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# the freethinker

the voice of atheism

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## C of E may have women bishops by 2014 – but who really cares?

The Church of England, described in a *Guardian* editorial last month as "out of line with both the law and the mood of the times", has finally decided, following a national assembly in July, that women should be allowed to become bishops, making only minor concessions to theological conservatives who have threatened to break away over the issue.

Dioceses will now consider the draft law, which would leave it up to individual bishops to allow alternative oversight for traditionalists who object to serving under women bishops. The dioceses must report back by 2012 and a final vote by the ruling body, the General Synod, will still be needed, but supporters say a milestone has been passed.

"The decision to consecrate women as bishops has been taken," said church spokesman Lou Henderson. "Everybody recognised the importance of offering safeguards and assurances to those who find it very difficult (to accept women bishops), but in the end Synod as a whole was not prepared to go as far as the traditionalists would have liked."

The decision was not final and still faced many hurdles.

After the dioceses make a decision over the draft law, the Synod will need to hold a final vote to approve it. That could be complicated by the formation and desires of the next incoming assembly, Henderson said.

If approved, the first women bishops could be appointed in 2014.

The decision is an important step for the governing Synod, which has for decades been debating whether to let women become bishops with the same status as male bishops. Traditionalist Anglicans — believing that allowing women to be bishops is

contrary to the Bible — oppose the move and say the decision could result in many leaving the Church of England. Others, however, argue that the church cannot afford to be seen as stuck in the past with out-of-date values.

Anglican churches in the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Cuba already have women bishops, Henderson said. The Church of England began ordaining women to the priesthood in 1994.

At a meeting at York University last month, the Synod narrowly voted down proposals to impose restrictions on the authority of female bishops.

Traditionalists had proposed a structure that guaranteed more conservative parishes would be supervised by male bishops and led by male priests who were not ordained by a female bishop. Under that proposal, the alternative bishop would have had some legally backed independence from a woman bishop.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, who leads the church, and Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, tried to rally support for that plan to keep the church unified.

But the ruling assembly rejected that proposal, which would create, in effect, "second-class bishops," Henderson said. Instead, the body decided that women bishops could choose to delegate their power to an alternative bishop if they so wish — and they will also have the power to dictate what

functions the alternative bishop carries out.

Although campaigners in favour of women bishops rejoiced, some religious leaders said they faced hard decisions with the



Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury

Continued on p4)

# 'Yes Virginia, there is no God'

**BARRY DUKE** IS AMUSED BY THE OUTRAGE CAUSED BY AN ATHEIST AD

Here's a terrific trivia question: who was Francis Pharcellus Church and what was he best known for?

**Answer:** the walrus-moustached American, who joined the Choir Invisible in 1906 aged 67, once received a letter from little Virginia O'Hanlon who wrote to him in his capacity as a lead editorial writer on his brother's newspaper, *The New York Sun*.

In it she said: "Dear Editor – I am eight years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, 'If you see it in *The Sun*, it's so.' Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?"

Church's reply, published on September 21, 1897, was syrupy enough to induce cavities in a camel's gnashers. "Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the scepticism of a sceptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with

the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

"Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus!

"Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! ... Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see ...No Santa Claus! Thank God! he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood."

This puke-inducing reply, shortened to spare readers too severe a bout of biliousness, made Church briefly famous among late Victorian devotees of honeyed prose. Then, mercifully, he slipped into obscurity – until this summer when some Christian nut called Carol J Lundemo wrote an outraged letter to *The Seattle Times* about the latest atheist ads that had been placed on city buses by the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF).

Fragile wee fundie Lundemo was "offended and disturbed" when she saw several Seattle buses bearing the slogan "Yes Virginia, there is no God" which she claimed was a "perversion of the original 1897 newspaper reply by Francis P Church to 8-year-old Virginia".

She claimed that she also believed that the slogan was part of a "completely unnecessary, cruel advertisement campaign". And she referred to the FFRF as "selfish".

The most interesting part of her letter was her finger-wagging at FFRF for using the money they used for the ads so frivolously. Apparently, this was a clear indication that FFRF does not "value humans". If they did, they would have used the money for something more worthwhile – like serving the less fortunate members of the community, as many other agencies do.

She added: "Oh wait, those agencies I mentioned that care about and help people are *Christian* organisations."

Writing in the US *Examiner*, Trina Hoaks sarcastically retorted: "Of course, we know that all of Christian money goes to help the less fortunate. They would *never* spend any of their funds frivolously.

"We should recall the millions of dollars that were spent on California's [anti-gay mar-

riage] Prop 8 by religious proponents of the measure. That was certainly helpful to the less fortunate. (Talk about being 'offended').

"While we are at it, why don't we consider the estimated \$1 billion plus that has been paid out by Catholics to settle and (in some instances) cover up sex-abuse cases. These child sex offenders and those who covered their rears sure are caring. (Talk about being 'disturbed'!)

"Talk about 'cruel'! I could go on, but won't.

"What is that they say about those who live in glass houses? At least the glass house in which FFRF resides only cost a few thousand dollars, which, when compared to the glass houses of the religious, seems like chump change."

And Ms Hoaks rightly pointed out that there are many atheist groups and individuals around the nation (and the world) working to help in their communities.

Much more, of course, could be done by secular groups to better their communities and their environments if they were able to mobilise more people – which, I imagine, is what the FFRF series of ads were designed to do.

Certainly, there is concrete evidence emerging from the US that atheist and humanist groups, since they decided to use transit ads, billboards and other media to raise their profile, have been hugely successful in recruiting large numbers of people who were previously too intimidated or apathetic to stand up for their non-belief.

Last April, *The New York Times* reported that "local and national atheist organisations have flourished in recent years, fed by outrage over the Bush administration's embrace of the religious right. A spate of best-selling books on atheism also popularised the notion that non-belief is not just an argument but a cause, like environmentalism or muscular dystrophy.

"Ten national organisations that variously identify themselves as atheists, humanists, freethinkers and others who go without God have recently united to form the Secular Coalition for America. These groups, once rivals, are now pooling resources to lobby in Washington for separation of church and state."

What's more, a wave of donations, some in the millions of dollars, has enabled the hiring of more paid professional organisers.

To "pervert" Church's words further, I would declare how dreary would be the world if there were no atheists to poke fun at the faithheads. The more, the merrier, I say!



**BARRY DUKE**  
FREETHINKER  
EDITOR

## the freethinker

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# Protests mount over plan to build huge mosque near Ground Zero in New York

DOZENS of opponents and some supporters of a 13-storey mosque planned near Ground Zero in New York attended a raucous hearing last month centred on whether the existing building, earmarked for the mosque-cum-cultural centre, should be designated a city landmark.

If declared a landmark, the building would be protected from development.

Republican gubernatorial candidate Rick Lazio, who has sought an investigation into the funding of the mosque, was among the witnesses who testified in support of giving the building landmark status.

After noting the lower Manhattan building's history and architectural significance, Lazio said it also warranted landmark designation because on September 11, 2001, it was struck by airplane debris from the terror attacks against the nearby World Trade Center.

That connection to the attacks, he said, made it "a place of deep historical significance and a reminder of just what happened on New York's darkest day."

Lazio has called on state Attorney General Andrew Cuomo, his Democratic opponent in the governor's race, to investigate the funding of the project. In July he repeated that request and said the pace of the landmark designation process should be slowed to allow time to thoroughly investigate the matter.

Nearly 100 people attended the hearing at a college campus on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Fifty-six people testified at the hearing, which turned rowdy at times, with some speakers drowned out by shouts from the audience and with one man escorted out by campus security.

"To deprive this building of landmark status is to allow for a citadel of Islamic supremacy to be erected in its place," said Andrea Quinn, a freelance audio technician from Queens who said she had worked with people at the World Trade Center.

But Rafiq Kathwari, who described himself as a moderate Muslim, said the landmark discussion had been hijacked.

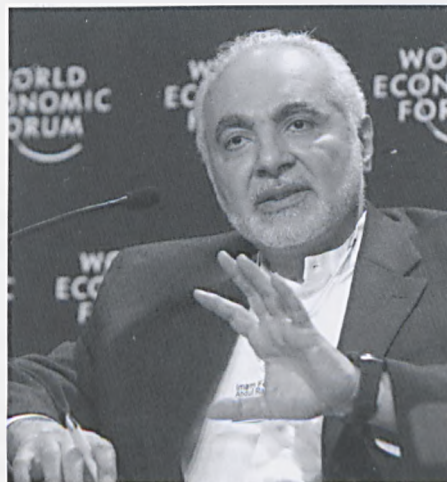
"This has been made by a very vocal minority into an issue of bigotry. I'm standing



*A mosque near Ground Zero would promote 'the same sharia ideology that the 9/11 hijackers used as the justification for their act of unconscionable murder'.*

in a hall in which I feel ashamed to be an American."

The mosque and the related community centre are a project of several groups, including the American Society for Muslim Advancement and the Cordoba Initiative,



*New York imam Feisal Abdul Rauf*

which promotes cross-cultural understanding between Islam and the West. Cordoba's director, Imam Feisal Rauf, has refused to disclose the sources of funding for the mosque.

Act for America, a group set up to oppose the mosque development, recently launched an online petition which had attracted almost 66,000 signatures by mid-July. The petition states: "We the undersigned join with millions of Americans who are opposed to the founding of a mosque at the very site where Islamist jihadists destroyed the World Trade Center and took the lives of nearly 3,000 people.

"We are opposed to the grotesque symbolism represented by the building of this mosque at Ground Zero. We are especially appalled that those pushing for this mosque have designated its grand opening date for September 11, 2011 – the ten year anniversary of the worst terrorist attack in US history.

"We are deeply disturbed by the insensitivity to the families of the victims of the 9/11 jihadist attack exhibited by imam Feisal Abdul Rauf and his supporters. We find it grossly hypocritical that Islamists and their allies repeatedly lecture Americans about the need to be "sensitive" to Muslims while Imam Rauf and his allies practise

the height of intolerance and insensitivity through the blatant act of building a mosque at Ground Zero.

"We are offended by the views imam Rauf has expressed about 9/11, such as his conspiratorial theory that Muslims did not perpetrate the 9/11 attack and that America's policies were partly to blame for the attack. Such views are a slap in the face of the victims and families of 9/11.

"We find it repulsive that imam Rauf and his followers and supporters would seek to build a mosque near ground zero promoting the same Sharia ideology that the 9/11 hijackers used as the justification for their act of unconscionable murder.

"Therefore, in deference to the families of the 9/11 victims and their memory, we call upon the elected officials of New York to oppose the building of this mosque near Ground Zero and for them to urge Feisal Abdul Rauf and his followers to find another location for it."



# 'The State and religion – the Church risks looking absurd'

news and expressed concerns that traditionalists were running out of options.

"The scope for remaining in the Church of England is getting more and more narrow and the options are rapidly closing," the Rev. David Houlding, a leading member of the Catholic Group on the General Synod, told the Press Association.

"I am staying in the Church of England for the time being until I am driven out. I am not going willingly, I will only go if forced," he said.

In its editorial on July 9, the *Guardian* – under the heading "The state and religion: The church risks looking absurd" – said "England's state religion is an accident sustained by apathy: lacking any logical existence at the heart of the nation, it survives because it is already there. No one would campaign to create an official Church of England if we had not inherited one; other parts of Britain do without it. Non-believers, when they think of the English church at all, tend to see a benign relic, the keeper of country churchyards, a modest, often helpful and mostly inoffensive part of the national fabric. Its rituals involve a declining number of citizens and its tortured internal politics are a mystery, but it is still an important – and often profound – part of many English lives. The fact that the monarch is also its supreme governor, that some of its bishops sit in parliament, and that its senior clerics are appointed by the Prime Minister, is both indefensible and profoundly unexciting.

"This tolerant indulgence, though, is being strained. The Church of England now expects both the benefits of establishment and the cultural freedom of private religion. At the very least, a national church should not become disconnected from the best values of the country it serves ... It devotes a shocking amount of energy to debating the supposed inferiority of women, gay men and lesbians. These issues matter intensely to some believers inside the church, but they make it look intolerant to the much larger number of people outside it.

"The church's position on these issues is now out of line with both the law and the mood of the times. It pointed out that Rowan Williams, whose support for the established church flowered only after he became the Archbishop of Canterbury, once noted: 'We have a special relationship with the cultural life of our country and we must not fall out of step with it if we are not to

*Continued from page 1*

become absurd and incredible.'" The editorial continued: "He said it. But the truth is that his church fell out of step long ago.

"This week a gay but celibate cleric, Jeffrey John, the dean of St Albans and a man of the highest intellectual and moral standing, was rejected as a candidate for the diocese of Southwark because of his sexuality. No other private or state institution would have been allowed to do this. No institution, either, would be allowed to bar women from applying for the job, allowing them to be



Dean of St Albans, Jeffrey John

ordained but not promoted.

"The internal agonies of a church caught between its Protestant and Catholic, and its liberal and conservative, tendencies cannot excuse this official institutionalisation of intolerance. It is true that disestablishing the church would require a huge amount of constitutional unpicking – much of it beneficial, such as the removal of anti-Catholic discrimination from the Act of Settlement. No government is likely to devote parliamentary time to the cause.

"It is true, too, that the established part of the church tends to be the more liberal, and that pulling back state involvement may do little to advance the cause of men such as Jeffrey John. Any mechanism that allows dialogue and change between the hard core of the committed and the penumbra of the vaguely supportive has something to be said for it. Religions that are entirely cut off from the surrounding culture neither die nor fade away, but turn crazy and dangerous. But formal disestablishment need not mean isolation, only the end of an unhealthy pretence that one church above all others can speak for a diverse nation."

## Council prayers: NSS launches fighting fund

THE National Secular Society is seeking for the High Court to declare that prayers integral to council meetings are not lawful. If the society wins the case it would create a precedent that would be binding on other councils.

The papers were lodged last month at the High Court for a "Judicial Review between the Queen (on the Application of the National Secular Society) and Bideford Town Council".

Bideford Council have until mid August to decide whether to stop prayers or fight the case. Said NSS Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood: "We know that the Christian Institute and Christian Concern have been in touch with Bideford Council. So Bideford will be well supported financially, and the NSS is getting dug in for what could be a long and expensive fight – its initial budget is for £25,000 but this will rise with appeals, which are likely.

"Even if Bideford do not fight, we will find quickly move on to a council that will – there are thousands to choose from. So the NSS is starting a fighting fund. We hope you will make a donation to the fund.

He added: "We would like to thank Brighton and Hove Humanist Society who unanimously voted for a £500 contribution to our fighting fund. We still have a long way to go towards our £25,000 target and would like to encourage other groups and individuals to match Brighton's glowing example. This would be a tangible way of expressing your support for our work on this case which goes to the very heart of secularism in public life and, if successful will set a key precedent. We get numerous letters expressing admiration for, and appreciation of, our work; contributing to the fund would be a tangible way of expressing your thanks, and it would be very much appreciated.

"Please make a donation securely online at [www.secularism.org.uk/donate.html](http://www.secularism.org.uk/donate.html) or by sending a cheque to NSS at NSS Fighting Fund, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. NSS President Terry Sanderson added: "We must grasp this rare opportunity to make public life more secular and do our very best to win. Your contribution will go to help ensure that."

# Sex education: new battle lines are being drawn

**S**elf-professed expert on all matters sexual – Christian Voice’s Stephen Green – was present at the launch last month of a parents’ forum on sex education in the London borough of Ealing.

According to the meeting’s organiser – Suzanne Fernandes, a leading light in the Christian Party – the aim of the initiative was to concentrate on Ealing Borough, but “There are principles at stake which apply to the whole of the UK ... Protecting children’s innocence and demanding rights as a parent to be fully informed about the content of school sex and relationships education (SRE) will be on the agenda.”

Fernandes, who polled a whopping 295 votes for the Christian Party in the Ealing constituency in the 2010 General Election, then asked: “Does it not concern you that there is increasing use of ‘SRE’ to sexualise children, with condoms given out to 12-year-olds and school nurses giving abortion advice behind parents’ backs?”

She added: “In addition, there is the growing trend to use the ‘relationships’ side of SRE, bolstered by the 2010 Equality Act, to groom children for sexual activities.”

She earlier warned parents in Ealing that the cross-party-supported Children, Schools and Families Bill “marks a new phase in the government’s relentless quest to undermine parents and impose a new morality upon schoolchildren.”

She insisted that “the materials children are being exposed to would horrify many parents, especially among the borough’s diverse faith communities. There are condoms being issued after so-called sex education classes.”

Green was present to give attendees the benefit of his expertise. This is the cretin who, in 2007, declared: “The best way of not getting cervical cancer and genital warts is to stay a virgin and marry a virgin”.

Earlier this year, the National Secular Society submitted a report to the government, setting out its views on sex and relationship studies.

In its *A response to Sex and Relationships Guidance to Schools*, the NSS welcomed the proposal to make SRE part of the curriculum in all schools and that it will be “factually accurate, evidence-based and age appropriate”. It commended the mention of the fact that “none of the abstinence-



*Christian fundie Stephen Green, a vocal opponent of progressive sex education*

focused programmes had a positive impact”, and pointed out that “the teenage pregnancy rate in the UK is the highest in Europe – one in 25 under 18-year-olds – and STI rates are climbing. It is essential that young people are given the facts as early as possible so that they can protect themselves while exploring, enjoying and taking responsibility for their sexuality.

“However, there are certain concerns about the proposed guidance and its inten-

## Protest the Pope film festival

AS part of its Protest the Pope campaign, the National Secular Society is presenting a short season of films that explore issues the Catholic Church and the Government would prefer were kept under wraps during the papal visit.

Says the NSS: “The authorities in this country refuse to ask difficult questions of the Pope – so we will do it for them. Each of these four powerful films illustrates clearly why the Pope should be made to answer for the many sins of his Church.”

Tickets for each film are £3. Seats are limited, so advance booking is advised.

The films are: *Sinners* (Monday, September 13, 7.30pm); *Deliver us from Evil* (Tuesday, September 14, 7.30pm); *Unrepentant* (Wednesday, September 15, 7.30pm + Q&A); *The Crime of Father Amaro* (Thursday, September 16, 7pm + Q&A).

You can buy tickets online by visiting <http://www.secularism.org.uk/protest-the-pope-film-festival.html>

tion to be ‘sensitive to faith and cultural perspectives’ and to the ‘ethos of the school’.

“Although there is currently no complete opt-out permitted to schools, the fact that governing bodies will retain the right to determine the schools’ approach to SRE may not be serving the best interests of young people and may in some cases be placing them at risk.”

The NSS said it was also concerned that parents could withdraw children from SRE up to the age of 15, “by which time many of them will already be sexually active. It is most likely to be strongly religious parents who withdraw children. The guidance itself notes that ‘SRE is more effective if it starts before a young person first has sex.’”

Voicing its concern about the SRE statement that “there are clear values that underpin SRE, including the value of family life, marriage and of loving and stable relationships in bringing up children”, the NSS noted that “no mention is specifically made of civil partnerships or of gay relationships in general. For schools with a strongly religious ethos, it would be too easy to use this directive literally, defining ‘family life’ in narrow terms and focusing only on marriage. Some religious groups oppose adoption by gay couples; the guidance should explicitly mention committed non-heterosexual relationships as equally important for raising children.

“At the very least, the NSS recommends that the wording be changed to ‘the value of family life and of loving, committed relationships in bringing up children.’”

The NSS added: “It is essential that, while young people are taught about stable relationships (of all kinds), they are also prepared to embark on casual relationships safely. In some religious schools, teaching may be biased by the selective use of facts or morally loaded against casual sex and short-term relationships, leaving young people unprepared to protect themselves. They may be ill-informed or too embarrassed to buy contraceptives or to consult health-care professionals about STIs or pregnancy. They may also be unprepared and vulnerable if they discover they are gay.”

• You can download a copy of the NSS’s *A Response to Sex and Relationships Guidance in Schools* by going online and clicking on this link: <http://tinyurl.com/372wd9x>

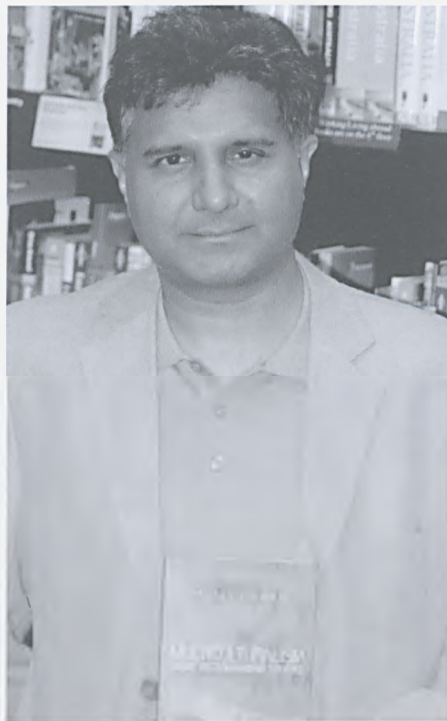
# Ex-Muslim wants multiculturalism and

**D**r Rummy Hasan is a quietly-spoken academic with a winsome smile who is quite unlikely to win many friends among mainly left-leaning British liberals who have, over the last 30 years or so, insisted on accusing critics of hard-line Islamic ideology as “Islamophobic” and – by extension – “racist”.

Hasan, a senior lecturer at the University of Sussex who cut his teeth on left-wing politics, has long poooh-pooohed the notion of “Islamophobia”, and in a book just published – *Multiculturalism: Some Inconvenient Truths* – he goes to great lengths to explain in forthright, no-nonsense terms just how effectively radical Islamists, playing the victim card, have used the term “Islamophobia” to further their influence, create intolerant male-dominated enclaves, and stifle any critical examination of their isolationist agendas.

Last night I got to meet the Muslim-turned-atheist, who has a horror of the ritual slaughter of animals, when he launched *Multiculturalism* at Waterstones in Brighton, where he gave a riveting overview of the contents of his book.

To the annoyance of at least one member of his audience, Hasan asserted that one positive step towards weakening the influence of the radicals – and those who seek to shield them from any form of



Dr Rummy Hasan, pictured at the launch of his book at Waterstones in Brighton

(Photo: Barry Duke)

criticism – would be to abolish “poisonous” faith schools. This, he said, would help enormously in integrating children from immigrant communities – particularly those from Muslim backgrounds – into mainstream British society.

The man who opposed the idea felt

that Protestant and Catholic faith schools, which had been with us “for centuries”, had played an important role in shaping Britain’s Christian cultural identity, and should not be prevented from continuing their good work.

Hasan dismissed this argument by pointing to the divisiveness of Protestant and Catholic sectarian schools in Northern Ireland.

In his book Hasan asserts that many of the beliefs and practices of religious-ethnic minorities are oppressive – especially concerning women and children – and that they are profoundly damaging the lives of many of those now trapped within “mono-religious, mono-cultural” segregated communities. *Multiculturalism* proposes a society which does away with the leading of “parallel lives” and segregation, and rejects oppressive and divisive cultural and religious practices.

In reviewing the book, Roddy Matthews, writing in *Tribune*, said: “Hasan is not concerned with protecting the culture of the host country from invaders; he is concerned with protecting immigrant arrivals from being trapped in an oppressive aspic of male domination, low skills and poverty. Hasan believes that current policy does this because it is based on a liberal notion – admirable in its original intent – that the once despised, traditional cultures of former colonies are worthy of respect.”

## Breast-feeding fatwas expose Islam to ridicule

TWO “powerful Saudi clerics” have advised women to give their breast milk to male colleagues and acquaintances in order to avoid breaking strict Islamic law forbidding mixing between the sexes.

They are at odds, however, over precisely how the milk should be delivered.

A fatwa issued recently about adult breast-feeding to establish “maternal relations”, thus precluding the possibility of sexual contact, resulted in a week’s worth of newspaper headlines in Saudi Arabia.

Some have found the debate so bizarre that they are now calling for stricter regulations about how and when fatwas should be issued.

Sheikh Abdul Mohsen Bin Nasser Al Obeikan, an adviser to the Royal Court and consultant to the Ministry of Justice, set off a firestorm of controversy when he said in a TV interview that women who come into regular contact with men who aren’t related

to them ought to give them their breast milk so they will be considered relatives.

Al Obeikan said: “The man should take the milk, but not directly from the breast of the woman. He should drink it and then becomes a relative of the family, a fact that allows him to come in contact with the women without breaking Islam’s rules about mixing.”

Obeikan said the fatwa applied to men who live in the same house or come into contact with women on a regular basis.

Al Obeikan – who made the statement after being asked about a 2007 fatwa issued by an Egyptian scholar about adult breast-feeding – said that the breast milk ought to be pumped out and given to men in a glass.

But his remarks were contradicted by another high-profile sheikh – Abi Ishaq Al Huwaini – who said that men should suckle the breast milk directly from a woman’s breast.

Shortly after the two sheikhs weighed in on the matter, a bus driver in the country’s Eastern Region reportedly told one of the female teachers whom he drives regularly that he wanted to suckle milk from her breast. The teacher has threatened to file a lawsuit against him.

The fatwa stems from the tenets of the strict Wahhabi version of Islam that governs modern Saudi Arabia and forbids women from mixing with men who are not relatives. They are also not allowed to vote, drive or even leave the country without the consent of a male “guardian”.

Under Islamic law, women are encouraged to breast-feed their children until the age of two.

It is not uncommon for sisters, for example, to breast-feed their nephews so they and their daughters will not have to cover their faces in front of them later in life, as they are then regarded as a “breast-milk sibling”.

# and 'poisonous' faith schools ditched

He adds: "Essentially, Hasan is saying not that multiculturalism is bad for Britain, as the Right say, but that it is bad for the people it is intended to help – incoming cultural minorities. Immigrant populations have remained unchallenged in their traditional ways, and the fate of women and children, "marooned from the shore of mainstream society", has been to fall into isolation and economic deprivation, because traditional community leaders, invariably male, have continued to dominate self-defined immigrant groups in a way that social liberals would never tolerate within the host society.

Multiculturalism, according to Hasan, gave way after 9/11 to what he calls "multifaithism". This is a highly fissured social model where increased government reluctance to criticise or interfere has damaged social cohesion, leading to the psychic detachment of certain minorities, especially South Asian Muslims.

Matthews says Hasan finds this profoundly unsatisfactory, and he "brilliantly points

out the anomalies and double standards inherent in the respect and recognition accorded to newly-arrived cultural groups. The host society is expected to change in response to the new arrivals, but individuals arriving are not, and are instead to be "celebrated" in their "difference".

**'Hasan is not concerned with protecting the culture of the host country from invaders; he is concerned with protecting immigrant arrivals from being trapped in an oppressive aspice of male domination'**

It is the host society that is assumed to be flawed and open to criticism, while the newly arrived community is exempt from any criticism at all.

Multiculturalism, as currently implemented, thus violates universalist principles in the areas of both law and social equality.

Multiculturalism, Hasan argues, preserves oppressive practices and deprives members of minority communities of individual liberty and the right of self-expression; they become prisoners of the larger group, condemned to mono-culturalism and mono-faithism.

Matthews concludes: "Hasan suggests some constructive measures and solutions to the problems facing migrant groups. The solution, he believes, is more intermixing, less segregation and the creation of a vision of a shared (and distinctly secular) future. These are, naturally, left-wing, progressive solutions, for Hasan feels no obligation to preserve either host or immigrant cultures in their present form. This stance pervades the book, and lends it its overall flavour."

Hasan has agreed to an exclusive interview with the *Freethinker*, which will be published in the print edition, then later online.

## Muslim fanatics hack off Indian professor's hand

AN Indian academic, Professor T J Joseph, last month had his right hand chopped off by Muslim assailants in Kerala in an attack provoked by the academic's alleged "blasphemy" earlier this year.

In March, while Joseph was teaching at Newman College in Thodupuzhe, he angered members of the Muslim community by preparing an exam which "included questions offensive to Mohammed".

Following a series of protests by Islamic groups, he was suspended from college. Later, Joseph publicly apologised for his "unintentional error". Joseph's mother said that in recent months her son continued to receive death threats.

Joseph, his mother and sister (a Catholic nun) were returning home from Sunday Mass when their car was stopped by a van carrying several men who carried out the savage attack on the 53-year-old professor.

Joseph's sister, Mary Stella, says that "the assailants destroyed the window of our car and pulled out my brother to execute him. My poor mother, who was in the car with us, witnessed the crime."

The police in Kochi, India, said that, in addition to losing his hand, Joseph was stabbed several times

Joseph underwent two lengthy micro-vascular operations at the Specialists



*Professor Joseph pictured in hospital after the attack*

Hospital, Kochi, and the severed hand was reconstructed and re-grafted. He was said to be recovering well in the intensive-care unit.

Kochi Police said that two members of the radical Muslim group Popular Front of India had been arrested in connection with the attack on the academic. Twelve other suspects with "extremist links" were also being held for interrogation.

The brutal attack has outraged the people of this region of India and drawn

widespread condemnation and demands for stern new measures to prevent further violent incidents. A number of Muslim organisations, including the Indian Muslim League, have stepped forward to condemn the attack on Professor Joseph and have asked the government to take aggressive action in bringing the attackers to justice.

Sajar: K George, President of the Global Council of India, spoke of his "sorrow for these attacks by Muslims against Christians" and expressed concern over the growth of Islamic extremism in the region. George also said: "Christian schools are often targeted by Muslim fanatics ... the rapid growth of the Muslim population and their influence in elections is increasing safety concerns for Christians throughout this country."

Meanwhile, it was reported last month that Iran had imposed a media blackout over the case of a 43-year-old mother of two who had been sentenced to death by stoning following her conviction for adultery. Her fate is still unclear despite an apparent "reprieve".

The Iranian authorities said that Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, who has been in prison for five years, and had received 99 lashes, would not be stoned, but her son believes that she could still be hanged.

# Escaping the tyranny of the Jehovah's Witnesses

**RACHEL UNDERHILL**, a British woman whose life was blighted by the cult, now works to help those who want to escape its clutches or who have already done so but need support in adjusting to a life free of the Witnesses' control

**R**eports of Jehovah's Witnesses dying unnecessarily after refusing blood transfusions periodically crop up in the media, leaving rational folk shaking their heads and asking themselves what sort of insanity lies at the root of cases such as that of Joshua McAuley, pictured below.



The teenage Jehovah's Witness was crushed by a car in May when it crashed into a store in May, 2010, in Smethwick, West Midlands. McAuley, 15, was airlifted to hospital, but died after refusing a blood transfusion.

The schoolboy, who received abdominal and leg injuries, is reported to have told doctors at Birmingham's Selly Oak hospital not to give him a blood transfusion because of his religious beliefs.

Clive Parker, an elder at Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses in Smethwick, where Joshua and his family worshipped, said Joshua was conscious after the accident and had "made a stand on the blood issue".

A spokesman for Selly Oak hospital said he could not comment on the individual case but described the issue as an "extraordinarily complex area" with no set rules. He said: "There is not one single policy and not one single law regarding transfusions. There is no automatic right to override parental wishes or that of a minor. It is a very complex area that has to be approached on a case-by-case basis.

"Any decisions that have to be made are made in consultation with as many

people as possible."

Now most people, according to author and new religious movement specialist, David Barrett, "know two things about Jehovah's Witnesses: they knock on your front door (usually when you're having dinner or watching TV) and they won't have blood transfusions.

"Beyond that, they are usually ignored as one of several unorthodox Christian sects we've all vaguely heard of, like the Mormons or the Plymouth Brethren.

"But what is it about Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs that set them apart from the more mainstream, more socially accepted Christian denominations like Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists and so on? And why do mainstream denominations not accept JW's as "proper" Christians?

Probably the main difference is that JW's don't accept Jesus is God, equal in the Trinity to God the Father and the Holy Spirit. They believe Jesus is the first of God's creations and that he is God's son, but not God himself; he is inferior to the Father. JW's also believe that the Holy Spirit is just God-in-action, rather than a separate Person of the Godhead. It is quite possibly this belief, much easier to grasp than the logical complexities of the Trinity, which attracts some people to the JW religion.

The main JW publications, *Awake!* and *The Watchtower*, strongly feature one of the movement's most important beliefs: the imminent return of Christ, the Battle of Armageddon and the setting up of God's Kingdom on Earth. The artwork in the magazines shows perfect nuclear family groups in idyllic pastoral scenes. Although JW's sometimes give the impression that they are the only Christians preaching this End-Time message, in fact their millennialist beliefs are broadly similar not only to those of other millennialist sects but also to the beliefs of many Evangelical Chris-

tians within mainstream denominations. It is only because they focus so strongly on this belief that it stands out so much.

For many years JW's taught that only 144,000 believers would be saved. They now have many more members than that (around 6 million worldwide) and their teaching is now that 144,000 will go to heaven as priests and kings, while all other believers will have eternal life on Earth after Christ's return.

According to Barrett, JW's also believe:

- Non-believers will not suffer an eternity of torment and punishment in hell, as mainstream Christianity teaches. Among non-believers, the dead are dead, and simply do not exist any more. Only true believers, Jehovah's Witnesses, will be brought back to a new life at the return of Christ.

- Jesus did not die on a cross but on a stake, with his arms stretched and nailed above him rather than out to his side (this belief became part of their teachings in 1936; before that they had accepted the cross).

- They are the only Christians with the truth. In the words of their second and most influential leader, Joseph Franklin "Judge" Rutherford (1869-1942), "The ecclesiastical systems, Catholic and Protestant, are under supervision and control of the Devil, and form a part of his visible organisation, and therefore constitute the anti-Christ."

The Jehovah's Witnesses were founded by Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916). Brought up in a Congregationalist family in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, he could not accept that a loving God would condemn countless millions to everlasting torment in hell. After death, he believed, there is nothing; death is the end – until, for believers, the Second Coming.

JW's are well known for their refusal to have blood transfusions even when they, or their children, might die without one.



This teaching, which was only introduced in 1945, is based on biblical prohibitions against eating blood (Genesis 9:3-6, Acts 15:29). The Bible shows that blood is sacred, the religion teaches, and that it is not to be used for human consumption; and they interpret this to include transfusions. There is a small reform group of JW's which argues that this policy is misguided, but generally the religion has held firmly to this belief. Even "autologous transfusion", the storing of a patient's own blood for transfusion back into the same person, is forbidden.

One social difficulty, especially for young people growing up in the religion, is that JW's don't celebrate Christmas, birthdays or national holidays. Their reasoning is that Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter are actually based on Pagan festivals, and that "birthday celebrations were giving undue honour to creatures"; they ignore national holidays "because Jehovah's Witnesses are no part of the world". This can cause awkwardness and embarrassment for children at school, who do not receive presents at Christmas and who cannot go to (or have their own) birthday parties. Although JW pupils may take Religious Studies as a subject with other pupils, they must withdraw from school assemblies. They are also discouraged from taking part in any after-school activities.

Such restrictions make JW teenagers different from their peers, at the time in their life when they most want to be accepted by them. Socially and emotionally, at what is already a potentially fraught time of developing from childhood to adulthood, such difference makes life for a JW teenager even more difficult.

The JW religion is very strict on sexual morality. Teenagers in JW families are not allowed to go to clubs, pubs or parties where inhibitions may be relaxed. They are discouraged from having boyfriends or girlfriends at all while still of school age. Even young adults in relationships must avoid being alone together; suspicion of physical intimacy, even sensual kissing, can bring disciplinary action from the Church elders.

Barrett's in-depth examination of Jehovah's Witnesses appears on a website set up four years ago by Rachel Underhill, a woman who claims that being brought up in the cult had almost cost her her life. The site – [exjw-reunited.co.uk](http://exjw-reunited.co.uk) – exists to support those who have escaped the clutches of this demented organisation.

Writing in the *Daily Mail* in February



Rachel Underhill

this year, Underhill recounted a terrifying experience she had in hospital when she was giving birth to twins. She had gone into labour ten weeks early, and her twins were in the breech position. She recalled: "As the consultant obstetrician looked through my notes, he suddenly lifted his head and said: 'I see you're a Jehovah's Witness'.

"I nodded mutely, overcome with fear, as I knew what would happen next. The doctor left the room and called the Jehovah's Witness Hospital Liaison Committee, a group of the religion's senior members – or 'elders' – who are on call to negotiate with doctors about blood transfusions.

"Jehovah's Witnesses believe that blood is sacred and that accepting a transfusion – which is likely during many operations – is a sin. Frightened and in pain, I was told by the doctors that I was in grave danger if I refused a transfusion.

"The anaesthetist, clearly agitated and upset, even said to me: 'Do you realise you are going to die and leave your babies without a mother?' Before I could protest, Dennis, an elder I had known for a few years, was at my bedside. He was in his 70s and from a Brighton congregation – all Jehovah's Witness elders are males. I genuinely thought: 'Dennis is coming to help', yet here he was clutching a form stating I would refuse a transfusion and telling me to sign.

"I glanced over at my parents and my husband Bob, hoping they would say something, but they stood by obediently, saying nothing while the elders took over.

"It still hurts to think we were all so brainwashed that they could have stood by and watched me and my babies die.

"I was in absolute turmoil. I knew that if I didn't sign the forms I would be banished from the movement and from

everyone I loved and would be left without the support of my family.

"I didn't want to die, but Dennis simply stood there, pen reaching out to me, and I knew what I had to do. I signed."

Underhill continued:

"Thankfully, the operation was a success. My twins, two healthy girls we named Chloe and Lucy, were beautiful. But I'd lost a dangerous amount of blood and was very tired. I didn't haemorrhage like poor Emma Gough, the Jehovah's Witness who died in 2007 after giving birth, but I needed huge doses of iron injections to build my strength.

"Meanwhile, the elders' useless advice in order for me to get better was to 'eat lots of beetroot'.

"I stayed in hospital for a week, the babies for six. Both were born with holes in their hearts and Lucy has cerebral palsy as a result of being premature.



Emma Gough

"It was after my operation that the consultant told me firmly that if either of my children needed a blood transfusion at any time, the hospital would go to court and seek an injunction if I refused.

"I simply said: 'Please do what you have to do', secretly pleased that they could intervene if necessary.

"I could so easily have lost my life thanks to this warped religion. Now I faced going home with my new babies and raising them under the faith that forbids friendships outside the religion."

Explaining how she had become a JW, Underhill wrote: "Millions of us have had Jehovah's Witnesses knocking on the door, but when it happened to my parents one one morning in 1974, just before I was born, it was to change the course of their lives, and mine, for ever.

(Continued on p10)

# Walking away from the Witnesses

“Neither my mother, a housewife, nor my father, a builder, knew anything about the religion before this fateful day, but my mother – who lost her own mum as a child – was intrigued by the notion that she could meet her again one day, in paradise.

“We lived in Whitstable, Kent, and every day I was terrified on the way to school in case the world ended and I wouldn’t find my parents when I came home.

“It’s a very strict religion that denies its members any freedom or the right to make lifestyle choices of their own. It is incredibly controlling and, as a family, we felt we couldn’t breathe without telling the elders first. I grew up in this indoctrinated household. We weren’t allowed to make friends with anyone outside the religion, which they called ‘outside of the truth’, and further education or careers were frowned upon, because our spiritual development came above everything.

“It was an utterly miserable childhood, very lonely and tough. Following fashion is forbidden – modesty is everything – and sex outside marriage is a huge sin.

“The other children at school would laugh at me, dressed in floral frilly dresses

or sailor dresses with hems down to the ground with not even a bare arm exposed. I looked like something out of the thirties.

“I have a younger brother, Tom, and a rebellious sister called Jo who is three years older than me and who got pregnant at 16 by an outsider. Jo had to leave the group, and the shame and blame my parents were made to suffer was shocking.

**‘It’s a very strict religion that denies its members any freedom or the right to make lifestyle choices of their own’**

“The news was announced at a big meeting at the Jehovah’s Witness meeting place, Kingdom Hall.

“My parents were too ashamed to attend so I went alone, aged 13, and I questioned the elders publicly. This was frowned upon, but I was so angry about the way my sister and my father were being treated that I couldn’t help but argue.

“After that, elders crossed over the street

when they saw Jo and, eventually, she was disassociated, or cast out, the worst thing that can happen to a Jehovah’s Witness, because you never get to speak to any of the friends you’ve formed over the years.

In 2004 Underhill decided finally that she’d had enough of Jehovah’s Witnesses controlling every aspect of her life and that of her family.

“I told my parents I was leaving the group knowing we would no longer be in contact, which was really hard. The elders hammered on my door day and night for six weeks trying to dissuade me, and I screamed and swore at them to make them go away.

“I got ill with the flu, and then my parents cut all ties with me. We had a brief reconciliation a couple of years ago, but as soon as I launched my website in 2006 to help other ex-members, they disowned me again out of loyalty to the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

“The only way towards another reconciliation is if I took my website down and I’m not prepared to do that, so I don’t anticipate being in contact with my family, ever again.

“For that first year out of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the only people who were there for me were my old schoolfriends. I cried more or less non-stop for a year, but I’m strong and I knew I’d get through it.

The twins are ten now. They have a brilliant time at Christmas, go to school assembly and celebrate their birthdays, all things they would have been deprived of if I hadn’t left.

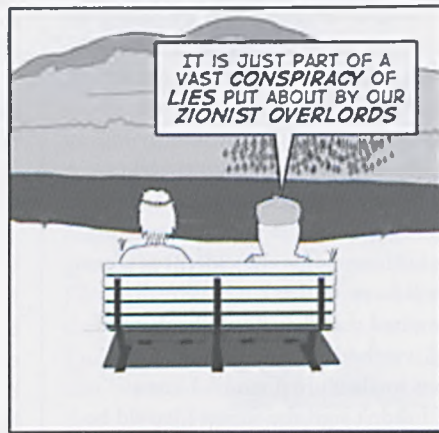
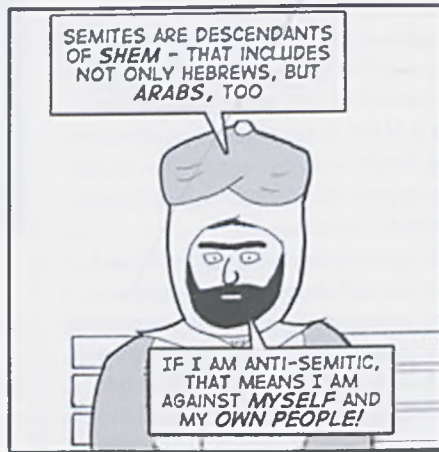
“I was thrilled when I was able to sign a form at the hospital in 2007 saying that if my child ever needed a blood transfusion, that would be fine. I was so proud of myself that day for having had the strength to reclaim our lives. I’ve got no doubts whatever that I did the right thing.

“I didn’t set out to criticise the religion when I launched my website. My aim is just to try to ensure that no one who leaves the Jehovah’s Witness has to endure total isolation with no support, as I had.

“I have two trained counsellors who help people cope with leaving, and I get between three-to five thousand hits a day on my site. I have so much to live for now.

“I married again last year, to Gerry, a company director, the children are thriving, and my business, a windscreen replacement service franchise, is doing very well. I could so easily have lost my life thanks to this warped religion and I’m so glad I found the courage to walk away.”

## Jesus & Mo



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# On life ... and death

Billy Jenkins – ‘the Man from Lewisham’ – is best known as a blues musician whose lyrics often have a powerful anti-religious flavour. He is also a British Humanist Association officiant who conducts godless, sometimes off-the-wall funerals. **PETER BRIETBART** caught up with him at Conway Hall in London earlier this year

**Peter Brietbart:** You say there “Aint no Lord up there”, but when did you first realise your atheism?

**Billy Jenkins:** Aged 4. I wrote about it in the *Life* album, in which we also promoted the *Freethinker*. We had a great cover on the album, a picture taken from the 37th floor of the World Trade Center just before it was hit. The caption was “Jump or burn”. We had a track on there called *First Day in Hell* which was about my Christian nursery school.

As a child I was wrenched out of the peace of my back garden – my own private little world. I was brought to all these screaming kids watched over by this “nice” lady who would threaten us, “If you don’t shut the hell up I’m going to smack you so hard.” That was the beginning of it.

On another track called *Ain’t No Lord Up There*, I sing about when my grandmother fell down a flight of stairs – and she was a really good lady. I just thought, “How’s that fair?”

Later, I figured out how to make money out of the church choir. I never believed in what I was singing, but we worked out that the more weddings we could get through in a day, the more we earned. We learned to speed the music up, to get them in, get them out. I was sceptical from the start. My family were Christians, but they never pushed me.

**PB:** You’re the nephew of Bishop David Jenkins, right? Did the difference of opinion ever cause any conflict?

**BJ:** Well, he was a pretty pompous man. There was always conflict between him and my father. My father didn’t go to university because of the war, whilst Uncle David did. That caused a schism. And I thought “If this is a God-fearing man, and he can’t even be pleasant to his own brother, then there’s something very wrong with that.”

And I was confused as to why they got so dressed up on a Sunday. We had an album called *Still Sounds Like Bromley* in 1991, and on it there’s a track called *Dressing Up For Church*, which is a very sombre,



*Billy Jenkins in Red Lion Square sharing a moment – and his woollen scarf – with Bertrand Russell* (Photo: Barry Duke)

12/8, melancholic dirge.

**PB:** You’ve officiated for grieving people and you’ve seen people dealing with mortality up close many times. How do you think that has affected your view of death?

**BJ:** I don’t think it has affected me, actually. What did happen was that – after I started doing them – life began to slow to a funeral-like pace. I thought I was really on to something: every generation thinks that life is going too fast. I talk to 80-year-olds, they say life’s going too fast. I talk to my kids, they say the same.

So it was great, because life slowed down for me. I’d discovered longevity, and so I could enjoy more of it. It made me all the more aware of how short life is. We’re here for just a tiny moment in the grand scheme of things.

**PB:** How do you think the notions of heaven and hell have affected people’s thoughts on death? It’s always seemed to me rather poisonous to teach people that this isn’t the only life, that we can live again.

**BJ:** When the British Humanist Association train us they’re clear that we’re not to be offensive to those of other faiths. It’s a funeral. We’re not there to attack anyone’s convictions, whatever we might think of

them. I do ask the grieving family if they’d like me to give a moment of reflection for those with faith. I tend to feel that all we’re really doing is just taking pity on them.

Sometimes, people will approach me and ask, “Will he/she go to heaven?” I say, “Well if you think they will, then they will.” I’m not about to tell them not to be so bloody stupid. I take pity on them.

And I do support the church, in that I’ve always felt that if we didn’t have religion, we wouldn’t have humanism. The world would be a less interesting place. We’d be missing out on a lot of pretty buildings! And I love religious or “sacred” music, but they’ve got such crap lyrics. It’s all bollocks.

When I was a kid in the church choir, we sang “Onward Christian Soldiers”, and the sibilance of the “Chr” sound rang out, and echoed around the acoustics. That was beautiful.

Anyway, we wrote *The Voice of God Collective* in 1981. Plato once said that “the voice of the people is the voice of God”, to which I add, “and the religion is music”. Once, when we were touring the album in the north of England, we went to visit my uncle Bishop Jenkins at his big estate.

*(Continued on p12)*

# On life ... and death

We said to him, "Our religion is music. We put it to you that our religion has caused a lot less distress to civilisation than your religion. Would you care to comment?" He wouldn't. One can only conclude that he couldn't bite the hand that fed him.

**PB:** So back to the British Humanist Association. We can see religion in the UK dying a slow death, and so the need for non-religious, or unreligious funeral officiates is growing ever greater. But what does an atheist funeral look like?

**BJ:** Well, before I answer, I must just say that the vicar where I live said to me exactly that. Apparently they're doing fewer and fewer funerals because so many people want humanist funerals now.

I write about 3,000 words for each funeral, and of course, each one is utterly unique. Whilst it's nothing like a rote Christian ceremony, there is a basic template. It might begin with music that's pertinent to the deceased or the chief mourners. Then there are words of welcome and thoughts on life and death from a humanist perspective – I tend to quote Lucretius – "We come from nothing and we go back to nothing."

Then we have tributes from the relatives and friends of the deceased, or I'll lead the tributes from what I've learned about the deceased. You have to pick up on the smallest things, too. Did the deceased talk about TV, telly or television? I'll try and make it as relevant as I can.

Then, some people want to have singing, but for some people that's a nightmare. Sometimes I do a call and answer, where people stand up and repeat what I say, and as one we say goodbye.

When things go well, which mostly it does, people come up to me after a humanist funeral and say, "I want one of those. I didn't know funerals could be like this." The reason they say that is not because it's humanist, but because it's all about them, not about God.

Of all the funerals I've done, I'd say about one in ten is explicitly humanist. Of those, I try and get a positive humanist message across. Sometimes I'll even get people come up to me afterwards, and they'll say, "Thank-you. You've really made me think differently about the way I see life." It's always lovely when people approach me afterwards to thank me. If they ask me for my card, I'll reply, "Aren't you feeling well, sir?" That's always jolly. But it really is a marvellous way to celebrate a

person's life.

**PB:** Are there any funerals that stand out as particularly creative?

**BJ:** One of the best ones was doing a cowboy funeral. It was a wild-west reenactment. They said they wanted to fire guns into the air as a salute. Now, I have had trouble getting permission for a tenor sax to play in the hall, and these people wanted to fire guns.

I wondered what might have happened if there was another funeral in the next hall where someone had died from a drive-by shooting – that would have been distressing. But in the end there were no problems. The military do it all the time. So guns are fine, but a tenor sax, no way.

The chap who had passed away thought of himself as an old Red Indian. He was called Bill "Two Persons" Stone because he was a bit schizophrenic.

His wife was called "Running Water" because she needed the loo all the time. The wild-west funeral was a real success, and everyone went away really happy. A local reporter actually came to see it, and he followed me around, boggled. He said, "I've never been to a humanist funeral before. Are all humanist funerals cowboy funerals?" Of course, I laughed. But I nearly hit him.

**PB:** You once said, "Conducting Humanist funerals is a natural extension of [musical] performance." How did you get into humanist funerals, and how do you think your creative nature lends to it?

**BJ:** There's so many parallels. When I meet the family to discuss the funeral, it has an up-beat feeling of, "Let's put on a gig, man!" We rehearse a set, we do warm-ups, we plan music, we plan speeches, we set the stage, everything. The only weird thing is that I get paid before the gig begins. When the conductor arrives in front of the hearse, it's "Good morning Mr Jenkins. Can we step inside and do the paperwork?" And I'm slipped a cheque!

But yes, it satisfies my creative urges, and it doesn't tire me out like loud music does. It's also not a 400-mile round trip like doing a tour, so I don't need to recover afterwards. But sometimes it does grief me out and I have to take a break, just like with my music.

And it involves honesty, integrity and empathy. That's how I've always done my music, and it's how I help folks say farewell to a loved one. It's a fitting and respectful farewell.

**PB:** How much of your musical output would you say is anti-religious?

**BJ:** A fair bit. Songs: *Sunday Morning, Dressing Up For Church, There Is No Lord Up There, First Day In Hell*, and the new album I'm making at the moment is called *Born Again, And The Religion Is The Blues*. That's out in August.

Actually, from 1979 to 1982 I was in something of a comedy/jazz outfit called Trimmer and Jenkins. It was a bit Lenny Bruce meets John Coltrane, or Flanders and Swann on speed. We used to work at the comic strip alongside Rik Mayall, Adrian Edmondson and some fledgling comediennes, who weren't particularly good, called French and Saunders. Of course, nothing ever became of them.

Anyway, we once did a skit called *The World is Fantastic*, which was a long, rambling bit about how crap the world is. In it, this guy goes up to the Pearly Gates and basically calls Jesus a cunt. Because of that, the National Union of Students banned us from ever performing in any of their venues. They said we were "blasphemous". How times change!

**PB:** You've got an album entitled *Songs of Praise*. Is that a sarcastic title about God, or is there something else you're praising?

**BJ:** It's about praising music. It's beautiful the way people can come together and just create. Put six people together in a room and just hear them interact musically. It's true kineticism when you have six people that haven't met in months, then they come together and begin to play. It's an organic process, it's true spontaneity. That's what my religion is. It's a celebration. It's like having sex without all the bodily fluids exchanging.

Funnily enough, the BBC actually banned my album *Songs of Praise* from YouTube. Someone had put some clips up from the album, and the BBC pulled it for infringement of copyright. I thought they couldn't be serious – they couldn't actually think they'd copyrighted those three words in order. Eventually I got a phone call from the BBC's lawyer making a big apology for any "misunderstanding". The clips are back up now.

The songs of praise are praising humans. People sometimes ask if I'm being satirical, but I'm really not. I'm smiling because of the joy of making music. That's another reason I got into funerals: to do something actually serious. For me, funerals are an absolutely avant-garde gig.

# Thomas Paine statue unveiled in Lewes

ROBERT MORRELL reports on an historic occasion

**B**efore what can only be described as a vast crowd, the new President of the Thomas Paine Society, Tony Benn, last month unveiled a magnificent new Thomas Paine statue in Lewes, Sussex, on the terrace outside Lewes Library in Styles Field.

Paine served his political apprenticeship in Lewes, working there as a riding officer in the Excise service from 1768 until 1774, for much of his time in the town lodging over the tobacconists shop in the High Street kept by Samuel Ollive, a member of the near-by dissenting Westgate chapel, then radical Presbyterian, now Unitarian.

Ollive was a member of what passed for the then Lewes town council which was known as the Court Leet, to which Paine was elected as a juror, the only elective office he held in Britain. Being the county town, Lewes, despite its small size, was an important place in the county, and in contrast to many other towns at that time was largely self-governing, having a well-established reputation for its radicalism.

In 1771 Paine married Ollive's daughter Elizabeth. But, for reasons which remain unclear, the marriage was not a success and in 1774 the pair separated. The settlement deed drawn up at the time has recently been discovered and was purchased at a London auction for the county archives. A transcript is to be published in a forthcoming issue of *The Journal of Radical History*.

It was while working in Lewes that Paine seems to have been approached by George Scott, a member of the Excise Board who was a confidant of the king – which is rather astonishing in view of his known Jacobite sympathies – to compile a document that set forth the case for awarding Excise officers an increase in their salaries, which for some years had been frozen.

The outcome of this was to be Paine's first major work, *The Case of the Officers of Excise*, now considered to be probably the first national trade union manifesto. It so happened that Excise salaries were met out of the king's civil list, for the Excise men were described as being "the King's officers of Excise", but, like their salaries, the civil list salaries, too, had been frozen. So, ironically in writing a manifesto calling for the pay of the lowly Excise officers to be increased, Paine was also making out a case for an increase in the king's salary!



In the event, Parliament refused to even consider the case advanced by Paine, who in 1774 was dismissed from the Excise for having, it was claimed in the notice of dismissal, neglected his duties.

It so happens that the aforesaid George Scott had also introduced Paine to Benjamin Franklin, who now urged the unemployed Thomas Paine to emigrate to Britain's north American colonies, and offered to provide him with letters of introduction to prominent people there who included at least one royal governor.

The town of Lewes, unlike Thetford where Paine was born and raised, has long cherished its Paine associations, the most recent manifestation of which is this magnificent new statue.

This has been sculptured by a local sculptor and artist, Marcus Cornish, who has a growing national reputation. It stands a lit-

tle over five feet in height and depicts Paine sitting and looking slightly upwards to his left, while under his left arm can be seen a book – perhaps symbolic of his *Case of the Officers of Excise*, although when I asked Cornish following the unveiling if this was so he would not say if this had been his intention, so it is a case of the viewer reading into it what it symbolically implies.

The statue, which cost around £35,000, was commissioned by a local resident who wanted to remain anonymous. But the donor, Janet Mortimer, in a short address she gave at the unveiling, said she had decided to allow her identity to become known, for in a town as small as Lewes it would soon have become common knowledge. So there was no point in seeking to conceal it any longer.

The unveiling was attended by numerous civic figures from Lewes and other nearby local authorities. Also present was the county's Lord Lieutenant, who is the queen's official representative in Sussex, although he was not present in that capacity. Others included the town's LibDem MP, and representatives from the Thomas Paine Society and other organisations.

As part of the unveiling ceremony a mummery play (sometimes known as Tipteerers plays in Sussex) entitled "Tom Paine and the Case of the Officers of Excise", was performed by the Lewes Mummerys. This had been written by Mike Turner of the Lewes Theatre Club, with the part of Paine being played by Simon Hellyer.

It was a thoroughly entertaining performance which greatly amused everyone, including Tony Benn, next to whom I was sitting.

The great day was rounded off in the afternoon when a capacity audience gathered in a local hall to watch the premier of a short film made in Lewes of Paine's life in the town, all the actors in it being amateurs with Simon Hellyer again playing Paine.

An outstanding and very effective feature of the film was the fact that unlike the mummery play, in which the characters dressed in period costume, the actors in the film all wore modern clothes, and opened with Paine arriving in the town by rail. What this achieved, at least for me, was to bring out quite dramatically the contemporary relevance of Paine's ideas. I understand that in due course a CD of the film will be made available for purchase.

## Quotable quote

IT'S so fascinating to have lived in a period when religion has taken the thrashing it deserves. Not that it has entirely; we still have a few religions knocking around, doing exactly what they've done through the ages – which is fucking up everything.

– British actor John Hurt, 70, in an interview with *The Times* in June. (Hurt's father was vicar of Shirebrook in Derbyshire.)

# points of view...

A DIG IN THE POST BAG – LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

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THE POSTAL ADDRESS IS POINTS OF VIEW, FREETHINKER,  
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## GRAYLING AND FREEWILL

OWEN O'Neill's rebuttal of Professor Grayling's argument in favour of freewill (Points of View, July 2010) strikes me as simplistic and fiercely deterministic. He states that our decision to act is "only and quite simply ... determined by our nature".

But what exactly is "our nature", and is it ever a stable commodity? Surely our urge, say, to attack another verbally or physically will depend not merely on our nature but on our surrounding circumstances at the time of decision. It is in no way pre-determined.

Those who have read George Eliot's *Middlemarch* will remember that, on the occasion of Dr Lydgate's casting his vote for the chaplaincy of the new medical school, he was determined to vote for his friend, the liberal-minded but lax Reverend Farebrother.

However, on hearing a voice muttering that everyone knew which way his vote would go, the impetuous doctor confounded expectation by voting for his friend's evangelical, gospel-preaching rival, Tyke. Lydgate's vote was not pre-determined, for he was not "by nature" a rash practitioner; it was determined by an impulse to defy expectations and remain, as the cliché has it, "a free agent".

**David James**  
London

ONCE again, the old chestnut of freewill and determinism comes up. Owen O'Neill tell us that we cannot do other than act according to our natures: to act differently we would have to be a different sort of person. Does anybody actually believe this to be true?

Let us consider a current controversy - paedophile priests in the catholic church. Obviously they act as they do because it is in their nature to be paedophiles, but does that mean that they that they can do no other than to behave as they do? To

accept this would mean that ethical choices are meaningless. And what about Pope Ratzinger - does he have a choice in the way that he has reacted to the scandal? If we accept the views of Barbara Smoker and Owen O'Neill, then no he doesn't in which case, all the outrage that this issue has generated is so much hot air. I don't think that even Barbara Smoker accepts the logic of this. In her letter, she says that there are no justifiable grounds for vindictive retribution - I would agree with that, but the very fact that she raises the issue implies that we do have a choice in how we deal with crime, although the logic of her own letter would seem to deny that choice.

For myself, I believe that a hard deterministic position is incompatible with morality, runs counter to basic common sense, and is a completely unscientific position. Professor Grayling in his comments raises the question of whether you could prove by scientific means it to be true, but I don't believe it possible to set up experiments that would settle the issue one way or the other. Unless someone is able to convincingly demonstrate the truth of determinism, then I for one will continue to reject it as an unproven hypothesis.

**John Gibson**  
Gateshead

## PRINCE CHARLES

MAY I suggest an explanation for Prince Charles' comments in defence of sharia law and his admiration for Islam (July 2010 *Freethinker*). It's the same explanation as there is for his pronouncements on medicine, homeopathy, architecture and a variety of other subjects which do not accord with his opinions.

The first part of the explanation is that Charles has spent his life cosseted by courtiers devoted to admiring his insights

while protecting his fragile ego from challenge. Those who might disagree are warned that the Prince does not take kindly to differing views. In his endlessly indulged egocentricity, the Prince, a man of modest intellect, is able to allow his dotty ideas to run riot.

The second part is that Prince Charles does not relate his ideas to himself. He transcends what he advocates for others. Charles enthuses about sharia law, criticises Western civilisation for becoming "increasingly acquisitive and exploitative", urges moral behaviour, the acceptance of "environmental responsibilities" and much else. However, all these apply to others and not to the Prince.

This is a man, still bereft of a role by his mother's long reign, who is detached not only from the realities of life but increasingly from reality itself.

**Denis Watkins**  
Wales

YOU (or *The Middle East Quarterly* if you quote it correctly) are mistaken. If the deluded "Defender of Faith" (July 2010 *Freethinker*) becomes king, he will become not Charles III, but George VII, the way Prince David became Edward VIII, and Prince Albert became George VI.

**Donald Room**  
London

EDITOR'S note: I can find nothing to suggest that Prince Charles will definitely be called George VII if he becomes King of England.

This is what WikiAnswers says: "Charles' full names are "Charles Phillip Arthur George" and, while he could choose any of these names - or any name at all - he will probably become King Charles III.

"The story that he would become



King George VII appeared in the British newspapers in December 2005 and was denied a few days later by official sources who said that no decision had yet been made about what his title will be."

WHEN Prince Charles first let it be known that he wanted to be designated "Defender of Faith", I was inspired to pen the following verse, which, in the light of last month's *Freethinker* report, I thought I might share with readers.

*A pope conferred on Henry Eighth  
The style "Defender of the Faith".  
On his accession, Charles the Third  
Struck out the "the". (Explicit word.)*

*So now all cultures worship share,  
Reciting unspecific prayer.  
Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews –  
One's private doctrines each may choose.*

*Thus: Paradise? Reincarnation?  
Universal Affirmation  
Leaves the details up to you.  
Select your end – or blend the two.*

*Theology is out of date;  
There's no more argument, no hate.  
Now only atheists demur –  
And even they the truce prefer.*

**Barbara Smoker**  
Bromley

## HISTORICITY OF JESUS

ROBERT Morrell seems confused (*Points of View*, June). While claiming that he found no reference to the Crucifixion in either Roman or Jewish records in my book *The Rise and Fall of Jesus*, he notes that I did comment on the references by both Tacitus and Josephus. Either he did not read the book properly or he likes to play games.

It is popular to claim that Tacitus was merely reporting hearsay, but this has been overruled by many learned authorities. As I wrote in the book: "The consensus is that this is a genuine secular testimony derived from sources independent of the Gospels or any other Christian or Jewish literature".

I also pointed out how it corroborated a report by Suetonius that messianic fervour in the names of Christ had reached Rome about 49 CE.

It is also popular among mythicists to claim that Josephus' two references are insertions by Christians. However, as I have pointed out, close study shows that this idea does not stand up. Listing those who disagree is not an argument.

If Mr Morrell wishes us to believe that "the story of the real Jesus" has somehow prevailed despite an attempt by someone to conceal it under that of a rebel, then

he should explain how this came about (it is not enough just to make that claim). In fact, as I have shown, the real story is largely concealed, but only because the evangelists were ignorant of it.

Robert Stovold (also *Points of View*, June) refers to the "burden of proof", claiming that it lies with "the one who alleges".

Not quite; in an argument, the burden of proof lies with those who make unconventional claims. In other words, I am not required to produce evidence that Jesus existed (the consensus is that he did); the onus is on those who claim otherwise.

Consequently, it is not enough for Ken Humphreys to claim that Jesus did not exist; he has to show evidence for that view.

In particular, I claim that he needs to produce an explanation of the gospel story without a historical Jesus. As I have shown, previous attempts to do this have failed, but I am willing to consider another. But where is it?

I have not made any *ad hominem* attack on Humphreys. All I did was to suggest a reason why he espouses the Jesus Myth Theory (it's the usual reason, but not a good enough one).

In his tedious article ("Nailing Jesus", also June), Ken Humphreys appears to be arguing that because the Gospels contain errors and invention, none of them can be trusted and so Jesus himself must be an invention. The fallacy of this conclusion is obvious and it is as foolish to claim that the Gospels are wholly reliable as to claim that they are not. To dig out the truth takes a lot more effort.

It is understandable that freethinkers should wish to be rid of Jesus and that they are attracted to the notion that he did not exist (so as not to need to debate his life). However, this is a leap too far that does violence to the historical record.

Better to acknowledge his existence, but as an obsessed Jewish fanatic who died in a vain attempt to rule Israel. Both mythicists and historicists want the death of the Christian meme, but are divided on how to go about it. The unnecessary dispute is unfortunate.

**Steuart Campbell**  
Edinburgh

## ISRAEL AND GAZA

SINCE my article "Israel's road to a second Holocaust" appeared in the April 2010 issue there has been the murderous assault on the Gaza aid fleet in international waters.

It has also emerged that Israel and the South African Apartheid government were working towards a joint nuclear weapons production programme in the mid-1970s. (See classified SA government documents recently released and highlighted in the *Guardian*.)

I rest my case.

**Graham Livingstone**  
London

## 'FEISTY' DIESEL BALAAM

DIESEL Balaam's admission that he was "a tad too scathing about liberals" is of small worth when, in the same letter (*Points of View*, July), he directs a characteristic sneer at well-meaning liberal "nannies". His implication, whether jocular or ironic, that I am "perfectly sweet", will cause some raised eyebrows in some quarters.

Mr Balaam declares that his libertarianism is "feisty". Quite so. Feisty is an American slang expression for "aggressive, excitable" (OD). So I will continue in my own sweet way while "Diesel Balaam" indulges in aggressive and excitable ego-tripping.

**Bill McIlroy**  
Hove

## Pakistan's dirty little porn secret

BUTTONED-UP, blasphemy-obsessed Pakistan has a dirty little secret – it's the world's No 1 consumer of on-line pornography. And not just your common-or-garden smut

According to research last month it has been top-dog in searches per-person for "horse sex" since 2004; "donkey sex" since 2007; "rape pictures" between 2004 and 2009; "rape sex" since 2004 and "child sex" between 2004 and 2007. "Animal sex" and "dog sex" searches are pretty damn popular too in "The Land of The Pure", as Pakistan likes to think of itself.

The country also is tops – or has been No. 1 – in searches for "camel sex," "rape video," "child sex video" and some other searches too disgusting to print.

The stats are based on findings generated by Google Trends and Google Insights, features of Google that produce data based on popular search terms.

Ironically, the Islamic country has banned content on at least 17 websites to block material deemed "offensive" and "blasphemous" to Muslims.

# the freethinker

## EVENTS & CONTACTS

i information w website e email

### Birmingham Humanists:

w [www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk](http://www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk). 0845 2015135. La Plancha Tapas Bar, Moseley. Tues, Sept 14, 7.45pm. *The Birmingham RE Syllabus*

**Brighton & Hove Humanist Society:** i 01273 227549/461404. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. Wed, Sept 1, 8pm. *Denis Cobell: Why I am not a Christian.*

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.silhg.adm.freeuk.com](http://www.silhg.adm.freeuk.com)

**Central London Humanist Group:** i Chair: Alan Palmer. Sec: Josh Kutchinsky. e [info@centrallondonhumanists.org](mailto:info@centrallondonhumanists.org).

w [www.meetup.com/central-london-humanists](http://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](mailto:phil.cork@blueyonder.co.uk). w [www.phil-cork.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/humleft.htm](http://www.phil-cork.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/humleft.htm)

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

**Cumbria Humanist Group:** i Tel. 01228 810592. Christine Allen w [www.secularderby.org](http://www.secularderby.org) e [info@cumbria-humanists.org.uk](mailto: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](http://www.secularderby.org)

### Devon Humanists:

e [info@devonhumanists.org.uk](mailto:info@devonhumanists.org.uk)

w [www.devonhumanists.org.uk](http://www.devonhumanists.org.uk)

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

w [www.dorsethumanists.co.uk](http://www.dorsethumanists.co.uk)

### East Cheshire and High Peak Secular Group:

i Carl Pinel 01298 815575.

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

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

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

w [www.farnham-humanists.org.uk](http://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](mailto:secretary@galha.org). w [www.galha.org](http://www.galha.org)

**Greater Manchester Humanist Group:** i John Coss: 0161 4303463. Monthly meetings (second Wednesday, 7.30pm) Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester. Aug 11: Topics from a Hat..

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

**Harrow Humanist Society:** Meets the second Wednesday of the month at 8pm (except Jan, July and August) at the HAVS Centre, 64 Pinner Road, Harrow. No evening meeting in August, but on August 18 we shall be having lunch at the Preston Pub, Preston Road. 12pm for 12.30. Non-members welcome.

i Secretary on 0208 907-6124

w [www.harrow.humanist.org.uk](http://www.harrow.humanist.org.uk)

e Mike Savage at [mfsavagemba@hotmail.com](mailto:mfsavagemba@hotmail.com)

**Humanists of Havering:** i Jean Condon 01708 473597. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgore Cres, Gidea Park. Meetings on first Thursday of the month, 8pm. Sept 2, Extraordinary general Meeting, and Harvest Supper.

### Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern

**Ireland:** i Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: 028 9267 7264 e [brianmcclinton@btinternet.com](mailto:brianmcclinton@btinternet.com).

w [www.nirelandhumanists.net](http://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](mailto:secretary@humanism-scotland.org.uk). Information and events: [info@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:info@humanism-scotland.org.uk) or visit [www.humanism-scotland.org](http://www.humanism-scotland.org).

uk Media: [media@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:media@humanism-scotland.org.uk). Education: [education@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:education@humanism-scotland.org.uk).

### Local Scottish Groups:

**Aberdeen:** 07010 704778, [aberdeen@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:aberdeen@humanism-scotland.org.uk). **Dundee:** 07017 404778, [dundee@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:dundee@humanism-scotland.org.uk). **Edinburgh:** 07010 704775, [edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk). **Glasgow:** 07010 704776, [glasgow@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:glasgow@humanism-scotland.org.uk). **Highland:** 07017 404779, [highland@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto: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](mailto:jeffgarland@wm.im). w [www.iomfreethinkers.org](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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.

w [www.lancashiresecularhumanists.co.uk](http://www.lancashiresecularhumanists.co.uk) i Ian Abbott, Wavecrest, Hackensall Rd, Knott End-on-Sea, Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire FY6 0AZ 01253 812308 e [ian@ianzere.demon.co.uk](mailto:ian@ianzere.demon.co.uk)

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

w [www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk](http://www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk)

**Lewisham Humanist Group:** i Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. The Goose, Rushey Green, Catford SE6. Meetings on third Thurs, 7.30pm. Aug 19, Mike Lawrence: *The Astrological Origin of Religion.*

w [www.lewisham.humanist.org.uk](http://www.lewisham.humanist.org.uk)

**Liverpool Humanist Group:** i 07814 910 286.

w [www.liverpoolhumanists.co.uk/](http://www.liverpoolhumanists.co.uk/)

e [lhghumanist@googlemail.com](mailto: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](http://www.MarchesSecularists.org)

e [Secretary@MarchesSecularists.org](mailto:Secretary@MarchesSecularists.org)

**Mid-Wales Humanists:** i Maureen Lofmark, 01570

422648 e [mlofmark@btinternet.com](mailto:mlofmark@btinternet.com)

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

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

### North East Humanists (Teesside Group):

i C McEwan on 01642 817541.

### North East Humanists (Tyneside Group):

i the Secretary on 01434 632936.

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

e [enquiries@nondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@nondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk)

w [www.nondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk](http://www.nondonhumanists.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](mailto:jdwhite@talk21.com)

**Peterborough Humanists:** i Edwin Salter Tel:

07818870215.

**Sheffield Humanist Society:** i 0114 2309754. University Arms, 197 Brook Hill, Sheffield. Wed Sept 1, 8pm. Mike Granville: *The Pope and his Church.*

**South Hampshire Humanists:** Group Secretary, Richard Hogg. Tel: 02392 370689 e [info@southhantshumanists.org.uk](mailto:info@southhantshumanists.org.uk) w [www.southhantshumanists.org.uk](http://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](mailto: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](mailto:library@ethicalsoc.org.uk). Monthly programmes on request.

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

Secretary: Denis Johnston.

w [www.suffolkhands.org.uk](http://www.suffolkhands.org.uk) e [mail@suffolkhands.org.uk](mailto:mail@suffolkhands.org.uk)

**Sutton Humanists:** i Alan Grandy: 0208 337 9214. w [www.suttonhumanists.co.uk](http://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](mailto:john.dowdle@watford.humanist.org.uk) w [www.watford.humanists.org.uk](http://www.watford.humanists.org.uk)

**Welsh Marches Humanist Group:** i 01568 770282

w [www.wmhhumanists.co.uk](http://www.wmhhumanists.co.uk) e [rocheforts@tiscali.co.uk](mailto: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.