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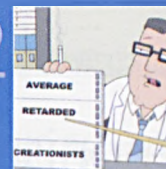
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Midsummer madness!

Ireland gets a new law of blasphemy as devout Catholics line up to worship a tree

Ireland became the laughing stock of the Western world last month when it introduced a law of blasphemy. The passing of the Bill in the Upper House of the Irish Parliament coincided with the appearance of the Virgin Mary in the form of a tree stump in the western county of Limerick (see p5).

This prompted immediate speculation that a priest, who warned devout Catholics not to worship the stump, could become the first person to be charged under the new law.

The priest, Fr Willie Russell, dismissed this latest example of parodolia as "just a tree."

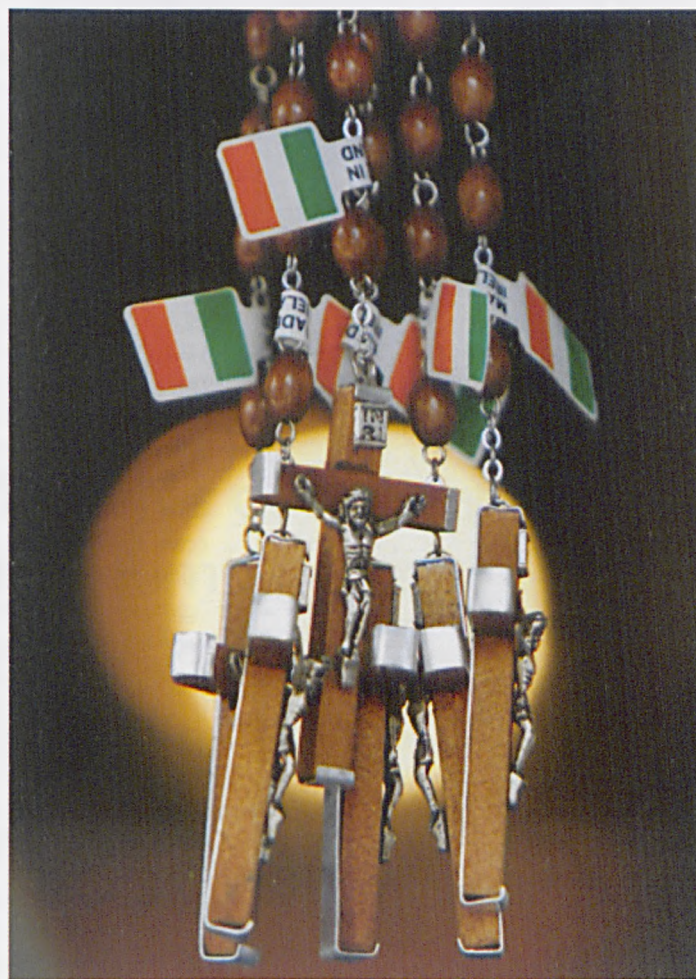
Senator Ivana Bacik told Parliament when the Bill was debated that "Fr Russell might be at risk of being found guilty of blasphemy since he is being critical, grossly abusive or insulting to people of a religion who seem to want to worship a tree. We should be mindful of the danger of introducing an offence like blasphemy in light of the sort of events that we are seeing in Rathkeale in Limerick."

Senator Dan Boyle, the chairman of the Green Party, the junior member in Ireland's governing coalition, quipped that he apparently led a party of "tree worshippers" and argued that the offence of blasphemy was archaic and should be made obsolete.

"The concept of blasphemy was brilliantly satirised by Monty Python in the film *Life of Brian* where a Pharisee was unintentionally stoned to death for repeatedly, although unwittingly, saying the word 'Jehovah'," Boyle said. "Much of the debate on this issue is a political equivalent of repeatedly saying the word 'Jehovah'. It is something we need to get out of our political system as soon as possible."

The House passed the Bill, but only after an initial hiccup when two senators' absence – one reportedly away at the dentist – all but caused it to be defeated by a small margin – or at least its main provisions weakened to meaninglessness by an opposition amendment.

The government of the traditionally Catholic country has defended the law by pointing out that there was already an existing piece of legislation dating back to 1961 that called for much stricter punishments. Ireland's constitution requires some form of punishment of blasphemy and the new law would decrease



Crucifixes on sale at Knock in Ireland

the penalty involved.

Justice Minister Dermot Ahern, who introduced the legislation, has been explaining at length that abolishing the crime of blasphemy altogether would require a constitutional amendment and a referendum.

Continued on page 4

Mormonism for Dummies

BARRY DUKE BONES UP ON THE CHURCH OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

Until last year, I regarded the Mormons as one of the world's most comical cults. I mean, magical underwear, what's that all about? If you don't know, let me offer help: the white tops and passion-killer bloomers for men and women pictured on this page are called "temple garments" which primarily provide wearers with "a constant reminder" of the covenants made in temples.

Second, the garment "provides protection against temptation and evil". Finally, wearing the garment is "an outward expression of an inward commitment" to follow Jesus Christ. The garments also "strengthen the wearer to resist temptation, fend off evil influences, and stand firmly for the right".

Researchers who interviewed a sample group of Latter-day Saints who wear lucky pants reported that virtually all expressed a belief that they provided "spiritual protection", and encouraged them to keep their covenants. Some of those interviewed "asserted that the garment also provided physical

protection". In Mormon folklore, tales are told of Mormons who credit their temple garments with helping them survive car wrecks, fires, and various other disasters.

I ceased regarding Mormons as amusing in 2008 when the Church suddenly decided to pour millions of dollars into Proposition 8, which overturned the rights of gays in California to marry. And, boy, did they have millions to spend. *Time* magazine recently estimated that the Church's current assets total a *minimum* of \$30 billion.

Last year \$5.2 billion in tithes flowed into its headquarters in Salt Lake City, \$4.9 billion of which came from American Mormons, of which there are around six million. Mormons worldwide total around 13 million. The LDS sends out over 50,000 missionaries who annually entice over 240,000 people into the cult.

So what do the Mormons *actually* believe? Mormonism, concocted by Joseph Smith in 1830, teaches that God – or "Elohim" – used to be a man on another planet, and that he became a god by following the laws and ordinances of a god on his home planet (not specified). In his present god-state, he rules our world. He has a body of flesh and bones and he has a wife. In their exalted positions as deities, it follows that Mr and Mrs Elohim must be at it like knives to spawn millions of spirit children that grow and mature in the spiritual realm before being propelled to earth.

The first spirit born to the Elohim was Jesus. Later came Lucifer and an assortment of "spirit creatures". After spirit children are born to God and his missus, the little spooks come down and entered into the bodies of human babies born on earth. During this "compression" into the infant state, the memories of their pre-existence as spirits are "veiled". All people, according to Mormonism, are born in heaven first then repeat the the whole tedious process on earth where they grow, learn, then return to God.

God the Father was concerned for the future salvation of the people on Earth. So he devised a plan for Earth's salvation. In his plan there needed to be a saviour – and Jesus, a useless sort of Prince of Wales figure who was aimlessly wandering around heaven with nothing better to do than perhaps chat up trees and endorse homoeopathy, was selected by He Who Must Be Obeyed to be reborn on Earth to Mary. Jesus gave the old boy's plan an enthusiastic thumbs-up. *A job at last!* Lucifer did not. He became jealous and rebelled. In his rebellion he convinced a large proportion of the spirits existing in heaven to side with



him and oppose God. God, being more powerful than they, cursed these rebellious spirits and turned them into demons.

The remaining spirits sided with God. Since they chose "the better way", when the time came for them to live on earth, they had the privilege of being born in locations of their choice. They could even choose their race.

Brigham Young, the second "prophet" of the Mormon Church, explained that instead of letting any old riff-raff diddle Mary, God came along to do it in person. Now I may have this wrong, but if, as Mormons imply, Mary was an offspring of God, she must have been Jesus's sister. Anyway, after his birth, Jesus grew up, got married, and had children.

All Mormons have the potential of becoming gods. A famous Mormon saying is *As God once was, man is. As God is, man may become*. In order to reach this exalted state a person must first become a good Mormon and pay a full ten percent tithe to the LDS. Afterwards, he or she can enter a Mormon temple and learn secret rituals: baptism for the dead, celestial marriage, and various oaths of secrecy and commitment. Additionally, four secret handshakes are taught so that the believing Mormon, upon arriving at the gates of the third level of Mormon heaven, can shake hands with God in the prescribed manner, and be granted entrance.

For those who achieve this highest of heavens, "exaltation to godhood awaits them". They will then be assigned their own planets and be gods of their worlds. Thus Mormonism will be expanded throughout the cosmos.

It beggars belief that people can fall for this fantastic garbage – but then again, consider how many people are duped each year by Scientology, a confused cocktail of crack-pot, dangerously applied psychotherapy, oversimplified, idiotic and inapplicable rules and ideas, and science-fiction drivel which is presented to its members (at the "advanced" levels) as profound spiritual truth.



BARRY DUKE
FREETHINKER
EDITOR

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Freethinker/GW Foote & Co Ltd
PO Box 234
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Email: barry@freethinker.co.uk
Tel: 01273 680531
Website: <http://www.freethinker.co.uk>

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“ They euthanased themselves. It’s a kinder word to use than suicide ”

Downes’ death pact re-ignites debate over Swiss euthanasia clinic



The decision taken by Sir Edward Downes and his wife Joan to end their lives at the Swiss clinic Dignitas has received enormous public support – but religious leaders are still insistent that assisted suicide should remain illegal in the UK.

Sir Edward Downes, 85, travelled to the Dignitas clinic last month with his wife Joan, 74, after she was told that she had terminal cancer. They were accompanied by their son and daughter, Caractacus and Boudicca. Sir Edward was frail but not dying.

Campaigners and church leaders immediately renewed their opposition to legalising assisted dying amid fears that elderly couples were being inspired to make “together-for-ever” suicide pacts.

Alastair Thompson, of the Care Not Killing alliance, said that the deaths risked “lowering the moral bar” and Dominica Roberts, chairwoman of the Pro-Life Alliance, said: “Britain is a world leader in palliative-care doctors. I am sure they could have lived out the rest of their lives happily.”

Aiding and abetting suicide is an offence punishable by up to 14 years in prison. The Crown Prosecution Service has failed to prosecute a single case involving Dignitas.

At least five of the 117 Britons who have died at Dignitas had conditions that doctors do not normally consider terminal. They include Daniel James, 23, who was left paralysed in a rugby accident but could have lived for many years. The Director of Public Prosecutions said there was no public interest in prosecuting his parents, who helped him to travel to the clinic.

Debbie Purdy, who suffers from multiple sclerosis and has fought to have the law on assisted suicide clarified, defended Sir Edward’s decision to die alongside his wife. “Who are the rest of us to tell Sir Edward Downes what he should or should not have borne? As a conductor, knowing he was losing his sight and his hearing must have been unbearable.”

Almost 800 people are now members of Dignitas. The clinic charges € 4,000 for assisted suicide. Commenting on the Downes decision, Melanie Reid, writing in *The Times*, said:

“Edward and Lady Downes had been together for 54 years – a magnificent marriage by any measure – and their health was deteriorating. His sight and his hearing were failing; he was also in discomfort from a hip operation. She had terminal cancer. They knew that

the end was coming and that the quality of life they had enjoyed was disappearing. And so before we rush to judgment about the rights and wrongs, let us grant this couple one thing: the right to make their own decisions about their lives, as they had presumably done in all the years before. Let us allow them absolute moral entitlement to choose what they considered to be a good death: together, lucidly, peacefully, and in control of their circumstances.

“They euthanased themselves. It’s a kinder word to use than suicide.

“Whether we, the public, consider what they did to be a good death is quite frankly immaterial. It was what the couple decided; and it was a brave, private decision. In that sense, how dare anyone be so patronising as to question it? But of course there are shadows. The sadness, perhaps, is that the Downeses were required to leave their home and travel, in their state of physical decline, to the clinic. This is the grubby bit, the point at which it becomes the business of death: the sense of a road travelled by the desperate; of money changing hands ...

“The end stages of life must become better managed here. If we were more adult about addressing what old people want, we would discuss this properly and understand what a good

death means. It means counselling, by someone who understands the looming loneliness; and it also means the decriminalisation of helping someone to die. The point is that sometimes proper counselling would avert a suicide and sometimes it might not, but the choice would be with the individual.

“In a compassionate society, the sadness is that the Downses were not able to die together, peacefully, lucidly, in control of their circumstances and in their own home.”

Contrast her piece with this fatuous bit of gobbledegook posted on *A Digest of Christian Comment* by Jonathan Mason: “How telling is the comment of their two children – ‘Our parents had no religious beliefs and there will be no funeral! Having no God to love and serve, Sir Edward Downes was, I suppose, in love with his work. And when he could no longer work, he found life intolerable. He was, of course, also deeply in love with his wife, and he chose to die with her rather than exist without her. In each case, he loved what had been created rather than the Creator. What he didn’t care to reckon with was that there is One who gives help to the helpless, and hope to the hopeless. And this is the One before whom we must all appear ...”

Mormon strikes daughter on the head with a lump of concrete

A 55-year-old New Zealand man who beat his daughter over the head with a lump of concrete when she refused to go to his Mormon church “does not understand what all the fuss is about”, the District Court in Hastings heard last month. Ulua Muliipu pleaded guilty to one count of assault with intent to injure.

Judge Geoff Rea said that on February 22 this year Muliipu had become involved in an argument with his daughter who refused to attend church. He chased her along a street and back into the house, picking up a lump of concrete along the way. He whacked her over the head with the concrete in a bedroom, then kicked her in the face causing bruising.

Judge Rea said: “When police arrived you told them your daughter was lucky you did not kill her.”

Muliipu’s daughter was taken to Hawke’s Bay Hospital with head injuries.

Defence lawyer Roger Stone told the court Muliipu had been angry that his daughter refused to go to church. He was a “proud” man who was “disappointed” his daughter had elected not to follow his Mormon faith.

Judge Rea said a probation officer’s report made “grim reading” because he “still does not understand what all the fuss is about.” Muliipu had been ejected from an anger management course because of his views and had an inability to understand that “whacking someone on the head is unacceptable.” In the circumstances, the judge concluded, there was only one course of action, and he jailed Muliipu for 12 months.



Ireland's 'stupid and regressive' new law

Ahern also defended his Bill by pointing to clauses which stipulate that blasphemous matter will only be prosecutable if it causes actual outrage among a substantial number of adherents of a religion. It also exempts works in which a "reasonable person" would find genuine literary, artistic, political, scientific, or academic value.

Which works qualify for that seems to open up a whole new debate. Atheists, who have separate campaigns running against the requirement for religious oaths before taking the office of judge or president of Ireland, say they will test the new law by publishing a deliberately blasphemous statement.

"The law also discriminates against atheist citizens by protecting the fundamental beliefs of religious people only", said Michael Nugent, one of the founders of Atheist Ireland (www.atheist.ie).

In a piece published in the *Irish Times*, Nugent, asked:

"Why has Dermot Ahern, in 2009, made blasphemy a crime punishable by a fine of €25,000? When this anachronistic part of the now Defamation Act is signed into law, Atheist Ireland will quickly test it by publishing a blasphemous statement. People need protection from harm, but ideas and beliefs should always be open to challenge.

"The new law is both silly and dangerous. It is silly because it revives a medieval religious crime in a modern pluralist republic. And it is dangerous because it incentivises religious outrage, by making it the first trigger for defining blasphemy.

"The problematic behaviour here is the outrage, not the expression of different beliefs. Instead of incentivising outrage, we should be educating people to respond in a more healthy manner than outrage when somebody expresses a belief that they find insulting.

"The law also discriminates against atheist citizens by protecting the fundamental beliefs of religious people only. Why should religious beliefs be protected by law in ways that scientific or political or other secular beliefs are not?

"Here's the background. The Constitution says that blasphemy is an offence that shall be punishable by law. That law currently resides in the 1961 Defamation Act. Because he was repealing this Act, Ahern said he had to pass a new blasphemy law to avoid leaving 'a void'.

"But this 'void' was already there. In 1999, the Supreme Court found that the 1961 law was unenforceable because it did not define blasphemy. In effect, we have never had an enforceable blasphemy law under the 1937

Constitution.

"After several retreats, Ahern claimed both that he had to propose this law in order to respect the Constitution, and also that he was amending it to 'make it virtually impossible to get a successful prosecution'. How is that respecting the Constitution?

"This type of 'nod and wink' politics brings our laws, and our legislature, into disrepute. In practice, we cannot be certain how our courts will interpret unnecessary laws, as we discovered after the abortion referendum.

"Also, the matter might be taken out of

on Civil and Political Rights.

"The Constitution also states that the homage of public worship is due to Almighty God. This is much more than an assertion of the right of citizens to worship this god. It is an assertion of the right of this god to be publicly worshipped by citizens.

"Our parliament recognises the rights of this god by praying to it every day. This prayer explicitly asks this god to direct the actions of our parliamentarians, so that their every word and work may always begin from and be happily ended by Christ Our Lord.

"Atheist Ireland is an advocacy group that campaigns for an ethical and secular Ireland, where the State does not support or fund or give special treatment to any religion. As well as a secular Constitution, we want to see a secular education system.

"Most primary schools in the Republic of Ireland are privately run denominational schools with a religion-integrated curriculum. This denies most children access to a secular education. It also affects teachers who are not religious.

"We are also launching a campaign encouraging people to read the Bible and other sacred books. Objectively reading the Bible is one of the strongest arguments for rejecting the idea of gods as intervening creators or moral guides.

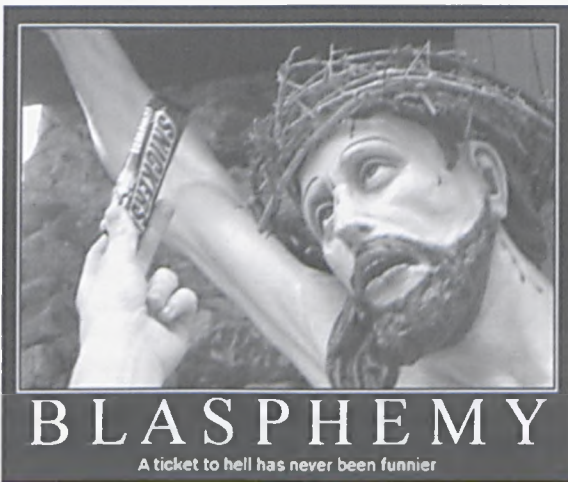
Atheist Ireland has now launched a campaign to have the law repealed – and Prof Richard Dawkins has thrown his weight behind their efforts.

In a message read out at Atheist Ireland's first AGM at the weekend, Dawkins said: "One of the world's most beautiful and best-loved countries, Ireland has recently become one of the most respected as well: dynamic, go-ahead, modern, civilised – a green and pleasant silicon valley. This preposterous blasphemy law puts all that respect at risk."

He said it would be too kind to call the law a ridiculous anachronism.

"It is a wretched, backward, uncivilised regression to the middle ages. Who was the bright spark who thought to besmirch the revered name of Ireland by proposing anything so stupid?", Dawkins added.

Messages of support for the campaign were also received from the creators of Father Ted, Graham Linehan and Arthur Matthews, and the European Humanist Federation. The federation, which represents 42 organisations in 19 countries, said it was "appalled" at the new law and it was "a seriously retrograde step".



our hands. In 2005, the Greek courts found a book of cartoons to be blasphemous, and issued a European arrest warrant for the Austrian cartoonist who drew them. This can be done if the same crime exists in both jurisdictions.

"Instead, we should remove the blasphemy reference from the Constitution by referendum. Many independent bodies have advised this, including the Council of Europe in a report last year co-written by the director general of the Irish Attorney General.

"We could do this on October 2nd, the same day as the Lisbon referendum. It could be the first step towards gradually building an ethical and secular Ireland. We should be removing all of the 1930s religious references from the Constitution, not legislating to enforce them.

"The preamble to our Constitution states that all authority of the State comes from a specific god called the Most Holy Trinity. It also humbly acknowledges all of the obligations of the people of the State to a specific god called Our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Up to a quarter of a million Irish atheists cannot become President or a judge unless they take a religious oath. These religious declarations are contrary to Ireland's obligations under the UN International Covenant

Christian chiropractor sacks atheist worker

Texas chiropractor, Dr Scott Dawson, invites people on his website to “experience the freedom of well-being” – but this despicable Christian zealot demonstrated no concern for the well-being of one of his employees, breast cancer sufferer Amanda Donaldson, when he discovered she was an atheist.

In fact he fired Amanda Donaldson because he believed her atheism was a threat to his “Christ-oriented” practice – but before doing so he threw a monumental tantrum.

Said Amanda, who had recently undergone a mastectomy: “He proceeded to scream and yell at me, while I was trying to get the key to his office off my keychain and gather my belongings, demanding that if I would accept Jesus I would be ok and telling me there was no point in my being there anyway, since I was never there.” The “never there” jibe referred her absences from work when she was being treated for her cancer.

Dawson found out about Amanda’s lack of belief when he stumbled on a blog run by her husband Brant in which he made clear his negative attitude towards religion. Brant set up www.saveamanda.com – where you can leave a message of support for Amanda – and frequently writes about the her illness, and the physical, mental and financial pain of her suffering breast cancer.

Dawson then threatened to sack Amanda if her husband did not remove anti-religious content from his blog. In order to protect his wife’s job, Brant agreed to do so.

This was not good enough for the vindictive zealot. On May 4, according to Brant, “a few hours into her shift he [Dawson] again brings up that she needs Jesus in her life, and she respectfully declined. She was told to leave. She was told “her attitude towards God was no longer welcome in his business”

Brant also alleges that Dawson told Amanda that she was “being punished for her lack of faith”.

Austin Cline, a Regional Director for the Council for Secular Humanism in the US, and a former Publicity Coordinator for the Campus Freethought Alliance, pointed out on his blog that the Donaldsons have little chance of bringing a successful lawsuit against Dawson. “By now I’ll bet you’re

thinking that Amanda Donaldson has a great legal case for illegal religious discrimination and will win a lawsuit – but you’d be wrong. Amanda has already gone to the EEOC and spoken with her state representatives and apparently Dr. Dawson could just state outright

“Yeah, I fired her because she’s an atheist and I’d do it again” without having to fear any legal repercussions.

“Why? Because labour laws in the state of Texas don’t entirely protect employees in companies that have 15 or fewer people working there. According to Amanda, any sort of discrimination – religious, racial, gender, disability etc – is legal for small firms.

She’s trying to get the law changed, but even if she’s successful that can’t help her now.”



Amanda Donaldson

Baptist pastor prays for Obama’s death

WILEY Drake is pastor of the First Southern Baptist Church in Buena Park, California – and he has been asking his parishioners to pray for Barack Obama’s death. He was given the chance to discuss these prayers with TV interviewer Alan Colmes.



Wiley Drake

Colmes: So you’re praying for the death of the president of the United States?

Drake: Yes.

Colmes: Are you concerned that by saying that you might find yourself on some secret service call or FBI most wanted list? Do you think it’s appropriate

to say something like that or even pray for something like that?

Drake: I think it’s appropriate to pray for the will of God. I’m not saying anything, what I’m doing is repeating what God is saying, if that puts me on somebody’s list then I’ll just have to be on their list.

Colmes: You would like for the president of the United States to die?

Drake: If he does not turn to God and does not turn his life around I am asking God to enforce the imprecatory prayers throughout the scripture that would cause him death, that’s correct.

Irish Catholics queue up to worship a tree

NOT only has Ireland acquired a blasphemy law, it now also possesses a tree stump which allegedly bears a resemblance to the Virgin Mary.

Last month thousands of Irish Catholics flocked to a County Limerick church to pray at the stump of a recently cut willow tree.

The phenomenon occurred at St Mary’s parish church in Rathkeale, population 3,000.

Said Noel White, who has been overseeing a church project to cut down trees dangerously overhanging the neighboring school playground: “People have been crying out for something good to happen. And this is all good for the soul.”

When one willow was felled near the church entrance, he said, a major branch cracked off and made “a funny shape.” One worker cut through the stump at a near-vertical angle, revealing a wooden relief that inspires some to see the Virgin Mary.

One lad beside the one who’d made the cut immediately saw the outline of Our Lady and blessed himself. He declared: “It really is unreal. Every one of us could see it.”

Except the workman who originally made the cut, Anthony Reddin. “I see it as the grain of a tree myself,” he scoffed.

Nonetheless, word of mouth brought about 100 to inspect and pray at the stump that first night. Numbers swelled to several hundred the next night. Three days later, more than a thousand came and went as a makeshift shrine of candles, rosaries and miniature statues of Mary grew. The praying continued past 2 am on the Thursday.

The parish priest was away on vacation. His summer replacement, the Rev Willie Russell, was not impressed. He says locals are letting their imagination run wild and threatening to violate the commandment, “Thou shalt not worship a false God.” He grumpily added “It’s just a tree. You don’t worship a tree.”

But the priest said he saw no harm in saying Hail Mary prayers at the spot – so long as the faithful don’t actually find themselves praying to the stump itself. “I don’t believe in idolatry. That would be the danger,” he said.

Oh, the irony!

Prison newspaper pulped for carrying a column deemed offensive to Muslims

A copy of *Inside Time*, the national newspaper for prison inmates in the UK, was removed from circulation and pulped in June because it carried an article authorities deemed offensive to Muslims.

The withdrawal of the issue, and its republication cost the charity that operates it between £15,000 and £20,000.

Worse, it led to the author of the satirical column – Andy Thackwray, an inmate at HMP Hull – being disciplined. He was placed in a segregation unit, and told he would be transferred to another unit.

The incident was brought to our attention by *Freethinker* subscriber Charles Hanson, who is in a resettlement unit in Kent, who commented: “I am appalled by this attack on free speech, and on a newspaper which most prisoners look forward to having once a month. Because a couple of Muslims complained, all hell broke loose, and the Prison Service bowed to their demands – religion again rears its ugly head.”

On his Jailhouse Lawyer internet blog, John Hirst, who is firmly committed to prisoners’ rights, and a campaigner for penal reform, confirmed that John Roberts, Operations Director and Company Secretary at *Inside Time*, had pulled the issue after Muslim complaints.

So, what was it that so upset the authorities?

In a comment piece entitled *Porky’s Revenge*, Thackwray, author of the “Angry Andy” column, wrote:

“Pig Flu? My arse! All this ooh-ahh about



The illustration that accompanied Thackwray’s column

rogue-gene-piggypox-bacteria-swine-bollocks is nothing more than a Government conspiracy to blag us all from finding out the truth about how this contagious virus actually came into being. Who does that bloody Gordon Brown think he’s kidding? Certainly not me! You see, I know the real origin of this so-called pig flu. Oh yes; there’s no two ways about it: it came into fruition from a botched, Muslim-led act of terrorism. All part of Osama Bin Laden’s global ‘war on pork’.

“C’mon, it’s common knowledge to all and sundry that not only do the bloody Taliban have a grudge about everything except facial hair, but in particular they can be seen as being extremely prejudiced against the West’s vast population of porkers. So, to try and get in Allah’s good books, Bin Laden created his own ‘halal flu virus’ with the intention of eradicating every pig in Christendom, and by

doing so piss off all Westerners by denying us our daily bacon.

“Initially, Bin Laden’s war on pork was targeted to disrupt and inconvenience the Americans the most, because Osama and his boys are fully aware that the yanks are a nation of clinically obese lard-arses who can’t function properly without their McRibbs, hog roasts and occasional wild boar shoot...

“Yes, not too long ago in a cave somewhere in deepest Afghanistan, our bearded foe created his halal flu virus to totally wipe out the pigs of the Western world, and hopefully see the end of pork as we know it. Only trouble was, the young terrorist Bin Laden hand-picked to fly across the Atlantic to carry out the wicked deed was not only a goat short of a full flock, he’d also never ventured out of his village before.

“So, with geography not being one of his strong points, coupled with his poor command of the English language, it’s not surprising that he got off the plane one stop early thinking he was in Kansas, America, when really he was in Cancun, Mexico. There, he set the Bin Laden flu virus free on a Mexican pig farm instead of on an American one as planned – what a knob!

“However, with brave, fairytale-style resilience, our little Mexican snouted amigos thwarted Bin Laden’s plan by quickly building up an immunity against his weak, cave-made, halal flu strain and, just like with the big bad wolf, the little swines saw the virus off and came out the winners – not even Al Qaeda could ‘blow their house down.’

“The pigs got their revenge too, completely bugging up Mexico’s tourist industry by passing a more complex and stronger strain of Bin Laden flu back onto us humans, a strain which is at present spreading globally, faster than shit off a shiny shovel.

“So, thanks to the resilience of our little pink pals, Bin Laden’s war on pork backfired. His stupid bloody idea had more cracks in it than London Ladies College. And the irony of it is: the only ones making ‘a killing’ out of Bin Laden’s war on pork are the bloody American-owned pharmaceutical companies. Who’s a daft bearded bastard then?

“So there you have it folks; forget all that bloody conspiracy bollocks in the mainstream media, you heard ‘the truth’ first here in Angry Andy’s Column. May the pork be with you!”

Burger King offends Hindus

FAST food chain Burger King outraged Hindus worldwide with an advertisement depicting Lakshmi, the Indian goddess of wealth, about to tuck into a “Texican Whopper”.

The company withdrew the advertisement from its stores in Spain after Hindus complained at the “denigration” of their religion.

According to the *Daily Telegraph*, the advertised product is an affront to Hindu sensitivities in its own right – it includes an all-beef patty, a beef chilli-con-carne slice, egg-based Cajun mayonnaise, all forbidden by strict Hindus.

The goddess and the burger were accompanied by a slogan claiming *La merienda es sagrada* – the snack is sacred. Burger King quickly issued this apology: “We are apologising because it wasn’t our intent to offend anyone. Burger King Corporation values and respects all of its guests as well as the communities we serve. This in-store advertisement was running to support only local promotion for three restaurants in Spain and was not intended to offend anyone. Out of respect for the Hindu community, the limited-time advertisement has been removed from the restaurants.

Harry Potter star was right to 'come out' as an atheist

EVANGELICAL Christians – particularly Evangelical those in the US – have never gone a bundle on Harry Potter books and movies, denouncing them as “unchristian”, “demonic”, “satanic” ... blah, blah ... blah ...

Now these joyless fundies have one more reason to detest Harry Potter: the revelation in the August edition of *Esquire* that Daniel Radcliffe, star of the Harry Potter movies is an atheist.

In an interview in the the magazine, Radcliffe, 19, said he did not believe in God.

He also expressed his admiration for Professor Richard Dawkins, the prominent atheist and *bete noir* of Evangelical Christians.

Until last month, Radcliffe has been reticent on the subject of religion, but in the interview to promote the latest instalment in the HP film series – *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, released in mid-July – he said: “I’m an atheist, but I’m very relaxed about it. I don’t preach my atheism, but I have a huge amount of respect for people like Richard Dawkins who do. Anything he does on television, I will watch.”

And he joked: “There we go ... that’s half of America that’s not going to see the next Harry Potter film on the back of that comment.”

Veteran British actor Jim Broadbent, who plays Professor Horace Slughorn in the new movie, is no believer either. In a *Telegraph* interview in 2007 he said: “If I was ever to go back to religion I would likely go to the Quakers first. I never did have it, really ...”

“So what do you think happens to you when you die?” he was asked. “Absolutely nothing. I’m with Arthur Morrison on that one,” he replied. (Arthur Morrison is the

character he played in *When Did You Last See Your Father?*, the film adaptation of the 1993 Blake Morrison memoir.)

Commenting on Radcliffe’s revelation, Staks Rosch, of the *Philadelphia Atheist Examiner*, said: “Many religious fundamentalists are already convinced that these films and the books they are based on promote witchcraft and Satan worship. Now they can add atheism to their list of paranoid outrage used to scare people into donating to their churches and ‘family values’ organisations.

“The odds are that those who are outraged about the star actor being an atheist probably weren’t planning on seeing the film anyway. Those who would boycott the film due to Radcliffe’s lack of belief in a deity would probably be the same people who believe that the film series and books promote witchcraft.

“Still, Radcliffe risked a lot by coming out of the atheist closet. Movie studios might be less likely to cast the young actor knowing that his presence would alienate a large portion of the American moviegoer. On the other hand, Potter fans would surely flock to any future Radcliffe film. Plus, Radcliffe isn’t the

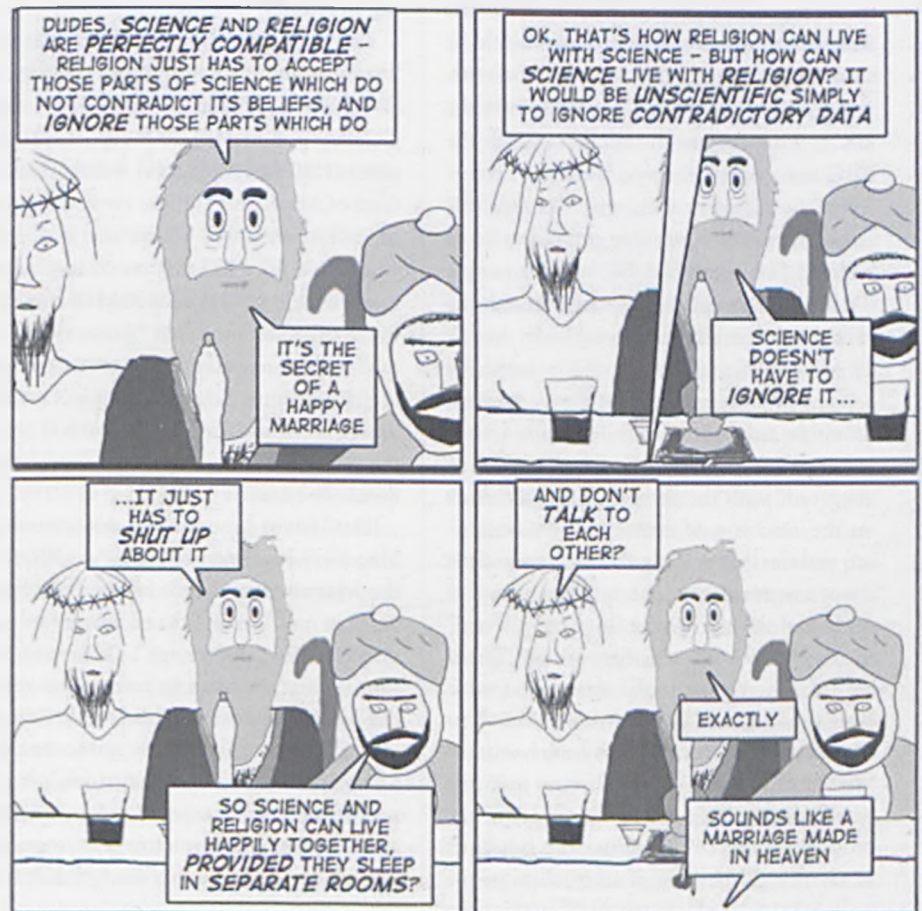


Daniel Radcliffe

only atheist actor in Hollywood these days. Both Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie have come out as atheists as well. Being an open atheist hasn’t seemed to hurt Bill Maher or Jon Stewart’s ratings either.

“The more high-profile actors and other famous people make their lack of belief in deities known, the more mainstream Christians will see that atheists aren’t devil worshippers who eat babies and have no morals. Many young people may be curious as to why Daniel Radcliffe doesn’t believe in the God of the Bible. They may start asking questions in church or in their homes that they normally wouldn’t have asked. There is little doubt in my mind that celebrities who are open about their atheism help to generate conversation, questions, discussions, and free thinking.”

Jesus & Mo



A right Royal Mail cock-up

OVER 70 subscribers will probably have noted that cheques they sent to the *Freethinker* postbox in May to renew their subscriptions had not been banked until July. This is because Royal Mail had contrived to “lose” more than 100 items of post in May.

The missing envelopes suddenly reappeared, without explanation, in the first week of July. A formal complaint has been lodged with the local sorting office, and we apologise to those affected for any inconvenience caused.

ANALYSIS

ID, Creationism & Science: Cutting the Gordian Knot

George Taylor exposes the underhand methods Christian fundamentalists are using to insinuate their propaganda into schools

Creationism and its fifth column, Intelligent Design, are mounting a concerted attack on science and education. It is a worldwide phenomenon, with Christian and Islamic movements having murky, unacknowledged funding and layered agendas.

In the UK the efforts of the Intelligent Design/Creationism movement (ID/C) are currently centred on creating confusion in schools and universities over the status of the theory of evolution.

Last November the *Guardian* reported a poll taken amongst UK schoolteachers by the television station Teachers TV: "Twenty-nine per cent of teachers believe that creationism and intelligent design should be taught as science, according to an online survey of attitudes to teaching evolution in the UK." This was also headline news for the BBC and was widely reported elsewhere.

But the *Guardian* went on, "Teachers TV emailed 10,600 education professionals, of which 1,210 responded. Because the sample is self-selecting, only those teachers with the strongest views might have replied." In fact 29 percent of respondents, that is some 3.3 percent of those asked, said that creationism should be taught as science. To be exact, their response was that they "disagreed or strongly disagreed" with the government's guidelines on the teaching of evolution - "Creationism and intelligent design are not part of the science national curriculum programmes of study and should not be taught as science." It is not reported whether or not Teachers TV has any particular agenda, on what basis the original 10,600 were selected, or how many teachers there are in the country. Statistically this is less significant than the headlines would lead us to believe, but the proponents of ID/C will use the headlines to say that 30 percent of all teachers in the

UK want creationism taught as science and that they should be allowed to do so if they want. Result for ID/C.

The headlines occasioned by these dubious poll results, and the fact that a government funded media organisation should consider conducting such a poll, are a good example of the movement's success in fostering confusion and the illusion that there is a "debate" between ID/C and evolution. Enough has been said elsewhere about what teachers should or should not be doing, the concern here is the threat posed by ID/C with its long-term objective of forcing religious propaganda into the curriculum and opening a backdoor to religious proselytising in schools.

This might seem an over-reaction to a few headlines about some dubious statistics, but ID/C is a worldwide movement. In America a Gallup poll in May 2008 reported that 44 percent of the population believe that the God of Abraham (TGOA) created mankind in its evolved form within the last 10,000 years. In 2007 a \$27 million creationist museum/theme park was opened in Kentucky by an organisation called "Answers in Genesis". More recently, this year saw the passing of a Science Education Act in Louisiana which enshrines the right to teach ID/C on the grounds that not to do so restricts academic freedom.

ID/C has its American headquarters in the Discovery Institute in Seattle. An offshoot of the Institute, the Centre for the Renewal of Science and Culture, has a manifesto entitled "The Wedge Strategy". This states "design theory promises to reverse the stifling dominance of the materialist worldview, and to replace it with a science consonant with Christian and theistic convictions." It goes on: "If we view the predominant materialistic science as a giant tree, our strategy is intended to function as a 'wedge' that, while

relatively small, can split the trunk when applied to its weakest points."

William Dembski, professor of theology at a Kentucky theological seminary and senior fellow of the Discovery Institute, states that the weakest point in the trunk is Darwinian evolution, and the wedge is intelligent design.

The Discovery Institute is also connected with, and may have funded, the film *Expelled: no intelligence allowed* which links Darwinism directly to the Holocaust. Several prominent members of the Discovery Institute also feature in the DVDs included in the ID/C information pack sent to thousands of UK secondary schools in 2006 by an organisation called "Truth in Science". This organisation is headed by a Professor Andy McIntosh of Leeds University, who is quoted in *New Scientist* (12/10/06) as saying "We're not flat earthers, we are just trying to encourage good scientific discussion. We want to see an open discussion of these matters." The same source however reports that Professor McIntosh is on record in the *Evangelical Times* in 2004 as saying that he could not accept any other account of the origins of life than the creation recorded in Genesis, and arguing that getting creationism into schools was the best way to convert non-Christians.

As part of an Islamic creationist campaign, a pseudo-scientific creationist book entitled *The Atlas of Creation* was recently mailed from Turkey to tens of thousands of scientists around the world. It is unclear who is funding this campaign, but it is reported to be making steady progress, particularly in Muslim countries, in which the penetration of scientific education and knowledge tends to be negligible compared to Old and New World countries. The book contains the allegation that Darwin was responsible for communism, fascism, Nazism, terrorism and

9/11. It also states that Noah was technologically savvy and that the Ark was steam powered. Ominously enough, in 2007 copies of the book were sent to Protestant pastors throughout Europe. Muslim and Christian fundamentalists may hate each other, but they hate science more.

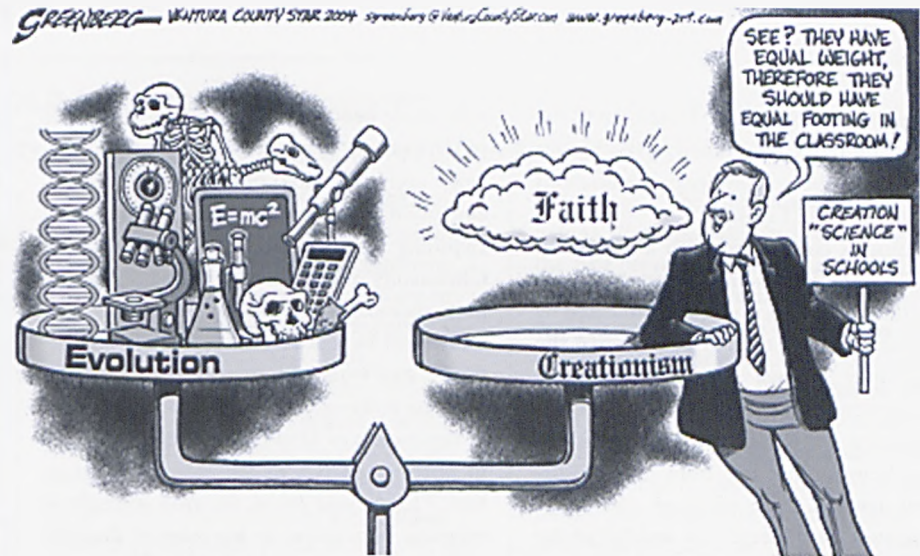
The problem in the UK is that ID/C is currently being countered as if it were simply a local assault on one particular aspect of science, and the opposition is consequently being articulated in scientific terms and scientific language which, while effective on their own territory, are helpless in the wider and dirtier arena of propaganda, political chicanery and downright dishonesty which characterise the ID/C movement.

The limitations of strict scientific thinking can be seen in the recent *There probably is no God ...* campaign. Scientifically the statement "There probably is no God" is as good as it gets. God, if it exists, is supernatural. Science can only explore the natural world, and the best it can say is that there is no evidence for the existence of God. It is also extremely difficult to prove a negative, and so we have to go with the balance of probabilities and say that "There probably is no... etc."

All of which, by concentrating on the scientific method to counter contemporary claims about the existence of this or that god, rather surprisingly overlooks the fact that modern archaeology and historical studies have demonstrated emphatically, beyond reasonable doubt, that TGOA, the God of Judah and Israel, inherited and acknowledged by both Christianity and Islam, is a fiction, and what is more, a politically inspired fiction.

This is an extremely strong assertion, not just because of its implications for Judaism, but because Christianity and Islam depend totally on the revealed truth of the single, supernatural, creator god. Demonstrating that this god is a human creation, a fake created to bolster nationalistic political sentiment, destroys at a stroke the justification for ID/C and reveals them for what they are, parasitic political movements with no purpose other than their own survival.

The argument has been some 200 years in the making, but this is the case in short. Why is TGOA male? Because he was originally only one of a family of gods and goddesses in the Canaanite pantheon. The religion of Israel and Judah, emerging city states in the eastern highlands of Palestine, was originally Canaanite polytheism (the peoples of both Israel and Judah were Canaanites, and al-



ways had been). This became henotheism (the worship of one God as supreme among many) when the god YHWH (later to become Yahweh or Jehovah to Christians; unpronounceable in Judaism and rendered as Adonai or Elohim) was adopted by a nationalist political faction in Israel in the eighth century BCE. The political ambitions of the YHWH faction unfortunately brought about the obliteration of their young kingdom by the Assyrian emperor, Shalmaneser V, in 724 BCE.

**God, if it exists, is
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Many Israelites took refuge in the neighbouring kingdom of Judah and the YHWH faction continued their nationalist activities there, nurturing a dream of re-creating Israel. YHWH became the focus of the Israel faction, and his worship was centralised on the Temple in Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, in deliberate contrast to the traditional worship of Canaanite polytheism carried out in shrines around the countryside. Having achieved power in Judah, the YHWH faction repeated their forebears' mistake of trying to punch above their weight in the imperial struggles of the eastern Mediterranean. (Palestine was the crossroads of trade routes between Africa, Asia and Europe and was coveted and claimed by every empire from

the ancient Egyptian to the British.) The result of this political ambition was a reprise of the fate of Israel. Judah was crushed by the Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BCE, and a large part of its population taken into slavery, the Babylonian Captivity, which however ended when the Persian Emperor Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 BCE. Amongst the spoils he found the Judahites, whom he returned to their homeland, now a small province, Yehud to the Persians, some 60 by 40 miles square, in the fifth satrapy of the Persian empire.

The Judahites had taken their worship of YHWH with them into bondage, and as their fortunes waned his stature had waxed. From being the only god for a true Israelite/Judahite to worship, he had become the Only God. And the Yehudim, as the Persians now referred to them, set about rearranging and rewriting the story of their people and their God to explain to themselves how they had come to be where they were, and why they and their God deserved better. And that self-justifying propaganda rewritten as history is what we know today as the Torah or the Old Testament.

The process of revealing that the Old Testament as not just fiction but political fiction, written by a set of big-time losers to persuade themselves that it wasn't their fault, has taken 200 years. It started with the 19th-century textual and philological work that showed that Moses and the prophets could not have written the Old Testament as was claimed by the Church, and continued with 20th-century archaeology and historical studies that asked why such outstanding events as the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt, the Exodus, the tribulation in the wilderness, the battle of Jericho and the setting up of the kingdom of David (which

ID, Creationism & Science

was supposed to stretch from Damascus to the Red Sea) are never mentioned in the history and records of the contemporary civilisations and empires in the Levant.

The process culminated with a revolution in late 20th-century and 21st-century archaeology and scholarship, ironically stimulated by the founding of the state of Israel, when the archaeologists stopped digging to find the Bible, a process which had been remarkably unproductive for decades, and started interpreting their findings free from religious filters and agendas. The result of which was the revelation of the brief rise and fall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and the making of their creator god.

The fall of Israel and Judah and the rise of their pseudo-god is well documented in *The Bible Unearthed*, Finkelstein and Silberman (Simon & Schuster 2002). This was made into a BBC Television series, but even today the significance of its revelations has not sunk in. Israel Finkelstein, co-author of *The Bible Unearthed* and director of the Institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University, does not even mention the consequences for Christianity and Islam. He confines himself to simply affirming that the absence of the deity does not detract from his identity as a Jew and an Israeli.

Two hundred years of work across a multitude of disciplines will apparently take some time to sink into the general consciousness, especially as it is always liable to distortion by Abrahamic interference, or by monotheistic assumptions embedded in the minds of even non-believers. However, the fictional nature of TGOA needs to be asserted loudly, far and wide, and the logical consequences followed through.

Christianity and Islam base all their claims on the existence and the authority of TGOA. Take away that god and that authority and what is left is two movements which seek power and influence by proselytising, propaganda, violence and interference in government. In other words, political ideologies – but ideologies not intended or designed for the benefit of humans in this world, and therefore parasitic, or even cancerous, soaking up energy and resources to no end other than their own survival and growth.

Without their god, Christianity and Islam are at best political self-interest groups, and at worst totalitarian political ideologies, and it is as political ideologies that ID/C and other symptoms of religious extremism and fundamentalism need to be opposed. There is an

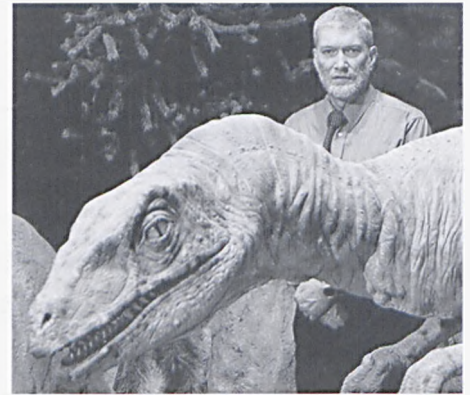
immediate need to raise awareness of the role of ID/C as the vanguard of a worldwide campaign against freedom of speech and thought, and ultimately, therefore, against democracy. Exposing and highlighting the origins of Christianity and Islam and their gods in the petty nationalistic politics of Bronze Age Palestine will be a start. A more telling and effective step would be a campaign to have the modern archaeological and historical account of the origins of Abrahamic religion included in history and RE in the national curriculum. That would reveal the true strength of religious opposition to freedom of thought, speech and education.

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The ultimate goal would be to have Christianity and Islam stripped of their recognition as religions in UK law, but that is a long way off. For that to happen, the Church of England would have to be disestablished, which would encounter a completely different reaction, one that has nothing to do with the pros and cons of disestablishment.

There is an almost universal assumption in Western cultures, even in the minds of unbelievers, of the superiority of Western culture, including Christianity, over all other cultures and religions past and present. Attacks on the forms and institutions of Christianity, as opposed to arguments about the existence of God, are seen or felt as attacks on that sense of superiority, an underhanded blow to our lingering, imperial *amour propre*. Revealing the extent of the Abrahamic con trick will help, but it would probably be at least a generation before these inbuilt prejudices could be overcome.

Another obstacle is the spurious claim by both Christianity and Islam to be the source and arbiter of all morality and ethics. There are large numbers of minds whose notion of morality is founded on childhood hymn singing, a muddled memory of the Ten Commandments and a vague wish that every day



Ken Ham, the 'brains' behind the Creation Museum in Kentucky. A reported 700,000 people have visited this insane, \$27-million project since its opening in May, 2007. One display shows humans coexisting with dinosaurs — despite the two species being separated by 65 million years in most science texts.

should be like Christmas. Even when such minds have long since ceased to attend to religion in either body or spirit, the dark robed ones can still raise in them a conviction that without religion the whole world is off to hell in a handcart. This argument is also used by ID/C, and is the burden of the propaganda film *Expelled*. The debate has been going on for some time under the heading of Moral Relativism, and looks set fair to continue for some time yet, involving as it does philosophers, psychologists, and neuroscientists, as well as religious, political, and even commercial interests.

In the meantime, Christianity and Islam are also vulnerable because they are afraid of being laughed at. Perhaps at the back of their minds they are aware of just how ludicrous their beliefs are without the authority and threat of TGOA, which is why they react so strongly to mockery and derision, feigning outrage and disapproval, complaining to politicians and demanding totally undeserved respect. But now we can strip away that authority and that threat, and establish a legal right to deny that overblown "respect" and to laugh at pretension and hypocrisy. At the same time, that will enable us to see believers for what they are, human beings subject to and suffering from delusions foisted on them by birth and circumstances, but delusions on which they have to build lives and careers. So the initial prescription is long and continuous laughter at the folly and presumption of the belief in TGOA, but laughter perhaps tempered by compassion for those that have been deluded.

A Response to *The Dawkins Letters*

DR ROBERT STOVOLD finds that a talk given recently in Brighton by Pastor David Robertson was 'a masterclass in religious apologetics'

I never really took to religion as a child, but when the Jehovah's Witnesses gave me a book entitled *Life: How did it get here? By evolution or by creation?*, it proved to be a life-changing experience. Unfortunately for the Witnesses, I wasn't changed in the way that they'd hoped. Having just completed a degree in zoology, I was shocked by the fact that woolly thinking and outright falsehoods could surround such important ideas, and set about debunking their propaganda.

At first glance, Pastor David Robertson of St Peter's Free Church of Scotland is a very different animal. Unlike the Witnesses, he's fairly relaxed about the whole evolution-creation "controversy", having said "I couldn't care two hoots about all the different theories of creation". However, his *modus operandi* seems similar to that of the Witnesses. So when Robertson came to town on June 30 in order to promote his response to Richard Dawkins' bestseller *The God Delusion*, I was ready for him.

Robertson's book *The Dawkins Letters* is subtitled *Challenging Atheist Myths*. That subtitle may go some way to explaining why in the course of his 20-minute talk he advanced no positive arguments for theism whatsoever. He just attacked Dawkins, and even those negative arguments were flawed.

We got the Argument from Numbers ("Many of my atheist friends are appalled by it [*The God Delusion*]"). So what? Just because some people dislike a book that doesn't make it wrong!

We got the Argument from Authority (Antony Flew – "Britain's most famous atheist" – believes in following the evidence wherever it leads, and he now believes in God). Who cares about famous people? Tell us the arguments so we can evaluate ideas for ourselves! We got the "There's absolutely nothing new in it whatsoever" argument, and the "They bought into it because it re-enforces what they already believe" argument. Again, who cares? These statements, even if true, have no bearing on the accuracy of the book's claims.

Robertson's attack on Dawkins' ethics is surely a masterclass in religious apologetics. First get some facts wrong, then quote selectively, then caricature your opponent with the help of some woolly thinking, and

then hypocritically ignore any scriptural verses that undermine your own position. (The first part of that sarcastic comment will probably come back to haunt me in the form of a glowing endorsement on the sleeve of Robertson's next book.)

Here's Robertson on Dawkins: "It's the Disney view of the world which is held by Richard Dawkins because he cites Daniel Dennett, when Dennett says 'There are good people in the world who do good things. There are bad people in the world who do bad things. But for good people to do bad

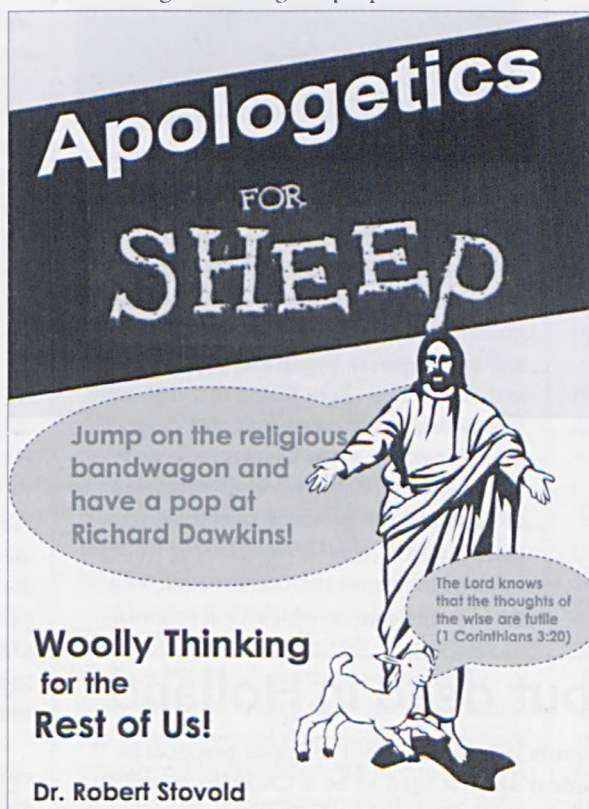
evil things" (*The God Delusion* p249, my italics). Perhaps tellingly, Dawkins includes the first bit of the quote, but Robertson omits it. Dawkins certainly has strong feelings about religion, but the idea that he sees things in black and white owes more to Robertson's fevered imagination than it does to what Dawkins actually wrote. How can the idea that good people sometimes do bad things be described as black and white? Amusingly, the phrase "You're with us or you're against us" (used by Robertson to exemplify a simplistic fundamentalist worldview) originated not with John Wayne but with Jesus Christ!

Atheists like myself who regard Jesus as a mythological figure can't properly be said to be "for him" or "against him", so what's to become of us? Well, fortunately the Bible has the answers. Mark 9:40 ("whoever is not against us is for us") implies that we'll be OK, while Matthew 12:30 ("He who is not with me is against me") implies that we'll be in trouble.

Robertson and Dawkins both agree that all humans (even atheists!) have a sense of morality. But from where did this sense come? Dawkins invokes various evolutionary mechanisms. Kin selection has revealed that in helping its relatives an organism is actually helping copies of its own genes. Reciprocal altruism (You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours) provides a mechanism by which apparently unselfish behaviour can be favoured even between unrelated individuals. The ability to empathise (to put oneself in

another's shoes and so imagine what they might think or do) is mind-bogglingly useful, enabling us to co-operate with friends and stay one step ahead of rivals. Once evolved, empathy acts as a natural brake to selfish behaviour – in hurting others, we are, in effect, hurting a part of ourselves.

In the Questions and Answers session that followed his talk, I took the opportunity to quiz Robertson regarding the alleged divine origins of morality: "You say in your book that atheists can't account for the origin of morality and that God is required. If, ultimately, murder is wrong because God said so and lying is wrong because God said so, murder and lying are wrong for exactly the same reasons, which implies that one is no worse than the other. So how can you



things it takes religion'. Now I call that the George Bush view of the world. Because George Bush's view of the world was incredibly simplistic. There's the bad empires – the evil empires – and the good guys. It's the John Wayne – you know, 'You're with us or you're against us' type thing".

There are so many errors here that it's difficult to know where to begin. Firstly, Dawkins quoted Steven Weinberg, not Daniel Dennett. Secondly, the idea that religion can make good people do bad things does not imply that religious people are always bad. Nor does it imply that only the religious can be bad. As the first part of Weinberg's quote acknowledges, "With or without it [religion], you'd have good people doing good things and evil people doing

A response to *The Dawkins Letters*

explain morality without going outside of God and looking at the properties of physical objects and asking questions such as 'Do they feel?' God cannot be a sufficient basis for morality, because if he is, it all turns out to be arbitrary, doesn't it?"

Robertson replied that we know some things are worse than others because the law of God is written on our hearts. He used the classic politician's trick of answering a question less awkward than the one that had actually been asked. I'd asked why God thought certain actions wrong, and Robertson gave an explanation for why people think certain actions wrong.

The argument I'd used against Robertson was hardly a new one. Plato made the same point in his dialogue *Euthyphro* about 2,400 years ago. Plato knew nothing of evolution by natural selection, and in his avowedly mythical explanation for the origin of our ethical faculties he said they were a gift from Zeus. But Plato did anticipate modern evolutionary ideas in some ways. In his dialogue *Protagoras*, he compared humans to animals, recognised that morality and intelligence were useful adaptations for group life and realised that humans and animals were both engaged in what Darwin was later to call "the struggle for existence": "Mankind at first lived dispersed, and there were no cities. But the consequence was that they were destroyed by the wild beasts, for they were utterly weak in comparison with them, and their art was only sufficient to provide them with the means of life, and did not enable them to carry on war against the animals:



David Robertson

food they had, but not as yet the art of government, of which the art of war is a part. After a while the desire of self-preservation gathered them into cities; but when they were gathered together, having no art of government, they entreated one another, and were again in process of dispersion and destruction. Zeus feared that the entire race would be exterminated, and so he sent Hermes to them, bearing reverence and justice to be the ordering principles of cities and the bonds of friendship and conciliation."

Contrast Plato's creation account with that of the Bible, in which God criminal-

ises the acquisition of knowledge and says "Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." (Genesis 11:4-8).

Robertson admitted in the Questions and Answers session that the evidence for evolution is "very strong", yet rejected Dawkins' view that our moral sense might have evolved: "I was brought up on a farm.... I saw a female pig eat her own young". There are two ways to illustrate just how silly that argument is. Firstly, consider the analogous statement: "I don't believe that flight could have evolved in bats. I was brought up on a farm, and pigs can't fly". Creationists don't believe in the evolution of flight, but even they would be embarrassed to employ this kind of argument! The second flaw in Robertson's argument is that cannibalism in pigs is actually pretty rare in absolute terms, accounting for about 4 percent of piglet deaths. Cannibalism is very rare in humans and rare in pigs. If the first case implies the presence of a divine standard, why not the second?

Enough of pigs. When considering human evolution it surely makes sense to look for clues amongst our closest living relatives. Chimpanzees will shun cheats (individuals that receive favours without returning them), engage in reciprocal altruism and demonstrate an ability to empathise. Studies on other primates may even have identified a mechanism underlying empathy. A class of brain-cells called "mirror neurones" are seen to fire when an animal acts, and also when the animal sees another animal performing the same act. Perhaps if Robertson had grown up on a farm containing chimps, he'd be less inclined towards theism?

Robertson's book *The Dawkins Letters* contains even more errors than his talk, and I lack the space to counter them here. I've posted a refutation of the book online along with a handy flyer that can be given out at his meetings. Both may be freely downloaded from my website <http://tiny-url.com/29fjom>.

Why do I bother? Well, as Richard Dawkins put it, "I am against religion because it teaches us to be satisfied with not understanding the world."

The Rev David Robertson wasn't able to explain why murder is worse than lying when I asked him, which strikes me as being indicative of having a pretty poor understanding of the world. He'd therefore likely appreciate the following quote, which really does come from John Wayne: "There must be some higher power or how else does all this stuff work?"

Catholicism is all but dead in Holland

AMERICA's Fox News did a series of reports last month about religious practices in Europe. Examining Holland, its correspondent said: "It used to be a Christian country, but you would never know it from the scenes on the street, nor the policies coming out of its Parliament."

He then spoke to Catholic Church spokesman, Jan-Willem de Wits, who said: "One of the most pious states in the world has become one of the most secularised."

The Fox report came hard on the heels of a prediction by a long-serving Church of England bishop that the Church of England will cease to exist within a generation.

The Right Reverend Paul Richardson said declining church attendance and the rise in multiculturalism meant that "Christian Britain is dead".

Richardson said that the Church had lost more than one in ten of its regular worshippers between 1996 and 2006, with a fall from more than one million to 880,000. At this rate it is hard to see the church surviving for more than 30 years, though few of its leaders are prepared to face that possibility.

Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, commented: "Bishop Richardson says that the Church should start the process of disestablishment before politicians get there first. We couldn't agree more. In fact, the only real prospect that the Anglican Church has of surviving is to free itself from the state's shackles. Its claim to speak for everyone in the country – including Muslims and non-believers – rings more hollow every time it is uttered. It is time for the Church and state to go their separate ways."

Sex and the Priestly

The Roman Catholic Church has lately developed a talent for shooting itself in the foot – and the Pope's recent reassertion of the celibacy rule can only do it further harm, says **Susan Jacoby**

Two things happened this summer that threw the Catholic Church's celibacy rule back into sharp public focus. The first was the defection of the aptly-named Fr Alberto Cutié who left his Miami parish in May to marry his girlfriend of two years – 35-year-old divorcee Ruhama Canellis. The second was the publication of former Milwaukee Archbishop Rembert Weakland's memoir detailing his life as a closeted homosexual within the Catholic Church, and the loneliness that drove him to pursue a sexual relationship with another man.

While both stories were hogging the headlines in America, Pope Ratzinger launched what he called "the Year of Priests", exhorting Roman Catholics to spend the coming year honouring the sacrifice of their local pastors and directing priests to encourage each other so that they might, among other things, "be able to live fully the gift of celibacy and build thriving Christian communities".

This was music to the ears of those who took great pleasure in seeing the Catholic Church engaging in yet another self-harming exercise. One such commentator was Susan Jacoby, of the *Washington Post*. Writing under the headline *Priestly celibacy: A self-inflicted wound*, she said:

"As an atheist and an ex-Catholic, I cannot claim to be displeased at the spectacle of the Roman Catholic Church continuing to shoot itself in the foot by refusing to ordain women or to allow priests to marry.

"If I cared about the survival of the Catholic Church, however, I would have to say that the severe priest shortage would end tomorrow if the Church simply allowed its preachers to have a normal family and sexual life. But Palestinians and Israelis are going to embrace one another at the Wailing Wall and the Dome of the Rock before the rigid old men who run the Vatican open up the doors of the priesthood to people who want to serve their god and enter into the full experience of loving and being loved by another human being.

"Pope Benedict XVI will not change his position on female priests or on priestly celibacy. One of the most ridiculous rationales for priestly celibacy used by the Church has always been the notion that the celibacy requirement is not just about sex but about the need for a priest to be fully free to de-



Alberto Cutié, who has now joined the ultra-liberal Episcopal Church, pictured with his wife Ruhama

vote himself to the spiritual needs of his parishioners. The notion that a priest somehow becomes better attuned to the needs of his or her flock by forgoing intimate human love is so illogical that it needs no further comment.

"It may even be more illogical than the rationale for not admitting women to the priesthood, which rests on the biblical depiction of the twelve apostles as men. (By that logic, all priests should be Jews because the biblical Jesus and the Apostles were Jews.)

"The priest shortage in the United States and western Europe began to develop in the late 1960s, when many young priests – who had once hoped that the Second Vatican Council would drop the requirement of priestly celibacy – began to realize that the successor to the great-hearted Pope John XXIII was not open to any fundamental change. Large numbers of heterosexual men left the priesthood at that time.

"This Church, with no room in its priesthood for women or for men who simply wanted to love and live with another adult, then proceeded to turn a blind eye to the paedophile predators whose evil deeds were covered up by the hierarchy for decades.

"The Rev Donald Cozzens, a celibate priest and professor of religious studies at John Carroll University in Ohio, says, 'I've asked dozens of men here that showed signs of deep faith if they had thought about going into the priesthood. They all said, 'I've thought of it, but I want to have a family.' You can be sure that Father Cozzens, the author of *Freeing Celibacy*, will not be promoted to monsignor

or bishop any time soon.

"Really, who cares about this other than the old men in the Vatican who want all younger priests to lead the same repressed, rigid, and lonely lives as their elders? In the US, an astonishing 25 percent of those raised as Catholics have left the Church.

"Priestly celibacy, like the Church's position on birth control and female priests, is part of the mix that has led so many once-loyal Catholics out of the church.

"As an atheist, I am pleased by news of the rising dropout rate. If I were the pope, I would be really, really worried. Oh, wait. Even if I were a believer, I couldn't become pope because I am a woman."

Amy Sullivan, writing in *Time* magazine, cast further light on the celibacy rule, pointing out that "for the 1,000 years of the Christian church, priests, bishops, and even popes could – and often did – marry. At least 39 popes were married men, and two were the sons of previous popes.

"The ideal of celibacy existed, but as a teaching from the Apostle Paul, not a church doctrine. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul argued simply that single men had fewer distractions from their godly work: 'He that is without a wife is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God. But he that is with a wife, is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife: and he is divided'.

"Over the centuries, the Church tried to split the difference, prohibiting marriage after ordination and encouraging married priests to abstain from sex with their wives after they had joined the priesthood. (The Eastern Orthodox Church continues to allow married men to be ordained as priests.)

"But it wasn't until the Second Lateran Council in 1139 that a firm church law allowing ordination only of unmarried men was adopted. Journalist and former priest James Carroll contends in *Practicing Catholic* that the reasons for this celibacy requirement were not purely theological. 'Celibacy had been imposed on priests mainly for the most worldly of reasons: to correct abuses tied to family inheritance of church property. Celibacy solved that material problem, but because of the extreme sacrifice it required, it could never be spoken of in material terms. So it was that sexual abstinence came to be justified spiritually, as a mode of drawing close to God'."

points of view...



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

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MORE THOUGHTS ON LEGALISING INCEST

IT seems that the incest debate continues in strictly opposing camps. Jim Hawkins' rebuttal to my letter in the June issue highlights inconsistencies in his argument and a gross misunderstanding of many points. Mr Hawkins states that I "claim to embrace a morality not dependent on religion and questions my meaning in calling incest "morally ambiguous".

Firstly I can only presume that Jim – as an atheist – also embraces morals not dependent on or dictated by religion. As for "morally ambiguous" I mean Morally: Concerned with right and wrong conduct, especially sexually, and Ambiguous: Uncertain (Oxford Dictionary). For further clarification, I would pay good money to observe Mr Hawkins conducting a survey of the general public from a pro-incest standpoint. He would most likely discover just how taboo the subject is and that society at large frowns upon it. A carefully posed question would likely also identify how little of these objections are based on religion.

Jim Hawkins goes on to argue that in the case of genetic abnormality, conceiving children is a separate issue to allowing incestuous couples to have sex. I am dumbfounded at this claim and find myself fighting the urge to explain to Mr Hawkins the ins and outs (pardon the pun) of the birds and the bees to highlight just how strongly these subjects are linked! It is this way of thinking that has sadly earned us the highest teenage pregnancy in Europe.

In conversation with geneticists I have ascertained that there is a significantly increased chance of genetic abnormality in inbred offspring. I won't bore everyone and transcribe the entire conversation, but suffice to say that at present no scientific developments exist that can prevent this abnormality. This is why the law exists. Changing the current law would also open the floodgates for second and third genera-

tions of inbreeding which increases the chances of abnormality exponentially!

Legalising incest and allowing generations of inbreeding could produce some interesting variations on *Homo erectus* as it stands.

Towards the end of his letter Mr Hawkins accuses me of offending him, but cites three different examples incorrectly. I can't help but wonder why Jim is taking my views on incest so personally?! Jim's attitudes towards sex with minors weren't really made clear in his initial letter, but this is irrelevant as my reference to paedophilia was only made as a simile to the Herr Fritzl case, which I presume Jim has no link with! Furthermore, my mention of slavery was citing my personal feelings on the antiquated viewpoints of the Bible. In misunderstanding basic arguments, I put forward that Mr Hawkins has more in common with a religious fundamentalist! I do, however, admit that my closing remarks on bestiality could be perceived as a cheap parting shot, yet since bestiality is also – like incest – a taboo and spoken against in the Bible, Jim Hawkins has no intellectual argument against my point. Any offence he took on a moral ground personally rather undermines his position on incest.

With unlimited space and time I daresay this debate could continue indefinitely. I have strong views on the father – daughter/mother-son relationship dynamic and how legalising incest would basically legalise "grooming" – but another time maybe. I am delighted that the *Freethinker* has allowed itself to be a platform for controversial debate and, despite our many disagreements, applaud my opponent for broaching such a subject. But should he want to take it from the soap-box to the law-courts, I defer to Terry Sanderson, President of the NSS, who told me recently "The NSS categorically has no interest in pursuing the abolishment of the incest laws, whatsoever! The NSS does not automatically take an

opposing viewpoint to the Bible, after all the Bible is anti murder!"

Greg Marshall
Brighton

AT the risk of perpetuating a somewhat sterile and circular debate, may I respond to the – admittedly cautious – two-man incestophile lobby, Jim Hawkins and Colin Mills? (July *Points of View*).

To begin, let me correct the misapprehensions both gentlemen are labouring under. I have already accepted that some of what Jim says about decriminalising incest is perfectly rational, and to be fair, he begins by accepting my point that we should only fight battles we have some hope of winning. Nonetheless, he elides my central point, that our relatively puny, ageing and under-funded secularist movement can ill afford to waste its time and money on a campaign that would benefit only tiny numbers of people, while undoubtedly attaching a debilitating stigma to the movement that could setback more worthwhile causes, like legalising some form of regulated assisted dying.

In drawing a parallel between pro-incest and pro-paedophile campaigners, I was not equating the two activities, as Jim suggests; I was simply pointing out how ill-judged campaigns can tarnish a whole movement.

Colin Mills's letter from the ivory tower is even more off-beam. He begins by airily criticising me for pointing out the "yeeuch" factor, but I'm sorry, in the real world (as opposed to the insular *Guardian*-reading, Radio 4-listening world of the chattering classes), that is precisely the reaction such a campaign will elicit, with dire consequences.

He also asks what evidence I have for claiming that prosecutions for consensual incest are rare. Well, newspapers known for sex-scandal reportage from the court rooms almost never carry such stories, which is probably evidence enough. He then goes



on to suggest that "Anyone claiming they were involved in consensual incest ... would run the risk of being charged themselves; their lawyers would most likely urge them to keep quiet". I suspect, Colin, that the danger of being exposed lies more in third party whistle-blowing, yet the burden of proving such a serious allegation, together with our stringent defamation laws, is clearly deterrent enough. Even if decriminalising consensual incest is rational, is it necessary?

Please believe me, that now is not the time to mount a "legalise incest campaign", no matter how reasoned it may be (and the secular jury is still out on that one, which suggests it would also seriously divide our movement). This would be an absurdly high price to pay simply to try and "get one over" on religious influence. We must all learn to act strategically to optimise the use of our scarce resources and capitalise on the most popular aspects of our secular agenda.

I want secularism to be popular, because, rather like Simon Cowell, I like things which are popular. Popular gets results. We should not be ashamed of appealing to popular sentiment and riding it to our own secular advantage. Successful movements and campaigns do not succeed by appealing to people's rationality alone. They succeed by appealing to their imagination, their priorities and sense of decency.

Diesel Balaam
London

JUST because religion has brainwashed even non-theists into calling endogenous mating incest, meaning "unchastity", and calling zoophilia bestiality, that does not validate the religious pretence that those victimless acts are objectively immoral.

Like almost everybody who boasts, "I am an atheist, but..." Greg Marshall (*Points of View*, June) equates his personal emotional reaction to the behavior of other people with morality. I personally find the idea of tugging a kangaroo revolting. But I do not take it upon myself to denounce boundary riders in the Australian outback for engaging in (presumably) consensual recreation that I find unappealing.

I also find the thought of tugging the Duchess of Cornwall revolting. But I do not denounce England's comic opera Clown Prince for not sharing my revulsion. I shudder at the recorded behavior of Ikhenaton, siring Tutankhamen on his mother, Tiy. But I do not use the religious slur incest to describe what is correctly called inbreeding.

If the inbreeding that produced the thoroughbred is to be denigrated, it should be on the scientific ground that it is as likely to reinforce non-survival traits as survival traits. To label an act of consensual,

non-procreative recreation "unchaste" is to validate the pretence that "chastity" is something other than a religious dogma.

William Harwood
Canada

OVER-POPULATION

AFRICA underpopulated? Maybe – if you disregard such facts as desertification, overgrazing, overfishing, dwindling water resources, growing pollution, increased extinction of animal species, and the impact of climate warming (especially dire in Africa in the years to come ...).

Over/under population is not only a matter of food and space, as G.Vaughan seems to think (*Points of View* June).

Re climate change: it would not be upon us, if we had had the sense to limit and stabilise human population worldwide at about 3 milliards. Three obviously pollute and "warm up" less than 10 or 12 ... We had a unique opportunity to save the world, but the Vatican and its likes won. Religion(=human stupidity)is ruining life on earth more than anything else.

Nelly Moia
Luxembourg

THOMAS SZASZ

I WAS interested to read William Harwood's review of Thomas Szasz's book, *Psychiatry: the Science of Lies*, in the May issue.

Thomas Szasz appears to believe that the majority of what we know as "mental illnesses" are no more than malingering and a form of deceit practised by psychiatrists on the general public. I believe most people, including most mental health professionals, fully understand that "mental illnesses" are not disease entities like pneumonia or cancer, but instead that "mental illness" is at best a useful metaphor.

I have myself suffered from depression and I know that it is a very real, debilitating condition. I certainly did not feel that I was malingering when I was unable to leave my house. However, I found that the answer to my problems lay in gaining a greater understanding of myself and in consensual, humane support from others, including some professionals.

Thomas Szasz believes in freedom and personal responsibility. Therefore he does not support the kind of forcible psychiatric treatment to which thousands of people are subject in this country alone. He has set up the Citizens Commission on Human Rights which aims to help people subjected to forced psychiatry and, William Harwood may be surprised to learn, is closely associated with and funded by Scientology.

William Harwood reserves his greatest

scorn for astrologers. I would like to point out that astrology is practised on a consensual basis. It is in fact a subtle system of psychological insight and a very useful tool for self-knowledge, when practised by a properly qualified astrologer. To the best of my belief, no astrologer has ever locked a person up and refused to release them until they agreed that they were indeed a Leo, and should take special "medication" for Leos for the rest of their lives.

Jean Cozens
London

PAEDOPHILE PRIESTS

I WOULD like to comment on a worrying experience I recently had. I was working in Southern Ireland when the news broke about the paedophile priests.

Like most rational people I had thoughts along the lines of "about time" and "lets hang the bastards". So, one night when I was in a pub, I thought I'd take the opportunity to ask a young local woman in her early 20s what she thought about it. The young lady's face clouded over and I could see that she did not want to talk about it. The best response I got was a mumbled "not all priests are bad".

So when I got back to the hotel, I switched on the TV and, by chance, found that a late night discussion programme was on about this very subject. Curious to hear what the general reaction was in Ireland, I sat and watched for around 20 minutes. Whilst a very articulate and moving man was allowed a good opportunity to talk about his sickening experience, the church representative who was getting interviewed got a very easy time of it. At no point did the interviewer really challenge the man.

The next morning I sat down to read the *Irish Times* at breakfast. A few letters were in complaining about the revelations, but again no real challenge. One moron even wrote "When we go to church, withhold the collection". I thought to myself "Why go to church, think for yourself."

Sadly, in the 21st century, a large percentage of the people of this amazing country are still living in fear of priests. There will continue to be child abusers amongst the clergy and as long as people, especially the media, will not stand up to them, nothing looks likely to improve.

A Ewing
Glasgow

the freethinker

EVENTS & CONTACTS

i information w website e email

Birmingham Humanists: i Tova Jones 021454 4692 w www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk. Programme available.

Brighton & Hove Humanist Society: i 01273 227549/461404. w <http://homepage.nitworld.com/robert.stovold/humanist.html>. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. Wed, Sept 2, 8pm. Michael Irwin: *Assisted Dying – What is Legal and What is Not*.

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 Phil Cork Tel. 01242 233746.

e phil.cork@blueyonder.co.uk

w www.phil-cork.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/humleft.htm

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

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, 7.30pm) Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester. Wed, Aug 12, Topics from a Hat.

Hampstead Humanist Society: i N I Barnes 10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 OHP. Tel: 0207 328 4431.

w www.hampstead.humanist.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. August 12 no evening meeting but a pub lunch at the Preston pub close to Preston Road underground station. Non-members welcome. Time 1230 for 1pm.

i Secretary on 0208 907-6124

w www.harrow.humanist.org.uk

e Mike Savage at mfsavagema@hotmail.com

Humanists of Havering: i Jean Condon 01708 473597. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgores Cres. Gidea Park. Meetings on first Thursday of the month, 8pm. Sept 3, Katie Frith: Tell us about your "isms".

Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern

Ireland: i Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: 028 9267 7264 e brianmcclinton@btinternet.com.

w www.nirelandhumanists.net

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

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

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

Local Scottish Groups:

Aberdeen: 07010 704778, aberdeen@humanism-scotland.org.uk **Dundee:** 07017 404778, dundee@humanism-scotland.org.uk

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

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

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

Humanists4Science: A group of humanists interested in science who discuss, and promote, both.

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

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

Jersey Humanists: Contact: Reginald Le Sueur, La Petella, Rue des Vignes, St Peter, Jersey, JE3 7BE. Tel 01534 744780 e Jerseyhumanists@gmail.com w <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Jersey-Humanists/>

Lancashire Secular Humanists: Meetings 7.30 on 3rd Wed of month at Great Eccleston Village Centre, 59 High St, The Square, Great Eccleston (Nr. Preston) PR3 0YB. www.lancashiresecularhumanists.co.uk i Ian Abbott, Wavecrest, Hackensall Rd, Knott End-on-Sea, Poulton-le-Fyde, 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

Liverpool Humanist Group: i 07814 910 286.

w www.liverpoolhumanists.co.uk/ e hghumanist@googlegmail.com. Meetings on the second Wednesday of each month.

Lynn Humanists, W Norfolk & Fens: i Edwin Salter Tel: 07818870215.

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

Mid-Wales Humanists: i Maureen Lofmark, 01570

422648 e mlofmark@btinternet.com

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

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

North East Humanists (Teesside Group):

i C McEwan on 01642 817541.

North East Humanists (Tyneside Group):

i the Secretary on 01434 632936.

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

e enquiries@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk w www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk

North Yorkshire Humanist Group: Secretary: Charles Anderson, 01904 766480. Meets second Monday of the month, 7.30pm, Priory Street Centre, York.

Peterborough Humanists: i Edwin Salter Tel: 07818870215

Sheffield Humanist Society: i 0114 2309754. The SADACCA Building, Wicker, S2. Public Meeting first Wednesday of the month, 7.30pm. Wed, Sept 2. David Price – *Sheffield Troublemakers*

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.