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the freethinker

the voice of atheism

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Vatican goes on the offensive as more abuse allegations emerge

The Vatican claimed last month that instances of sexual abuse of children were far more widespread in the secular world than in the Catholic church as it worked to calm a growing row over allegations of clerical misconduct.

In a front-page editorial, its official newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* stressed: "For the love of truth, the number of incidents involving clergy is very small."

It blamed media coverage of the sex scandals rocking the Catholic Church in Ireland, Germany and Austria for implying that there was a higher instance of sexual abuse in the Church than in other parts of society.

"This has a negative effect on the Catholic Church...but it should be noted that abuse of children is more widespread in non-religious people and married couples than clergy," the paper said.

As pressure increased on the Vatican, Ireland's top Roman Catholic, Cardinal Sean Brady, rejected calls to quit after it emerged he had attended meetings where two alleged victims of a notorious paedophile priest signed an oath of secrecy.

Campaigners for victims of clerical child abuse called for his resignation after a Catholic Church statement said Cardinal Brady was present at the 1975 meetings at the direction of the late Bishop of Kilmore Francis McKiernan.

The Church was investigating sex abuse complaints against Father Brendan Smyth whose activities led to the fall of prime minister Albert Reynolds' coalition government in 1994.

Smyth, who is believed to have abused hundreds of children over a 40-year period, was finally jailed in the 1990s and died in prison.

The cardinal insisted that his presence at the meetings was not a "resigning matter" and said he failed to contact

the state authorities at the time as he was not the "designated person" to do so.

Meanwhile, in Vatican City, the Church worked to distance the pontiff from an abuse case in Germany.

Last month it emerged that Pope Ratzinger, while Archbishop of Munich, had been involved in a decision in 1980 to move a priest who was suspected of child abuse.

At the time the Pope, then Archbishop Josef Ratzinger, jointly agreed to the priest undergoing therapy at a rectory in the diocese of Munich and Freising, where he was archbishop from 1977 to 1981.

However, rather than sending the priest for therapy as had been agreed, the diocese's then vicar-general, Gerhard Gruber, assigned him to a Munich parish without restrictions.

Church officials in Germany have stressed that the Pope was unaware of what had happened and it has emerged that the priest, known only as H, was convicted of child sex crimes.

The Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* suggested that the Vatican feared cases within Italy itself and an avalanche of claims for compensation.

Church officials in the northern Italian diocese of mainly German-speaking Bolzano have set up an e-mail hot line for victims of abuse by priests.

A local newspaper has already carried an interview with a man who claimed he was abused by priests at a local school. Luis Benedikter spoke of a "climate of fear" at the unidentified school during the 1950s, which he attended for three years until he was 15.

Mr Benedikter said: "The director of the choir would beat us with a whip, hitting us in the face and on the hands. There was an atmosphere of crude violence and intimidation. It was physical and

Continued on p4)



A protester at one of the first demonstrations in London against Ratzinger's visit

Playing the persecution card

BARRY DUKE: WHY SHOULD RELIGIOUS WORKERS GET SPECIAL TREATMENT?

Visit the Christian Institute's website, and others like it, and the impression you'll get is that the world has become a cold and hostile place for believers; that Christians, metaphorically speaking, are once again being fed to the lions, and that, if something is not done to reverse the trend, they will soon *literally* be trussed up and offered as tidbits to the ravening beasts.

This, of course, is sheer tosh, for if you examine these claims of persecution, you'll find they are built purely on the belief that Christians (and those of other faiths) have a god-given right to be "exceptionalised", and should be not be subjected to any laws they disapprove of – especially in the workplace.

Last month, for example, howls of outrage were emanating from CI Central over the treatment of Lillian Ladele, the Islington registrar who came over all queer when she realised that her duties would include having to splice same-sex couples.

Ladele became the CI's sour face of perse-

cution when she was disciplined by Islington Council because of her stance on civil partnerships. According to the CI, when the law changed to permit homosexual civil partnerships, she "politely" requested an accommodation of her religious beliefs. But heartless managers from Islington treated her request "as a freestanding act of gross misconduct and threatened her with dismissal".

Ladele took Islington Council to an industrial tribunal, which found that she *had* suffered religious discrimination. Islington appealed the decision and won. Then, with the help of the CI, Ladele went to the Court of Appeal and lost. Determined to press on, Ladele and her backers went to the Supreme Court, which refused to consider the case, claiming it "does not raise an arguable point of law of general public importance".

The case could now be heading to the European Court of Human Rights.

All this time and money spent simply to prove that one delusional bigot who proved unfit for purpose was somehow a "victim" just beggars belief.

Ladele, of course, is not the only one that outfits like the CI, awash with paranoia, hold up as an example of "persecution". Another is the ghastly Nadia Eweida, who lost a discrimination case against British Airways, which, she claimed, had trampled all over her religious rights by ruling that the cross she insisted on wearing breached its dress code. She appealed against the decision, but lost again in the Court of Appeal, which found that, because it was not a requirement of Christianity that adherents had to publicly display their faith, it was not indirect discrimination for an employer's dress code to prevent a staff member from wearing a cross as a visible neck adornment.

When she originally took her case to the tribunal, it found that she had a "readiness to make a serious accusation without thought of the implications"; that she was "insensitive towards colleagues", "lacked empathy for those without a religious focus in their lives", and could not comprehend "the conflicting demands which professional management seeks to address and resolve on a near-daily basis".

In short, an insufferable, arrogant troublemaker with aggravated Jesus dementia.

What was particularly worrying about the Eweida case was the fact that it had been championed by civil liberties group Liberty, which, according to Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, "got the whole thing wrong".

Before her appeal came to court, he said:

"Ms Eweida, and all those who are using this case to create the impression that Christianity is under attack in Britain, are actually making the case for religious privilege, not religious freedom.

"Ms Eweida is a relentless evangelist who is determined to gain special status for religion in the workplace. If her appeal succeeds, it will strengthen the hand of the present crop of right-wing religious groups who are determined that their faith will have a special status in the workplace – to the disadvantage of those who do not believe. If a precedent is set, we can expect to see all kinds of extreme religious garb appearing in the workplace and all kinds of demands for special privileges for people who claim exemptions on the grounds of their 'faith'."

Commenting on the Ladele case, Sanderson said: "Had Ms Ladele's case succeeded it would have completely undermined equal treatment under the law for gay people and unlocked the floodgates to many other damaging challenges to equality legislation. Her demands that anyone following their religious conscience be exempt from the law to which everyone else is subject were unreasonable, and I am pleased that the courts have recognised this."

Couple the Ladele and Eweida cases with a growing number of reports of people being denied the contraceptive or "morning after" pills by "devout" pharmacy workers, and a disturbing pattern begins to emerge.

Last month I posted a piece on the *Freethinker* blog about the Lloyds Pharmacy chain. Under the headline *Why does this company employ religious nutters who won't do their jobs properly?* I drew attention to two separate incidents in which customers had been refused contraceptive and "morning after" pills by religious staff. The first refusal had been made by an unidentified Muslim. The second came from an unnamed staff member whose religious affiliation was kept secret.

A large number of blog visitors expressed outrage over the report, but one comment by Tom Rees pretty much summed up what most thought. "I think we do need to complain. But the people to complain to are the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. They are the licensed body that determines what pharmacists can and can't do. They have a code of conduct that specifically approves this kind of behaviour. Unless we get that changed, then we're huffing and puffing to no effect."



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Airport prayer room 'insults the memory John Lennon'

A man who describes himself as a "militant atheist" was found guilty last month of leaving "grossly offensive religious images" in a prayer room at Liverpool's John Lennon airport.

Jurors, who all swore their oath on the Bible, took just 15 minutes to convict Harry Taylor, 59, of leaving obscene material depicting figures from Christianity and Islam, often in sexual poses, in the multi-faith room with the intention of causing harassment and alarm.

Taylor admitted placing the items in the prayer room on three separate occasions, but insisted he was simply practising his own religion of "reason and rationality".

Taylor told jurors he had left the items in the room in memory of "his hero" John Lennon before reciting the words from the song Imagine.

He said: "The airport is named after one of my heroes and his view on religion was pretty much the same as mine. I thought it was an insult to his memory to have a prayer room in his airport."

Giving evidence in his own defence, Taylor admitted being "strongly anti-religious" after being treated badly by the Catholic brothers as a boy growing up in Dublin.

But he insisted that people would only be offended if their faith was "weak" and that the images were meant as satire.

But the jury of ten women and two men all rejected his defence.

They had heard from airport chaplain Nicky Lees who told of her alarm after finding the images.

She said: "I was insulted, deeply offended and I was alarmed."

As the unanimous verdicts were delivered, smartly-dressed Taylor simply raised an eyebrow, but showed no other emotion.

Taylor, of Griffin Street, Salford, Greater Manchester, declined to comment after his conviction on all three counts of religiously aggravated intentional harassment, alarm or distress. The offences were committed in 2008.

Neville Biddle, prosecuting, who had told Liverpool Crown Court jurors they were



Harry Taylor's hero, the late John Lennon

acting as the "conscience of our society" revealed Taylor already had two convictions from May 18, 2006 for using abusive, insulting words or behaviour.

He told how on that occasion Taylor had left similar offensive material in St Anne's Church in the centre of Manchester. When he was arrested sexual cartoons were found in his possession.

Judge Charles James said he wanted to know all the details from Taylor's previous convictions. He also ordered a pre-sentence report to be prepared on him, but gave no indication of the sentence.

The judge granted Taylor bail until sentencing on April 23 with a condition not to enter John Lennon airport.

US man arrested for 'Elton John must die' protest

A CHRISTIAN fundamentalist in the US was arrested last month and charged with criminal defamation, making terrorist threats, and disseminating threats through the internet after he posted an "Elton John must die" video on YouTube.

Neil Horsley, 65, who claims he is running for Governor of Georgia, didn't actually call for the pop star's assassination, but simply said when Elton John recently suggested that Jesus Christ might have been gay, he risked "the wrath of God".

The singer said in a magazine interview: "I think Jesus was a compassionate, super-intelligent gay man who understood human problems."

In a fit of fatwa envy, Horsley – who is also a fierce anti-abortionist – said that if John had blasphemed against Islam, a death sentence would have been issued. "[But] we are not taking out a fatwa, we're reminding him that God literally killed people for lying."

Horsley said that John's remarks in effect say: "The Lord Jesus Christ has perverted sex in order to reach orgasm ... he achieves orgasm by receiving men's penises in his anal orifice, or by sucking other men's penises."

In the video shot outside John's Atlanta



Neil Horsley, who had sex with a mule

flat, Horsley raged: "What Elton John has done is desecrate the image of the Lord Jesus Christ."

News of Horsley's arrest prompted us to use the internet to learn more about his background.

This produced an interesting result. In 2005, *New Hounds* reported that "anti-abortion extremist" Horsley had been a guest on *The Alan Colmes Show*, a FOX News radio programme. The topic was an interesting one – whether or not an internet service provider should allow Horsley to post the names of abortion doctors on his website. Horsley does that as a way of targeting them and one doctor had been killed.

In the course of the interview, Colmes asked

Horsley about his background, including a statement that he had admitted engaging in homosexual and bestiality sex.

AC: "You had sex with animals?"

NH: "Absolutely. I was a fool. When you grow up on a farm in Georgia, your first girlfriend is a mule."

AC: "I'm not so sure that that is so."

NH: "You didn't grow up on a farm in Georgia, did you?"

AC: "Are you suggesting that everybody who grows up on a farm in Georgia has a mule as a girlfriend?"

NH: It has historically been the case. You people are so far removed from the reality ... Welcome to domestic life on the farm ..."

Colmes said he thought there were a lot of people in the audience who grew up on farms, are living on farms now, raising kids on farms and "and I don't think they are dating Elsie right now. You know what I'm saying?"

Horsley said, "You experiment with anything that moves when you are growing up sexually."

"You're naive. You know better than that ... If it's warm and it's damp and it vibrates you might in fact have sex with it."



‘The Roman Catholic Church is headed by a mediocre Bavarian bureaucrat once tasked with the concealment of the foulest iniquity, whose ineptitude in that job now shows him to us as a man personally and professionally responsible for enabling a filthy wave of crime. Ratzinger himself may be banal, but his whole career has the stench of evil ...’

– Christopher Hitchens, writing in Slate magazine last month

Vatican battles to deflect criticism

psychological abuse.”

In another attempt to deflect attention away from the abuse scandal, three Irish RC bishops last month attacked Ireland’s Civil Partnership bill which they described as an “extraordinary” attack on freedom of conscience and religion. Speaking at a press conference, bishops John McArdagh, Denis Brennan and Christopher Jones said they were “very concerned” about the Bill becoming law.

The Irish Civil Partnership Bill goes even further than UK legislation as it lays out fines and a potential prison sentence for registrars who refuse to carry out same-sex civil partnerships.

It would grant welfare and tax benefits on a par with marriage to homosexual couples who enter a civil partnership.

The Bill also contains new rights for cohabiting couples, whether same-sex or heterosexual.

Bishop Jones, who is chairman of the Bishops’ Committee for Family and Children said he was worried that the Civil Partnership Bill “is going to undermine marriage by conferring all the rights on same-sex unions as marriage, equating same-sex union to marriage itself.”

The bishops made clear that marriage means the union of a man and woman, saying: “Same-sex relationships, by their very nature, cannot be considered equal to marriage or almost equal to marriage.”

They also said it was a grave injustice if the State ignores the unique and proper place of husbands and wives, the place of mothers and fathers, and especially the rights of children, who deserve from society a clear understanding of marriage as they grow to sexual maturity.

Their complaints were voiced just days before a Brazilian Catholic priest, Father Marques Barbosa, 82, was relieved of his pastoral duties after a TV channel, in an investigation of clerical sex abuse in Brazil, showed recent footage of him having sex



NSS President Terry Sanderson delivers the ‘Make the Pope Pay’ petition to Downing Street

with a 19-year-old altar boy

The bishops also warned of the wide-ranging effects of prosecution for refusing to carry out same-sex civil partnerships. They said: “Christians, Jews and Muslims or anyone else who refuses to make halls and other facilities available for a celebration or reception connected with a same-sex partnership will face prosecution and fines.”

Last month Irish Justice Minister Dermot Ahern said that Irish registrars would not be given conscience opt-outs on religious grounds for conducting same-sex civil partnerships.

But Seymour Crawford TD, speaking for the opposition, said many religious groups “are genuinely worried about the situation and cannot understand why we cannot allow a level of freedom in this area.”

However, in December the Evangelical Alliance in Ireland controversially said that Christians should support the Civil Partnership Bill. Evangelical Alliance Ireland is a distinct organisation from evangelical alliances in other countries such as the UK. Its General Director, Sean Mullan, claimed in a statement at the time: “The Government is seeking to legislate for greater justice and fairness for co-habiting couples, both same-sex and opposite-sex couples. As Christians we should support that stance.”

There can be no doubt that when Pope Ratzinger comes to the UK later this year, the scandals will overshadow his controversial state visit. There are, after all, a great many

individuals and organisations in Britain working hard to ensure that the Church is reminded time and again over the coming months of its despicable crimes against children.

Last month representatives of the National Secular Society delivered a 28,000-name petition to Downing Street, requesting that the cost of the Pope’s trip to Britain be borne by the Church rather than the taxpayer.

The delegation from the NSS – including President Terry Sand-

erson, Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood, Council members Elizabeth O’Casey, Gerard Phillips and staff members Tessa Kendall and Stephen Evans – presented the petition with a covering letter to Gordon Brown calling on him to downgrade the visit to “pastoral” so that the Church is made responsible for the estimated £20-million cost.

Another petition, organised by human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell, asks Gordon Brown “to disassociate the British government from the Pope’s intolerant views”, and urges the Prime Minister to make it clear that his government disagrees with the Pope’s opposition to women’s reproductive rights, gay equality, embryonic stem-cell research and the use of condoms to prevent the spread of HIV.”

It continues: “We ask the Prime Minister to express his disagreement with the Pope’s role in the cover-up of child sex abuse by Catholic clergy, his rehabilitation of the Holocaust-denying bishop Richard Williamson, and his decree paving the way for the beatification and sainthood of the wartime Pope, Pius XII, who stands accused of failing to speak out against the Holocaust. We also request the Prime Minister to assure us that the Pope’s visit will not be financed by the British taxpayer.

The deadline for signing the petition is October 2, 2010. Please add your name to it at <http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/ProtestthePope/>

Pressure in Britain mounts for an assisted suicide inquiry

The death last month of Vicki Wood, 67, at an assisted suicide clinic in Switzerland, has led to further demands by euthanasia campaigners for an independent inquiry to consider the law on assisted dying because the present law does not reflect public opinion.

The former health secretary Patricia Hewitt, MP and patron of Dignity in Dying, said it was currently left to a “few individuals and the courts to force the pace of change” on the issue. She said people with a terminal illness who want to end their lives had little choice.

In an adjournment debate in the Commons in March, Hewitt said: “For some people – more than 100 Britons since 2002 – the answer lies in a visit to the Dignitas clinic in Switzerland. For others, help might come from their doctor – sometimes, but not always, acting within the present law.”

Research had shown that one in 500 deaths in the UK was the result of voluntary euthanasia, involving a criminal act, she added.

“Other desperate people find that they have to refuse food and water, a wretched process, in order to exercise some control over when and how they die. And each year, a number of terminally ill people – it is impossible to say how many – resort in desperation to violent, lonely and often botched suicides.”

Her comments follow guidelines set out by the director of public prosecutions, suggesting it is unlikely that someone would be prosecuted for assisting if they acted out of compassion. The law on mercy killing, however, is far from clear. In January, a judge criticised the prosecution service for pursuing Kay Gilderdale, who was acquitted of the attempted murder of her daughter, Lynn, an ME sufferer, after pleading guilty to assisted suicide.

Frances Inglis was jailed for a minimum nine years for murder after injecting her brain-damaged son, Tom, with a lethal dose of heroin.

And last month radio presenter Ray Gosling was released from police custody after he had confessed to killing a young lover 20 years ago who was suffering from AIDS. The 70-year-old was released on bail and without charge after being interviewed five times by detectives investigating the death.

Vicki Wood was convicted of trying to kill her husband Tim – “the love of her life” – in an act of mercy more than a decade ago. Mr

Wood had irreversible dementia and, later, Parkinson’s disease. Vicki, a toymaker and artist from Totnes, Devon, was spared jail in 1999 after admitting his attempted murder. She was put on probation for two years and banned from seeing her husband alone for the rest of his life. He died nine months later.

Vicki was suffering an undisclosed debilitating illness.

Her death came shortly after two major new polls revealed that a large majority of British people either “strongly agree” or “tend to agree” that a mentally-competent adult should be legally allowed to receive a doctor’s assistance to die if they are suffering unbearably from a terminal illness from which they are expected to die within six months.

More than 80 percent of people questioned in a YouGov poll for the *Daily Telegraph* said relatives of terminally ill people, who had made it clear they wanted to die, should not be prosecuted.

Three-quarters of those polled said the law should be amended to allow assisted suicide, a crime currently punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

According to a poll by ComRes, carried out for the BBC’s *Panorama* programme,

Chorister lined up rent boys for senior official in the Vatican

ANGELO Balducci, a Gentleman of His Holiness, was recently caught by police on a wiretap allegedly negotiating with Thomas Chinedu Ehiem, a 29-year-old Vatican chorister, over the specific physical details of men he wanted brought to him.

Transcripts in the possession of the *Guardian* suggest that numerous men may have been procured for Balducci, at least one of whom was studying for the priesthood.

Balducci was arrested on February 10, suspected of involvement in widespread corruption. A senior Italian government official, he is alleged to have steered public works contracts towards favoured bidders.



Vicki Wood

73 percent of people agreed that family or friends should not fear prosecution if they help a loved one to die.

The latest poll results were published last month by the Society for Old Age Rational Suicide (SOARS), a group which was formed two months ago to campaign to get the law changed so that elderly, mentally competent individuals, who are suffering unbearably from health problems, are allowed to receive a doctor’s help to commit suicide, if this is their persistent request.

The poll also shows that 67 per cent either “strongly agree” or “tend to agree” that very elderly, but rational, people who are suffering unbearably from health problems should be able to have a doctor’s assisted suicide – even if they are not terminally ill.

Dr Michael Irwin, the coordinator of SOARS and a former chairman of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, said of this finding: “This is a far greater percentage than I had imagined – now there should be serious discussion, in the UK, about helping this group of individuals, in addition to the present debate on doctor-assisted suicide for those who are terminally ill.”

One of SOARS’ main aims is to get society to re-evaluate the word “suicide”. Dr Irwin said: “Today, many shy away from this word. Antagonism to ‘suicide’ dates back mainly to previous centuries when religious influences decided that the act was sinful.

“We want to reclaim it now as being a rational and positive act for a mentally competent, very elderly individual who has carefully considered the main pros and cons for wanting to stay alive.”

But Niall Gooch, a spokesman for Life, the pro-life and anti-abortion charity, said: “Because this is such a complex issue, polling is of limited value. Policy makers should beware of polling.”

Muslim hatred of Jews reaches epide

Disturbing reports emerging from Sweden and Norway indicate that levels of anti-semitism have reached epidemic proportions, and that Jews are having to leave certain areas for fear of abuse and physical attacks.

Last year, the focus was on Malmö in Sweden, where the Muslim population now stands at around a quarter of the population, but now there are reports that anti-semitism has spread to Oslo in Norway.

An American TV channel last March linked its report on anti-semitism to a riot that erupted when 6,000 “Muslims, leftists

and anarchists” protested against a Davis Cup tennis match between Sweden and Israel. Hundreds of protesters attacked police.

Sweden’s third largest city, said the report, sits just across the water from Copenhagen, Denmark. To visitors, Malmö, with a population of 260,000, “seems quiet, nice, maybe a little boring; in other words, quintessentially Swedish. But under the surface, Malmö has serious problems.”

Massive immigration has made Malmö today one quarter Muslim, and stands to transform it into a Muslim majority city within just a few decades. “One of the most popular baby names is not Sven,” said the

report, “but Mohammed. Pork has been taken off some school menus. Want to learn to drive? You can attend Malmö’s own ‘Jihad Driving School.’”

But despite Malmö’s usually placid appearance, this experiment in multiculturalism has not gone well. In the Rosengård section of Malmö, a housing project made up primarily of immigrants, fire and emergency workers will no longer enter without police protection.

Unemployment in Rosengård is reported to be 70 percent. An immigrant-fuelled crime wave affects one of every three Malmö families each year. The number of rapes has tripled in 20 years.

Swede Ted Ekeroth saw Arabs throwing rocks at a 90-year-old Holocaust survivor

But Malmö has been so accommodating toward immigrant Muslims that a local Muslim politician, Adly Abu Hajar, has declared that “The best Islamic state is Sweden!”

The report continued: “Don’t ask Malmö’s Jews to give the city the same glowing assessment. Jews who dare walk the streets wearing their yarmulkes risk being beaten up.”

“It’s true. Jews cannot walk the streets of Malmö and show that they’re Jews,” said Lars Hedegaard.

Hedegaard lives across the water from Malmö in Copenhagen, Denmark, where he was a columnist for one of Denmark’s largest newspapers. He says pro-Israel demonstrations in Malmö, like the ones during the recent fighting in Gaza, were met with rocks, bottles and pipe bombs from Arabs and Leftists.

“I was there for the demonstration – a pro-Israeli demonstration with about 400 or 500 people, Jews and non-Jews” Hedegaard said. “I came over to cover it. The police allowed, I’d say 100 Palestinians or Arabs to shout and threaten and throw bombs and rockets at us. A homemade bomb landed about ten yards from me, and went off with a big bang. And now of course, I thought the police were going to jump these guys, get them out of the way. They didn’t. They just let them stand there.”

Swede Ted Ekeroth helped film the Arab-Left counter-demonstrations. He saw Arabs

An Islamic terrorist in the making: Walid, aged six

THE six-year-old son of a Colorado nursing student who ran off to Europe to join a terrorist murder cell was brainwashed into a hate-filled Islamic fundamentalist zombie, his family said last month.

“He said that Christians will burn in hellfire,” the child’s grandmother, Christine Mott, told the *New York Post*. “That’s what they are teaching this baby.”

The boy’s mom, Jamie Paulin-Ramirez, 31, converted to Islam over the last year. Her family said she struck up an Internet friendship with another Colorado radical, Najibullah Zazi, an al Qaeda associate who pleaded guilty last month in a plot to set off bombs in the New York subway system.

Her conversion was so complete, Paulin-Ramirez changed her son’s name from Christian to the Islamic name Walid after enrolling him in a fire-breathing Muslim school in Ireland.

The terror mom’s stepfather, George Mott, said he talked by phone once with the boy at the school and the boy said: “We are building pipes [pipe bombs], like the Fourth of July!”

Paulin-Ramirez ditched her life in the Rocky Mountain city of Leadville, Colorado, last September, and allegedly joined a small group of radical Islamists in Ireland who planned to claim a \$100,000 al Qaeda bounty by killing a Swedish cartoonist who drew the prophet Mohammed as a dog.

She was arrested in a series of raids in the cities of Waterford and Cork, along with other members of the group. They included Colleen LaRose, 46, of Pennsylvania, another blonde American woman who called herself “Jihad Jane” and has been in custody since October.

The Colorado woman’s parents believe she was recruited by LaRose, who they say introduced her to her Algerian husband.

Paulin-Ramirez was released by Irish authorities last month, although charges may still be forthcoming, said a spokesman for the Irish police.

Mott said that she became estranged from her daughter who sank into a radical Islamic lifestyle. George Mott, himself a Muslim convert who speaks Arabic, said that once as he talked to the boy on the phone, he could hear a Jihadi recruitment tape playing in the background talking of death to Zionists and Americans.



Islamic fundamentalist Colleen LaRose, who calls herself ‘Jihad Jane’

epidemic levels in Norway and Sweden

throwing rocks at a 90-year-old Holocaust survivor.

"I filmed the police chief and asked him why are they not reacting to this," Ekeroth said. "Why are they not doing anything? And he simply answered, 'It's their right according to the Swedish constitution.' They come and they shout different slogans," he continued. "It can be everything from Arabic slogans inciting killing of Jews to, in Swedish and Danish, 'Kill the Jews'."

The immigrant issue is a big reason the right-wing Swedish Democrats are the fastest growing political party in the country.

Matthias Karlsson is the Swedish Democrats' Press Secretary. He said: "In many parts of Sweden, people are fed up. They're being pushed too far and they want to make a stand."

Erik Almqvist is national youth leader for the Swedish Democrats. He said: "The media has tried to portray us as extremists, racists. People think we're almost inhuman."

Hedegaard says as Malmö goes, so goes the rest of Sweden.

"I think the best prediction is that Sweden will have a Muslim majority by 2049, so we know where that country's going," he said.

Last month, the Norwegian Broadcasting Network (NRK) reported that Jews in Malmö are having to leave there – due in part to Mayor Ilmar Keepalu's lack of interest in tackling the problem of anti-Semitism.

The report then examined the situation in Norwegian schools, where many students who come from Muslim backgrounds are openly anti-semitic, going even so far as to speak approvingly of the Koran supporting the murder of Jews.

The governments in both Sweden and Norway appear to be entirely powerless to stop the trend, and have apparently resigned themselves to the fact that their own Jewish communities will some day soon become extinct.

Examining the situation in Norway, NRK found widespread anti-semitic attitudes among Norwegian Muslims. NRK interviewed many Jewish parents who told how their children were being targeted.

A Jewish father, who did not want to be identified for fear of reprisals, recounted an incident in which his son was accosted by a gang of older boys:

They asked: "Are you a Jew?". When he said "yes" they threatened to drag him into the woods and hang him. The family moved to another district, but experienced



In 2008, Muslims set fire to buildings in Malmö when a landlord decided not to renew the lease of a basement that was being used as a mosque. Cars and garbage bins were also set ablaze and stones were thrown at police in violent clashes over a two-day period

intimidation there too.

NRK spoke to teachers at schools that had Muslim students. The teachers who agreed to speak did so only on condition that they were not identified.

Teacher 1, female: "Praising Hitler for what he did to the Jews is common among Muslim students at my school. The worst thing about this is that Jew-hatred has now been completely legitimised among large groups of pupils with a Muslim background."

Teacher 2, male: "I see a Jew-hatred, especially in social studies lessons. Students say the Jews control everything, the entire West is controlled by Jews. Several also said that they admire Hitler because he killed

Jews. Jews, they say, orchestrated the 9/11 attack. In my class if someone says they support terrorism, there are some who protest. But if someone expresses Jew-hatred, no one protests."

Teacher 3, female: "Several students sneer when I talk about the Holocaust. A boy stood up and commanded me to stop talking about Jews and the Holocaust. Most of these kids are born and raised in Norway. I find it shocking that it's possible to grow up in Norway with such attitudes."

Teacher 4 male: "'Fucking Jew' is a heavily used term of abuse during school hours. Had I been a Jew, I would have felt it very offensive. These statements are a big problem."

Islamic radicals jailed for plotting terror attacks on German soil

FOUR Muslim radicals who plotted to blow up US military installations, airports and nightclubs in the Frankfurt area were jailed for between 5 and 12 years last month for planning "a terrible blood-bath involving an incalculable number of deaths".

Sentencing Fritz Gelowicz, Daniel Schneider, Adem Yilmaz, and Atilla Selek in a bomb-proof Düsseldorf courtroom, Judge Ottmar Breidling said: "There has never been an attack on such a scale on German soil." The men were planning to bring the Islamic holy war to Europe and create explosions that would have been several times more destructive than the London Tube bombs of July 7, 2005, he added. They had collected about 750kg (1,650lb) of hydrogen peroxide – the same explosive used in the London attack – had arranged for detonators and had scouted out targets.

The group, which had contacts with the Uzbek-based Islamic Jihad Union, was arrested in 2007. When the trial began the men – Muslim converts Gelowicz and Schneider and two German Turks – were defiant, refusing to stand up for the judge. The leader of the group, Gelowicz, 30, and Schneider, 24, the quartermaster responsible for buying the chemicals, were jailed for 12 years.

Gelowicz, Schneider and Adem Yilmaz, 31, attended a training camp in the township of Mir Ali in northern Waziristan, Afghanistan.

Yilmaz, who was jailed for 11 years, was responsible for financing the operation.

ARABS AND JEWS

Israel's road to a second Holocaust

Israel's colonialist expansion and treatment of the Palestinians is now worse than Apartheid was in South Africa and could, in the long term, be more of a threat to the Jews themselves than Nazism was, writes **GRAHAM LIVINGSTONE**

It is of course more than understandable that the international community wanted to help the Jews in the aftermath of Nazism and its millions of Jewish victims. However, 65 years later, the time is now more than overdue for those of us worldwide with any compassion or respect for human rights to take a long, hard look at the monstrous situation that has been created in the Middle East, its assault on natural justice and its potential for catastrophe on an unimaginable scale, possibly including the virtual liquidation of the Israelis. Since nearly 40 percent of the world's Jews now live in Israel it would not be possible to exaggerate the scale of the potential threat.

However well-intentioned the founding of the state of Israel may have been, the final irony is that, a mere 15 years or so before the beginning of the crumbling of the white colonial empires in Africa and the end of segregation in the United States, a Jewish colony was established on land inhabited mainly by Palestinians.

However much the Jews suffered under Hitler, two lessons of history that should have been abundantly clear were ignored:

- Colonial powers always subjugate, destitute and victimise indigenous populations
- The colonialist's predominant religion will always encourage them to feel righteous about the atrocities they commit against native populations.

Very often this leads to the virtual extermination of the original inhabitants of a colonised area, for example the North American tribes and the Australian aborigines, with the few survivors being grossly marginalised in the lands of their forefathers.

Even when they are not largely exterminated, however, they are invariably reduced to at best helotry and at worst slavery, examples being the Africans and Indians in the days of the British and French empires, the South Americans under the Spanish and Portuguese, the

Tibetans under the Chinese, and so on.

Empire builders do not, of course, perceive themselves as purveyors of evil. The British, French and Spaniards naturally thought they were bringing the benefits of Christianity to the Heathens. When the Spaniards, however, cut one foot off each man in a village to prevent escape or when the conquerors of North America deliberately infected the natives with smallpox to cause an epidemic they found nothing in the Bible to suggest that such behaviour might be wrong.

The fact that Israel purports to be a secular democracy makes the moral culpability of that country greater, not less

Similarly, when the Dutch and British invaders gradually colonised the whole of what is present-day South Africa, they believed they had God on their side and that their conquests were due to their following of the Bible – they conveniently overlooked that the real reason for their success was that they had guns.

When Adolf Hitler died, he left behind him more than one legacy.

One of these, as South Africa under the Apartheid government (and the God-fearing folk of America's Deep South) were eventually forced to recognise, was an abhorrence of legalised discrimination on racial lines.

However, most, if not all, religions believe that their own adherents, being the only true followers of God, are nearer to God than their rivals are. It follows therefore that they regard followers of

other religions – and of course atheists – as further from God than they are.

Since Christians and Hebrews believe that man was created in God's image, they are perilously close to believing that those that differ from them are less human than they are – even if they do not generally express this as crudely as the Nazis did. Since anti-Semitism – and discrimination against blacks – are now finally virtually beyond the pale, this has led (I suspect) to a search for new targets for at best abuse and at worst dehumanisation.

Sadly, it seems that Muslims have become the chief one.

How else does one explain the almost complete indifference of the ordinary citizens of countries like Israel, the USA and the UK to the appalling events in Iraq, Afghanistan and Gaza?

(We read virtually on a daily basis that eight, ten, 12 or even 20 members of one family including several children have been killed by yet another misdirected (?) American drone or Israeli bomb, yet most of us are totally unmoved – who cares what happens to ragheads and wogs who do not read the Bible? On the other hand, when one coffin returns to an RAF base, a multitude lines the streets to weep.)

Another legacy that Hitler left is the theory that the Jews have suffered more than anyone else, and that anyone who criticises Israel or Zionism or the Hebrew religion is an anti-Semite or at best a fellow-traveller.

This totally ignores the fact that the majority of Hitler's victims were not Jewish. (And also incidentally that the Hebrew, Christian and Islamic religions have virtually identical prejudices, even if there is sometimes a difference of degree, but that is beyond the scope of this particular article.)

It is generally accepted that the Nazis murdered about six million Jews and this is a statistic that almost any reasonably well-informed person would be able to quote.

However, if one were to ask how many Russians died during the Second World War very few people would be able to answer that 25 million did. (Others again would simply care less about the Russians – at least partly due to a perception among religious people that the Russians, all being Communists and atheists, simply did not matter as much. Actually, there were more Christians left in Russia even after Stalin than there were members of the Communist party, but this is glossed over.) Even fewer would know how many Poles, gypsies or homosexuals died.

The perception is – though it is the prejudice that dares not speak its name – that only Jews matter.

I now wish to make a few points about the demonising of Muslims, which has assumed terrible proportions recently. (Not just since the attack on the World Trade Centre, which I suspect was merely a convenient excuse, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq having probably been planned earlier by the colonialists in Number 10 and the White House.)

Muslims have in fact become the new Jews: it is somehow OK to vilify them, even in countries which regard themselves as generally tolerant, such as France, the UK and the Netherlands. (To give only one example – no-one would ever suggest that there was no such thing as a moderate or tolerant Christian, while one frequently hears that all Muslims are bigoted fanatics – as if it were humanly possible for one-and-a-half billion people ALL to be extremists!)

Since Hitler, and very probably in most countries even earlier, almost no-one would dare suggest to any audience that Jews ought not to wear yamulkas or the attire favoured by the ultra-orthodox communities in places like Stamford Hill in north London. Also, anything which they chose to attach to one of their places of worship would be above criticism. And quite rightly so!

However, recently we have seen the construction of minarets on mosques actually outlawed in Switzerland, while moves are being made in France to ban Muslim women wearing orthodox Islamic dress from being seen in public – or at best, from visiting certain public places.

Compare the muted response to these appalling attacks on Muslim freedom to worship with the outcry that would greet any similar moves against the Hebrew or any other religion!

Are orthodox Muslim women expected to be totally housebound?



Orthodox Jews in London supporting a Free Palestine rally. But according to First Light Forum, an anti-Semitic website, "anti-Zionist Jews in London who protest at what they call the 'Zionist state' in Israel do so in order that the Jews will appear to be divided into good and bad, and hence can't be dealt with by the gentiles as one unit of criminals as they ought to be."

(And I have read hardly a word of compassion for the women themselves in all the acres of newsprint I have seen on the subject!)

In addition, Muslims and Muslim places of worship are frequently attacked in the UK – and these shameful events get very little media attention. (Neither does the police kicking in doors in dawn raids on the homes of Muslim families to arrest a teenager who caused a bit of damage in a coffee shop several months earlier and handcuffing their parents as if they were dealing with suicide bombers. The fact that most terrorism in the UK is committed by Christians in Northern Ireland is also glossed over.)

To return to Israel, which, far from being a helpless little state where the Zionists ask for nothing more than to live in peace, has colonised areas as vastly beyond her 1967 borders, is a regional superpower, boasts the world's fourth largest armed forces, bristles with nuclear weapons and is supported slavishly by the world's most powerful society, as well as enjoying the craven support of the UK and EU.

It has progressively colonised virtually the entire area once populated by the Palestinian people, is a constant threat to neighbours such as Lebanon and Syria and is now making blood-curdling threats against Iran. (This is closer to Nazi expansionism than to Apartheid.)

Anyone who makes direct comparisons

between Israel and even the former South African government, however, of which it was in any event a close ally, is automatically accused of being an anti-Semite. However, as one who grew up in a dissident South African family during that era, I have no hesitation whatsoever in saying that what Israel has done to the people of Gaza and the West Bank – and even to Palestinians in Israel itself, who face very severe discrimination – is much worse than Apartheid and in fact far closer to Nazism.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, after visiting the West Bank, commented: "It reminded me so much of what happened to us black people in South Africa", while the former ANC cabinet minister Ronnie Kasrils said: "Don't insult Apartheid. This is far worse!"

South Africa did not erect whites-only roads, refuse blacks access to water, (or sell it to blacks at double the price whites paid), cordon off one-and-a-half million people in an area no bigger than a London borough, deliberately bomb ambulances and heavily populated civilian areas, use terrible illegal weapons, force black women to give birth at checkpoints or shoot farmers trying to tend their crops in buffer zones.

All these atrocities and more have been committed against the Palestinians by Is-

(Continued on p10)

The secret o

JOHN RADFORD challenges Jack Straw's belief that the religious e

For some time now I have not bought a regular daily paper. Why spend good money, I feel, to be regularly angered and/or depressed. But I happened to see *The Times* of January 15, 2010. Sure enough, an article had the usual effect. It was by the Right Honourable (mysterious title) Jack Straw, Justice Secretary and Labour MP for Bolton.

He praises Tauheedul Islam Girls High School Blackburn, third best in the country for exam results, with 98 per cent of pupils getting five or more good GCSEs including English and Maths. The school began as a private venture 25 years ago and became state funded three years ago. It is not in a wealthy area. What's its secret? There is no secret. Instead, as its chairman of governors, Kam Kothia, puts it, it has "a perfect combination – committed parents, committed students and, crucially, personalised learning". Indeed this is no secret. The formula has been known to good teachers, I am confident, since schools were invented. Certainly it has been repeatedly described

over centuries, and latterly has been supported by ample research.

But it has nothing whatever to do with Islam or any religion. In highly religious societies, most if not all schools have perforce been religious, but the "combination" works whether they are or not. But this will not do for Mr Straw. He goes on: "Yes, the faith of the school does make a big difference. An Ofsted report in 2006 praised not only its academic achievement but its spiritual and moral ethos. 'The commitment to excellence and the values of Islam, which are at the heart of the school, shine out in many ways', it said."

Well, again, commitment to excellence marks every good school, religious or not. We are not told what the values of Islam are. There are many fine ones. But absolutely fundamental is the belief that "There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his messenger". Since this is patently nonsense, it is hardly something on which to base an education. There are many hundreds of gods, and have been many hundreds more now vanished. All have been figments of

the human imagination, and none therefore has had a messenger, though many people have fancied they were such.

On the other hand, if you accept the belief, it is made quite specific that denying the sole existence of Allah is the greatest of sins, the one he will never forgive. The vast majority of people in Britain are not Muslims, and presumably would not give much credence to the doctrine. Christians (of whom Mr Straw himself is one) specifically deny it, since Jesus Christ is also God. Does Tauheedul School teach that they will all end up in hell? "As to those who reject faith, I will punish them with terrible agony in this world and hereafter" (Koran 3.56). Does it teach other Islamic values, such as the divine command to maintain capital punishment? It cannot even be questioned, since it is part of God's word. What about the position of women? "Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other" (4.34). "A man shall inherit twice as much as a female" (4.11). Or jihad: "Believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around

Israel's road to a second Holocaust

rael – which, as we are told time and again, is the only democracy in the Middle East.

The fact that Israel purports to be a secular democracy, however, makes the moral culpability of that country greater, not less. If Israel is a democracy, that means that the Israelis could vote their right-wing government out and elect a peace-loving one which would work towards a genuine two-state solution. The Israeli electorate has however chosen not to do so. (Unlike what eventually happened in South Africa, where the white electorate effectively voted for change in a referendum which was the last all-White poll.)

Also, Israel boasts a huge advantage over the Apartheid government in South Africa in that world opinion has been far slower to even begin to wake up to its cruelties and idiocies and collectively decide to bring pressure to bear on it to effect change.

The Israelis are effectively at best left to carry on regardless and at worst actively supported by the Western powers, with opposition left to civilian pressure groups and charities – including, to their consid-

erable credit, many Jews, some of whom have marched shoulder-to-shoulder with Palestinians, pacifists and trade-unionists on the streets of London.

Meanwhile the majority of the Israelis have blood on their hands. They are colonists emboldened by the craven cowardice of the Western powers, which connive at everything they do.

As for the future, Israel's behaviour is in the worst possible interests of the Jewish people themselves. It is a small country, virtually surrounded by predominantly Islamic states with vastly larger populations. At present, some of these are in the American/ UK/EU sphere of influence, but only because they have oil to sell.

To the Israelis, I say think long and hard. Consider what may happen when Saudi Arabia and the other Middle Eastern client states no longer have oil -- but still share a powerful religion with the people of Palestine.

Look ahead to the day – which will come – when emerging powers like China, India and Brazil are more powerful than

the USA, if not individually, than certainly collectively.

Remember what happened when that other powerful regional bully South Africa invaded Angola – and found itself up against Russian jet fighters flown by Cubans. (And think again about the wisdom of attacking Iran.)

Look to the day when climate change and population pressures cause resource wars, not just about oil as in Iraq, but about food and water as well.

Consider what might happen if America's war-mongering in Pakistan leads to an Islamic revolution in that nuclear-armed country, not a million miles from Israel.

Ask yourselves what will happen when, like South Africa, you have run out of powerful friends in the international community.

Consider who will take you in if you are forced into a second Exodus.

Mend your ways in your own interest, before the area between the Jordan river and the Mediterranean sea foams with your blood.

et of success

religious ethos of a school can contribute a great deal to its success

you" (9.23). Or theft: "As to the thief, male or female, cut off his or her hands' (5.38). And many more.

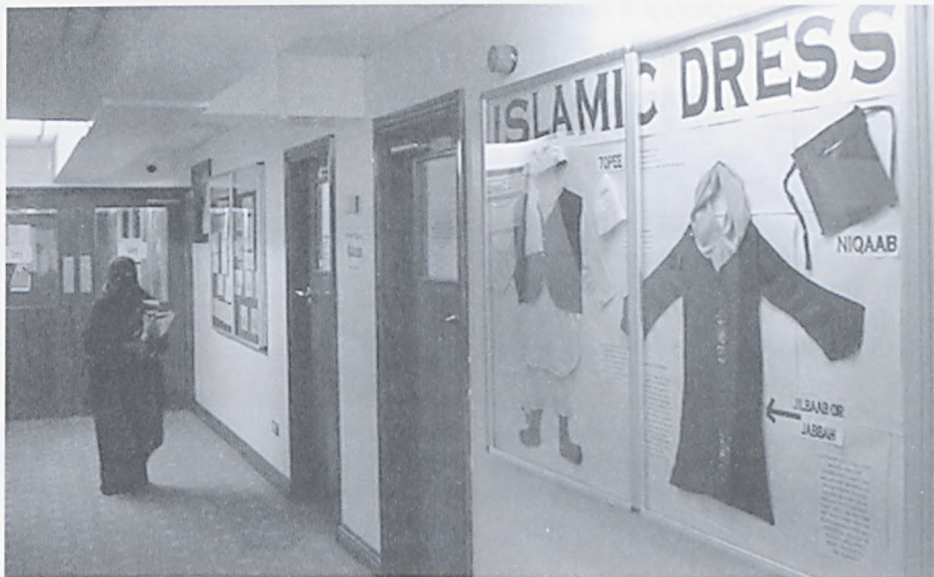
I have no doubt that at Tauheedul they do what religious people usually do, that is pick out the nice bits of their doctrines and ignore the rest as far as possible. But I suppose the pupils must be taught that the whole of Allah's message is true and eternal. They cannot be Muslims otherwise.

There is, Mr Straw tells us, another factor in Tauheedul's success. It is (naturally) an all-girls school. "As every parent knows, while boys tend to do better in mixed schools, girls tend to do better when learning with other girls." How does he know what all parents think? Has he asked them all? The first part is rather dubious, it may derive from some research in the 1970s which reported such an effect, but has not been widely supported.

There is quite a lot of evidence for the academic superiority of single-sex schools in general, though firm conclusions are difficult due to the complexity of other factors; for example, in the UK at least, only about one in a hundred children attend single-sex state schools. Parents who go to the trouble of finding such schools may be more supportive in other ways also.

If Mr Straw's claim were true, however, it would present an insoluble dilemma, since if all girls went to female schools, boys could not attend mixed ones. But in any case, this factor too has nothing to do with faith. If girls, or boys, do better at single-sex schools, it is regardless of whether the schools are religious or not.

We are also told that "Catholic, Anglican and Jewish schools generally perform better than non-faith schools" We are not offered any proof that this superiority is due to the faith, and the evidence suggests strongly that it is not. For example, a very thorough study of primary schools by Stephen Gibbons and Olmo Silvia of the London School of Economics in 2009 concludes "We find that most, if not all, of the observed educational advantage of faith schools is due to non-random selection of higher ability and better-background children into schools that have autonomous admissions and governance arrangements – including those in the faith sector" (<http://ftp.iza.org/dp4089.pdf>). This would be doubly unacceptable to



An exhibition of Islamic garb at Tauheedul Islam Girls High School

Labour politicians since they are reluctant to admit that children differ in ability and tend to oppose selection in principle. One does not expect politicians to be consistent, but, in passing, it is ironic that personalised learning, which Mr Straw rightly values, is precisely what his government's policies have made almost impossible in my own sector of higher education, by much greater student numbers, vastly increased bureaucracy, and diminished funding.

Mr Straw tells us that he "argued for years in opposition that if the country had Catholic, Anglican and Jewish faith schools then we either had to get rid of them all (bad idea) or had to allow schools from all faiths to become state aided". The recent history of Ireland and Northern Ireland (for example) suggests to many people that it would be a very good idea to get rid of religious schools. For much further evidence on the ill effects of religious schools, see www.accordcoalition.org.uk. And the constitutional exclusion of religion from public (state) schools did not prevent the USA from becoming the world's most powerful nation.

All faiths? Does he really want hard-line Christian fundamentalists insisting that Eve was a real woman made from a real rib taken from Adam, and that Noah's flood actually covered the whole round world, and all the rest? Or Pentecostal schools with regular lessons in mouthing gibberish, known as "speaking in tongues"? What about Rastafarian schools promoting cannabis (I feel less

strongly about this than I suspect he does)? Or Scientology schools teaching that we all have "thetans" inside us, which originated in beings from other galaxies, forced to Earth by the evil Galactic dictator Xenu who – but I'm sure you know all that. Or Aztec schools where pupils could learn how to tear the hearts out of the numerous human sacrifices demanded by the gods, lest they grow angry and destroy the world. And so on, and so forth.

As to the present article, yes, it angered me to find such nonsense peddled, and depressed me to think our government is riddled with such idiocy.

Mr Straw may well be sincere in his unfounded belief that faith is good for education. But his motivation is pretty clear. With an election approaching, it is to try to salvage the Islamic vote for a government that has spent the last few years invading Muslim lands and killing their citizens.

However, the Conservative Party has gone one, or two, better. David Cameron has promised a large increase in state-funded faith schools, while Michael Gove, the shadow education secretary, thinks independent schools are "socially divisive" and should go comprehensive. More faith schools for the faithful, combined with more comprehensives for the left-of-centre vote.

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

The meaning of life: an interview

Earlier this year, **PETER BRIETBART**, a recent addition to the *Freethinker* team, met with Philosophy at Birkbeck, University of London and a supernumerary fellow of St Anne's *Liberty in the Age of Terror* and *Ideas That Matter*, and he is a regular contributor to the *Guardian* on great literature and the right to die. The interview is split into four and the remaining parts asked about purpose in life, what inspires him, if he thinks a ban on the burqa would be ju

PETER Brietbart: The universe can be a difficult and confusing place. How are we to find direction or purpose?

ACG: The direction and purpose of individual lives are a function of the work that an individual puts into creating them. When people ask "What is the meaning of life?", the answer is that it's the meaning you impose on it. It's the aim you set for yourself. There are many different kinds of good lives, and many kinds of valid meaning in life — as many as there are talents for living them. We've all got different such talents.

The challenge we're offered is as old as Socrates and probably older. Socrates said

that the "considered life", in effect meaning the "chosen life", is the good life — always, of course, under the government of principles that stop you from harming other people or preventing them from being able to form a good life for themselves.

So the idea is that we have to think about what we want to achieve, why we want to achieve it, what our capabilities are for achieving it, what we value — and then the pursuit of those values is what makes our lives good to live.

PB: And personally? What gets you out of bed in the morning? What drives you, what inspires you?

ACG: Lots of things! I've always wanted to try to understand this world of ours and

the human predicament: how best to live, how to form good relationships — for these lie at the heart of good lives — especially friendships and affectionate relationships.

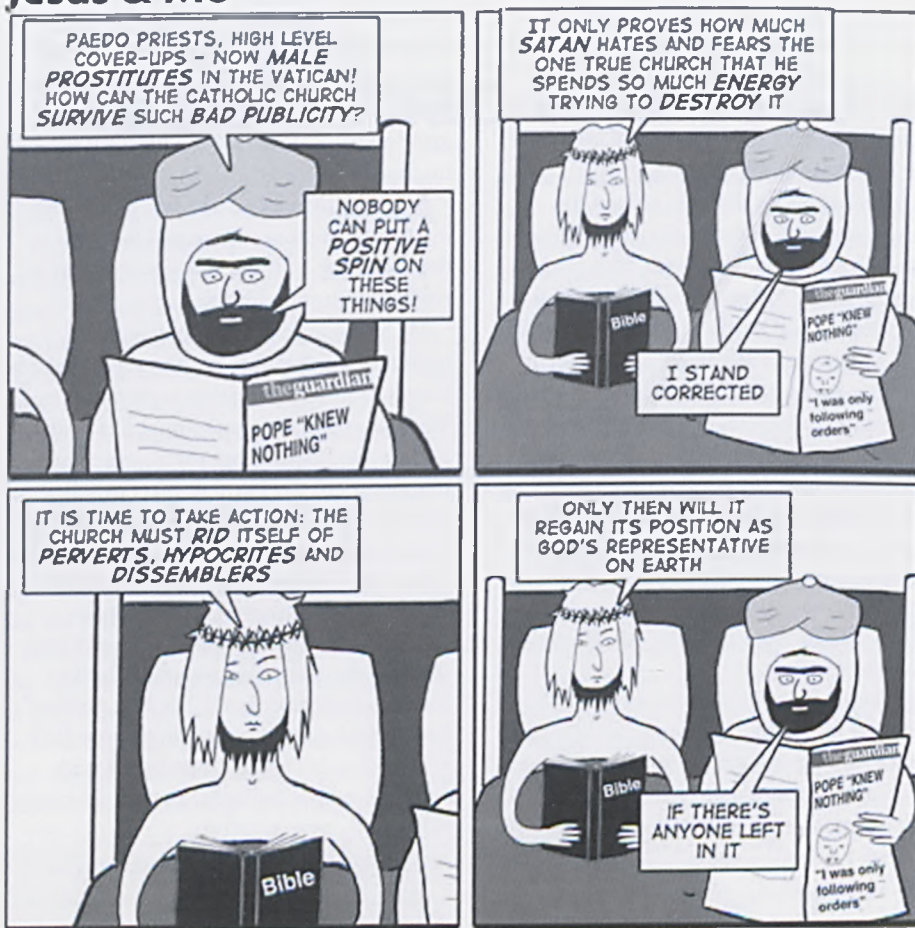
The business of thinking philosophically also involves reflecting on literature and the other narrative arts, which can tell us so much about human experience, helping us to reflect on our own experiences and our efforts to create something of value from it. We're all equipped with an ability to create value. In my case the effort is made through teaching and writing, trying to make a difference too, if possible, by taking part in the conversation that humanity has with itself about what matters.

So that's what gets me up in the morning, because there's a lot to be done! There are a lot of problems in the world, and one would like to try to be involved in understanding them and in making some contribution, however small, to solving them.

PB: A change of tack now, from the philosophical to the political. France is currently considering banning the burqa. Do you consider such an act justified, and would you support the UK doing likewise?

ACG: First it's important to note that what is meant by "banning the burqa" is that any French citizen who accesses public provisions of the French state, such as education or welfare, is required to do so as a French citizen, rather than as a member of one or another self-selected identity group such as constitutes a religion. I don't think France is asking anybody not to wear their religious symbols or their religious dress in their own private time. What it's saying is, if you want to access public provision in some way, don't come disguised, masked, or wearing any major religious symbol, which seems to give the message that you're demanding you be treated differently. So in principle I'm very much with *laïcité*, the idea of having a neutral, equal public domain, where you're not going to listen to attempts by people to say, "Look, I'm wearing a big crucifix" or, "Look I'm covering my head" so, "you've got to treat

Jesus & Mo



view with Professor A C Grayling

an, met world-renowned philosopher, humanist and atheist **A C GRAYLING**, Professor of St Anne's College, Oxford. He is a prolific author, whose works include *Against All Gods*, on the *Guardian* newspaper. Their discussion ranged from burqa bans to circumcision, free will, and other interesting parts will be published in consecutive issues of the magazine. Here in part 1, Grayling is asked how he would be justified and how he responds to the idea that science is "unweaving the rainbow".

me differently."

I think the same should be true here. We've already had some similar difficulties about women because of their religious principles. The same principle applies in all these cases. Public provision is equal to all, and so one shouldn't try to distort the relationships in the public sphere by means of these major assertions of religious identity. **PB:** Religious believers have been known to accuse those of a scientific mindset of "unweaving the rainbow". That is, taking the mystery and wonder out of the universe and replacing it with a set of dry mathematical or logical laws. How might you respond to such a critic?

ACG: Usually people who say that are quite ignorant of what's involved in scientific research and of the wonder, the beauty, the amazement that comes out of



Professor A C Grayling

encountering things in the exploration of nature through science. Such a person must obviously never have had the experience of solving a problem in mathematics or logic

and realising how beautiful those rational structures are.

Also, it's a silly and rather shallow view, because someone might be a technical geologist or physicist during the working day, and in the evening hugely enjoy music or writing poetry and reading it to his beloved, and the like. It's a rather trivialising view that completely misunderstands the richness and complexity of human responses, probably all the richer in very intelligent people, people of the kind of intelligence that can do science seriously.

In Part 2, Grayling is asked how he'd combat extremism if he were the British Prime Minister; how we can have morality in a godless world; whether circumcision is ever morally acceptable and why religions are so common and varied.

LEFT-WING radical and atheist Michael Foot, leader of the Labour Party between 1980 and 1983, died at his home in London on March 3 at the age of 96.

A staunch republican (though actually well-liked by the Royal Family on a personal level) and proponent of an elected upper house, Foot had rejected honours from the Queen and the government, including a knighthood and a peerage, on more than one occasion.

Foot, an atheist, an honorary associate of the National Secular Society, and passionate supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, was described by Prime Minister Gordon Brown as:

"A man of deep principle and passionate idealism and one of the most eloquent speakers Britain has ever heard. Michael Foot was a genuine British radical – one who possessed a powerful sense of community, a pride in our progressive past and faith in our country's potential for a radical future."

Journalist Jon Snow, a friend of Foot, wrote: "Michael Foot was above all a romantic, an idealist, a scholar, a humani-

Farewell, Michael Foot (1914 – 2010)

tarian and perhaps in the end quite simply too good for politics.

"Foot believed in a better world for all. Unlike just about every other Labour leader he was never interested in money, accepted no political honours, did not go to the House of Lords, and did not bask in the political world of 'when I was'.

"He was a decent and accomplished man. He was superb company, a fantastic gossip and married to a wonderful woman in Jill Craigie, the film director [who died in 1999]. They ran an almost open house of endless meals, drinks, conversation and walks with dogs on Hampstead Heath.

"I feel fortunate to have known him as a friend. He lived a full life to the end, his body seeming to desert a still vibrant mind. History will eventually recall that

he was a remarkable force for principle and morality in the unprincipled and immoral age in which he lived."

Above all, Foot was a passionate defender of free speech – but his outspoken defence of Salman Rushdie during the *Satanic Verses* affair, earned him few friends in the Islamic world.

Although Foot spoke passionately during the "End the Occupation of Iraq" rally in London in 2003, one Islamic website, which carried a picture of him, pointed out: "Please remember that Michael Foot is no friend of Muslims, as was revealed during the Rushdie affair when he proclaimed that Islam was 'the great persisting threat to the world'."

One of Britain's finest writers and journalists, Foot retired from the House of Commons in 1992 and was the author of several books, including the highly regarded biography of H G Wells.



points of view...

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CALLS FOR A BURQA BAN ARE BASED ON A DISHONEST PREMISE

WHILE I share Linda Parfitt's and David K Gorrings's intense dislike of the Muslim burqa and what it represents (*Freethinker*, March), I think that any libertarian freethinker must draw back from advocating a legal ban. Ironically, the trouble with the illiberal ban they and other secularists are proposing lies with the dishonest liberal premise on which it is based.

Most secularists only seem able to tackle the problem posed by Islam from a liberal-feminist perspective, no doubt due to a quite unnecessary fear of being called "racists" if they tackle Islam head on. This approach is not just cowardly, but condescending to those Muslim women who freely choose to wear the burqa or niqab and who even regard them as empowering.

I vividly recall one TV documentary in which a group of Muslim women, interviewed somewhere in the Midlands, burst out laughing when it was put to them that they might be coerced into wearing, or oppressed by, their veils, head coverings and ghoulish gowns.

The problem is, that hand-wringing liberal secularists like to pretend that underneath every burqa or niqab there is a wannabe-Germaine Greer, or perhaps a wannabe-Katie Price. In almost all cases, this is not true. We must not project what liberals like to pretend are universal values onto people, who, unlike us, have not had 300 years to slowly absorb Enlightenment values, universal suffrage, women's lib and so on. Many Muslims regard our society as fundamentally dysfunctional and abhorrent, with feminism largely to blame. Hence the determination of devout Muslim women to distance themselves from it in the way they dress.

Plainly, Muslims who adhere strictly to their faith and ideology reject our culture of equality, freedom and fair play precisely because it is so liberal. While we must always support Muslim women who do choose to reject Islamic dress codes, or indeed, any as-

pect of religious coercion and restriction (I have twice provided "safe house" to young Muslim women on the run from tyrannical Muslim relatives), we must accept that devout Muslim women, just as much as devout Muslim men, are the sworn enemies of what every liberal Westerner holds dear. We have every right to openly criticise and challenge such women, without resorting to the fig leaf of far-fetched feminist fantasy as justification.

What liberals won't admit – and this is the dishonest part – is that, rather than it being a question of whether veiled Muslim women are being coerced and oppressed, or perhaps the authors of their own misery, it is more a case of white Western liberals being the authors of their own discomfort.

For decades, liberals have been in charge of our immigration policies (or lack of them), the result being we have far too many of the wrong sort of Muslims here who have no intention of integrating themselves or adapting to our way of life. For them, our country belongs to Allah and we are just the infidels awaiting either conversion, slavery, or death and damnation.

So, when it comes to the burqa, whining liberals should either put up or shut up. There is a case for banning the veil in certain public situations, like courtrooms, schoolrooms, airports and supermarket checkouts, where faces need to be "read" openly – but that's it.

Secularists could certainly afford to be a little more bold and imaginative when they encounter devout Muslim separatists. Rather than contemplating bans based on disingenuous liberal-feminist ideas, wouldn't it be funny, if every time we came across a Muslim wearing traditional clothing, be it a niqab, a burqa, or jellabaiah, we took a sheet of greaseproof paper out of our pocket and told them "I'm sorry, but I can only speak to you from behind this sheet of greaseproof paper, while standing on one leg facing in the approximate direction of Darwin's birthplace!"

Devout Muslims should remain free to demonstrate their rejection and contempt for our liberal freedoms through their offensive sartorial choices – but they shouldn't be the only ones who are free to take the piss.

Libertarian freethinkers are a lot more feisty and fearless than their limp liberal counterparts in countering Islam, but, nevertheless, we support the freedom of any woman to wear what she wants, for whatever reason, be it a push-up bra, twin-set and pearls, boilersuit, or full Muslim ghoulish gown. And for that matter, we support the freedom of men to do the same.

Diesel Balaam
London

'DISHONEST' AND 'OBSCENE'

I OBJECT to the wearing of the burqa, niqab or any other face covering on two grounds: 1, dishonesty and 2, obscenity.

To cover your face in public is a basic act of dishonesty. Anyone who refuses to show their face is refusing to meet their fellow human beings on equal terms. Because we have individual features, we can be known and held accountable for our actions. Anyone who covers their face is avoiding their moral responsibility for their actions.

Some women say that they feel "empowered" by covering their faces in public – but only a cheat would feel empowered by this act of dishonesty.

My second point is that anyone who claims that it is "indecent" for a woman to show her face equates a woman's features with her genitals. A human face represents their personhood. To claim that a woman should cover her face on the grounds of decency is to deny the personhood of women, and to declare that women are not people, just genitalia. This is an obscene insult to all women.

Barbara Sanders
London



WRONG ABOUT HYPNOTISM

WILLIAM Harwood is usually on the ball, but last month, in his review of R L Park's book on superstition, he was unjustifiably sceptical about hypnotism.

Not only has this practice often been used successfully as an anaesthetic in surgery, it is also (equally successfully, though less acceptably) often exploited by entertainers.

As well as knowing people who have been hypnotised, I have seen the results of hypnosis several times on television, both in medical and entertainment programmes, and have no doubt that it can be amazingly effective, though some practitioners admit they are careful to select susceptible subjects. I would be interested to learn the scientific explanation for it.

Barbara Smoker
Bromley

JESUS NEVER EXISTED

I AM appalled by the article in the March edition of the *Freethinker*, "Freethinking about Jesus."

I can't speak of the original book by Mr Stuart Campbell (outside the pages of the *Freethinker* I've never heard of it) but REALLY: "One can construct a coherent and logical sequence of events that explain Jesus' life by making some fundamental assumptions ... Jesus can only be understood in his historical milieu, as an aspirant Messiah ... a Nazarene leader, a faked death by crucifixion, clueless disciples mistaking an old shepherd ..."

Hello? With this sort of approach we are playing the Christians' game. So long as secularists go along with the idea that JC was some kind of man-with-a-plan the brethren can get away with the con-trick of a god sent to save us all.

Though the message hasn't yet leaked out to the unwashed multitudes, Jesus Christ shares a trait inherited from his Father: NON-EXISTENCE.

One can be coherent and logical and reach all kinds of erroneous conclusions and Jesus as a fanatical, opium-swallowing megalomaniac is one of them. He joins a veritable army of manufactured Jesuses, each built up from unjustified assumptions of what "must be true".

Remove the miracles and the supernatural events; remove the improbable juxtapositions and self-serving propaganda; remove the midrashic embellishment of Jewish scripture and the pagan traditions; remove the contemporary romance and the theatrical flourishes, and what on earth do you have left? Core facts? Not on your life!

If Jesus didn't "transfigure" on a mountain top in the company of apparitions of Moses

and Elijah are we really to suppose that it was a day out on the mountains with a few pals? If Jesus didn't eject a horde of demons into a hapless herd of pigs, what should we think, that he was taking the air?

There are NO CORE FACTS about Jesus. There are merely cherished assumptions that few fail to question – and sadly that includes an awful lot of atheists who should know better.

Ken Humphreys
Sussex

Editor's note: Ken Humphreys is author of *God Never Existed*. Visit his website at <http://jesusneverexisted.com/>

WORDS WITHOUT MEANING

BARBARA Smoker's letter (*Freethinker*, March), agrees with Owen O'Neill's February article that, generally, religious adjectives are void of meaning; citing "divine" and "sanctified" as examples. I'm with her on that one; but then she says the same is true of many non-religious adjectives and uses "intelligent" and "beautiful" as examples.

I'm sorry to tell her that she's made a mistake here: "divine" and "sanctified" are words used to describe an abstract quality which cannot be measured and has no meaning in reality; whereas "intelligent" and "beautiful" do have meaning – they are quantifiable.

If you ask someone how divine an object is, they cannot give a sensible answer. They cannot tell you that it's a little bit divine, or that it's very divine. The same goes for asking someone how sanctified something is. You cannot be told that it's half sanctified; or that it's averagely sanctified.

Now, if you want to know how intelligent a person is, you are talking about a measurable attribute; so the adjective has meaning. Intelligence is measured on various scales (whether the scales measure what they purport to is another discussion). There is agreement, among the people who do the measuring, about what the measurements mean, and scores are given. Intelligence has various definitions; one of which is "the ability to deduce relations". From here we are able to use the word "intelligent" and know what we mean when we describe a person as being very intelligent.

"Beautiful" is a word to describe something that is more subjective; but we can still quantify it. Gather a large group of people together and give them an array of photographs of people's faces. Ask them to rate the photographs on a scale of 1 to 10, from "not beautiful at all" to "extremely beautiful". There will be some disagreement; but the overall consensus will be statistically measurable. From here, you will

be able to say whether a person is beautiful or not and know what you mean.

Better examples to show how an adjective can be meaningless would have been "fathomless" and "wearable" – something we can't measure.

Jack Eddowes
Stoke on Trent

SMOKING BAN

IN your response to the letter about the smoking ban, you, like most smokers; have not taken into account that the main purpose of the ban was to protect workers from smoke.

If you follow the example you give, of having smoking and non-smoking bars and cafes, then you will be forcing the smoke on employees. Some people have proposed to only employ smokers in such establishments, but this is not realistic (and a bit like faith schools banning non-faith teachers).

Many of the people who have to work in the establishments are not employed by them. I worked many years in the brewing industry as a quality auditor and trainer. My job forced me into a smoking environment against my will. Others who would have to work in smoking establishments if choice was available, include company reps, delivery people, craftsmen and technical people (particularly in pubs), health & safety officers, Trading Standards officers and many others.

Regarding the comment you made about non-smoking establishment being like morgues, I would say part of this is due to the intransigence of many smokers. When we were forced to choose in the UK, I can recall on many occasions going out with groups of people where a minority were smokers. The smokers, however, always refused to go to non-smoking pubs and more often than not the others would give in to them.

I am also convinced that smokers do not appreciate the effect of smoke on non-smokers. For instance, I develop a migraine and throaty cough if I visit the home of someone who smokes, even if they don't smoke whilst I am there.

I am now 62 years old and for the first time in my life I have truly been able to enjoy going out without suffering for a week afterwards. I don't believe smokers having to go outside experience any suffering, just minor discomfort for a short period.

Tony Collingbourne
Halesowen

Editor's reply: Point taken, Mr Collingbourne. I would also like to apologise to Mr Gorringer, whose name I wrongly mentioned in my reply last month. It should, of course, have been Jack Lavety.

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 Apl 15, 7.45pm. Subject: Current issues and BHA campaigns.

Brighton & Hove Humanist Society: i 01273 227549/461404. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. Wed, Apl 7, 8pm. Anna Behan: *The Church of England, Time to Disestablish*

w <http://homepage.nfworld.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.slhg.adm.freeuk.com

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

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

Chiltern Humanists: Enquiries: 01296 623730.

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

Cotswold Humanists: i Phil Cork Tel. 01242 233746.
e phil.cork@blueyonder.co.uk. w www.phil-cork.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/humleft.htm

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

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

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

Devon Humanists:

e info@devonhumanists.org.uk

w www.devonhumanists.org.uk

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

w www.dorsethumanists.co.uk

East Cheshire and High Peak Secular Group:

i Carl Pinel 01298 815575.

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

Essex Humanists: Programme available i 01268 785295.

Farnham Humanists: 10 New House, Farm Lane, Woodstreet Village, Guildford GU3 3DD.

w www.farnham-humanists.org.uk

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA):

1 Gower St, London WC1E 6HD. Tel: 0844 800 3067.

Email: secretary@galha.org w www.galha.org

Greater Manchester Humanist Group: i John Coss: 0161 4303463. Monthly meetings (second Wednesday, 7.30pm) Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester. Apl 14. AGM

Hampstead Humanist Society: i N I Barnes, 10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 0HP. Tel: 0207 328 4431 w www.hampstead.humanist.org.uk

Harrow Humanist Society: meets the second Wednesday of the month at 8pm (except Jan, July and Aug) at the HAVS centre, 64 Pinner Road, Harrow. April 14t. Speaker: John Rayner (author): *An Ethical Dimension to Politics: How do the Parties match up?*

i Secretary on 0208 907-6124

w www.harrow.humanist.org.uk

e Mike Savage at mfsavagema@hotmail.com

Humanists of Havering: i Jean Condon 01708 473597. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgores Cres, Gidea Park. Meetings on first Thursday of the month, 8pm. May 6 Rabbi Zvi Solomons: *Everything You Wanted to Know about Judaism, but Were too Afraid to Ask.*

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.

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

Local Scottish Groups:

Aberdeen: 07010 704778, aberdeen@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

Dundee: 07017 404778, dundee@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

Edinburgh: 07010 704775, edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk

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

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

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

Email: jeffgarland@wm.im w www.ionfreethinkers.org

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

w www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk

Lewisham Humanist Group: i Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. The Goose, Rushey Green, Catford SE6. Meetings on third Thurs, 7.30pm. Apl 15: Barbara Smoker: *The Crucifixion – the Sodomachistic Heart of Christianity.*

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 Apl 7, 8pm. Public meeting.

South Hampshire Humanists: Group Secretary, Richard Hogg. Tel: 02392 370689 e info@southhantshumanists.org.uk

w www.southhantshumanists.org.uk

Somerset: Details of South Somerset Humanists' meetings in Yeovil from Edward Gwinell on 01935 473263 or e edward.gwinell@talktalk.net

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

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

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.

Listing & Event Deadlines

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.