



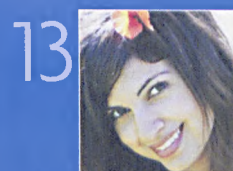
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Free speech under threat in the 'free world', warns law professor

A warning that free speech is under greater threat than ever before was sounded last month by a Washington law professor – and it ironically coincided with an attack by hackers on the website of the Danish-based International Free Press Society, which had earlier announced that it was selling 1,000 signed prints of Kurt Westergaard's iconic "Turbomb" cartoon.

Diana West, Vice President of the IFPS, said that "in addition to increasing demand for the cartoon prints, this crude cyber-assault on free speech has boosted people's awareness of the urgency of the IFPS mission."

And Westergaard added: "The contemptible attempts to close us down will not succeed. The enemies of free speech will soon realise that their hacker attack on the IFPS website has only made us all the more determined to get our messages out. I take great comfort from the fact that so many people have already bought copies of my cartoon. It's good to know that freedom of expression has defenders all over the world."

In the same week, a magazine – *Ibdaa* – was shut down by Egyptian authorities for having published a poem branded as "blasphemous."

"God is not a policeman, grabbing perpetrators by their necks," poet Helmi Salem wrote in his 2007 poem, *On the Balcony of Leila Mourad*. "He is a simple villager, feeding the duck, checking the cow's udder with his fingers, crying 'There is plenty of milk'."

A lawyer brought a lawsuit against Salem and *Ibdaa*, charging them with "insulting the Divine Entity". This resulted in an administrative court in Cairo cancelling *Ibdaa's* publishing licence.

Writing in the *Washington Post*, Jonathan Turley – a law professor at George Washington University – said:

"For years, the Western world has listened aghast to stories out of Iran, Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern nations, of citizens being imprisoned or executed for questioning or offending Islam. Even the most seemingly minor infractions elicit draconian punishments. Late last year, two Afghan journalists were sentenced to prison for blasphemy because they translated the Koran into a Farsi dialect that Afghans can read. In Jordan, a poet was arrested for incorporating Koranic verses into his work.



Kurt Westergaard, the 72-year-old Danish cartoonist, is living under the threat of death from Muslim extremists

"But now an equally troubling trend is developing in the West. Ever since 2006, when Muslims worldwide rioted over newspaper cartoons picturing the prophet Mohammed, Western countries, too, have been prosecuting more individuals for criticizing religion. The 'Free World', it appears, may be losing faith in free speech."

Turley said that "emblematic of the assault is the effort to pass an international ban on religious defamation, supported by United Nations General Assembly President Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann".

"Brockmann," he pointed out, "is a suspended Roman Catholic priest who served as Nicaragua's foreign minister in the 1980s under the Sandinista regime. Since then, Brockmann has literally embraced such free-speech-loving figures as Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whom he wrapped in a bear hug at the UN last year."

He said that the UN resolution, which has been introduced for the past couple of years, is backed by countries such as Saudi Arabia, "one of the most repressive nations when it comes to the free exercise of religion". Blasphemers there are frequently executed. Most recently, the government arrested author Hamoud Bin Saleh simply for writing about his conversion to Christianity.

Continued on page 3

Oh, those crazy Creationists!

BARRY DUKE REFLECTS ON THE HYPOCRISY OF FUNDAMENTALIST KEN HAM

Creationists and Intelligent Design proponents crack me up – they really do! But what they lack in credibility, they more than make up for in cash to fund their cock-eyed propaganda. It's a mystery where the money comes from in these straitened times.

A prime example of UNINTELLIGENT design on a scale that can only be described as monumental is the Creationist Museum opened in Petersburg, Kentucky in 2007 by a screwball outfit called Answers in Genesis (AiG). It came in at a price of around £14-million.

Among the 4,000 or so who attended its opening was Lawrence Krauss, an author and physicist at Cleveland's Case Western Reserve University.

"It's really impressive, and it really gives the impression that they're talking about science at some point," said Krauss. Awarding marks out of five, he said, "I'd give it a four for technology, five for propaganda. As for content, I'd give it a negative five," he said.



The museum features hi-tech exhibits designed by former theme-park artist Patrick Marsh, including animatronic dinosaurs and a wooden ark at least two stories tall, plus a special effects theatre and planetarium.

Some exhibits show dinosaurs aboard Noah's ark and assert that all animals were vegetarians until Adam committed the first sin in the Garden of Eden.

According to a report in the *Guardian* (June 7, 2007), when Mr Marsh was asked to explain the existence of fossilised remains of man's ancestors, he replied: "There are no such things. Humans are basically as you see them today. Those skeletons they've found, what's the word? They could have been deformed, diseased or something. I've seen people like that running round the streets of New York."

All went quiet after the initial razzmatazz of the opening, and I'd heard little for months from the "brains" behind the project, Ken Ham. Until last month, that is, when I learned that Ham was fizzing over the treatment his pet "astrophysicist", Dr Jason Lisle, had received at the hands of those godless heathens at the BBC.

The devious old fossil complained on his AiG website that the BBC had "ambushed" Lisle. Ham elaborated:

"We were told that it was just going to be an 'examination of creationism'. Well, we are somewhat leery when it comes to dealing with the British media – by far, British journalists and commentators (and particularly those from the BBC) are the most mocking about biblical Christianity of all the media we've worked with over the years. We have had probably 20 different countries send reporters to the Creation Museum since we opened 22 months ago, and most of them have been fair and balanced in their coverage – but not so with the typical British reporter.

"That's why it was not too surprising that when Dr Lisle went on the air to be interviewed by the BBC, he quickly found out the BBC had not told us the truth – it turned

out to be an attempted ambush – not an interview (as we had been led to believe), but a creation/evolution debate. On the other line was perhaps America's best-known evolutionist defender, Dr Eugenie Scott, whose organization has as its sole purpose to counter creationist efforts wherever they can and to uphold evolution."

He then whinged: "The BBC has not responded to our publicist who has challenged them concerning their deception. Then again, for those people who don't believe in God and there is no absolute authority, not telling the truth and deception would not be ethically wrong – as they have no basis for right and wrong!"

Ham's complaint left Michael Zimmerman, Dean of Butler University's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, gasping in disbelief.

"What makes Ham's complaints so incredibly ironic and hypocritical is that this is exactly what he did to me a year ago. I was scheduled to do an interview last year on a fundamentalist Christian radio show only to discover, upon going on the air, that Ken Ham was also on the line, ready to debate me. When asked why neither the host nor Ken had the courtesy to inform me that I was to participate in a debate rather than in an interview, I was told that they believed that I wouldn't have accepted their offer had I been told the truth. When I questioned them about the deception, I was told that since the debate was to further God's wishes, a minor deception of this sort was acceptable."

It's worth noting that Lisle is no less of a crackpot than Ham. According to AiG:

"Most practicing astronomers and astrophysicists believe in the big bang, a billions-of-years-old universe and other evolutionary ideas. But based on Scripture and the best interpretation of the scientific evidence, they are simply wrong, according to Dr Jason Lisle, AiG-USA's newest speaker and researcher.

"An astrophysicist with a Ph.D from the University of Colorado at Boulder, Dr Lisle is now helping AiG (and the creation movement as a whole) refute the evolutionary account of origins – using his strong science background. He has designed exciting planetarium programs for the Creation Museum in Northern Kentucky ..."

Presumably a Creationist planetarium programme would involve a man in a white gown and beard turning the light on for the audience – then leaving!



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US Evangelical movement slides towards oblivion

American Christian commentator Michael Spencer is a believer – with a twist. He describes himself as “a post-evangelical reformation Christian in search of a Jesus-shaped spirituality” and he is convinced that the US evangelical movement is heading for oblivion.

According to an article in the *Christian Science Monitor*, the Kentucky-based Spencer says: “We are on the verge – within ten years – of a major collapse of evangelical Christianity. This breakdown will follow the deterioration of the mainline Protestant world and it will fundamentally alter the religious and cultural environment in the West.

He adds: “Within two generations, evangelicalism will be a house deserted of half its occupants. (Between 25 and 35 percent of Americans today are evangelicals.)

“In the ‘Protestant’ 20th century, evangelicals flourished. But they will soon be living in a very secular and religiously antagonistic 21st century.

“This collapse will herald the arrival of an anti-Christian chapter of the post-Christian West. Intolerance of Christianity will rise to levels many of us have not believed possible in our lifetimes, and public policy will become hostile toward evangelical Christianity, seeing it as the opponent of the common good.”

Why is this going to happen?

“Evangelicals have identified their movement with the culture war and with political conservatism. This will prove to be a very costly mistake. Evangelicals will increasingly be seen as a threat to cultural progress. Pub-

lic leaders will consider us bad for America, bad for education, bad for children, and bad for society.

“The evangelical investment in moral, social, and political issues has depleted our resources and exposed our weaknesses. Being against gay marriage and being rhetorically pro-life will not make up for the fact that massive majorities of evangelicals can’t articulate the Gospel with any coherence. We fell for the trap of believing in a cause more than a faith ... Evangelicalism doesn’t need a bailout. Much of it needs a funeral.”

Despite this, Spencer – known as the Internet Monk – holds out some optimism for the future of



Michael Spencer

Christianity:

“We can rejoice that in the ruins, new forms of Christian vitality and ministry will be born. I expect to see a vital and growing house church movement. This cannot help but be good for an evangelicalism that has made buildings, numbers, and paid staff its drugs for half a century.

“We need new evangelicalism that learns from the past and listens more carefully to what God says about being His people in the midst of a powerful, idolatrous culture.”

He concludes: “I’m not a prophet. My view of evangelicalism is not authoritative or infallible. I am certainly wrong in some of these predictions. But is there anyone who is observing evangelicalism in these times who does not sense that the future of our movement holds many dangers and much potential?”

Free speech under threat in ‘free world’

He added: “While it hasn’t gone so far as to support the UN resolution, the West is prosecuting ‘religious hatred’ cases under anti-discrimination and hate-crime laws ... No question, the subjects of such prosecutions are often anti-religious – especially anti-Muslim – and intolerant.

“Consider far-right Austrian legislator Susanne Winter. She recently denounced Mohammed as a paedophile for his marriage to 6-year-old Aisha, which was consummated when she was 9. Winter also suggested that Muslim men should commit bestiality rather than have sex with children. Under an Austrian law criminalizing ‘degradation of religious doctrines’, the 51-year-old politician was sentenced in January to a fine of 24,000 euros and a three-month suspended prison term.

“But it is the speech, not the speaker, that’s at issue. Insulting and misinformed as views like Winter’s may be, free speech is not limited to non-offensive subjects. The purpose of free speech is to be able to challenge widely held views.

“History has shown that once governments begin to police speech, they find ever more of it to combat. Countries such as Canada, England and France have prosecuted speakers and journalists for criticizing homosexuals and other groups. It’s the ultimate irony: free speech curtailed for the sake of a pluralistic society.

“Not only does this trend threaten free speech, freedom of association and a free press, it even undermines free exercise of religion. Challenging the beliefs of other faiths can be part of that exercise. Countries such as Saudi Arabia don’t prosecute blasphemers to protect the exercise of all religions but to protect one religion.

“Religious orthodoxy has always lived in tension with free speech. Yet Western ideals are based on the premise that free speech contains its own protection: Good speech ultimately prevails over bad. There’s no blasphemy among free nations, only orthodoxy and those who seek to challenge it.

“After years of international scorn, the United States can claim the high ground by supporting the right of all to speak openly about religion. Otherwise, free speech in the West could die with hope of little more than a requiem Mass.”

TV soap in hot water over Easter broadcast

ITV reported last month it had received 100 complaints from Christians about remarks made about Christianity on *Coronation Street* by Ken Barlow, played by actor William Roache. Ofcom, the broadcast watchdog, logged 23 complaints.

Barlow, in the Easter Sunday broadcast, referred to the faith as “superstition” and God as a “supernatural being”.

The character was later seen in the pub saying he believed “children should be told the truth” and that Christianity was comforting because “that’s how they get their hooks into you, when you’re vulnerable.”

While the Barlow family were preparing to go to church, Ken questioned his son Peter on why he was allowing his grandson, Simon, to be “indoctrinated” by the church. He then went on to criticise Simon’s school for teaching creationism.

The *Daily Telegraph’s* religion correspondent, Jonathan Wynne-Jones complained afterwards that Christians were “made to look like nutters” in TV portrayals.



Bishop blames atheists for Nazi atrocities

IN an Easter Sunday sermon warning of the rising tide of atheism in Germany, the Catholic bishop of Augsburg linked the crimes of Nazi and Communist regimes to godlessness.

Said Walter Mixa: "Wherever God is denied or fought against, there people and their dignity will soon be denied and held in disregard."

The bishop also said that "a society without God is hell on earth" and quoted the Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky: If God does not exist, everything is permitted.

He added: "In the last century, the godless regimes of Nazism and Communism, with their penal camps, their secret police and their mass murder, proved in a terrible way the inhumanity of atheism in practice."

Christians and the Church were always the subject of "special persecution" under these systems, he said.

Atheist groups, according to *Spiegel Online*, reacted with fury and accused Walter Mixa of rewriting history.

The bishop's claim that humanity automatically arises from religious faith is "totally untenable," Rudolf Ladwig, president of the Germany-based International League of Non-Religious and Atheists (IBKA), told *Spiegel*.

Mixa's words, he said, are part of a "long-term strategy by the Church to exculpate, in a historically inaccurate way, the history of its own



Bishop Mixa – and a Nazi belt buckle with the 'atheist' motto 'God with Us'

institution as relates to fascism."

The Nazi dictatorship targeted Communists, Social Democrats, liberals, trade unionists, Jews, Romanies, homosexuals, the disabled and others, Ladwig said. It was by no means the dictatorship of a dedicated atheist movement. Resistance from within the churches came only from individuals.

Philosopher Michael Schmidt-Salomon, head of the humanist non-profit group the Giordano Bruno Foundation, also sharply criticised Mixa.

"If you bear in mind that during the Nazi era it was precisely the Jews who were accused of being godless, then one sees how perfidious Mixa's reasoning is."

He pointed out that freethinker associations were disbanded by the Nazis and avowed atheists were persecuted.

Mixa's claim that the Nazi regime was "godless" is, he said, a "massive distortion of history", and he pointed out that Nazi ideology –

including its anti-Semitism – was based largely on Christian traditions. Evidence for that can be found in Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and elsewhere. "The majority of the Nazi elite saw themselves as Christians," he asserted.

Avowed atheists were not welcome in the Nazi party or the SS, he said.

In a speech* delivered on April 12, 1922, Adolf Hitler said: "My feelings as a Christian point me to my Lord and Saviour as a fighter. It points me to the man who once in loneliness, surrounded by a few followers, recognised these Jews for what they were and summoned men to fight against them and who, God's truth! was greatest not as a sufferer but as a fighter.

"In boundless love as a Christian and as a man I read through the passage which tells us how the Lord at last rose in His might and seized the scourge to drive out of the Temple the brood of vipers and adders. How terrific was His fight for the world against the Jewish poison.

"To-day, after 2,000 years, with deepest emotion I recognise, more profoundly than ever before, the fact that it was for this that He had to shed His blood upon the Cross. As a Christian I have no duty to allow myself to be cheated, but I have the duty to be a fighter for truth and justice... And if there is anything which could demonstrate that we are acting rightly it is the distress that daily grows. For as a Christian I have also a duty to my own people."

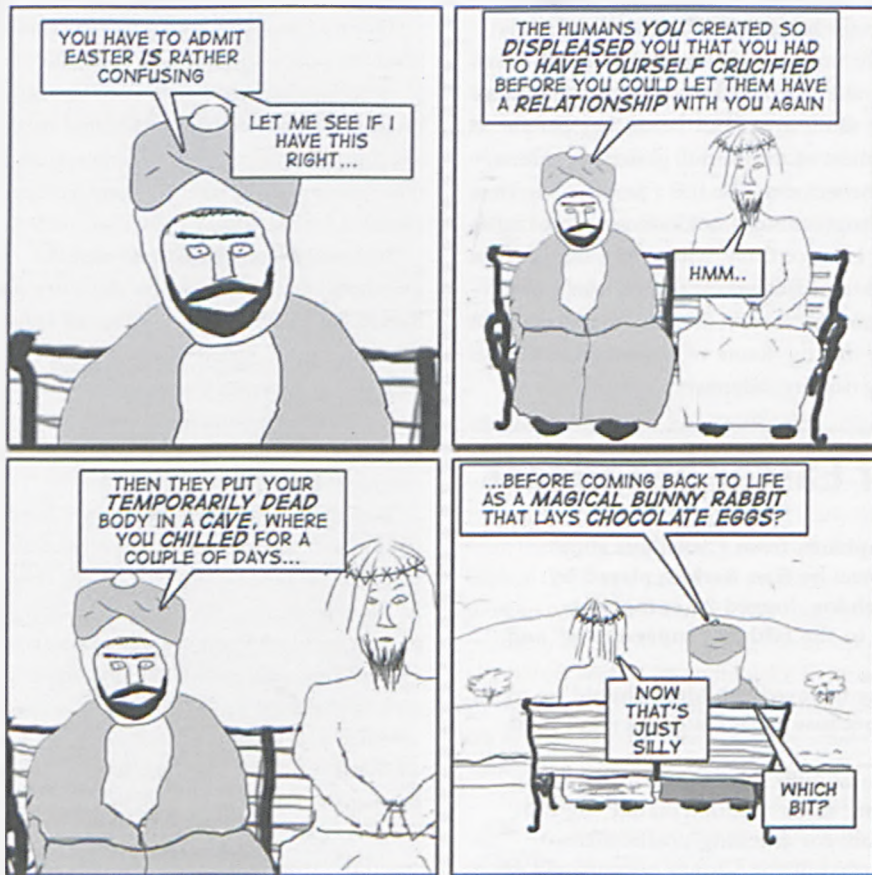
The relationship of the Catholic Church to the Nazis was also an ambivalent one. Individual members of the clergy openly confronted the regime, which in some cases resulted in their persecution and murder. Others voluntarily collaborated with the dictatorship, while most simply did nothing. A systematic persecution of Christians did not take place in the Third Reich – let alone the "special persecution of Christians and the Church" which Mixa spoke of.

The Easter sermon was not the first time that Mixa has made comparisons to Nazism for rhetorical purposes. In February, the bishop compared the number of Jews murdered during the Holocaust with the number of abortions performed over the past decades. Mixa's spokesman also responded to criticism from Germany's leading Green Party politician, Claudia Roth, who called the bishop a "crazy über-fundamentalist," by comparing her words to Nazi propaganda.

According to the Federal Statistical Office, approximately one-third of all Germans do not belong to an organised religion. A 2005 survey conducted by AP-Ipsos showed that only 22 percent of Germans have no doubt about the existence of God, while some 23 percent of Germans identify themselves either as atheists or agnostics.

*The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April 1922-August 1939, Vol. 1 of 2, pp. 19-20, Oxford University Press, 1942 – Norman H Baynes, ed.

Jesus & Mo



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“ This is clearly a gross misrepresentation of both Jesus Christ and Christianity ”

BNP recruits Jesus for European elections

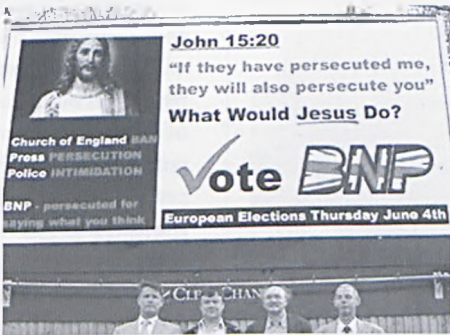
The far-right British National Party (BNP) has grabbed at Jesus to attract Christian votes in the European elections in June.

A poster it has created for the election according to *Church Times* “reflects the party’s concerted attempt to portray itself as defender of Britain’s Christian heritage and ‘Christian’ values.”

Nick Griffin, the party leader, last month invited supporters in an email message to preview the billboard, which, he says, is “aimed at attracting even more Christian voters”.

The billboard message criticises the Church of England in particular for passing a resolution at the February Synod that membership of the BNP was incompatible with being a member of the clergy.

Griffin asks: “What has become of the Christian church in this country? Instead of inclusively ‘embracing all’ which the church claims as its basis, certain groups within that body have banned people from their ranks. . . .



Surely if God calls a man to his service, no church has the right to contradict HIS holy will!

Jonathan Bartley, co-director of the think tank Ekklesia, which has been monitoring the BNP’s identification with Christianity, said of the billboard:

“This is clearly a gross misrepresentation of both Jesus Christ and Christianity. Jesus was completely opposed to bigotry.”

The West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council has mounted a campaign, “Use your Cross –Vote for Hope in Yorkshire”, which urges everyone to vote on June 4 for other parties, even if they do not normally vote in the European elections.

The campaign literature says: “Christians assert that all human beings are created equally in the image of God . . . The Christian vision of society is one where each person is treated with dignity and respect, whatever their race or religion. It is a vision of hope. The Christian churches are totally opposed to the BNP”

Let’s have less religion in politics, says MEP

MARY Honeyball is a member of the European Parliament. She has been a London Labour MEP since 2000, and last month she lashed out against the pernicious influence of religion in politics.

“I for one object to this. I do not believe Christianity should have the kind of privileged place in our public life which it so manifestly does . . . Faith is and should remain exactly that: a personal eccentricity, not something to be forced on others in any way whatsoever,” she said.

In an article entitled *Tony Blair’s Aggressive Christianity*, Honeyball also described the Catholic church as an “extreme Christian organisation”.

She said: “While churches may be emptying – people having more sense than to pay even lip service to religion – Christianity is on the increase in the corridors of power. I have seen very obvious attempts to bring Christianity

into the European Parliament during my nine years as an MEP.

And she pointed out: “Silvio Berlusconi attempted to appoint an intensely religious Catholic, Rocco Buttiglione, as a European commissioner. Though his efforts were thankfully rebuffed by the majority of MEPs due to Buttiglione’s anti-homosexual and anti-abortion stance, religion had reared its head. Likewise there was a strong movement to include a reference to ‘god’ in the ill-fated European constitutional treaty.”

She added: “Meanwhile back in the UK the Roman Catholic church and other extreme Christian organisations tried to defeat parts of the 2008 human fertilisation and embryology act . . . There has, in fact, been a marked increase in political lobbying by Christian organisations over the last ten years.

“We are getting more of it in the public square, not less.”

Mourners opt for pop songs at funerals

HYMNS at funerals in England and Wales are fast giving way to far perkier pop songs, according to a survey by Co-operative Funeralcare.

The survey of 242 funeral homes and 30,000 services showed 58 percent of people in England and Wales chose pop music for their funerals.

However, Scottish mourners are bucking the trend by choosing traditional hymns.

The Co-op found that since its last study four years ago, the number of people in England and Wales choosing hymns to be played at funerals dropped by 6 percent, from 41 percent to 35 percent, while the number opting for pop music rose from 55 percent to 58 percent.

In Scotland the number of funerals accompanied by hymns rose from 54 percent to 56 percent and those with pop music fell from 37 percent to 36 percent.

More than a quarter of funeral homes surveyed received unusual requests during the year, including television themes from *Emmerdale*, *Top Gear* and *Only Fools and Horses*.

The study also revealed about one in every ten requests for pieces of music were rejected because clergy conducting the funeral felt the choice was inappropriate.

The trend has also been observed in Australia. At Centennial Park, the largest cemetery and crematorium in the southern city of Adelaide, only two hymns still rank among its top ten most popular funeral songs: *Amazing Grace* and *Abide With Me*.

Among other less conventional choices were *Always Look on the Bright Side of Life* by the Monty Python comedy team, *Ding Dong the Witch is Dead*, *Hit the Road Jack*, *Another One Bites the Dust* and *I’ll Sleep When I’m Dead*.

The choice of *Always Look On the Bright Side of Life* may very well be inspired by its performance at a memorial service for Monty Python’s Graham Chapman, where a very irreverent John Cleese used the word “fuck” and called Chapman a “freeloading bastard”.

The Government must grasp the ne

RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS REMAIN THE PRINCIPAL STUMBLING BLOCK TO EUTHANASIA. IT'S

Eighty percent of UK citizens would like to see assisted suicide legalised – and many of them, I am sure, share my profound irritation over the fact that the Government cannot bring itself to debate the issue in any meaningful way – let alone take the necessary steps to introduce a law that would make it possible.

The Times had this to say in an editorial entitled *Deathly Silence* on March 7:

The actress Julie Walters, who is also a mother, recently appeared in a dramatisation of the last days of Anne Turner, who travelled to Switzerland in 2006 with her two children to commit suicide. Walters said that the scene in which Dr Turner said goodbye to her children was so sad that she could only read it once.

On Thursday Peter and Penelope Duff became the latest Britons to make a journey to a rented Swiss flat their last. If they saw Walters' performance they were not deterred. They died together, in the company of their own children, from lethal doses of barbiturates provided by the non-profit assisted suicide group, Dignitas.

Both the Duffs had terminal cancer in its advanced stages. A spokesman for a British charity opposed to assisted suicide has called their case "desperately sad and unusual", and so it was – at

Lawyers' Secular Society launched

LAST month saw the launch in the UK of the Lawyers' Secular Society, a body which aims "to promote progressive law and policy making that advances principles of equal rights and respect for all".

The LSS hosts lectures and seminars to raise awareness and to stimulate debate about the conflict between equal rights and the continuing demands by religious believers for special treatment, for the allocation of resources and for exemptions from equality requirements.

The LSS is not anti-religious, but believes that religion is a matter for private conscience, not public advantage.

It welcomes applications for membership from lawyers in all areas of practice and from academics and students of all disciplines.

More details can be found on its website: <http://www.lawyerssecularsociety.org>



Lord Joffe

least in its details. But its basic facts are less and less unusual. Around 100 Britons have so far enlisted Dignitas to help them to end their lives. Nearly 700 more have registered with the organisation. That number is sure to grow faster than hitherto after the Lord Chief Justice's statement that there are "broad circumstances" in which helping someone to commit suicide should no longer be considered an offence.

So far Gordon Brown has ruled out changing the law for fear of loss of clarity about the value of human life. Privately he has said he is loath to provoke a public debate on the subject lest it be dominated by the most shrill and reactionary voices and produce legislation that is not progressive. Writing new laws should not, indeed, be the default response to personal tragedies. But in the absence of proper parliamentary discussion the terms of one of the most profound and urgent ethical debates facing the country are being set by a private Swiss organisation operating entirely beyond Westminster's reach.

Dignitas charges about £3,000 per person for its services, which means that it offers choice in the manner and timing of one's death, but only for those who can afford it. Unlike the House of Lords Assisted Suicide Bill sponsored by Lord Joffe but so far denied a second reading, Swiss law – and Dignitas – do not require a terminal diagnosis for assisted suicide to be legal. But its clients must be in Switzerland to die, and some

of those coming from Britain end their lives earlier than they would otherwise in order to be able to travel in reasonable comfort.

The British institutional response has been piecemeal at best. The Director of Public Prosecutions set an important precedent last year by refusing to prosecute the parents of Daniel James for helping him to commit suicide in Switzerland after a rugby accident. The Lord Chief Justice's remarks last month confirmed the significance of the James case, and this week the General Medical Council's new guidelines on withholding life-prolonging treatment shifted control partly from doctors to patients.

Parliament's silence has been deafening. Both main parties are complicit; their reluctance to grapple with assisted suicide is being mocked by reality. The country needs a full debate that guards at all costs against a drift from the "right to die" towards a "duty to die", but also ends the absurdities that drive critically ill people abroad, never to return. Lord Joffe's Bill should be the starting point.

Lord Joffe responded to *The Times'* editorial in a letter saying:

I naturally agree with your leading article that the country needs a full debate on assisted dying. This was the purpose of the Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill that I introduced in the House of Lords in 2005. The full debate would have taken place at committee and subsequent stages in the Lords, had not the opponents of assisted dying, desperate to avoid such a debate, broken a long-standing convention in the Lords never to oppose a Private Member's Bill at second reading. Their reluctance can readily be understood because they are aware that 80 per cent of the population support assisted dying.

I believe that the public are entitled to hear the case for and against assisted dying conducted in a calm and rational manner based on evidence and research rather than on speculation, misrepresentation and the opposition of the faith leaders who on this issue are out of tune with the views of society and much of their own laity. To begin the

nettle of assisted suicide

IT'S TIME TO SHUNT THEM ASIDE, SAYS **BARRY DUKE**

debate, I have three questions to ask the opponents of assisted dying:

1) As assisted dying and/or voluntary euthanasia clearly work in Oregon, the Netherlands and Belgium where it has been decriminalised for some time, why do they think that assisted dying will not work in the United Kingdom? What is different here from those countries?

2) If they consider that our proposed safeguards to protect the vulnerable members of society are inadequate, what further safeguards would they recommend?

3) As they acknowledge that palliative care is not the solution for all terminally ill patients, what do they suggest is the solution? Alternatively, are they content that such patients should simply be required to suffer until they die?

Shortly after publication of *The Times'* editorial, Washington became the second US state to legalise voluntary euthanasia.

A majority of voters in Washington state approved allowing doctors to prescribe a lethal dose of drugs on request, under certain conditions. The Death With Dignity Act that emerged is now law in the state. So Washington has become the second US state to sanction assisted suicide, joining Oregon. Similar legislation is being advocated in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Mexico, Hawaii, Pennsylvania and elsewhere.

Last year 60 Oregonians ended their lives by taking a lethal drug dose prescribed under its Death With Dignity Act.

That's the highest annual total in the 11-year history of the law, 11 more than in 2007. Deaths from a drug prescribed under the Oregon law now account for two of every 1,000 deaths in Oregon.

In all, 401 terminally ill Oregonians have died this way since 1997, when Oregon made it legal for a doctor to prescribe a lethal drug dose to a terminally ill patient who makes the request orally and in writing.

Given that the population of Oregon is around 3.8 million, this figure is miniscule, and must surely indicate that euthanasia opponents, who bang on about "slippery slopes" and "opening floodgates" are talking out their hats.

As in previous years, most Oregonians who died this way last year had cancer and were older than 70, white and highly educated. All

but one was enrolled in hospice care, and all but two had some form of health insurance. Most died at home; the rest, in an assisted-living center or a foster-care home.

"The number of deaths was higher in 2008, but the rest of the patterns are essentially the same," said Dr. Katrina Hedberg, an epidemiologist with the Department of Human Services who compiled the most recent report.

The 11th annual report is the briefest so far, suggesting the absence of surprises in year-to-year data compiled by the state. It consists of a two-page summary and less than three pages of statistics. As recently as three years ago, the annual report ran to 24 pages.

While the number of deaths rose last year, the number of prescriptions written under the Death With Dignity Act stayed essentially the same – 88, compared with 85 the year before. Some patients who request and receive a lethal prescription do not use it because they reconsider, lose their capacity to swallow the drug, or die of their underlying disease.

Oregon's law allows a doctor to prescribe a life-ending drug to a terminally ill patient of sound mind who requests it. Two oral requests must be made at least 15 days apart, plus a request in writing. A second doctor must agree the patient is expected to die within six months. The patient must swallow the lethal drug without assistance.

Broadcaster and writer Dame Joan Bakewell, 75, who revealed in the *Guardian* in 2004 that she was "an unbelieving Anglican" who "made no effort to see that my children became believers – I read my grandchildren bible stories as I read to them of Greek legends and Roman gods" – is one of the 80 percent of Britons who supports voluntary euthanasia – much to the consternation of the Christian Institute, which seized on her comment that the elderly should not be kept alive once they lose their "identity".

The CI's Simon Calvert said that Dame Joan's comments "ran the risk of giving the impression to people with dementia that they have a duty to die".

The CI, along with many other religious organisations, remain the principal obstacle in the battle to have the law changed in the UK. Given that religion means so little to the vast majority of the population, it is both bizarre and infuriating that these organisations are allowed to wield so much influence in regard to this vital issue.

Demand soars for debaptism certificates

TOP story in a March issue of the Church of England newspaper concerned a sudden surge of Brits choosing to debaptise themselves.

In one week alone, the paper reported via its Religious Intelligence website, 1,500 Brits paid for debaptism certificates provided by the National Secular Society.

The NSS has offered the certificate on its website for five years – and more than 100,000 people have downloaded it. But when it introduced a new parchment copy for £3, the demand suddenly escalated.

The NSS asked the Anglican Church if they will follow the Catholic example and provide an official procedure for undoing baptism, but the Church is refusing to recognise a need for the procedure.

A letter from the Church's legal adviser Stephen Slack to NSS president Terry Sanderson said: "The Church of England has no reason from its point of view for maintaining a formal record of those who have renounced their baptism: it is content simply to accept that those who have explicitly repudiated their baptism and take no part in the life of the Church should not be regarded as members of it in the more general sense."

The Church insists that it collects data only on attendance, the number of those who have been baptised in the Church of England in the year in question, and the number of people whose names are entered on the electoral rolls maintained by its parishes.

However, a recent investigation by *The Times* revealed that the number of Anglicans baptised in England was used by the Wakeham Commission in reform of the House of Lords.

The 26 Lords Spiritual could now have their position undermined as the number of people being debaptised grows.

Sanderson has been "astonished" by the popularity of the certificate. He said: "It could have political repercussions – if a sufficient number of people became involved. I can't see that happening though. It mainly shows that the resurgence of religion that we're seeing at the moment is unsettling a lot of people. It's always in the background, everybody has still got that residual echo of religion in their heads even if they rejected it intellectually."

The text of the certificate was written years ago by former NSS President Barbara Smoker.

REAL LIFE

Growing up in America's most hated family

Trevor Melanson meets Nate Phelps, atheist son of Pastor Fred Phelps, founder of the hate-mongering Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas

The mattock, a close cousin of the pickaxe, is used to dig through tough, earthy surfaces – it loosens soil, breaks rock, and tears through knotted grass. Its handle is a three-foot wooden shaft, twice the density of a baseball bat and its dual-sided iron head is comprised of a chisel and a pick. It was Pastor Fred Phelps's weapon of choice when beating his children according to his son, Nate Phelps.

"The Bible says 'spare the rod, spoil the child,'" explained Nate, "and he would be screaming that out as he was beating us." One Christmas night, Pastor Phelps hit Nate over 200 times with a mattock's handle, swinging it like a baseball player.

Nate would hide out in the garage with his siblings, where he could escape his father's wrath. What he couldn't escape, however, was the fear of going to hell. He suffered much abuse growing up under the roof of the infamous Westboro Baptist Church (WBC) – he still suffers today.

The church, which believes that "God is hateful", hasn't changed its grim outlook since Nate's time there 30 years ago, but it has expanded its fame. WBC has become well known for picketing funerals, where its followers, predominantly Phelps family members, proclaim that God is punishing "fags and fag enablers". To further the damage, the church frequently targets military funerals.

"WBC will picket the funerals of these Godless, fag army American soldiers when their pieces return home," their website says. They believe God is punishing America for facilitating homosexuality, which, according to the church, ought to be a capital crime.

More recently, WBC planned to protest the funeral of Tim McLean, the young [Canadian] man who was beheaded on a Greyhound bus. However, they were barred from crossing the Canadian border. It is little wonder that Louis Theroux's BBC documentary on the Phelps was titled *The Most Hated Family in America*.

Incidentally, it was when I mentioned this



A typical Westboro Baptist Church rally

documentary that Nate introduced himself to me. It was a Monday in September 2008 and I was on my way to the Cranbrook Airport, Cranbrook, a modest city of about 25,000, in BC's Kootenays. It rests behind a shroud of mountains, clean air, and restful silence.

I began a conversation with my cab driver, who looked to be in his late forties, with a trimmed beard and kind eyes. He told me that he once owned a chain of print shops with his brother, that he liked the BBC, and that Pastor Fred Phelps was his father – only after I had mentioned WBC, unaware. Following this coincidence, he agreed to an interview.

Nate's story tells of the "shadow – the dark, ugly thing at the back of their minds." The fear of burning in hell never goes away, said Nate, who is still struggling with it himself. "It's destructive. It's hard to live life with that stuff in your head." But he's doing his best.

His conditioning began over 40 years ago in Topeka, Kansas, where WBC was formed and still exists today. As its pastor, his father very

quickly alienated himself from most of the people who had seeded the church.

"A young lady got pregnant by a soldier at Fort Riley," explained Nate, "and [my father's] response to that was to kick her out of the church...and that sent most of the people packing. There was already that siege mentality developing: us against the world."

Sundays were particularly strict. Nate was expected to dress formally and present himself in the church auditorium by a certain time. The sermon that followed was always "fire-and-brimstone preaching".

"I know that very early on [my father] was under the influence of those drugs," Nate said. Pastor Phelps was attending law school and would take amphetamines to stay awake and barbiturates to come down. "It spiralled out of control [and he] was prone toward violence ... He just wasn't tolerant toward the presence of all of us kids running around – and the accompanying noise ... He would beat the kids with his fists and kick them and knee them in

the stomach.”

Nate doesn't know why his father was such an angry man; he didn't know his father very well. "I just know that that's the way he was and I stayed as far away from him as I could."

He remembers when his father would force him and his siblings to run five to ten miles around the high school track every night. One evening another boy was riding his bicycle along the outer lanes of the track, and Fred began yelling at him to leave. The boy's response was to keep riding on the track, and Fred's was to push him off the bike. The boy left, screaming, and 20 minutes later a truck came screeching into the parking lot. The boy had brought his father, who approached Fred and knocked him to the ground.

"The man was threatening to sue him," said Nate. "Then my old man yelled at us all to get in the car and we went home, and [my father] ended up beating my mom that night."

Nate left home the day he turned 18. For a while he worked for a lawyer in Kansas City, eventually moving to St Louis to work for a printing company with his brother Mark. He and Mark opened up their own print shop soon after. But then, after three years and despite his brother's disapproval, Nate returned home.

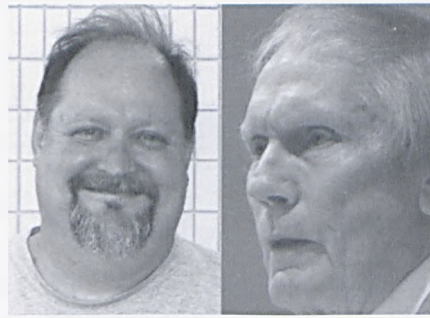
"My sisters were trying to convince me that things had changed....I attended college for a semester and realized that while he may have been less prone to physical violence, he still was the same person. He just used different techniques to violate people – with his words and his deeds."

In October of 1980, Nate left for good. He found residence above a Volkswagen repair shop, where he went through about six months in a drug and alcohol haze. He eventually ran into Mark's wife and she suggested that he and his brother reconcile their animosity, which had been caused when Nate returned to WBC temporarily. And so Nate moved to California to work with his brother again.

Late one night over a decade later, Nate found himself listening to his father being interviewed on a radio station in Los Angeles – it wasn't long after Fred had gained national attention with his protests. Nate called in under the impression that the interview was a rerun, but realised after calling that his father was on the air live.

"I was freaked out. I got on and I challenged [my father]....That lasted about maybe a minute, and it devolved quickly into him calling me every name he could imagine, and then he handed the phone to Shirley, and she delivered a few diatribes."

Shirley Phelps-Roper, Nate's sister, has gained her own reputation for being the



Nathan Phelps and his abusive monster of a father, the Rev Fred Phelps

church's other loud voice. Nate says that she has always been their father's favourite. I contacted her to ask about her brother, and she responded with the following.

"Nathan Phelps is a rebel against God," she said. "He has nothing to look forward to except sorrow, misery, death and hell ... Great peace fell upon our house when Nathan left ... He spat on the goodness of his mother and father."

'Nathan Phelps is a rebel against God. He has nothing to look forward to except sorrow, misery, death and hell'

"In spite of that, his father and mother loved him and did their duty to him ... and required of him that he behave while he lived in their house. They loved him in the only way that the Lord God defines love! They told him the truth about what the Lord his God required of him. He was not going to have that!"

Shirley also claimed that Nate "left when he was a raging disobedient rebel with selective memory," and asked, "What in this world is he doing in Canada?"

Nate met his ex-wife in 1981, married in 1986. They had three children together and he helped raise a fourth. They moved to a new, pre-planned city, Rancho Santa Margarita, nestled at the foot of Saddleback Mountain in California.

"It was like paradise," Nate said. "It was a perfect little town, and we were young and starting a family. It all just seemed so ideal."

They joined a church, where they met many other families, with five of which they became close.

"Every Sunday, I was listening closely and trying desperately to find something in the preaching or in the words that would convince me that this was right. Even while I was doing that, I was always sceptical ... but I

never voiced it. I was very good at playing the apologist for the Christian faith. In fact, I had quite a reputation for writing and talking in defence of Christianity."

The turning point was one Christmas, when Nate decided to teach his children about God. In the end, his son Tyler began crying in the backseat of the car, saying that he didn't want to go to hell.

"He wanted to believe because he didn't want to go to hell," Nate said. "I was just stunned because I didn't know what I had said or how I had left him with that fear. I thought I was doing a good job of presenting it without the fear."

"Thinking about it after the fact, I realised you can't do that. With a young mind it doesn't matter. You can try as much as you want to talk about how good God is, but the bottom line is there's this intolerably frightening punishment if you don't accept it. And how does a young mind deal with that?"

Nate agrees with prominent atheist and scientist Richard Dawkins, who has said that religion can be "real child abuse".

Dawkins tells the story of an American woman who wrote to him. She was raised as a Roman Catholic and was sexually abused by her parish priest in his car. Around the same time, a Protestant school friend of hers died tragically.

"Being fondled by the priest simply left the impression (from the mind of a seven-year-old) as yucky," she wrote, "while the memory of my friend going to hell was one of cold, immeasurable fear. I never lost sleep because of the priest, but I spent many a night being terrified that the people I loved would go to hell. It gave me nightmares."

"The threat of eternal Hell is an extreme example of mental abuse," Dawkins says on his website, "just as violent sodomy is an extreme example of physical abuse."

"I couldn't agree more," asserted Nate. "In so many different ways we have abused children with religion over the centuries."

Nate said that he is being contacted by nephews he'd never previously met who have made the same choice he did 30 years ago. One of them was Tim, who told Nate that he spends many nights crying himself to sleep. He's scared. "Once he made the choice, he's cut off. Everything that he grew up with is taken away from him, and he gets to wonder if he's going to burn in hell....[He's] living with that shadow."

Eventually, Nate told his wife that he couldn't continue believing. Then he told the men from the five families that they were close to, and they responded by disappearing

Growing up in America's most hated family

from his life.

"As far as they were concerned, I was a traitor – well, that's how they behaved."

In 2005, Nate's marriage failed. Around the same time, he met another woman online, Angela. She lived in Canada, and Nate knew that he had to make a tough decision.

"The decision was that I was going to come here to her," Nate said. "When I left, one of the first things [my wife] did was blame the failed marriage on us leaving the church."

He moved to Cranbrook in December of 2005. Since then, he's been doing a lot of reading and thinking.

"I do declare myself an atheist now," affirmed Nate, "although I'm willing to admit that there's stuff in life that I'm not real clear on yet."

Despite this, he still lives with anxiety caused by his experiences over 40 years ago.

"I spent the first 25 or 30 years of my life denying that anything was wrong with me ... Then bam: all this weird stuff just starts coming out.

"It's so, so difficult to go back and look at stuff and try to make sense of it, especially being this far removed from it. I'll immerse myself in it for a couple weeks, and then I've got to back away because it's too destructive. But I have to believe it's going to turn out."

I asked Nate what he wanted for his future.

"I think the best way to answer that is what I said to my wife when we were fighting at the end." He paused for a moment. "That I just



Shirley Phelps-Roper

want peace. I want to not wake up fearful every morning."

Editor's note: Trevor Melanson's piece originally appeared in the University of British Columbia's student publication, *The Ubyyssey*. It is the largest student paper in Western Canada. Immediately after its publication, Shirley Phelps-Roper, Nate's sister, penned the following e-mail to *The Ubyyssey*: "Amazing stuff. At the end of the day, rebel Nate who is a man of the flesh according to the Bible, cannot get it into his head the the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The child crying over a fear of hell is exactly what is intended by the plain language of the scriptures.

"You can love that and live that and own that and be one with that, as they say, or you can

foolishly fight against that. WHO thinks they can beat God? YIKES! He never one time mentions HIS duty to teach HIS children every day in every way with every thing that does and says what the Lord their God requires of them. God is a consuming fire. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, WE PERSUADE MEN! Just look at the way you two brutes got together and tried to put a fluffy spin on rebellion AND the consequences thereof."

This prompted a response from American atheist commentator Austin Cline:

"It sounds an awful lot to me like Shirley Phelps-Roper is arguing that psychological and emotional abuse of children is the point of the Bible. Given how atrocious many of the stories and teachings in that book are, I find it hard to argue against her – but rather than treat this as license to engage in abuse, I treat it as a reason to reject the Bible and seek guidance or inspiration in more moral sources.

"I think other Christians at least unconsciously agree and this is one reason why they aren't flocking to churches like Phelps'. Unfortunately, they can't completely let go of ancient superstitions so they continue to cling to the Bible by reinterpreting in ways that more closely match morals, ethics, and standards what would have been foreign and abhorrent to the original authors. In effect, they want the authority of the Bible behind ethics that have little or nothing to do with the Bible."

Cult says toddler 'will rise from the dead'

A 22-year-old Maryland woman has agreed to co-operate in the prosecution of members of a cult accused of causing the death of her two-year-old son – on condition that charges against her be dropped if the child rises from the dead.

Ria Ramkissoon's plea bargain was described by her attorney as unprecedented in American jurisprudence.

Baltimore Circuit Court Judge Timothy Doory told Ramkissoon that "if the victim in this case, Javon Thompson, is resurrected – as you still hold some hope he will be – you may withdraw the plea, and the charges will be *nolle prossed* [withdrawn] against you.

A spokeswoman for the Baltimore state's attorney's office said that in recent weeks, as prosecutors and Ramkissoon's attorney discussed the plea bargain, they made it clear that she could not get out of her obligations if she asserted that Javon returns as anything other than



Ria Ramkissoon with her son Javon

himself.

Margaret Burns said that "this would need to be a Jesus-like resurrection. It cannot be a reincarnation in another object or animal." Ramkissoon and other cult members are convinced that Javon will come back to life.

Ramkissoon is the prosecution's star witness against a 40-year-old Baltimore woman named Queen Antoinette. Prosecutors allege that Queen Antoinette led a small cult, called One Mind Ministries, based in West Baltimore, and that in early 2007 she instructed Ramkissoon and others to deprive Javon of food and water because he didn't say "amen" before breakfast. The child later died.

Queen Antoinette has been charged with first-degree murder and child abuse resulting in death, as have three of her followers. Any trial is expected to be at least a month away.

Ramkissoon pleaded guilty to child abuse resulting in death. If she testifies truthfully against the other defendants, according to the agreement, prosecutors will recommend that she be released from jail, placed on probation, and provided treatment that could include "a process of deprogramming".

Something rotten in the state of Kerala

The abuse of nuns in this southwestern Indian state is part of a bigger picture of Catholic Church greed and corruption, reports **JANE KEANE**

In August of last year, the Indian press gave wide coverage to the suicide of Anupa Mary, a nun at the St Mary's Convent at Kollam. Her father alleged that his daughter had been "mentally and physically tortured by the head of the convent. She was made to do all the chores in the convent and in the night she was sexually harassed by the Mother Superior. This had been happening for the past two months, and I came to know about it only after she committed suicide".

Then, last November, Kerala was rocked by the news that two priests from the Kottayam Knanaya Catholic Diocese and a nun had been arrested in connection with the death 16 years earlier of Sister Abhaya, who was found dead in a water well in St Pius X convent in Kottayam, India. She was 19 years old at the time of her death and was a member of St Joseph's Congregation for Women.

Initial police investigations led to the conclusion that she had committed suicide. But public pressure on the police forced further investigations, and foul play was uncovered. The police then arrested Fr Thomas Kottur, Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Kottayam, Fr Jose Puthrikkayil, Principal of St Pius X College, Rajapuram, Kasaragode, and Sister Sephy, a member of St Joseph's Generalate, in Kottayam.

The Central Bureau of Investigation alleged last December that all three were highly influential and had directly exerted "undue influence on the witnesses through the handouts circulated on their behalf at Kottayam and elsewhere". As a result, witnesses at the scene of crime, inmates of the hostel and others were refusing to divulge facts known to them.

A trial is still pending.

There was more bad news for the Catholic Church earlier this year when Sister Jesme, 52, recalled years of sexual abuse in a book published in India and now in its third reprint.

Amen: The Explosive Life Story of a Kerala Nun, reveals that Sister Jesme, once part of the Congregation of Mother of Carmel under the Catholic Church, had experienced a harrowing ecclesiastical life which eventually forced her to leave the convent after 30 years.

Born C. Meamy Raphael, Jesme says in her autobiography that she received her first rude shock when she was a novice. "At a retreat for novices, I noticed girls in my batch were unsettled about going to the confession chamber. I found that the priest there asked each girl if he could kiss them. I gathered courage and went in. He repeated the question. When I refused, he quoted from the Bible which spoke



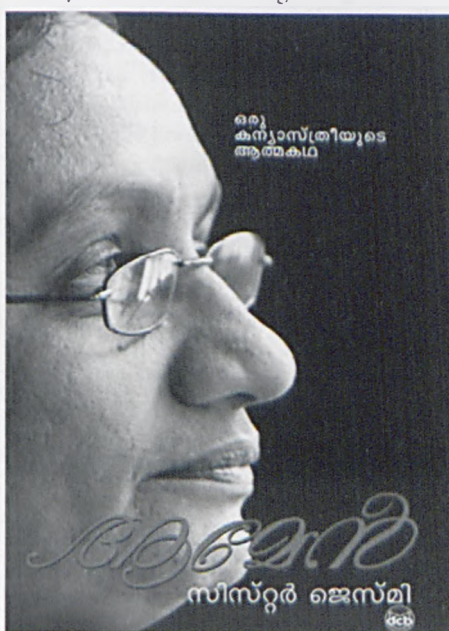
Dead nuns Anupa Mary, left, who committed suicide, and Sister Abhaya, who was murdered

of divine kisses," she writes.

Her second shock encounter was with an ordained nun. "I was sent to teach plus-two students in St Maria College. There, a new sister joined to teach; she was a lesbian. When she tried to corner me, I had no way but to succumb to her wishes. She would come to my bed in the night and do lewd acts and I could not stop her."

Lesbian relations are quite common in many of the convents, where nuns often get bonded as pairs for emotional and physical relief, Jesme says.

In Bangalore for a refresher course in English, she was "told to stay at the office of a priest respected for his strong moral side. But when I reached the station, he was waiting there and hugged me tight on arrival. Later in the day, he took me to Lalbagh and showed me



Sister Jesme, featured on the cover of her best-selling autobiography, Amen: The Explosive Life Story of a Kerala Nun

cupid-struck couples and tried to convince me about the need for physical love. He also narrated stories of illicit relations between priests and nuns to me. Back in his room, he tried to fondle me and when I resisted, got up and asked angrily if I had seen a man. When I said no, he stripped himself, ejaculated and forced me to strip."

Of her autobiography, which I understand might soon be published in English, M V Pylee, first Vice Chancellor of Cochin University of Science and Technology says: "It's a very courageous work. It's not easy for a person who has lived 30 years in a convent to bring out the undesirable things that happened there, particularly matters like jealousy and backbiting between sisters in responsible positions."

Narrating how deeply disappointed and disillusioned she is after choosing a religious vocation on her own volition at a very young age, Jesme exposes the power struggles in the "dark confines" of convents she had lived in for about 30 years, and in the corridors of church administration.

An English professor and later the principal of a church-run college in Thrissur, Jesme quit the convent last year after what she said were years of "sufferings and struggles".

"I wanted an outlet for my experiences of my trauma ... Society has every right to know what is happening to sisters," Jesme said, dismissing suggestions she has sensationalised issues to get cheap publicity.

Jesme, who continues her religious life or "sanayas" even after leaving the convent, said the aim of the book was not just selling something juicy but "opening a little window to allow some light to enter into the silent sufferings of hundreds of women ... When a woman is molested only one in thousand will speak out. Then think of the nuns, they will not speak out the truth".

Jesme's friend and lawyer R. K. Asha, who helped in the writing of the book, insists the work was not meant to tarnish the church's image as alleged in certain quarters.

"She had shown courage to expose the unholy things happening in convents and whatever she had written are truths", Asha said.

In examining the background to Jesme's book, Hong Kong-based human rights lawyer Bijo Francis wrote that Sister Jesme, principal of the prestigious St Mary's College in Thrissur, Kerala, "was revered in the academic community as a fine teacher with open views about the society where she teaches and lives".

"As a nun in the Congregation of Mother Carmel, Sister Jesme had taken a vow of pov-

Something rotten in the state of Kerala

erty, prayer and education. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, also known as St Benedict of India, who established the first seven monasteries in India established the CMC congregation, which was the first such institution to educate women in India.

"However, with the passage of time, the church, particularly the Syro-Malabar Church of India, distanced itself from poverty. The CMC congregation, like many other affiliates of the Syro-Malabar Church, runs educational institutions in India to which only the rich and influential can afford to send their children. Jesmi was against this and started publically speaking against this 'business' approach of her own congregation.

"It did not take long for the CMC congregation to consider her a hindrance to the 'business' of the congregation. She was reportedly asked by her superiors to refrain from addressing public functions, which she refused. Soon she was asked to step down as principal of the college.

"Among the accusations against Sister Jesmi were that she refused to force her students to participate in church-organised protests; that she continuously refused to dismiss and punish teachers who were not 'acceptable' to certain persons at the bishop's house; and that she dared to question the legitimacy of orders issued by the church – which she claims defied the principles of decency, legality and the very nature of an educational institution.

"Democracy within the Catholic Church appears to resemble rather closely the communist version – in other words, absolute dictatorship. There is also a shared tendency to slander opponents; church-sponsored publications in Kerala claimed that Sister Jesmi suffered from a mental disorder.

"Jesme tried to meet the mother superior of the congregation, but was refused an appointment. Fed up with the continuous insults,

Jesme resigned from the Church.

"Jesme's story is not a unique incident in India. Disgruntlement inside and outside the church due to its businesslike approach is very common. Yet, for a nun to resign and call a press conference to explain the reasons is extremely rare.

"Education has long been a full-fledged business in India. Leading the way and setting new trends in this business are Christian institutions – for example, the professional educational institutions run by Christian missionary establishments in Kerala state.

"The Jubilee Mission Hospital in Thrissur is one instance. The mission hospital was converted into a medical college recently. Since it is under private management – the Church – it could demand whatever admission fees it liked.

"The latest reports are that the management of the Jubilee Mission Medical College demands an admission fee from students ranging from 5 to 7 million rupees (US\$113,000 to US\$158,000) per student.

"According to Indian standards, for parents to pay such huge sums of money for their children's education, they must either have an illegal source of income or they must be defrauding the tax department. By accepting such black money, the church is not only conniving with tax defrauders, but is also causing a serious dent in the state's economy.

"The fact that parents are willing to pay such huge sums of money to church-run institutions means they feel safe that details of their payments will not be divulged by the church to the government. That means the church is also engaged in accounting fraud.

"So much for the Christian churches, founded on the philosophy of poverty and sacrifice. Churches run other business establishments as well, ranging from professional music studios to petty chit funds. As of now the churches in

India have become synonymous with corporate business.

"Obviously such business interests can only survive in a society that has the least possible concept of justice. With so many corrupt business interests at stake, the Christian church needs to promote corruption. For this, the church shamelessly rallies behind corrupt politicians and bureaucrats.

"For example, a high-ranking police officer in Kerala – notorious for corrupt practices and recently found at fault for torturing innocent persons in custody – is a close associate of the Catholic Church in Kerala. In fact this officer was earlier known for composing church hymns in Malayalam.

"The Christian church has long been an ingredient in the toxic concoction of power, religion and politics of the country. Church leaders in India are known for their close association with corrupt politicians and police officers. Using this influence the church wards off anything and everything that opposes its business interests. One such example is the case concerning a retreat center in a place called Potta, near the Chalakudi Township in Kerala.

"The retreat centre is well known among believers as a detoxification center for drug abusers and alcoholics. Slightly more than a decade ago it was a small retreat center run in a thatched shed; it has now become a huge establishment.

"It is alleged that some of the inmates were prescribed medicines by priests at the centre who had no licences to practice medicine. The patients were prescribed medicines and prayers alike, making them believe that such treatment would cure life-threatening conditions like cancer and AIDS. This is illegal and a crime under Indian law.

"When the police took action against the retreat centre after receiving a complaint concerning unauthorised medical treatment, the church retorted by claiming that it was an infringement of religious freedom. The church organised state-wide protests to oppose the police enquiry. Students studying in Christian educational institutions were forced to take to the street to protest against the highhandedness of the state.

"It is incidents like these that Sister Jesme protested and against which she voiced her concern. But her superiors had turned a blind eye to this corruption due to religious fundamentalism and the luxuries that the business of religion brought in.

"Students at her former school will miss Jesme, but the Christian church will not. For the church, individuals like her are not devoted nuns or priests – they are a bad investment in a large enterprise."

Taliban kill love affair couple

THE Taliban in Afghanistan last month publicly executed a young couple who they said had tried to run away to get married.

The man, 21, and woman, 19, were shot dead on Monday in front of a mosque in the south-western province of Nimroz. Nimroz is an area where the Taliban have a strong influence.

Governor Ghulam Dastageer Azad told the AFP news agency the killings followed a decree by local religious leaders, and were an "insult to Islam".

Azad said: "An unmarried young boy and an unmarried girl who loved each other and wanted to get married had eloped because their families would not approve the marriage."

Officials said the couple were traced by militants after they tried to go to Iran. They were made to return to their village in Khash Rod district.

"Three Taliban mullahs brought them to the local mosque and they passed a fatwa (religious decree) that they must be killed. They were shot and killed in front of the mosque in public," the governor said.

Ariane Sherine: The Gentle Securalist

Dave McKeegan chats to the young creator of the Atheist Bus Campaign

Share a thought for “Proclaiming Truth In London”. The Christian evangelical group’s modest hope was that their Bible-quoting bus advert would hell-scare a few of the capital’s pedestrians into worshipping their zombie-god.

Instead, it sparked a planet-wide atheist counter-revolution, with public transport in cities around the globe bearing messages which cast varying degrees of doubt on the dearly held beliefs of millions.

In the league table of Christian home-goals, it ranks up there with Christian Voice’s Stephen Green’s finest.

And for that, we have to thank Ariane Sherine, journalist, comedy writer, and atheist. On that fateful morning last June she saw two of those “Jesus Said” adverts and was inspired to start a campaign of her own.

Almost a year later, the now-famous slogan *There’s Probably No God. Now Stop Worrying and Enjoy Your Life* was plastered onto the sides of buses in cities all over the UK – and copycat campaigns started up in Canada, the US, Spain, Holland, Italy and Australia.

The media coverage was spectacular, and Ariane was nominated for the National Secular Society’s Secularist of the Year Award (won eventually by Evan Harris MP and Lord Avebury for getting the blasphemy law abolished).

Arguably, atheism has never enjoyed such a high – and highly positive – public profile.

I bumped into Ariane on the internet, and took the opportunity to ask her for an interview. She kindly agreed.

Dave McKeegan: Many people – mostly defensive Christians, but also many supportive atheists – see the atheist bus campaign as an attack on religion. Is it?

Ariane Sherine: Not at all. It’s a gentle, philosophical advertising campaign designed to reassure anyone who may have been scared by evangelical advertising (specifically the Jesus Said adverts running on London buses back in June, but also other adverts and websites which promote the idea of hell).

DM: Given the gentle, philosophical nature of the campaign, were you surprised at the ferocity of the reaction it provoked from some people?

AS: To be honest, I think everyone – except perhaps Stephen Green – has been quite mild about it (and I even suspect Stephen Green of being a little tongue-in-cheek at times!) There’s certainly been a lot of press coverage, but overall it’s been a lot more balanced than I expected, which is encouraging.

DM: The slogan remained unchanged from your original article back in June 2008. Did you have to fight for it?

AS: It had slightly changed (from “get on with your life” to “enjoy your life”, to make it catchier and more positive) but the slogan we’ve used is the same slogan I suggested to the British Humanist Association at the start of last September when they offered to support the campaign. I think the fact that so many people had already been positive about the slogan helped to persuade us all that it would be successful.

DM: There have been many suggestions for future slogans. What are your favourites?

AS: I like many of the slogans suggested by the Brazilian Atheist Bus Campaign, especially, “I’m happy without believing in any God”, with the subtitle “Be proud to be who you are. Do not hide.”

DM: Christians responded with their own campaign, which is markedly more aggressive. For example – I paraphrase – “All atheists are idiots” (“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’, Psalm 14:1). What do you think of this?

AS: I don’t think it’s going to cheer anyone up on the way to work! And I don’t think, overall, that it reflects well on the Trinitarian Bible Society. I’d much rather think I’d put out an ad which had made people smile, and I’m fairly sure they can’t think that. I don’t think people gravitate as readily to negative ideas as to positive, inclusive ones.

DM: As a professional comedy writer, do you think there is a place for humour and/or ridicule in the fight against irrationality?

AS: Yes – I think comedy can be one of the most effective mediums for change. If you can make people laugh, you’ll have connected with them, and they’ll be more likely to listen to your point

of view, whatever their current worldview. At the same time, I’m aware that we’re dealing with ideas which, though not rational, mean a lot to many people – so I try to keep that in mind if I do joke about them.

DM: Why do you think religion continues to be so popular?

AS: There are many reasons. Lots of people find it comforting to think a higher being is looking out for them when they’re going through tough times. Many also like the sense of community and togetherness they get from their religion. In dozens of countries – and millions of families – openly leaving your belief system is not an option. And there are also plenty of people who have been brought up to believe their religion is the only route to fulfilment.

DM: What is your personal philosophy?

AS: I’m an atheist and a secularist. I think everyone should be free to believe what they like, as long as they express these beliefs peacefully and allow others the same freedom. I also believe that all governments, schools and public institutions should be secular and base their laws, teachings and judgements on reason and science. I believe in being kind to people and in treating everyone equally, whichever belief system they follow.

DM: Are you going to carry on campaigning for a rational world view?

AS: Now that the main phase of the British campaign has finished, I’m going to take a break for a little while, but would definitely like to keep writing about secularism and promoting rationalist ideals. I think all children should be free to grow up in a world where they are allowed to question, doubt, think freely and reach their own conclusions about life’s big questions – and I hope that, within our lifetimes, this will happen.



points of view...

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

ADDRESS E-MAILS TO [BARRY@FREETHINKER.CO.UK](mailto:barry@freethinker.co.uk), AND LETTERS TO POINTS OF VIEW, *FREETHINKER*, PO BOX 234, BRIGHTON BN1 4XD



TIME TO SCRAP INCEST LAW?

NOW that we have rightly celebrated that monumental parliamentary success of abolishing the nonsense of blasphemy, is it not time to turn our guns on another great and purely religious absurdity? I speak of course of incest, that weird idea that it is always wrong for more or less closely related persons to have sex.

The concept of incest is found in many cultures and religions. The list of relationships that fall within its purview varies between them. Historically it was undoubtedly due, at least in part, to the recognition of the unfortunate consequences of inbreeding, and supporters of the continued existence of the legal prohibition continue to emphasise this.

But in Western society today, where contraception is widespread, incest is almost never committed with the intention of achieving procreation. Of course I hear the cries of "What about that Austrian who

deliberately fathered seven children with his daughter!", but he is surely an extreme case. And the point to notice is that his behaviour fell squarely under other criminal offences of rape, sex with minors and others. Those offences are rightly deplored and punished in all civilised societies. The additional offence of incest in such cases serves no practical purpose whatsoever.

But the legal offence of incest can bring terrible consequences in cases not involving minors. Sex between persons who are of age, who are capable of consent and are consenting, should surely never be the concern of the law, whatever the blood relationship between them may happen to be.

But many cases have been reported of men and women, related in one of the proscribed ways, who have been living together as sexual partners, and subsequently have been dragged through the courts and had their lives ruined for no reason save satisfaction of this archaic and absurd law.

What do others think?

S J (JIM) HAWLINS
Isle of Man

BOB SHAYLER
Cheltenham

'DODGY' ORIGINALS

FOLLOWING on from your "Dodgy" Herbs report (*FT* April), I should point out that the company website says this of its notoriously overhyped Duchy Herbs Detox Tincture: "It is made from extracts of artichoke and dandelion, cleansing and purifying herbs to help support the body's natural elimination and detoxification processes ..."

Which leads one to ask: "What are the toxins that necessitate these cleansing and detoxification processes, and can you demonstrate that this tincture actually enhances the body's natural abilities to deal with metabolic problems that you made up in order to convince the gullible to buy your bogus product?" And what happens to people who, like me, never "detoxify?"

The site also flogs Duchy Herbs Echina-Relief Tincture, a traditional herbal medicinal product used to relieve (sic) the symptoms of the common cold and influenza type infections ...

The made-up term "Echina-Relief" probably most closely means relief from hedgehogs and sea urchins.

Dr James Merryweather
Kyle of Lochalsh

MONOTHEISM IS AT THE ROOT OF FANATICISM

WE are horrified learning about the violent manifestations of religious extremism. People kill the non-believers and kill themselves so that their truth may triumph.

In fact it all goes back to the enunciation of the theory of monotheism.

The ancient Romans and Greeks, as well as other polytheists, worshipped many gods who, though immortal and very powerful, were not perfect. They loved and hated like we all do and, most importantly, could make mistakes.

Of course the Romans and the Greeks did a lot of killing but it was not for the triumph of their many gods.

It was Abraham and later Moses who structured a belief in a single perfect entity which could make no mistake because the concept of a single truth rules out other possibilities. Christianity and Islam followed the same logic which unavoidably leads to fanaticism and to extreme and violent manifestations.

And democracy, which maintains the possibility of many truths, is based on the rejection

THE CLIMATE CRISIS

MAY I add to the viewpoints on "The Climate Crisis" expressed by Stuart Campbell and David C Flint in the March *Freethinker*?

There has been a very large number of media articles and programmes on this issue, but very few of them stress the on-going damage to the climate and the environment due to sheer human over-population.

Switching off appliances on stand-by, using economy lightbulbs, even development of clean energy technology, whilst important, is only tinkering with the problem. What is urgently needed is significant population-reduction.

Readers may care to read a more-detailed case for this assertion (together with many other issues of interest to Humanists and atheists) in *Soliloquies of Concern & Action in a mixed-up World*. This book is freely available for downloading on www.getfreebooks.com Or simply Google in the title in speech marks (" ").

of the central assumption of monotheism.

Some may say that what is valid for politics has nothing to do with religion.

The problem is that to postulate the concept of multitruism even in science, one should reject the theory of monotheism.

DAVID IBRY
London

'FLAMING NUTTERS'

JUST to thank you for the April issue and to say that the new cover design, started a while ago, is alluring. Makes you want to get stuck in even more. Incidentally, I agree that "flaming bloody nutters" is a pretty good approximation to "ultra-Orthodox Jews" (*Freethinking Allowed*, April) – with one clear proviso: that it should be applied to all fundies, including Talibs, raving neo-cons and Catholics convinced that condoms can't do anything to control the devastating impact of AIDS.



Enver Carim
London

BIG QUESTIONS IN SCIENCE & RELIGION

PROFESSOR John Radford, with his typical perspicacity, again treated readers to a tremendous review of the big questions in science and religion (*Freethinker*, April, pages 8-10).

About half-way into his analysis, when speaking of "religious" experiences – otherwise called mystical, spiritual, or revelatory, where devotees report contact with a god, or with a transcendent, other, ultimate, divine or cosmic reality (with/without fairies or aliens) – said that because they are wholly subjective phenomena they are problematic and asks, "[W]hat is the experience of, what is the cause of it?"

It has been proposed (by Julian Jaynes and others) that they are regressions to an earlier mentality, and I'd like to present a new perspective to better understand their probable provenance. Although they differ in intensity, all these experiences of the mind have an hallucinatory element, and for their brief duration, as described by subjects, displace working "consciousness", a controversial term because there seem to be as many definitions as there are those who claim to possess it. So following Locke's, Descartes', and Jaynes' ideas, a brief personal understanding:

Consciousness is more than simply being awake, reactive, aware and knowledgeable of surroundings – many animals exhibit these attributes – rather, it is the operation of my private inner mind-space where I introspect, visualise, cogitate, calculate, plan and like Peter Pan playfully engage in all manner of escapades, at will dipping into memory or triggering others, and always with myself – an imagined analog – inescapably as participant or spectator. The facilitator is metaphorical language, for without it there can be no metaphorical "me", no internal dialogue, no narratisating, conceptualising, contextualising. So the more sophisticated the language, the wider can be the sweep of consciousness.

Imagine a see-saw. On the left is consciousness, on the right the susceptibility to "religious" experiences and religious belief. In cultures with rudimentary language, it would I think be true to say that the level of consciousness, as expressed by the cultural zeitgeist, is much lower than that of scientific cultures with advanced language.

In such rudimentary cultures, shamans and their groupies, using drugs or hypnotising ritual, readily access hallucinatory or "religious" states of mind, therein gaining "wisdom" about their world. Likewise, within advanced cultures, those with a genetic predisposition for religious experiences – whether the trigger is a relaxation technique or a psychological trauma – usually have little understanding of science and unsophisticated language. Or even within families: young children are mentally more vulnerable than adults. So when consciousness is relatively low, susceptibility to religious experience – and acceptance of irrational knowledge – is high. And vice-versa, when consciousness is high, religious belief is low.

The further one goes back in history, the further the see-saw tilts towards "consciousness low – religious belief high". If one goes back far enough, when pre-metaphorically linguistic homo sapiens

had a mentality that can only be postulated, it has swung to the vertical: "consciousness none – hallucination everything". I hear the shouts, "Not conscious! – of course they were conscious". Its called anthropomorphising: endowing pre-historic humans – or even animals – with a consciousness like our own, which is a barrier to a greater under-

standing of the big questions.

It is a vast subject Prof Radford thoughtfully raises. For consciousness varies depending on demand. When reading this letter, maybe yours became concentrated.

Graham Newbery
Southampton

THERE IS SOME GOOD IN RELIGION

THE April edition of the *Freethinker* was the best I have read. Although the whole magazine was very good, the articles by William Harwood and John Radford were outstanding. They were calmly and logically argued and avoided a mistake which does sometimes creep into our journal.

"Vicar steals parochial funds" is a headline which might appear – but should it? 'Humanist robs post office' is not a headline we are likely to see. It could be argued that the thieving vicar is a hypocrite but his religion cannot be blamed for his offence. A theist could reasonably argue that the vicar has betrayed the beliefs of the church. On the other hand when a Catholic priest assaults a child it is reasonable to suggest that the sexual perversion of imposed celibacy might have contributed to the crime.

Yes, many of the rules made by theists are vile. Your article on the dreadful treatment of the old woman in Saudi Arabia illustrates what can and does happen in the name of Islam. But Pol Pot did not need a religion to

urge him to behave the way he did.

Some of the religious teachings on how we should behave are excellent and we should not shy away from admitting that some religious individuals and some religious organisations do good things. Salvationists have barny beliefs but many of them go out at night to minister to the homeless while I stay in my warm house. If I think of the people I have known in my long life I find that some have been kind and some not. Some have been religious and some not. I can see no pattern of belief or non-belief affecting behaviour. There are good and evil theists. There are good and evil atheists.

Our attacks should not be against the bad behaviour of individuals but against religious bodies and the promotion of religion because they pervert the search for truth. Theism is wrong because it promotes fantasy as truth and then claims the right to dictate how we live our lives.

Douglas Harding
Worstead

ATHEIST BUS CAMPAIGN ... AND DARWIN

MANY congratulations on the attractive new format to our indispensable FT which, incidentally, seems to get better and better with every issue. I think the "new look" is a real eye-catcher and may well tempt non-readers to sample its contents.

As a humanist/atheist for over 60 years I think I can say without fear of contradiction that the Atheist Bus Campaign is just about the greatest fillip to the freethought movement in this country that I have witnessed for many a long year. I think the reason that it got off the ground so spectacularly was because the media displayed immediate interest as a result of the astonishing public response for donations. At least the media should now understand that Prof Richard Dawkins is not the only atheist in this country (as some sections of the Press occasionally suggest!) and that there are literally thousands of atheists up and down the country who happily share the professor's incisive and uncompromising rationalism.

I feel compelled to take issue with Rupert Young, a member of the British Humanist Association, in his dismay that Westminster Abbey refused to recognise the 200th anniversary of

Darwin's birth by holding some sort of religious ceremony in the Abbey after the wreath-laying. I think this would have been totally inappropriate and something that Darwin would surely not have approved. It is a well-known fact that the great man never endeared himself to the Church of England, especially when we remember a passage in his unexpurgated autobiography where he declared that... "I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true, for the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my father, brother and almost all my friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine." Hardly the words of a dedicated member of the Anglican Church!

I have always believed that science and religion are totally irreconcilable and I still remember a remark I overheard as a teenager to the effect that "when evolution was born the Christian God died". In much later life I heard it expressed thus: "You can have evolution or you can have God – but you can't have both!"

Martin O'Brien
Gwent

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 May 21, 7.45pm. Howard Brown, *Autobiography: Journey Through Darkness*.

Brighton & Hove Humanist Society: **i** 01273 227549/461404 **w** <http://homepage.nfworld.com/robert.stovold/humanist.html>. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. Wed, May 6, 8pm. Barry Duke (*Freethinker* editor). *Atheism on the Internet*. Wed, June 3, 8pm. David Powell: *Thomas Paine. The Greatest Exile*. Wed, July 1, 8pm. AGM.

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** Chair: Alan Palmer. Sec: Josh Kutchinsky. **e** info@centrallondonhumanists.org **w** www.meetup.com/central-london-humanists

Chiltern Humanists: Enquiries: 01296 623730.

Cornwall Humanists: **i** Patricia Adams, Sappho, Church Road, Lelant, St Ives, Cornwall TR26 3LA. Tel: 01736 754895.

Cotswold Humanists: **i** Philip Howell, 2 Cleavelands Close, Cheltenham GL50 4PZ. Tel. 01242 528743.

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

Cumbria Humanist Group: **i** Tel. 01228 810592. Christine Allen **w** www.secularderby.org **e** info@cumbria-humanists.org.uk.

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

Devon Humanists: **i** Roger McCallister, Tel: 01626 864046 **e** info@devonhumanists.org.uk

w www.devonhumanists.org.uk

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

w www.dorsethumanists.co.uk

Ealing Humanists: **i** Secretary Alex Hill Tel. 0208 741 7016 or Charles Rudd 020 8904 6599.

East Cheshire and High Peak Secular Group:

i Carl Pinel 01298 815575.

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

Essex Humanists: Programme available **i** 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** N I 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. May 13 AGM followed by discussion **i** Secretary on 0208 907-6124

w www.harrow.humanist.org.uk

e Mike Savage at mfsavagamba@hotmail.com

Havering & District Humanist Society: **i** Jean Condon 01708 473597. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgores Cres, Gidea Park. Thurs May 7, 8pm. AGM.

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

w www.nirelandhumanists.net

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

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

uk Media: media@humanism-scotland.org.uk. Education: education@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

Local Scottish Groups:

Aberdeen: 07010 704778, aberdeen@humanism-scotland.org.uk **Dundee:** 07017 404778, dundee@humanism-scotland.org.uk **Edinburgh:** 07010 704775, edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk **Glasgow:** 07010 704776, glasgow@humanism-scotland.org.uk **Highland:** 07017 404779, highland@humanism-scotland.org.uk **Perth:** 07017 404776, perth@humanism-scotland.org.uk

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

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.

w 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. May 21. Terry Liddle: *Thomas Paine's Influence on Radicalism, Secularism and Republicanism*

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

e lhghumanist@googlegmail.com. Meetings on the second Wednesday of each month.

Lynn Humanists, W Norfolk & Fens: Tel: 07811870215.

Marches Secularists: **w** www.MarchesSecularists.org **e** Secretary@MarchesSecularists.org

Mid-Wales Humanists: **i** Maureen Lofmark, 01570 422648 **e** mlofmark@btinternet.com

Norfolk Secular and Humanist Group: **i** Vince Chainey, 4 Mill St, Bradenham, Norfolk IP25 7QN. Tel: 01362 820982.

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

North East Humanists (Teesside Group): **i** C McEwan on 01642 817541.

North East Humanists (Tyneside Group): **i** the Secretary on 01434 632936.

North London Humanist Group: Meets third Thursday of month (ex. August) 8 pm at Ruth Winston House, 190 Green Lanes, Palmers Green, N13 5UE. Plus social events. Contact Sec: 01707 653667 **e** enquiries@nondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk **w** www.nondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk **e** enquiries@nondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk

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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. June 3. Michael Granville: *Finances of the Catholic Church*.

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** Alan Grandy: 0208 337 9214. **w** www.suttonhumanists.co.uk

Think Humanism: An independent discussion forum for anyone interested in humanism, secularism and freethought - www.thinkhumanism.com

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

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.

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.

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