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'Fornicator' Nelson's statue will be trashed when Islam gains 'glorious dominion' in the UK

A fundamentalist Muslim group, which is demanding full implementation of sharia law in Britain, has unveiled its plans for Trafalgar Square when Islam gains dominion over the UK. The Islam for the UK group revealed its vision for this world-renowned landmark on its website, which declares: "In light of the Islamic resurgence taking place around the world, particularly in the United Kingdom, one can definitely come to the conclusion that the dawn of a new era is close and that the prophecies of the Final Messenger Muhammad in relation to the domination of Islam worldwide are indeed true.

"Consequently, we at Islam4UK felt it necessary to divulge to the British public what precise changes will occur when Britain transforms into this glorious dominion, not only as psychological preparation but also as a means of enticement to encourage and hasten its implementation."

In just "24 hours after sharia is established in the UK" the statue of Admiral Horatio Nelson "would be removed and demolished without hesitation".

This is in keeping with the Islamic ban on "the construction and elevation of statues or idols."

"Indeed, there is none truly worthy of worship except Allah (and thus the veneration of any man or woman is unacceptable, let alone a man such as Horatio Nelson who was a notorious fornicator, as his illicit relationships with married women such as Emma, Lady Hamilton, demonstrate."

Even Nelson's column may have to be changed. "Due to the fact that the actual column is based on the architecture of the Temple

of Mars Ultor, in Rome, the engravings on the column will have to be altered in favour of Islamic indentations, possibly floral designs."

Replacing the 18ft Nelson will be "an exquisitely constructed Islamic clock with the black flag of Islam flying high over it; this clock could also be fitted with an electronic device that would sound the Islamic call to prayer 5 times a day; moreover, because the statue of Horatio Nelson is coincidentally positioned facing due south, on its replacement with an Islamic orientated clock. The front of the clock would duly be rotated 45 degrees (anti-clockwise) so as to indicate the direction of the qibla ie direction of the Kaabah in Makkah, thereby making it easier for Muslims in the locality to know which way to pray."

The famous bronze lions will also be removed, and replaced with "pots of gold coins". A new Islamic governor (who will presumably replace the Queen and the entire Cabinet) "may position pots of gold coins as a replacement, so as to provide all members of the public with the opportunity to freely take money and fulfil any need that they might have."

As the *Freethinker* was going to press, the group was planning a rally in London on October 31 to demand the full implementation of sharia law.

The procession – dubbed March 4 Shari'ah – will start at the House of Commons, which the group's website describes as the "very place where the lives of millions of people in the UK are changed and it is from here where unjust wars are launched".



This is how Islam4UK envisages Nelson's column when Islam gains 'glorious dominion' over Britain

(Continued on p4)

Up the poll!

BARRY DUKE UNLEASHES ATHEIST HORDES ON BRIGHTON'S LOCAL PAPER

The power of the internet never ceases to astound me – and I must confess that since I became a dab hand at harnessing the thing I have engaged in more mischief than a cage full of chimps.

The most recent bit of fun I've had in cyberspace came within hours of Brighton's local paper, *The Argus*, carrying a report signalling the intention of an evangelical vicar to capture Brightonians for *Jeeeeesus*.

Reverend Archie Coates arrived in the city about two months ago to establish a franchise of London's evangelical Holy Trinity Brompton church at the failed Anglican St Peter's Church – a landmark building dubbed Brighton's Cathedral, the congregation of which had dwindled to about five ga-ga geriatrics and a dog.

The church was about to close when Holy Trinity, which is the headquarters of the daft Alpha Course, took over in the hope of reversing its fortunes.

In a web video, Coates said: "Brighton is

a place of great social and spiritual need. Homelessness, drugs and young men and women caught in the sex industry. It has been dubbed Britain's most godless city."

But he insists his church could transform Brighton. "Our vision is not just to fill the church but it's to build in the heart of this city a community and do whatever we can to sow our best years into playing our part in the re-evangelisation of Brighton and transformation of this society."

Coates added: "Since I moved to Brighton six weeks ago I have realised that it is a lot more godly than I imagined. If you look around you see the creativity, the vibrancy and the life of the city."

When I saw that the *Argus* report, reproduced on the internet, was accompanied by an online poll, my immediate thought was: "How do I get as many atheists as possible to vote?"

The poll asked: "Is the Reverend Archie Coates right to repeat the description of Brighton as 'godless'?". The choice of answers was: (a) "Yes, and it's good that he intends to change this"; (b) "No it has its troubles but is generally a good place and (c) "Being described as godless is a compliment".

Then it hit me. One of the best atheist sites on the internet – *Pharyngula* – is run by PZ Myers, a biologist and associate professor at the University of Minnesota, Morris. And it gets many thousands of visitors a day. Because Myers (pictured right)



has lately taken to publicising on-line polls such as the one run by *The Argus*, thus prompting atheists to vote in great numbers, I immediately emailed him a link to the local Brighton poll.

That was around 10 am, when already around 72 percent readers had chosen option c. That number shot up to an amazing 95 percent after Myers put up a link to the poll on his blog a few hours later.

This is how PZ described the *Argus* report: "An ambitious priest gets assigned to Brighton, which he calls 'the most godless city in Britain'. He has declared that it is now his intention to transform the place into a sanctuary for unctuous old farts with their brains scrambled by nonsense (uh, those are my words, not his, if you couldn't tell.)" Alluding to Coates' remarks about

Brighton's creativity and vibrancy, Myers said: "Twit. Those are symptoms of *godlessness*, not *godliness*."

Myers also played no small part in leaving the Alpha lot with egg on their faces.

An on-line poll they recently launched asked "Does God Exist?" Three choices were offered: "Yes", "No" and "Probably". After the poll was Pharyngulated, the "No" vote shot up to 97 percent!

Incidentally, Alpha put the same choices on a poster that I understand has been plastered on stations throughout London.

On Friday, September 18, an unnamed commuter spotted the poster at London Bridge railway station.

In a letter to the London Transport Police, he wrote:

"The question, 'Does God Exist?', was very straightforward, and 'No' was obviously the correct answer. I was particularly concerned that vulnerable people exposed to the alternative answers of 'Yes' and 'Probably' were at risk of exploitation by individuals who might attach a set of rules and obligations to those who hope that some super-being will take responsibility for their lives, or intervene in some other way.

"I felt the offered answer 'Probably' to be particularly sinister. It was for this reason I chose to engage with the questionnaire and ensure that the correct answer was ticked.

"As a result of responding to this questionnaire I was arrested by a plainclothes police officer. Two other plainclothes police officers were in attendance. I was informed that I had been seen on CCTV ticking the correct answer.

"As I sat caged in the back of the police van I counted six police officers who were attending this incident, which was presented to me as being criminal damage. My tick was entirely within the specified 'No' box, and the questionnaire was not damaged in any way. Interestingly the arresting police officer spent much of his time ticking similar multiple choice boxes on a questionnaire of his own.

"I understand that I am required to pay an £80 penalty notice fine, or attend court. I am left with little choice but to ask that this matter be dealt with by the court."

At the time of writing this, I had not managed to identify the "criminal", nor ascertain whether his case had come to trial.

I have no doubt the amazing internet will provide the answer soon.



BARRY DUKE
FREETHINKER
EDITOR

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Mad Muslim group forces Geert Wilders to relocate planned UK press conference

Controversial anti-Islamic Dutch politician Geert Wilders – who was turned away from Britain after criticising the Koran as a “fascist book” but allowed into the UK last month after winning a tribunal appeal – was forced to hastily change the location of a scheduled press conference in London in the interests of his own security.

Wilders had been due to host a press conference on College Green, opposite the Palace of Westminster, at noon. However, about thirty male activists from a group called Islam for UK began chanting: “Wilders burn in hell” and “Sharia for UK”.

Brandishing banners saying, “Sharia is the solution, freedom go to hell” and “Geert Wilders deserves Islamic punishment”, the protesters were held back by about 50 policemen.

Wilders was advised not to confront or walk past the protesters and instead to hold his press conference in the nearby Abbey Gardens building used by members of the House of Lords.

Wilders told journalists that he lived under constant security because of his views. Explaining his controversial views on Islam, he said: “I have a problem with the Islamic ideology, the Islamic culture, because I feel that the more Islam that we get in our societies the less freedom we get.”

He was asked if he still believed that Islam was a retarded culture. He answered that under some Islamic cultures, “homosexuals are beaten up and killed. Journalists are jailed. That action is retarded.”

He said that he stood by his views that the terrorist attacks on New York on September 11, 2001 were directly linked to the Koran.

The 46-year-old first sparked controversy after making a film entitled *Fitna* which defined the Koran as a fascist book. He is not expected to show the film while he is in Britain.

In February, Mr Wilders was denied access to Britain amid Home Office fears that his presence could trigger inter-faith violence. That decision was overturned on appeal.

Abu Muaz, from Islam for UK, said: “If I were to say some of the things he has said I would be arrested under the Terrorism Act. But because there is a war on Muslims he gets an easy ride.”

He added: “When Muslims defend their faith, they are seen as extremists. This man [Wilders] has said more than enough. The future is bright, it is not orange, it is Islam.”

Mohammed Shafiq, from the Ramadhan Foundation, said it was right that Mr Wilders had been allowed into the UK, but he should



Geert Wilders

be closely monitored while in the country.

He said: “The right decision was made to let him in because we believe in freedom of speech in this country, no matter how abhorrent someone’s views are. But he has got to be monitored so that he doesn’t say anything to incite religious violence.”

“If you start attacking somebody’s faith in the way that he has, they could react violently. Islam is not above criticism, and criticism based on a mutual respect and tolerance is fine. But his hatred is no different to the intolerance that the BNP and the far-Right are preaching.”

The Muslim Council of Britain branded Mr Wilders “a relentless preacher of hate” and objected to “the rapturous welcome he is receiving in the name of free speech”.

Muhammad Abdul Bari, its secretary-general, said: “At a time of heightened tension, with the unprecedented rise of the far-Right, we must all pull together and focus on points of unity and cohesion. Our unhealthy obsession with divisive figures only bolsters their objective to sow discord on the streets of Britain.”

Addressing journalists alongside the UKIP peer Lord Pearson, Mr Wilders said that his visit was “a victory”. He pledged to return to Britain and to show his film.

Bible ‘improperly used’ in Texas murder trial

AMNESTY International has appealed to the state of Texas to commute the sentence on Khristian Oliver, 32, who is due to die this month.

He was sentenced to death in 1999 for murdering a man whose home Oliver was burgling. The victim was shot in the face and beaten with his own rifle.

It later emerged that while deciding whether he should be given the death penalty, jurors consulted the Bible. Four jury members admitted that several copies had been in the jury room and that highlighted passages were passed around.

At one point, a juror reportedly read aloud from a copy, including the passage: “And if he smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.”

Defence lawyers argued in appeals that jurors had been improperly influenced by the Bibles but the trial judge rejected the claim, a decision upheld by a Texas appeals court.

The US constitution calls for the separation of state and religion. In 2005, the state supreme court in Colorado overturned a death penalty on a convicted murderer because jurors had consulted the Bible while deliberating over his sentence.

Commuting Robert Harlan’s sentence to life imprisonment without parole, the court ruled that the Bible constituted an “improper outside influence” and a reliance on what it called a “higher authority”.

However, a federal appeals court ruled last year that while the Bible should not have been allowed into the deliberation room at Oliver’s trial, there was no clear evidence to indicate that it had influenced the jurors’ decision. In April this year, the US Supreme Court refused to hear Oliver’s appeal.

Kate Allen, Amnesty International’s UK director, said Oliver’s trial was a “travesty”.

“Religious texts provide consolation and spiritual guidance for billions of people the world over, but this use of the Bible to decide life or death in a capital trial is deeply, deeply troubling,” she said.

A vision of Britain under fascist Islamic law

Continued from page 1

The group then intends to march to 10 Downing Street and “call for the removal of the tyrant Gordon Brown from power”.

The march will then converge on Trafalgar Square where protesters expect it “will gather even more support from tourists and members of the public, making clear in the heart of London the need for Shariah in society”.

The group declared: “We hereby request all Muslims in the United Kingdom, in Manchester, Leeds, Cardiff, Glasgow and all other places, to join us and collectively declare that as submitters to Almighty Allah we have had enough of democracy and man-made law and the depravity of the British culture.

“On this day we will call for a complete upheaval of the British ruling system, its members and legislature, and demand the full implementation of Shariah in Britain.”

Politicians and fellow Muslims condemned the group’s incendiary comments, which come in the wake of recent violent incidents in towns and cities like Manchester, Birmingham and Luton.”

Conservative MP and ex-Army officer Patrick Mercer said: “It is extremely distasteful and is stoking the fires of fear within the British public. If anyone thinks that those views are a step forward in society they are seriously deluded. They are repellent and repulsive.”

The group was also attacked by Tory MP Philip Davies who said: “This march is clearly a deliberate and provocative attempt to incite racial tension and disrupt commu-

nity cohesion.

“The simple solution is for these people to move to a country which already has sharia law.”

A spokesman for the Islamic Society of Britain said: “99.999 per cent of Muslims despise these people. This only serves to fuel racial tensions.”

And Tory MP and *Daily Express* columnist Ann Widdecombe said: “You cannot have

Choudary has said that under sharia law in Britain people who commit adultery would be stoned to death, adding that “anyone who becomes intoxicated by alcohol would be given 40 lashes in public”. He has also mocked the deaths of British soldiers, and branded an Army homecoming parade a “vile parade of brutal murderers”.

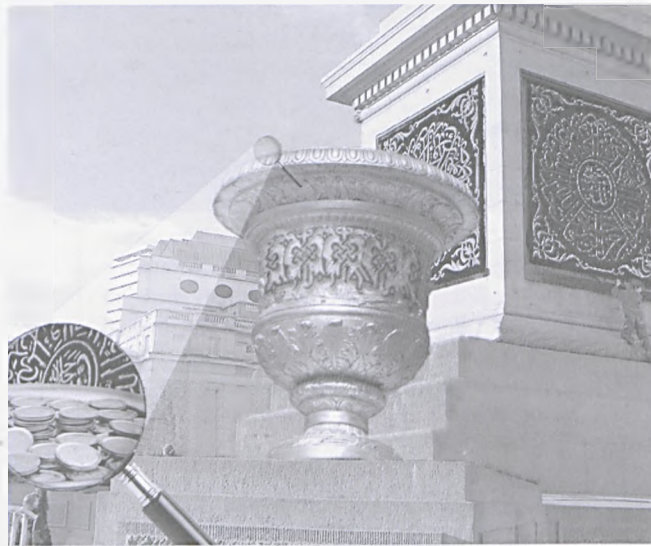
Meanwhile it has been announced that The One Law for All campaign is organising a rally against sharia and all religious-based laws in

Britain and across the world, and in defence of human rights and secularism, on November 21 in London. Rally organisers are calling upon those who cannot get to London to organise similar rallies or acts of solidarity in other cities across the globe. They say that public show of opposition is crucial at a time when sharia law is on the rise in many places and is being touted as a “right” and a “choice” when it is anything but these things.

Organisers insist that sharia is not wanted by “ordinary Muslims or those labelled as Muslims (since there are just as many differences of opinion and belief in all so-called Muslim communities as among others).”

They added: “If it were really the desire of Muslims to be stoned to death for sex outside of marriage, hanged for being gay, executed for

being apostates, flogged for eating during Ramadan, forcibly veiled and segregated from childhood, Islamic states and the regressive Islamic movement would not need to resort to such indiscriminate violence and brutality.”



Trafalgar Square’s famous bronze lions will be replaced with pots of gold containing free money for those in need

two legal systems side by side and the one we have now works and the British people are perfectly happy with it.”

Islam4UK is fronted by lunatic preacher Anjem Choudary who has also called for all British women to wear burquas.

Ludovic Kennedy, atheist and voluntary euthanasia campaigner, dies aged 89

SIR Ludovic Kennedy, the distinguished broadcaster, outspoken campaigner and committed atheist, died last month at a nursing home in Salisbury.

At the age of 80, Kennedy – an honorary associate of the National Secular Society – wrote *All in the Mind – a Farewell to God* in which he dismissed beliefs on which Christianity was founded as “preposterous”.

Hanne Stinson, chief executive of the British Humanist Association, told *The Guardian*: “Sir Ludovic was a stalwart supporter of the BHA and a progressive campaigner on many fronts. He will be sorely missed.”

A lifelong Liberal – he once stood unsuccessfully as a candidate – Kennedy was lauded by the Lib Dem leader, Nick Clegg, as “one of the great thinkers of his generation. His pursuit of justice and his championing of sometimes unpopular and controversial causes marked him out as a true liberal.”

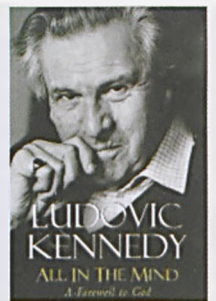
A vociferous advocate of assisted dying – one of his books is entitled *Euthanasia: the Good Death* – his belief in the right to die with dignity was born from watching his mother Rosalind’s last, painful months. He was president and co-founder of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society

He resigned from the Lib Dems in 2001

when the former leader Charles Kennedy refused to include the issue of voluntary euthanasia in the party’s election manifesto, though he later rejoined.

Kennedy’s books and campaigns to right judicial wrongs secured pardons and remissions of a number of sentences. His successes included the posthumous pardon of Timothy Evans, a lodger in the home of the serial killer John Christie, who was hanged for the murder of his baby daughter.

His best-known campaigns involved the wrongful convictions of the Guildford Four, the Maguire Seven and the Birmingham Six for alleged terrorist acts.



The Vatican is accused of dodging its responsibilities over child abuse scandals

The Vatican has been accused of evading its responsibilities over child abuse and trying to distract attention from its crimes by accusing other faiths of having even worse records.

In a rebuttal to accusations levelled at it at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), the Vatican says that protestant churches and even Jewish synagogues have even worse records of child abuse than the Catholic Church.

The original accusations were made by Keith Porteous Wood, speaking on behalf of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU).

He alleged at a meeting of the Human Rights Council that the Vatican had failed to provide the mandatory reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Its reports were now fifteen years overdue. It has now grudgingly offered to provide just one paragraph on abuse by priests which has led to compensation being paid all over the world running to billions of dollars.

Wood, who is Executive Director of the National Secular Society, also pointed out that the Catholic Church had an appalling record of cover-ups, evasions, moving around of offending priests and making counter accusations of lying against victims who spoke up.

He said: "The Vatican's record on this is truly shocking. It has shown little remorse for the suffering inflicted on tens of thousands of innocent children over the years. In fact, it has tried very hard to cover up and evade responsibility.

"We have called on the international community to stop pussy-footing around the Vatican and to hold it to account for the misery it has inflicted on countless people. We want the Vatican to be made to face up to its responsibility and accept its culpability."

Wood said that the Vatican compounded the distress of victims by constantly trying to belittle their suffering or to evade responsibility for it altogether.

"Victim groups around the world will tell you that closure is just about impossible when the abusers are protected by the church

and the victims are made to feel that they are, in some way, responsible for their exploitation.

"The Vatican really must be challenged to change its ways and to show some repentance not only for the deeds of its priests but for its own conspiracy to try to sweep the whole dreadful business under the carpet. The complacency exhibited by this supposed rebuttal shows that the problem goes to the most senior level in the Church."



Keith Porteous Wood, right, pictured with Lord Avebury, joint winner of the *Secularist of the Year* prize for 2009

Leeds vicar jailed for sex offences against young boys

A LEEDS vicar has been given a 14-year jail sentence for raping two boys and for a string of other sex offences.

Peter Hedge, 47, of Pudsey, carried out the "calculated and systematic" abuse as a curate at St Margaret's Church in Thornbury, Bradford, and later as vicar at Holy Trinity Church, Queensbury.

Judge Peter Benson told Hedge he had disgraced the church. "As a result of your conduct, which really defies description in its wickedness, you not only robbed these young men of their childhood, you scarred their young lives."

He said Hedge had abused the trust placed in him in the most cynical and corrupt fashion, and his offending had undermined the respect for other decent and respectable members of the Anglican Church.

He rapped Hedge's "sickening hypocrisy" in boasting to the court about helping push through a child protection code at the heritage railway where he worked while at the same time carrying on his abuse.

The jury at Bradford Crown Court heard evidence that Hedge gave youngsters cash to buy cannabis and later gave them money to secure their silence.

Hedge was suspended from his post at the church when the allegations came to light two years ago.

Hedge, who was ordained in 1993, faced three charges of rape and 33 of indecent assault against six boys during the 1990s. He denied all the charges, claiming that the victims were motivated by a possible "big money" compensation claim.

In a statement, the Right Reverend David James, the Bishop of Bradford, said he had heard about the guilty verdicts with the deepest regret and sadness. "Clergy of the Church of England are expected to uphold the highest moral standards; by committing these very serious crimes Peter Hedge has betrayed the trust put in him by the people of Thornbury and Queensbury.

"My thoughts and prayers are with the victims who have been deeply damaged by someone who should have been nurturing them and keeping them safe. And I thank them for their courage in coming forward to give evidence."

Christians outraged by 'porno' Genesis

A SEXUALLY explicit illustrated *Book of Genesis* by controversial artist Robert Crumb, which features Bible characters having intercourse, has been condemned by religious groups. The book, which is released this month, carries the warning "adult supervision recommended for minors", and is described as "scandalous satire" by its publishers.

It includes graphic illustrations of Bible characters having sexual intercourse, and other scenes depicting naked men and women as well as "gratuitous" depictions of violence.

Crumb, the book's author, is most famous for his creation Fritz the Cat, a sexually graphic "underground" comic strip. He has said he does not believe that the Bible is the word of God. "I take it all for myth from start to finish, with probably some faint relation to historical reality," he said.

The Christian Institute is not amused. "It is turning the Bible into titillation," said the crackpot organisation's Mike Judge, "It seems wholly inappropriate for what is essentially God's rescue plan for mankind. If you are going to publish your own version of the Bible it must be done with a great deal of sensitivity. The Bible is a very important text to many many people and should be treated with the respect it deserves."

International Blasphemy Day comes up

September 30 marked the launch of International Blasphemy Day by the New York-based Center for Free Inquiry – and immediately ran into flak from CFI founder Paul Kurtz, who described its latest efforts as simply “vulgar antics” by some “fundamentalist atheists” that dishonour the basic ethical principles of what he claims the CFI has stood for until now – the toleration of opposing viewpoints.

International Blasphemy Day was timed to coincide with the fifth anniversary of a Danish newspaper's publication of controversial cartoons about Mohammed, and its objective was to encourage people around the world to “demonstrate their right to uninhibited expression of their views of religion,” especially expressions that would be or would have been considered blasphemous.

“Our voices will be heard – on whatever subject we choose. No topic off limits! No more taboos,” said the CFI.

As part of its effort, CFI launched petition drive urging relevant UN bodies not to limit speech critical of religion; a contest “that will challenge your blaspheming

**IDEAS DON'T
NEED RIGHTS
PEOPLE DO**



skills,” and other initiatives designed to “defend the right to free expression”.

But Paul Kurtz said he believes the effort was “most unwise” and “betrays the civic virtues of democracy.”

“I support the premise that religion should be open to the critical examination of its claims, like all other institutions in society,” he wrote in a dissenting opinion piece.

Kurtz added, “I do have serious reservations about the forms that these criticisms take. When we defended the right of a

Danish newspaper to publish cartoons deploring the violence of Muslim suicide bombers, we were supporting freedom of the press. But for CFI itself to sponsor the lampooning of Christianity by encouraging anti-Catholic, anti-Protestant, or any other anti-religious cartoons goes beyond the bounds of civilised discourse in pluralistic society. It is not dissimilar to the anti-Semitic cartoons of the Nazi era,” he said.

“It is one thing to examine the claims of religion in a responsible way by calling attention to biblical, koranic or scientific

Pakistan's blasphemy laws ‘encourage extremism’

AMERICAN lawmakers want Pakistan to do more to fight religious intolerance, saying the issue should play a bigger role in US assistance to and engagement with Pakistan in coming years.

Witnesses at a congressional hearing testified that Pakistan's blasphemy laws encourage extremism, according to a Voice of America report last month.

Pakistan's blasphemy laws, which carry a potential death penalty for derogatory remarks or actions against Islam, the Koran or the Prophet Mohammed, have long been controversial within and outside the country.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other organisations say the laws have been used to squelch dissent and oppress Muslim and non-Muslim religious minorities, and have often led to violence.

Anti-Christian violence in the Pakistani city of Gojra this past August resulted in the deaths of at least seven Christians, with 50 homes burned.

Nina Shea, of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, says additional events since Gojra have underscored that religious tensions continue. Shea and other witnesses support a non-binding resolution introduced in the House of Representatives by Republican Congressman

Christopher Smith, who says radicalism poses a threat to Islam. “In the intermediate and long-term, certainly these radical Islamic jihadists and others are the greatest threat to Islam and to believers such as yourselves,” Smith said.

The resolution says US non-military assistance, which will triple over the next five years, must support an interfaith dialogue begun by Pakistan's Minister of Minorities Affairs Shabaz Bhatti, and help the government counter religiously-motivated hostility and violence.

It also urges Pakistan to repeal the anti-blasphemy laws, and investigate acts and punish perpetrators of religiously-motivated violence.

Non-Muslims make up less than five percent of Pakistan's population of 175 million. Four million of the country's Muslims are Ahmadis, who say they face increasing persecution.

Mujeeb Ijaz is an activist in the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in the US, and was among three witnesses appearing before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission.

He says Pakistan's blasphemy laws are used by extremists to silence alternative views of Islam and definitions of such things as jihad. “Because of the government's legalised of-

ficial repression of minorities, the average Pakistani cannot question the clergy's doctrines, even if they call for violence in the name of religion, for fear that they become labelled as blasphemers.

“The nightmare scenario is to be tagged as a blasphemer, end up in prison, face police brutality, judicial indifference, social boycott and in many cases death at the hands of vigilantes,” he said.

Attorney Amjad Mahmood Khan, a lecturer on human rights, law, and governance in Muslim majority countries, says blasphemy laws have gained legitimacy and withstood legal challenges in Pakistan, but are not legitimate and even blatantly violate international human rights law and principles.

“The anti-blasphemy laws circumvent Article 55(c) of the U.N. Charter, and Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Pakistan is a signatory. This is especially troubling since Pakistan was once firmly committed to abide by the Charter and Declaration. Second, the anti-blasphemy laws circumvent Articles 18, 19, 20, and 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [ICCPR] to which Pakistan is a signatory as of last year,” he said.

der fire – from a leading US secularist

criticisms, it is quite another to violate the key humanistic principle of tolerance," he stated. "One may disagree with contending religious beliefs, but to denigrate them by rude caricatures borders on hate speech.

"I apologise to my fellow citizens who have suffered these barbs of indignity," he concluded.

Currently, Kurtz is chair emeritus of the Center for Inquiry-Transnational, editor-in-chief of *Free Inquiry* magazine, and professor emeritus of philosophy at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

Ronald Lindsay, meanwhile, heads the Center for Inquiry in Amherst, NY, which claims to have 100,000 followers worldwide.

Earlier this year, Kurtz had revealed that he had been "unceremoniously ousted" as chairman of the Center for Inquiry-Trans-

national on June 1, 2009, and only holds the title "chairman emeritus."

"I have agreed to remain on the Board for now – though I feel completely demoralised by the power grab – after a degrading inquisition conducted by the Board a year ago and my final expulsion from an organisation, which I love dearly, and whose future survival I fear is now endangered," he wrote to friends and colleagues.

Kurtz revealed at the time that he was concerned that the direction of CFI would be changed.

After some back and forth between himself and Center For Inquiry CEO Ron Lindsay, Paul Kurtz reasserted his opposition to Blasphemy Day.

"My objection to Blasphemy Day is that it can be rather sophomoric; particularly

the holding of a contest to see who comes up with the most pithy forms of blasphemy. I have consistently said that if we are to be taken seriously we need to provide the best scholarly and scientific examination of claims. I have also forthrightly defended 'the right to blaspheme': but there are different ways of doing this, and I submit that poking fun at one's opponents is counter-productive. I do not think that 'in-your-face' atheism will get us very far. I have defended the right of the Danish newspaper to publish cartoons critical of Muslim suicide bombers, and I am not unilaterally opposed to the use of cartoons, particularly where there is a political or social point that needs to be made. But this is different from purposely seeking to blaspheme to gain public notoriety."

C of E lawyers make idiots of themselves over 'blasphemy' charge against photographer

A FIRM of solicitors acting on behalf of the Church of England demonstrated how badly behind the times they were when they sent a letter to a St Austell-based photographer Andy Craddock, accusing him of blasphemy, and demanding that he remove pictures, taken at St Michael Penkivel Church in Cornwall, from his website.

The letter also ordered him to "begin destruction of all copies of the images in your possession or under your control".

Solicitors Michelmores wrote: "Our clients believe that a number of these photographs constitute blasphemous material. Blasphemy is an indictable criminal offence at common law consisting in 'a publication of contemptuous, reviling, scurrilous or ludicrous matter relating to God, Jesus Christ, the Bible or the formularies of the Church of England'.

"A number of your photographs use

internationally recognised images of the Christian religion, including fonts, altars, crucifixes, religious imagery in stained glass windows and on gravestones for posed pornographic



Andy Craddock

photographs. The publication of blasphemous material constitutes an offence regardless of whether the person publishing the material intended that the material amount to blasphemy or not."

The "crime" of blasphemy was abolished in the UK in 2008, and it beggars belief that the law firm appeared unaware of the fact.

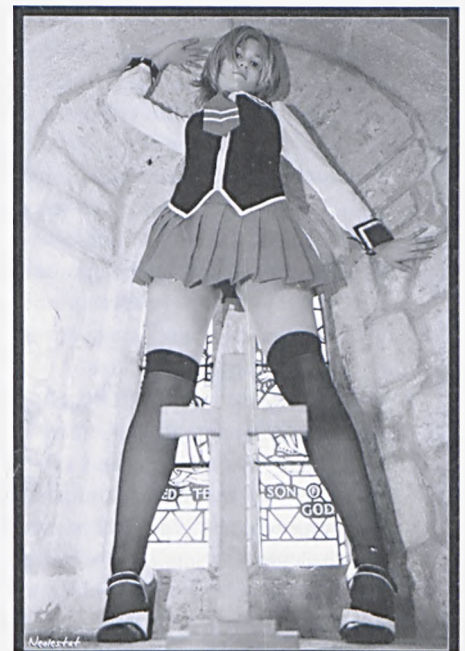
Shortly after the letter was sent to Craddock, the C of E withdrew the blasphemy action, as well as a charge that the photographer had trespassed at the church.

One photo featured two models, called Kate and Bex, fondling each other on a cloth-draped altar, while another showed a partially-clothed woman lying on a grave.

Craddock – who takes erotic pictures at secret photoshoots at churches across the UK – ignored the letter and calls from Michelmores. He claimed they were powerless to stop him, and defended the photos as art.

Jeremy Dowling, a spokesman for the Diocese of Truro, told Sky News Online:

People in the locality where he lives are not best pleased with him, and nor are the church. But the case has been dropped. We thought it would be better to do that rather than give Mr Craddock continued publicity. He added: "If he had



One of Craddock's 'blasphemous' photos done the same thing, say, in a mosque for instance, all hell would have been let loose... he probably wouldn't have just got a letter.

Said Craddock "I can see how my photos could cause offence, but I think they would only be an offence to a minority of people. It's a difficult thing, it may be a bit twee, but historically artists have offended people. Van Gogh painted prostitutes ... and Banksy sprays stuff on public buildings." He added: "But I don't like the way the church went about their complaint. If Andrew Yates had sat down with me, face-to-face, I would have listened to him. I think it shows a level of cowardice hiding behind a solicitor, it's not the sort of openness I'd expect from a man of God."

IGNORANCE EXPOSED

An Open Letter to a clergyman

James Merryweather sets the record straight on evolution – and more besides – for the Rev William Macleod of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)

DEAR Mr Macleod,

Paradox: You tell us why we are wrong to think the way we don't.

It is several years since I first read *The Theory of Evolution is Crazy!* (*Free Church Messenger*, 2006). I analysed the article in detail, checking and correcting your, shall we call it, idiosyncratic representation of the biology, and appending lengthy annotations as I worked through the discussion. I learnt an immense amount (not in the way you would wish, I'm afraid), and after a couple of stimulating conversations with your colleague Rev. Graeme Craig, I embarked on a fascinating journey of discovery and enhanced understanding.

Now we have your editorial in this year's special issue *Good News*, in which you briefly tackle the same theme in a mini-essay subtitled *God Made Us*. It contains colossal misapprehensions to which I call your attention, correcting and clarifying each in its turn.

Being an atheist

May I presume that the "Lots of people" referred to in your opening sentence, who "wish there was no God and no day of reckoning", are the atheists and evolutionists among whom I eagerly class myself? If so, I challenge the implicit charge that we actively desire that there should be no God and no day of reckoning. I have considered in great depth what it is to be an atheist and concluded, in concordance with others, that atheism is nothing more than a label for something we are not. Neither am I a grocer, astronomer, mezzo-soprano or mermaid. Do I bother to label myself an a-grocer, un-astronomer, non-mezzo-soprano or not-mermaid? No, of course not. The only reason I label myself a-theist is because of pressure we are all under to declare some sort of religious affiliation. I have none.

If there were no religion, there would also be no atheism. Atheism represents a worldview, but its substance is precisely nothing. It is just an abstract label.

That having been explained, I hope you can now see that there can be no question of our wishing there was no God etc, because, as far as we are concerned there is no

God to wish away; and a day of reckoning is, therefore, a non sequitur.

Before I consider your comments about evolution, I will deal with your closing sentence, which I again presume is aimed at atheists and evolutionists: "In your conscience you know God made you and that you will have to answer to Him on the Judgment Day." Since I have now explained the atheist psyche, it should be clear to you that, at least as far as atheists are concerned, the statement is completely irrelevant.

Having clarified the nature of atheism, let us turn to evolution, biology and biologists. I say biologists, rather than evolutionists, because we who are persuaded by and study the evolutionary view of life on Earth are first and foremost biologists. Although evolution is a vital component of the study of living things, it lies nested within many others with which it exchanges ideas: palaeontology, embryology, cytogenetics, molecular genetics, comparative anatomy, systematics, ecology, etc. Evolution is a tool of explanation that has emerged from inquiry. It is not an end in itself and certainly not, as you imply, a wicked plot or weapon of destruction wantonly aimed at religion.

Biologists and God

Your inclusion of the word "because" in the sentence, "They like Darwin because they think that his theories do away with the need to believe in God." plainly suggests some sort of *intent* to do away with God. That statement is false because Darwinian theory and the deliberations of biologists do not need to include God. We do not become biologists in order to destroy your God. The objectives that drive us are not that we are "... desperate to find another explanation of existence apart from a Creator God". We are biologists because we are fascinated by natural history. Many of us are lifelong enthusiasts for the subject, hooked in infancy, long before we began to speculate upon the eternal verities. My personal experience is that I seem always to have been half biologist and half musician, well from around the age of five. Both seemed to come to me naturally, though I don't doubt their advance-

ment was promoted by the encouragement of my parents and teachers (and, no, I do not consider them to be gifts from God).

What scientists, including biologists, seek to do is discover patterns in nature that reveal to us the way life functions. Their quest is for scientia, knowledge. The many biological patterns we have shed light on all happen to agree, without exception, with the well-thought-out ideas of another lifelong biologist, Charles Darwin. There has been no wilful or wicked intentionality behind this – it just happened to turn out that way. We look to nature for explanations and find what we find. We have no specific desire to disprove your God through science. However, if the process of truth seeking results in His demise, only the truth can be held responsible for that.

We have here to confront what for you ought to be an uncomfortable paradox. You maintain that God made everything and us, but when we explore the facts of everything we receive powerful messages that do nothing to support or even suggest the existence of God. How should we respond to that? For my part, I happily accept God's probable non-existence, devote my attention to what is real and make, in the company of thousands of other thinkers, intellectual and cultural progress. You, I imagine, metaphorically holding your Bible aloft, slam all cognitive and philosophical doors against the delicious enlightenment these investigations have provided. You and I, and our respective colleagues, have each made profound decisions with regard to this choice and emerged from different – opposite – doors. One day, the truth will prevail and one or other side must concede defeat. I can foresee no route to compromise.

Erroneous origins

One way to refute an idea is first to present that idea as it is not and then proceed to prove how your corrupt version of the facts is wrong. If you present your spurious thesis in a way that confidently proclaims your authority in the matter, many people will think you're right.

No scientist has ever suggested that "... by



some amazing reaction a living cell formed in a puddle ...” You may be under the illusion that is how it is thought to have happened, but I can assure you that was never the evolutionists’ contention, so your interpretation is obviously incorrect. Indeed, something remarkable once happened in what was probably an aqueous environment, but we can’t say whether it was a puddle, a river, the sea, a rain cloud or even a wet patch on an as yet unidentified distant world.

We can say with confidence that the result was not – it could not be – the appearance of a living cell. The living cell is a mind-bogglingly complicated structure that eventually came into being as the result of evolution long after the first signs of life – or rather proto-life – appeared on the planet. First steps, as far as can be deduced at present (and biochemists are making startling progress in this field) involved the aggregation of relatively simple molecules to form the first self-replicating molecules that enabled a population to occur within which the cycles of variation, selection and reproduction that constitute Darwinian evolution could begin and then promote the slow but sure progress of life on Earth.

Early organisms, highly complex aggregations descended from those first self-replicating molecules, the predecessors of something not unlike the modern simplest organisms we call the Archaea, lived and died, collaborated, competed and reproduced for millions of years until early bacteria emerged gradually after countless iterations of change, selection and replication. Bacteria themselves joined forces as they continue to do today, by swapping genetic material, invading one another and fusing to create symbioses that are identifiable as the earliest cell-like structures. But that happened after many millions years of change

and development, not at the beginning of life on Earth. Only then, by variation as well as by “... natural selection [did] the various life forms on the planet develop.” Of course, I know that not only will you not wish to espouse these ideas, but you will also be unsympathetic with our commitment to the passage of many millions of years. I tackle that disparity below.

That old chestnut: chance

You write: “It all is a matter of chance.” If by “it all” you mean evolution, that statement is entirely contrary to biologists’ stated definition of their theory. You might claim that Jesus was born of a virgin mother, but whether or not I think that is true does not affect the fact that you say you believe it to be so. I might doggedly insist that London buses are yellow single-deckers. Of course that is wrong, but if I believe it, I believe it. Similarly, if biologists consider that random chance plays only a partial role in evolution (that has been clearly defined many times by and since Darwin) then that is a true statement of their theory. It is not something that others can glibly gainsay, other than if by accidental or deliberate misrepresentation.

If the theory of evolution were to rely solely on chance events it would never survive even rudimentary mathematical scrutiny. Creationist researchers have done the sums and they very convincingly demonstrate that chance would never result in life on Earth as we know it, let alone mankind. On this point, we agree. Chance is, however, a factor by which variation is introduced into populations of organisms and species (and there are mechanisms that launch variation other than random DNA code copying errors – mutations – but that’s another essay). The environmental influences that drive natural selection can be defined and are measurable, though they can be ser-

A recent fossil species has cast light on one of the most important transitions in evolution – from water to land. The “missing link”, dubbed Tiktaalik roseae was found in river sediments up in the Arctic circle.

A team of paleontologists found several specimens of the plucky part-fish, part-amphibian during a gruelling month long expedition in 2004 to the remote site on Canada’s Ellesmere Island. The incredibly well-preserved details, described in the journal Nature, reveal a set of evolved features that enabled Tiktaalik’s semi-aquatic lifestyle.

endipitous. Calculations that incorporate those factors show that evolution could easily occur within the time frame determined by geology and physics.

This of course assumes that our reasoning is not dependent, and thus stuck, by adherence to Bishop Ussher’s calculated age of the cosmos at around 6,000 years. That may have seemed a reasonable exercise in 1654, but it entirely collapses when confronted by modern physics and logic.

I know full well that that point causes us to differ diametrically. We have reached, I suggest, the main obstacle that separates us: the spectacular dissonance between biblical and scientific timescales. I call it the Six Thousand Year Impediment, the monumental factor that hopelessly disables concord between Bible literalists and the rest of the thinking population. How can we get over this obstacle so that we might make progress as collaborators in our common voyage of discovery? To me it’s a tall solid brick wall that separates us, and I’m perfectly content not even to perch on top ready to drop down on either side, but to remain resolutely on mine, until the Young Earth lobby comes up with a more convincing argument than that “it is written”.

What, no transitionals?

However you interpret the fossil record, you must first discover what fossils have been found – up to date! It is distinctly disingenuous to cite the fossil record as it was known in the past, ignoring modern research that has immensely, perhaps you find too uncomfortably, advanced our knowledge. A century and a half ago, when the fossil collections were immensely poorer than they are today, Darwin was frustrated by the absence of transitional fossils that he sensed and eloquently argued would illus-

(Continued on p10)

An open letter to a clergyman

trate his theory of change over time in which new species gradually emerged from communities of earlier species, about which he wrote so convincingly in his *Origin of Species*.

That Darwin was as near right as makes no difference has been confirmed a million and more times from fossils discovered since he made his momentous deliberations.

Maybe you are hampered by a mental image of species lining up in straight series, turning from one into the next and that into the next. It seems so from your question: "But don't fossils show us creatures developing from one into another?" You might even think evolution has frogs turning into monkeys or chimpanzees into humans. I trust not, for those are silly caricatures of evolutionary thought. Neither Darwin nor modern evolution biologists have visualised a direct, point-to-point chain of descent from ancestral types (whether they blend seamlessly in Dawkinsian fashion or make Gouldian leaps, away from their ancestors and towards their descendants), whilst expecting the fossils, as they were found, conveniently to form the links in that imagined (erroneously) chain.

Fossil forms usually represent fragments of ancestral arrays of species, examples from experimental lineages that eventually failed and became extinct. These arrays are joined to form an expanding bush-like pattern, from origins to the present. Any single ancestor that gave rise to the next is most unlikely ever to be found because it will have been singular – one out of squillions – and indistinguishable from its immediate relatives. We will never find them all and we would not want to, for if we did we would be utterly overwhelmed by their sheer quantity. Those we have so far constitute an adequate set of interconnected series of ancestors; additions are always welcome. New fossil discoveries invariably refine theoretical models already constructed.

Only when significant geological time has passed can morphological differences be recognised; and then most individuals do not fossilise, so finding series of representative types is not a simple matter. But it is by no means impossible, given time and effort, and the application of well informed, organised, flexible minds.

Yes, we are fortunate to have an advanced brain with a powerful capacity for pattern recognition (it is a survival tool bequeathed us by our evolution) and data evaluation. We can take the available evidence and devise models (hypotheses) to represent what we think the

patterns we detect might mean, and then subject them to rigorous testing. If, when challenged, a hypothesis remains robust it can be accepted as probably true, but if it does not survive scrutiny, it is mercilessly rejected and scientific minds become opened to alternative possibilities. If evidence arrives that contradicts a theory, further testing is applied so that the truth may be revealed and the theory maintained or, if that is the correct conclusion, rejected. However, if new evidence supports the theory, it is added to the existing evidence bank, reinforcing the theory. That's the scientific method in a nutshell.

So, once again I find myself confidently contradicting your main point: science does not exist so that scientists can reject God, but to enable them to detect interconnected truths within an abundance of apparently unrelated facts. I think you will agree that, for

**As we learnt more and
more about the world
we live in, it became
clear that God was not
needed to complete
our explanations**

most of its history, science was conducted by clerics in order to reveal and explain nature as God's glorious work. But scientific progress took a turn that awkwardly proved incompatible with religion. As we learnt more and more about the world we live in, it became clear that God was not needed to complete our explanations. Many of religious faith have accepted this wealth of new, improved knowledge and taken it in their stride whilst others have become so alarmed that they abandon their innate human capacity for curiosity leading to understanding and cling stubbornly to obsolete, patently incorrect dogma. The latter now fudge unconvincing, easily dismantled refutation attempts as they try to retain their inexorably loosening grip on the supposed "scientific truth" written in holy books.

Evolution was once a set of hypotheses being considered from several points of view by numerous thinkers. Darwin and his contemporaries collated, refined and tested them and they proved secure under that rigorous scru-

tiny, particularly when important new discoveries were added. Those hypotheses have been repeatedly tested in the light of new evidence these past 150 years and they have not collapsed – far from it. Trillions (maybe more, who's counting?) of new facts have served to support and polish the theories of evolution.

In stark contrast, a handful of ancient holy books that contain histories, metaphors and morality, but little of substance that can be witnessed or validated, has been put forward as contradicting or refuting what can be deduced from examination of the extant natural world – that is, everything we can see, touch, smell, remember and analyse – the indisputable reality of our surroundings – plus the conclusions of legions of philosophers. Do you really think that is reasonable?

Today, not only do we now have massively complex, detailed charts of descent for numerous lineages based on fossils (particularly of molluscs, vertebrates and protozoa with hard parts, such as diatoms, radiolaria and foramenifera) and several other matching, overlapping sources of evidence, but predictions are being made from them in combinations that enable palaeontologists to home in to a specific site to find what they expect to find there. For instance: a) *Tiktaalik roseae*, that clarified an already convincing sequence of fossils that demonstrated the evolution of certain lobe-fin fishes to amphibious, ultimately terrestrial, tetrapods; b) *Puijila darwini*, a mammal that used its legs for walking on dry land, but in other features of its skeleton showed that it was a distant ancestor of the semi-aquatic, certainly not perambulatory, seals. Both were discovered *a priori* by following clues obtained from a set of informed predictions based upon substantial information. The scientists went to where these fossils were most likely to be found ... and found them!

You are correct to state "Today, however, many millions of fossils having been found ..." but way wide of the mark to say that "... we are still waiting for the discovery of the transition forms – and we will have to wait a long time because there was no transition." In fact many transitions have been illustrated with fossils and there should be no excuse for any inquirer not being aware of this. Information about them is readily available, even in the popular press, for instance in *Evolution: what the fossils say* by Donald Prothero. Palaeontology advances so rapidly that this 2007 book was published a fraction too soon to include the remarkable discoveries of *Tiktaalik*

and Puijila, which so neatly bridged gaps of transition that were already closing so satisfactorily that the lineages into which they fit had already been recognised. The gaps that troubled Darwin are filling fast. To deny this is to renounce reality, reveal an outstanding lack of knowledge or run the risk of being caught in the act of wilful obfuscation.

Keep on running

How odd to assert that "Evolution is simply man running away from God". I have addressed that already, but since you mention it a second time I will restate: That is not what biologists do or why they are biologists. I write as one who has been fascinated by natural history most of my sixty-one years and accumulated a lot of knowledge about it. Thoughts for or against God just do not come into it any more than do the Glasgow bus timetable or the fingering perfection required to win the quaich in a Pibroch competition. By espousing, evolution biologists neither run towards or away from God; they just study biology. It's hard luck for God if he doesn't like it when their discoveries fail to reflect his existence. If He made biologists, then He must take responsibility for what they do, and not be disappointed when, to quote Douglas Adams, He then "disappears in a puff of logic".

Maybe you think biologists should run to God, and wish to tell them so. That is not best achieved by denying or falsifying the facts of natural history as biologists understand them, that you can verify for yourself by learning about them through observation, listening, reading, reflection and discussion. It is advisable in any debate to know at least enough about the topics you wish to counter that you don't misrepresent them before pretending to demolish them. If you do, your opponent, upon whom lies, of course, a similar burden of responsibility and who undoubtedly brings more than that requisite basic knowledge into the arena, will joyfully dispatch your case from the position of informed authority.

If you present your case using the correct information, it might be easier for us to listen to what you have to say. Then, if swayed by your argument, we can choose whether or not we wish to turn to God. Your arguments published in *Free Church Witness* as well as, I expect, from the pulpit, may convince the biologically untutored, but they lay you open to aggressive criticism from informed readers who discover that their subject is under so inept an attack.

I'm afraid your attempts to debunk evolutionary biology, to put it politely, plainly disclose that you have a lot yet to learn. This is not meant as a taunt. It is merely a statement of fact (and there is an obvious remedy). To illustrate: in matters of synchronised swim-

ming, bridge engineering, ballet and quantum mechanics – only four from an extensive list of things I do not and cannot do – I am a hopeless ignoramus. When I needed my house floor levelled and new guttering installed I sought the services of experts who knew how to do it, and I particularly treasure the sculptures and other artwork that adorn that house because they were created by people who far exceeded my competence to a degree of excellence that I will never comprehend. When I want to make music with a violinist or French horn player I ask a player of the instrument, but if I need a bassoonist, I step forward to do it (unless the Weber concerto is called for, under which circumstance I defer to a virtuoso). To make sense of a lifetime of observation, I turn to books and other knowledge banks, to absorb and reason with the wisdom of people who know more or other than I do.

Let us, if you will, return to that Six Thousand Years Impediment. Until this morning (8-09-09), I found the many natural clocks used to date geological rocks and strata, the fossils therein and the ages of the cosmos quite difficult to get my head round, let alone argue with those who claim, with palpable spurious reasoning and no counter evidence, they don't work. Chapter four of Richard Dawkins' new book *The Greatest Show On*

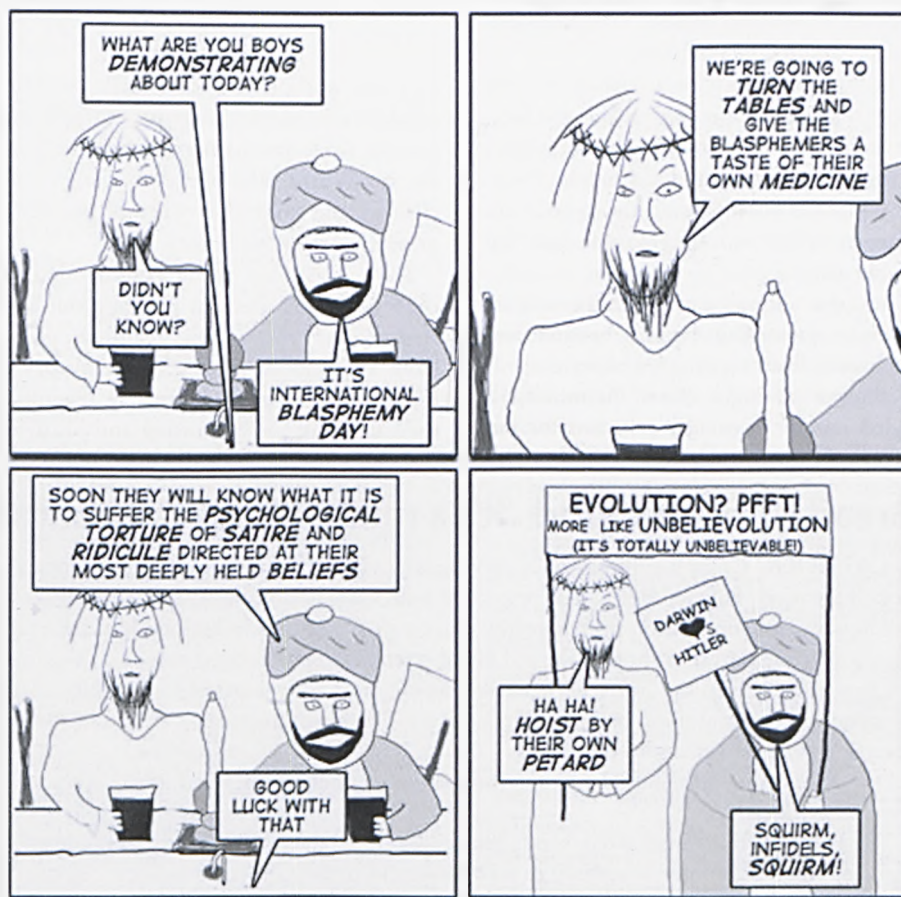
Earth has led me step by step through this topic that lies outside my main interests and training, so that I am coming up to speed on that one, enhancing my already competent appreciation of evolution itself.

You could understand this topic too from Dawkins, though you need not heed his words any more than I am obliged to accept Genesis as reality. Were you to read *The Greatest Show On Earth* (as I have Genesis and a lot of Genesis-based literature), then you would at least understand why we say the world and all there is in it began well in excess of 6,000 years ago and how life came to be as it is by – we reckon – evolutionary processes. It is presented in the most accessible form ever attempted, so, having read about it all in just one book, you would really understand what the biologists say about the living world.

Once you understand the science and logic of evolution, then you are welcome to attempt refutation, but at that juncture from an informed position. You will then with authority be able to say why we are wrong to think the way we do. *God Made Us* and *The Theory of Evolution is Crazy!* are declarations of why we are wrong when we think the way we don't, and that is plainly an illegitimate way to argue a point.

Yours faithfully,
James Merryweather.

Jesus & Mo



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Does God Hate Women?

Peter Brietbart reviews a book on 'divine misogyny' by Ophelia Benson and Jeremy Stangstrom, who run Butterflies and Wheels, arguably the world's best atheist website

An incredible act of charity occurred recently. In Sudan, Lubna Ahmed al-Hussein, a woman who wore a pair of green trousers out to a restaurant, was spared 40 lashes by a merciful Sudanese court.

For the crime of wearing trousers, she had been jailed for flouting the shariah-based indecency laws. She was caught in the heinous act when the restaurant where al-Hussein was dining was raided by police. At her trial, women gathered outside in solidarity. The police fired tear gas and beat them with truncheons.

The story made headlines, not because of the idiocy of the sentencing, but because al-Hussein was standing up for women's rights in an Islamic country. She chose to go to trial, whilst the ten other women who were also seized at the restaurant had already been whipped as punishment.

In *Does God Hate Women?*, Ophelia Benson and Jeremy Stangroom take on these misogynistic cultures and illustrate just how much worse it is for women when the men who dominate them really do think that they are doing God's bidding.

The book opens with a barrage of true stories that leave the reader reeling and furious on behalf of the women who are subject to such humiliating and degrading abuse. But whilst the public should always be aware of stories of this sort, they do not make up testable data.

Thus, the authors carry out the science of despair, presenting statistics, research and conclusions from expert after expert.

Religious apologist Karen Armstrong is singled out for particular criticism for her suspiciously uncritical view of religious big-



Every major religion's texts were written at a time when women were regarded as little better than talking cattle. Their words and commands reflect this, plainly and bluntly. This book starts with a panoramic sweep across the world, showing – with archetypal cases – how every religion has groups today thumping women down with its Holy Book.

– Extract from a review of *Does God Hate Women?*
by Johann Hari in *The New Statesman* (July 2)

otry. The authors cast a spotlight on Armstrong's unwavering support of faith, and provide some fascinating contrasts between the established facts and Armstrong's conciliatory and somewhat deceitful manner of presenting religious history.

The authors are to be commended for their time well spent in pointing out how Armstrong's rose-tinted religious glasses paint a revisionist picture of the history of religion. There is no doubt that religion is used as a tool for supporting and justifying the suppression of women, and choice pas-

sages of the New and Old Testament as well as the Koran are dissected in support of this claim. The Koran suffers particularly under the scrutiny of the authors, for the simple reason that it is the most ethically regressive text. For example, in Islam, the Prophet Mohammed is the example of virtue to which all Muslim men must aspire. Unfortunately, he married a girl perhaps as young as six years old, providing Islamic scholars the necessary Koranic example to justify such marriages in the 21st century.

A chapter is dedicated to the blight of Female Genital Mutilation, within which the causes, motivations and prejudices are taken apart and studied. The idea that religion has nothing to do with FGM is scrutinised with illuminating results. The authors note that whilst a religion may not encourage FGM, there is no better force for maintaining the status quo. And this is not at all irrelevant: to take an alarming modern example, according to the World Health Organisation, 95% of women aged 15-49 living in Egypt are genitally mutilated.

Anyone fighting in the war against FGM will sometimes battle against the religious,

Bread turns to blood: 'It's a miracle!' say Catholics

A CATHOLIC Church commission is investigating claims of a miracle at a church in Sokolka, eastern Poland, after a local priest said holy communion bread had turned into red liquid. The commission from a nearby diocese in Bialystok was looking into the claims after medical tests showed the red liquid contained human heart tissue.

Churchgoers claim the "miracle" occurred during mass when a priest accidentally dropped some communion bread during a service. The host was put in a chalice and several days later turned into red liquid.

Doctors examined the liquid and determined it contained pieces of a human heart at the point of death.

The Polish Rationalists Society wants prosecutors to establish the identity of the heart tissue to rule out murder, according to a Polish Radio report.

but will always battle against men whose heads are brimming with gross concepts of virginity, value, purity and pride.

A highlight of the book is the insightful and objective comparison between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam. With a sharp eye and plenty of wit, the authors obliterate the CDHRI, showing it to be a truly vacuous and utterly ridiculous document. This book is not a comedy, but the authors' unmistakable sense of humour shines brightly throughout the criticism.

A personal favourite part of the CDHRI states that, "Safety from bodily harm is a guaranteed right. It is the duty of the state to safeguard it, and it is prohibited to breach it

without a Shari'a-prescribed reason." So no brutality unless Islamic law says it's fine, in which case, go right ahead.

This is not only a critique of the religious right, but also the secular left, who are so unthinkingly complicit in the protection of fanatical patriarchal domination. The authors are persuasive in making the case that the left should be squarely on the side of the women, not on the side of the cultures that oppress them.

Two claims: first, of cultural imperialism and second, that criticism of Islam is racist, are cut down by Benson and Stangroom with precision and clarity. They offer original insights into the debates currently raging within the political left.

If you have an interest in the evils of religion, this book will show you precisely what happens when God-believers translate divine misogyny into action against women.

But in a sense, this is also a book for the apathetic and indifferent: some books are weapons that will arm you in debate, some are defensive, and show you what positions are tenable. But this book is a banner, a rallying cry that will make your blood boil and ready you for war against the tyranny of oppression.

And the battles have only just begun.

• *Does God Hate Women?* Ophelia Benson and Jeremy Stangroom. Continuum, 208pp, £14.99

What is Good?: the Search for the Best Way to Live, by A C Grayling

Reviewed by **Peter Sutherland**

This is book on ethics for the general reader rather than the academic philosopher. Grayling discusses the last 2,500 years in terms of a struggle between the ideas and ideals of Humanism on the one hand and those of organised religion on the other. He works through the periods of history which are relevant to humanists. He starts by going back to the ancient Greeks, and Plato in particular. Plato's concepts of *sophrosyne* is apparently impossible to translate into English. It conveys the view that reason should prevail over the emotions and that this is the foundation of goodness. It is hard for a rationalist to disagree with this.

He then moves on to the Renaissance, discussing influences such as Erasmus.

The Third Enlightenment is that of Hume *et al*: Grayling's golden era.

In many ways Grayling continues to look backwards to this heyday of rationalism, with its prime virtues of *rationalité, liberté* and *individualité*.

Grayling devotes 33 pages to this chapter.

Unfortunately this means that he is not looking forward towards the many huge problems facing our planet in the 21st century. Global warming is only one of them. Do philosophers not have a role to play in solving these problems? Is to do good not, above all, to preserve our planet for our children?

However, as far as women are concerned, he does at least look at the present. In a recent interview by Julian Baggini (2009) Grayling argues that for women there has never been a better era to live than now in

a modern liberal democracy. But this does not apply to Muslim states.

A particularly interesting source which he cites is *The Imperfect Garden* by Toderov. This considers the case that secular humanism has destroyed the fundamental value of society that its members should put the needs of their society before their own. Instead humanists prioritise individual free choice,

US Christians rail against *Antichrist*

THE US Christian media ministry MovieGuide is in a rage over a film that opened last month in the US. Dr Ted Baehr, founder and publisher of *Movie Guide* and chairman of the Christian Film & Television Commission, said: "Coming to your local theatre is a movie that I can only call the most horrific movie ever seen. It's called *Antichrist*, and it's filled with a wicked worldview, vile pornographic scenes, onscreen mutilation of private parts and some other material which I simply cannot describe to you in a family publication."

According to *Movie Guide's* review of the film, William Defoe's recent effort includes demonic activity, full nudity and graphic on-screen depictions of sex, sadomasochism, sexual mutilation with both a block of wood and a pair of scissors, child abuse, and violent animal acts.

The movie opened in the UK in the summer and was passed without any cuts – and it generated very little outrage ... or even box office takings.



A C Grayling

ie putting their own selfish needs before those of society. Toderov and Grayling both refute this argument.

In his final chapter, "Laying the Ghosts", Grayling gives a credo for Humanism. On the basis of his critique of all the major religions, and Islam in particular for its intolerance of all the others, he argues for a secular society. All the services which the state provides, such as education and health, should be free from religious interference.

Overall I have not found anything fundamental with which I, as a humanist, disagree. However, I don't regard Judaism as a major world religion, except for its influence on Christianity. In any case Grayling puts our case in a clear and readable style.

References:

Baggini, J (summer 2009) "Ideas that matter" Interview with A C Grayling in *Humanitie*, the Humanist Society of Scotland magazine.

Toderov, T (2002) *The Imperfect Garden*. London.

• *What is Good? The Search for the Best Way to Live*. A C Grayling, London: Phoenix, ISBN 0 75381 755 1, 274pp. £7.99 pb.

points of view...



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

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JESUS' SEXUALITY

WILLIAM Harwood claims that a gay Jesus is implausible (*Freethinker*, October). I would go further and claim that it is highly improbable.

Gay Christians and their apologists are very fond of pointing out that Jesus said nothing in the Gospels about homosexuality and that he would have condemned the Church's oppression of lesbians and gays. The clear implication is that he would have taken a benign attitude towards lesbian and gay sexual practices which are clearly condemned in both Old and New Testaments of the Bible. It has even been suggested that Jesus was himself gay and that, were he alive today, he would support the campaign for lesbian and gay rights.

It is true that there is no record in the Gospels (the only sources for what Jesus allegedly said and did) of his referring to homosexuality, but it is absurd to conclude from this that he would have taken a more liberal stance on homosexual practices than his contemporaries, and condoned them.

There is not a shred of evidence to support this conclusion. On the contrary, the views he expresses in the Gospels about other aspects of sexual morality all point in the opposite direction.

He supports the statement in Genesis that in the beginning God created humankind male and female, and uses this as a basis for ethical guidance: "That which God has joined" (ie the heterosexual married relationship) "let not man put asunder."

In the Sermon on the Mount, he stresses the importance of adhering strictly to the Mosaic Law - a law which required the death penalty for homosexual acts: "Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to complete. I tell you this: so long as heaven and earth endure, not a letter, not a stroke, will disappear from the Law until all that must happen has happened. If any man therefore sets aside

even the least of the Law's demands, and teaches others to do the same, he will have the lowest place in the kingdom of Heaven."

And not content with insisting on compliance with the Law, he wants to go further in condemning what he regards as sexual sins. Whilst the Law condemns adultery, he goes so far as to claim that lustful looks are equally culpable: "You have learned what they were told, 'Do not commit adultery.' But what I tell you is this: If a man looks at a woman with a lustful eye, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Whilst the Law allowed for divorce in certain circumstances, Jesus condemns it outright and claims it makes people adulterers: "They were told, 'A man who divorces his wife must give her a note of dismissal.' But what I tell you is this: If a man divorces his wife for any cause other than unchastity he involves her in adultery; and anyone who marries a woman so divorced commits adultery."

There is also a passage in Matthew's Gospel in which he advises his followers to mutilate themselves rather than give way to sexual temptation - advice taken literally by some, notably the Greek Christian writer Origen who castrated himself in an attempt to get rid of his sexual urges.

Thus, the prudery and puritanism which have characterised the Church's attitude to sex from the earliest times can be traced back directly to Jesus himself, and the baleful worship of virginity, celibacy and sexual abstinence which has flourished throughout Christian history is all there in germ in the Gospels.

If Jesus were gay (and, again, there is not a shred of evidence for this in the Gospels), he would seem to have much in common with those closeted, repressed gay members of the Church of England's General Synod who voted in favour of the homophobic motion carried overwhelmingly at its meet-

ing in 1987, and who opposed the ordination of women priests.

George Broadhead
Kenilworth

I FIND it surprising that William Harwood makes no mention of William E Phipps's book, *Was Jesus Married?* (1970), otherwise available as *The Sexuality of Jesus*, or to Tom F Driver's *Sexuality and Jesus* and Ogden Kraut's *Jesus was married* (1986). Phipps concluded that Jesus probably was married; he also rubbished the idea (as I have) that Jesus was an Essene.

Hetairos certainly does not "commonly denote a hired catamite". It was frequently used to address followers or servants but was more distant than *philos*, "loved, beloved, dear", which surely would have been used if Matthew understood a more intimate relationship. Elsewhere in Matthew it is translated in the AV as either "fellow" or "friend" and translates the Hebrew (*rea*), a friend. Modern translations have "friend", but how can we be sure that this remark was even made?

Stewart Campbell
Edinburgh

AS a religious studies graduate I enjoyed William Harwood's article on the sex life of Jesus. Certainly a gay Jesus is not plausible. As a Jew he would disapprove of same-sex relationships. In Matthew 11 v 23 Jesus speaks of the sinfulness of Sodom.

Yet to suggest that because he infringed The Essene Rule on handwashing he also copulated is absurd. He was faithful to the essential aspects of the Law (Matthew 5 v 15-17) in condemning anger (Matthew 5 v 20) and demanding love of enemies (Matthew 5 v 41-43) he was demanding a stricter interpretation of the essence of it than did Moses and the Essenes.

Women followers of Jesus obviously found him attractive, but though female followers are named no wife is ever mentioned and no good Jew like Jesus would copulate with an unmarried woman. He

clearly did not copulate, for to Jesus lustful thoughts as well as adultery were wrong (Matthew 5 v 27-28).

In Matthew 19 v10-12, Jesus uses the image of eunuchs to show a more ideal way of conduct than even marriage is for people not to engage in any sexual activity. Publicans and prostitutes did follow Jesus but they had to alter their old way of life. Humans had to repent to receive the Kingdom of God (Mark 1 v 15). In Mark 2 v 13-17 sinners which include publicans and prostitutes are sick people who need a physician. In Mark 16 v 9, we read that Jesus had driven seven devils out of Mary Magdalene – which even if that particular account of the Resurrection is not historical still shows that the early church believed Mary Magdalene had ceased her prostitution on accepting Jesus.

He cannot be compared to Rasputin; Jesus, despite his natural fearfulness, was prepared to undergo a martyr's death on a Roman Cross; such a man would be faithful to what he taught regarding celibacy. The Early Church esteemed virginity above marriage; they would not have done so if Jesus had not been celibate.

Andrew Harvey
Carlisle

SCIENCE & RELIGION

COLIN Mills' apologetics (*Points of View*, October) says that "many believers are prepared to accept scientific theories such as evolution". How enlightened of them!

He goes on to say that "the conflict is between dogmatism and science rather than between religion and science".

No, the conflict is between religion and science and there can be no facing both ways. Either you cling on to what George Eliot called those "Hebrew old clothes", looking back to a world that never was, and forward to one for which there is not a scrap of evidence – or you accept that life, thought and human nature evolve.

David James
London

MAY I refer to the letter by Colin Mills (*Points of View*, October).

The monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam believe that a single omnipotent and omniscient God created all there is from nothing and could never be wrong, ie God's pronouncements are absolutely true, whereas science accepts our human fallibility and the limits of our knowledge, ie rejects absolute truths.

What religions fail to explain is the problem of evil.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam struggled for centuries to explain how a perfectly

good God could have created evil.

Originally Christianity took up a Greek legend and talked of an angel who sinned against God. But where did the angel's sin come from?

Eventually St Augustine had a new explanation: Evil is lack of perfection in a created world which, by defect, could not be as perfect as the creator.

Later John the Scot Erigena repeated the same argument and later still Leibnitz redefined it with the concept of the best possible creation.

However, this explanation boils down to a semantic manipulation.

By naming evil as lack of perfection or, as Leibnitz put it, as the closest possible to perfection, one merely gives a different name to evil.

For humanism, good and evil have no intrinsic value because they are produced by how humans interpret reality in order to cope with it in the best possible way.

Humanism abhors the absolute truths of monotheistic religions and relies on rational scientific views.

David Ibray
London

PAEDOPHILIA

IT WAS interesting to read A Ewing's letter (*Points of View*, August), though he focused (mainly) on the "media" as those who fail to stand up to "paedophile priests".

I would say that families themselves are so devastated and alarmed at the social consequences of this phenomenon, that they often turn on the victim in a powerful display of denial. This of course is a cruel and pitiless second phase of the abuse experienced.

While those involved were not priests, my partner and myself were both individually abused by paedophiles, and in both cases, the family chose to focus on us – the victims – as the source of the trouble!

Both cases involved a family member or a family friend; in my case, a trusted family friend and respected member of a small town community...

I would guess that there is a similar set of sexual taboos – in the letter-writer's case, linked directly to the Catholic religion and its priests – working within families which all too often urges them to abandon common sense, as well as the law, and punish the victim for coming forward and not the original offender.

Randolphe Palmer
Essex

IT occurred to me that the rise of Islam may be a blessing in combating Britain's demon: paedophilia.

You see, Muslim men require women to wear conservative clothing such as the

burqa, which prevents the temptation of onlookers.

We've noticed a rise in assaults against our children by predatory paedophiles consumed by perverse lust for children that you or I would merely find adorable.

Is it not time we took a lesson from our Muslim friends and dressed children in burqas for their good, and to finally eradicate paedophilia?

James Brewster
Fife

OVER-POPULATION

WHILE we are accusing the obvious culprits (the Vatican, capitalism etc) and the all-too-passive conservationists regarding the world's demographic disaster, what about the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and its bizarre logic when it comes to campaigns, donations and the like?

All my life I have been called upon to donate to this and that good cause and charity, national and international – especially to campaigns to vaccinate and feed the third and fourth worlds. Yet all along I have been waiting to be asked to help fund birth-control projects in overpopulated, poor countries.

I am still waiting, frustrated and angry.

Having turned for an explanation to an IPPF representative, I was given the following astounding reason for this oversight: this worldwide organisation is divided into segments, one per continent. And each segment looks only after its own, ie I can only help to finance a European project, and must leave it to, for example, Bangladeshis to help family planning in Bangladesh!

In other words, the poor must help the poor, the well-to-do stick to the (relatively) well-to-do.

That is of course madness. I hope that this letter will stir an IPPF representative to a reply. I do so hope I have got it all wrong.

Meanwhile, though, I am still waiting for a big international campaign to collect money for family planning projects in the poor world.

Decades ago, in the 1970s, a major IPPF figure, Malcolm Potts, vehemently criticised the unrealistic and ineffective workings of the organisation. Apparently in vain ...

And yet, what Iran has managed to do should be feasible in other overpopulated nations, shouldn't it? (Iran's birth rate fell from 6.5 in 1980 to 2.3 in 2002!)

Nelly Moia
Luxembourg

the freethinker

EVENTS & CONTACTS

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

Birmingham Humanists: **i** Tova Jones 021454 4692 **w** www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk. Friends' Meeting House, George Rd and St James's Rod, Edgbaston. Thurs, Nov 19, 7.45pm: Robert Morrell: *Thomas Paine – a Misunderstood Radical*.

Brighton & Hove Humanist Society: **i** 01273 227549/461404. **w** <http://homepage.nflworld.com/robert.stovold/humanist.html>. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. Nov 4, 8pm. Terry Sanderson, Derek Lennard and Keith Porteous Wood: *Celebrating the 150th anniversary of Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species*. Wed, Dec 2, 8pm. Ken Humphreys: *St Paul, the First Christian Trickster?*

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 Kutichinsky. **e** info@centrallondonhumanists.org **w** www.meetup.com/central-london-humanists

Chiltern Humanists: Enquiries: 01296 623730. Public Library, High St, Wendover. Tues Nov 10, 8pm. Simon Allen: *Humanist Ceremonies*.

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:

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 Pine! 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. Nov 11, Eleanor Davidson: *Humanist Chaplaincy*.

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

w www.hampstead.humanist.org.uk

Harrow Humanist Society: Meets the second Wed of the month (except January, July and August) at the HAVS Centre,

64 Pinner Road, Harrow at 8pm. Nov 11. Rachael Matthews, Borough Manager of Victim Support (Harrow): *Life after Crime*.

i Secretary on 0208 907-6124

w www.harrow.humanist.org.uk

e Mike Savage at mfsavagemba@hotmail.com

Humanists of Havering: **i** Jean Condon 01708 473597. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgore Cres, Gidea Park. Meetings on first Thursday of the month, 8pm. Nov 5, Peter Waller: *Flight Recording – the Black Box*.

Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern

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

w www.nirelandhumanists.net

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

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

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

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

Isle of Man Freethinkers: **i** Jeff Garland, 01624 664796.

Email: jeffgarland@wm.im. **w** www.iomfreethinkers.org

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

w <http://humanists4science.blogspot.com/>

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

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

Jersey Humanists: Contact: Reginald Le Sueur, La Petella, Rue des Vignes, St Peter, Jersey, JE3 7BE. Tel 01534 744780

e Jerseyhumanists@gmail.com. **w** <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Jersey-Humanists/>

Lancashire Secular Humanists: Meetings 7.30 on 3rd Wed of month at Great Eccleston Village Centre, 59 High St, The Square, Great Eccleston (Nr. Preston) PR3 0YB.

w www.lancashiresecularhumanists.co.uk **i** Ian Abbott, Wavecrest, Hackensall Rd, Knott End-on-Sea, Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire FY6 0AZ 01253 812308 **e** ian@lanzere.demon.co.uk

Leicester Secular Society: Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB. Tel. 07598 971420.

w www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk

Lewisham Humanist Group: **i** Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. The Goose, Rushey Green, Catford SE6. Meetings on third Thurs, 7.30pm. Nov 19, Isaac Ascher: *In Defence of Agnosticism*.

w www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com

Liverpool Humanist Group: **i** 07814 910 286.

w www.liverpoolhumanists.co.uk/

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

Lynn Humanists, W Norfolk & Fens: **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. University Arms, Western Bank. Public Meeting first Wednesday of the month, 7.30pm. Wed, Nov 2. *Humanist Ceremonies*.

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 11 am & 3pm at Conway Hall Library, Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, 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 Gwinnett on 01935 473263 or

e edward.gwinnett@talktalk.net

Suffolk Humanists & Secularists: 25 Haughgate Close, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 1LQ. Tel: 01394 387462.

Secretary: Denis Johnston.

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

Sutton Humanists: **i** Alan Grandy: 0208 337 9214. **w**

www.suttonhumanists.co.uk

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 Tues of the month at Ludlow, Oct to June.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group: **i** 01792 206108 or 01792.296375, or write Julie Norris, 3 Maple Grove, Uplands, Swansea SA2 0JY.

Please send your listings and events notices to:

Listings, the *Freethinker*,
PO BOX 234, Brighton, BN1 4XD.

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