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A Tory victory would bring cold comfort to atheists

In what looks like being one of the most closely-fought election in decades, the Conservative Party, under the leadership of David Cameron, is frantically trying to disentangle itself from its "nasty" past – its Thatcherite period in particular – portraying itself as "inclusive", "gay friendly" and generally benign.

Yet the Tories clearly regard support from the UK's sizeable population of non-believers as unworthy of their efforts, and are, instead, reaching out for votes from the "faith-head" community.

The most alarming manifestation of the party's determination to win over religious voters comes with its commitment to oversee the biggest expansion in the number of "faith schools" in the UK since the 19th century.

The Tories are proposing the establishment of "free schools" – which can be set up using public money by religious groups, parents, charities, businesses, universities and other not-for-profit organisations. These would be outside local authority control. The blueprint, based on similar reforms in Sweden, has already been welcomed by the churches as another opportunity for them to increase their influence in education.

In a recent speech this week, David Cameron, said he was a great supporter of "faith schools" politically and personally. His own daughter goes to a Church of England school.

There are already about 7,000 state-funded faith schools in England and several hundred more in the private sector, the vast majority of which are Christian. They have been criticised for abusing their (already privileged) entry privileges and for not teaching about other religions.

Cameron said: "I support faith schools, I think they have a lot to bring to education. I'm in favour of choice and discretion. I think that actually drives up quality and standards in our educa-



Tory Leader David Cameron

tion system. Faith schools often bring a culture and an ethos to a school that can help them improve. I'm a supporter politically and personally."

In response to a further question, Mr Cameron said of the admissions procedure: "I think we need to try to make it less complicated, rather than more complicated, because I think faith schools are an important part of our system."

The Conservatives say that if they win the election they will bring forward an education bill that will result in the biggest expansion of church schools since the establishment of thousands of "national" schools almost 200 years ago.

Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, said: "The idea that an unlimited expansion in the number of religious schools will continue to drive up standards is illogical. If there are to be no community schools, where will all the unsupported and disadvantaged children from deprived homes – the ones that the Church doesn't want to know about – go? It's at that point that the myth of the 'religious ethos' causing

this success will come crashing down. It is fallacious to suggest that so-called free schools will extend 'choice'."

Then, in an interview last month with the *Catholic Herald* – one of his first interviews of the election campaign – Cameron made it clear that faith schools would also be able to teach sex education as they wished.

He also pledged to review Britain's abortion laws and to stop assisted suicide.

In what the *Daily Telegraph* described as "moves designed to place religious issues at the forefront of the Conservative election campaign", Cameron said that he would personally favour reducing the abortion limit from 24 weeks to 20 or 22 weeks.

Continued on p4)

The bear truth about paedophile priests

BARRY DUKE LEARNS WHY PANDAS WERE ADDED TO A PAPAL BILLBOARD

When some wag spray-painted a pair of pandas on a huge billboard advertising Ratzinger's visit last month to devoutly Catholic Malta, I naively imagined the culprit did it to draw attention to the similarities between pontiff and panda – you know, the snowy hair, the dark rings around the eyes, the propensity for inaction ... that sort of thing.

It wasn't long before I found out the real reason. They were put there specifically to draw attention to the Holy See's escalating global paedophilia scandal.

The US cartoon character on which the pandas were based is Pedobear, a determined little pervert who preys on underage kids. The character – more Pooh than panda, it should be noted – is now rapidly gaining recognition across Europe.

Malta, a member of the European Union, is a small Mediterranean island with a population of about 400,000, 98 percent of whom are said to be Catholic. It's a deeply conservative

country where nothing much ever happens. It only hits the headlines once in a blue moon, usually when its draconian, medieval board of censors does something particularly stupid – such as banning the Reduced Shakespeare Company from performing their satirical masterpiece, *The Bible – The Complete Word of God*, on the grounds that "the play would have offended our religious sentiments".

So you can well imagine the embarrassment and consternation felt by the Maltese administration, and the Catholic Church in particular, when, within hours of the bears' appearance, the graffiti incident – thanks to the power of the internet – had spread clear across the globe.



One of several internet images linking Pedobear with the Pope

Within 36 hours, an estimated 300,000 *Times of Malta* online readers had seen the story. Many then took an active part in linking and sharing the report with their friends around the world.

By mid-April, a Google search of the words "Pedobear" and "Malta" threw up more than 36,000 entries – and the character's *Wikipedia* page was updated to include a reference to the graffiti in Malta.

On the social networking site, Facebook, a fan page was set up for "The guy who spray-painted Pedobear onto the Pope billboards". When we went to press it had gained more than 1,600 fans.

Supporters of the papal visit were mortified. Bloody angry too, with many describing the graffiti attack as "childish".

But before the giggles had a chance to subside, Malta again became the focus of international derision when the mayor of a village called Luqa, which the Pope was scheduled to visit, asked – nay, demanded – that a "phallic-like" sculpture on a roundabout outside a Lidl store, be removed lest it offend Papa Ratzki.

Puffed up with piety, the ridiculous Mayor John Schembri described the colourful artwork – entitled *Colonna Mediterranea* – as "a monument of shame" and said: "In the opinion



The 'phallic' sculpture Mayor Schembri thought was an 'embarrassment'

of the council, the Pope's first visit among us risks being a source of embarrassment to the people of Luqa and the Maltese in general, due to the obscene 'monument' which is still dominating the LIDL roundabout on one's entry into the village."

Schembri said that "there can be no doubt that, among the people of Luqa, there is a widespread cross-party consensus that the object placed at the entrance of Luqa is not the most fitting way in which to greet the Pope, especially by what is considered to be the most Catholic country in the world."

The imbecile said its removal would at least be "a sign of respect for His Holiness the Pope." But Malta's Front Against Censorship insisted that it should not be removed – "not even temporarily for the Pope's visit. Such an act would classify as yet another obscene case of censorship, much in the same vein as the recent literature and theatre censorship cases."

Colonna Mediterranea is the work of Paul Vella Critien and was installed in January 2006. The monumental sculpture was said to be an abstract based on fantasy and the beauty of the Mediterranean colours.

Incidentally, shortly before his visit, Ratzinger indicated that he was willing to meet Maltese victims of clerical sex abuse, but only if the encounter was conducted in a "calm and discreet" atmosphere rather than under the media spotlight.

The diocesan authorities in Malta had earlier revealed that out of 45 child-abuse allegations against priests on the island, 19 were found to have no basis but 13 were going ahead and another 13 cases were "pending".



BARRY DUKE
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Christians want 'faith-heads' to preside over religious discrimination hearings

Christians who believe they have been discriminated against at work joined forces last month ahead of a critical legal case which is forcing an unprecedented confrontation between the Church of England and the judiciary.

In a letter published in the *Daily Telegraph*, high-profile Christians including Caroline Petric, who was suspended from her work as a nurse for offering to pray for a patient, pledge their support for Gary MacFarlane – a Christian relationship counsellor appealing against an employment tribunal ruling that supported his sacking for refusing to give sex therapy to homosexual couples.

His lawyers, supported by Lord Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, submitted an application on requesting that a specialist panel of five judges with an understanding of religious issues be set up to hear his case and future cases involving religious rights.

They will urge senior judges to stand down from future Court of Appeal hearings

because of what they claim are “disturbing” and “dangerous” rulings issued by them in recent religious discrimination cases.

The signatories to the *Telegraph* letter each filed individual letters of support to the application.

Critics were particularly concerned by a ruling by Lord Neuberger, the Master of the Rolls on behalf of the Court of Appeal, that Lillian Ladele – a registrar who refused to conduct civil partnerships because they were against her beliefs – broke the law and could no longer work as a registrar.

They claim that the effect of the ruling in December now means that the right to express the Christian faith must take second place to the rights of homosexuals under Labour's equality laws.

The hearing of Mr McFarlane, 48, who is from Bristol, is due to be heard by the Court of Appeal but it has not yet been decided which judges will hear the case. McFarlane's legal team will argue that Lord Neuberger and other judges should not participate because of their alleged

prejudices.

Signatories to the letter include Shirley Chaplin, who was banned from working on hospital wards after refusing to remove a crucifix, and Olive Jones, a Christian teacher sacked within hours of offering to pray for a sick pupil during a home mentoring visit.

The signatories said: “It is highly unsatisfactory that Christian beliefs are not tolerated in the workplace, often because the beliefs are themselves considered intolerant. Surely, being part of a liberal democracy means tolerating the beliefs of others, not trampling all over them when we disagree?”

“It is unacceptable to be told by employers that if we have a problem we can quit our jobs. If this attitude is adopted, then a religious bar to office would be created for a great number of professions. We are magistrates, counsellors, teachers, nurses and foster parents, and there are countless other professions that could create a ‘crisis of conscience’ for Christians if such an intolerant attitude is adopted.”

UN adopts resolution condemning 'defamation of religion' – but only by a whisker

The United Nations Human Rights Council last month adopted a non-binding resolution condemning what it calls “the defamation of religion”.

The resolution was introduced by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which has spearheaded successful drives to adopt similar resolutions at the UN for the past 11 years.

The resolution expressed deep concern with “the negative projection of certain religions in the media,” and stressed the need “to effectively combat defamation of all religions and incitement to religious hatred in general and against Islam and Muslims in particular.”

The resolution passed by the slimmest margin in the history of the resolution, with 20 members of the Human Rights Council voting for the measure, 17 opposing, and eight abstaining.

Six countries which abstained last year voted no this year. The United States op-

posed the resolution, despite its laudable stated goals, on the grounds that it undermines freedom of expression and endangers the rights of religious minorities and dissidents.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton says that any effort that could lead to the criminalisation of defamation of religion is “a false solution, that exchanges one wrong for another”.

She emphasised that “the United States will always seek to counter negative stereotypes of individuals based on their religion and will stand against discrimination and persecution.

“But an individual's ability to practise his or her religion has no bearing on others' freedom of speech. The protection of speech about religion is particularly important since persons of different faiths will inevitably hold divergent views on religious questions. These differences should be met with tolerance, not with the suppression of

discourse.”

“We are convinced,” said Secretary Clinton, “that the best antidote to intolerance is not the defamation of religion's approach of banning and punishing offensive speech, but rather, a combination of robust legal protections against discrimination and hate crimes, proactive government outreach to minority religious groups, and the vigorous defence of both freedom of religion and expression.”



In an increasingly godless UK, religio

Although Cameron has previously voted to reduce the abortion limit, his decision to raise the issue during the early days of the election campaign is likely to prove divisive. It will be welcomed by many Christians but may anger women's groups.

Last month, the Conservatives successfully blocked Labour plans to introduce compulsory sex education in schools, a measure which was due to be rushed through Parliament before the election.

It was a move that angered gay and others groups, and campaigners for assisted suicide were outraged when, in his *Catholic Herald* interview, Cameron reiterated his opposition to assisted suicide.

The Crown Prosecution Service recently published guidelines which meant that those helping people wanting to die were less likely to face charges, but the Conservative leader said: "My personal view is that if assisted dying is legalised, there is a danger that terminally ill people may feel pressurised into ending their lives if they feel they've become a burden on loved ones. I don't believe anyone should be put in this position. So no, I don't support any change in the law."

The astonishing argument that there are simply too few non-believers in the UK to merit attention was put forward a few weeks earlier by *Telegraph* commentator George Pitcher, who said that the real political force to be reckoned with was Christians. He referred to research findings published in February by Theos, the public theology think tank, which showed that "our politicians, and particularly David Cameron, could be ignoring the religious vote at their peril".

"Traditionally", wrote Pitcher, "our political leaders have held that faith is a private matter, more likely to damage than enhance electoral prospects. We're different from the United States, they reason, where the Christian vote can make or break presidencies.

"But while a powerful Bible Belt is unlikely to develop in the deep south of England, demanding tough anti-abortion laws and burning homosexualist literature, there is a religious vote in Britain and our party psephologists would do well to mark it, particularly at a time when any ideological constituency could make all the difference to an election result ..."

He pointed out that the last census in

(Continued from page 1)

2001 showed well over 70 per cent of the population describing themselves as Christian. "Even I wouldn't claim to count all these among the faithful. Many will simply subscribe to the cultural notion that 'this is a Christian country', seeing the Church of England as a significant part of our national identity, with the Queen at its head. Still others will claim Christianity as an inoculation against their Islamophobia.



Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg

But that makes these voters more accessible politically than if they were a Bible-bashing, American-style God Squad."

He added: "It is a constituency to which Cameron could speak, as he faces leading the largest party in a hung Parliament."

Pitcher, of course, cited the 2001 census because it supported his argument, but the census figures were comprehensively discredited in a later poll – the British Social Attitudes Survey – which is one of the largest annual polls of opinion in Britain and is commissioned by the National Centre for Social Research. The latest edition revealed a further dramatic lurch away from religion by Britons. It also showed a deepening suspicion of people with strongly-held religious beliefs.

At the time of its publication, the National Secular Society said: "We have repeatedly objected to the claims by Prime Minister Gordon Brown that religion is central to the lives of people in this country on the grounds that they are false. This research, conducted in 2008, shows the claims are also counter-productive; more and more people are turning away from organised religion and are increasingly suspicious of politicians who parade their faith as part of their politics. People particularly do not

want their private lives to be dictated by religious teachings."

When asked which, if any, religion they belonged to, 50 percent said they were Christian (in 1983, that was 66 percent) and 43 percent said they had no religion (up from 31 percent in 1983).

When asked whether they believed in God, 18 percent said that they definitely did not; 19 percent said they didn't know whether there was a God and there was no way to find out; 14 percent said they didn't

believe in a personal God, but did believe in some higher power; 13 percent said they sometimes believed in God and sometimes didn't; 18 percent said they had doubts but overall believed in God; 17 percent said they had absolutely no doubt that God exists.

When asked to assess their own religiosity, 7 percent said they were "very or extremely" religious; 30 percent said they were somewhat religious; 22 percent said they were neither religious nor non-religious, whereas 26 percent said they were "very or extremely non-religious".

When asked about church attendance, 62 percent admitted they never went to church. (It is well established that respondents grossly exaggerate church attendance so this figure is likely to be well understated.)

Pitcher then claimed that the Liberal Democrats were best placed to attract the votes of non-believers "given the numbskull atheism declared by their leader Nick Clegg" and said that "secularists and atheists represent the tiniest of constituencies when it comes to political activity; organisations such as the National Secular Society and the British Humanist Association make a lot of noise and post silly adverts for the non-existence of a deity on the sides of buses, but they are very coy about their membership numbers. In truth, as a concrete body of voters motivated by an anti-religion ideology, they are less significant politically even than the Muslims."

Although Clegg recently said he did not believe in God, he later added he had "enormous respect for people who have religious faith", that his wife is Catholic and that his children are being brought up Catholic.

Pitcher pointed out that a Theos think-tank survey showed that nearly two-thirds of voters believe that religious leaders have a responsibility to speak out on political is-

Religion should not be an election issue

sues, while 63 per cent oppose the idea that the law should prevent people expressing their religious views at work.

"So it may now be time for Cameron to come out and express his religious views at work ..."

So what about the Labour Party? Faith leaders, particularly over the last few months, have stepped up pressure against the Government, accusing it of outright hostility to religion. In February, for example, the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland accused the Government of conducting a "systematic and unrelenting attack on family values".

This prompted Scottish Secretary Jim Murphy, himself a practising Catholic, to assert that religious faith had a role in British politics, and that Labour best represented people of faith.

He argued that faith values have always been "at the very foundations of the Labour Party" and added that "it's wrong to think that it plays no role in British politics".

Cardinal Keith O'Brien, the leader of the Roman Catholic church in Scotland, welcomed Mr Murphy's "recognition of the role played by faith and religion in society". But he added: "A tangible example by the government over the last decade that it acknowledged or endorsed religious values would also have been welcomed. Instead



Prime Minister Gordon Brown

we have witnessed this government undertake a systematic and unrelenting attack on family values. This is a charge I personally put to Gordon Brown when we met in 2008 and I have seen no evidence since then to suggest anything has changed".

Reacting to Murphy's speech, Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, said:

"Jim Murphy is taking the Labour Party into dangerous territory when he calls on it to make a special play for the religious vote. His personal religious enthusiasm may be blinding him to the facts. It is no longer the case that clerics can dictate the

way their congregations vote. People are too independent-minded now to be herded into the voting booth by religious considerations alone.

"The society that we live in today is very different to the one that existed 50 years ago, and we want our politicians to reflect that change. Even in the last 20 years Scottish mass attendance has almost halved. The Labour Party should rein in Mr Murphy before he does it permanent damage."

"The recent poll by ComRes showed that half of those who define themselves as Christian say that religion is of "little importance" to them. If the Labour Party starts favouring religious voters by promising socially regressive legislation, dictated by out-of-touch and dogmatic religious leaders, it risks alienating huge numbers of people.

"Other polls have shown that ordinary Catholics are completely out of sympathy with the teachings of the Catholic Church on issues such as contraception, euthanasia, homosexuality and abortion."

"A 2007 YouGov poll showed that only a quarter of Catholics (and only a seventh of the population) agreed with Catholic dogma on abortion. This suggests allying a political party to religion is electorally very dangerous.

"This is why the electoral results of the Christian Party are pitiful."

Muslim university in India plunged into crisis over the death of a gay professor

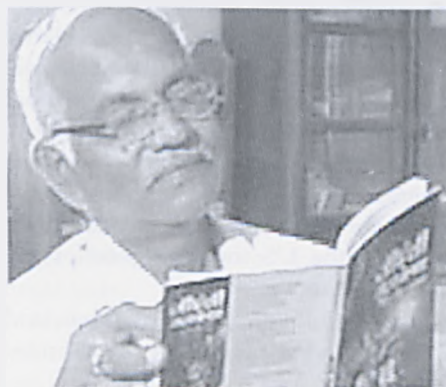
A MUSLIM university in Uttar Pradesh is in deep trouble following the mysterious death of a professor it had sacked earlier this year because he was gay.

Shrinivas Ramchandra Siras, 64, was sacked from Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in north India after he was secretly filmed having consensual sex in the privacy of his home with a man described as a rickshaw puller.

Siras was found dead last month at his rented single-room accommodation, shortly after the Allahabad High Court had ordered his reinstatement.

It is thought he may have committed suicide.

Originally from Nagpur, Siras had been a professor in the Department of Modern Indian Languages in Aligarh Muslim University for 22 years.



Students say that the popular professor never kept his sexual orientation a secret.

In February, after the Proctor of AMU received a tape showing Siras having sex with another man, he was sacked without an inquiry.

Homosexuality was decriminalised in

India last year.

According to a NDTV report, charges of criminal trespass, physical assault and forcible disturbance of privacy rights, have been lodged against six persons, including four senior AMU officials, on the order of a local court which was approached by Siras before he allegedly committed suicide.

A petition has been set up by the Integrated Network of Sexual Minorities (INFOSEM) – the largest network of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender groups in India – calling on the President of India to "take immediate steps to get justice for a gentle, law-abiding and dignified professor against the harassment and ill-treatment meted out to him by the Aligarh Muslim University in the weeks leading to his death."

History of child abuse in the Catholic

The first official decree on the subject was written at the Council of Elvira, held around CE 305 near Granada, Spain. The precise history, wrote **BRENDAN KILEY** in Seattle's alternative weekly, *The Stranger* (February 3, 2009) is complicated, but the council is traditionally believed to have set down 81 rules for behavior, the 71st of which is: "Those who sexually abuse boys may not commune even when death approaches." It was the harshest one-strike policy: If you're caught abusing a child, you are not only laicized, but permanently excommunicated – damned for all time.

The other major condemnation of clerical sex abuse was *The Book of Gomorrah*, completed by radical church reformer Father Peter Damian (a Benedictine monk, as it happens, who became a cardinal) in 1051. He appealed directly to the pope about the abuse of children, as well as consensual sex among clergy – in howling language: "O unheard of crime! O outrage to be mourned with a whole fountain of tears!... What fruitfulness can still be found in the flocks when the shepherd is so deeply sunk in the belly of the devil!"

In the 1930s, a priest-psychiatrist – and also a Benedictine – named Reverend Thomas Verner Moore researched the higher-than-usual rates of insanity and alcoholism among Catholic clergy. He suggested the

church build an asylum for priests. The US Catholic Bishops turned down his request in 1936. Father Moore became a Carthusian hermit.

In 1947, Father Gerald Fitzgerald founded the Servants of the Paraclete in Jemez, New Mexico.

In a 1957 letter to the Bishop of Manchester, Father Fitzgerald wrote that predatory priests (to whom he euphemistically refers as "schizophrenic") cannot be effectively treated and should not be allowed to continue in the ministry:

Their repentance and amendment is superficial and, if not formally at least subconsciously, is motivated by a desire to be again in a position where they can continue their wonted activity. A new diocese means only green pastures... We are amazed to find how often a man who would be behind bars if he were not a priest is entrusted with the cura animarum [the cure, or care, of souls].

By the early 1960s, Father Fitzgerald had seen enough chronic pedophiles that he did not want to treat them and have them rereleased into the ministry, but, as he proposed in a letter to Archbishop Davis, to build an "island retreat... but even an island is too good for these vipers."

In 16 centuries, church policy had evolved from one strike you're out to 30 strikes and you're sent to an island in the Caribbean.

In 1965, according to an affidavit from Fitzgerald successor Father Joseph McNamara: "Father Gerald purchased an island in [the Caribbean], near Carriacou, which had an abandoned hotel, damaged by fire, on it. This hotel was entirely removed from any civilization... This was to be Father Gerald's long sought after 'island refuge,' but it did not come to be. As is described below, Archbishop Davis ordered Father Gerald to sell the island."

Shortly thereafter, Father Fitzgerald was asked to step down. "It all became too public," Wall says. "The Holy See would never be able to explain Father Fitzgerald's leper island for pedophile priests."

In 1985, two priests and a lawyer—Father Michael Peterson, Dominican Father Thomas Doyle, and Ray Mouton—presented a report to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. The report, which reads more like concerned advice than a condemnation, warns that high rates of abuse and high rates of recidivism for "treated" priests could cost the church over \$1 billion and a major loss of credibility in the coming decade.

Later that year, in the first highly publicized case of a pedophile priest in the United States, Father Gilbert Gauthe admitted to abusing 37 boys in Louisiana. He accepted a plea bargain, was sentenced to 20 years, and served 10. By 1997, accord-

'Pope is not a head of state, and can be a

PLANS to have the Pope arrested when he visits the UK would succeed because he is not a head of state, a solicitor told *The Scotsman* last month.

Atheist authors Professor Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens proposed the action against Ratzinger for his handling of child-abuse scandals in the Catholic Church.

The writers' solicitor, Mark Stephens, said applications would be made to UK courts and the International Criminal Court for a warrant for Ratzinger's arrest.

His likely defence would be that he is immune from prosecution during his visit to Britain in September, said the lawyer.

Mr Stephens said: "The courts will examine the claim of immunity. I believe an English court would reject it. If the Pope was on a state visit, ordinarily a

head of state would have sovereign immunity. What I believe is because he's not a sovereign, not a head of state, he's not entitled to the defence."

He said that the Vatican was declared to be a state by Benito Mussolini, but this had no standing in international law.

The Pope faced criticism after it emerged that he signed a letter that delayed the punishment of a paedophile priest in the US for the "good of the universal church".

Writing in 1985, the future Pope said that he needed more time to consider the case.

Mr Stephens, who has represented abuse victims in the past, said: "This will require the Pope to deal with the way in which he appears to have prioritised the reputation of the Catholic Church over the welfare of children."

Dawkins said: "This is a man whose

first instinct when his priests are caught with their pants down is to cover up the scandal and damn the victims to silence."

"I am optimistic that we shall raise public consciousness to the point where the British government will find it very awkward indeed to go ahead with the Pope's visit."

Hitchens added: "This man is not above or outside the law."

He said he does not believe the Vatican to be a legal state – which raises questions as to whether the Pope, as head of state, could claim diplomatic immunity.

Said Hitchens: "The UN at its inception refused membership to the Vatican but has allowed it a unique "observer status", permitting it to become signatory to treaties such as the Law of the Sea and (ironically) the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to speak and vote at UN conferences where it

Catholic Church goes back centuries

ing to the *New York Times*, he had moved to Texas, where he was "arrested for fondling a 3-year-old boy" and put on supervised probation. (According to the *Times*, "Texas authorities did not know of his criminal record in Louisiana.") In April 2008, he was arrested again for failing to register as a sex offender.

In 1993, Canice Connors, the director of St. Luke's, a psychiatric institute for troubled clergy, told the *Los Angeles Times*: "The Catholic Church in North America possesses the greatest data bank of evaluation and treatment of nonincarcerated pedophiles on the continent. That data should be analyzed scientifically and shared with others studying the problem." He was in Milwaukee to present his findings to the U.S. Conference of Bishops.

In 2003, the Archdiocese of Boston agreed to pay out \$85 million to 552 victims of clerical sex abuse.

In September 2005, former Cardinal Ratzinger – who'd just become the pope – asked the justice department of the Bush administration to grant him immunity from prosecution in sex-abuse cases in the United States. Ratzinger, the one-time head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, was accused of "conspiring to cover up the sexual molestation of three boys by a seminarian" in Texas, according to the Associated Press. Ratzinger had "writ-



WANTED FOR CRIMES AGAINST KIDS

ten in Latin to bishops around the world, explaining that 'grave' crimes such as the sexual abuse of minors would be handled by his congregation. The proceedings of special church tribunals handling the cases were subject to 'pontifical secret,'" Ratzinger's letter said. The Bush administration granted Ratzinger the immunity.

In 2007, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles agreed to pay \$660 million to more than

500 victims of clerical sex abuse.

Meanwhile, the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales has issued a rare public rebuttal of the Vatican following suggestions made by its second-in-command that the sexual abuse of children was linked to homosexuality.

Cardinal Bertone, the Holy See's secretary of state, said that homosexuality was the "problem" that caused Catholic priests to molest children.

In what the *Telegraph* last month described as "a sign of tension" between the hierarchies over how best to handle public outrage over child abuse, Father Marcus Stock, the general secretary of the Catholic Bishops Conference, said research showed that paedophilia was "not a question" of sexual orientation.

Stock said: "To the best of my knowledge, there is no empirical data which concludes that sexual orientation is connected to child sexual abuse.

France's foreign ministry condemned the comments as "unacceptable" and the Vatican tried to distance itself from the cardinal's comments.

Father Federico Lombardi, a press officer, said: "General assertions of a specifically psychological or medical nature are not the responsibility of Church officials."

Peter Tatchell, of the homosexual rights group Outrage!, said: "The reputation of the Vatican and the Pope has been badly damaged by recent attempts to blame gays, the media and Jews for the public outcry over the sex crimes of Catholic clergy."

be arrested', says UK lawyer

promotes its controversial dogmas on abortion, contraception and homosexuality."

The group cited as precedent the recent case of Israel's former foreign minister Tzipi Livni, who cancelled a visit to London after a British judge issued an arrest warrant over her alleged involvement with the conflict in Gaza.

And writing in the *Guardian*, columnist George Monbiot said: "Picture the Pope awaiting trial in British prison, and you begin to grasp the implications of the radical idea that has never been applied: equality before the law."

The BBC's religious affairs correspondent Robert Pigott said the anti-Pope campaign could be seen as a mischievous attempt to create an "air of criminality" around the Pope.

"The controversy over alleged papal involvement in the cover-up of child sex abuse is providing atheists with a stick

with which to beat religion," he said.

But Dr William Oddie, former editor of the *Catholic Herald*, said the campaign demonstrated how "wonderfully lunatic" both Christopher Hitchens and Professor Dawkins were.

"What's lawful is what is lawfully agreed by lawful authorities, in this case Italian law – the government of Italy – and secondly, international law, determined by the United Nations. Both legal authorities accept the Vatican is a legal state.

Meanwhile the Vatican has dismissed calls for the Pope to be arrested. Vatican spokesman Father Federico Lombardi said: "This is a bizarre idea. It looks like the intent is to make a public opinion splash.

"The Pope's visit is a visit of state, and so it would be very strange if during a state visit the person who is invited to make a state visit is arrested."

GIVE THE DEVIL HIS DUE

My Lord of Amiens knew a thing or two

NEIL BLEWITT, who died last year, found it odd that two gentlemen to whom Christianity owes its very existence are shown no gratitude whatsoever

*Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude...*

NOWHERE is Amiens observation in *As You Like It* better illustrated than in the attitude of Christians to the Devil. And, I may add, to Judas Iscariot as well. Despite the fact that Christianity owes its existence to these two gentlemen, not a single church is dedicated to them, no Feast Day is prescribed for them in the Prayer Book – nor, as far as I know, has a Service of thanksgiving ever been held in appreciation of their part in the Christian story. It is not that Christians are unaware of their roles; Judas graces several books of the New Testament while the Devil has parts in Genesis and Revelation with several guest appearances in the intermediate books.

I have seen only one record of an interest being shown in the well-being of the Devil and that is in an essay Chapman Cohen wrote nearly 90 years ago. He recorded that at a prayer-meeting a lone, sympathetic voice called out: "Let us pray for the Devil". Unfortunately, Mr Cohen was not told of the response to this demand, but I suspect that the person making it was hastily ejected from the meeting and fervent prayers offered for his return to normality.

One can admire the gentleman's courage, if it was not a sense of mischief, but it would have been far more relevant if he had said instead; "Let us give thanks for the Devil". For consider the version of the Adam and Eve story in Genesis 2 and 3. If the Devil, in the form of a serpent, had not beguiled Eve and she, in turn, her husband into eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, they would have retained their primal innocence and it is likely therefore that the world's population would have remained at two and there would have been no sin transmitted from

the couple to future generations – by, as Augustine would have it, concupiscence.

And no sin would have meant that there was no necessity for Jesus to come into the world to make atonement and, incidentally, no necessity for the Holy Ghost to sire him – even if the Virgin Mary had miraculously appeared. So there would have been no Christianity, none of the religious wars that followed in its wake, no persecutions, sectarian violence nor hell and damnation. The pity is that there would have been only two people to appreciate the situation.

Now I know that the serpent in Genesis is not described as the Devil there. But what else could the serpent have been?

As Jesus said: "By their fruits ye shall know them. In any case the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* confirms the serpent's identity. Added to which what respectable ophidian would make improper suggestions to a lady on their first meeting, particularly if they had not been formally introduced? And I think we can go one step further and conclude that the Devil would have cast his disguise before God's punishment took effect.

It would have been degrading for some-



Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss

one of the Devil's status to spend eternity being kicked by man and crawling on his belly (the nature of his earlier preferred form of locomotion need not concern us here). He had certainly dispensed with his disguise by Job's time and by the end of the New Testament he was appearing as a roaring lion and a dragon. Clearly the Moriarty of his day.

It may be argued that God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. But that was in the first version of the story. In the second, their primal innocence, before the advent of the Devil, was such that it is highly probable they would not have known how to multiply even if God had drawn them a diagram.

After they succumbed to the Devil's temptation they must have become aware and went at it with a will. They begat, as Genesis says, sons and daughters. The world then was populated by incest and although God had a commandment forbidding such conduct it did not come into force until after this time and it seems it was not meant to be retrospective.

It is interesting to note, and I digress a little here, that God relented on his threat to Adam. He had said: "The day you eat of the fruit of that tree you shall surely die." Adam ate the fruit but lived to 930. Years of age, that is, not pm, on the day of his sin.

And, as G W Foote put it: "Adam and Eve ate the apple and we suffer the stomach-ache." But, of course, it was in God's interest that Adam and Eve should have sinned, lost their innocence and been in a position to set about the task of populating the world. For a deity who thrives on worship, a potential congregation of millions would be bound to be much more satisfying than two. It would also later be appreciated by priests – particularly in the matter of church collections.

As for Judas, it is recorded in Luke's gospel that the Devil entered into him to be-

tray Jesus by identifying him to the minions of the high priests and elders. Quite why he had to be identified is something of a mystery given that many thousands of people within and without Jerusalem had witnessed the extraordinary events of his career. His face must have been one of the best-known in the land. But attempting to solve that mystery belongs to another day. The important point is that Jesus was betrayed by the Devil and Judas jointly.

But if he had not been, there would have been no crucifixion and no resurrection and, as Paul explained to those in Corinth who chose to read his epistles, if Jesus did not rise from the dead then nor would anybody else. As for Jesus himself – an unresurrected one that is – he may well have continued his nomadic life casting out an evil spirit here and uttering a homely saw there until he drifted into senility and death, leaving little behind him that would be worthy of notice by future generations.

It follows that if there had been no resurrection, Paul would not have had his Damascus moment nor a reason to found Christianity

For who would want to commemorate a superannuated god who had not the wit to organise, on his own behalf rather than relying on a betrayer, a death, resurrection and ascension as so many other gods and sons of gods had done before him? So, whether God allowed Judas to die by suicide, a fall, or being crushed to death (the accounts differ) what a poor reward for services to Christianity. Blow, blow, thou winter wind indeed!

It follows that if there had been no resurrection, Paul would not have had his Damascus moment nor a reason to found Christianity and there would have been only an ancient, minor Middle-Eastern deity of somewhat bloodthirsty habits left to worship; and for those who chose to do so a veritable strait-jacket of otiose commandments to climb into.

And think, without the Devil and Judas, what would happen to the Prayer Book? It would be virtually redundant. Imagine, for example, the centre-piece, the Apostles Creed. It would be reduced to:

*I believe in God
The Bachelor*



Maker of heaven, and earth.

Amen.

Services would make few demands on votaries' time.

Christians should not simply echo the cry of the man at the prayer-meeting in Chapman Cohen's essay and pray for the Devil. They should worship him on bended knees and ensure that, as their benefactor, all their churches should be dedicated to him. Except, of course, those

that had Judas Iscariot their patron.

Jesus is not entirely blameless in this matter. He should have set an example by falling down and worshipping the Devil when he was invited to do so at the Temptation. Jesus should have known of the debt that had accrued and would accrue further to him – and if he did not know, his father, who had had a longer acquaintance with the Devil, should have briefed him.

Bear portrayal of Mohammed causes outrage

THE portrayal of the "prophet" Mohammed disguised as a bear in the 200th episode of the *South Park* TV series last month outraged a frothing band of jihadis, who immediately began issuing threats against the popular TV series' creators.

The Revolutionmuslim website warned Trey Parker and Matt Stone that they risked violent retribution after the episode included a satirical discussion about whether an image of the "prophet" could be shown. In the end, he is shown wearing a bear suit.

Revolutionmuslim, based in New York, was the subject of a CNN investigation last year for its radical rhetoric supporting "jihad" against the West and praising al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. Its organisers insist they act within the law and seek to protect Islam.

Revolutionmuslim said: "We have to warn Matt and Trey that what they are doing is stupid and they will probably wind up like Theo Van Gogh for airing this show. This is not a threat, but a warning of the reality of what will likely happen to them."

Van Gogh was a Dutch filmmaker who was murdered by an Islamic extremist in 2004 after making a short documentary on violence against women in some Islamic societies. The posting on Revolutionmuslim featured a graphic photograph of Van Gogh with his throat cut and a dagger in his chest.

To hell with Bishop Malone,

When **JOSEPH CONSTANT** died in the US last year, his Catholic funeral was used as a platform for **PAUL CONSTANT** was so enraged over this gross violation of his faith that he wrote a letter to the editor of *The Stranger* last month. It was published in Seattle's alternative newspaper, *The Stranger*, where

I am addressing this letter to you because my entire life as a Catholic took place in Maine. I was baptized into the Catholic Church at St Matthew in Limerick a few weeks after my birth in 1976. And I was confirmed 16 years later at St. Anne's in Gorham.

Even though I have never believed in God or the afterlife or anything else that Catholics profess, I did get confirmed in the church of my own free will, and though every baptized human being is supposedly a "full Catholic" at the moment of baptism, the consensual sacrament of confirmation* supposedly, in the words of the church, "renders the bond with the church more perfect."

My father, Joseph Constant, worked his whole life, adored his wife for 45 years, and loved us no matter what. And I decided when I was 16 that as long as I was living under his roof, I would continue to be a full member of his church. He wanted to meet us again one day in heaven, and he believed that there was only one way to do that: by believing in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. My confirmation was a tribute to him, but it only went so far: after I struck out on my own, I lived as an atheist.

But I suppose that, technically at least, I'm a Catholic, one of the millions of Catholics whom American bishops profess to lead and,



Paul Constant

when the church inserts itself into our political process, claim to speak for.

Today, Bishop Malone, I am demanding that you excommunicate me. I cannot in good conscience belong to your church anymore; I do not want to be counted with the 200,000 Catholics in Maine, or the 68,115,001 Catholics in the United States of America, or the 1.1 billion Catholics in the world.

I have been watching the events of the last few weeks with horror. The pope (an ex-Hitler Youth whom your fellow bishops used

to refer to, lovingly, as "God's rottweiler") whined during a Palm Sunday homily about what he called "petty gossip". That "petty gossip" is a tsunami of reports of child rape perpetrated by Catholic priests across the globe and attempts by bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and the pope himself to cover up that child rape by moving ordained rapists to new parishes where they could, and did, rape again. That "petty gossip" includes one case in which the pope halted an internal investigation of a Catholic priest in Wisconsin who is alleged to have raped more than 200 deaf boys.

Then, on March 30, Bill Donohue of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights placed an ad in the *New York Times* dismissively accusing the *Times* of "looking for dirt" that "occurred a half-century ago" and saying that the church's "pedophilia crisis" has "all along" been a "homosexual crisis." He accused the *Times* of flogging this story to further a progressive agenda that includes "abortion, gay marriage, and women's ordination".

I demand to be excommunicated because I do not believe women are second-class citizens. I demand to be excommunicated because your missionaries are informing impoverished citizens of third-world countries that birth control is a sin when it is in fact the single most important thing they could do to gain some small amount of control over their economic situation and health. I demand to be excommunicated because your church has become a hate group as virulent as any this world has ever seen, one that is unnaturally obsessed with the sex lives of good men and women across the planet. I demand to be excommunicated because I do not condone child rape or the concealment of child rape.

You might ask, Bishop Malone, what my father will think of all this. Joseph Constant died on August 20, 2009, after a long battle with acute pulmonary fibrosis. The sacrament for the sick gave him great comfort at the end, and I thanked the priest for administering it. But then, at a Mass that was dedicated in Joseph's name in September, instead of a homily about how Joseph lived the kind of life that other Catholics should

'Religion the antidote to 'quakes'

A BARMY Iranian cleric says women who wear revealing clothing and behave promiscuously are to blame for earthquakes.

Iran is one of the world's most earthquake-prone countries, and the cleric's daft explanation for why the earth shakes followed a prediction by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that a quake is certain to hit Tehran, and that many of its 12 million inhabitants should relocate. Seismologists have warned for at least two decades that it is likely the sprawling capital will be struck by a catastrophic quake in the near future.

"Many women who do not dress modestly ... lead young men astray, corrupt their chastity and spread adultery in society, which increases earthquakes," Hojatoleslam Kazem Sedighi was quoted as saying by Iranian media. Women in the Islamic Republic are required by law to cover from head to toe, but many, especially the young, ignore some of the more strict codes and wear tight coats and scarves pulled back that show much of the hair.

"What can we do to avoid being buried under the rubble?" Sedighi asked during a prayer sermon last month. "There is no other solution but to take refuge in religion and to adapt our lives to Islam's moral codes."

ne, the Church and the Pope

as a platform for a diatribe against same-sex unions by **BISHOP RICHARD MALONE**, of Portland. In connection with the celebration of his father's funeral that he wrote an open letter to the bishop of Portland, where Paul works as the books editor. His letter is reproduced in full below.

emulate—generous, faithful, good, true—the priest showed a video. You came on the screen that had been set up on the altar (as you did in all the other Catholic churches across Maine that weekend), and my family was forced to watch as you gave a hate-filled lecture about why Maine's pending gay marriage law must not be allowed to come into force, and then you had every church under your control pass the collection plate a second time solely to collect funds to fight marriage equality. (Thanks in large part to the Catholic Church's efforts — efforts that included threats to remove charitable Catholic organizations from the state if the law was approved — gay marriage remains illegal in Maine. You must be so proud.) You took an occasion intended to celebrate my father's life and spoiled it with hate speech.

And so it is with deep personal satisfaction, sir, that I say — and I'll put it so you can understand it — to hell with you, Bishop

Malone. To hell with your church. To hell with the pope, especially. If you think the Catholic God actually smiles down on you from heaven for your hatefulness, then to hell with that God, too. I renounce your church, your God, and your traditions. I will not be a part of any organization that welcomes and comforts hatemongers, child rapists, or you.

I demand that you excommunicate me immediately and that you send me confirmation as soon as possible that you have expunged me from the roster of the Catholic Church.

** You may wonder why I go on to explain the sacrament of confirmation to a Roman Catholic bishop. This letter is not just for you, Bishop Malone; it's an open letter, published in print and online, and by the time you get your copy in the mail, tens of thousands of people—at least—will have already read it. Some of these other readers will not be Catholic, and consequently, they will not be familiar with this uniquely Catholic*



Bishop Richard Malone

sacrament. As I don't want non-Catholic readers to go "confirma-huh?" and turn the page, I thought I would explain it for them. Because I want as many people as possible to read this, and I want them to read it all the way through. I want the whole world to read it. I do not want anyone to ever associate me with the likes of you ever again.

Judge backs atheist parolee who balked at a faith-based anti-drug programme

AN ATHEIST drug offender in California, who was returned to prison after complaining about a faith-based rehabilitation programme he was ordered to attend, has won an important legal victory.

Barry A Hazle Jr, 41, served a year in prison on a drug charge. As a condition of his release, he was ordered to attend a 90-day, in-patient drug treatment programme. He agreed to the programme, but even before his release told prison officials he wanted to be sent to a treatment facility that did not contain religious components.

Instead, he was assigned to the Empire Recovery Centre in Redding, to undergo a 12-step programme pioneered by Alcoholics Anonymous and featuring a strong religious element which included references to God and "a higher power".

When Hazle asked to be moved to a programme that was not run along

religious lines, he was told — wrongly, as it turned out — there were none in Northern California.

His parole agent, Mitch Crofoot, instructed him that "he should continue to participate in the Empire programme or he would be returned to prison".

Hazle kept attending, but continued objecting to the arrangement. He presented Crofoot with a written appeal on April 3, 2007.

Three days later, according to court papers, Empire workers told the parole agent that Hazle had "been disruptive, though in a congenial way".

He was then returned to prison for more than three months. In September 2008, he sued officials at the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Six weeks later, the department issued a directive noting that parole agents "cannot com-

pel a parolee" to take part in religiously-themed programmes if the parolee objects.

Instead, such parolees should be referred to non-religious programmes

Last week Hazle won his case when US District Judge Garland E. Burrell Jr. decided in his favour, and he now stands to collect damages for having his constitutional rights violated.

In a statement issued through his attorney, Hazle said: "This has been a long and painful process for me. The judge's ruling can't give me back my lost freedom, but it begins to restore my faith in our judicial system."

Judge Burrell found that Hazle's forced participation in the programme ran "afoul of the prohibition against the state's favouring religion in general over non-religion."

Monetary damages are to be determined, either by settlement or trial.

Professor A C Grayling: 'I'd get

In this, the second of a four-part interview by **PETER BRIETBART**, Professor Gray

PETER Brietbart: If you were the Prime Minister of the UK, what actions would you take in order to defend against Islamic extremism and to increase social integration?

A C Grayling: First, I'd get rid of faith-based schools. I'd make it a requirement that if people want to bring their children up in a faith-dominated environment that (a) it should be at their own expense and remain a private matter, and that (b) it should be open to inspection. But it should also be the case that religious instruction be removed from our publicly-funded schools because it's very distorting, divisive, and could lead, eventually, in a small number of cases, to people becoming extremists if they follow the logic of what their faith requires of them ... although if everybody followed the logic of what their faith requires of them, they would all become extremists.

PB: Without an objective moral arbiter, how can we make meaningful moral judgements, and furthermore, how can we justify them?

ACG: It is actually very easy to identify and to act upon the moral baselines. Moral baselines derive from our understanding of what it is to be human and what human beings need to flourish. For example, at a minimum people need food, they need somewhere comfortable, dry and warm to be, they need friendship, they need opportunities to use their intelligence, because we're a highly intelligent species. People need opportunities to develop, they need time to rest and benefit from the creativity of leisure, they need safety, and they need social bonds.

We know all these things, and if you look at human rights instruments like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, what they say is what the minimum requirements are for opening a space around individuals, so that they can use their abilities to do things that are good and satisfying for them.

So this very basic understanding of what it is to be human, along with what we dislike, what we want to avoid, what we need, what we benefit from, tells us something about what our obligations are to other people. It

tells us how we should respond to them, and on the basis of that, how to deal with more complicated and sophisticated matters, including recognising that other people have interests and needs, that we may not share, understand or even like – while recognising that they have a right to them.

That's where the hard work of being tolerant towards other people comes in. We all think we're tolerant, but that's because we usually don't really mind what others are doing. It's when we do mind and yet we've got to let other people have their margin to be their own way, that we know what's needed to be tolerant. So we have to start with our most sympathetic understanding of human nature and the human condition, and work from that to a livable system.

PB: On a completely different tack, do you think there is a place for the circumcision of male infants in the 21st century?

ACG: No. There are arguments regarding AIDS and HIV, and about how much more hygienic it is, and how much women prefer the look of it, and all that kind of thing – but it is a form of mutilation. The practice started in religious myth, which is hardly a good reason for continuing to do it in the 21st century.

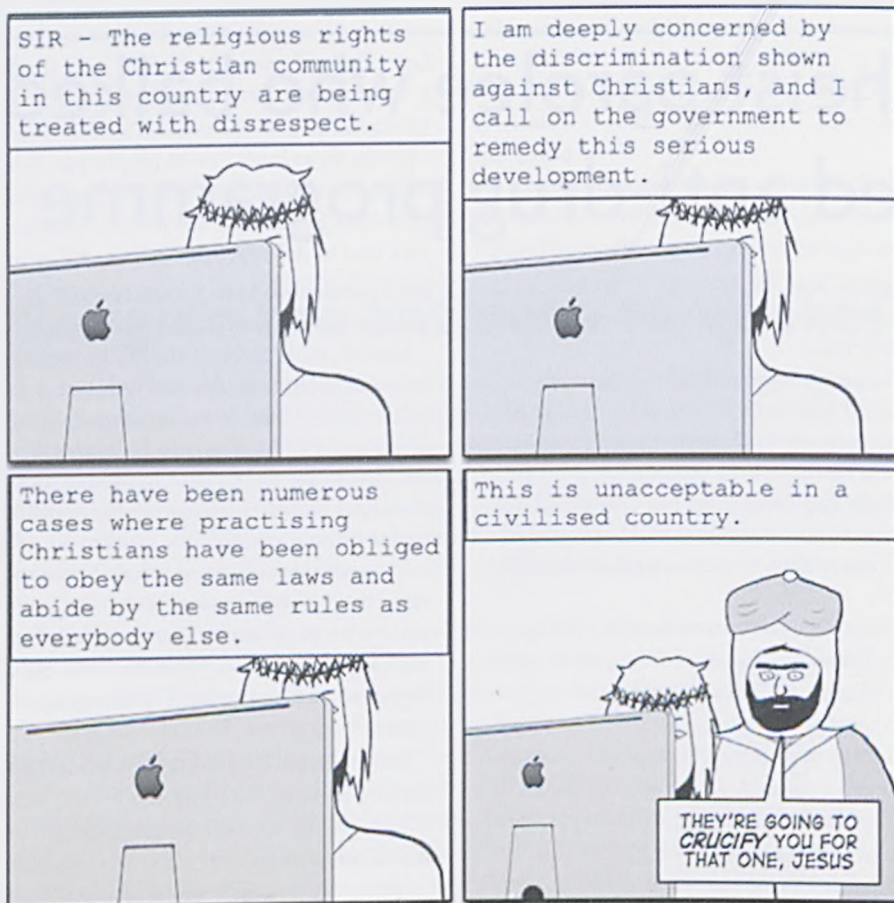
It does seem to be true that there is less HIV transmission, reduced risk of genital warts, cervical cancer and such. But what this suggests is that men need to wash more carefully and more often.

PB: And in areas where hygiene is very difficult to maintain at high levels? Is there no case that could be made for it as a preventative measure?

ACG: Well, with consenting adults, and in circumstances where there is no alternative to it as a prophylactic against the transmission of STDs, then of course there might be a reluctant case for it. This is an example of saying, in general terms, any form of mutilation would have to be extremely well justified by powerful case-by-case arguments. Would one similarly argue a case for chopping off someone's willy altogether if he were an absolute sexual maniac, say? Generally speaking, circumcising infant boys because it's a fashion, because it's a tradition, is not acceptable.

PB: We're in complete agreement there. Now, what do you think can account for the multiplicity of independent and separate religions around the globe?

Jesus & Mo



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get rid of faith-based schools'

Professor Grayling addresses topics ranging from religious extremism to circumcision.

ACG: One reason has to be their falsity – that they're all spurious, man-made inheritances – derived from humanity's very earliest attempts to make sense of the world. I think that it matters tremendously that people recognise the plurality of religions as being an instance of evolution, and another indicator of support for the general presence of evolutionary tendencies socially and ideologically as well as biologically.

What we now call religion wasn't always "religion" among our earliest ancestors. It was proto-science and proto-technology. It consisted in attempts to impose some kind of explanatory framework on things. To ascribe agency to the clouds, the lightning, the wind is just a projection of our own felt capacity as agents to push things and throw things, to make things happen. So, people might have thought that the thunder was some great being walking on the clouds, that wind was a great invisible being puffing its cheeks and blowing. And as our knowledge grew and as our understanding of nature increased, so these agencies ceased to be part of the natural world, and beliefs about them ceased to be attempts at naturalistic explanation.

And therefore they receded over the horizon, and then upwards: first, to the tops of

mountains, then up into the sky, and now the gods are outside space and time altogether. So the further our knowledge advances, the further away these beings go. They're now in the realm of ineffability. Theologians now tell us we can't understand them at all, but up to a few thousand years ago they were a part of nature. They weren't religion. Attempts to appease them, make sacrifices to them, talk to them, a belief that you were making contact with them when you were drunk or epileptic or after eating psychedelic mushrooms, probably suggests that our ancestors thought we could communicate with them: ask them to send us rain or keep the floods or disease away, cure our diseases, and so on.

The technology side of these early beliefs thus involved attempts to interact with those agencies to influence their behaviour. This became ritual, tradition and taboo. You can see how priesthoods, specialists in dealing with the gods, would want to hang on to their privileges and power. You can see how the temporal authorities would find it extremely useful that the ecclesiastical powers could help them to govern the people.

There's nothing more powerful than persuading your subjects that there's an invisible

policeman who watches everything you do, all the time, even in the dark when you're on your own.

It keeps control of people and so it evolves into a very useful tool.

It's interesting to note that the major religions of the world today – Christianity, Judaism, Islam, even to some extent Hinduism – were modified from these early semi-naturalistic views at a time when political and social structures were monarchical: kingly and hierarchical. So all their gods are modeled on the idea of kings. They're rulers who give orders, and who punish and execute. That's exactly what the God of the Old Testament is – a tyrannical, kingly figure. Yet these religions are very young religions, only two or three thousand years old. For tens of thousands of years before that, what we had was quasi-naturalistic efforts to explain the world. Not really religion at all, but early science.

- In Part 3, Grayling is asked why religion has stuck around so long, whether we could ever be free of superstition, why humanism is good for the world and if he thinks freewill could exist in a purely physical world.

Peter Sutherland reviews *The Greatest Show on Earth*

THIS is not another *The God Delusion* in terms of its impact both within our movement and – more importantly – on those people hovering on the margins. There may never be another *The God Delusion*.

This is a very different book. Unless they are biologists, readers of the *Freethinker* may regret this. If you are a biologist you may thrive on Dawkins's voluminous account of current evolutionary theory.

It is a lovely book to look at. There are plenty of superb colour pictures. The appearance seduced me into buying it, rather than borrowing it from the library.

It is also extremely well written, as always with Dawkins' books. However, has he really got anything new to say to freethinkers? Probably not, unless you are interested in the details of evolution.

We all know that Dawkins is not afraid to take on fundamentalists of all religions. But here he also takes on the person

whom many regard as being the greatest mind in the history of Western civilisation – Plato. Dawkins argues that Plato's concept of each creature having essential qualities which cannot be changed is totally at odds with Darwin's concept of continuous adaptation and change, even into new species.

I have just returned from South Africa where I visited a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Cradle of Mankind. Here some bones of the oldest predecessor of mankind was found. It has been dated as having originated four million years ago. Yet when I lived in South Africa in the 1960s the pro-apartheid Afrikaner Nationalist government taught the Old Testament version of the origins of man (from 4,000 years ago) in schools! It is not surprising that I emigrated away from such a society.

Ever willing to tackle the enemy bravely, Dawkins has a sting in the tail. In the ap-

pendix he demolishes the history deniers. This strong piece is worth a more significant position in the structure of the book.

If you wish to try to convert a creationist to the evolutionary case, then this is the right book. But I wonder what the likelihood is of many creationists accepting Dawkins' challenge? If so they will be faced with a most enthusiastic advocate of evolution and a dedicated 21st-century supporter of Darwin's ideas. I am sure that all of us are 100 percent behind Dawkins in his battle to have evolution, rather than creationism, taught in schools. This book should prove a worthy tool in this battle, particularly as, for an "academic" book, it is such an easy read.

- *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution*. Richard Dawkins. London: Bantam Press, ISBN 9780593061732 (cased), 978593061749 (tpb), 470 pp, £20 hardback, £8.99 paperback.

points of view...

A DIG IN THE POST BAG – LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

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ISRAEL ARTICLE WAS 'AN APPALLING AND IGNORANT DIATRIBE'

I AM shocked to find that the *Freethinker* agreed to publish Graham Livingstone's appalling and ignorant diatribe on Israel (April 2010). As a rough rule-of-thumb guide to the Middle East anyone who thinks one side is all white and the other all black is part of the problem rather than the solution.

Let's now deal with a few of the misleading statements.

1. "A Jewish colony was established on land inhabited mainly by Palestinians". Yes, but the land allocated by the UN for the establishment of Israel had a Jewish majority. Israel expanded because the Arabs started a war against it which they lost.

2. "Anti-Semitism" is "finally virtually beyond the pale". To refute this one merely has to read the two pages before Livingstone's article. Pages 6-7 have the headline *Muslim hatred of Jews reaches epidemic levels in Norway and Sweden*. The MEMRI website provides press coverage of Arab newspapers. From this it is evident that Nazi level anti-Semitism is normal in many countries.

3. "Almost complete indifference" in "the UK to the appalling events in Iraq, Afghanistan and Gaza". What country has Livingstone been living in in this century?

4. Attack on the World Trade Center, which Livingstone does not condemn but says: "I suspect was merely a convenient excuse, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iran having probably been planned by the colonialists in Number 10 and the White House". Note "suspect" and "probably", clear indications that Livingstone has no evidence but is merely displaying his prejudices.

5. Swiss vote on minarets on mosques and French ban on Muslim women wearing "orthodox Islamic dress ... in public". These are presented as "appalling attacks on Muslim freedom to worship". Think again. These restrictions do not stop anyone from entering a mosque for prayer.

As for wanting "a word of compassion for the women themselves", such compassion should focus on giving women freedom equivalent to that enjoyed by men concerning what they wear.

6. Israel has "colonised ... vastly beyond her 1967 borders". In 1967 Israel was surrounded by Arab armies threatening to drive her population into the sea. That's what led to the war which the Arabs then lost. If they had not started the war and lost it, Israel's borders would not have been extended.

By the way, Livingstone does not tell you that Israel actually got out of territories it conquered in Gaza, Sinai and Lebanon.

Michael Levin
London

WITH great respect I was surprised that your excellent journal would publish such a vitriolic attack on Israel as the statements by Graham Livingstone.

Graham seems to have a very misconceived understanding of the world geopolitical realities, of basic statistical facts, and of the motives behind the issues in the Middle East. His utterances about the history of our world are appalling.

There is more freedom in Israel than in any other country in that area. Many Israelis have openly deprecated the disproportioned violence used by Israel and many Israelis openly and actively work towards achieving mutual respect and friendship between Arabs and Jews.

It is precisely because of the attitudes displayed in Graham's letter that there is in Israel an unshakeable and desperate resolve to repulse and survive any attack from any source whatsoever.

I have no doubt that there will always be an Israel.

David Ibry
London

ONE-SIDED, ill-informed, ideologically suspect and shrill. Has Dave Spart, *Private Eye's* resident ranting Trot been engaged by the *Freethinker* to provide some much-needed comic relief? Judging by Graham Livingstone's anti-Jewish, anti-Israeli tirade in the April issue, it certainly appears so. By the end of his article "Israel's road to a second Holocaust", the poor dear reaches such a pitch of hysteria he begins to make Julius Streicher – the swivel-eyed publisher of *Der Stürmer* – look positively serene! Incredibly, not one authoritative, objective source is quoted in the entire piece.

As the noted journalist and broadcaster, Richard Littlejohn, has commented, Israel is an heroic little secular democracy, bordered on all sides by Islamic countries which are at best indifferent to its fate and, at worst, permanently hostile. Only slightly further afield, Iraq and Iran (which Graham regards as being "threatened" by Israel), have deliberately rained down Scud missiles on civilians in Tel Aviv, or else signalled their intention to "wipe Israel off the map" with nuclear weapons. It's like the principality of Wales being ganged up on by England, Ireland and Scotland, with France and Germany plotting the annihilation of the Welsh people altogether.

Predictably enough, Graham merely parrots the same old left-wing claptrap about downtrodden Palestinians and the evils committed against them by the Israeli state that he's been banging on about for years. Of course, Israel is not blameless. The aggressive settlement of the West Bank is certainly provocative and unhelpful, while stunts like Israeli soldiers burying Palestinian rioters alive and running over them in a dumper truck are indeed worthy of the Nazis. But at the same time, consider the remarkable restraint shown by Israel in 1991 when Saddam Hussein launched Scud



missile attacks on civilian towns and cities in Israel. Israel did not retaliate, to the great admiration of the supposedly “sabre-rattling” USA and western allies. Show me an Arab country that would be similarly restrained and mature!

Maturity lies at the centre of this debate which is all too often hijacked by left-wingers having an ideological group wank. Yes, ultimately, most of us are agreed that the Palestinians must have their own state – justice demands it – but at present, they are unfit for nationhood. They are a delinquent people, proven by their election of Hamas in 2006. Until such time as they learn reason and respect, recognising Israel’s right to exist, then – sorry – support for their full self-determination must be turned down flat. We must always support Israel in its brave fight against its most hostile, murderous neighbours.

Like “red” Ken Livingstone, George Galloway and the Marxist academic Terry Eagleton, Graham lectures us about “demonising” Muslims. Well, judging by daily news reports, they do a pretty good job at that themselves! He also claims there are “frequent attacks” on Muslim places of worship (such attacks are, in fact, rare in the UK), then accuses us of being unmoved by “wogs and ragheads” killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is insulting drivel, but it is perfectly natural and right that our main sympathies lie with British service men and women killed in the fight against dark Islamic forces on our behalf. Like most Brits, I am sick and tired of being lectured about “Islamophobia” by millionaire socialists who don’t see a Muslim face from one end of the week to the other – how many of Terry Eagleton’s three houses do you suppose are located in Muslim areas? Not a single one!

If Graham Livingstone, or any other lefties, were to visit my corner of London, I would take them to see the Jewish primary school I pass on my way to work. When I moved here, in 2002, it had a regular wire fence so you could see the kids running about in the playground, laughing and shouting – uplifting sights and sounds. Sadly, after Jewish schools in north-west London were reported by the police as having “come under hostile surveillance”, a tall reinforced wooden fence had to be erected, while security guards now patrol the perimeter, eyeing passing vehicles suspiciously as they check parents’ identities at the school gate. A Jewish high school, again local to me, where I sometimes play 5-a-side football, now resembles an Army barracks in 1970s Ulster. Such measures are, alas, necessary, in order to make sure the next Beslan doesn’t take place in Borehamwood. Welcome to Britain, 2010.

So, who are the real aggressors, Graham? While you and other socialists will no doubt continue to wave your “We Are All Hezbollah Now” placards at every opportunity, genuine freethinkers will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our Jewish and Israeli friends.

Diesel Balaam
London

JESUS NEVER EXISTED

KEN Humphreys (*Points of View*, April) is appalled by my article “Freethinking about Jesus” (*Freethinker*, March) and believes that he never existed. (I’d never heard of Ken’s book, called *Jesus Never Existed* [incorrectly referred to as *God Never Existed* in last month’s issue], or his website).

If Ken had taken the trouble to actually read my book, he might understand my point of view. In particular, he would find a whole chapter devoted to the crazy idea that Jesus never existed. This belief is now over 200 years old and has been comprehensively demolished, not just by New Testament scholars but by historians. Nevertheless it gets resurrected from time to time, misleading freethinkers.

Am I to understand that Ken only claims that Jesus never existed so as to undermine the Christian message and that he has no care for history? If so, then it not only does violence to the records but is a case of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Nor would he be the first to do so.

Jesus’ crucifixion is testified by both Roman and Jewish records. These are ignored only by those who are prejudiced against historicity. Anyone who claims that Jesus did not exist has to provide a believable explanation, not only for the Roman and Jewish records, but, most difficult of all, for the Gospels. I see no sign that Ken has attempted to do this.

Steuart Campbell
Edinburgh

I CHECKED out Ken Humphreys’ website, as well as his book. Like Steuart Campbell, whom he disputes, and James Gardner, who favorably reviewed Humphreys’ book for Amazon.co.uk, Hum-

Quotable quote

DESPITE a full century of scientific insights attesting to the antiquity of the earth, more than half of our neighbours believe that the entire cosmos was created six thousand years ago. This is, incidentally, about a thousand years after the Sumerians invented glue.

– Sam Harris, author of
The End of Faith

phreys is a well meaning amateur.

Like most of the amateurs I have encountered, Humphreys and Gardner fatuously, arrogantly and dogmatically label as incompetent the 65 percent or more of biblical historians who are satisfied that the Jesus fairy tales were posthumously grafted onto the biography of a real person from history. Prominent scholars who initially considered Jesus a purely mythical figure but, on reconsidering the evidence, concluded that there was indeed a real person at the heart of the myths, include Robert Price and G. A. Wells. Campbell reaches many conclusions I cannot endorse, but he is several degrees of magnitude more accurate than Humphreys or Gardner (whose doctorate is in an unrelated field).

Re hypnotism and Barbara Smoker’s letter in April: I do not dispute that alleged hypnotism has produced helpful placebo effects. But my 40 years of working with stage and therapeutic hypnotists qualifies me to agree with Robert Baker (*They Call It Hypnosis*) that hypnotism does not exist, has never existed in the past, and will not exist in the future. The only persons with comparable experience who continue to believe in hypnotism are those who cannot abandon their belief without jeopardizing their bread and butter.

William Harwood
Canada

JUST WEAR NOTHING

BARBARA Sanders describes the wearing of facial covering as a “basic act of dishonesty” (*Points of View*, April 2010).

Actually, the wearing of garments of any nature whatsoever covering any portion of the human anatomy for reasons other than protection from the elements (or from harm) is an act of dishonesty. We wear everything from underpants to three-piece suits to disguise our real appearance.

Even the wearing of garments supposedly for the sake of decency can fall foul of this – for example, underpants designed to make a man’s balls look bigger than they really are are now on sale.

A friend of mine who worked in Munich told me that young Germans on hot days remove all their clothing before swimming down the river Isar. They then catch buses back to where they left their clothing, after which indignant fellow-travellers write letters to the papers complaining that “these young people have not bought tickers!”

The only way to be honest about one’s appearance is to wear nothing at all and the above example strikes me as being a far healthier response than any form of prudery.

Graham Livingstone
London

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. Tues, May 11, 7.45pm. Steve Hurd: *Humanist schools in Uganda*.

Brighton & Hove Humanist Society: **i** 01273 227549/461404. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. Wed, May 5, 8pm. Adam Trimmingham: *Living without religion*. Wed, June 2, 8pm. Michael Jelley: *Personal impressions of Catholic Ireland*.
w <http://homepage.nflworld.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** web 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. May 12, Rev Jane Barraclough: *Unitarianism*.

Hampstead Humanist Society: **i** NI 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. May 12th: Annual General Meeting plus discussion.
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*.

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

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

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

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

Local Scottish Groups:

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

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

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

Humanists4Science: A group of humanists interested in science who discuss, and promote, both.
w <http://humanists4science.blogspot.com/>
Discussion group: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/humanists4science/>

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

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

Lancashire Secular Humanists: Meetings 7.30 on 3rd Wed of month at Great Eccleston Village Centre, 59 High St, The Square, Great Eccleston (Nr. Preston) PR3 0YB.
www.lancashiresecularhumanists.co.uk **i** Ian Abbott, Wavecrest, Hackensall Rd, Knott End-on-Sea, Poulton-le-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. May 20: Public Meeting.
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** mllofmark@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 May 5, 8pm. *Covered actions of the Creationist Movement in the UK*. Wed June 2, 8pm: *How faith schools distort their admissions procedures*.

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.