Prince himself", to "look at the effectiveness, especially from a financial point of view, of integrated healthcare." The commission claimed that up to £480 million could be cut from the prescription drugs bill of Britain's National Health Service if ten percent of primary care physicians offered homeopathy as an alternative to standard drugs.

"Of course," wrote Weissmann, "had 20 percent of the docs offered rose-water to their patients, Britain could have saved a billion pounds."

British science struck back. Anticipating Prince Charles's sermon in Geneva, thirteen of Britain's most eminent physicians and scientists issued a widely quoted "Open Letter: Use of 'Alternative' Medicine in the NHS". The letter expressed concern over "ways in which unproven or disproved treatments are being encouraged for general use in Britain's National Health Service."

The signatories, who included three Fellows

Dilutions of grandeur

of the Royal Society, one Nobel Laureate (Sir James Black, FRS) and the son of another (Professor Gustav Born, FRS), cited the overt promotion of homeopathy by the NHS, including its official website. The Open Letter warned that "it would be highly irresponsible to embrace any medicine as though it were a matter of principle."

Their position was supported by an extensive meta-analysis of the efficacy of homeopathy in *The Lancet* which documented that homeopathic regimens were no better than placebo for a wide variety of ailments. (The Open Letter also concluded that homeopathy "is an implausible treatment for which over a dozen systematic reviews have failed to produce convincing evidence of effectiveness." They should know: Sir James's highly effective beta-blockers and H2 antagonists have kept more humans alive than any integrated crystal therapist, and if Gustav Born hadn't worked out platelet aggregation, we'd have missed the aspirin effect in heart disease.

As for the Prince's "financial point of view", Professor Michael Baum, another of the signatories, noted that Britain had spent £20-million refurbishing the Royal Homeopathic Hospital. Had that sum of money been spent on making available herceptin and aromatase inhibitors, it could have saved 600 lives a year in one health district alone.

Prince Charles was unfazed – on the day the Open Letter was published, he stopped at St Tydfil's Hospital in South Wales to watch alternative medicine at work. He accepted a "spiritual" crystal, as if he were Albus Dumbledore, headmaster of Hogwarts School, accepting the Philosopher's Stone.

Wrote Weissmann:

"Unlike Dumbledore, however, who only professed witchcraft and wizardry, Prince Charles called up every form of 'integrative therapy' against Alzheimer's disease. One notes that when Prince Charles and other fans of unproven or disproved medical practices use terms such as 'integrated therapy' or 'alternative medicine', they're following the lead of creationists who hide under the term 'intelligent design' – these are all convenient slogans that permit the credulous to con the gullible."

Weissman also pointed out that Prince Charles's activities have not been limited to the UK. In 2003, he authorised his US charity to fund a research fellowship at the National Institutes of Health's National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM).

"This unusual gift to an agency of the US government came after a private dinner at St James's Palace to which the Prince and Camilla Parker-Bowles had invited the clinical director of NCCAM, Marc Blackman, his wife, and

like-minded guests 'to discuss ideas and visions for complementary medicine'."

"The NIH," observed Weissmann, "seems happy with research on homeopathy and kindred therapies. Its website replies 'yes' to the question 'Is NCCAM funding research on homeopathy?' while admitting that 'Homeopathy is an area of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) that has seen high levels of controversy and debate, largely because a number of its key concepts do not follow the laws of science (particularly chemistry and physics)'."

The Center has expended much of its \$120-odd-million war chest to fund studies on chelation therapy, black cohosh, mushroom-induced immunopotentiality, and homeopathic dilutions of cadmium for prostate cancer. It recognises and explains in detail therapies based on "the life force" variously called "qi", "ki", "dosh", "prana", "etheric energy", "fohat", "orgone", "Odic force", "mana", and "homeopathic resonance".

"Never mind the laws of chemistry and physics: this sounds like a final exam at Hogwarts!" Weissmann declared, adding: "Hogwarts is certainly on the move! If the trend persists, perhaps MIT or Cal Tech will march in step with the medical schools and offer prizes for integrative alchemy or alternative engineering."

Farewell, Bill Simcock

We recently learned of the death last last year of an ardent *Freethinker* supporter, Bill Simcock, at the age of 89.

Bill spent much of his lifetime pursuing unfashionable causes, which in his final days he conceded ruefully had failed to win general support. Land-value taxation, Esperanto, humanism and vegetarianism were all close to his heart.

He was born in Dresden, a suburb of Longton in the Potteries, and like so many from Stoke-on-Trent had the compulsive habit of turning pieces of crockery over to see which pottery firm had produced them.

After service in the Royal Artillery during the second world war, he was home on leave in time to help his father stand as a Labour Party candidate in the 1945 general election.

He enrolled on the postwar emergency training programme for teachers. At a college situated on a converted American Air Force base in Bamber Bridge, Lancashire, he met his wife, Muriel. They were

married for 61 years.

Andrew Simcock, who informed us of his father's death, was one of their six children.

Amateur dramatics in Stoke-on-Trent and a teaching career followed, with 22 years as head teacher of Manifold primary school in Warslow, Staffordshire.

Bill was retired for almost 30 years, and devoted much of his time to teaching the international language Esperanto, which took him all over the world. He was always in demand as a pianist and organist and it was fitting that, despite his conversion to humanist views, he played the Douglas MacMillan Hospice organ at the morning service on the last Sunday of his life.

As a lifelong devotee of cinema, he frequently disagreed with conventional wisdom. Marlon Brando, for example, was a "terrible mumbler".

On his last trip abroad, to Vienna in 2005, he went on the trail of one of his favourite films, *The Third Man*, and was photographed standing on the same spot



as Orson Welles, in a cabin on the Prater big wheel, where he delivered one of his favourite speeches:

"In Italy for 30 years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder and bloodshed but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love and 500 years of democracy and peace. And what did that produce? The cuckoo clock."

Fear of Islam paralyses critics

An Australian archbishop and a British secularist speak out on the fear generated in Western societies by radical Islamists

Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, and Cardinal George Pell, the controversial Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, last month separately warned that the fear of being branded “Islamophobic” was preventing proper scrutiny and criticism of Islam in the West.

Sanderson, in an editorial in the NSS’s *Newsline*, said the UK Government was “paralysed with fear as extremism flourishes in ‘faith schools’.

“We’ve been telling the Government for years that Islamic schools in this country are simply academies of indoctrination. The Education Department wasn’t in a mood to listen, afraid that the ‘Muslim community’ would start whingeing again about ‘Islamophobia’.

“Now Ed Balls, the Education Minister, says he is ‘concerned’ that these schools are not preparing pupils for ‘life in wider British society’. Consequently, he has ordered Ofsted to investigate a small sample of independent faith schools to find out if they meet obligations to teach pupils about other religions and cultures.

“This apparent change of heart follows the recent publication of a report by think-tank Civitas which claimed some Islamic schools were promoting fundamentalist views.

“Naturally, the Association of Muslim Schools said that it would happily go along with the investigation, claiming it was ‘at the forefront of preparing children and young people to face the challenges of life in modern Britain’.”

Mohamed Mukadam, chairman of the Association of Muslim Schools, said: “I’ve yet to see any surveys or Ofsted reports that show big concerns about Muslim schools.”

“That,” said Sanderson, “is because — as Civitas also revealed — the Ofsted inspectors are terrified of criticising Muslim schools for fear of ‘causing offence’ and being labelled ‘Islamophobic’.

“Of course, all things are relative and what some people would regard as reasonable behaviour in a ‘faith school’ (forcing girls to wear head coverings, denying girls swimming lessons or sport, spending an inordinate amount of the school day studying the Koran, denying evolution and promoting creationism) other people would regard as extremism ...”

The Civitas report says that “Music, chess and cricket are just three things banned in some Muslim schools in the UK. Others are drama, dance, sport, Shakespeare, and, in some cases, any aspect of Western culture whatever. According to the management committee of London’s Madani Secondary Girls’ School, this is because ‘our children are exposed to a culture that is in opposition with almost everything Islam stands for’. The response to this sense of danger is often to forbid outright any kind of relationship with non-Muslims: ‘Allah has warned us in the Koran, do not befriend the kuffaar. The Jews and Christians will never be content with you until you follow their way,’ says Riyadhul Haq, a teacher in Kidderminster.”

Said Sanderson: “The Madani Girls’ School is part of the state sector, funded by you and me (and the aforementioned Mohammed Mukadam just happens to be its head teacher). It has now removed the offending sentence quoted above from its website, which is not to say it has disowned the sentiments.

“Mr Mukadam has a history of moving the goalposts to suit his agenda. His response to the Civitas report was to say that it promoted

‘distrust’. But distrust is something that we should all feel towards Mr Mukadam’s campaign to separate Muslim children further from the mainstream of society.

“Unfortunately, Ed Balls, like the Government as a whole, isn’t likely to have the guts to offer a real challenge to this dangerous development that is happening right in front of our eyes in the full glare of daylight. We predict that this investigation, like all the others concerning ‘faith schools’, will come to nothing.”

Meanwhile, on a visit to the UK last month, Cardinal Pell said that the West had become scared to criticise Islam and accepts death threats by Muslim extremists as normal.

The outspoken cardinal said that laws intended to promote tolerance were being used to stifle debate, which was “fermenting intolerance under the surface”.

In a speech at Oxford University, he said: “Many in the West have grown used to practising self-censorship when it comes to Islam, just as we seem to accept that ex-Muslims who criticise Islam and extremism, such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, require round-the-clock police protection.

“You can be persecuted for hate speech if you discuss violence in Islam, but there is little fear of a hate-speech prosecution for Muslim demonstrators with placards reading ‘Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas’.”

The fear the British Government has of offending Muslims was typified by its cowardly knee-jerk banning of Dutch MP Geert Wilders (See *Freethinker*, February.) The Government’s refusal to allow him into the UK so outraged *Freethinker* subscriber Keith Bell that he wrote to the Dutch Foreign Office “expressing my anger”. He received this response from Marjanne de Kwaasteniet, Director, Western and Central Europe Department:

“With reference to your letter of 11 Feb to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Maxime Verhagen, I should like to point out that the Dutch government has repeatedly asked the British authorities to reconsider their decision of 10 February to refuse entry to the UK to Mr Geert Wilders, a member of the Dutch parliament. Since the decision of the British authorities was directed against Mr Wilders personally, it is now up to Mr Wilders himself to appeal against the ruling.”

In an e-mail to the *Freethinker*, Bell said: “What I didn’t know and presumably some agency such as *The Times* must have known is that the Dutch govt ‘repeatedly asked the British authorities’. It strikes me as considerably over the top for the British Government to dismiss repeated protests, in a matter of what is really only of symbolic importance.

“To dismiss them from a close ally, probably our closest in the EU, is outrageous! There has to be something more than meets the eye. Is it that, from surveillance, our intelligence services knew of the kind of nasty protest planned, as there was for the British regiment recently returned from Basra?

“If it is to do with that sort of thing, it would have been a very dangerous delimiting of a British government’s freedom of action.

“I hardly need say, I shall be sending a copy of the letter to my MP, with slightly different worded comment but to the same effect. We really have to know whether our freedoms depend on whether there will or will not be an organised Muslim protest on an issue.” FT

points of view...

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DARWIN'S BURIAL

EDWARD Tuddenham (*Points of View*, March) quotes Darwin as saying that he wanted to be buried at Downe. He was. It was only his corpse that was carted off to Westminster.

Darwin himself was electrical and chemical activities in the brain of a body that to some extent helped his mind to understand the world around him and allowed other people to recognise him.

So he is safely at Downe House and in our heads.

I hope that block of stone in Westminster Abbey represents an embarrassed recognition by the Establishment that he was probably correct.

Peter Arnold
Alderney

BBC AND RELIGION

I HAVE just been listening to a debate on the BBC World Service where Professor Colin Blakemore responded to questions. I was amazed to hear almost every contributor on air, from so many different countries, complain that Christians and Muslims were treated with undue deference and non-believers subjected to prejudice.

A common complaint was Muslims stopping work five times a day to pray while others had to cover for them.

What amazed me was the lack of support for religion. I suppose I have grown used to the local BBC and its subservience to its religious mafia.

Denis Watkins
Wales

A "religious affairs correspondent" keeps popping up on BBC news to report on some story with a supernatural dimension, so why isn't there a "non-religious affairs correspondent" to cover atheist items of interest?

So much for "BBC impartiality"!

R M Atkinson
Edinburgh



THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

IN the *Free Church Witness* (March, 2007) – magazine of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) – the Rev William Macleod wrote an editorial on the subject of sin, entitled *Resist Temptation*. In it he said: "In the Garden of Eden our first parents naturally and readily kept the Ten Commandments."

As far as my biblical history (which is a bit shaky) goes, nobody knew about the Ten Commandments until Moses fetched them down from Mount Sinai, twice, around 2,000 years after The Fall (the gross naughtiness or "sin" of eating forbidden fruit), which this surely must pre-date.

Did Adam and Eve manage to get hold of a pre-publication copy? If so, how did they manage their behaviour according to the Commandments, which seem better suited to a world population greater than two?

So let's have another look at the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20: 1-17; Deuteronomy 5: 6-21):

1. I am the LORD thy God. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. *No problem, though this sounds a bit pompous considering all the other gods there were around in those days, as there are today.*

2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. *No*

problem then, but a bit tough on all the world's artists since then, particularly those with pious motives.

3. Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain. *No problem. Could we not widen it a bit: Thou shalt not be rude to or about anybody?*

4. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. *No problem. Since Adam and Eve are the only people, nobody else need be inconvenienced as they often are in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, even in the 21st century.*

5. Honour thy father and thy mother. *Who were Adam and Eve's parents? "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground". Honour dust? "And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman". Honour a rib?*

6. Thou shalt not kill. *Options: Adam kill Eve or Eve kill Adam?*

7. Thou shalt not commit adultery. *Doddle. There's nobody else to do naughties with.*

8. Thou shalt not steal. *They don't own anything, and anyway Adam could rob only Eve or Eve rob Adam. They're in love and, at this point in the story, free of sin, so they wouldn't do that.*

9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. *There are no other people, let alone neighbours.*

10. Thou shalt not covet ... any thing that is thy neighbour's. *Ditto.*

DR JAMES MERRYWEATHER
Kyle of Lochalsh

THE CLIMATE CRISIS

EDWIN Salter ("The Climate Crisis", *Freethinker*, January) rightly links outbreeding and religion to the climate crisis facing us.

The threefold increase in the global population from three billion in 1960 to a forecast nine billion in 2050 is a key driver of not just potentially catastrophic climate change but current environmental degradation and exhaustion of natural resources.

Organised religion must take a large share of the responsibility for this historic crime against the prospects for humanity. Modern family planning gives couples the means to voluntari-

ly limit their fertility, but provision of effective contraceptive methods has been consistently sabotaged across much of the world by the Catholic Church and the US Religious Right

Simon Ross
Optimum Population Trust
London

A memorial meeting for H J Blackham (1903 - 2009) will be held on Sunday, April 19, at 3pm at the Conway Hall, London. All welcome.

CREATIONISM AND INTELLIGENT DESIGN

YOUR editorial (March) about the antics of creationists, upset that they cannot get the National Trust to take their delusions seriously at the Giant's Causeway, contains an unfortunate gaffe. The Antrim basalt lavas that form the Causeway are around 60 million years old, not 55 million.

Of course this is still far too old for the creationists, and a look at their website causewaycreation.com reveals a sorry tale of deception, omissions and possibly even deliberate lying in their attempts to fit this geological marvel into their Noah's flood scenario. After the editors of *Earth Science Ireland* were accused of being "anti-Christian" for criticising them, and as the mad Mervyn Storey is now threatening legal action to force the Ulster Museum to peddle more of their nonsense, I decided to investigate, and your editorial has prompted me to share with your readers some of my initial findings.

The creationists' website provides links to articles on the Causeway by Tas Walker, an Australian engineer with a geology degree. Unfortunately, his degree was wasted on him. Even with my modest earth science training (two years at university) I was swiftly able to demolish his claims. First there's that pesky 60 million (60 Ma) date from radiometric dating. Walker's strategy seems to be "guilt by association". He cites a Hawaiian lava, erupted in 1800 – 1801, as giving radiometric dates of millions of years. No it didn't. It was xenoliths in the lava (much older fragments caught up in the lava) that gave the great ages, not the lava itself. How Walker can have missed this when even the very first line of the abstract makes it clear beats me. It is tempting to accuse him of lying.

The two other examples of "dodgy" dates he cites are both infamous creationist deceptions. In each case modern lavas were submitted by creationists for K/Ar dating in the knowledge that this radiometric method is best suited to old rocks due to the long half life of ^{40}K , and traces of non-radiogenic argon. To use it for a rock erupted in the 20th century is like trying to measure millimetres with a yardstick. Only a creationist would be so stupid – or dishonest. Yet this is exactly what they did, and when they got "dates" of a few million years they banded them around as "disproving" the method.

Had they used $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ dating they might well have got the correct dates, as this avoids some of the problems with the K/Ar method. The $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$ technique gives ages of 61–58 Ma for the Antrim basalts. It gets better (or worse if you are a creationist). In the middle of those basalts is a prominent red band – the interbasaltic bed. This is a major feature of Northern Irish geology, being present over a large area of Antrim, including the Causeway. In some places it contains rhyolite lava. This has been dated by $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$, U/Pb, U-Th/He and Rb/Sr at around 60 Ma. Four different radiometric dating methods giving the same ages!

The interbasaltic bed vexes the creationists

terribly. It is a laterite, a product of slow chemical weathering in a warm, humid climate. At a maximum formation rate of 58 metres per million years (and probably very much less, the global average is 6 m/Ma), the up to 30 m thick laterite that is the interbasaltic bed would have taken many thousands of times longer to form than the single year of Noah's flood would allow. The creationists have only one option – to deny it is a laterite. So we are treated to alleged "problems". Like the sharp boundary between it and the basalt below. Yet such sharp weathering fronts are actually a feature of laterites! Or a claim that "many hundreds of metres of material" should have been removed when, in fact, the thickness observed is entirely consistent with known rates of laterite formation.

Significantly absent from Walker's cursory and error-riddled treatment of the interbasaltic bed is any reference to the up-to-date research on it. So the paper in *Chemical Geology* (2000, vol. 166, p.65–84), providing detailed analyses proving it is a laterite, is not even mentioned. Instead we are told that it is the result of "energetic chemical alteration" by heat and water, what geologists would call "hydrothermal" alteration. Unfortunately for Walker, hydrothermal alteration of basalt creates calcite, zeolites and clays, not laterite. Such alteration is present at the

Causeway, but not in the interbasaltic bed.

Walker's treatment of the underlying chalk is just as perfunctory. As chalk is made by the slow accumulation of the calcareous skeletons of trillions of organisms in clear water, its rapid formation in a catastrophic muddy flood is problematic. Then it has to be hardened, elevated, and eroded off to create a land surface which was then subjected to similar protracted weathering to that which created the laterite, forming another distinctive soil type called a *terra rosa*, onto which the lavas were erupted; and all during the flood. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Causeway creationists omit this.

Nor do Northern Irish creationists dwell on other geological features of their province, like the thick rock salt beds mined at Carrickfergus. Seas do not evaporate during a flood, yet evaporation of salt water is how rock salt forms. Or the granite intrusions, several miles across, of the Mourne, that would take many thousands of years to cool. Of course creationist websites have feeble "explanations" for such phenomena, which to geologists are as comical as their "explanation" for the Giant's Causeway, but I'll save those for another day. Your editorial was right about one thing. Creationists are good for a chuckle!

Dr Stephen Moreton
Warrington

DISCONNECTED RULING CLASSES

THE *Sunday Times* editorial (22.2.09) entitled "A Country in Crisis needs moral leaders", refers to "bankers clutching the swag" and to politicians who "share the same moral deficit". That, with a passing reference to a Home Secretary and MEPs making ends meet in interesting ways, takes up about 208 of the 612 words. 112 words are deployed to state that the country may not have faith in a "political class" from which Thatcher (103 words) apparently rescued the country. From this one gathers that the crisis we are in is caused by representatives, parliamentary and other, who are avaricious and "disconnected".

When I read it, immediately I thought of the BBC interviewer, Michael Buerk, saying to Geert Wilders, the Dutch MP, that "Most of the Koran is blameless", "How many Muslims do you actually meet?" and "Don't you ever feel you are wrong ...Ever?"

Everybody who is interested in the matter knows that the Koran comes together as a political declaration of war (the killing kind) on those who don't go along with its description of how the world should work. This is Mr Wilders' point – that Western civilisation and an ideology based on the subversion of it cannot be knitted together.

The *Sunday Times* point was that cupidity and parliamentary democracy may not be knitted together, whereas everybody interested in the current crisis now understands that it is not cupidity

which makes British democracy inoperable, it is Parliament itself – with or without the avarice.

Now, if what I say is true, one has to ask the question why it is that posh people will try to channel political talk towards anything, provided it is away from the heart of discontent with parliamentary democracy?

We are not intended to talk about immigration and, if one insists on thinking about the impossibility of fascist-theocracy, as elaborated in the Koran and Hadiths, marrying with Western liberal traditions, then we must talk about the latest fellow who has been refused asylum, who has been granted asylum, who is under curfew restrictions ... about anything except the incompatibility of any form of theocratic political credo with an infidel one.

The very institutions by which we are governed have been enfeebled for many years by the refusal to face up to the fact that they are in no way representative any more. If they were, it would be easy to deal with the issue of cupidity among our political class. I submit that the "shoddy tricks" that *Sunday Times* editorial refers to are prompted by the non-representative nature of our ruling establishment and its refusal to take seriously popular disquiet over immigration, in particular over Islam. "Disconnected" it is.

Keith Bell
Wales

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.
Tues April 21, 7.45pm. Tim Betts: *The History of Surgery*.

Brighton & Hove Humanist Society: **i** 01273 227549/461404. **w** <http://homepage.nflworld.com/robert.stovold/humanist.html>. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. April 1, 8pm. Tom Ruebens: *The Case for a Secular Society*. Wed, May 6, 8pm. Barry Duke (*Freethinker* editor): *Atheism on the Internet*.

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 rupert@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 Pihel 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 Coss: 0161 4303463. Monthly meetings (second Wednesday) Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester.

Hampstead Humanist Society: **i** NI Barnes.
10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 0HP. Tel: 0207 328 4431.

w www.hampstead.humanists.org.uk

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. April 8. Ann Hunter: *Bringing up a Family Without God*. **i** Secretary on 0208 907-

6124 **w** w.clarencewilson.cwc.net/hhs.htm

e Mike Savage at mfsavagema@hotmail.com

Havering & District Humanist Society: **i** Jean Condon 01708 473597. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgores Cres, Gidea Park. Thurs April 2, 8pm. Dennis Eraut: *Community Projects for the Developing World*.

Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern Ireland: **i** Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: 028 9267 7264 **e** brianmccolinton@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.
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.

Isle of Man Freethinkers: **i** Jeff Garland, 01624 664796. Email: jeffgarland@wm.im **w** www.iomfreethinkers.org

Humanists4Science: A group of humanists interested in science who discuss, and promote, both.
w <http://humanists4science.blogspot.com/>

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

Isle of Wight Secular and Humanist Group. **i** David Broughton on 01983 755526 or **e** davidb67@clara.co.uk

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@ianzere.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. April 16. Sue Mayer: *What is Positive Atheism?*

Liverpool Humanist Group: **i** 07814 910 286
w www.liverpoolhumanists.co.uk/

e lhghumanist@googlemail.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.

Sheffield Humanist Society: **i** 0114 2309754. The SADACCA Building, Wicker, S2. Public Meeting first Wednesday of the month, 7.30pm.

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 Gwinnell on 01935 473263 or **e** edward.gwinnell@talktalk.net

Suffolk Humanists & Secularists: 5 Hadleigh Road, Elmsett, Suffolk IP7 6ND. Tel: 01473 658828.

w www.suffolkhands.org.uk **e** mail@suffolkhands.org.uk

Sutton Humanists: **i** 0208 773 0631. **w** www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com **e** BrackenKemish@ukgateway.net.

Think Humanism: An independent discussion forum for anyone interested in humanism, secularism and freethought

w www.thinkhumanism.com

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.