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# the freethinker

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## Catholic fury erupts over planned Pope documentary

A documentary about Pope Ratzinger, commissioned by Channel 4 to coincide with the pontiff's overblown, over-budget visit to the UK in September, has drawn fire from leading British Catholics, who anticipate a hatchet-job.

The broadcaster chose Peter Tatchell, gay rights campaigner and outspoken critic of the Vatican to front the 60-minute programme. Tatchell is one of the founders of a group called Protest the Pope, which criticises his track record on homosexuality, contraception and child abuse and says that he "is an unsuitable guest of the UK government".

Channel 4 said that the programme will examine the impact that the Pope's pronouncements have had on both the developing and Western world, and that it will give voice to a range of views on the Pope.

Tatchell has defended the programme, saying: "This will be a robustly factual programme that explores the Pope's personal, religious and political journey since the 1930s, as well as the motives and effects of his controversial policies."

Ann Widdecombe, the Tory politician who famously converted to Catholicism, said: "I think this will confirm the view that there probably already is in the Vatican that this is a profoundly anti-Catholic country. I wouldn't call this the right thing for any serious broadcaster to do, but they're doing it for the publicity, they're doing it to stir up controversy. Mr Tatchell certainly won't be sympathetic to his subject, so what's the point of doing it? It won't be skeptical, it will be hostile."

Christina Odone, the Catholic writer, said: "Peter himself would be the first to admit that he is no authority on the subject. And perhaps it would be good, rather than have some polemical, knee-jerk reaction to the Pope, if Channel 4 would be



Ratzinger: an 'unsuitable guest for the UK'

interested in actually shedding light on a figure who is so important, and so often misinterpreted and misunderstood – and of whom more needs to be known. I don't think the founding father of [gay rights pressure group] Outrage! is the right person for this."

"It's really awful," said Jack Valero, a prominent member of Opus Dei. "Any idea that Mr Tatchell can be impartial in presenting a programme about the Pope coming here – it's just amazing that anybody could think that."

Mr Tatchell said that his own career has been personally inspired by Catholic humanitarians including US anti-war activists Fathers Daniel and

Philip Berrigan. However, he has previously criticised the "dishonesty and homophobia that infect the Vatican at the highest level", adding that "the Vatican leadership is morally bankrupt and is rightly scorned by all decent Catholics".

Ralph Lee, head of specialist factual at Channel 4, said: "The Papal visit in September provides an ideal opportunity to examine the impact of Benedict XVI after five years in office. In keeping with Channel 4's remit to provide a platform for diverse and alternative perspectives, equality campaigner Peter Tatchell will assess the effect of the current Pope's teachings throughout the world and the conflict between some of his values and those held by modern Britain."

But devout Catholic composer, James MacMillan, declared: "There is nothing surprising in the continued frantic jumping up and down by the *Guardian*/Channel 4/BBC axis in opposition to the Pope. Their venom is now so repetitive that it has

Continued on p4)

# Let there be no light ...

DEMANDS TO CELEBRATE MOTHER TERESA MUST BE RESISTED, SAYS **BARRY DUKE**

August 26, 2010, marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of the late Mother Teresa, aka the Albanian Prune, aka the Sacred Cow – and US Catholics are demanding that the old charlatan be commemorated in lights at the Empire State Building.

The owner of the iconic New York landmark, Anthony E Malkin, is equally determined that the skyscraper should not be hijacked to promote religion – any religion – and has now become the principal target in a hate campaign led by Catholic fanatic Bill Donohue, of the US Catholic League, who launched a drive last month to force Malkin's company to violate its long-standing policy of not lighting the building for religious purposes.

Donohue declared the company's decision to stick to its policy "indefensible and obscene", and accused the owner of anti-Catholic bigotry. He then threatened Malkin.

"Malkin has made his decision to stiff Catholics. His decision to double down at this juncture – in the face of massive support for our request – is something he will regret for the rest of his life."

Donohue announced a protest by Catholics outside the Empire State Building on August 26, suggesting that the owner's failure to capitulate to demands could lead to riots.

"I think that too many Catholics have fallen asleep at the wheel. It's time for people, the rank and file, to say enough is enough. I hope it's going to be non-violent, I wouldn't encourage violence but I know there's a lot of anger."

To date, Catholics supporting the lighting have gathered 40,000 petition signatures in the city of over 8 million. City Councilman Peter Vallone has gone one step further, introducing a resolution which would urge the owner to light the building as demanded.

The Freedom from Religion Foundation has taken a stance against the Council resolution – deemed an inappropriate intrusion of religion into government – but is in favour of lighting up the building on August 26 to mark Women's Equality Day.

Said Foundation Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor: "Do not let Women's Equality Day be supplanted by cheerleaders for the Roman Catholic Church and its anti-women, anti-gay, anti-stemcell-research, anti-progress doctrines."

She added: "Mother Teresa did not stand for women's rights – she was all about taking away women's rights: the fundamental decision of when or whether to become a mother. She used her podium relentlessly and globally to pound away at reproductive rights, including the right to contraception. She used virtually every public occasion to call for the recriminalisation of abortion, and virulently opposed legalization of abortion, despite the fact that backstreet abortions are the leading cause of maternal deaths in countries outlawing abortion."

Although death called time on MT's obscene activities 13 years ago, the Church's relentless war on women shows no signs of abating. The most recent evidence of its intransigence and cold-hearted inhumanity surfaced earlier this year when a medical team at St Joseph's Hospital and Medical Centre in Phoenix, Arizona, were obliged to carry out an abortion to save the life of a woman who was seriously ill with pulmonary hypertension.

The ethics committee which ruled that the abortion of the 11-week-old foetus was necessary included hospital executive Sister Margaret McBride, who was demoted, then excommunicated by Phoenix's Bishop Thomas Olmsted. The Arizona prelate stressed that the "direct killing of an unborn child is always immoral, no matter the circumstances, and

it cannot be permitted in any institution that claims to be authentically Catholic". He also underlined that any Catholic who "formally cooperates in the procurement of an abortion" is "automatically excommunicated by that act ... she excommunicated herself."

And the Medical Ethics Director of the Diocese of Phoenix stated that McBride "consented in the murder of an unborn child. There are some situations where the mother may in fact die along with her child. But – and this is the Catholic perspective – you can't do evil to do good. The end does not justify the means."

The case made headlines in the US, with most media expressing its outrage that a dedicated, highly-professional medical expert should have been treated in this way. McBride later told Bishop Olmsted that her ruling was "a morally good and allowable act".

Unmoved, the Church instead rallied around Olmsted. In May, 71 prominent Catholic individuals –including Vatican officials, academics, medical professionals and pro-life leaders – signed a joint statement in support of the Phoenix bishop and his position. It read:

"We the undersigned are aware of the strong defence of Catholic teaching recently propounded by Bishop Thomas Olmsted, Diocese of Phoenix, Arizona, in the case of an abortion that occurred in St. Joseph Hospital and Medical Center ... We are also aware of the hostility toward Bishop Olmsted created by a media dedicated to watering down Catholic teaching ... We take this opportunity to stand in solidarity with Bishop Olmsted in his defence of truth and life as we also offer our prayers for those who were involved with this direct act of cruelty."

Reflecting on the McBride case, Gregory Paul, an independent US commentator, writer and researcher said: "Although he may no longer be sheltered from secular prosecution, a Catholic man who makes his living as a priest can bugger all the boys he wants and he will not receive the worst retribution the church can deliver: excommunication. But a caring nun who did her duty as a medical caretaker has been excommunicated for saving the life of a fellow human being .. core Catholic doctrine is outright evil."

Illuminating the Empire State Building in honour of Mother Teresa is tantamount to endorsing this evil, and Catholic efforts to bully the building's owners should be vigorously opposed.



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# Somali football fans killed by militant Islamic group

TWO Somali football fans were killed last month by Islamic militants after being caught watching World Cup matches.

The deaths occurred near the capital Mogadishu when members of the Hizbul Islam group stormed a house where people were watching Nigeria play Argentina.

A further ten people were arrested by the group, which has imposed a strict version of Islam in the areas they control in southern and central Somalia.

The following night, another 30 people including a 15-year-old boy were arrested as they watched the Germany-Australia game in two private homes in the town of Afgoye.

A spokesman for the group, Sheikh Mohamed Abdi Aros, said the rest of Somalia should respect their ban on the World Cup – the first to be hosted in Africa – and focus instead on “pursuing holy jihad”.

“We are warning all the youth of Somalia not to dare watch these World Cup matches. It is a waste of money and time and they will not benefit anything or get any experi-

ence by watching mad men jumping up and down,” he said.

The ban, which has seen radio stations around the city taken off air for playing music, has resulted in people flocking to public cinemas in the few Government-controlled areas of the country.

Ahmed Santos used to live in an area of Somalia run by militants, but now is in a government-controlled area.

“I can now freely watch the matches,” he said. “I am so sorry that some of my friends who are now living where I was once don’t have that chance to watch the World Cup. I really feel sorry for them.”

Others are risking the wrath of the militants, such is their love of the beautiful game.

One man, who lives in the militant-controlled livestock market area of the city, said he watched Algeria-Slovenia at home with his family.

“I have one eye on the TV and the other on the door, and the sound turned down,” he said.

# Christian nutter arrested while on a mission to kill Osama bin Laden



Osama bin Laden

AN American man who claimed to be on a mission to hunt down Osama Bin Laden was arrested last month in northern Pakistan.

Police said that Gary Brooks Faulkner, 52, was detained in the mountains of Chitral district north of Peshawar.

He had a pistol, dagger and a sword and was carrying night-vision equipment as well as Christian literature.

Faulkner was stopped near the border with Afghanistan’s Nuristan province, a known Taliban stronghold.

He told investigators after his arrest that he was on a solo mission to kill Osama Bin Laden who is thought to be hiding in the mountainous Afghan-Pakistan border area.

The al-Qaeda leader is the world’s most-wanted man, with the US offering a reward of up to \$25m (£17m) for information leading to his capture.

Faulkner, who is from California, was handed over to intelligence officials in Peshawar, the main city in north-western Pakistan.

Asked if he felt he had a chance of tracing Bin Laden, he told police, “God is with me, and I am confident I will be successful in killing him.”

The US embassy in Pakistan confirmed that a US citizen had been arrested and said it was seeking access to him.

Bin Laden has evaded a huge US effort to capture him since the attacks on the US of 11 September 2001 for which he is blamed.

Chitral - because of its close proximity to Nuristan - is considered to be one of his possible hiding places.

# Canadian teen killed by her father and brother for refusing to wear the hijab

THE father and brother of a Mississauga Muslim teenager who was strangled in December, 2007, last month pleaded guilty in Canada to second-degree murder.

Aqsa Parvez was 16 years old when she was killed in her bedroom.

Muhammad Parvez and his son Waqas will be automatically sentenced to life in prison.

The girl’s friends said she had feared for her safety in the days leading up to her death because she had clashed with her family over her reluctance to wear a hijab, and her preference for slim-fitting “Western-style” clothing.

Two days before she died, Aqsa went to the movies for the first time in her life.

That week, she had asked a guidance counsellor to look over a resumé and said she wanted to find a part-time job, something her father had never permitted.

When police entered the Parvez home on the night Aqsa died, they found her mother, Anwar Jan, hysterical in the basement where emergency responders could not resuscitate Aqsa.

In an earlier interview with police, her



Aqsa Parvez, right, pictured with a friend shortly before her death

brother Atishan said he did not feel his sister deserved to die “but if it was his daughter, he might have broken her legs.”

In the days after her death, as the police investigation proceeded, a man who worked with Waqas Parvez came forward to say Waqas had asked him how to get a gun because his sister was “causing the family embarrassment” and he intended to kill her and said their father planned to take the blame. He asked “what happens to someone in Canada if they kill someone?”



# Cost of Ratzinger's visit: 'It will be far cheaper to fly British devotees to Rome'

lost any potency it once had. Frankly, people are getting bored with them."

The National Secular Society said it was clear that apologists for the Pope are "terrified that anything other than complete fawning might be broadcast in the run-up to the visit. They are agitating against anything that might risk difficult questions being posed about this Pope and his highly questionable behaviour, for example over the covering-up of child abuse and his often inhumane teachings".

The NSS pointed out that "there has been no similar shrieking at the prospect of a documentary about the Pope that has been commissioned by the BBC from prominent gay Catholic Mark Dowd, who is unlikely to press the Church on difficult issues. Nor have the critics of the Tatchell programme said a word about the documentary the BBC is making about Cardinal Newman – which, again, is unlikely to examine the many questions surrounding the Cardinal's sexuality or his personal disapproval of saint-making".

NSS President Terry Sanderson concluded: "Obviously Catholic propagandists, who are on record as saying the visit is an opportunity to revive the reputation of the Church, don't want anything 'inconvenient' or critical to be said in the press or on television. Nothing must disturb their hagiographies of Pope Benedict. But the Protest the Pope campaign is planning to try to disrupt this cosy fantasy by putting the Pope on the spot."

Meanwhile, there is every indication that the cost of the Pope's visit will cost British taxpayers far more than was ever anticipated.

Last month it was reported that Scottish police are reeling at a prediction that the cost of security for Ratzinger's visit to Glasgow could be as much as £70 million.

Sanderson pointed out that when the Pope visited Germany, a minister there had jokingly remarked that it would have been cheaper to fly everyone who wanted to see him to Rome.

"The way things are going, the same could apply here."

Terrorism expert David Capitanchik, from Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, said that the security operation for the Pope's Mass in Bellahouston Park could be on a par with that required for the G8 summit which was held in Gleneagles –

and that cost £72 million.

Capitanchik said: "Strathclyde Police do not have the resources for this. They do not have the number of officers needed for the huge counter-terrorism operation and to protect the large numbers of people in Glasgow from everyday crime at the same time."

The Scottish police forces, which are already facing substantial cutbacks, now say that central Government must provide more money for the event, but the Cabinet Office is insisting that the costs must come out of "existing police budgets".

Sanderson added: "This is a massive amount of money to expect struggling local police authorities to find. And we should remember that this is only for the first day. When the Pope arrives in England, the security costs are likely to spiral into hundreds of millions of pounds as he holds giant masses in the Midlands and Hyde Park in London. This needless spree has been dreamed up without any care for the cost which hard-pressed taxpayers will have to stump up."

Senior Scottish civil servants later met

## World Youth Day in Australia cost taxpayers A\$86-m

THE cost to New South Wales of "World Youth Day" in Sydney in 2008 ran horribly over budget – to the tune of \$64-million.

From an original estimate of \$20 million, the Catholic get-together in July 2008 escalated to a total cost to taxpayers of \$86 million.

Some \$41 million – more than double the original estimate for the entire event – was paid to the Australian Jockey Club and the racing industry for the use of Randwick Racecourse for a mass conducted by Pope Ratzinger.

A draft report published last month by Auditor-General Peter Achterstraat stated: "The costs to the state for the World Youth Day festival in Sydney were \$64 million more than initially budgeted. This raised concerns about whether the government is receiving the right advice on major events."

Foreign Office officials to try to negotiate money from central government to pay for the security.

An SNP spokesman said: "The Scottish Government was invited, for the first time, onto the main UK planning group for the Papal visit, which we very much welcome. Obviously, as a State Visit, there would be an expectation that Westminster would have a prime responsibility for security costs."

Strathclyde Police Authority chairman Stephen Curran said:

The outcome of these discussions is critical given the policing budget is already under considerable pressure.

A Cabinet Office spokesman declined to discuss Thursday's meeting, but said: "The Scottish Government and UK Government are working together closely, including on finance, to make this visit a success."

But Scottish Tory community safety spokesman Bill Aitken said: "It is concerning that, 10 weeks prior to this event, no funding arrangements have been agreed. What has everybody been doing? Should the Scottish Government not have been making the appropriate noises earlier?"

At the time of the visit's announcement, the cost was set at £15m (excluding security) with the Church setting itself a target contribution of £6.75m. It is understood that, so far, the Church has only raised £2.4m from a mixture of donations and pledges.

They hoped to raise a further £1m via a national collection that took place on May 23, although there were reports that the distribution of the relevant gift aid envelopes (necessary to secure a charity tax subsidy that is presumably part of the target contribution of £6.75 m) went awry.

Sanderson said: "We have written to Lord Patten [government co-ordinator of the event] requesting that no further taxpayers' money be pumped into this totally overblown and unnecessary event.

"In a week when the Government has told us that it needs to make unprecedented cuts in public and welfare spending that will last for decades, the amount of taxpayer money that is being flung at this indulgent State visit is obscene."

Sanderson said he did not hold out much hope that Lord Patten would listen and feared that the public purse would be prised to be opened to meet the shortfall.

# Vatican plans to re-impose hardline doctrine on wayward Irish Catholics

According to informed sources in the Catholic Church, a team of investigators has been appointed by Pope Ratzinger to clamp down on liberal secular opinion in Ireland as part of an intensive drive to re-impose traditional respect for clergy.

The nine-member team led by two cardinals will be instructed by the Vatican to restore a traditional sense of reverence among ordinary Catholics for their priests, according to this report.

Among other things, priests will be told not to question in public official church teaching on controversial issues such as the papal ban on birth control.

Theologians will be expected to teach traditional doctrine by constantly preaching to lay Catholics and to return to the practice of regular confession, which has been largely abandoned by adults since the 1960s.

An emphasis will be placed on an evangelisation campaign to overcome the alienation of young people scandalised by the spate of sexual abuse of children and



*Pope plans to throw the book at liberal Catholics in Ireland*

by later cover-ups of paedophile clerics by leaders of the institutional church.

A major thrust of the Vatican investigation will be to counteract materialistic and secularist attitudes, which Pope Benedict believes have led many Irish Catholics to ignore church disciplines and become lax in following devotional practices such as going on pilgrimages and doing penance.

Bishops and priests will be instructed to preach to their congregations the unchanging central message of Jesus Christ about love, healing and repentance.

While the restoration of church discipline and pious practices such as praying to Our Lady and the saints will be welcomed by regular church-goers, the Vatican investigation is likely to face a backlash from liberal Catholics who want more accountability and democracy in church decision-making.

Vatican officials are finalising the precise terms of the instructions for the investigators named last week by Pope Benedict, who initiated an "Apostolic Visitation" last March in his pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Ireland.

At a meeting held in Maynooth last month, Archbishop Dolan told a gathering of priests "to return to basics" and to ground their ministry in "prayer, humility and a rediscovery of identity".

Archbishop Dolan's address, titled "God is the only treasure people desire to find in a priest", was the high point of the Irish church's celebration of the Year of the Priest, a campaign to encourage vocations to the priesthood.

The hardline address was enthusiastically endorsed by Cardinal Sean Brady, the Primate of All Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh.

## Creationist group demands a presence at Northern Ireland's Giant's Causeway

A ridiculous evangelical group based in Northern Ireland wants creationism reflected at the planned Giant's Causeway visitors' centre.

The iconic World Heritage Site is made up of spectacular basalt stone columns left by volcanic eruptions 60 million years ago.

The Caleb Foundation said it wanted equal prominence for its religious viewpoint. Foundation chairman, Wallace Thompson, has met the tourism minister Arlene Foster to discuss its request.

"All we are asking for is that the views that we hold, which are based on the Word of God, are at least respected and taken on board. A Christian politician in a position of power can make a difference," the group said.

But SDLP MLA Alban Maginnis said he

was opposed to a creationist representation at the new facility.

"You are talking about a visitors' centre which will attract people from all over the world. It will be dealing with the natural sciences in relation to the Giant's Causeway.



*The Giant's Causeway*

I do not think it would be appropriate in these circumstances to have a very narrow religious view expressed."

The Foundation, according to its website, is also trying to force dotty creationist propaganda into the Ulster Museum. It states: "We fully accept that the theory of evolution is the view of the majority of scientists, but it is important to note that evolution is a theory and not a fact.

"A visit to the Ulster Museum would not give that impression. Indeed, the very clear assertion is made across the entire 'Nature Zone' that evolution is a fact. This, presumably quite deliberate, error is further compounded by the complete absence of even the merest mention of any other theory of origins such as the biblical account of creation, for which there is strong scientific evidence."

# Deluded 'Defender of Faiths' thinks Islam is

**H**EIR to the British throne Prince Charles last month exhorted the Western world to adopt Islamic principles in dealing with environmental issues.

Lecturing on "Islam and the Environment" at the Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford, the Prince of Wales, who regards himself as "Defender of Faiths", said "the Islamic world is a custodian ... a priceless gift to the rest of world".

Which is completely at odds with an essay entitled *Islam and Ecology*, in which Marjorie Hope and James Young wrote:

"Although many Muslims with whom we have talked are familiar with these broad Koranic principles, few see any need to move an ecological ethic to the centre of their awareness.

"True, some Muslims have become heads of national and international environmental organisations, but the average citizen is only vaguely aware of the extent of the crisis; most political and educational leaders perceive only a few of the problems, and those in isolation.

"Moreover, many advance the common



Prince Charles, kitted out for an arduous session of rug-butting

argument that 'when we catch up with the technological superiority of the West, then we can begin to focus on this issue'. Not a few Muslims see environmentalism as still another form of Western control, intended to keep Islam from developing and Muslims from realising their economic potential. Hence it is hardly surprising that, generally speaking, there is little discussion about

actually applying Islamic principles to environmental practice."

Our future king blamed a lack of belief in the soul for environmental problems, and said that the planet will not be able to sustain a population likely to rise to nine billion in 40 years.

He said that it was "baffling" that so many scientists claimed to have faith in God and yet science was still used in a "damaging" way to exploit the natural world.

Prince Charles even criticised the work of Galileo. Condemning the drive for profit behind scientific research, he said: "This imbalance, where mechanistic thinking is so predominant, goes back at least to Galileo's assertion that there is nothing in nature but quantity and motion."

Charles, whose income last year was just over £19-million, also said: "We are clearly living beyond our means."

He argued that the current economic and environmental crisis is the result of a deeper crisis of the soul. "We need a recovery of the soul to the mainstream of our thinking. Only the sacred traditions have the capacity to do this," he said.

Charles's words – if comments posted under on-line reports of the lecture are any-

## Mad Muslims riot over 'blasphemous' pants

**A**t least nine people, including five policemen, were injured in June after violent protests erupted in different areas of Srinagar, India, when news spread through the city that the "sacred" Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem had been printed on underwear.

The structure on the garment turned out to be an historic cathedral in Italy.

Police said they have identified the culprits who spread the rumours, leading to widespread law-and-order problem in the city. The trouble started in Nowhatta market after some people spotted a brown-coloured sketch of a building covered by a huge dome on underwear.

Some people mistook the structure as that of the mosque. Soon the residents in Nowhatta and adjoining localities of the old city started gathering and protesting against the "blasphemous underwear".

Pramfuls of protesters, according to this report, began rallying on the streets of old

city – then used the opportunity to raise anti-Israel slogans.

Wailed one protester: "This sketch is sacrilegious. We can't tolerate such acts."

Then all hell broke loose when the protesters began rioting and throwing stones.



The Srinagar report prompted us to digitally create this pair of 'blasphemous' briefs featuring the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the iconic Mobomb cartoon

Policemen responded with canes and smoke canisters. Three people were injured as the clashes soon spread to other areas.

Srinagar police official, Javed Reyaz Bendar said: "There was no blasphemy. The underwear bore imprints of some building. The law-and-order problem was handiwork of rumour mongers. We have identified them".

According to a press statement issued by police in the evening: "the underwear garment in question was produced and examined. It was found that it carries sketches of various buildings on it which resemble places like Big Ben in London, St Paul's Cathedral and other places.

"No sketch has any likeness to any Muslim religious place or building. The attempt to create tension in the society is a deliberate move to disturb the situation by indulging in blasphemous rumors. The general public is advised to remain calm and caution against such elements."

# Islam is the answer to environmental problems

thing to go by – sparked surprise, disbelief and outrage. Which, in itself, is surprising as his mad infatuation with the Magic Carpet People goes back years.

For example, in 1996, the London *Evening Standard* carried a story in which it was suggested by the Grand Mufti of Cyprus that the Prince had converted to Islam. “Did you know that Prince Charles has converted to Islam? Yes, yes. He is a Muslim. I can’t say more. But it happened in Turkey. Oh, yes, he converted all right. When you get home check on how often he travels to Turkey. You’ll find that your future king is a Muslim.”

This, of course, was vehemently denied by Buck House officials.

The future Charles III, according to *The Middle East Quarterly* (September 1997), has made several strong public statements endorsing Islam as the solution to the spiritual and cultural ills of Britain and the West. His public advocacy of Islam appears to go back to 1989, when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued an edict (fatwa) against Salman Rushdie, a British citizen, for blaspheming the Prophet Mohammed in his novel *The Satanic Verses*.

Rather than defend Rushdie’s freedom of speech, Charles reacted to the death decree by reflecting on the positive features that Islam has to offer the spiritually empty lives of his countrymen.

Charles first delivered a major address on Islam on October 27, 1993, at the Sheldonian Theatre at Oxford where he is a vice-patron of the Centre for Islamic Studies. He declared that the usual attitude to Islam “suffers because the way we understand it has been hijacked by the extreme and the superficial. To many of us in the West, Islam is seen in terms of the tragic civil war in Lebanon, the killings and bombings perpetrated by extremist groups in the Middle East, and by what is commonly referred to as ‘Islamic fundamentalism’.”

He then explained the causes for this distorted understanding: “Our judgment of Islam has been grossly distorted by taking the extremes to the norm ... For example, people in this country frequently argue that the Sharia law of the Islamic world is cruel, barbaric and unjust. Our newspapers, above all, love to peddle those unthinking prejudices. The truth is, of course, different and always more complex. My own understanding is that extremes, like the cutting off of hands, are rarely practised. The guiding principle and spirit of Islamic law, taken straight from the Koran, should be those of

equity and compassion.”

Charles suggested that European women may even find something to envy in the situation of their Muslim sisters: “Islamic countries like Turkey, Egypt and Syria gave women the vote as early as Europe did its women – and much earlier than in Switzerland! In those countries women have long enjoyed equal pay, and the opportunity to play a full working role in their societies.

Charles considers Christianity inadequate to the task of spiritual restoration and denigrates science for having caused the West to lose its spiritual moorings. Echoing a common Muslim theme, he declares that

**Rather than defend  
Rushdie’s freedom  
of speech, Charles  
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decree by reflecting on  
the positive features  
that Islam has to offer  
the spiritually empty  
lives of his countrymen**

“Western civilisation has become increasingly acquisitive and exploitative in defiance of our environmental responsibilities”.

Instead, he praises the “Islamic revival” of the 1980s and portrays Islam as Britain’s salvation:

“Islam can teach us today a way of understanding and living in the world which Christianity itself is poorer for having lost. At the heart of Islam is its preservation of an integral view of the Universe.

“Islam – like Buddhism and Hinduism – refuses to separate man and nature, religion and science, mind and matter, and has preserved a metaphysical and unified view of ourselves and the world around us ... But the West gradually lost this integrated vision of the world with Copernicus and Descartes and the coming of the scientific revolution. A comprehensive philosophy of nature is no longer part of our everyday beliefs.”

He concludes by suggesting that “there are things for us to learn in this system of belief which I suggest we ignore at our peril”.

In a speech at the Foreign Office Conference Centre at Wilton Park in Sussex on December 13, 1996, he called on

Islamic pedagogy and philosophy to help young Britons develop a healthier view of the world. Praising Islamic culture in its traditional form for trying to preserve an “integrated, spiritual view of the world in a way we have not seen fit to do in recent generations in the West”, he went on to say:

“There is much we can learn from that Islamic world view in this respect. There are many ways in which mutual understanding and appreciation can be built. Perhaps, for instance, we could begin by having more Muslim teachers in British schools, or by encouraging exchanges of teachers. Everywhere in the world people want to learn English. But in the West, in turn, we need to be taught by Islamic teachers how to learn with our hearts, as well as our heads.”

The results of this study will help Westerners “to rethink, and for the better, our practical stewardship of man and his environment – in fields such as health-care, the natural environment and agriculture, as well as in architecture and urban planning.”

In addition to these comments on Islam, Charles has taken steps to give that religion a special status. For example, he set up a panel of twelve “wise men” (in fact, eleven men and one woman) to advise him on Islamic religion and culture. This caused much talk, especially as the group was reported to have met in secret. Some noted that no comparable body exists to inform the crown prince about other faiths practised in his future realm.

Some offices of the British government have found a practical use for the prince’s affection for Islam. In particular, the Foreign Office uses him as a point of focus for British business interests in Muslim countries, leading one journalist to comment that “the Charles of Arabia phenomenon is here to stay”, for it helps assure British commerce with the Muslim world.

Although some Britons may be bewildered at Prince Charles’s infatuation with Islam, he has become a hero among Muslims.

John Casey of Cambridge University, warned that the British public lacks a clear understanding of Charles’s standing in the Muslim world: “The extent to which the Prince is admired by Muslims – even to the point of hero-worship – has not yet sunk into the consciousness of the British public. When it does, that public may or may not be pleased.”

Casey concluded that the prince of Wales’s “hero status” in the Arab world is permanent.

## ANALYSIS

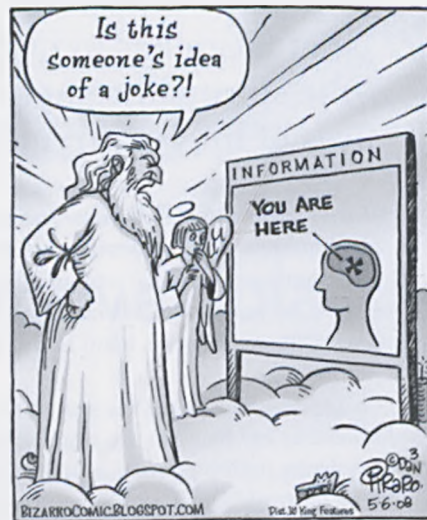
# Richard Swinburne's God

**JOHN RADFORD** concludes that the deity, as portrayed by prolific theologian Richard Swinburne is 'a sort of mad alien'

**R**ichard Swinburne is a prolific and much-cited theologian. I discuss here his concept of God as expressed in *The Existence of God* (1991) and *Is There a God?* (1996). I will put Swinburne's views, paraphrased though often using his words, in italics. The first question is, which god? He says *it is that of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. The Christian god is called God, which distinguishes him from Yahweh or Jehovah and Allah (though all mean much the same as "god"). In fact, these are not identical, a prime difference being that Christians believe that their god took human form in Jesus. This is rejected by Jews and is a profound blasphemy to Muslims. And Swinburne himself claims that *the Christian revelation is unique. God, first of all, is a person, like us in having beliefs, purposes, and the power to act intentionally.*

But these functions cannot be like ours, since we as persons are intrinsically physical. My power to act, very simply, is constrained by my physique. More importantly, all our thoughts, feelings, wishes and so on are the product of our evolved bodies and brains, developed in a social and material environment. A human person is a functioning totality. The fantasy of transferring oneself to another body, as in many a film, is impossible. There is no separate "self" to transfer. God has other attributes. First, *God is omnipotent. But there are limitations on his power. He cannot do what is logically impossible.* Second, *God is omniscient.* Again there is a limitation. *God has given us (partial) free will, and this means that he cannot know what we are going to do by free choice. If he did it would not be free, but determined.* Third, *God is perfectly free. He is not constrained by desires, as we are.* Why therefore he is not constrained by his beliefs and purposes I am not clear. From these follow further attributes (though I don't see why). *God is eternal. This does not mean that he exists outside of time, as some*

*theologians hold. Rather, he exists at each moment of unending time.* This seems to imply that time itself exists independently (of God? If so how did it come about?). It follows, I understand, from Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity (1905) that time is not a medium in which events occur. Rather, it is the sequence of events, or rather the distance between them; essentially, it is a measurement. I suppose one could hold that God is an endless series of events and so equivalent to time.



Next, *God is bodiless. He has no material substance.* A problem here is that, apart from God if he exists, we have no knowledge of any purely non-material mental events. An analogy is made with thoughts. Thoughts can certainly be said to exist, and are not to be equated with the brain. But there is no evidence at all that they can occur without it. Nor can they be communicated without some physical process. The God theory simply asserts that they can.

Next, *God is omnipresent. This follows from his being omnipotent and bodiless.*

Next, *he is the creator and perpetual sustainer of all that exists. He is not the God of deism, who simply set things in motion and left them. But most of the time he contents himself*

*with keeping things going.* Occasionally he intervenes, as we shall see.

Last comes the most contentious attribute. *God is perfectly good.* The first problem is what this means. What, in fact, is good? Some theologians have held that it is defined by God. Swinburne sides with others, including Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, who think that *there are moral principles independent of God.* This is a third limitation. God cannot make something bad, good. The only example Swinburne gives is that *it is wrong to torture children for fun* (could it be right to torture children not for fun?). Where do these principles originate? If they are independent of God, they cannot somehow be built into the structure of the universe, as that is determined by God. There seems to be only one other source, the obvious and correct one, that they come from ourselves. It might be said that they result from free will, which is itself from God. But as we have seen, he cannot know what use we will make of that ability, so he could not know what moral principles we might devise. However, *being omniscient God knows the principles* (whatever they are) *and being good and omnipotent puts them into practice.* It would seem that he always chooses to do what is good, his only problem is which of an infinite number of good actions he should choose. Why, since he is omnipotent, he cannot do all of them, again I am not clear.

Here we come up against the great problem of monotheism, that of evil. How can bad things happen, when God is all good and all powerful? Swinburne dismisses *three possible answers.* Two are that *evil is punishment for our sins*, or for "the sins of our fathers", and one is that natural evils, at least, are *brought about by free agents other than humans, namely fallen angels.*

His main line is the Free Will Defence. *God has created us to worship him and marvel at the natural world, and to have and exercise moral knowledge. For these, free will is neces-*



sary. But it inevitably follows that sometimes we will do evil, not good. Further, the existence of evil gives us the opportunity to oppose it, and to try to understand its causes and reduce it. It gives us cause to be courageous in adversity, and compassionate to others who suffer. All these are good. These arguments apply to natural evils, such as epidemics and earthquakes (though these are not the result of free will), as well as to humanly caused harm. And they apply even when the victims are innocent and helpless, for example children. Animals too may die in natural disasters, and often kill each other. The answer here is that they don't suffer very much, at least not as much as we do, and they may also show valuable behaviour, such as a mother protecting her offspring, even though not by choice. What we can be sure of is that God allows just the right amount of evil for us to exercise our desirable behaviour.

## Quite how we are saved from sin because God allowed himself to be killed, only to rise again after three days, I have never grasped

The countless millions who have suffered and died in wars, disease, famine, tsunamis and the rest, were precisely necessary. However, in any case, *our creator God deserves our gratitude, and has rights over us which fellow humans cannot have. Since he creates us, his choice is not whether to harm existing creatures, but what sort of creature to create. He chose to make us, with our unavoidable potential for suffering.*

Given that God is thus, how does he operate in the world? As we have seen, *he is responsible for everything existing.* This must mean, among other things, that he was responsible for the creation and later destruction of the myriads of species we know only from fossils or other records. This must have been good, but I do not see how, and Swinburne does not mention it. *God also sometimes intervenes in the world, in four ways.*

One is in which no natural law is affected, for example he could put ideas into someone's head (this is possible since both God and ideas are non-material). Another is by miracles. Swinburne restricts these to cases in which natural laws are violated. *Since these are laid down by God, he is merely varying them, which he does to answer our*

*prayers or meet our needs.* Swinburne gives two examples. One is in Kings II, when in response to the prayers of the prophet Isaiah, God gave a sign to King Hezekiah that he would recover from illness, and that Jerusalem would be saved from the Assyrians. Rather a trivial occasion, one might think. The sun's shadow moved backwards ten paces.

The other is that God occasionally saves individuals from serious illness. He quotes one case of a man in Glasgow who was cured of cancer. *But God does not do this too often, as we might think that prayer was the best answer to illness, and thus lose the important choice of putting our money into medical research.*

The third way is by revelation. *A revelation must, like a miracle, alter natural laws, but it must also reveal something that is both good and plausible.* The meaning however may be too deep for us to see why it is good. Swinburne seems to think that *there has been only one true revelation, that of Jesus' incarnation and resurrection.* The good and plausible message was such things as *the Sermon on the Mount, the divinity of Jesus himself, the concept of the Trinity, and the principle of atonement for sins.* (In passing, it was a few hundred years before the last three were accepted as part of Christian doctrine.) Purported revelations he rejects include *Moses speaking with God, because it was recorded only long after the event, and Mohammed receiving the Qu'ran, because no*

*natural law was suspended.*

The final way is by participation, and again Jesus is the only example. *It was natural that God, like a fond parent, would wish to share the suffering of his children.* Admittedly only once and for a very short time, but Jesus also had other functions. The second was his *mission of preaching.* Swinburne does not mention that the main burden of that preaching was that the Kingdom of God was at hand, and that Jesus himself was inaugurating it. Possibly because this did not happen. Third, *Jesus was a necessary sacrifice, to atone for human sins.* Quite how we are saved from sin because God allowed himself to be killed, only to rise again after three days, I have never grasped.

Lastly there was *the function of resurrection, demonstrating God's existence and message by suspending one of his laws.*

In a brief summary I have had to omit the subtle reasoning with which Richard Swinburne presents his views. I hope I have not misrepresented them. Personally, I feel that if God is to be conceived as the sort of mad alien he appears to be from this account, tossing lives and suffering around to see what will happen, and occasionally poking his finger into the world to stir it a little, I am more than ever glad that there seems to be no reason to think that he exists.

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

## Giant Jesus goes up in flames



A BOLT of lightning last month destroyed a 62-foot-tall statue of Jesus outside the Solid Rock Church in Monroe, Ohio.

Made of plastic foam and fiberglass over a steel frame, the "King of Kings" statue — one of southwest Ohio's most familiar landmarks — was erected in 2004 outside the 4,000-member, non-denominational church founded by former horse trader Lawrence Bishop and his wife. He said his wife suggested the Jesus figure as a beacon of hope and salvation and they spent about \$250,000 to finance it.

Jesus caught fire when lightning struck during a thunderstorm. The blaze spread from the statue to an adjacent amphitheatre but was confined to the attic area, and no one was injured.

# Grayling: People want to make their

In this, last of a four-part interview by **PETER BRIETBART**, Professor Grayling c  
of humanity, where the best philosophy is to be found, and

**PETER BRIETBART:** In your view, and, given human nature, what might Utopia look like?

**ACG:** It would be a place where people are given the maximum opportunity to explore different ways of living and relating, but without harming other people or causing them distress or getting in the way of their lives. A sort of John Stuart Mill paradise. But that does seem to be a bit unrealistic given human nature! As it is, human nature is full of greed and selfishness and so on, making it very difficult.

It seems to me that if we had the right resources and the right teachers we could really make education work. To get children to think and to really see why they shouldn't harm others, and why it is important that they have freedom, and how to enjoy it responsibly. Given the flaws we have, Mill's view might be the best we can achieve.

**PB:** And if we could transcend the merely human with the aid of science and technology, what sort of trans-humanism can you foresee?

**ACG:** It looks as though we've evolved contradictory sets of capacities. On the one hand, we have the capacities to be very empathetic and concerned about other individuals, even if we don't know them. To shout, "Look out!" if we see they are in danger. On the other hand we have tendencies that are purely self-regarding, non-altruistic, greedy and aggressive, that may make us respond with anger.

We elect people into out-groups and de-humanise them and so on. What one would hope is, since any journey has to start from here, any trans-human reality that eventuates is going to have to be a down-playing of the negative and the aggressive, hostile and divisive aspects and a promotion of the more empathetic and positive emotions.

One can imagine a situation where people have a greater propensity to be tolerant, generous and kind towards other people and a lessened propensity to be aggressive and to place people into out-groups, without at the same time everything collapsing into a kind of pink, fluffy nursery where there's no edge, criticism or discussion. Ideally, like a philosophical discussion between friends, unlike in a seminar with people showing off and trying to do someone else down.

**PB:** I've experienced my fair share of that. Now, what question do you wish you were asked more often, and why?

**ACG:** That's a tough one. I must preface this admittedly unsatisfactory answer by saying that these "beauty-contest questions" like "who is the greatest philosopher"; "what is the most important thing to know"; "what question do you wish you were asked more often"; really force me to pick from a range of all of the things I know. All I can really say is what subjects I like to talk about, so that I can try and articulate an answer that I've spent some time thinking about.

I like to talk about why the arts matter to human life. We all take them for granted, we all produce pieties about them, we're all meant to be in favour of them, but there are deep reasons why humans have always told themselves stories and drawn pictures and enacted things. They're part of the continuing education of our sensibilities, which is terribly important. If someone were to ask me where the best philosophy is to be found, I would say: in literature, in novels, in plays. That's where we really get an opportunity to explore something which is real, and makes a difference to people's lives.

**PB:** So, whilst I'm asking these broad, sweeping questions, would you care to name some of the novels that you consider to contain the greatest philosophy to be found?

**ACG:** Yes, certainly. One thing I think that is distinctive about literature with a capital "L" and a golden glow, as opposed to railway station paperback thrillers, is that they do strike us as having an insight into the human condition from which we can learn. Not that I'm saying that it is a criterion of literature that it should be educative. Literature is many things, including the beauty of the prose and so on.

Let me give you some examples. Everybody knows *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. Among all of its other virtues, including its wit, the beauty of its prose, the sense of irony in it, and the wonderful perception of human variety ... that novel is about moral epistemology. It's about characters misreading one another and having to rethink the judgments that they should properly make about one another. So Elizabeth Bennet and Darcy misunderstand one another, and through the events of the novel

they recalibrate their understanding. It always amuses me that Elizabeth finally understands Darcy when she sees his big house. In the end, they get one another as a reward for having re-learned something quite painful to them about how they judge other people.

A much more powerful example would be in the series of fictions written by Dostoevsky round about the 1850s, starting with *Notes From Underground*, going on to *Crime and Punishment* and then, later, *The Idiot*. What's interesting is that if you read Dostoevsky's letters of correspondence at the time, we see he was trying to do something with those novels.

In *Notes From Underground* he was writing about someone who's so abased, so degraded, so humbled that when he was walking home after being humiliated at that party he sees all these old, toothless ex-prostitutes sitting at the side of the road and he feels a kind of compassion or love for them, because he feels worse than they are. This is Dostoevsky's attempt to try and explain what it would be like to have true Christ-like compassion for other people. Of course, it's because he's got a religious agenda going on.

In *Crime and Punishment* he wrote about a man, Raskolnikov, who commits murder because he wants to see if he can do it, and then live with having done it. He finds that he can't, but is it because he's being confronted with the true horror of a moral crime? Or is it just because he is weak? So he's in the dilemma and he can't work it out. When he finished the novel, Dostoevsky wrote to his niece and said that he was going to try and write about someone who had plumbed the depths like Raskolnikov, but come back to a position of virtue. He found that he just couldn't write it.

So he just left the position of absolute virtue to the character of Prince Myshkin, trying to explore in this fictional context how it would be possible for such a character to be. I suppose the closest thing we can think of is Peter Seller's character in the film *Being There*, which is again about this Christ-like figure who is weirdly detached from the world around him, and yet, strikes people with his simple wisdom.

Now Myshkin doesn't actually do that: what he does in *The Idiot* is fail, because an entirely good person can't survive in this

# their own choices about life and death

Grayling discusses what Utopia might look like, what lies in store for the future of the world, and the rights of people to determine their own death

world. It's an analogue of the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov* saying that if Jesus Christ were to come back now he'd be thrown straight into prison for being disruptive.

Now that's an example of a real effort being made through fiction, through the medium of a novel, to grapple with very fundamental moral questions, admittedly from a certain point of view, a 19th-century, superstitious point of view, but it's a very good example of it.

Better examples might be found in Thomas Mann in, say, *The Magic Mountain*, which is all philosophical discussion. There are so many good examples, but those are some favourites.

**PB:** Should there be a legal right to end one's own life, or seek the assistance of another in doing so? Should Britain change the law?

**ACG:** Yes, it should. There's no question about it. We're thinking specifically about people who are condemned to interminable suffering, or suffering that can only be terminated by death, mainly those with incurable diseases or terminal illnesses. If you think about being old and being diseased with no hope of recovery, but able to linger on and on and on with medical help, being incontinent, having to be cleaned up all the time by nurses, but offered an alternative. Either you go on like this, progressively being more and more drugged until you can't even interact with your family, or you could choose to die at a time and in a manner of your own election.

**PB:** Do you worry about a subtle pressure on the elderly? A sort of suggestion that they could just get out of the way? That seems to be the only contra-argument that carries any weight.

**ACG:** That is an argument, and it does carry weight. The truth is, however, that families keep people alive who don't want to stay alive, by saying, "Oh daddy, don't die. We love you, what are we going to do without you?" So 99 percent of the pressure comes from the other direction. But it is certainly true that there will be cases where elderly people will be subtly coerced to choose early assisted death by family members. The fact that is possible, the fact that something may be abused, is not a good enough reason

for continuing the suffering of tens of thousands of people because we're too squeamish to do anything about it.

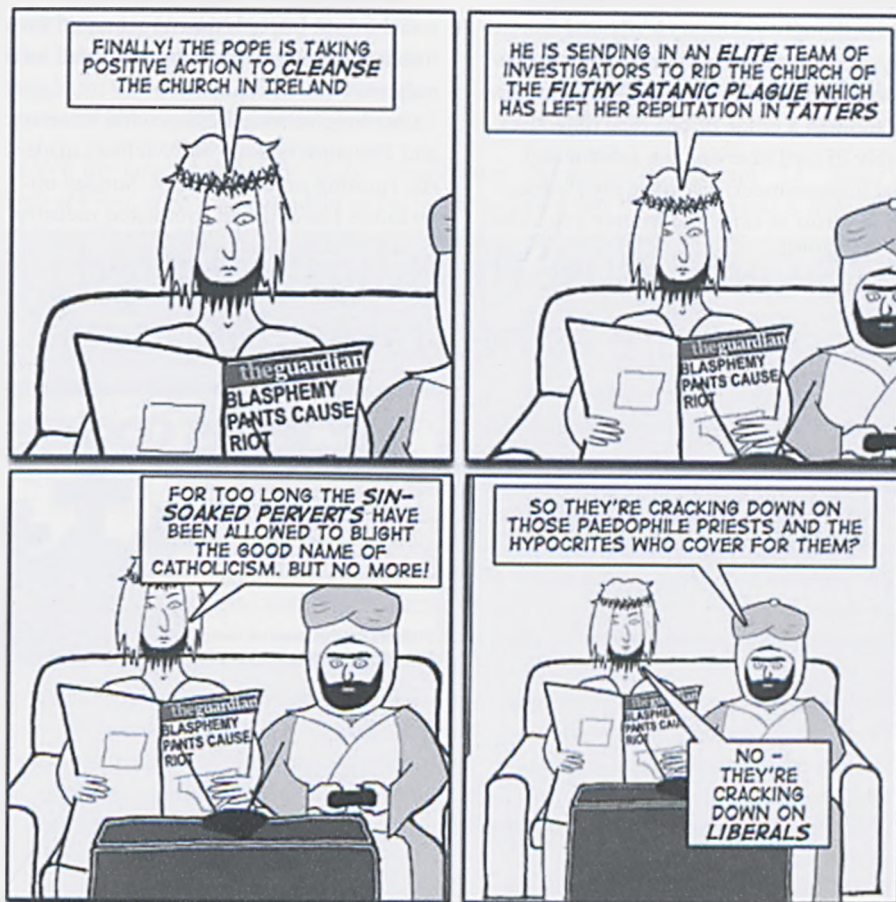
I sometimes tell a related story that makes me ashamed. We had some pet hamsters when my children were very young, and a very typical thing that happens to hamsters is that they get inverted intestines, whereby their intestines come out of them because of the diet we give them. And when that happens, they die. If they are not put down they die in a very slow and painful manner. So this happened to one of our hamsters, and I rang a friend who was a vet and asked what I should do.

She said to take the hamster and just twist its neck sharply and kill it. I just couldn't bring myself to do it. She said in that case I should put it inside a plastic bag, put it under the wheel of your car and drive over it. I told her I was sorry, but I just couldn't

bring myself to do that to a living creature. I cannot do it. She gave me all sorts of other suggestions of how to kill it, but in the end it died as a result of what had happened to it, and not as a result of us helping it to die as quickly as possible to release it from its suffering. To this day I feel ashamed: that my squeamishness prolonged the suffering of a little thing like that.

That's what happens in our society. There are people in the most awful situations. Whilst pain can be controlled to a large extent, it's the indignity of it, having to worry about choking to death and so on. People want to make their own choices about their own life and death. Suicide used to be regarded in the Roman era as "the last great freedom". The fact that you could commit suicide and that it was a real possibility for people to do it really made them powerful, because it made them free. In the end, no-one other than themselves could make a final decision about how they felt on the matter.

## Jesus & Mo



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# Secularism and political strategy

In January, 2010, we published 'On Incest' – a piece written by **DAVID TRIBE** that prompted one reader Diesel Balaam to suggest that Tribe was 'long on fastidious rational argument and short on political strategy'. Here is Tribe's reply:

I'm pleased Diesel Balaam (*Freethinker*, February) enjoyed my "On Incest" and agrees with most of it; so I'll concentrate on the few, but important, points of difference.

His main criticism is that I am "long on fastidious rational argument and short on political strategy". Clearly, he hasn't read my *Godless and Glad of It: Fifty Years of Militant Secularism*, published online by the National Secular Society in 2008.

In particular, its "Introduction" is predominantly about secularist strategy and tactics. In the 1960s and early 70s I was well aware of the importance of "good old-fashioned 'common sense'" and political realism. Unlike Marxists and some humanists of the period, I never believed that religion would simply "wither away". Nevertheless, secularists could help to bonsai it. Further, for complex sociopolitical reasons, we could never hope to become a large organisation like the churches, but could increasingly become an influential one.

Three principles were paramount: state our freethought position clearly and fearlessly; at the same time, demonstrate that we were more than obsessive "God-botherers" and had a range of practical objectives, notably in civil liberties, law reform and social improvement; prioritise these objectives in terms of time and money expended

so as to conserve our limited resources.

As NSS President, I issued a great number of media releases on national and international political, social and ethical issues, usually where Christianity and other religions played a role – hardly surprising, as they don't confine themselves to questions of "faith" but comprehensively dictate to the world at large. Often, no more than one media release and follow-up sufficed to show our concern, hopefully contribute to amelioration of the problem, and serve to lift our profile and stimulate secularisation.

Even on the 22 "core" issues described in *Godless*, vastly different concentration was given to each. Thus we devoted relatively little time ourselves to promoting reform of abortion and homosexual laws, not because we deemed them of low importance but because two very effective lobby groups existed; and my presence on the executive committee of the National Council for Civil Liberties (Liberty) and NSS motions at its AGMs regularly fostered recognition of secularist concerns on these and other social fronts. Instead, we concentrated on hitherto neglected areas. In fact, there were only two.

Our long-serving NSS general secretary and *Freethinker* editor, Bill McIlroy, made the running on one of them: Sunday observance. His activism stimulated industry

groups, previously strangely passive despite their commercial interests, and ultimately led to major, and almost certainly irreversible, reforms.

In the narrow sense of an orchestrated production of media releases, publications, public meetings, lectures, broadcasts, letter writing (gaining tacit support from the *Times Educational Supplement*), ministerial deputations and liaison with other bodies like the Humanist Teachers Association, the NSS had only one true campaign: secular education.

Its justification, if needed, was the privy winding-up of the Secular Education League in 1964. Ironically, though this NSS involvement attracted the most public interest and sympathy (and most upset the religious and a section of the humanist establishment), it achieved no tangible reforms – though it may have forestalled further deterioration. Only in 2006, following long agitation by Keith Porteous Wood and Terry Sanderson, were sixth-formers allowed to opt out of religion without parental support. Conversely, the position of unbelieving teachers is worsening.

How does this analysis illuminate possible incest law reform? Clearly, if the NSS were ever to support it, it would be a low-priority issue. Diesel Balaam protests the Zeitgeist is against it and no incestophile lobby exists. Yet surely these factors antedated every liberal reform down the ages. How can anyone but a Marxist or historicist assert that "nor is there ever likely to be" an incestophile lobby?

Your correspondent further objects to my parallel between gay and adult incestuous activity, though his plausible theory of the evolution of a homosexual "sensitivity" might equally apply to incest. If there is a question of being "unintentionally insulting to homosexuals", it's his suggestion that "choice of occupation, where you live, how you dress, how you speak, or the contents of your CD collection" – for example, that becoming a hairstylist, living in a gay ghetto, dressing like Elton John, speaking like Kenneth Williams, and a devotion to Boy George CDs – are the badges of all homosexuals.

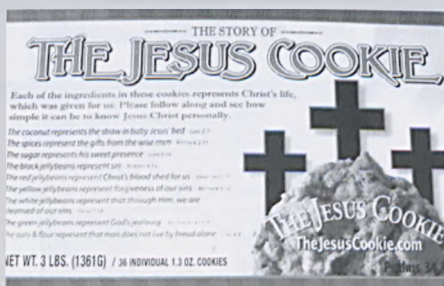
• You can access David Tribe's *Godless* at <http://www.secularism.org.uk/history.html>

## Sweet Jesus! This Christ-centred cookie sure as hell takes the biscuit

LATEST addition to the wacky world of truly tacky religious crap is the Jesus Cookie, yours for just \$16.00 (you get three dozen to the box).

What's special about Jesus Cookies are their Bible-based ingredients:

- The coconut represents the straw in baby Jesus' bed
- The spices represent the gifts from the wise men
- The sugar represents his sweet presence
- The black jellybeans represent sin
- The red jellybeans represent Christ's blood shed for us
- The yellow jellybeans represent forgiveness for our sins
- The white jellybeans represent that through Him we are cleansed of our sins



- The green jellybeans represent God's jealousy
- The oats and flour represent that man does not live by bread alone.

All that's missing are wooden splinters that represent Jesus' crucifixion, and the odd nail or two which would fast-track you into the arms of ever-lovin' Jesus.

# points of view...

A DIG IN THE POST BAG – LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

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## ISRAEL'S TREATMENT OF THE PALESTINIANS: THE DEBATE RUMBLES ON

GRAHAM Livingstone's article "Israel's Road to a Second Holocaust" (April 2010) re-ignited a debate which has long smouldered in *Points of View*. Before fanning it I would like to clarify two matters.

Firstly, criticism of the policies of the present Israeli government must be distinguished from traditional Christian anti-Semitism, just as opposition to the purposes of Al-Qaeda or reservations about the beauty of Islam must be separated from Kiplingesque "Gunga Din" racism and BNP thuggery.

Secondly, as atheists, we would do well to remember that the historic basis of the Jewish claim to Palestine is a divine injunction, imparted to Joshua and others, to commit genocide against a Canaanite population which was, inconveniently, in prior occupation of the territory (Joshua I, 3-5; VI, 17, 21; VIII, 21-22; XI, 6-7; I Samuel XV, 7-8; stop me here, Editor!); and that the unique sanctity of East Jerusalem is ultimately based on the myth of Abraham's sacrifice of a ram on Mount Moriah (Genesis XXII).

But to the present. I doubt whether either Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu or Defence Minister Ehud Barak believes in the literal truth of the Books of Joshua and Genesis, and, to be fair to them, neither has ever proposed a "final solution" to the problem of co-existence with a population perceived as alien, in the way that Joshua (or should we say "The Lord"?) and Hitler did.

But their policies in relation to the Palestinians resemble those of the apartheid governments of South Africa in relation to the Bantu more than those of any other state since the corralling of American Indian tribes in reservations by US governments in the 19th century.

Allegations of ethnic cleansing have been regularly levelled against the Israelis since the massacres at Deir Yassin and Kafr Kassem in 1948. And these allegations have, predictably, elicited counter-claims of bias and

misrepresentation, which Christian Europeans, post-Holocaust, have sometimes felt uncomfortable in refuting.

Professor Ilan Pappé, born in Haifa to German-Jewish refugees from Nazism, educated at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and having held his first academic post as lecturer in politics at the University of Haifa, can hardly be accused of anti-Semitism.

Here is his assessment of current Israeli government policy on Palestinian relations: "The only version of this solution (to the problem of the Palestinian population) that is acceptable to Israel...is an offer to imprison the Palestinians in stateless enclaves in return for ending their struggle." ("What Drives Israel?", *Sunday Herald* 6/6/10.) And again: "The Palestinians are asked to give up their struggle for self-determination and liberation in return for the establishment of three small

Bantustans under tight Israeli control and supervision" ("The Deadly Closing of the Israeli Mind", *Independent* 6/6/10)

Professor Pappé argues persuasively that, "Before one discusses either an alternative solution – a single democratic state for all – or explores a more plausible, two-state settlement, one has to transform fundamentally the Israeli official and public mindset." (Both papers.)

Pappé emphasises that, so long as this mindset exists, no rational compromise is possible and that only "sustained pressure" by western governments on Israel, such as the sanctions against South Africa and Serbia, will convince Israel that her policies are not morally acceptable to the world to which she wants to belong.

**Jack Hastie**  
Renfrewshire

I HAVE the honour to be one of the "mudslingers" derigrated by a certain "TA" (June *Points of View*), who is so confident of his or her position that the actual name is denied us. I, along with two other letter writers, are alleged to have described Graham Livingstone as "anti-Jewish". Nothing in my letter warrants this allegation. I said he was "ignorant", which I substantiated with factual rebuttals of his position.

"TA" then produces the stock canard likening Israel to apartheid South Africa, in that Christians and Muslims are disenfranchised. This is quite wrong. There are, in fact, Arab MPs in the Knesset. So in Israel Arabs have had the vote continually since the state was founded in 1948. Perhaps "TA" can tell me in which other Middle Eastern state Arabs have had a democratic vote for all of the last 60 years.

I now turn to David Simmonds' long letter, which has a number of points that I accept. However, I am alleged to have given a distorted view of the origins of Israel. In 1917, at the time of the Balfour Declaration, Simmonds says that in Palestine Arabs outnumbered Jews by 13 to 1. Maybe, but this is beside the point for my case, for the Declaration did NOT promise Palestine to the Jews; it merely offered them a national home "in", ie within, Palestine. So the national home was to be within part of Palestine, and the Peel Commission Report of 1937 recommended a Jewish state in that part where Jews were the majority.

Simmonds continues: "Michael also implies that Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and Lebanon in 2005 was a gesture of goodwill". There is no such implication in what I wrote. I merely said that "Israel got out of territories it conquered in Gaza, Sinai and Lebanon". I gave some facts with no suggestion of possible motives. As for those "imprisoned in Gaza", the solution is in their own hands; they merely have to recognise the state of Israel and cease firing rockets into it.

There are many ways in which sections of Israeli society have, lamentably, totally lost their

(Continued on page 14)

# points of view...

moral compass, but it is important to render criticism of them, as of any other society, on the basis of actual facts rather than of trendy one-sided prejudices.

**Michael Levin**  
London

## DR EVAN HARRIS

THE front-page article in the June issue of the *Freethinker* laments the defeat of Dr Evan Harris, the former Liberal Democrat MP for Oxford West and Abingdon, in the recent General Election. The article mentions a leaflet describing Dr Harris as “Dr Death” which was allegedly the work of a clergyman.

The leaflet was, in fact, an election communication from the Animal Protection Party which stood the former animal rights prisoner, Keith Mann, as a candidate. The Animal Protection Party put up a number of other candidates including one against the pro-hunting Labour MP, Kate Hoey.

The leaflet states Dr Harris had been nicknamed “Dr Death” by fellow MPs who opposed his support for euthanasia and extending the time limit on abortions. It went on to state that Dr Harris supports the use of hybrid/animal embryos for research.

The leaflet alleges that Dr Harris is “the most vocal supporter of Oxford University’s secret animal research programmes. Here researchers attack the brains of monkeys in order to replicate the symptoms of Parkinson’s disease.

It continues: “He also wants to remove our right to refuse the mass fluoridation of our water supply. Fluoride is a waste product of the aluminium industry, is of no benefit to teeth, and is linked to a variety of diseases.”

Dr Harris, says the leaflet, is the drug companies’ chief mouthpiece in Parliament and always has their best interests at heart. It claims he used his position to attack herbal remedies, vitamins, and homeopathy as “untested”, while promoting animal-tested drugs such as Vioxx, the world’s biggest drug disaster, which killed tens of thousands ... Today over three million animals are dying in British labs each year, yet the fourth biggest killer in the Western world ... are animal-tested drugs. Thalidomide, mercury and aspartame all passed the animal drugs tests ...

It is right to praise Dr Harris when he takes a progressive stand on abortion, euthanasia, immigration and gay rights. But in the same Liberal tradition those who think him wrong on animal experiments and fluoridation have a right to criticise

him without having unproven allegations of clerical conspiracy hurled against them.

**Terry Liddle**  
London

## ATTACK ON LIBERALS

YOUR correspondents D K Gorrington and Bill McIlroy are in many ways correct about the importance of liberalism, yet they misrepresent my views – innocently in D K Gorrington’s case, who simply misunderstands where I’m coming from, but in Bill’s case, quite disingenuously. Nonetheless, I was a tad too scathing about liberals, I admit.

As a progressive, freethinking, cultural commentator, my purpose is to advance much the same kind of society as Bill and D K wish to achieve. When I criticise liberals for being wishy-washy, please understand that I do so, not from an illiberal perspective, as Bill McIlroy claims, but from a feisty *libertarian* perspective. I am sorry if I failed to make this clear. We are simply talking about different approaches to achieving the same secular humanist ends.

Having been accused of being “illiberal” I have to point out that it was me, actually, who supported the freedom of devout Muslim women to wear the burqa and veil if they genuinely so wish, except where it impinges on the freedom of others to “read” their faces in interactive situations like schools, supermarket checkouts, etc. This isn’t a case of “anything goes” but a carefully reasoned balance of freedoms, including the accommodation of those freedoms one rather wishes other people didn’t exercise! One may also object to smokers, huntsmen, nudists, or “hoodies”, but their freedoms are also precious, to be curtailed only in certain, very specific circumstances.

Libertarian freethinkers can belong to the political right, left, or centre, but share an approach that is more purposeful, independent of mind, and rigorously analytical than old-school liberals, who are, indeed, generous, decent, fair-minded people. Unfortunately, with a few honourable exceptions, liberals tend to lack focus, see the world through rose-tinted spectacles, and lack ideological rigour. This is why, after the recent General Election, the Liberal Democrats were able to behave “like every harlot in history” (as David Blunkett colourfully described them), discarding many of their principled policies faster than a strumpet’s petticoat.

Liberal humanists like Bill McIlroy are perfectly sweet, but they are products of a gentler, bygone age.

We are living in a different world now, and to protect the freedoms and spaces that liberalism creates in our society we must sometimes be prepared to stoutly defend those freedoms and spaces – from the Christian right, from Islamists, from doctrinaire socialists, the criminal fraternity, and yes, well-meaning liberal “nannies”.

If you are truly passionate about freedom of expression, you sometimes have to stand up and fight for it. This includes safeguarding the freedoms of those who seek to take our own freedom of expression away, while making sure they cannot. This strikes me as far more noble and genuinely “liberal”, than trying to disguise one’s antipathy toward Islam in a cloak of dissembling liberal-feminism, that is – to be honest – just a socially acceptable way of bullying devout Muslim women.

**Diesel Balaam**  
London

## NOT A PUT-DOWN

MY description of Stuart Campbell as a well-meaning amateur was not a put-down. As far as I am aware, he has never taken a graduate course in history that required him to write a thesis on the origins of the Christian religion. That makes him an amateur by definition, but by no means an incompetent one.

Persons who claim that Jesus was a purely mythical figure, but make no attempt to explain away the negative anecdotes that no Jesus fan would ever have invented, are incompetent amateurs.

My 2009 book, *God, Jesus and the Bible: The Origin and Evolution of Religion*, is an update of my 1992 doctoral dissertation. That makes me a historian.

Jesus was a self-deluded, would-be freedom-fighter, basically a nobody who did nothing. If Paul of Tarsus had not arbitrarily chosen him from the dozen or so recently crucified messiahs to be the figurehead of Paul’s newly invented gentile religion, his name would not have survived. All competent biblical historians (a term that does not include theologians) recognize that the fairy-tales in the gospels have no connection with the Jesus of history. Trying to prove the nonexistence of Jesus by showing that fantasies posthumously grafted onto his biography were plagiarized from pre-Christian sources is like trying to prove that there was no George Washington by falsifying the cherry-tree fable.

Practically all of the points made by Ken Humphries in his article (*Freethinker* June)



are valid. I made the same points in *GJB*. They refute the delusion that the gospels are non-fiction, and as such are useful arguments against believers. They say nothing to persons who already know that there was no cherry tree. If Mr Humphries wants to be taken seriously, he needs to explain why the gospels contain stories that portray Jesus as an unmitigated failure who declared a war of independence and lost (see *GJB*, pp 267-273).

**William Harwood**  
Canada

## GRAYLING AND FREEWILL

THOUGH largely in agreement with Professor Grayling's views, I fear that in the third instalment of his *FT* interview (June issue) he concedes far too much to religious ideas on "mind" and freewill.

Theologians refuse to recognise that what we call "mind" is not something apart from the body (ie the "soul"?!), but merely the ever-changing accumulated results of complex connections (synapses) within the living brain – and unfortunately Grayling seems to accept the theological mind/body dichotomy.

This leads him to confuse "free choice" with "freewill". The first "free" generally means not coerced by other people, whereas the second "free" has a philosophical connotation, meaning not determined by past events. In his anecdote of a man choosing not to follow his first impulse to bash someone's face, Grayling fails to realise that "thinking better of it" is also determined – by such factors as self-image, fear of the consequences, conscience, and strength of will: all emanating from inbuilt personality traits, childhood conditioning, the culture, legal and social deterrence, the outcome of similar situations in the past, and much more. That is, the choice is itself caused – not "free" in the philosophical sense.

The determinism/freewill argument is exemplified by the 18th-century philosophers Hume and Kant respectively, and I am sure Grayling would not want to be associated with Kant.

He says, however, that if we rule out freewill we will have to "think again about reward and punishment, praise and blame". Just so — there are no justifiable grounds for vindictive retribution. But deterrence can be useful in reforming choice.

Some years ago I decided to encapsulate the determinism debate in verse, and must say I am rather proud of my effort.

Here it is:

*Opposing Hume's deterministic view,  
Freewill for humankind did Kant infer  
To justify God's ire when people err.  
Which view is true? Has Hume or Kant  
won through?  
While we may choose to do what we prefer,  
We cannot choose what we prefer to do.*

**Barbara Smoker**  
Bromley

PROFESSOR Grayling raises the perennial subject of "freewill" and "choices". It is of course true that we regularly make choices, but this is not to say any more than when we are faced with two apparent courses of action and the need to do one or the other, we go through a process of assessment, consider the pros and cons, and having weighed it up "decide" on one – it says nothing more.

The important fact to note is that the "decision" we make is predetermined – not because we are automata, nothing to do with "being written in the early history of the universe", but only and quite simply that it is determined by our nature, by the sort of person we are. (We have no "choice" to act against our nature; if we are cruel we act cruelly (or benign, be-

nignly etc); we are called "cruel" because we act cruelly.)

This seems so obvious it is puzzling why the situation is complicated by the notion of "freewill". What is this "freewill" – what is the will free of? (I am not taking into account any external constraints.) Presumably it is free of influences of any sort, free of any guiding hand, operating in a vacuum, ie, figuratively a decision is just the toss of a coin, without purpose or direction.

But of course this is not the case – there is one thing we are not free of – our own nature; clearly it is the sort of person we are that determines our action. We cannot do other than according to our nature; to act differently we should have to be a different sort of person.

The reason you don't bash the person is that your natural compulsion to control the urge to bash is stronger than the urge itself. There was no possibility of your doing otherwise; there was never a point when you "could genuinely have done otherwise". If Peter chose B, he could never have chosen A, because that would entail his being a different sort of person.

**Owen O'Neill**  
West Sussex

## AN ATHEIST'S DISTURBING EXPERIENCE IN HOSPITAL

IN A recovery ward after surgery at Southampton General Hospital recently, upon learning from a doctor that, apart from the just-removed bladder tumours, blood tests indicated that my prostate was also cancerous, I inwardly panicked. Perhaps an over-reaction, but to the doctor and staff at the bedside I half-joked that "When my time comes, I want an easy exit!" adding, for good measure, "Euthanasia should be an option."

Silence. Wan stares. A wry smile. A black female nurse said, "You don't need to worry, the hospital provides spiritual counselling." Predicated, I presumed, upon religion, about which, on all official forms, I had said "None". To the nurse and all listening, in polite refutation of all religion, I politely insisted I was an atheist and thought there should be people non-believers could talk to in time of need. A matron, obviously a Christian, visited and advised that there isn't secular counselling as such, that non-religious, or pastoral, counselling is conducted by a chaplain. Hopeless!

The following day a black male nurse lectured me on the wickedness of those who don't believe in God, later entering the ward jauntily singing, "Come to Him." I hoped prejudice against an atheist wouldn't affect my care – it seemed paradoxical that amidst all the science-founded high-tech medical equipment and procedures under the aegis of brainy people with manifest technical competence, religious delusion was so prevalent and accepted as the norm. (Southampton General Hospital's website advertises a number of chapels and quiet rooms for prayer and reflection, with resident Anglican and Roman Catholic chaplains or visits from religious advisors of other faiths available – but nothing for non-believers.)

I think hospital patients should, firstly, be free of religious intimidation and, secondly, have access to a secular rationalist worldview. Perhaps NHS staff across the UK who share this view could volunteer their services, and with provision being made by the NHS Trusts, hospitals could then offer secular counselling as an alternative to the religious. I'd certainly like the option when my time comes!

**Graham Newbery**  
Southampton

# 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. 0845 2015135. Wed, July 21, 7.45pm. Tim Betts: *Changes in Religious Thought from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment.*

**Brighton & Hove Humanist Society:** **i** 01273 227549/461404. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. Sept-Dec (inc) Public meetings first Wed of the month, 8pm.

**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** web www.phil-cork.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/humleft.htm

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

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

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

### **Devon Humanists:**

**e** info@devonhumanists.org.uk

**w** www.devonhumanists.org.uk

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

**w** www.dorsethumanists.co.uk

### **East Cheshire and High Peak Secular Group:**

**i** Carl Pintel 01298 815575.

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

**Essex Humanists:** Programme available **i** 01268 785295.

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

**w** www.farnham-humanists.org.uk

### **Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA):**

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

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

**Greater Manchester Humanist Group:** **i** John Coss: 0161 4303463. Monthly meetings (second Wednesday, 7.30pm) Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester. July 14, Michael Imison: *An Ethical Jury.*

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

**Harrow Humanist Society:** meets the second Wednesday of the month at 8pm (except Jan, July and Aug) at the HAVS centre, 64 Pinner Road, Harrow. No evening meeting in July, but on July 14 we are taking a daytime boat trip on the Thames to Kew. Non-members welcome.

**i** Secretary on 0208 907-6124

**w** www.harrow.humanist.org.uk

**e** Mike Savage at mfsavagemba@hotmail.com

**Humanists of Havering:** **i** Jean Condon 01708 473597. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgores 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](http://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](http://www.lancashiresecularhumanists.co.uk) **i** Ian Abbott, Wavecrest, Hackensall Rd, Knott End-on-Sea, Poulton-le-Flyde, Lancashire FY6 0AZ 01253 812308 **e** ian@ianzere.demon.co.uk

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

**w** www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk

**Lewisham Humanist Group:** **i** Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. The Goose, Rushey Green, Cufford 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** mllofmark@btinternet.com

**Norfolk Secular and Humanist Group:** **i** Vince Chainey, 4 Mill St, Bradenham, Norfolk IP25 7QN. Tel: 01362 820982.

**Northants Secular & Humanist Society:** For information contact Ollie Killingback on 01933 389070.

### **North East Humanists (Teesside Group):**

**i** C McEwan on 01642 817541.

### **North East Humanists (Tyneside Group):**

**i** the Secretary on 01434 632936.

**North London Humanist Group:** Meets third Thursday of month (ex. August) 8 pm at Ruth Winston House, 190 Green Lanes, Palmers Green, N13 5UE. Plus social events. Contact Sec: 01707 653667 **e** enquiries@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk **w** www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk

**e** enquiries@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk

**w** www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk

**North Yorkshire Humanist Group:** Secretary: Charles Anderson, 01904 766480. Meets second Monday of the month, 7.30pm, Priory Street Centre, York.

**Oxford Humanists:** Chair: John White, 77 High St, Chalgrove OX44 7SS, 01865 891876.

**e** jdwhite@talk21.com

**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 Gwinnett on 01935 473263 or **e** edward.gwinnett@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](http://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.