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the freethinker

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Anti-Christian bias in the media? It's all a myth, says Daniel Dennett

In the US, as in Britain, Christians have been setting up a clamour, complaining loudly that the media is biased against them. But prominent US philosopher and atheist Daniel Dennett, 68, last month dismissed their claims, saying "there is no media bias against Christianity. If it appears to some people that there is, it is probably because after decades of hyper-diplomacy and a generally accepted mutual understanding that religion was not to be criticised, we have finally begun breaking through that taboo, and are beginning to see candid discussions of the varieties of religious folly in American life."

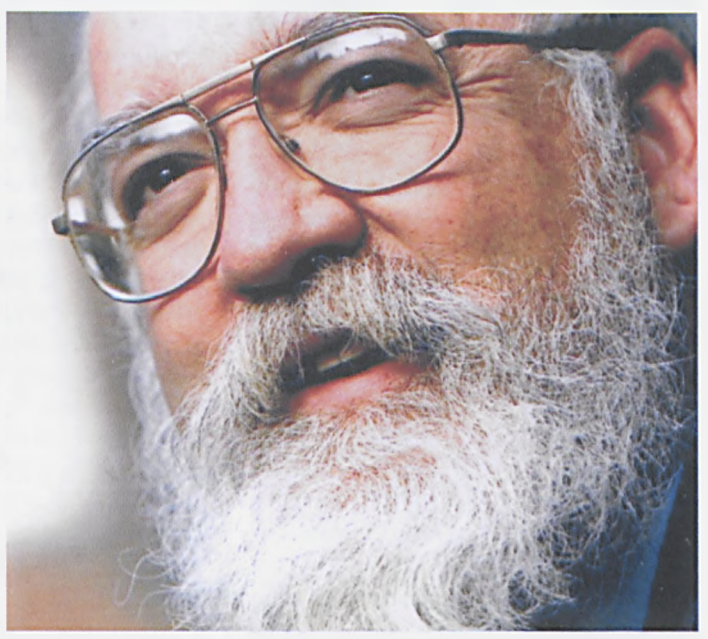
Writing in the *Washington Post*, he added: "Activities that would be condemned by all if they were not cloaked in the protective mantle of religion are beginning to be subjected to proper scrutiny."

"There is still a lot to accomplish, however. We need to change the prevailing assumptions in the same way that public opinion has been reversed on drunk driving. When I was young, drunk drivers tended to be excused because, after all, they were drunk! Today, happily, we hold them doubly culpable for any misdeeds they commit while under the influence."

"I look forward to the day when violence done under the influence of religious passion is considered more dishonorable, more shameful, than crimes of avarice, and is punished accordingly, and religious leaders who incite such acts are regarded with the same contempt that we reserve for bartenders who send dangerously disabled people out onto the highways."

"I also look forward to the day when pastors who abuse the authority of their pulpits by misinforming their congregations about science, about public health, about global warming, about evolution must answer to the charge of dishonesty. Telling pious lies to trusting children is a form of abuse, plain and simple. If quacks and bunko artists can be convicted of fraud for selling worthless cures, why not clergy for making their living off unsupported claims of miracle cures and the efficacy of prayer?"

"The double standard that exempts religious activities from almost all standards of accountability should be dismantled once and for all. I don't see bankers or stockbrokers wringing their hands because the media is biased against them; they know that their recent activities have earned them an unwanted place



in the spotlight of public attention and criticism, and they get no free pass, especially given their power. Religious leaders and apologists should accept that since their institutions are so influential in American life, we have the right to hold their every move up to the light. If they detect that the media are giving them a harder time today than in the past, that is because the bias that protected religion from scrutiny is beginning to dissolve. High time."

In a recent interview, Dennett, whose research centres on philosophy of mind, philosophy of science and philosophy of biology – particularly as those fields relate to evolutionary biology and cognitive science – said "We need to show those who fear us that atheists are not value-challenged, and works speak more loudly than words."

"I think that well-organised and well-publicised campaigns for health, justice, safety, environmental protection, etc to rival the good works of the churches would actually swell our ranks. Many people want to be part of large, inspiring projects that make the world better. (And we should let believers participate in OUR projects as long as they don't try to use them to spread their own messages.)"

Should the French ban the burqa?

BARRY DUKE EXAMINES SOME OF THE ISSUES UNDER DISCUSSION

Most readers, I imagine, would be discomforted, if not actually repulsed by the photographs below. Me? I'm pretty relaxed with the tattoos chosen by the Canadian known as "Zombie Boy", whose features are well-known to body modification *afficionados* around the world. Why this good-looking young man would want to adorn his face – and every other inch of his body – with a macabre zombie theme is anyone's guess. But, while I don't much like what he's had done to himself, his appearance doesn't unsettle me ... much.



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The creature under the veil, on the other hand, simply horrifies me. Why? because she has NO visible features.

It's no exaggeration to say that our faces proclaim our personalities, and facial expressions – which "Zombie Boy", despite all the ink, still has, but "Burqa Lady" is unable to exhibit – are an essential basis for all forms of direct interaction among humans. Anything that acts as a barrier to such communication has to be regarded as deeply sinister. Think executioners' masks, think Ku Klux Klan hoods.

Charles Darwin was one man who recognised the importance of facial expressions. He published the first serious scientific study into the subject in 1872. In his illustrated *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*, Darwin claimed to have identified 13 universal expressions. These are astonishment, shame, fear, horror, pride, hatred, wrath, love, joy, guilt, anxiety, shyness, and modesty.

Darwin clearly understood the importance of the human face and the emotions it can instantly convey. So why does Islam, or rather, a virulent strain of this foolish religion, conspire so assiduously to deprive its women – never its men, mind – of their ability to express their humanity? Despite claims that they are meant to denote "modesty", I believe that garments such as the niqab – or the burqa, which goes to the further extreme of hiding the eyes behind a fabric grille – exist only to impede or prevent communication. Worse, they *diminish* the wearer by negating her personality, making her something less than human; a mindless, soulless non-entity who has no right to exist as anything other than a chattel.

What got me thinking about the vile veil was France's announcement last month that it intended banning full-face coverings like the niqab or burqa.

Would such a ban be right? One part of me says "absolutely!" Another part – the one which bitterly resents Britain's now well-entrenched but utterly insane smoking ban – says "Non!" How do others feel? Writing in the *Independent*, Muslim columnist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown condemned the burqa "and will do so till the end of my days. By that time, with the unstoppable rise of Wahhabi Islam, they will probably have incarcerated me in black polyester and turned off my voice".

But she felt that the "licentiousness" and "lewdness" of Westerners was playing a huge role in driving Muslims towards fundamentalism – and its females into garments that express a "revulsion and fear of contamination" from such licentiousness. This, she says,

is "as bad as the problems they are trying to escape, sometimes worse. Sexual abuse, rape and forced homosexuality remain the dirty secrets of British Muslim communities, kept under wraps as it were, while they flap around proclamations of purity."

India Knight could not make up her mind over the proposed ban. Writing in *The Times*, she said that one of her concerns was that "burqas turn women into objects – creatures, if you like. You don't think: 'Oh, there's Mrs So-and-so'; you think: 'There goes one of those women peering out of a grille.' It's as if there's a bird in a cage and someone has thrown a sheet over it. With the best will in the world, it's hard to see (literally) how the concepts of citizenship, freedom and democracy are working for the bird person ...

"The bottom line, I guess, is that you have to fall into line with the country you're living in. I was in Marrakesh a couple of months ago and, as ever, was treated to the sight of idiot tourists wandering around the souks half-naked, complaining loudly about unwelcome attention and taking photographs of the picturesque natives without asking first. So you could argue that banning the burqa is a variant on the same thing: stopping people offending the social mores of the country they find themselves in. On paper that sounds reasonable. In reality and when the legislation appears to be aimed firmly at one – huge – section of society, based on one skin colour and one religious affiliation, it can't help but leave a bad taste in the mouth."

Then she trots out this frankly racist garbage. "The Muslim world was inventing mathematics and architecture when the French were practically still trolls, grunting away in the mire and not looking forward to the annual rinse of the armpits. There are many things wrong with the Muslim world but the idea that its ordinary, non-bonkers, non-extremist millions need to be 'civilised' into knowing what's what sticks in the craw."

She concludes: "If someone held a gun to my head and forced me to make a choice, I suppose I'd come down in favour of the ban on the basis that my instinct says – *shouts* – that no little girl comes into the world longing to be covered in a black tent when she grows up. Instincts don't make laws, though. But there's no gun and no one's forcing me to do – or put on, or remove – anything, for which I am very grateful."

So, what are your thoughts on the subject?



BARRY DUKE
FREETHINKER
EDITOR

'Islam is terrorism' says Irish convert to the Religion of Peace

“I always believe Islam is terrorism. We are told to terrorise the enemies of Islam. The world will become a dangerous place. Everybody had better start embracing Islam or people will start flying planes into buildings again.”

These are the words of Khalid Kelly, a former Roman Catholic altar boy from the Liberties area of Dublin, who was undergoing weapons training in Pakistan's mountainous tribal region late last year in order to fight jihad against the enemies of Islam.

His dream, he told *Sunday Times* correspondent Nicola Smith, is to face a British soldier in combat, although he would “settle” for an American.

The Irish jihadist living in Pakistan's Swat valley said he was preparing to wage war against British and allied troops in Afghanistan. “I'm already on the path to jihad. I've already picked up a gun and done target practice to make myself familiar with weapons. The other day I learnt how to use an M-16 [rifle] in five hours,” he said. “Next week, *inshallah*, I could be in Afghanistan fighting a British soldier.”

Asked how he would feel about his own three-year-old young son becoming a suicide bomber he replied: “I hope he goes to *jannah* [heaven] before marriageable age.” His son, named Osama after Kelly's role model, lives in Britain with his Pakistani mother and two younger brothers. His father reckons Osama will be efficient with weapons by the age of ten.

Kelly says he learnt map-reading in the Scottish mountains, terrain similar to Afghanistan, although he admits he is currently out of shape. He justifies his intentions because of the West's actions against Muslims.

“Why is it such a big deal that I want to do this? Have I not got the right to do the same thing as a guy going into an army recruitment centre?” he said. “As long as we have no security, you will have no security. We'll kill and bomb you as you have killed and bombed our lands.”

Ireland is also a legitimate target, according to Kelly. “Ireland has a US embassy so it is open to attack,” he stated.

Kelly, 42, is an unconventional jihadist. Having grown up a staunch Catholic and trained as a nurse, he moved to Saudi Arabia in 1996 to work at the King Faisal hospital on a tax-free salary. In 2000 he was introduced to radical Islam by an Afghan when



Terry 'The Terrorist' Kelly who changed his name to Khalid

he was serving time in the Al-Ha'ir prison in Riyadh for bootlegging.

“I was living a cushy Western lifestyle, in a three-storey house with a swimming pool. I was your average Western racist,” he said of his time before conversion. “Now I'm living the dream, but the prize of paradise does not come cheap. I am getting up at 5am to pray. I travel a lot and I'm experiencing hardship.”

Kelly moved to the UK in 2002 where he joined Al-Muhajiroun, the now banned hardline Islamic organisation, and an associate of radical clerics Omar Bakri Mohammed and Anjem Choudary. He achieved notoriety in 2007 when he declared the London bombings of 7 July a “happy day”.

“If I had had the opportunity, I would have been on those tube trains. But my time in London was to give the call,” he said. Kelly also “gave the call” in Ireland, where he returned frequently in a bid to lure young Muslims with his jihadist teachings. He warned that Ireland was putting itself in the

line of fire by allowing US warplanes to land at Shannon airport.

Kelly now sees his time in the West as mental preparation for jihad, claiming he spent a lot of time on the internet learning how to make bombs. He left the UK in 2008 after some friends were arrested for extremist behaviour during a protest about the Danish cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed.

After a period underground, Kelly re-emerged in Pakistan's Swat valley, where the army recently drove out the Taliban in a three-month military operation. He travels frequently to Rawalpindi, a garrison city next to the nation's capital Islamabad, to meet contacts and spread his radical jihadist message.

In a meeting in one of the city's parks last month he told *The Sunday Times* that he had a “divine calling” to kill. “I would feel good because you are killing for God. I have practised enough mentally to know that when my time comes I'll be ready. I pray every night for bravery,” he said.

Kelly said he moved to Pakistan to join the “best of the best” in the jihadist struggle and to work towards replacing the civilian government with an Islamic one. As Islamabad vows to take on Islamic militants, Kelly harbours a dark hope that Pakistan will become like Iraq with “beheadings and kidnappings”.

His face brightens at the mention of suicide bombings and shootings that have devastated hundreds of Pakistani families since the army launched its recent offensive against Taliban and Al Qaeda militants in the tribal belt of Waziristan.

He is also unapologetic about his desire to fund, encourage and take part in terrorism.

Secularist of the Year about to be named

THE £5,000 Irwin Prize for Secularist of the Year 2010 will be presented at a glittering lunchtime event in central London on Saturday, February 13. The prize is awarded by the National Secular Society to the person judged to have contributed most to the cause of secularism in the previous year.

It has proved a convivial and fun-packed event in the past – and is one that's become an important part of the movement's calendar. Tickets are £45 which covers a welcome drink and a three-course meal. You can buy tickets online from the NSS (www.secularism.org.uk) or by post from the NSS, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

This year's event will be held at a sumptuous West End venue, and as well as the award for Secularist of the Year, there will also be a special award from the website *Platitude of the Day* which will be given to the contributor to *Thought for the Day* who has been judged to have provided the most plaudits “Thought” of the year.



Tiller's killer acted to 'save unborn babies'

WHEN his trial opened last month in Kansas, Scott Roeder, the devout Christian who gunned down and killed abortion provider Dr George Tiller last May, was allowed to make a "necessity defence" in court.

This allowed him to testify that he believed he was saving unborn babies when he shot the doctor in a Kansas church.

Presiding Judge Warren Wilbert decided he would allow the 51-year-old to build a defence of voluntary manslaughter, which Kansas law defines as "an unreasonable but honest belief" that there were circumstances to justify deadly force. If successful, it could bring his prison sentence closer to five years, instead of a life term for first-degree murder.

The prosecution argued that such a defence should not be considered because there was no evidence that Tiller posed an imminent threat at the time of the killing.

But the defence hit back, arguing that in Roeder's mind there was an imminence of danger because Dr Tiller's Wichita clinic was performing abortions. "It had staff. It had a practitioner. It had a budget. It had clientele. ... In the mind of Mr Roeder, the victim presented a clear danger to unborn children."

On May 31, Roeder put the barrel of a .22-caliber handgun to Tiller's forehead and pulled the trigger. The shooting occurred at Wichita's Reformation Lutheran Church.

Executive Vice-President of the Feminist Majority Foundation, Katherine Spillar, said that "the perplexing decision is effectively back-door permission for admitted killer Scott Roeder to use a 'justifiable homicide' defence that is both un-justifiable and unconscionable. Allowing an argument that this cold-blooded, premeditated murder could be voluntary manslaughter will embolden anti-abortion extremists and could result in 'open season' on doctors across the country."

Shortly after Dr Tiller was murdered, a Catholic couple from Louisiana revealed that they had chosen to visit his clinic after they learned that there was very little chance that the child they were expecting would live. Gail Anderson, who had been an active anti-abortionist, said: "Dr Tiller was a very gentle man to my husband and me. He wasn't the villain that people – me included – had often painted him. He was soft-spoken. He held our hands while we

mourned our loss. He even prayed with us."

Devout Catholics Robert and Gail Anderson looked forward to starting their own family with great anticipation, eagerly awaiting pregnancy test results each month in hopes that they would discover they were to become first-time parents.

After confirmation of her pregnancy, a routine ultrasound – Gail's first – was carried out. Concern was raised over the development of the child. Later the couple were told that cystic masses were covering the child's left lung, forcing pressure on a heart that had not fully developed. The child they wanted so badly might not live even after a series of operations to repair damage was

abortions in Metairie, Louisiana, once a month, coming together, praying for the souls of the unborn babies; for the souls of those making this choice. They travelled in silence, both trying to come to terms with their own perceived failures in the choice they were making.

Explaining the procedure to the Andersons and the efforts the clinic would make to help them memorialise their child, Dr Tiller showed the Andersons the compassion and support they so badly wished they had received from their neighbours and friends.

The next day as they arrived at the clinic, they found themselves surrounded by protesters chanting, begging the Andersons to change their mind and a group of children holding a pro-life model of a foetus while calling the Andersons murderers, telling the Andersons that God would not save their souls for taking away the life of another. What was already a traumatic experience was now infused with guilt, panic and fear.

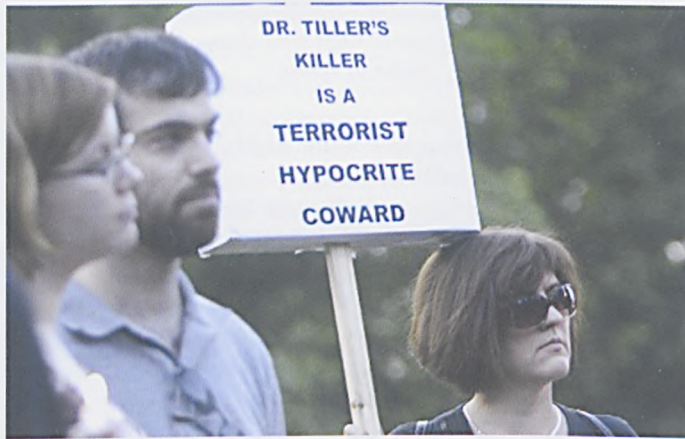
"The staff was respectful and allowed me to have a little bit of dignity where I didn't think I had any left. It made me sad that I didn't get that from my friends or my religious community, but from strangers in a hospital setting. To this day, I am bitter about that," Gail confessed.

On the wall of their living room, next to a crucifix and a painting of the Virgin Mary and St Brigid of Ireland, is a plaque bearing two tiny footprints.

"She was real. They made her real for us. Those footprints were Dr. Tiller's idea. He wasn't a man with crazed eyes anticipating the kill like some anti-abortion activists would like you to picture. He understood the difficult position we were in. He allowed us to still have a piece of the family we wanted.

Dr Tiller's murder came as a great shock to the Andersons "because he was one of the few individuals who showed them understanding. He became an unofficial member of their family, the quiet uncle that sits in the corner, observing, quiet except for a few pieces of sage advice," according to Alternet, the website which carried the Anderson interview.

"The people who praised Dr Tiller's murder – they are the real monsters", the couple insist.



A protester holds a placard at a candlelight vigil for Dr Tiller in Kansas in the hours after his death last May

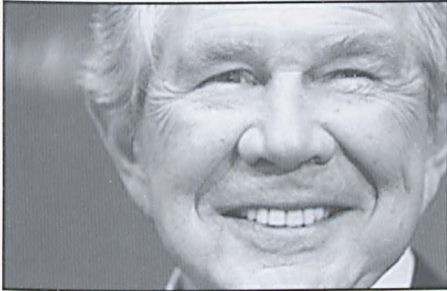
carried out.

After a frank discussion with their specialist, they decided that not only did the quality of life of their unborn child need to be questioned, but also the life expectancy. After discussing every option available to them, the decision to visit Dr. George Tiller's office in Kansas to have a late-term abortion was made. Both Andersons sank into a depression, feeling as if they were losing both their child and their religion.

"We are Catholic. We are supposed to be against abortion, but the church teaches mercy as well. The church examines quality of life. It isn't a black-and-white issue as so many like to make it," Robert said.

As they packed their car to travel to Wichita, Kansas, members of their parish came, trying to talk them out of their decision. Unable to deal with the confrontation, Gail admits she almost called the trip off at the last minute, unsure of how she would be able to sit next to these women in mass. These were the same women she had gathered with outside of a clinic that performed

US televangelist blames Haiti's earthquake on 'a pact with the Devil'



Pat Robertson, master of idiotic observations

If you thought that the devastation suffered in Haiti last month was the result of tectonic plate movements below a heavily populated area blighted by poor building standards, you're WRONG!

According to US televangelist Pat Robertson, it was a pact with ol' Beelzebub that caused the earthquake.

On the Christian Broadcasting Network's "700 Club" – after a lengthy interview with a missionary who talked about helping the victims of the earthquake in Haiti – the

Indian man offered his tongue to Shiva in exchange for a baby

A CHILDLESS Indian man sliced off his tongue as an offering to the god Shiva in the hope of becoming a father.

Police said 28-year-old Mukesh Kumar sliced off his tongue with a razor blade at a temple in the state of Uttar Pradesh dedicated to the Hindu god.

Kumar, from a village in Banda district around 125 miles from the city of Lucknow, was taken to a private hospital by other devotees.

Doctors said he is out of danger, but would probably suffer from major speech problems later, police said.

Senior inspector R P Mishra added that Mr Kumar remained childless after more than four years of marriage.

He added: "An ardent devotee of Lord Shiva, an angry Kumar left his house following a tiff with his wife for not being able to conceive. He went to the temple, where he offered his tongue to the deity."

Kumar was unable to comment.

80-year-old imbecile offered his explanation as to why the earthquake struck the impoverished nation:

"Something happened a long time ago in Haiti, and people might not want to talk about it. They were under the heel of the French, uh, you know Napoleon the 3rd and whatever, and they got together and swore a pact to the Devil.

"They said, 'We will serve you if you'll get us free from the French.'

"True story.

"And so the Devil said, 'Okay, it's a deal.' And, uh, they kicked the French out, you know, with Haitians revolted and got themselves free. But ever since they have been cursed by one thing after another, desperately poor.

"That island of Hispaniola is one island. It's cut down the middle. On the one side is Haiti on the other side is the Dominican Republic. Dominican Republic is prosperous, healthy, full of resorts, etcetera.

"Haiti is in desperate poverty.

"They need to have and we need to pray for them a great turning to God and out of this tragedy I'm optimistic something good may come."

In an article entitled *God, Satan and the Birth of Haiti*, Jean R Gelin, PhD, writes:

"I was born and raised in Haiti, and I am a graduate of the State University in Port-au-Prince. I am also a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ in accordance with the Bible. In all of my studies of Haitian history, however, I have yet to find good evidence of even the idea of Satan's assistance in the Independence War, let alone a satanic pact.

"Obviously, the idea that Haiti was dedicated to Satan prior to its independence is a very serious and profound statement with potentially grave consequences for its people in terms of how they are perceived by others or how the whole nation is understood outside its borders. One would agree that such a strong affirmation should be based on solid historical and scriptural ground. But, although the satanic pact idea is by far the most popular explanation for Haiti's birth as a free nation, especially among Christian missionaries and some Haitian church leaders, it is nothing more than a fantasist opinion that ultimately dissipates upon close examination."

'Poor? Go ahead and nick stuff', says York vicar

A VICAR has stoutly defended his suggestion – which has angered his arch-deacon and the police – that stealing is sometimes OK.

The claim that stealing by the desperate is no sin "is long established Christian teaching," according to Rev Tim Jones.

The 42-year-old priest in charge of St Lawrence's, York, spoke to the Church of England newspaper as anger mounted over the message he delivered at his local church primary school.

Jones said that stealing from large national chains was "sometimes" the best option open to vulnerable people. He also suggested that it was "far better" for people desperate during the recession to shoplift than turn to "prostitution, mugging or burglary".

He told the congregation "My advice, as a Christian priest, is to shoplift. I would ask that they do not steal from small family businesses, but from large national businesses, knowing that the costs are ultimately passed on to the rest of us in the form of higher prices."

He added: "I offer the advice with a heavy heart and wish society would recognise that bureaucratic ineptitude and systematic delay has created an invitation and incentive to crime for people struggling to cope."

Fr Jones told the C of E paper: "What I said is nothing more than what is long established Christian teaching dating back to the desert fathers. I've said nothing more than St Ambrose, St John Chrysostom and St Thomas Aquinas said.

And he claimed: "What is more, everything I said in the school message is backed up by all the relevant papal encyclicals of the 20th century."

But Richard Seed, Archdeacon of York, said: "The Church of England does not advise anyone to shoplift, or break the law. Fr Jones is raising important issues about the difficulties people face when benefits are not forthcoming, but shoplifting is not the way to overcome these difficulties."

A North Yorkshire police spokesman said: "Shoplifting is a criminal offence and to justify this course of action is highly irresponsible. Turning or returning to crime will only make matters worse – that is a guarantee."

The curse of American evangelism

Last March, three American evangelical Christians, whose teachings about “curing” homosexuals have been widely discredited in the United States, arrived in Uganda’s capital to give a series of talks.

The theme of the event, said Stephen Langa, its Ugandan organiser, was “the gay agenda – that whole hidden and dark agenda” – and the threat homosexuals posed to Bible-based values and the traditional African family.

For three days, according to participants and audio recordings, thousands of Ugandans, including police officers, teachers and national politicians, listened raptly to the Americans, who were presented as experts on homosexuality. The visitors discussed how to make gay people straight, how gay men often sodomised teenage boys and how “the gay movement is an evil institution” whose goal is “to defeat the marriage-based society and replace it with a culture of sexual promiscuity.”

Now the three Americans are finding themselves on the defensive, saying they had no intention of helping stoke the kind of anger that could lead to what came next: a bill to impose a death sentence for homosexual behavior.

According to Jeffrey Gettleman, reporting last month for the *New York Times*, one month after the conference, a previously unknown Ugandan politician, David Bahati MP, who boasts of having evangelical friends in the American government, introduced the Anti-Homosexuality Bill of

2009, which threatens to hang homosexuals. The proposed legislation immediately put Uganda on a collision course with Western nations.

Donor countries, including the US, are demanding that Uganda’s government drop the proposed law, saying it violates human rights, though Uganda’s minister of ethics and integrity (who previously tried to ban miniskirts) recently said, “Homosexuals can forget about human rights.”

The Ugandan government, facing the prospect of losing millions in foreign aid, is now indicating that it will back down, slightly, and change the death penalty provision to life in prison for some homosexuals. But the battle is far from over.

Instead, Uganda seems to have become a far-flung front line in the American culture wars, with American groups on both sides, the Christian right and gay activists, pouring in support and money as they get involved in the broader debate over homosexuality in Africa.

“It’s a fight for their lives,” said Mai Kiang, a director at the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, a New York-based group that has channelled nearly \$75,000 to Ugandan gay rights activists and expects that amount to grow.

The three Americans who spoke at the conference – Scott Lively, a missionary who has written several books denouncing homosexuality, including *7 Steps to Recruit-Proof Your Child*; Caleb Lee Brundidge, a self-described former gay man who leads “healing seminars”; and Don Schmierer,

a board member of Exodus International, whose mission is “mobilising the body of Christ to minister grace and truth to a world impacted by homosexuality” – are now trying to distance themselves from the bill.

“I feel duped,” Mr. Schmierer said, arguing that he had been invited to speak on “parenting skills” for families with gay children. He acknowledged telling audiences how homosexuals could be converted into heterosexuals, but he said he had no idea some Ugandans were contemplating the death penalty for homosexuality.

“That’s horrible, absolutely horrible,” he said. “Some of the nicest people I have ever met are gay people.”

Lively and Brundidge have made similar remarks in interviews or statements issued by their organisations. But the Ugandan organisers of the conference admit helping draft the bill, and Lively has acknowledged meeting with Ugandan lawmakers to discuss it. He even wrote on his blog in March that someone had likened their campaign to “a nuclear bomb against the gay agenda in Uganda.” Later, when confronted with criticism, Lively said he was very disappointed that the legislation was so harsh.

Human rights advocates in Uganda say the visit by the three Americans helped set in motion what could be a very dangerous cycle. Gay Ugandans already describe a world of beatings, blackmail, death threats like “Die, Sodomite!” scrawled on their homes, constant harassment and even so-called correctional rape.

Bacon-scoffing Muslim chef who lost discrimination claim faces £76,000 costs

A MUSLIM chef who lost a claim of religious discrimination against Scotland Yard after complaining he was forced to cook sausages and bacon is reportedly facing a legal bill of more than £75,000.

Hasanali Khoja accused the Metropolitan Police of failing to consider his Islamic beliefs when he was asked to handle pork products as a catering manager at a police station. The £23,000-a-year chef claimed suggestions by his bosses that he should wear gloves and use tongs left him “stressed and humiliated”.

But Khoja, 62, lost his claim last May after a police employee told an employment

tribunal how she saw Khoja eat bacon rolls and sausages.

The Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) has now won a ruling ordering Khoja to pay its costs, which total at least £76,200. In its costs claim, the Met said Khoja “knew that he had asked for a bacon roll two or three times for personal consumption before bringing his claim and throughout the conduct of his claim. The fact that he had knowingly come into contact with pork products before bringing the claim shows that the claim had no reasonable prospect of success from the outset.”

Judge Michael Southam agreed and ruled

that Khoja should pay costs.

Khoja, from Edgware, North London, who is still employed by the Met, claimed at a hearing in Watford that he could afford to pay only £80 a week as he has little income, lives in rented property and is struggling with £30,000 legal bills of his own.

But the court discovered he had sold another home last year, splitting profits of almost £200,000 with his wife and two sons.

The decision is a major setback for Khoja, who believed he was on course for a large settlement when he launched his case in 2007.

ism ignites Ugandan homophobia

“Now we really have to go undercover,” said Stosh Mugisha, a gay rights activist who said she was pinned down in a guava orchard and raped by a farmhand who wanted to cure her of her attraction to girls. She said that she was impregnated and infected with HIV, but that her grandmother’s reaction was simply, “You are too stubborn.”

Despite such attacks, many gay men and lesbians here said things had been getting better for them before the bill, at least enough to hold news conferences and publicly advocate their rights. Now they worry that the bill could encourage lynchings. Already, mobs beat people to death for infractions as minor as stealing shoes.

“What these people have done is set the fire they can’t quench,” said the Rev Kapya Kaoma, a Zambian who went undercover for six months to chronicle the relationship between the African anti-homosexual movement and American evangelicals.

Mr. Kaoma was at the conference and said that the three Americans “underestimated the homophobia in Uganda” and “what it means to Africans when you speak about a certain group trying to destroy their children and their families.”

“When you speak like that,” he said, “Africans will fight to the death.”

Uganda is an exceptionally lush, mostly rural country where conservative Christian groups wield enormous influence. This is, after all, the land of proposed virginity scholarships, songs about Jesus playing in the airport, “Uganda is Blessed” bumper stickers on Parliament office doors and a suggestion by the president’s wife that a virginity census could be a way to fight AIDS.

During the Bush administration, American officials praised Uganda’s family-values policies and steered millions of dollars into abstinence programmes.

Uganda has also become a magnet for American evangelical groups. Some of the best known Christian personalities have recently passed through here, often bringing with them anti-homosexuality messages, including the Rev Rick Warren, who visited in 2008 and has compared homosexuality to pedophilia. (Warren recently condemned the anti-homosexuality bill, seeking to correct what he called “lies and errors and false reports” that he played a role in it.)

Many Africans view homosexuality as an immoral Western import, and the continent is full of harsh homophobic laws. In northern Nigeria, gay men can face death



An anti-gay protest staged last December in Uganda. Photo: Marc Hofer, New York Times

by stoning. Beyond Africa, a handful of Muslim countries, like Iran and Yemen, also have the death penalty for homosexuals. But many Ugandans said they thought that was going too far. A few even spoke out in support of gay people.

“I can defend them,” said Haj Medih, a Muslim taxi driver with many homosexual customers. “But I fear the police and the government. They can arrest you and put you in the safe house, and for me, I don’t have any lawyer who can help me.”

Christian Voice’s Stephen Green implores ‘fellow believers’ to support Uganda’s bid to uphold ‘family values’

WHILE virtually the whole of the civilised world has condemned Uganda’s planned Anti-Homosexuality Bill, one British Christian hatemonger who has spoken out in favour of the Bill is Stephen Green, who heads Christian Voice.

Green, who haunts at Gay Pride rallies across the UK with small bands of sour-faced supporters, has urged “fellow-believers to support the Ugandan people in their determination to rid their nation of foreign homosexual proselytisation”.

In a statement issued in December, the egregious Green said:

“The Bible calls for the ultimate penalty for sodomy (Lev 20:13) and for rape (Deut 22:25), and our Lord upheld the death penalty when He called for the accusers of the woman caught in adultery to cast the first stone (John 8:7) – if, that is, they were not implicated in adultery themselves.

“The Bible also calls for there to be ‘two or three witnesses’ (Deut 17:6) before anyone is convicted of a crime, so in practice, whatever penalty were in place for sodomy, men committing it consensually in private would not be affected.

“Furthermore, Bahati’s proposed law does not criminalise anyone for ‘being gay’ – it is the act of sodomy and the promotion of homosexuality which is to be outlawed.

“The contrast between our politicians and those of Uganda could not be more stark. A Parliamentarian in Uganda is trying to protect his nation’s children. The House of Commons of the United Kingdom is trying to corrupt ours.

“Which country is the more civilised, I wonder, in the eyes of Almighty God?

“What is at stake here is no less than Uganda’s status as a sovereign nation. Will they allow themselves to be bullied by Western secularists, or will they stand by their Christian values and the traditional African way of life? I hope and pray it will be the latter, and that the Western homosexuals and abortionists who are trying to corrupt their youth will be sent a firm message to stop their wickedness.”

ANALYSING RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

Words without meaning

OWEN O'NEILL argues that religious terms that defy definition in a secular sense are not merely foolish, but downright dangerous

Pertinent to the perennial interest in the "Does God exist?" controversy, is a quite ordinary truism which, it seems to me, can shed light on the debate from a different perspective, but one which, as far as I know, is never invoked. It is this: that people routinely use words without knowing what they mean. It is not that this has not been recognised through the ages; Plato, in his *Meno*, has both Meno and Socrates saying they've spoken of "virtue" hundreds of times but have no idea what it is. And there are more examples from the past – both Aristotle and St Augustine admitted they didn't know what they were talking about when they used the word "God".

However, it is not just the fact that people sometimes do not know the meaning of words they use that is of interest to us now – but the far more important fact that, without knowing it, millions of people use words which simply do not have any meaning at all; there is nothing they could be talking about. Thomas Hobbes, 350 years ago, made this point very clearly in his *Leviathan*, (Penguin, pp 108, 99, 146 etc). I want to elaborate on this and show its fundamental relevance to the "Does God exist?" and related debates.

Basically, there are two, quite distinct, types of languages we use, the main one being the one we all use every day, to talk about the physical world around us, mainly by giving names or labels to the objects and phenomena that comprise it, and describing their interaction. Knowledge of this familiar everyday world we acquire by means of our senses, that is by seeing, hearing, touching etc. Let us call this language our "empirical" or "secular" language.

This secular language is completely different from the other language in quite common use, which has a different purpose. This other language does not talk about, has nothing to do with, our familiar physical world. The things that, grammatically, it appears to talk about are not visible, have no location or extension,

cannot be perceived by means of any of the senses. Instead, it concerns itself with the metaphysical – the "supernatural", "spiritual", "celestial" etc, using such words as "divinity", "god", "immortality", "heaven", "immaculate conception" and the like, saying such things as "the sacrament turns the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ". Let us call this language "spiritual" or "religious" language.

In any language, if we are not to utter gibberish, we must surely know what the words we use mean – what we are talking about, referring to or naming – when we use them. (Words, of course, are intrinsically mere sounds or scribbles on paper; they only have meaning when we use them as labels to refer to things we wish to talk about – the "meaning" of the word being the thing of which the word is the label/name.) When we are using secular language, there is no problem, but there is a crucial proviso; for example if we ask "Do unicorns exist?" it is futile to attempt to answer the question if we have not first mutually agreed on the meaning of the word "unicorn", ie we have the same, imaginative, mental picture, (the result of recombining perceptions we have already had empirically).

But it is quite a different matter with the religious language; if we ask for the meaning of any religious word there are no such mental pictures – nothing that can be perceived, imaginatively or otherwise, by the senses. In which case how could a meaning for any religious word – eg "God" – be given; what *sort* of meaning could there be – what *could* anyone be talking about, if anything, when using the word?

I doubt if the majority of ordinary believers concern themselves with such matters, but one would expect their spiritual mentors to do better; if they can't, how can they distinguish between saying "God is in his heaven" and "Umpa is in his dodda"? If we ask the theologian the meaning of any of the words of his religious language, he would probably agree

quite willingly that these words cannot be defined ostensively; their meaning cannot be given in terms of our secular language. That is, if you ask, for example, what the word "heaven" means, it is a total misconception to ask questions like "Where is it?", "Is it visible?", "Is it material?", "Can you walk about in it?". But, he will add, that is completely irrelevant; why *should* its meaning be related in any way to the mundane physical world? Religious experience, beliefs, concepts, doctrines, etc are nothing to do with the physical world, so in order for them to be discussed and shared they need their own unique, metaphysical, language; and this religious language they, of course, do have; one which indeed, he would avow, *is* meaningful, they *are* talking about something when using it. (But in that case, his use of "meaningful" would have to be quite different from the normal secular one.)

If then, the meaning of religious words cannot be comprehended by the senses – ie we can never see, hear etc what the words are referring to, or naming, how can their meaning be given? Obviously the only other way is verbally – giving the meaning of the religious words by other words. But while this is perfectly in order, and commonplace, in giving the meaning of secular words, because the defining words are secular, ie names of objects or phenomena in the physical world about us, it is useless for defining religious words.

This is because, in defining religious words verbally, the defining words themselves are, and can only be, religious words. So, for example, if the theologian is asked what the word "sacred" means, he can only say something like "it means pertaining to divinity, to God, holy, sanctified, transcendent etc" – all religious, non-secular words. And this is the same for any religious word – only religious words can be used to define religious words; thus, in the example the defining words "holy", "sanctified" etc require definition *themselves*, which can only be given by further religious words; then these in turn can

clairvoyance, second sight.

RELATED TERMS mantic, -mancy.

divine¹ adjective ① a divine being GODLY, angelic, seraphic, saintly, beatific; heavenly, celestial, holy. ② divine worship RELIGIOUS, holy, sacred, sanctified, consecrated, blessed, *divine food* See LOVELY

only be defined by further religious words ...and so on and so on. However far this procedure is pursued, no terminal point would ever be reached at which a word could be defined by non-religious words, in which case the word is never comprehensible – at least in any normal meaning of “comprehensible”. (In any case the definition is quickly seen to be circular – for example, to define “divine” we might say – “divine” means “holy”, “holy” means “sacred”, “sacred” means “sanctified”, “sanctified” means “consecrated”, “consecrated” means “godly”, and “godly” means “divine”.) You have only to challenge any believer, however sophisticated, what he is talking about when he uses any religious word, to see that the above is so.

However, the believer would, no doubt, retort that he is quite unconcerned that it is not possible to define religious words using secular words, pointing out that his religion is not based on the everyday physical world, but on a higher, metaphysical, spiritual authority that, whatever its essence or nature, gives him spiritual comfort, purpose, fulfilment – and that is meaningful enough for him.

But the fact that this may be so, however benign in itself, is not sufficient reason to refrain from demonstrating that religious words and statements are nothing but mere empty words, and that believers, in conversation or devotion, have no idea what they are talking about, because there is *nothing* they could conceivably be talking about – they are meaningless. (This doesn't apply only to the believer, the same applies, for example when an atheist says he doesn't believe in God's existence – *what* is it he doesn't believe in? He could only say precisely what the believer does, which would get him nowhere. In denying God's existence he has no idea what he is talking about,

for he is not talking about anything.)

What I have said applies specifically to the question that the scholars persist in debating – “Does God exist?”, which is meaningless for the reason I have pointed out – ie it is unintelligible to predicate existence or anything else, to God if it has not first been established what the word “God” means – and this nobody has ever been able to do. (“The supreme, non-physical, spiritual, all-powerful creator of the universe” – or other similar would-be definitions – really does not describe, refer to, or name anything at all.)

However, this specious question is unintelligible on another count – the word “exist” as used in it is also meaningless. Certainly “exist” has an authentic very useful meaning in our everyday language: “To exist” means “to be perceived” (or capable of being perceived); eg, to say black geraniums exist means if you go to the appropriate place you will perceive, ie see, one – (*not* that geraniums are doing something called “existing” – whatever that could possibly mean).

Even if we accept that, in the physical world, other definitions are acceptable – eg “to exist” means “to be part of the physical world”, this clearly doesn't work in the religious domain – nobody is going to say “God exists” means “God is part of the physical world” (and therefore can be seen etc.)

If then, it has not its secular meaning, what can “exist” mean for the believer when he says “God exists”? No doubt he would say that what he believes has nothing to do with the physical world – why should it – what you say is quite irrelevant. He just “knows” God, by other means. God is “revealed” to him in his religious experiences, his intuition, his spiritual insight, devotion, epiphany; fine-sounding words, but what do they

mean here? In fact, as before, he is unable to give any meaning except by other inscrutable religious words; for example what does he mean by “revealed” – surely not that he actually *sees* something – that his God is actually visible? (If he does then please let us know – describe, in some comprehensible way, *what* it is that is revealed.)

He will likely retort that that sort of language belongs to the material world – all this perceiving business is irrelevant – he just *knows* God; but again he doesn't say what he means by “know”. In everyday language “to know” is to perceive, and there is no way of perceiving except by the five senses; if he doesn't mean “perceive” by “know”, then what does he mean – in words other than religious ones?

To put the whole matter simply, it is *not* a question of not being able to say what the word “God” means but rather that “God” – and every other religious word – has no meaning whatsoever. The users of these words are uttering meaningless sounds, or making meaningless scribbles on paper; they are not talking about anything at all.

If anyone finds this hard to accept, they have only to ask any believer to say what they mean by these words. My purpose is not to deprive anyone of any solace they receive from their religion; but it doesn't stop there – there is the dark side: propagation of this religious language can, and does, have terrible consequences. It is a deadly assassin of reason, the enemy of enlightened intellectual progress, a relic of pagan superstition and ignorance, responsible for immense human degradation, barbarism and suffering. The ominous signs of its increasing power and influence are ample justification for exposing it for the mumbo-jumbo it is.

All out of step

JOHN RADFORD reviews Terry Eagleton's *Reason, Faith and Revolution*

Literary critic Terry Eagleton (henceforth TE), born 1943, is a distinguished professor of English Literature and author of some 50 books. He was brought up a Roman Catholic and then turned to Marxism. In *Reason, Faith and Revolution* he discusses his views on these and related issues. At 185 pages the book is quite short, but full of ideas, though I found it repetitious. What has particularly caught the attention of the reviewers I have read is his attack on the "new atheists", above all Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, whom he often lumps together as "Ditchkins", with a swipe or two at Daniel Dennett. Others, such as Sam Harris, Michel Onfray, Victor Stenger, Lewis Wolpert etc, he does not mention.

TE does not claim a deep knowledge of theology, but he does feel he knows enough to say that the atheists are talking nonsense about God. He does have a point in that conceptions of God, or gods, vary widely, so that refutation of one might not apply to others. The atheist argument would be that there is no reason to think that any

such being exists. Dawkins remarks that he does not need expert knowledge of fairies to be sure there are none at the bottom of his garden. I can't make out whether TE himself retains a belief in God, and if so on what grounds. He does say that religion is believed in by millions, and thus there must be something in it.

Of course there is something in it, namely belief, but what does that prove? He is content to argue that "Ditchkins" attacks only one version of God, one which he regards as simplistic and untypical. He says, for example, that this version sees God as the explanation of the universe, "but Christianity was never meant to explain anything in the first place". This is a puzzling remark. Meant by whom? Christianity is an amalgam of many thousands of individual thinkers and believers. It never had a "first place". The biblical Jesus was certainly not a Christian. Many of those individuals have considered God to be the ultimate explanation, including such established modern theologians as John Polkinghorne, Richard Swinburne, and Keith Ward. And TE himself says that God "loved" the

world into existence, and that he "is the reason why there is something rather than nothing". His point seems to be that God is not another sort of being who created our world. But this is how he is depicted in the Old Testament, which most Christians accept, in essence if not always literally.

TE modestly tells us that he knows "embarrassingly little" about science, but then makes round assertions about it, for example that "it does not ask questions such as why there is anything in the first place, or why what we do is actually intelligible to us". Some scientists certainly do address such questions, and TE seems here as simplistic as he accuses "Ditchkins" of being. TE also says that "Ditchkins" wrongly claims that religion relies solely on faith and rejects reason. He points to the numerous theologians who have offered arguments for their beliefs; but he also admits that these arguments are ultimately not relevant, since the existence of God (in particular) is not dependent on them. If God exists, it does not have to be proved. Further, there are beliefs that are reasonable but not provable, such as that someone

At last – the prospect of an atheist Prime Minister

WHEN Labour cabinet members were asked about their religious allegiances last December, following Tony Blair's official conversion to Roman Catholicism, it turned out that more than half of them are not believers. The least equivocal about their atheism were the health secretary, Alan Johnson, and foreign secretary David Miliband.

This was pointed out last month in the *Guardian* by A C Grayling, professor of philosophy at Birkbeck College, University of London, who added that "the fact that Miliband is an atheist is a matter of special interest, given the likelihood that he may one day, and perhaps soon, occupy No 10.

"In our present uncomfortable climate of quarrels between pushy religionists and resisting secularists – or attack-dog secularists and defensive religionists: which side you are on determines how you see it – there are many reasons why it would be a great advantage to everyone to have

an atheist prime minister.

"Atheist leaders are not going to think they are getting messages from Beyond telling them to go to war. They will not cloak themselves in supernaturalistic justifications, as Blair came perilously close to doing when interviewed about the decision to invade Iraq.

"Atheist leaders will be sceptical about the claims of religious groups to be more important than other civil society organisations in doing good, getting public funds, meriting special privileges and exemptions from laws, and having seats in the legislature and legal protection from criticism, satire and challenge.

"Atheist leaders are going to be more sceptical about inculcating sectarian beliefs into small children ghettoised into publicly funded faith-based schools, risking social divisiveness and possible future conflict. They will be readier to learn Northern Ireland's bleak lesson in this regard.

"Atheist leaders will, by definition, be

neutral between the different religious pressure groups in society, and will have no temptation not to be even-handed because of an allegiance to the outlook of just one of those groups.

"Atheist leaders are more likely to take a literally down-to-earth view of the needs, interests and circumstances of people in the here and now, and will not be influenced by the belief that present sufferings and inequalities will be compensated in some posthumous dispensation. This is not a trivial point: for most of history those lower down the social ladder have been promised a perch at the top when dead, and kept quiet thereby. The claim that in an imperfect world one's hopes are better fixed on the afterlife than on hopes of earthly paradises is official church doctrine.

"Atheist leaders will not be tempted to think they are the messenger of any good news from above, or the agent of any higher purpose on earth. Or at very least, they will not think this literally."

ep but our Terry

Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate

loves you. Belief in God is of this kind.

And Dawkins, says TE, himself relies on a belief in reason, which cannot be proved. I think that many scientists would agree that, ultimately, they rely on assumptions, usually unstated, such as that the world can be investigated empirically and more or less objectively, and that this gives us a better idea of how things really are. This is supported by the observation that science (or reason) works: vaccines are better than blood-letting. I don't think that this is the same as religious beliefs, whether of sophisticated theologians or of everyday participants. I think the bottom line of both would be that they simply know their religion is true (I have often been told this, though not by theologians).

Again, TE argues that religious faith is not primarily a belief that someone or something exists, but "a commitment and allegiance – faith in something which might make a difference". Such a faith is no doubt felt by many millions who pray, but I am pretty sure they also believe they are addressing something that really exists.

A further argument is that "Ditchkins" attacks the evils of religion, but ignores the very many evils that arise otherwise. Dawkins might well answer that those are not the focus of his concerns when writing specifically about religion. One can agree with TE that "religious" conflicts are generally due to multiple causes, including social, economic, and nationalistic. TE in fact agrees with much of the criticism of religion, but on different grounds. The "Ditchkins" ground is basically that religious beliefs are false, and they inevitably foster obscurantism and fanaticism. TE's stand is an old one, essentially that religion, specifically Christianity but also Islam, has become distorted from its original, though only by a minority.

Personally I have no doubt that the vast majority of religious believers are decent kindly people, but I don't think that the bad side is a mere aberration, rather it is at least partly the result of what Dennett calls "belief in belief". And the "pure original" idea is a version of the golden age or Garden of Eden myth. As far as I can see, all religions have always been a mix of sense and nonsense, and of what I regard as good and bad.

This leads to TE's view of Jesus, since it is his teaching in particular that he thinks has been distorted. I take "Jesus" here to mean simply the figure who appears in the New Testament. We don't, of course, know with certainty what precisely he did or said. Certainly the accounts are inconsistent. TE does what many do, that is select the parts he likes. He quotes his father as saying that Jesus was a socialist, and he seems to agree. This is on the basis that Jesus preached to people of all classes and conditions, and told a rich man (for example) to sell all he had and give it to the poor. My no doubt partial understanding would be that Jesus believed he had a mission to bring all Jews closer to God, whose kingdom he was himself inaugurating. To this, social class or any other differences were irrelevant. The rich man's possessions were an obstacle to his salvation, a common theme in many religions. TE sees Jesus as emancipating the downtrodden, whereas now a distorted Christianity is part and parcel of exploitation. But advanced capitalism is essentially godless. He will perhaps have wryly noted Lloyd Blankfein, chairman and chief executive of Goldman Sachs, recently proclaiming that bankers are "doing God's work".

In similar vein, TE warmly acknowledges the values of the 18th-century Enlightenment, such as individual liberty, freedom from tyranny over body and thought and from superstition, and so on (values he claims derived largely from the Christian doctrine of free will). But he argues that these have necessarily led to our present world of exploitative global capitalism, military and commercial aggression, destruction of the environment and all the rest. The only system that understands this is Marxism, or, what seems to be the same for him, socialism. This, too, is something that cannot be proved, but it should be accepted, both because it is such a good idea that no-one has been able to disprove it, and because we must believe in the possibility of change for the better.

Christianity also promises this, by a different route, salvation through the self-sacrifice of Christ. One might feel that the results of neither approach have so far been very encouraging. I suspect TE might fall back on the old argument that neither has been properly tried yet. TE considers both



to be examples of "tragic humanism", the view that humanity can only flourish freely if we confront the worst of ourselves, and engage in "a process of self-dispossession and radical re-making". The "liberal humanism" of "Ditchkins" and others, on the other hand, also believes in the possibility of improvement, but on the simplistic basis that it is only necessary to throw off "a poisonous legacy of myth and superstition".

For my part, I share neither view, nor any hope of universal redemption. I see us, *Homo sapiens* as we are pleased to call ourselves, as animals who have evolved many remarkable capacities, some good inasmuch as they lead to better lives for more individuals, some destructive (perhaps fatally). "Better" is itself evolutionary in origin, as perpetuating the species. How to increase the one and limit the other is a matter of greater understanding of ourselves, rather than of systems or of beliefs. TE has nothing to say about the means to such understanding, essentially in my view by the application of a rational, scientific, but also humanitarian approach.

TE accuses Dawkins and the new atheists of being merely old-fashioned 19th-century liberal rationalists. His views in this book seem to be essentially an idiosyncratic version of the Christian socialism of comparable vintage. However, I found the book interesting and worth reading, and I liked it better than I thought I should from the reviews.

• *Reason, Faith and Revolution: Reflections on the God debate*, by Terry Eagleton is published by Yale University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-300-15179.

John Radford is Emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of East London

Laughing God ou

BARRY DUKE says there is much fun to be had between

Oh my, how things have changed ... a few short years ago one really had to struggle to find good, fresh atheist writing. Now it's a struggle to keep up with the output, as publishers around the world latch on to the fact that there is a real appetite out there for innovative, intelligent, no-holds-barred assaults on superstition and irrationalism.

But the problem with many of these books is that they are brilliant only if you have a mind for science, and/or possess a genuine interest in theology. For most people they can make for cumbersome reading. While the "heavyweight" authors may be popular with the intellectual elite, they are, for your average literary hobbyist, complex, and far from entertaining.

That's the view of C J Werleman, who

set out to correct this imbalance with *God Hates You – Hate Him Back*, published at the end of 2009. In it, Werleman makes the ultimate case for the claim that the God of the Bible is the most wicked character in the pages of history. With a wit as dry as a martini, and the cross-examination techniques of a seasoned lawyer, Werleman lays out all sixty-six chapters of the Bible to present an irrefutable argument that, indeed, God hates us all.

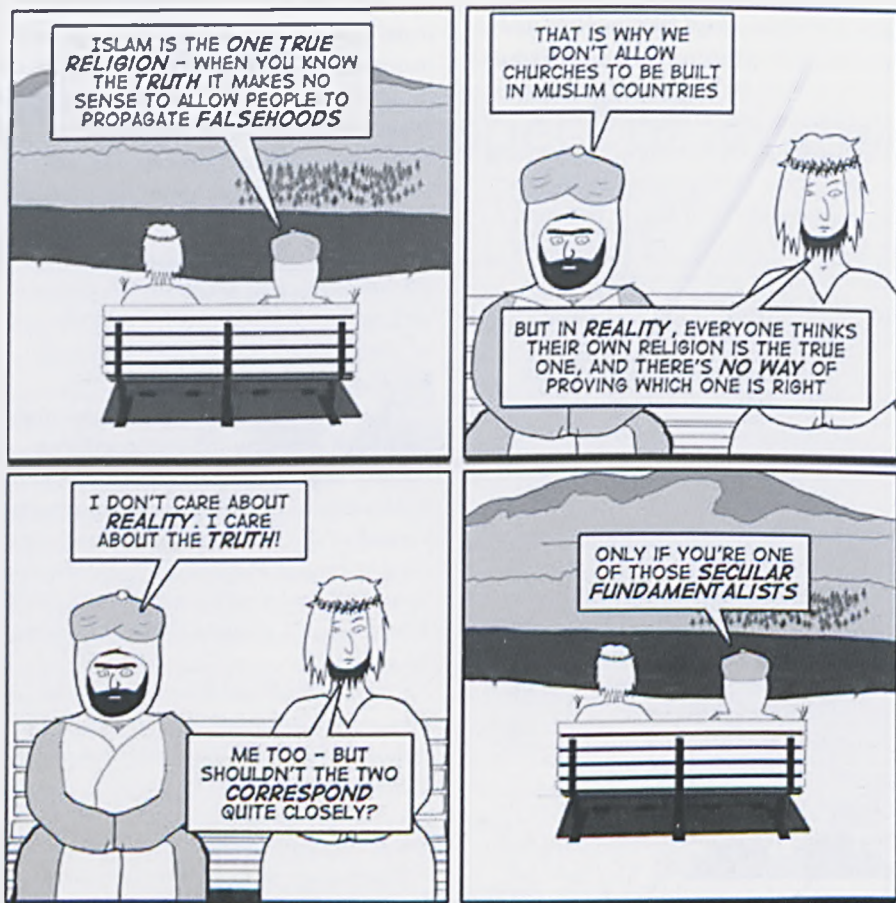
If you have never read or never fully understood the Bible then you can do no better than turn to this unique, comedic, 21st century summary of the greatest story ever sold, or in Werleman's own words "never read".

God Hates You – Hate Him Back provides one with an arsenal of Biblical facts, stories, mythology and assertions to ensure you a victory in your next religious debate. It is arguably the most unique, certainly most entertaining, rendition of the Bible ever told!

Immediately after its release, it began receiving five-star ratings on Amazon. Here's just one plucked from the many rave reviews posted on the Amazon site. It was written by Maia Caron, of Toronto, just before Christmas.

"C J Werleman has written an entertaining, laugh-out-loud parody of the Bible. His purpose was to 'use the Bible as an indictment against itself', and he has succeeded admirably well. Werleman puts the Bible under a rationalist's microscope, applying logic to each passage. When reading Genesis, he brings up a telling detail you won't hear in Bible class. Werleman asks: 'Where the hell did Cain's wife come from?' The original authors of the Bible didn't count on anyone actually thinking through the fact that Adam and Eve had Cain and Abel, but somehow Cain managed to find a wife, even though there were no other women yet 'created' on earth to choose from be-

Jesus & Mo



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The scriptures of the Bible are wonderful stories that are just begging to be told with a giggle

sides his own mother.

"Continuity issue or incestuous relations among the first family? Christians the world over fail to question these sorts of inconsistencies in their 'sacred text'.

"To give you a sense of how much fun it is to read, I finally got this book back from my 17-year-old daughter, who had borrowed it a few weeks ago and was reluctant to return it. This proves that *God Hates You – Hate Him Back* is the perfect Christmas gift for the questioning teen or budding unbelievers in the family."

Australian-born Werleman says: "I believe people learn more when they find reading a pleasure, and with an entire genre of anti-religious texts sprouting up all over the place, I hadn't come across any title that just laid out the entire Bible in a manner that for me was pleasurable. And the scriptures of the Bible are wonderful stories that are just begging to be told with a giggle."

Out of existence

d between the covers of C J Werleman's *God Hates You ...*

Werleman, who witnessed first-hand the religiously-motivated terrorist atrocities in Bali in 2005, continues: "The objective of the book is to provide the reader with a thorough understanding of the Bible, from end to end, while also demonstrating that the 'God' that people worship so readily and unquestioningly is a vengeful bully, with a monopoly on evil. Which I guess is primarily why the Devil had no reason to publish his own book."

He hopes that his approach of using the source of the creationists' belief-system to make a compelling argument against worshipping such a malevolent patriarch can bridge the gap between superstitious belief and rational understanding by at least shaking believers out of their hypnotised state of relying on "faith over logic".

Many critics of atheism claim that the fanatical fervour displayed by Dawkins and his ilk betrays their cause. Similarly, Werleman believes labelling believers as infantile or moronic is counter-productive in leading religious folk to rationality and, ultimately, secularism.

"The best device we have for secularism or atheism is the Bible itself. When you have all the biblical assertions laid out in front of you, it is almost impossible to continue holding onto the beliefs created by a tribe of nomadic goat herders, who believed the shovel to be emergent technology!"

He adds: "Essentially this book demystifies the Bible by using plain speak and humour. I show the reader what it is that pleases God: invariably baby killing, and ethnic cleansing. While also demonstrating that not only was Jesus an overtly racist false prophet, and not very nice to his mother, his biography was crudely hammered together by people who never met him."

When asked what he hoped to achieve with his book, C J replied, "I hope my book provides one small stepping stone on humanity's journey away from ancient beliefs that retard social progress and promote human conflict rather than solidarity."

More recently, Werleman, who regularly blogs on the internet, pointed out that "atheism is the fastest growing minority in the USA, and if current trends continue then agnostics, and atheists will be the

majority by the year 2040.

Once we are the majority then religion will have little or no say in deciding the social wellbeing of America through the political forum.

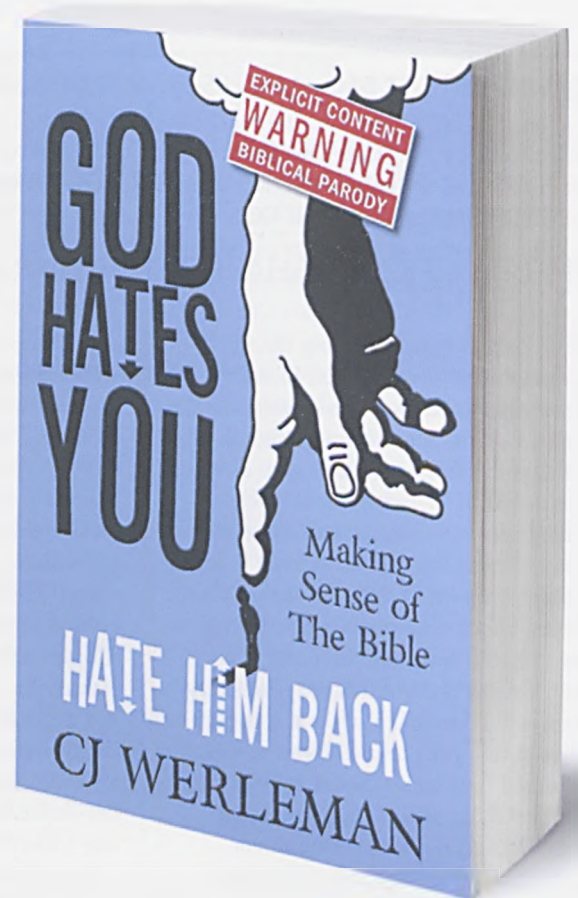
"Once religion is removed from passing proposed bills in the respective houses of government then we will have a country that looks like the nations in Scandinavia – nations such as Sweden that have low religiosity but are ranked highest in terms of societal health. Societal health defined by low rates of crime, gender equality, access to education and health, high *per-capita* income, affordable housing, low teen-pregnancy, etc.

"We have years of experience in determining what the theistic worldview looks like, and it looks like Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and the Dark Ages. It looks like blocking stem-cell legislations; it looks like gender equality gaps; it looks like government (mostly men) determining a woman's rights; it looks like the bombing of an abortion clinic; it looks like denying basic human rights to gay couples in love; it looks like the spread of AIDS; it looks like George W Bush; it looks like

Benny Hinn; it looks like Jerry Falwell.

"The United States of Scandinavia. This is my goal."

• *God Hates You ...* (paperback) is available from Amazon.com for around £16.00



Dear God, please bless our BlackBerries

IT'S 2010 – yet there's still room for primitive mumbo-jumbo in the financial heart of the capital. In London's 17th-century St Lawrence Jewry Church last month, parishioners whipped out the tools of their trade – mobile phones and laptop computers – to have them blessed by the Rev Canon David Parrott.

A "symbolic" pile of the things was laid on the altar where they were blessed.

It was an effort, said Rev Parrott, "to remind the capital's busy office workers that God's grace can reach them in many ways." He added: "It's the technology that is our daily working tool, and it's a technology we should bless."

The short blessing capped a services at the Christopher Wren-designed building – the official church of the Corporation of the City of London, which runs the capital's financial district. A few of the faithful held their phones up in the air as he ran through the prayer.

He said the blessing ceremony was an update of a traditional back-to-work ceremony called "Plow Monday," in which villagers gathered to bless a symbolic farming implement dragged to the church's door.

points of view...



A DIG IN THE POST BAG – LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

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

ATHEISTS NEED TO SHARPEN UP THEIR ACT

I VERY much enjoyed reading David Tribe's informative article "On Incest" (*Freethinker*, January), but as he chose to quote me several times over, I feel I must respond. My comments below are intended as an elaboration rather than a rebuttal, because when David quotes me, he does so to advance his own very similar argument, only briefly departing from my opinion on the matter (ie over how much time the National Secular Society should devote to this issue), before meandering to pretty much the same conclusion as I did several months ago, namely, that we have more pressing things to spend our limited time and resources on right now.

Like too many atheist freethinkers, he is long on fastidious rational argument and short on political strategy. His arguments about incest are flawlessly objective, but if we, as freethinkers, want to advance our agenda, we must sharpen up our act, learning to prioritise and communicate our ideas at precisely the right time to make maximum political impact. This will involve compromise and even the accommodation of the irrational, sometimes, but that's the price we pay for translating at least some of our rational agenda from the Petri dish of the *Freethinker* and NSS into concrete social and political change.

David points out, quite correctly, that in saying "we should only pick fights that matter" (when I dismissed calls for a campaign to decriminalise incest), I overlooked the highly subjective nature of what it is that matters. No rationalist could disagree, but a strategist would point out that we live in the specificities of time and place, while there also exists, at any given time, a zeitgeist, a "consensus", not to mention good old-fashioned "common sense" (trendy cultural critics like to deride such a concept, but it exists nonetheless). These things are not immutable – otherwise reforms like birth control, homosexual emancipation and the abolition

of the blasphemy laws could never have been achieved – but they do have to be negotiated and they will inevitably dictate the popularity, timing, character and likely success of such reforms. At the risk of sounding like a Marxist, it is irrational folly to ignore these socio-economic constraints on the freethinkers' wish-list. Reason is not enough.

Such constraints make some social changes positively glacial (homosexual law reform and assisted dying being two examples), others may be remarkably swift (the smoking ban in public places), while other ideas for social change remain just that – ideas (e.g. decriminalising incest). There is no hint of a self-realised incestophile lobby, or "community", nor is there ever likely to be.

Terry Sanderson was therefore exercising sound judgment when he bluntly refused to embroil the NSS in this pointless and possibly damaging academic debate.

David Tribe also tries to draw a parallel between early secularists' dismissal of homosexuality as a proper concern for the movement and my dismissal of incest as a proper (or, rather, worthwhile) concern for contemporary secularists. This is both misguided and unintentionally insulting to homosexuals. Comparing the "plight" of incestophiles to that of homosexuals is a bit like comparing the "plight" of the Black & White Minstrels to that of Nelson Mandela.

Consensual incest is a conscious act, a choice one freely makes. The same is true of homosexual acts, of course, but homosexuality is not so narrowly drawn. It is a general orientation that exists outside specific sexual encounters, or specific, individual love objects; an involuntary sensibility; an identity that usually wakens in early childhood and develops over time until it all begins to make some compelling kind of sense in early adulthood (just like heterosexuality, in fact). Consensual incest is none of these things and it probably won't influence your aspira-

tions, your choice of occupation, where you live, how you dress, how you speak, or the contents of your CD collection.

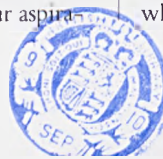
In the final analysis, whether one is homosexual or heterosexual, one may indeed find oneself attracted to tall, dark, handsome men, or leggy blondes – but if you're sexually attracted to your tall, dark, handsome brother, or your leggy blonde sister, it's probably just nature's way of saying "You need to get out more!"

Diesel Balaam
London

GOD IN THE BLOODSTREAM

SO the Archbishop of Canterbury has had another gripe at the Government, this time for its treating faith as a "problem" and believers as "oddities" and "eccentric". And this about a Government that funds faith schools, furthers belief with BBC propaganda, and each day starts parliamentary procedures with a prayer! Is he never satisfied? Dr Williams' latest worries are not remarkable; what is, though, is when he says most people have God "in their bloodstream", because it's yet more evidence that he's losing his grip on the English language.

His metaphor is unfortunate, for it implies God is soluble in water. Does Dr Williams think, then, this is how believers get the idea of God into their heads? Not from indoctrination, nor from electromagnetic rays or invisible spirit-stuff emanating from outer space, but through the bloodstream? That's a new one. But unsurprising, because increasingly believers are having problems with biblical language and are searching vainly for new words and meanings to justify their inane beliefs. And they're losing ground: science has irrevocably encroached upon religious territory and usurped its traditional role of controlling and mediating what people think and believe.



Voices and visions of God are now known to be misperceived auditory and visual hallucinations and manifestations of neural malfunctioning; likewise, spiritual, mystical or religious experiences are neurological in origin, as are all sensations. Because the brain is the only processing matrix of environmental "information" (measured, like computer download speed, in bits/sec - ref. Tor Norretrander's *The User Illusion*), explanation of mystery is coming from human insight and calculation using the language of science, not that of religion - however inventive Dr Rowan Williams tries to be.

Graham Newbery
Southampton

AID WITHOUT RELIGION

WHENEVER a natural disaster occurs there always is a mad scramble by religious fundamentalists to see who can be first to utter the most stupid remarks.

Clear winner after the Haiti earthquake was American televangelist Pat Robertson, who blamed the disaster on a "pact made with the Devil" by the Haitian people in 17-something-or-other.

But far worse, to my mind, is the fact that such disasters are treated by mainly fundamentalists as a recruitment opportunity.

Unfortunately, the media never portrays this tactic for what it really is: cynical opportunism. Instead, the religious are praised for their efforts, while non-religious bodies and individuals who dash in with no-

strings assistance are rarely recognised.

Hats off, therefore, to the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science (RIDFRS) which last month set up a dedicated bank account and PayPal facility for donations to non-religious relief organisations helping victims of the Haitian earthquake. The new account is in the new name of Non-Believers Giving Aid, with all of the money donated being distributed to disaster relief.

While the website set up for the appeal - <http://givingaid.richarddawkins.net/?> - emphasised that there was an immediate need to alleviate suffering in Haiti, the new account will remain available for future emergencies too. There are, of course, many ways for you to donate to relief organizations already, but doing it through Non-Believers Giving Aid offers some advantages:

1. 100 percent of your donation will go to these charities: not even the PayPal fees will be deducted from your donation, since Richard will personally donate a sum to cover the cost of these (capped at \$10,000). This means that more of your money will reach the people in need.

2. When donating via Non-Believers Giving Aid, you are helping to counter the scandalous myth that only the religious care about their fellow-humans.

Donations will only be passed on to aid organisations that do not have religious affiliations. In the case of Haiti, the two organisations chosen were Doctors Without Borders (Médecins sans Frontières) and

International Red Cross.

RIDFRS says: "Preachers and televangelists, mullahs and imams, often seem almost to gloat over natural disasters - presenting them as payback for human transgressions, or for 'making a pact with the devil'.

"Earthquakes and tsunamis are caused not by 'sin' but by tectonic plate movements, and tectonic plates, like everything else in the physical world, are supremely indifferent to human affairs and sadly indifferent to human suffering.

"Those of us who understand this reality are sometimes accused of being indifferent to that suffering ourselves. Of course the very opposite is the truth: we do not hide behind the notion that earthly suffering will be rewarded in a heavenly paradise, nor do we expect a heavenly reward for our generosity: the understanding that this is the only life any of us have makes the need to alleviate suffering even more urgent.

"The myth that it is only the religious who truly care is sustained largely by the fact that they tend to donate not as individuals, but through their churches. Non-believers, by contrast, give as individuals: we have no church through which to give collectively, no church to rack up statistics of competitive generosity. Non-Believers Giving Aid is not a church but it does provide an easy conduit for the non-religious to help those in desperate need, whilst simultaneously giving the lie to the canard that you need God to be good."

R G Bennett
Weymouth

The Strange Case of the Serpent's Locomotion (or Early Days in Eden)

WHEN God saw Eve in chastened mood
And freshly conscious she was nude
He knew she'd filched forbidden food.

He asked her how it came about
She knew she sported not a clout
And only Adam had a spout.

She said: "O, Lord, I feel defiled
And understand your being riled
But I was by the snake beguiled
And, soon as I'd consumed the fruit,
I knew that we were destitute
Of all except our birthday-suit;

So we made aprons on the spot
And be they a la mode or not
Mine covered up my Thou-know'st-what.

But why I stand here far from jolly
Is, when we made them for our folly,
We used not fig-leaves. Lord, but holly!"



"And that doth serve thee right," said God;
"Now get thee hence from this green sod
And go where no-one yet has trod -"
The Me-forsaken land of Nod."

He then addressed the serpent so:
"As thou hast spoiled My status quo

Upon the belly thou shalt go
And dust be thine eternal woe."

Thus crawled the snake for evermore,
But naught there is in Bible lore
Of how it got about before.

- Neil Blewitt

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 & St James Rd, Edgbaston. Thurs Feb 11, 7.45pm Darwin Day Meeting. Speaker: Dr Peter Griffiths.

Brighton & Hove Humanist Society: i 01273 227549/461404. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. Wed, Feb 3, 8pm. Barry Duke, *Freethinker* editor: *Scientology – Is This the Beginning of the End?* Wed, Mar 3, 8pm. Robert Stovold: *Defending Darwin, Defeating Design*. w <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/robert.stovold/humanist.html>.

Bromley Humanists: Meetings on the second Tuesday of the month, 8 pm, at Friends Meeting House, Ravensbourne Road, Bromley. i 01959 574691.

w www.sihg.adm.freeuk.com

Central London Humanist Group: i Chair: Alan Palmer. Sec: Josh Kutchinsky. e info@centrallondonhumanists.org.

w www.meetup.com/central-london-humanists

Chiltern Humanists: Enquiries: 01296 623730. Public library, High St, Wendover. Tues Feb 9, 8pm. Rachel Fryer: *Green Party Policy on Faith Schools*.

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 [web www.phil-cork.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/humleft.htm](http://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 Pintel 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. Feb 10, Steve Hurd: *Humanist Schools in Uganda*.

Hampstead Humanist Society: i N I Barnes, 10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 OHP. Tel: 0207 328 4431 w www.hampstead.humanist.org.uk

Harrow Humanist Society: meets the second Wednesday of the month at 8pm (except Jan, July and Aug) at the HAVS centre, 64 Pinner Road, Harrow. February 10th. Workshop on the purpose and meaning of life for Humanists led by Rob Grinter, Vice-Chair of the Greater Manchester Humanists.

i Secretary on 0208 907-6124

w www.harrow.humanist.org.uk

e Mike Savage at mfsavagamba@hotmail.com

Humanists of Havering: i Jean Condon 01708 473597. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgores Cres, Gidea Park. Meetings on first Thursday of the month, 8pm.

Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern

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

w www.nirelandhumanists.net

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

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

Local Scottish Groups:

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

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

Humanist Society of West Yorkshire: i Robert Tee on 01113 2577009.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

www.lancashiresecularhumanists.co.uk i Ian Abbott, Wavcrest, 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. Feb 18. Graham Bell: *Man, the Evolved Social Animal*

w www.lewisham.humanist.org.uk

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, 197 Brook Hill, Sheffield. Wed Feb 3, 8pm. Danny Dorling: *Why Inequality Persists*.

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 Gwinnell on 01935 473263 or

e edward.gwinnell@talktalk.net

South Place Ethical Society. Weekly talks/meetings, Sundays 11 am and 3pm at Conway Hall Library, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Tel: 0207242 8037/4

e library@ethicalsoc.org.uk. Monthly programmes on request.

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

Secretary: Denis Johnston.

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