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Evan Harris's defeat robs Britain of a principled MP

Whatever one might think of Britain's new Lib-Con Government, there's very good cause to lament the absence in the new coalition of Dr Evan Harris, who lost his Oxford West & Abingdon seat by fewer than 200 votes.

Harris had been the target of campaigns by at least two clerics, one of whom was behind a leaflet distributed in his constituency that described him as "Dr Death".

Writing on the *New Statesman* blog lastmonth, Sholto Byrnes said: "If more MPs had been like him, it is highly unlikely that politicians would have come to have been held in such low regard. If more Liberal Democrats had been like him, I suspect they would be doing much better and might even have stood a genuine chance of replacing Labour as the main party of the left."

"A consistently strong voice for the NHS and for science, he shared the title of Secularist of the Year with Lord Avebury in 2009 for their work in helping abolish the offences of blasphemy and blasphemous libel. He has campaigned against faith schools and argued courageously in favour of abortion, eutha-

nasia, immigration and gay rights."

Byrnes' piece was a robust response to a vitriolic attack on Harris by the *Telegraph's* religion editor, Rev George Pitcher, who wrote: "A stranger to principle, Harris has coat-tailed some of the most vulnerable and weak people available to him to further his dogged, secularist campaign to have people of faith – any faith – swept from the public sphere."

"The Lib Dems served the purpose of providing him with a parliamentary seat, but his true love was the National Secular Society. For a doctor, he supported the strange idea that terminally ill people should be helped to kill themselves. He pretended to defend Roman Catholics by attacking the Act of Settlement, with the real aim of undermining the established Church of England. A drab, secular determinism was his sole motivation; his parliamentary career consequently a one-trick pony."

Byrnes added: "Some readers – especially those who have described me as being 'an apologist for religion' – may be surprised to see me praising him. On the contrary, although I may disagree with some of Evan's stances, I think he has been one of the most principled MPs in parliament, sticking to his convictions and standing up for a true-liberal view of free speech and of the idea of liberty itself."

Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director of the NSS who has worked closely on many campaigns with Harris, said: "Evan Harris has been a tireless worker for secularism and many other progressive causes during his time in parliament and we will miss his input enormously. Let us hope that he will have another opportunity to return to parliament in the not too distant future. We commiserate with him and deeply regret the loss of a brave and effective voice in parliament. We are also sad to lose another Honorary Associate, Paul Holmes, who has been another supportive voice of reason in Parliament and will also be much missed."

"We congratulate four honorary associates in the Commons who retained their seats: Graham Allen in Nottingham North, Angela Eagle in Wallasey, Kelvin Hopkins in Luton North and Joan Ruddock in Lewisham Deptford. Bob Marshall-Andrews QC and Colin Challen stood down at this election. We are grateful for their support over the years."




Dr Evan Harris

Religion really does poison everything

BARRY DUKE REJOICES IN THE DOWNFALL OF DR GEORGE ALAN REKERS

American "psychologist" and Baptist minister George Alan Rekers, 61, is not a homosexual. I repeat, Rekers is not gay. Indeed, Rekers is SO hereosexual that he has devoted his life to making sure that he has devoted his life to making sure than no-one in his sphere of influence ever becomes gay, and, if they do, he has perfected techniques to "cure" them.

To this end he uses the resources of the Family Research Council (motto: *Defending Faith, Family and Freedom*) which he founded, and the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH) of which, until recently, he was a member.

But Rekers awoke one morning early in May with a problem. A BIG problem. He was spotted at Miami International Airport on his return from a trip to Europe with a very attractive young man. A photograph was taken of the pair. A subsequent investigation by the Miami  revealed that Rekers' travelling companion was a male prostitute known as "Lucien" (real name Jo-Vanni Roman) whose services for the ten-day trip had been procured via a website called Rentboy.com.

Caught blinking like a rabbit in a powerful beam, Rekers – author of *Who am I, Lord?* – blustered that "Lucien" had been hired to "lift his luggage" during the trip. This was necessary, he said, because he had recently undergone surgery. He had no idea of the escort's vocation – or that "Lucien" had an 8-inch dick – until after they had departed. When he did realise what "Lucien" did for a living, he took time to share the gospel with him. Oh, and no sex between them had occurred.

"Lucien", made aware after the trip of his client's reprehensible history, naturally got all upset and spilled the beans. True, no sex, he said, had taken place. All he had to do for his \$75 dollars a day was to get naked and apply a "long stroke" to Rekers. This, he elaborated, was a complicated caress "across his penis, thigh ... and his anus over the butt cheeks. Rekers liked to be rubbed down there."

All of this Rekers passionately denies, despite the fact that another male hooker has since emerged to tell a similar tale. Said Carl Shepherd: "He lay on the bed, stomach down. I climbed astride him and started massaging his neck ... I ran my fingers down his spine. He was squirming and pushing his ass up in the air, because he wanted me to touch him there. Eventually I'd touched him over every inch of his body with the same light touch. He got very aroused for an old guy – I was impressed actually."

But Rekers continues to protest "I am not gay", and that it's all a ghastly misunderstanding. *Of course it is!* A site called Rentboy.com is an obvious first port of a call for a heterosexual man needing help with his luggage.

Truth is, Rekers is a pitiful, hypocritical liar – a sad, self-loathing reptile who just accidentally happened to leave his closet door slightly ajar at the wrong place, at the wrong time.

Should he be crucified by the media for his indiscretion? *Oh yes* – and then some.

For Rekers has, in the name of Jesus, devoted a large part of his life projecting his self-hatred onto others. In the process he has wrecked lives – the lives of young children he has identified as "potentially gay" after observing "sissy" traits in boys, and the tom-boy behaviour of girls; and the lives of young adult gays, lesbians and transgendered folk subjected to his quack "cures".

The man has left a trail of misery in his wake, and it is only now that the enormity of his interference is beginning to be realised.

One man who probably now rues the day he ever heard the name Rekers is Florida's Attorney General Bill McCollum. In 2007 Mc-

Collum recommended Rekers as an "expert" witness to defend a state ban on gay adoption.

After Rekers was exposed as a liar, the *Orlando Sentinel* commented that "the deal between Florida and Mr Rekers would be scandalous even if the psychologist weren't a world-class hypocrite".

The state paid Rekers more than \$60,000 to testify against a challenge to the ban from a gay man seeking to adopt two young brothers he'd raised as a foster parent. Rekers was hired on McCollum's recommendation three years after a judge in Arkansas branded as worthless the charlatan's testimony – for which he was paid \$100,000 – in a similar case.

The judge in the Florida case, Cindy Lederman, wound up declaring the state's gay adoption ban unconstitutional. In her ruling, Lederman wrote that Rekers' testimony was neither "credible nor worthy of forming the basis for public policy".

Since the revelations surfaced about Rekers, an embarrassed McCollum has been on the defensive about hiring him. "There wasn't a whole lot of choice," he said.

Observed the *Sentinel*: "The dearth of credible experts to defend the ban should have told the Attorney General something. Reputable studies have shown parents' quality, not their sexual orientation, is what counts."

Leonard Pitt's Jr, an award-winning columnist on the *Miami Herald* added this: "If all this sounds like a rerun, that's only because it is. Indeed, in recent years, the crusader against gay rights who is revealed to be secretly gay himself has become a 'type', ubiquitous to the point of cliché ... And what's sad is not just that a George Rekers would do this, but that ours is a culture that would encourage and reward such duplicity in the first place.

"He purported to heal homosexuals? One is reminded of an injunction from the book of Luke: 'Physician, heal thyself'. Rekers would be wise to heed that advice. Homosexual urges are the least of his afflictions."

Rekers resigned last month from NARTH in somewhat of a rush, declaring: "I am immediately resigning my membership in NARTH to allow myself the time necessary to fight the false media reports that have been made against me. With the assistance of a defamation attorney, I will fight these false reports because I have not engaged in any homosexual behavior whatsoever. I am not gay and never have been."

See, I told you he isn't gay.



BARRY DUKE
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Author Sam Harris joins the 'arrest Ratzinger' campaign

Sam Harris, the atheist writer, has launched an appeal to fund a legal bid to have the Pope arrested when he visits Britain.

The American neuroscientist is seeking financial backing for the campaign that is being led by British writers Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. The pair have asked human-rights lawyers to produce a case for charging Ratzinger over his alleged cover-up of sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic church.

Harris, the author of *The End of Faith*, launched his appeal online, stating: "I would like to announce that Project Reason, the foundation that my wife and I started to spread scientific thinking and secular values, has joined Hitchens and Dawkins in an effort to end the 'diplomatic immunity' which the Vatican claims protects the Pope from any responsibility.

"We would greatly appreciate your support in this cause. All donations are tax-deductible in the United States."

The 42-year-old told the *Sunday Times* last month that he had been moved to get involved after reading the findings of the Irish Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse. "The evidence suggests the misery of these children was facilitated and concealed by the



Sam Harris

hierarchy of the Catholic church at every level, up to and including the current Pope.

"In his former capacity as Cardinal Ratzinger, Pope Benedict personally oversaw the Vatican's response to reports of sexual abuse in the church. Did he immediately alert the police and ensure that the victims would be protected from further torments?"

"On the contrary, repeated and increasingly desperate complaints of abuse were set aside, witnesses were pressured into silence and offending priests were relocated only to destroy fresh lives in unsuspecting parishes."

Benedict is due to be in Britain between September 16 and 19, visiting Glasgow, Edinburgh, London and Coventry, where he will beatify Cardinal John Henry Newman, the 19th-century theologian.

Geoffrey Robertson, a UK barrister, and solicitor Mark Stephens believe the Pope would be unable to claim diplomatic immunity from arrest because, although his tour is a state visit, he is not the head of a state recognised by the United Nations.

A spokesman for the Vatican insisted the Pope would enjoy diplomatic immunity and dismissed the campaign to arrest Benedict as a publicity stunt.

Lesbian kicked by Christian homophobe

A SOUTH African woman has instituted a R1.5-million (£137,000) damages claim against a member of her church who allegedly kicked her several times between the legs in "a bid to convert her to being a heterosexual" as it was "ungodly" to be gay.

Cecilia (Liana) Munnik, 31, of Garsfontein stated in papers filed at the Pretoria High Court that not only was she severely injured but her feelings were also hurt in the May 2007 incident, which took outside the home of Margaret and Gerhard de Beer.

Munnik claims that Mrs De Beer told her that she, as a gay woman, would "go straight to hell" and that she was an insult to Christianity. Other claims include that Mrs de Beer kicked Munnik between the legs in a bid to "convert" her.

The assault took place in full view of other people, she said. While she was being assaulted and abused, Gerhard de Beer did nothing to stop his wife. Munnik was treated at the Pretoria East Hospital and could not work for two weeks. She said she suffered serious emotional trauma and was subjected to humiliating medical examinations.

While both parties are members of the Hatfield Christian Church, they do not know each other. Munnik said Mrs De Beer, however, knew that she was gay and her comments boiled down to "hate speech" regarding gay people. Munnik also felt that the woman insinuated that a person could not be gay and a Christian.

Gerhard de Beer dismissed Munnik's claims as "99 percent lies".

Atheist GP wins prestigious Golden Phallus award

BEATING off stiff competition, Dr Antony Lempert, co-ordinator of the Secular Medical Forum, was voted "Academic of the Year" in the 2010 Erotic Awards.

The GP, who practises in Wales, was presented with his prize, a winged golden phallus, at the Erotic Awards ceremony in London recently. Later he spoke at a public rally in Regent's Park where he declared: "The battlefield chosen by religious bodies is often the genitalia and other people's sexual freedoms. It has only been by engaging the religions on their own sexual territory that I accidentally find myself working towards a less constrained, less damaged, more erotic society. I am delighted to find myself in this camp."

The Erotic Awards celebrate people working towards sexual freedom around the world. Dr Lempert was given the award in recognition of his work for the Secular Medical Forum to prevent religious bodies from interfering with other people's bodies.

The SMF campaigns for accurate and informative sex and relationship education for children, and against childhood ritual genital mutilation. They have argued in favour

of advertising condom and abortion services on television, and have challenged pharmacists' rights to refuse to dispense emergency contraception.

The SMF also campaigns to abolish all forms of ritual genital mutilation, including non-therapeutic male circumcision, to improve access to emergency contraception and abortion, and generally keep religious tendrils from interfering with people's sex lives. He works very hard and expresses his views in a gentlemanly, logical yet relentless manner.

Dr Lempert says: "I hold to account those people and organisations who espouse potentially dangerous views or who are engaged in harmful practices. This is particularly the case in the sphere of religion, where entrenched traditional religious privilege so often conflicts with other people's dignity, autonomy and safety."



Dr Antony Lempert



Please support the NSS's 'No to

The National Secular Society's campaign to remove prayers from council meetings entered a new phase last month when a lawyer's letter ahead of action was sent to Bideford Council in Devon setting out the grounds under which it believes the practice to be illegal. The NSS advised the council that unless the practice was stopped, it would seek a judicial review. It is hoped that this will set a precedent that will affect the many other councils that have prayers as part of their agenda.

The Society's intervention follows a complaint from local councillor Clive Bone, whose motions to remove prayers from the agenda have failed, despite the council having been warned by the National Association of Local Councils that continuing prayers as part of the council meeting would be a breach of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The case has sparked media interest, with the *Guardian* and the *Daily Mail* carrying articles about the challenge. Further interest was generated when Lord Carey, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, joined the fray. He told the *Guardian*: "The centuries-long tradition of saying of prayers before council meetings is simply an acknowledgment of the important role the Christian faith plays in civic life. The attempt to rule such prayers as discriminatory is an attack on freedom and a cynical manoeuvre to drive public expressions of faith from national as well as local life. This should not be a matter for the courts as it concerns democratic freedoms. Councillors can halt the practice of saying prayers through a vote rather than resorting to judicial means."

But Clive Bone, the councillor at the centre of the protest, told the BBC that prayers at a council meeting were no more relevant than prayers would be at a board meeting of Tesco. Mr Bone said: "Religious worship is a fundamental human right, but so is procreation, and we don't bring that into the council chamber."

Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director of the NSS, said: "Charges that the NSS was picking on Bideford because it was small and had limited resources were unfounded. We didn't pick Bideford; we were asked to intervene by a councillor there. This need cost the council nothing. They know this is almost certainly not legal: the National Association of Local Councils told them some years ago and our lawyers explained it to them in detail last year. All they have to do is comply with the law. We have no objec-

tion to people praying if they want to – but it should not form an integral part of the council meeting. The council claims that prayers have been said since the time of Elizabeth I, conveniently omitting that they were abandoned and reintroduced relatively recently. Emptying pews put paid to the other supposed justification – that Britain is a Christian country (and, by implication, Christianity can and should be forced on everyone).



Cllr Clive Bone

"If Bideford Council's prayers take place before – but completely separate – from council business, we will have no argument with them. The council should confine itself to providing services for the public, not forcing religious services on its councillors. We are a secularist organisation, and as such we seek to separate politics from religion. Council prayers represent a fusion of politics and religion and a completely unnecessary one."

The NSS points out that "all we are doing is asking the courts to decide whether this practice by a public body is legal". It described as "ridiculous" Lord Carey's assertion that the NSS campaign was an "attack on freedom".

"This ridiculous comment reveals a much larger and more sinister agenda by Carey and his evangelical lawyer friends. Carey had intervened in the recent Gary



Gary McFarlane

McFarlane case to make wild and gratuitous claims, even wanting special panels to decide Christian cases.

At the end of April Lord Justice Laws refused McFarlane permission to have his religious discrimination case heard before the Court of Appeal. McFarlane, a relationships counsellor from Bristol, was sacked by the Relate Relationship organisation after he refused to provide sexual counselling to homosexual couples because of his Christian beliefs. He asked that his case be heard by different judges from those who ruled against Lillian Ladele in December 2009.

Said the NSS: "For his troubles Carey was torn apart by Lord Justice Laws. Carey's assertion that freedom to worship was being undermined was also met with undisguised contempt by the learned lord, a card carrying Anglican.

"The real objective of Carey and co is for British law to revert to the times when Christianity was grossly privileged. And the National Secular Society is just as determined that they will not get their way."

The NSS is opening a fighting fund to help with the costs of this case. If you would like to contribute, you can make an online donation by credit card (<http://www.secularism.org.uk/donate.html>) or by cheque to NSS Fighting Fund, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

Meanwhile, a Methodist minister, Paul Martin, who occasionally takes the prayers at Bideford Council, now says that he will no longer do so unless the prayers are separate from the council meeting. On his blog, Mr Martin writes:

"I wish this was resolved without courts. However, sad as it may be, this has so far not happened. ...The point of human rights legislation is that minorities have rights as well.

"The Bishop of Crediton offers the following insight: 'The saying of prayers before meetings is an integral part of the British system of government'.

"Only this is not so. I served for four years on the Redruth Town Council. Never did I hear a prayer in that time – and given that I think only one other member ever attended a place of worship it would have been odd for the situation to be otherwise! I know of many other councils where prayers are not said.

"Let me be clear about my position! I am happy to pray with anyone. I am happy to pray with councillors who wish to be prayed with. Equally I am happy to pray with refuse collectors, teachers or nurses

o to Council Prayers' campaign

who express such a wish. Their responsibilities are at least equal to members of a town council.

"But I am not going to force my prayers down those who do not wish them. Why? Some Christians say it does no harm and is tradition. My response is that prayer is a dangerous thing because it opens us up to the living God. And that living God is not the possession of safe bourgeois understandings to pour holy water on decisions that at times may be contrary to the gospel that proclaims a world in which the mighty are brought down and the lowly lifted up."

Mr Martin says that his decision is not a capitulation to the NSS – whose motives he suspects – but his belief that there should be no compulsion in religion.

Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, said: "Mr Martin might not trust us, but we are full of admiration for his principled stand. He seems to have grasped the issue at stake in a way that the Council and Lord Carey have failed to do. He is a secularist himself, whether he accepts the label or not."

And Northam Council, which neighbours Bideford, is to consider scrapping its prayers. The *North Devon Gazette* reports: "Northam Town Council will be reviewing its policy of having prayers at the beginning of its meetings. Mayor Chas Langton said the council was having difficulty getting members of the church to come to meetings and lead a prayer. Councillor Langton said he would be putting the item on the council's next agenda. He told the council: 'I have also had difficulty seeing some members of the council leave the room during the prayers. I wonder if we could have some form of words we are all happy with read out before meetings. I think this may alleviate some problems for us'."

And in the *Morning Star*, Councillor Paddy Kane of the London Borough of Sutton writes: "May I applaud as long overdue the legal challenge by the National Secular Society to the ritual of prayers before council meetings. I made my colleagues aware some years ago of my reason to delay entering the council chamber until that part was over. Hopefully the challenge

will shed some light as to why it's perceived that mayors need a chaplain at all. From the numerous reserved seats for the Church of England in the House of Lords, down to modest local councils with their mayor's chaplains, we are still fighting the age-old battle to separate church and state."

In the *Guardian*, Bill Nock, an atheist ex-councillor with 19 years of service on Wirral MBC, wrote that he and others made a point of staying outside the council chamber until prayers were over. But when he became mayor he ended the "tradition" – as well as the mayor's church service. He said to Clive Bone: "I hope you win, as in a democracy no-one should be made to take part in any religious service."

An attempt to end prayers at Wellington Town Council in Shropshire last month failed when independent councillor Pat McCarthy's suggestion that the council hold a separate service before meetings with official council business starting 15 minutes later was rejected. The council refused to debate the motion and went straight to a vote.

Sentencing of Liverpool atheist creates 'a dangerous new blasphemy law'

THE sentencing of Harry Taylor, 59, to six months in prison (suspended for two years) for leaving anti-religious cartoons in an airport prayer room has been condemned by the National Secular Society as "creating a new blasphemy law that will open the way for every religious extremist to persecute and prosecute their critics."

Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society said: "Regardless of the fact that this six-month sentence has been suspended, it is still totally out of proportion for what Mr Taylor did. Nobody can deny that he was being deliberately provocative in leaving these rather mild cartoons, cut from *Private Eye*, in the prayer room, but in the end he didn't harm anybody and was simply making a point about the existence of such a facility. The chaplain could quite easily have simply thrown the papers in the bin.

"Instead, she claims to have been hurt and offended by this material, which makes her ultra-sensitivity a dangerous thing indeed. The professional 'offence takers' in religious communities will now



One of the images left in the airport prayer room by Harry Taylor

feel that they have a strong new weapon to use against anyone who is critical or disapproving of them. It is, in effect, a blasphemy law that covers all religions and is much more powerful than the one that was abol-

ished only two years ago."

"Religiously aggravated offences represent a new kind of blasphemy law, and the professional offence takers in religious communities won't be slow to exploit this new avenue of restricting criticism and comment about their beliefs. It is time for parliament to reconsider these provisions and remove them from the statute book."

Sanderson said that Mr Taylor describes himself as a "militant atheist" who wanted to challenge the existence of the "prayer room", particularly as it was situated on John Lennon Airport in Liverpool – he maintained that John Lennon was an atheist and would not have approved of the presence of the prayer room.

During his trial at Liverpool Crown Court, Taylor, 59, denied three counts of causing religiously aggravated harassment, but at the end of April was found guilty by a jury. He was sentenced to six months in jail, suspended for two years, ordered to perform 100 hours' of unpaid work, pay £250 costs and given an Anti-social Behaviour Order (Asbo).

'Islam will dominate the world' and 'kill Go

A Muslim protester who daubed a war memorial with graffiti glorifying Osama Bin Laden and proclaiming "Islam will dominate the world" walked free from court in April after prosecutors ruled his actions were not motivated by religion.

Tohseef Shah, 21, could have faced a tougher sentence if the court had accepted that the graffiti – which included a threat to kill the Prime Minister – were inspired by religious hatred.

But – citing a loophole in the law – the Crown Prosecution Service chose not to charge him with that offence and he escaped with only a two-year conditional discharge and an order to pay the council £500 compensation after admitting causing criminal damage.

The decision was attacked by politicians and veterans who were shocked by the desecration of the memorial in Burton-upon-Trent, Staffordshire.

Tory MP Patrick Mercer, chairman of the Parliamentary Counter Terrorism sub-committee, said: "This is an outrage against our war dead."

Shah sprayed the words "Islam will domi-



Muslim fanatic Tohseef Shah

nate the world – Osama is on his way" and 'Kill Gordon Brown' on the plinth of the memorial in December.

He was arrested after his DNA was found on the discarded spray-can but refused to give an explanation for his actions or show any remorse, a court heard.

A file was sent to lawyers at the Counter Terrorism Division of the CPS in London to see if there was a racially or religiously motivated connotation.

However when Shah appeared before magistrates this week, prosecutor Andrew Bodger said: "It was decided there was not enough evidence to prove this, and they decided it was politically motivated."

Defending, Mumtaz Chaudry said Shah

did not hold extremist views.

"This is nothing to do with his religious beliefs, his family's beliefs or his cultural beliefs. He is just an ordinary guy. He is remorseful, but at the time of his interview he was simply answering questions and didn't realise that was the right time to show remorse."

Local veterans reacted with horror. Roy Whenman, 78, who fought in the Korean War, said: "If what he wrote on the memorial wasn't evidence of racial or religious hatred then what is? The memorial commemorates people of my generation who died for our freedom as well as those fighting in wars today. It's diabolical that someone could deface it in this way."

Community leaders among Burton-upon-Trent's 4,000-strong Muslim population also slammed Shah's actions.

Khadim Thathall, a former president of a mosque in the town, said: "This young man has clearly been radicalised by groups which are looking to cause trouble and it's a pity that the court hasn't been able to deal with him more strictly."

Shah – believed to be a former student of De Montfort University in Leicester – used a photograph of a flaming lion's head

Italian burqa case re-ignites debate over

Apologists for Islam who argue that Islamic face coverings ought to be tolerated in Western societies because they are a symbol of piety, or of modesty, periodically even go so far as to insist that women aren't compelled to wear sinister abominations like the burqa. Some even claim that such garments are "empowering".

This, of course, is complete baloney – and was exposed as such when a Muslim living in Novara, Italy, declared that he would have no option but to place his wife under a form of house arrest if the law prevented her from venturing out looking like a perambulating black pillar-box.

Ben Salah Brain, 36, signalled that his wife Amel Marmouri, 26, was no better than a chattel after she was fined 500 euro (£430) for queuing inside a post-office with her body and face fully covered by a burqa. She was warned by police that she would receive another fine if she were spotted again in public in the garment.

Days after, her unemployed husband said as a result he had no option but to stop

her from venturing out. "Now Amel will have to stay indoors. I can't have other men looking at her. If the law says she can't wear one then she will have to stay inside night and day. There is nothing I can do."

His wife had fallen foul of local laws banning clothing that "prevents the identification of the wearer inside public buildings" introduced by Novara's mayor Massimo Giordano, who said: "I signed the new regulations for reasons of security but also so that people who come to live in our city are aware and respect our traditions. The regulations in Novara specifically cover people wearing clothing that prevents them from being identified in a public place, and a post-office is a public place. This would also apply to a motorcyclist who walked into a post-office wearing a crash helmet. The people of Novara do not want to see people walking around in the city wearing a burqa. This is the only way to stop behaviour that makes the already difficult process of integration even harder.

Shortly after, atheist author and commentator Christopher Hitchens penned a

piece for *Slate* magazine in which he observed: "Society is being asked to abandon an immemorial tradition of equality and openness in order to gratify one faith, one faith that has a very questionable record in respect of females.

"Let me ask a simple question to the pseudo-liberals who take a soft line on the veil and the burqa. What about the Ku Klux Klan? Notorious for its hooded style and its reactionary history, this gang is and always was dedicated to upholding Protestant and Anglo-Saxon purity. I do not deny the right of the KKK to take this faith-based view, which is protected by the First Amendment to the US Constitution. I might even go so far as to say that, at a rally protected by police, they could lawfully hide their nasty faces. But I am not going to have a hooded man or woman teach my children, or push their way into the bank ahead of me, or drive my taxi or bus, and there will never be a law that says I have to.

"There are lesser objections to the covered face or the all-covering cloak. The latter has often been used by male criminals

l Gordon Brown' not religious hate speech

superimposed on crossed Kalashnikov rifles on his Facebook profile which he deactivated immediately after his sentencing.

But the social networking site gained a group demanding that Shah be jailed then deported "to a more suitable country".

Shah lives with his parents in a £200,000 detached house and works at his father's car spares shop.

He refused to discuss the case. Instead he appointed Abdullah Ibn Abbas, who described himself as spiritual leader of a group called Road to Jannah, to speak on his behalf.

Abbas said: "It really doesn't concern us how the British people feel about the graffiti he wrote – the real outrage should be about the thousands of Muslims who are being killed and butchered as a result of British foreign policy.

The CPS said Shah's offence could not be charged as a hate crime because the law requires that damage must target a particular religious or racial group.

It said: "While it was appreciated that what was sprayed on the memorial may have been perceived by some to be part of a racial or religious incident, no racial or



religious group can be shown to have been targeted."

Andrew Bodger, prosecuting, said information about Shah and photos of the graffiti were sent to the Crown Prosecution Service headquarters in London for a review by senior lawyers.

They decided there was insufficient evidence that the crime was racially or religiously motivated, which could have led to more serious charges and a harsher

sentence.

Mr Bodger said: "Shah wouldn't give an explanation as to why he had done it and has shown no remorse for this very sensitive matter.

"The words were cleaned off without difficulty at a cost of £500. The CPS specialist unit was sent the pictures, as well as his mobile phone records, to see if there was a racially or religiously motivated connotation."

er faceless Islamic females

– not just religious terrorists but common thugs – to conceal themselves and make an escape. It has also been used to conceal horrible injuries inflicted on abused females. It is incompatible – because of its effect on peripheral vision – with activities such as driving a car or negotiating traffic. This removes it from the sphere of private decision-making and makes it a danger to others, as well as an offence to the ordinary democratic civility that depends on phrases like 'Nice to see you'.

"It might be objected that in some Muslim societies women are not allowed to drive in the first place. But that would absolutely emphasise my second point. All the above criticisms would be valid if Muslim women were as passionately committed to wearing a burqa as a male Klansman is committed to donning a pointy-headed white shroud. But, in fact, we have no assurance that Muslim women put on the burqa or don the veil as a matter of their own choice.

"A huge amount of evidence goes the other way. Mothers, wives, and daughters

have been threatened with acid in the face, or honour-killing, or vicious beating, if they do not adopt the humiliating outer clothing that is mandated by their menfolk. This is why, in many Muslim societies, such as Tunisia and Turkey, the shrouded look is illegal in government buildings, schools, and universities. Why should Europeans and Americans, seeking perhaps to accommodate Muslim immigrants, adopt the standard only of the most backward and primitive Muslim states? The burqa and the veil, surely, are the most aggressive sign of a refusal to integrate or accommodate. Even in Iran there is only a requirement for the covering of hair, and I defy anybody to find any authority in the Quran for the concealment of the face."

Hitchen concluded: "So it's really quite simple. My right to see your face is the beginning of it, as is your right to see mine. Next but not least comes the right of women to show their faces, which easily trumps the right of their male relatives or their male imams to decide otherwise. The law must be decisively on the side of transparency,

The French [who are considering banning the burqa in public places] are striking a blow not just for liberty and equality and fraternity, but for sorority too."

Writing in the *Independent*, British Muslim commentator Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, said: "For me, the overwhelming argument against the burqa (and various coverings for children, another growing abomination) is that there is such a thing as society. Community fetishes cannot override social communication, connection, obligations, equality, duties and understanding. Security and safety-measures too require facial identification. Politicians need to get assertive and argue that they believe in non-racist, universal human development. Effective policies to halt the spreading habit (in both senses) will then naturally follow.

"And reformist Muslims too should speak up more frankly without fear or favour. A traditional Pakistani friend of mine – who always wears the shalwar kameez – recently refused service from a burqa-ed librarian in one of our big libraries. The next time she went in, the face was no longer hidden. Maybe our new government should consult her. She could teach them how resistance, not acquiescence, gave us our past freedoms and will preserve our present ones."

DEMOLISHING THE MESSIAH MYTH

Nailing Jesus

KEN HUMPHREYS, author of *Jesus Never Existed*, asserts that the Jesus tale is a fictional drama in which a stereotypic hero has been intruded into a more or less historical landscape

How far should the atheist buy into the story of Jesus? Most, I suspect, reduce the Christian superstar to a dimly perceived “good man” of some description, who perhaps said some wise words, fell foul of Jewish and Roman authorities and managed to get himself crucified.

The answer from some, however, appears to be rather more accommodating of the gospel yarn, accepting more or less everything minus the miracles and the claim to be Son of God. Like the rest of us, they erase all the bits that offend their own sense of the rational. But then, from what they think are the residual certainties of a life and death – a mother called Mary, a girlfriend called Mary Magdalen, a brother called James, etc. – they assemble their own secularised Jesus, mining freely from holy literature in an enthusiast’s conviction that the “truth” is hidden there and one simply needs the key.

But there is a big difference between a reality embroidered with propaganda (for example, Caesar’s Gallic wars) and a fantasy placed into an authentic-sounding historical setting (such as Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes). The Jesus tale is very much in the latter category – a fictional drama in which a stereotypic hero has been intruded into a more or less realistic historical landscape. And as we would expect of a fictional creation, there exists not a single contemporaneous reference to such a character, nor a single genuine artefact to substantiate that he ever walked the earth.

The traditional, “authorised” version of Christian origins is a “big bang” theory: one fine day, the only begotten son of God materialised in a virgin’s womb. He grew to manhood, assembled his acolytes, imparted his wisdom, made his redemptive sacrifice and rose again. A religion was born.

Secularised, this same big bang theory boils down to little more than “Christianity exists, it must have begun somewhere;

it began with a single character, here’s my version of who he really was.” Favourites include an itinerant philosopher in the style of the Cynics and a social/religious reformer, either a pacifist like Gandhi or a militant like Che Guevara. In fact, like recovered meat from a de-fleshed carcass, Jesus has been “re-formed” a hundred times, often as a cypher for a genuine historical character, including, among others, Julius Caesar, Judas the Galilean, John of Gamala, and Titus Caesar. The very ubiquitousness of the idea of Jesus convinces many that “someone” must lie beneath the encrusted legends.

The traditional, ‘authorised’ version of Christian origins is a ‘big bang’ theory: one fine day, the only begotten son of God materialised in a virgin’s womb. He grew to manhood, assembled his acolytes, imparted his wisdom, made his redemptive sacrifice and rose again. A religion was born.

But before we build yet another Jesus in our own image, what on earth can we trust as a firm handhold? For one thing, eliminating the miraculous is not as straightforward as you might think. For example, consider the simple matter of Jesus calling his disciples. “They left everything and followed him”, if to be understood as reportage, is in fact a miracle. In the normal world, people just don’t do that! This transforming encounter of godman with fishermen, as written in the gospel, is just as unworldly as Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus. If we regard the episode as shorthand for a protracted period of discussion and recruitment (by a merely “human” Jesus) then we begin the whole process of fabricating our own Jesus anyway.

And if a miracle is eliminated – for example, “the spirit driving him into the

wilderness to be tested by Satan” – do we have any reason to suppose he went into the wilderness at all? Did he ascend a mountain if he didn’t “transfigure”? Was he by the lake if he didn’t walk on the water? Was he even at a wedding if he didn’t turn water into wine? Few of the Jesus stories make sense without the miracle that defines the encounter.

Removing miracle after miracle doesn’t leave a whole lot and yet we’ve only just begun to consider the difficulties of a “historical” Jesus.

Do the few non-miraculous episodes make any sense? “Cleansing the temple” sounds not wholly improbable until you realise that the temple had a vast course of thirty-five acres, enclosed by porticos and at Passover thronging with thousands of pilgrims (and not a few temple guards). Did Jesus really – single-handedly – drive out all the money-changers and herds of oxen, sheep and dove sellers? Can you even imagine such a thing? Would he not have been wrestled to the ground in short order? The gospels describe a berserker’s performance appropriate to a blockbuster superhero. What should we do, scale the event down to an acceptable melee – or recognise (correctly) that an imaginary incident has been worked up from a scriptural template (in this case, Zechariah 14.21 and Hosea 9.15)?

Even mundane and plausible-sounding details are problematic – for example, Luke’s “census of all the world” (as if) or Matthew’s “Slaughter of the Innocents” by Herod (not even his fellow evangelists noticed that one). A surprising number of Jesus venues (Magdala, Arimathea, Emmaus, Cana, etc) are unknown either to archaeology or history. Even a 1st-century Nazareth is in doubt (certainly, there was no “city” as claimed by the gospels). The placid Lake Tiberias (Chinnereth) is transformed into a storm-tossed Sea of Galilee so that Jesus can “calm the storm.” The trial (six distinct hearings!) is incompatible

with all that we know of ancient Jewish law. The gospel portrait of Pontius Pilate is totally at odds with the evidence from other sources. And the difficulties go on and on.

It is a big mistake to think that we can simply take the gospel stories, discard the miraculous and then assemble the residue into what we may fondly believe to be “the real Jesus”.

Ancient testimonies quite freely weave propaganda, myth and probable fact but the gospels are a very different type of document. One oddity of the Jesus tale is its four-fold construction, presented by a deceitful Church as four unique witness statements. Blatant contradictions between the “witnesses” are waived off as “authentic” alternative viewpoints, but they are nothing of the kind.

One thing of which historians and NT scholars are well aware is the trajectory by which the Jesus tale developed from an original text. Matthew, Luke and even to some extent the fourth gospel, built on a brief original tale (*sans* miraculous birth and post-mortem appearances) written at an uncertain date by an anonymous author, which Church tradition alone identifies as Mark. Matthew took this story off in one direction, correcting Mark’s “curious” errors of geography and Jewish practices, and packing the text with “prophecy”. Luke, in contrast, trawled through the works of Josephus for his tidbits of “historical accuracy.” John’s Jesus is so different from the hero of the synoptics that he has a completely incompatible “biography”. Whatever else, eye-witness testimonies they are not, and the tendentious story was all but unknown until the second half of the second century.

Aware of these difficulties, NT scholars posit a multiplicity of “traditions” that preceded the gospel tales. And what do these earlier traditions tell us of Jesus?

Pauline Christianity, with its emphasis on the “Risen Christ”, has an all-but-total lack of reference to a human Jesus and is a very different animal from the Christianity of the “Pillars” in Jerusalem. Paul himself castigates several rival factions, including those who followed John the Baptiser, not Jesus. And this, before we step outside the parameters of traditional Christianity.

Though the NT fails to acknowledge even their existence, the Essenes, one of Josephus’ four sects of the Jews, anticipated Christianity in a number of respects. The Therapeuts of Egypt (described in detail by Philo, though he made not a single reference to Jesus or Christianity) were

hailed by Church historian Eusebius as “early Christian monks”, yet they were widely established well before the opening of the Christian era! The Gnostics, a wide variety of esoteric fraternities, far from originating as heretics in the second century, were certainly active before orthodoxy got its boots on and generally held that their god could never have taken human form. Among them were the Docetae, sectarians that vexed Paul by denying a Jesus “in the flesh”. What’s very clear is that completely divergent forms of Christianity (or rather, proto-Christianities) were already widespread before Jesus took up his starring role.

And if a “Christian” movement existed before its purported eponymous founder, what then are we to make of the thinly drawn “life of Jesus” which certainly appears to owe an extraordinary amount to Jewish scriptural precedents – whether drawn from Adam, Moses, Enoch, Melchizedek, Elijah, Elisha, *et al* – collectively, a vast anticipation of the words and deeds of Jesus? Let one instant stand for many: on the south side of the Hill of Moreh, Elisha raised the only son of an old woman (2 Kings 4.32,35); on the north side of the same hill Jesus also raised the only son of an old woman (Luke 7.11,15). Do we buy into the Christian apologetic of “fulfilment” when a simple “copying” explains the same? In fact, we know that Christian scribes trawled through Jewish scripture (the Greek Septuagint at that) for proof of their godman, but they were seeking not confirmation but inspiration!

What are we to make of the multitude of parallels to Jesus lore to be found in ancient world mythology? One enormous train of coincidences? I don’t think so. Even the embarrassed Church Fathers spoke of diabolical mimicry. It seems that Satan himself understood the true message of the Jewish prophets and was thus able to pre-empt Christianity centuries before the arrival of Jesus. And if the Devil could read the prophets and construct a Jesus or two could not Christian scribes do precisely the same?

The fact is, we have absolutely no trace or mention of Jesus’ exploits anywhere until the gospels were written decades after the purported events. Desperate to penetrate the primordial fog, some scholars strive to identify an early “layer” of teaching said to derive from the mouth of an historical Jesus. But does a “sayings tradition” (as in the Gospel of Thomas) really point to a single author of wise words? The Bible itself provides an answer.

We have a sayings collection in the Book of Proverbs (attributed to Solomon) and another in the Book of Psalms (attributed to David). Neither accreditation is historically valid; rather, we know it was standard practice in the ancient world to lend authority and prestige to new material by falsely accrediting a prestigious figure from the past (even, as in this case, to personages who are historically dubious!) But even more fatal to the claim of a “sayings tradition” is the patent failure of anyone to record any of the supposed astounding new teachings at the time! If “great multitudes” throughout Syria, Galilee, the Decapolis, and Judea heard and believed, how odd that not one recorded those sparkling gems of wisdom! Not even Paul, the great proselytiser, quotes his Lord, but instead habitually turns to Jewish scripture for divine endorsement.

If we still insist on some sort of flesh-and-blood progenitor we now run into another difficulty. A Jesus who did nothing of consequence and said nothing of consequence would not have been the catalyst for a religious revolution. A nonentity of a Jesus, even a gifted carpenter, simply could not have inspired an overturning of established belief systems that had held sway for centuries, if not millennia. A minimalist Jesus (and in fact there were hundreds of men of that name!) obliges us to look elsewhere to explain the religious sea-change.

The truth is that Christianity grew from neither a god nor a man but out of what had gone before; a human Jesus was no more necessary than was a human Horus, Dionysos, Mithras, Attis, etc. Can we explain the emergence of Christianity without its humanoid superstar? Of course we can. Christianity, like all religious movements, was born from myth-making and many currents fed the myth, including astrological speculation, pagan salvation cults, Hellenistic hero-worship, and the imperial cult itself, manufactured at precisely the “time of Jesus”, with its own sacrificed saviour (Divus Iulius), its own gospel of a son of god (Res Gestae Divi Augusti), its own priests and temples, established in the very same urban centres which later witnessed the emergence of early Christianity.

In its various rival incarnations the Christian movement languished for two centuries. Thanks to civil war it got its big chance and finally triumphed in an omnibus edition of all that had gone before, the ultimate product of ancient religious syncretism.

Grayling: Brainwashing children

In this, the third of a four-part interview by **PETER BRIETBART**, Professor Grayling
ever be free of superstition; why humanism is good for the world, a

Peter Brietbart: *Daniel Dennett talks about it in terms of memetics, but why do you think religion has hung around so long?*

A C Grayling: It's partly because humanity is in a very, very early stage in its history. We tend to think that we're at the end of a long process but we're not actually, we're in a very early stage. But religions become institutionalised and get reinforced by society. You only have to look at something like the time, effort and money that has gone into building cathedrals and mosques and the like to see how deeply institutionalised religion really is in society. This is why a child will believe in God, the Tooth Fairy and Father Christmas until about the age of ten, then give up the tooth fairy and Father Christmas, but keep the deity. After that time, that's when society reinforces it in the form of adults who take the idea of a deity very seriously.

If it weren't for, in effect, proselytising and brainwashing children in early life, religion would vanish. That is the one major thing that keeps it going. Most children lose it for a while though, during the teenage years when hormones and sex make it rather inconvenient to be religious.

But then later something will happen: failure, grief at a parent dying or divorce, their first child born – a “miraculous” experience – and they go back to these beliefs for a time.

Most religious people don't really think about their beliefs though. They don't really believe them either. It's a kind of con-trick they perform on themselves. What they want to do is believe that they believe. They would like it to be true, so they just act as if it were.

PB: That is a much more optimistic approach than that of, say, Christopher Hitchens, who reckons that the religious impulse just can't be got rid of. But you say there is hope for humanity? We can be rid of all superstitious thought?

ACG: I'm not sure about superstitions because, in just the same way as someone splats a Rorschach pattern and we see images in the shape, like someone's face or an event, it is simply because we are narrative seeking creatures. We impose interpretation on things.

Further, we're very naturally credulous,



which is a great evolutionary advantage for very small children who believe everything they're told. Ghost stories and alien abduction stories, urban myths and conspiracy theories, we Hoover them up with enthusiasm. We love that kind of thing because they're stories that are easy to understand and provide alternatives to the dreary truth.

We really have a natural propensity for this, but if we didn't feed that propensity during childhood, especially with all the gravity and seriousness of grown-up, religious behaviour, it might not be so bad. It makes children think, “Well, it's got to be true because the grown-ups take it so seriously.” If we didn't do that, it would have a very, very loose grip. If I came to you in adulthood and presented you with a story that a three-wheeled car plummeted from the sky, hit the ground and immediately dispersed into its component molecules, or made up some even more incredible and ridiculous story, you would laugh it out of court. But if I told you it when you were very young and said, “This is really true and really important, and you're in serious trouble if you stop believing it or ever turn your back on this” and I frighten you with it, then you'd accept it. It would be a powerful reinforcement.

PB: If we consider humanism to be a good grounding for law and ethics, what is to stop it being corrupted by the same kinds of people that corrupt everything else? What makes humanism better?

ACG: Because it's not premised on the idea that there is an orthodoxy, that there is one right way of doing things, that some humanists know better than others about what

the truth is or how to understand “the great founding texts of humanism”. There's no “Arch-Humanist”, no bishops of humanism. The point about it is that it is nothing more than a premise. The premise is: our ethics must be derived from our best and most sympathetic understanding of human nature and the human condition, that there's plenty of room for discussion and negotiation, that we must move with the needs of society and be responsive to what happens in history. Of its very nature it's about discussion, thinking, reflection, argument, being tolerant of other people's points of view. It's not about observing an orthodoxy. It's not about obeying. It's not about the submission of your will to the deity. It doesn't tell you that you're proud, and therefore in danger of hellfire if you think for yourself. It's a very different mindset, a different way of thinking about everything.

PB: If we are to agree that the mind is the brain, then it must be held in accordance with deterministic physical laws. Where, then, is freewill?

ACG: The freewill question is by far the hardest question in metaphysics. All the evidence that is coming out of brain science, neurology and neuro-psychology at the moment tends to push us in the direction of thinking that as a part of the natural world, the brain and what it secretes, that is, consciousness, thought, memory and so on, must be subject to deterministic causal laws. We look as though we're headed in the determinism direction rather than the freewill direction.

There are several things to think about here. Firstly, we shouldn't be too simplistic with the problem, to think that what we call the mind is the same as a set of physical events in some structure in the brain, pure and simple.

Identity theory is too simple, and for the following reason. Mental properties are properties of properties. They're not properties immediately of the brain. They're outputs of very complex interactions of the brain. The parallel would be to say that the property of a motorcar of being able to be driven from London to Brighton is a property of the combination of the parts of the motorcar. You couldn't dismantle a motorcar

Children keeps religion going

or Grayling discusses why religion has stuck around so long; whether we could
 e world, and if freewill could really exist in a purely physical world



While Christianity is all but dead in the UK, we are now confronted with ostentatious and often unsettling displays of piety by fundamentalist Muslims

and then expect it to drive to Brighton. It's got to be organised in the right way, everything has to be in the right relationship so that it can have the property of being able to drive to Brighton. So conscious and mental phenomena are high-level properties, which arise from the relationship of the low-level properties.

Secondly, remember that the mind is not just what the brain does. The mind is also the relationship with other minds and with the environment. Meaning is the relationship between something that you know and things out there in the world to which these things refer and of which they can be true and so on. In the same way, your mind, your experience, your consciousness are only really understandable with regards to the relationship between your mind and the physical and social environment through which you move throughout your life. It's as if the mind were somehow connected with the outside world. The activity of the brain is responding to information from the outside world, information which is both natural, like light and sound, but also social, like the significance of the noises and marks produced by other people. So when we think about "mind", we're thinking about something, a full description of which would

have to contain more than a description about brain events alone.

Now, what that says about freewill, one can't yet work out. It doesn't say anything one way or the other. So we have to set against it the following thought: that if there is no such thing as freewill, if everything that we do is written into the early history of the universe and is simply an outcome of all the causal occurrences that connect us with 13 billion years ago, then all our thinking about human nature, morality and human life is massively and systematically wrong. It seems very odd when we consider that, that we live with this completely unfounded error theory about other people's behaviour, their intentions, their choices, how to relate to them, how to predict them, what their character is, we're just completely wrong about it because they are just, in fact, automata. We think of ourselves and others as agents, but we wouldn't be, we'd be patients of the causal process.

It's very hard to accept that as true. It might be true. If science settles that it's true then we've got to accept it. We'd have to think again about reward and punishment, praise and blame, the idea of choice, the idea of changing ourselves through reflection. It's all just accident, just chemistry.

PB: So as we currently understand the mind/body freewill problem, would you call yourself a compatibilist?

ACG: I think I'm some kind of compatibilist, yes. My own temptation is to think that there is more to this than it seems. Imagine this: there are two people standing at the side of a field. The first person, a physicist, describes the set of events on the field in terms of bodies of a certain mass, velocity, the principles of mechanics, emissions of radiation and so on. The second person, a sociologist, describes the same set of events as a rugby match. In the vocabulary of the sociologist there will be explanatory concepts of a try, a penalty, a fly-half. There won't be any such concepts in the language of physics. But in the language of sociology there are no such concepts of velocity and radiation. They don't have a role there.

Accordingly, the vocabulary of brain science and the vocabulary of intentionalistic "folk psychology" are two quite different vocabularies that address two quite different phenomena, and with respect to which we have very different interests. And what we want is to make everything simple, we have a very good, well rounded desire to effect a reduction of a psychological explanation to a physiological or neurological explanation. It's a sound and scientific impulse. But that doesn't mean that we won't find out that high-level properties of brain activity are such that different aspects of our conscious life interact with one another in certain ways, as for example, you might have an impulse to bash somebody in the face, but you control yourself. You deliberately think, "I'm not going to do that, I'm going to control myself." So there was a point when you could genuinely have done either of those two things. If the proposition "Peter could have done A but chose to do B" is literally true, in a way that makes the use of the concept "choice" irreducible. If such a proposition could be true then we have freewill.

• Next month, in the final part, Peter Brietbart asks Grayling what Utopia might look like; what lies in store for the future of humanity; where the best philosophy is to be found, and whether the right to die should be a legal right.

Gay rights trailblazer Antony Grey dies aged 82

PIONEERING gay activist and architect of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, Antony Grey, died on April 30 at the age of 82.

An outspoken atheist who penned a number of articles for the *Freethinker* over the years, Grey was, in the words of human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell, "a superbly professional organiser who successfully won over and marshalled together sufficient MPs and Lords to secure gay law reform".

Tatchell added: "I knew Antony for nearly 40 years. This is a very sad moment. We have lost a giant of the gay movement.

"As secretary of the Homosexual Law Reform Society in the 1960s, Antony was one of the founding fathers of the gay law reform struggle in Britain. Although a true pioneer, he sadly remains a largely unsung hero of the movement for LGBT equality.

"More than 20 years before Stone-wall and OutRage!, Antony Grey was

spearheading the campaign to end the criminalisation of homosexuality, which remained totally illegal and punishable by life imprisonment until 1967.

"While MPs like Leo Abuse got the publicity and credit for decriminalisation, it was Antony's astute, meticulous behind-the-scenes lobbying that was the key to securing the passage of the ground-breaking 1967 Sexual Offences Act.

"His crucial role was never properly acknowledged or recognised."

Tatchell continued: "Antony was immensely frustrated by the way the MPs and Lords sponsoring the decriminalisation Bill watered down his draft legislation, resulting in the passage of a liberalisation law that was not nearly as liberal and progressive as he had wanted and proposed.

"Undeterred, Antony continued lobbying for further gay law reform for a further two decades, mostly through the Homosexual Law Reform Society and its successor, the Sexual Law Reform Society.



Antony Grey: a one-man reform movement

"When Antony attended Gay Liberation Front meetings in the early 1970s he was often treated quite shabbily. I was involved in GLF and remember some radical firebrands unfairly branding him as an 'Uncle Tom'.

"In fact, he was much more radical than his critics claimed. He was supportive of GLF and later of OutRage!

"I don't believe in the honours system but it is absolutely outrageous and despicable that he was never offered even an OBE, let alone the knighthood that his work for homosexual equality merited.

"Successive Labour and Conservative governments deserve severe condemnation for failing to honour this truly great social reformer.

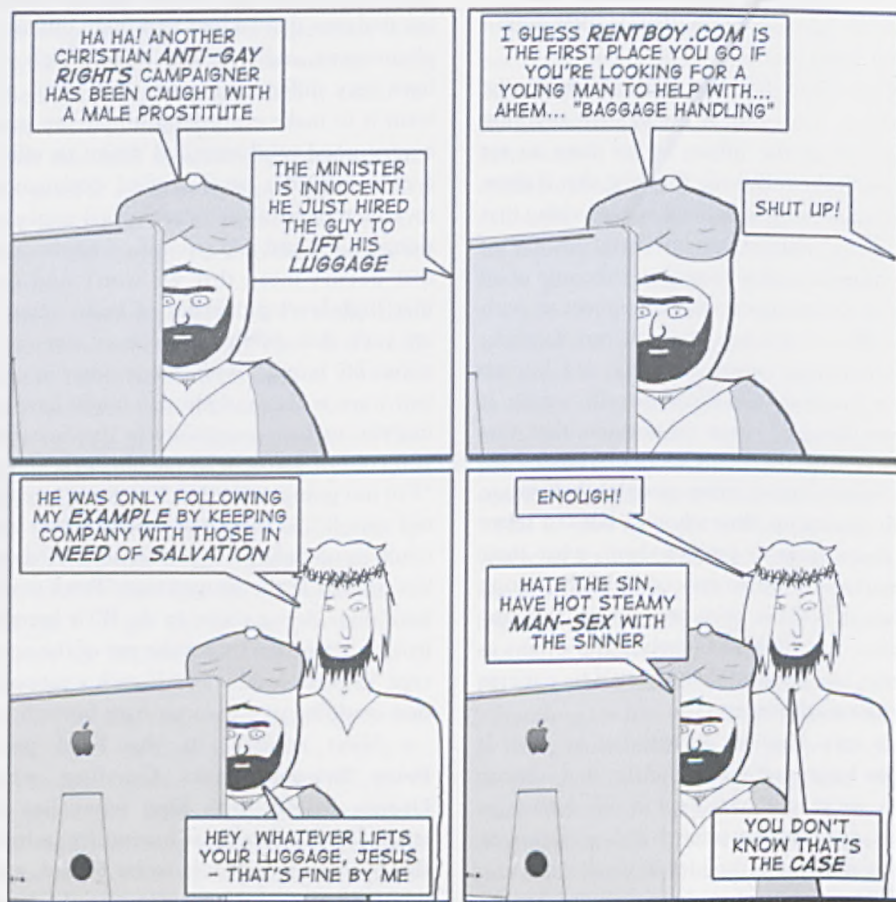
"I salute Antony Grey and his trailblazing contribution to LGBT equality and human rights. We all walk in his shadow."

Born Anthony Edward Gartside Wright, Grey had been ill for several years with leukaemia, and died at King Edward VII hospital in London on April 30.

He lived with his partner Eric Thompson for 50 years, even at a time when it was considered dangerous for gay couples to share a house,

Grey was the author of several books, including *Quest for Justice: Toward Homosexual Emancipation*, *Speaking of Sex*, and *Speaking Out: Sex, Law, Politics and Society*.

Jesus & Mo



points of view...

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IN DEFENCE OF LIVINGSTONE'S ARTICLE ON ISRAEL

HAVING read Graham Livingstone's article "Israel's Road to a Second Holocaust" (*FT* April 2010), I would like to say how refreshing to see someone talk about the unmentionable. Too long has 70-year-old European guilt prevented us from even mentioning the crimes that are being committed by Israel. I despair of humanity – how one people can revisit the same atrocities on others that their grandfathers suffered.

I was then saddened to see the vitriol poured on Graham by three "contributors" in the May edition where they said he was anti-Jewish. There was nothing in Graham's article which was anti-Jewish.

On further consideration I think those three contributors actually strengthened Graham's case – for too long there has been a deliberate and cynical policy to twist any anti-Israeli statement to be anti-Jewish, and by inference a pro-Nazi statement. Hence playing on our collective guilt, with the inevitable consequence of not allowing any proper debate or even the mildest criticism of Israel.

Another bit of old, pretzel logic trotted out by the contributors is that Israel is the only democracy in the area. I seem to recall white South Africans of old boasting similarly of South Africa being the only democracy in Africa.

Any nation which disenfranchises people based on colour and religion cannot with clear conscience boast its democratic credentials. It really is indisputable that the Palestinians (Christian and Muslim) are so disenfranchised.

Thank you, Graham and other genuine freethinkers, for raising this debate and the plight of the Palestinians which are arguably worse than those suffered by the Jewish elders in Warsaw. I do hope others will not feel intimidated to engage in open and honest debate and that the mudslingers will be seen to be what they are.

TA

(Full name and address supplied)

WHEN wrongdoing prospers and continues to harm, frustration easily becomes anger. Many atheists feel something of this about religious institutions. I have a particular antagonism toward the "global warming isn't happening, and anyway we won't change" lobby because I so fear the consequences.

Israel is a target for anger for similar reasons, and unsurprisingly this spills over toward Jewish communities that can be presumed supportive. (Hostility drives out fairness, so it must be noted that many Jews have gradually assimilated and some have contributed greatly to humanity, even opposition to Zionism.)

We too deserve blame for our uncritical support of Israel and the USA, and for our own faults in relation to the Arab world (not apologised for, let alone recompensed in a way that might encourage forgiveness). We should recall Mossadeq, Suez, Aden and Iraq along with our endorsement of despotic and theistic regimes (elsewhere, it was the USA with our help that sponsored the Taliban), all tending to foment an ugly

fundamentalism rather than toleration and acceptance of the right to differ.

The US, our more godly partner in the special relationship we seem so proud of, has a grim record of aggression – ideological (evangelism and the destruction of socialism), economic (global capitalism and debt) and military (destroying governments by war or subversion). Its resources, wealth, achievements and the undoubted merit of many citizens make this conduct doubly unpalatable. The evidence of pathology includes: accounting for nearly half the world's military expenditure (and more by proxy) and nearly a quarter of its prison population; leading the ills of consumption from greenhouse-gas emissions to obesity; fuelling global crime (the drugs and sex industries) and being ready to corrupt or torture.

The effort has to be made to displace anger, a necessary start, by reason and careful interaction. People can change, but promoting that needs not only the evidence but also well judged tactics.

Edwin Salter
Norfolk

THE letters in defence of Israel (May, 2010) raise a number of issues which should be challenged.

Michael Levin, for example, presents a distorted view of the origins of Israel. To argue that the land allocated for the establishment of Israel had a Jewish majority is meaningless outside of the historical context. When Balfour promised Jews a homeland in Palestine in 1917, the Palestinian Arabs outnumbered Jews by at least 13 to 1.

In its infancy, therefore, the enterprise to found a Jewish state in Palestine faced a major dilemma: the territory was already populated. One of the proposed solutions was the "transfer solution", a euphemism for the removal of Palestinians to neighbouring lands. That this was embraced at the highest level of leadership, including Ben Gurion, long before the 1948 war, is well documented. They got their opportunity during the fighting in 1948. Even Zionist historian Benny Morris accepts that Israeli paramilitary groups made it their

(Continued on page 14)

points of view...

from their homes.

Michael also implies that Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and the Lebanon in 2005 was a gesture of goodwill. They withdrew from Gaza because too many soldiers had lost their lives trying to protect the settlers; and if goodwill was the intention, why did they at the same time set about expanding their settlements in the occupied West Bank? They withdrew from the Lebanon in 2006, having destroyed a vast amount of their infrastructure, again because they were losing too many soldiers. (They had earlier occupied southern Lebanon from 1982 to 2000).

David Ibry and Diesel Balaam draw the outdated picture of a beleaguered Israel fighting for its very existence. Israel's two largest neighbours, Jordan and Egypt, both have full diplomatic relations with her. All the other Arab countries have also offered Israel full recognition and secure borders, policed by American troops, in return for her withdrawal from the occupied territories (subject to land swaps). Israel really cannot continue complaining that Arabs do not recognise her, while she is in occupation of Palestinian land, and while her wall, or security fence, cuts off large swathes of Palestinian land and cuts villages and farms in two. Israel has a right to build a wall, but not on her neighbour's land. Even the PLO publicly declared in 1988 its readiness for a two-state solution and, tied to this, a recognition of Israel, and acceptance of a mere 22 percent of historic Palestine.

And now with Israel's announcement in March of plans to build 1,600 new homes in East Jerusalem, she has abandoned even the pretence of wanting to negotiate with the Palestinians. If greater pressure is not brought to bear on the Knesset to change direction, two things will happen: a reassured Israel will continue its creeping expansion – possibly until all of the West Bank is taken; and the Palestinians will resort to ever more desperate and unacceptable means of resistance.

In any case the survival of Israel's neighbours, the Lebanese and the Palestinians, is far more under threat from Israel, in my opinion, than vice versa. Lebanon was lucky to survive at all when Israel destroyed so much of it in 2006. Unlike Lebanon and the Palestinians, Israel at least has the protection of the world's only super power.

Your correspondents rightly draw attention to Israel's free speech, democracy and other achievements. This is admirable, and Israel could have much to contribute in

the region. However, it is of little comfort to the thousands who have lost families, or homes, or who are imprisoned in Gaza, to know that those responsible are representatives of a democratically elected government. (The ratio of Palestinian to Jewish deaths in the 2008/9 invasion of Gaza was 100:1, and in his report on the conflict, Judge Goldstone, himself a South African Jew and Zionist, stated that the evidence of Israel targeting civilians was overwhelming.)

I abhor the fundamentalism, racism, homophobia etc of the likes of Hamas or Hezbollah, but these are, in a real sense, monsters of Israel's creation.

David Simmonds
Essex

HISTORICITY OF JESUS

I TAKE exception to being described by William Harwood as "a well meaning amateur" (*Points of View*, May). In the matter of the historical Jesus, only a historian could be described as a professional, and then only if he majored in Jewish history and the Jewish religion. I am not aware that Harwood himself is such a professional.

I regret that he cannot "endorse" many of my conclusions, which are all logical and supported by evidence, the accuracy of which he recognises.

Steuart Campbell
Edinburgh

STEUART Campbell (*Points of View*, May) dismisses his critics as "crazy" and "prejudiced" and in a remarkable *ad hominem* attack insinuates that author Ken Humphreys "only claims that Jesus never existed so as to undermine the Christian message".

A more charitable interpretation of course is that Ken seeks to undermine the Christian message because he believes Jesus never existed. And what was the name of Ken's site again? Ah yes, www.jesusneverexisted.com.

When considering the existence of Jesus or anything else, the burden of proof lies with the one who alleges. One doesn't have to know for a fact that Jesus didn't exist in order to reject historicity, any more than one needs to disprove unicorns in order to deny their existence. One need only point out (as Ken Humphreys does) that there's no contemporary evidence for Jesus, that many aspects of Jesus' life history contain parallels in myths, that many events in the life of Jesus appear to be re-workings of Old

Testament tales, and that his "biographers" (the New Testament writers) clearly weren't above playing fast and loose with their sources, since they distorted the Old Testament when it suited them to do so. Against this backdrop, which claim is the more reasonable – that Jesus never existed (which is, remember, really the failure to make a claim) or the following claim made on Mr. Campbell's website: that the first person to "put all the clues together, to see Jesus' full plan" was not a disciple of Jesus nor any of his followers, nor any New Testament writer – but a certain Mr. S. Campbell, writing two millennia after the alleged events?

Robert Stovold
Brighton

IN HIS response to Ken Humphreys' article on the non-existence of Jesus published in the March issue of the *Freethinker*, Steuart Campbell refers to the mythicist case having been "comprehensively demolished not just by New Testament scholars but by historians". However, as most "New Testament scholars" and, for that matter, most historians who seriously take into account Christian historical claims concerning the life of Jesus, are committed Christians, it is only to be expected that in their published works they may be hostile in respect of the hypothesis.

Mr Campbell refers to the crucifixion of Jesus as being testified to in Roman and Jewish records. It would have been interesting to know what records he had in mind, for I have found none in either the first edition of his book *The Rise and Fall of Jesus, The Ultimate Explanation for the Origin of Christianity* (Explicit Books, 1996), or in the revised and updated version published by WPS, in 2009.

Professor Craig A Evans reviewing references to Jesus found in non-Christian sources, held that there are only two "important non-Christian sources" but "only a modicum of helpful information about the historical Jesus" can be gleaned from them (*Jesus in Non-Christian Sources*, in B Chilton & CA Evans, eds, *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluation of the State of Current Research*, Leiden, 1994, pp 477-8). The two he discusses, both of which are also discussed by Mr Campbell in his book, are a paragraph from Tacitus's *Annals of Imperial Rome*, and one of two in Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews*.

But there is no reason to believe other than that Tacitus either simply recounts what he had heard from Christians



concerning their beliefs while serving as governor of the province of Asia, and their beliefs are only evidence for them, or from his friend and colleague Pliny the Younger, who at the same time was governing the adjacent provinces of Pontus and Bithynia with a direct mandate to investigate Christian activities there, which, it had been alleged, were creating major economic problems.

As to the authenticity of the paragraph in the *Antiquities*, this has been seriously disputed by not a few distinguished Christian and Jewish scholars, as Evans points out, providing a partial list of those who do so (p 467).

Clearly, then, the myth hypothesis has not been “comprehensively demolished”, as Mr Campbell pretends is the case. There is another hypothesis concerning Jesus and Christian origins, namely that he was a rebel active in contesting the Roman domination of Israel, which would explain his crucifixion. So perhaps the story of the real Jesus has been overwritten by a later story of Jesus, concocted by other hands desperate to conceal the real Jesus, and it is the saga of this fictional Jesus that has prevailed.

The historian F A Ridley considered Jesus to have been a Galilean, Spartacus, whose life story in the gospels has been concealed in a “dense blur of hagiography”, from which the “truth occasionally peeps out” (*Julian the Apostate and the Rise of Christianity, A Study in Cultural History*, London, Watts, 1937, p 78), while the Jewish rabbi Shmuley Boteach likens the figure of Jesus in the gospels to an Egyptian mummy which, once its wrappings are removed, is shown not to have been a “sound-bite-speaking do-gooder, a wandering religious self-help guru who loved the Romans and hated his people” but “a deeply religious Jewish patriot who despised the Romans for their cruelty to his people and for their paganism...” (*New Jersey Jewish Standard*, 12-9-2005).

Robert Morrell
Nottingham

LASHING OUT AT LIBERALS

DIESEL Balaam makes many good points concerning the wearing of total face coverings, but when he fumes that I and others who propose a ban are “cowardly, condescending and whining liberals”, these are not among them.

It's the old paradox of how far we should tolerate the intolerable in a liberal society. I

happen to think that lines should be drawn and that not everything goes.

Suppose a religious sect decides that it is God's will that it should go around naked in public, do we have to tolerate this?

I don't think the religious card should trump everything.

Facial expression is fundamental in human communication, so faces should not, in public, be covered by ghoul gowns or Ned Kelly-type buckets.

D K Gorringe
Herefordshire

IT appears that your correspondent who signs his letters Diesel Balaam cannot write the word “liberals” without a contemptuous sneer like hand-wringing, limp, whining etc. Mr Balaam should remember (if he ever knew) that, but for the dedication, goodwill and generosity of decent, liberal-minded people, there wouldn't be a *Freethinker*. And he would be hard-pressed to find another outlet for his illiberal effusions.

Bill McIlroy
Hove

GET AN ATHEIST BADGE AND WEAR IT WITH PRIDE

YOUR *Freethinking Allowed* article in May about Christians being discriminated against reminds me that, some time ago, a neighbour called to ask if I wanted to participate in his Alpha Course group. As if rampant Wee Frees were not enough around here, this weird fundamentalist religious cult meets in the house across the street every Wednesday. I was already a little amused because he was clutching a little sheaf of grubby leaflets, just like a Jehovah's Witness.

I thought he knew me reasonably well and might have guessed I was an unlikely candidate, but they don't think that way (this faith-head makes me wonder: do they think at all?). I'm afraid I simply laughed aloud and heartily, much to his confusion.

As he stood in the doorway, he leant forward in such a way that a small shiny model of a vile instrument of torture and execution (would you believe it: with a little silver man nailed to it) dangled before me, hanging on a silver chain that he wore around his shirt-open neck. I was shocked, appalled, upset, revolted, disgusted, horrified, sickened and of course deeply, deeply offended. (Dropping the irony, I do find it incredible that anybody should want to wear a relative of the rack, iron maiden, braiding wheel and impaling spike – in use, for goodness' sake! – as an ornament of glorification.

I've toyed with the idea of making my own version of the crucifix, perhaps an

emblem declaring my support for Amnesty: an agonised little man either broken and braided on a wheel atop a pole or alternatively with a pointed pole up his bottom, emerging from his mouth. Nice.

Ever since that visit from the strange world across the road I have worn an Out Campaign scarlet letter “A” lapel badge on every outer garment, but he has never noticed or mentioned it. One Christian lady did once ask what it meant, and when told “Atheist” in an offhand manner of which I was rather proud, she fell suddenly silent and then adroitly changed the subject. Otherwise, to my disappointment, no Christians have taken offence.

A couple of weeks ago I was performing in a concert in church. To my great satisfaction the minister didn't try praying, not even to thank God for the gift of music (see *Freethinker*, July 2009). However, it did cross my mind that I could have been highly offended by the two large crucifixes beside which I was expected to play my bassoon, and which could have been covered with dusters to spare the sensitivities of non-believers. I'm a well-behaved atheist, so I kept schtum.

I'm independent, but if I had a job, such as counsellor, nurse, air host(ess) or registrar, and I wore my splendid new silver “A” on a chain round my neck, at work, for all to see, I wonder what Christians would have to say about that?

I urge atheists holding such posts to get hold of silver “A” chains and do just that. They can be had from: <http://store.richarddawkins.net/collections/accessories>. Stir 'em up, and let's hope we hear about you being asked not to wear your letter “A” whilst at work because it offends Christians; and also about you, making as much fuss as possible as you put it out of sight, whilst not being offended at all.

James Merryweather
Kyle of Lochalsh

Humanist milestone

LEWISHAM Humanist Group celebrates their Golden Jubilee on Thursday, June 17 at 7.30pm in the Civic Centre, Catford, SE6, with Martin Rowson (*Guardian* cartoonist), Andrew Copson, Director of the BHA, Billy Jenkins, atheist blues man, comedienne Jeanne Rathbone, former NSS President Barbara Smoker ... and more. All welcome.

the freethinker

EVENTS & CONTACTS

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

Birmingham Humanists:

w www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk. Friends Meeting House, George Rd & St James Rd, Edgbaston. Fri, June 11, 7.45pm. Richard Lea: *Zoonotics*

Brighton & Hove Humanist Society: **i** 01273 227549/461404. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. 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 Kutchinsky. **e** info@centrallondonhumanists.org.

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

Chiltern Humanists: Enquiries: 01296 623730.

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

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

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

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

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

Devon Humanists:

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. June 9, Jim Herrich: *International Humanism*.

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. June 9: on the 85th anniversary of the "monkey" trial in Tennessee we shall be showing the 1960s film *Inherit the Wind*.

i Secretary on 0208 907-6124

w www.harrow.humanist.org.uk

e Mike Savage at mfsavagamba@hotmail.com

Humanists of Havering: **i** Jean Condon 01708 473597. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgore Cres, Gidea Park. Meetings on first Thursday of the month, 8pm. June 3 Libby Jardine: *Recycling Awareness* July 1 David Marshall: *Did Man Really Go to the Moon?*

Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern Ireland: **i** Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: 028 9267 7264 **e** brianmcclinton@btinternet.com.

w www.nirelandhumanists.net

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

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

Local Scottish Groups:

Aberdeen: 07010 704778, aberdeen@humanism-scotland.org.uk. **Dundee:** 07017 404778, dundee@humanism-scotland.org.uk. **Edinburgh:** 07010 704775, edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk

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

Humanist Society of West Yorkshire: **i** Robert Tee on 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, Wavcrest, Hackensall Rd, Knott End-on-Sea, Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire FY6 0AZ 01253 812308 **e** ian@lanzerz.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.

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 July 7, 8pm. Public Meeting. Subject: *Humanist Ethics*.

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 Gwinnell on 01935 473263 or

e edward.gwinnell@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.