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# the freethinker

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## Richard Dawkins' attack on burqas generates outrage among Muslims

Outspoken atheist Professor Richard Dawkins last month found himself in the midst of a furious row after describing the burqa as a "full bin-liner thing". The 69-year-old author and scientist told of his "visceral revulsion" when he sees women enveloped in such repellent garb.

But he stopped short of calling for the UK to follow the French in banning them, insisting such legislation would not be in Britain's liberal tradition.

Predictably, his comments ignited fury among Muslim groups who accused him of being "ignorant" and "Islamophobic".

Professor Dawkins made the comments in an interview with the *Radio Times* while discussing his forthcoming documentary about the dangers of faith schools.

Dawkins stood by his remarks and told the *Daily Mail*: "I do feel visceral revulsion at the burqa because for me it is a symbol of the oppression of women." But he admitted he was reluctant to advocate banning any item of clothing.

He said: "As a liberal I would hesitate to propose a blanket ban on any style of dress because of the implications for individual liberty and freedom of choice."

In July the French government voted to ban the burqa and the face-covering niqab from public places. At the same time Belgium and Spain faced similar bids to limit the number of MBOs (moving black objects) in their midst.

But Immigration Minister Damian Green effectively ruled out the UK following suit, arguing a ban would be "rather un-British" and run contrary to the conventions of a "tolerant and mutually respectful society".

However, some 67 per cent of UK voters want full-face veils to be outlawed.

Seyyed Ferjani, of the Muslim Association of Britain, said of Professor Dawkins' comments: "I think it is ignorant and Islamophobic. This kind of thing has been on the rise for some time. Britain is a diverse and free society. It is a woman's choice if she wishes to wear a burqa, a niqab or not. Why does it matter to this man what a woman is wearing? We should be encouraging respect and understanding for each other."

In his More4 documentary last month – *Faith Schools Menace?* – the Oxford University evolutionary biologist says religious schools encourage social segregation and asked why public money should be spent labelling children on the basis of "something as arbitrary as religion".

His investigations for the documentary left him shocked. In one Muslim school in Leicester none of the pupils believed in evolution.

He said: "Their first recourse was not 'what's the evidence?' but 'what does the Koran say?'"

It is not the first time Professor Dawkins, who is the author of books including *The Selfish Gene* and *The God Delusion*, has attracted criticism for his views on Islam.

In 2008, he said: "It's almost impossible to say anything against Islam in this country, because you are accused of being racist or Islamophobic."

Earlier this year, atheist Ian McEwan, the Booker Prize winner, said those who claimed judging Muslims was *de facto* racism were presenting a "poisonous argument".

McEwan, 61, the best-selling author of novels including *Amsterdam*, *Atonement* and *Saturday*, thought many in the left wrongly took this position because they had an anti-Americanism shared with Islamists.



An exercise in absurdity: a woman in a burqa is photographed in a voter registration centre in Afghanistan

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# No deathbed conversion for Hitchens

**BARRY DUKE** IS APPALLED BY THE DISHONEST CLAIMS OF 'GOOD' CHRISTIANS

Saddened though I was to hear that Christopher Hitchens is likely to die within the next few years of cancer, I was heartened to learn that he has declared that – short of becoming utterly ga-ga – he has no intention of converting to Christianity (or to any other religion) on his deathbed.

In what appeared to be an effort to quash any conversion rumour before some deranged religious nutjob decided to start one, Hitch, stricken but still entertaining, still cutting and charismatic, last month said in a videoed interview with Jeffrey Goldberg of *The Atlantic*, "How am I? I'm dying. Everybody is, but ... the process has accelerated on me. So I'm looking for ways to try to die more like you."

The writer and commentator, who is undergoing treatment for oesophageal cancer, added: "There are bad days and then there are worse days, and I'm never quite sure whether the exhaustion comes from the treatment or from the tumour itself. I'm a realist, I'm objective. It's not a good cancer to get. The statistics are very depressing. Mine isn't just in my oesophagus, either. It's gone to my

lymph nodes. I would be a very lucky person to live another five years."

Hitchens added that he would never become religious despite his looming mortality. If any such conversion was ever attributed to him, he said, it would be either a lie propagated by religious zealots or an effect of the cancer and treatment that made him no longer himself.

"The entity making such a remark might be a raving, terrified person whose cancer has spread to the brain. I can't guarantee that such an entity wouldn't make such a ridiculous remark, but no one recognisable as myself would ever make such a remark."

Accounts of deathbed conversions span centuries, and the vast majority have, of course, been exposed as false. Perhaps the most famous example is that of Charles Darwin, who, according to a mendacious British evangelist called Elizabeth Reid, had recanted his theory of evolution with his last breath and accepted Jesus Christ as his saviour.

Together with her father, Reid, who went by the title Lady Hope, was part of the evangelist temperance movement, living in Beckenham, Kent, about six miles from Downe, where Charles Darwin died on April 19, 1882.

Reid travelled to the United States in 1913. It was there in 1915, 33 years after Darwin's death, that the Lady's account first appeared in an American Baptist newspaper, the *Watchman Examiner*, on August 15, 1915. She wrote that Darwin had told her: "How I wish I had not expressed my theory of evolution as I have done." He went on to say that he would like her to gather a congregation since he "would like to speak to them of Christ Jesus and His salvation, being in a state where he was eagerly savoring the heavenly anticipation of bliss".

The story spread, and the claims were republished as late as October 1955 in the *Reformation Review* and in the *Monthly Record* of the Free Church of Scotland in February 1957.

Darwin's son dismissed the account: "Lady Hope's account of my father's views on religion is quite untrue. I have publicly accused her of falsehood, but have not seen any reply." And his daughter said: "I was present at his deathbed. Lady Hope was not present during his last illness, or any illness. I believe he never even saw her, but in any case she had no influence over him in any department of thought or belief. He never recanted any of his scientific views, either then or earlier. We think the story of his conversion was

fabricated in the USA. The whole story has no foundation whatever."

That such lies are bound to be exposed sooner or later does not deter the Christian vultures from circling vulnerable, ailing people like Hitchens so they can seize on an opportunity to spread lies.

Just as detestable is the sort of rumour they start after someone comes to a sudden, sticky end, which is what happened in the case of Steve Irwin, 44, the quirky Australian television personality, wildlife expert, and conservationist known as "The Crocodile Hunter".

Within days of his death caused by a stingray barb entering his chest, the following email, written by "pastor RR" began circulating the Internet, claiming that Irwin had made a timely conversion to Christianity.

*Yes, we now have confirmation of Steve Irwin's decision for Christ. I want to inform Creation Ministries International that Steve Irwin became a born-again Christian two and a half weeks ago at King's Church AOG in Buderim, Queensland Australia, going forward publicly before the congregation to ask Christ to become his Lord and Saviour. Many of us will now spend eternity with him. I am sure Terri [his wife] is comforted as a Christian in the fact that she will be with Jesus and also Steve again for eternity. Steve declared the day before he died that he was the happiest he had ever been in his whole life.*

Writing on her B@d Language blog, Karen Stollznow pointed out that "Irwin never publicly claimed to be a Christian, an atheist, agnostic or evolutionist. However, as a conservationist with an applied approach to zoology, it is doubtful that he was religious."

The email was a complete fabrication – and a source of some embarrassment to the church referred to. In an official response, the pastor of King's Church, Steve Penny, posted the following message on his website:

*Steve Penny wishes to advise that the story of Steve Irwin's conversion to Christianity in Kings Christian Church is unfounded. Further investigation has failed to substantiate rumours of his conversion in any church on the Sunshine Coast, or through a zoo or school chaplain.*

While we all know that Christianity rests on a bedrock of lies, it still comes as a shock that, in this day and age, so many adherents believe they can use such crude tactics in an attempt to ensnare others in their delusional webs of deceit.



**BARRY DUKE**  
FREETHINKER  
EDITOR

## the freethinker

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# Complaint lodged over use of chaplains to treat soldiers' mental health problems

THE Military Religious Freedom Foundation has written a letter to the US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates about a troubling new fact of life in some parts of the military – the use of chaplains to treat mental health issues frequently encountered by soldiers during war, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The letter, sent last month, is co-signed by Paul Sullivan, the Executive Director of Veterans for Common Sense, whose organisation has received many complaints from veterans that when they sought treatment for PTSD and other mental health issues while in Iraq and Afghanistan, they were sent to chaplains who proselytised them, rather than to psychologists.

The letter said: "Perhaps the most alarmingly repugnant stories are those coming in from our recent war veterans regarding the widespread practice of 'battlefield Christian proselytising'.

"When, on active duty, our service members sought urgently needed mental health counseling while on the battlefield and with the gun smoke practically still in their faces, they were instead sent to evangelizing chaplains, who are apparently being used with increasing frequency to provide mental health care due to the acute shortage of mental health professionals. Chaplains are not certified, professional mental health experts.

"According to the reports of these veterans, the chaplains they were sent to for evaluation and treatment had the unmitigated temerity to urge, as a medicinal cure, a conversion to evangelical Christianity, and sometimes even went so far as disgustingly lacing their 'counseling' with the soldiers' need to stay on the battlefield to 'kill Muslims for Christ'. Even in the best cases, while the chaplains' words of proselytizing may have provided a temporary placebo, allowing these soldiers to return temporarily to combat for the remainder of their deployment, within months of returning home from war, their 'temporary religious faith' wore off as their profound mental health symptoms, quite predictably, returned in all their fury. And, again, the shortage of available mental healthcare professionals and lack of treatment exacerbated the service members' psychological trauma."

The letter also complained that among the many types of shocking incidents and illicit and dehumanising practices reported to MRFF have been the military's teaching of creationism as an actual *bona fide* means



Paul Sullivan

of suicide prevention.

The letter added: "For many of our veterans, the severe adverse consequences of being subjected to battlefield Christian proselytizing rather than receiving genuine mental health care have been, to just name a few, broken families, crime, drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness, and particularly, even suicide.

"While religious counseling may be helpful to some service members, and should certainly be available to those who specially seek religious counseling, the widespread use of evangelizing by Christian chaplains as a substitute for qualified mental health professionals is preventing many service members from getting the serious medical treatment that they desperately need and deserve, and is most likely exacerbating the unprecedented, unbridled suicide epidemic.

"It's just as specious and heinous as having these proselytizing military chaplains substitute for military combat trauma surgeons.

"Another alarming matter is that, due to the heavy promotion by the military of sectarian Christian religious 'solutions' to mental health problems, non-religious, even moderately religious, service members struggling with mental health issues or contemplating suicide may not seek the help they need because they think they will just get evangelical, fundamentalist Christianity rammed down their throats if they do."

## 'Living Buddha' enthroned in Tibet

AMID chanting of hymns and sutras, a five-year-old Tibetan boy chosen to head a Buddhist sect in Tibet was "enthroned" as the sixth "Living Buddha" last month with the approval of the Chinese government.

The boy was enthroned as sixth Living Buddha Dezhub according to Tibetan Buddhist rituals at Zagor Monastery in Tibet's Shannan Prefecture, about a month after he was selected, through a draw of lot, to be the reincarnation of the fifth Living Buddha Dezhub who died in March 2000.

At the inaugural ceremony, Losang Jigme, Tibet's top official in charge of religious affairs, read out the regional government's approval of the enthronement, official Xinhua news agency reported today.

As hundreds of monks chanted sutras to pray for peace and happiness, the crimson-robed Living Buddha paid his respects to statues of Lord Buddha at the monastery before he was seated on the throne.

The solemn-looking five-year-old sat straight when he was adorned with a yellow cassock and yellow hat, the symbols of the Gelugpa school, also known as the Yellow Sect, one of the four streams of Tibetan Buddhism.

The young Living Buddha, whose secular



name is Losang Doje, was born in Shannan in 2005. He was chosen as a candidate after years of searching by senior monks in tune with religious practice and traditions.

He was selected as the reincarnation and was tonsured by Bainqen Erdini Qoigyijabu, the Chinese government appointed 11th Panchen Lama, in Lhasa on July 4. The Panchen Lama also gave him the religious name Dezhub Jamyang Sherab Palde.

Tibetan Buddhism has three most important monks, the Dalai Lama (political and spiritual head), Panchen Lama (regarded as second in command) and Karmapa Lama (head of the largest Buddhist sub-sect Karma Kagyu).

Besides these three, the Himalayan region has hundreds of Living Buddhas regarded as eminent monks, some of whom are heads of various sects of the Tibetan Buddhist schools of thoughts.





# 'Criticism of Islam is not racist'

In an interview with the *Telegraph Magazine*, McEwan said: "Chunks of left-of-centre opinion have tried to close down the debate by saying that if you were to criticise Islam as a thought system you are a de facto racist. That is a poisonous argument.

"They do it on the basis that they see an ally in their particular forms of anti-Americanism," he said.

"So these radical Muslims are the shock-troops for the armchair Left who don't want to examine too closely the rest of the package – the homophobia, the misogyny and so on."

McEwan first entered the fray in 2007 to defend his friend Martin Amis against charges of racism.

Amis had been accused of Islamophobia after writing an essay criticising the "extreme incuriosity of Islamic culture"; arguing that Islam had "proved responsive" to the influence of Hitler and Stalin; and labelling Islamism a "cult of death".

The essay itself attracted little attention, but in a subsequent interview Amis made the incendiary comment: "The Muslim community will have to suffer until it gets its house in order." Muslims would have to

*Continued from page 1*

undergo "discriminatory stuff" like stopping them from travelling, he said.

Prof Terry Eagleton, the Marxist literary critic, subsequently compared him



*Burqas are a rich source of inspiration to cartoonists around the world*

to a British National Party "thug". Amis maintained throughout that he was not Islamophobic, but detested Islamism, the religion's fundamentalist branch.

He later said that he had only been "conversationally describing an urge" in his comments about discriminatory measures for Muslims, "an urge that soon wore off".

"I hereby declare that 'harassing the Muslim community in Britain' would be neither moral nor efficacious," he added.

However, Ronan Bennett, who wrote the screenplay to the film *The Hamburg Cell*, later deplored Amis for making "as odious an outburst of racist sentiment as any public figure has made in this country for a very long time".

At that point McEwan got involved, writing a letter in defence of Amis. He was himself then decried as a member of the "clash-of-civilisations literary brigade". McEwan said he consequently became the victim of hate messages on jihadist websites.

In his interview with the *Telegraph Magazine*, McEwan stressed that his political views were "incredibly unexciting", being "just left of centre".

## The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Pullman

A JESUIT priest and bible scholar has written a fierce response to Philip Pullman's retelling of the life of Jesus, claiming that the author distorted history to reinforce his own unfavourable views about institutional Christianity.

Father Gerald O'Collins, author of over 50 books and professor of theology at the Gregorian University in Rome for over 30 years, has published a book challenging Pullman's assertion, in his novel *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*, that "this is a story".

And he asked whether Pullman's bestselling book, published in March, should be renamed *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Pullman*.

O'Collins said Pullman's book gives Jesus a manipulative twin brother, Christ, who eventually betrays him. The miracles of the gospels are given plausible explanations, and Jesus eventually condemns the concept of a church, something he believes would make the devil "rub his hands with glee".

"Jesus is not in a position to correct misrepresentations, especially serious ones that the public, often pretty gullible in these matters,

is inclined to accept at face value," O'Collins told the *Guardian*. He believes that Pullman's aim in the novel was to cast doubt on "belief in the divine identity of Jesus" and suggested the author used "or rather misused the story of Jesus to wage war on Christianity".

"His distaste for institutional religion is well documented in *His Dark Materials*," O'Collins writes. "What better way to demolish Christianity than by suggesting that it was founded on deliberate fraud: not on a true resurrection of Jesus, but on the theft of his body, and encounters with his twin masquerading as Jesus risen from the dead?"

He takes issue with Pullman's claim to throw "fresh light on who Jesus was". "What I think he's doing is to distort the history of Jesus, in the interests of what he sees as higher truths."

In his book, O'Collins criticises Pullman for "picking, choosing and changing" what he wants from the gospels, altering the story "over and over again in the interests of his own 'truth' or ideology", making historical errors and conducting poor historical research.

He takes particular issue with Pullman's

retelling of the parable of the prodigal son. In Pullman's version, Joseph welcomes Jesus home to a feast after his 40 days in the wilderness, during which time Christ plays the role of the tempter. When Jesus tells the story himself, in terms similar to the version in Luke's gospel, Christ is listening and feels mortified by his brother.

O'Collins calls this one of "the most egregious examples of Pullman's tampering with the text" as it removes from the parable its central message: the unconditional mercy of God embodied in the person of Jesus. "It might prompt some readers into asking themselves: should this book be renamed *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Pullman*?" he writes.

Contrary to O'Collins's misgivings, Pullman's book was largely positively reviewed. In the *Observer*, Richard Holloway said "there is no doubt in my mind that Pullman has a complete grasp of the intricacies of the quest for the historical Jesus", while in the *Guardian*, Rowan Williams, although not uncritical, said it was "mostly Pullman at his very impressive best, limpid and economical".



# Humanists accused of 'bigotry' for slamming creationist zoo award

The British Humanist Association has strongly condemned the decision of the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom to award the creationist Noah's Ark Zoo in Wraxall, near Bristol, a "Quality Badge" in recognition of its educational programme.

The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom was established by the previous government to promote educational visits for schoolchildren. Its Quality Badge is intended to assist schools in identifying external organisations, such as museums, which are "committed to providing high quality teaching and learning experiences".

The Quality Badge was awarded to Noah's Ark Zoo following a visit by assessors in June.

The BHA has written to the Council urging them to retract the award.

BHA education campaigns officer James Gray said: "This is an appalling decision. It is entirely inappropriate that the Council should support an establishment that advances creationism and seeks to discredit a wide variety of established scientific facts that challenge their religious views, such as radio carbon dating, the fossil record and the speed of light."

He added: "Teachers and parents look to the Council for assurance that children will experience high quality educational visits that meet the relevant government guidelines. Awarding this particular zoo a Quality Badge risks exposing hundreds of children to anti-scientific dogma.

"This is not a freedom of speech or freedom of religion issue. The question is whether the information displayed by this zoo meets the tests of accuracy and truth that parents, teachers and other educational professionals expect."

The BHA action infuriated Anne Widdecombe, who accused the BHA of "bigotry".

In her *Daily Express* column (August 11) Widdecombe rushed to the defence of the zoo. "Those who run the zoo have established workshops which cover the national science curriculum but do not include discussion of religion and do not promote the extreme creationist view that the world was created 6,000 years ago. In other words it is a moderate, education-focused organisation that challenges children's minds and produces evidence from fossils.

"The British Humanist Association says the award is inappropriate merely because the zoo concentrates on creation. In short the British Humanist Association does not believe that children should be allowed even to discuss creation or to be exposed to any evidence that might support it."

She then hops onto the subject of faith-healing. "Also, academics carry out a study of the effects of prayer on the blind and deaf and finds evidence people's sight and hearing have improved as a result of faith healing. Immediately the National Secular Society



brands the findings 'religious propaganda'.

"Its president Terry Sanderson says faith healing groups 'exploit the desperation of people living in extreme poverty who are unable to access proper medical care'. Really, Mr Sanderson? My mother lived comfortably and had available to her all the medical care the NHS could provide and her private insurance could buy and she still experienced miraculous healing.

## Vampire novelist Anne Rice ditches Christianity

ANNE Rice, the author best known for her vampire novels, created a sensation last month when she declared on her Facebook page that she had "quit being a Christian".

Twelve years after her return to Catholicism, Rice said she still believed in God, but that: "In the name of Christ, I refuse to be anti-gay. I refuse to be anti-feminist. I refuse to be anti-artificial birth control. I refuse to be anti-Democrat. I refuse to be anti-secular humanism. I refuse to be anti-science. I refuse to be anti-life."

"Forbidding children to examine both sides of an argument is to substitute propaganda for education and dismissing as propaganda properly conducted surveys is a mark of intolerance. We can expect the British Humanists and the National Secular Association [*sic*] to be pretty vocal during the Papal visit. It is as well therefore to understand their bigoted approach from the outset."

Noah's Ark Zoo Farm then found itself mired in another controversy when leading animal charities condemned its plans to display elephants for the first time.

The Captive Animals' Protection Society (CAPS) submitted a detailed objection to a planning application by the zoo for an elephant enclosure but it was passed by North Somerset Council, even though part of it would use green belt land.

The RSPCA, Born Free Foundation and Animal Defenders International have all now joined with CAPS to urge the zoo not to have elephants because of the inherent welfare problems of keeping them confined in zoos.

A recent government-funded study found "there was a welfare concern for every elephant" in UK zoos. Amongst those problems, only 16 percent could walk normally, the remainder having various degrees of lameness. It also discovered that 54 percent of the animals showed stereotypies (behavioural problems) during the daytime.

Said CAPS: "Noah's Ark Zoo's plans goes in the opposite direction to many zoos in the UK and USA who have phased out their keeping of elephants because of insurmountable welfare problems caused by captivity."

A growing body of scientific evidence reveals the cruelty of confining elephants in zoos. The animals live up to three times longer in the wild than in zoos.

Zoo enclosures, 60 to 100 times smaller than the smallest home ranges in the wild, restrict movement, and hard flooring leads to foot problems. Limited exercise makes many captive elephants obese, itself a contributor to early deaths.

Last year, Noah's Ark Zoo was dismissed from the trade body BIAZA after an undercover CAPS investigation revealed its tigers and camels had come from the owner of Great British Circus, one of the few remaining animal circuses. The zoo has since returned a breeding female tiger to the circus owner.



# Plan unveiled for gay bar next to giant

**G**reg Gutfeld, 46, is said to be the funniest man on American TV, but the host of the Fox News late-night programme, *Red Eye*, insists he wasn't joking when he announced on his blog last month that he planned to open a gay bar adjacent to a giant mosque in New York.

Wrote Gutfeld: "So, the Muslim investors championing the construction of the new mosque near Ground Zero claim it's all about strengthening the relationship be-



Greg Gutfeld

tween the Muslim and non-Muslim world.

"As an American, I believe they have every right to build the mosque – after all, if they buy the land and they follow the law – who can stop them? Which is, why, in the spirit of outreach, I've decided to do the same thing.

"I'm announcing tonight, that I am planning to build and open the first gay bar that caters not only to the West, but also Islamic gay men. To best express my sincere desire for dialogue, the bar will be situated next to the mosque Park51, in an available commercial space.

"This is not a joke. I've already spoken to a number of investors, who have pledged their support in this bipartisan bid for understanding and tolerance.

"As you know, the Muslim faith doesn't look kindly upon homosexuality, which is why I'm building this bar. It is an effort to break down barriers and reduce deadly homophobia in the Islamic world. The goal, however, is not simply to open a typical gay bar, but one friendly to men of Islamic faith. An entire floor, for example, will feature non-alcoholic drinks, since booze is forbidden by the faith. The bar will be open all day and night, to accommodate men who would rather keep their sexuality under wraps – but still want to dance.

"Bottom line: I hope that the mosque owners will be as open to the bar, as I am to the new mosque. After all, the belief

driving them to open up their center near Ground Zero, is no different than mine.

"My place, however, will have better music."

A day later, Gutfeld revealed that his plan had annoyed Cordoba House, the organization behind the planned mosque-cum-cultural centre. He received a terse message saying "You're free to open whatever you like. If you won't consider the sensibilities of Muslims, you're not going to build dialog."

Wrote Gutfeld: "Right now the working name of the bar is Heaven and Halal. It will be two floors – one serving halal food, and the other serving cocktails. There will be 72 of them. And they will be virgin.

"By the way, I'm not building dialog, I'm building a bar. And as for the sensibilities of Muslims – which involves homophobia – that's not for me. And that's my point – it's weird being educated in tolerance by an incredibly intolerant ideology. As long as gays and women are treated so poorly, how can they teach us compassion and generosity?"

On a more serious note, the *Washington Post* last month carried an article written by a Muslim woman opposing the construction of the mosque.

Neda Bolourchi, who lives in Los Angeles, lost her mother who was on board one of the planes that slammed into the World Trade Center on 9/11. She wrote:

## Mecca's Islamic clock aims to trump Greenwich

FOR more than a century, a point on the top of a hill in south-east London has been recognised as the centre of world time and the official starting point of each new day.

But now the supremacy of Greenwich Mean Time is being challenged by a gargantuan new clock being built in Mecca, by which the world's 1.5 billion Muslims could soon be setting their watches.

The clock began ticking on Thursday, August 11, at the start of Ramadan. It is at the heart of a vast complex funded by the Saudi government that will also house hotels, shopping malls and conference halls.

Bearing a striking resemblance to both St Stephen's Tower, which houses the bell of Big Ben, and the Empire State Building, the Saudi upstart, according to the *Daily Telegraph*, "aims to outdo its revered British rival in every way".

The clock's four faces are 151ft in diameter and are illuminated by two million

LED lights along with huge Arabic script reading: "In the name of Allah". The clock will run on Arabia Standard Time which is three hours ahead of GMT.

When a glittering spire is added, topped with a crescent to symbolise Islam, the edifice will stand at nearly 2,000 ft, making it the world's second tallest building.

The clock of Big Ben, by comparison, is just 23ft in diameter, while its tower stands at a mere 316ft.

Residents of Mecca will also be reminded that it is time to pray when 21,000 green and white lights, visible at a distance of 18 miles, flash five times a day.

But Islamic scholars hope the clock's influence will stretch far further than the sands of Saudi Arabia, as part of a plan for Mecca to eclipse the Greenwich Observatory as the "true centre of the earth".

For the past 125 years, the international community has accepted that the start of

each day should be measured from the prime meridian, representing 0 degrees longitude, which passes through the Greenwich Observatory.

A standard time by which other clocks were set was needed to organise global travel and communications, but in the Islamic world the idea that it should be centred on a part of London is seen as a colonial anachronism.

As Mohammed al-Arkubi, manager of one of the hotels in the complex, put it: "Putting Mecca time in the face of Greenwich Mean Time. This is the goal."

According to Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an Egyptian cleric known around the Muslim world for his popular television show "Sharia and Life", Mecca has a greater claim to being the prime meridian because it is "in perfect alignment with the magnetic north." Al-Qaradawi has been barred from the UK for preaching hate,



# ant Ground Zero mosque in New York

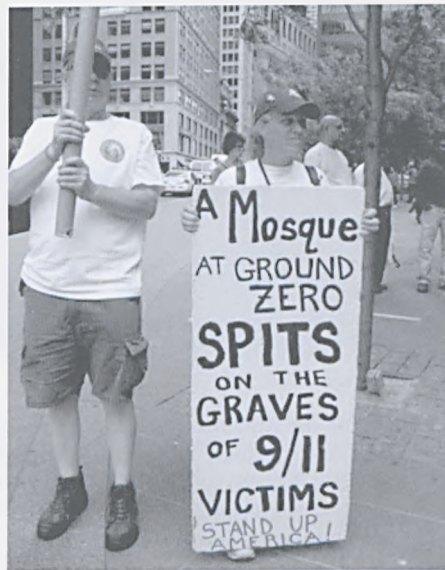
“Though I have nothing but contempt for the fanaticism that propelled the terrorists to carry out their murderous attacks on Sept. 11, I still have great respect for the faith. Yet, I worry that the construction of the Cordoba House Islamic cultural center near the World Trade Center site would not promote tolerance or understanding; I fear it would become a symbol of victory for militant Muslims around the world.

“I try to take solace in the notion that her death has forced a much-needed conversation and re-evaluation of the role of religion in the Muslim community, of the duties and obligations that the faith imposes and of its impact on the non-Muslim world.

“But a mosque near Ground Zero will not move this conversation forward. There were many mosques in the United States before Sept. 11; their mere existence did not bring cross-cultural understanding. The proposed center in New York may be heralded as a peace offering – may genuinely seek to focus on ‘promoting integration, tolerance of difference and community cohesion through arts and culture’, as its website declares – but I fear that over time, it will cultivate a fundamentalist version of the Muslim faith, embracing those who share such beliefs and hating those who do not.”

And she pointed out:

“The Iranian revolution compelled my



family to flee to America when I was 12 years old. Yet, just over two decades later, the militant version of our faith caught up with us on a September morning. I still identify as a Muslim. When you are born into a Muslim family, there is no way around it, no choices available: You are Muslim. I am not ashamed of my faith, but I am ashamed of what is done in its name.

“I do not like harboring resentment or anger, but I do not want the death of my mother – my best friend, my hero, my strength, my love – to become even more politicized than it already is. To the sup-

porters of this new Islamic cultural center, I must ask: Build your ideological monument somewhere else, far from my mother’s grave, and let her rest.”

Meanwhile, it was reported last month that Muslims trying to build a mosque in Murfreesboro, a suburb in Nashville, Tennessee, have run into strong opposition.

Opponents of a new Islamic centre say they believe the mosque will be more than a place of prayer. They are afraid the 15-acre site that was once farmland will be turned into a terrorist training ground for Muslim militants bent on overthrowing the US government.

“They are not a religion. They are a political, militaristic group,” said Bob Shelton, a 76-year-old retiree who lives in the area. Shelton was among several hundred demonstrators recently who wore “Vote for Jesus” T-shirts and carried signs that said: “No sharia law for USA”. Others took their opposition further, spray-painting the sign announcing the “Future site of the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro” and tearing it up.

In Temecula, California, opponents brought dogs to protest a proposed 25,000-square-foot mosque that would sit on four acres next to a Baptist church. Opponents worry it will turn the town into a haven for Islamic extremists, but mosque leaders say they are peaceful and just need more room to serve members.

## Shut German mosque was a magnet to radicals

A SMALL Hamburg mosque once frequented by the 9/11 attackers was shut down and searched last month because German authorities believed the prayer house was again being used as a meeting point for Islamic radicals.

The Taiba mosque was closed and the cultural association that runs it was banned, officials in the northern German city of Hamburg say.

“We have closed the mosque because it was a recruiting and meeting point for Islamic radicals who wanted to participate in so-called jihad or holy war,” said Frank Reschreiter, a spokesman for the Hamburg state interior ministry.

He said 20 police officers had searched the building and had confiscated material, including several computers. He said he had no information about any arrests.

The homes of leading members of the cultural association were also searched and the group’s assets were confiscated, Hamburg’s

state government said in a statement.

The prayer house, until two years ago known as the al-Quds mosque, was a meeting and recruiting point years ago for some of the September 11 attackers before they moved to the United States, authorities say. The attackers’ ringleader, Mohamed Atta, as well as Marwan al-Shehhi and Ziad Jarrah, had studied in Hamburg and frequented the al-Quds mosque.

Reschreiter said the mosque had been under observation by local intelligence officers for “quite a long time” and this was the first time it had been closed. The local interior ministry said about 45 supporters of jihad live in the Hamburg area and around 200 people regularly attend Friday prayers at the Taiba mosque.

The ministry also said that over the years the mosque also became a magnet for so-called jihad tourists — Muslims from out of town who bragged about having worshipped at the same mosque where once the

September 11 terrorists gathered for prayer.

A 2009 report by the Hamburg branch of Germany’s domestic intelligence agency said the mosque had again become the “centre of attraction for the jihad scene” in the northern port city.

The current imam is Mamoun Darkazanli, who was questioned following the 2001 attacks after it emerged that he moved in some of the same circles as the hijackers. Darkazanli, a dual citizen of Germany and Syria, denied any links to Osama bin Laden or the attacks.

In October 2004, he was arrested in Hamburg on a Spanish warrant accusing him of involvement with al-Qaida and alleging that he was a bin Laden financier.

His extradition was blocked by Germany’s high court and he was eventually released. In 2006, German prosecutors closed their own investigation of him, saying there was insufficient evidence to show that Darkazanli supported al-Qaida.



# Even the Pope can't prove he is in contact with God

Pope Ratzinger is in Britain this month, and **GEOFFREY H L BERG** would like some answers from His Holiness

**T**he Pope is visiting Britain this month. There has been a lot of controversy about the cost, the propriety of making it a state visit, and about his handling of child abuse among the clergy. However, what seems to have escaped notice are the extraordinary claims made by and about the Pope.

I have written a book, *The Six Ways Of Atheism*, setting out logical arguments why God cannot exist. Yet the Roman Catholic Church does not merely claim that God exists but that its leader, the Pope, is the present incarnation of God's word on Earth and is a mini version of Jesus Christ living in our time!

He alone, supposedly guided by God's Holy Spirit, can amend ancient Church doctrines – and over a billion Catholics worldwide are expected to follow his dictats. Indeed, since the 19th century, he can even ordain his pronouncements as infallible!

This is a cult and religious authority of a size beyond the wildest dreams of any Indian God-Man, any fanatic Ayatollah or even the Dalai Lama. Even other smaller Christian denominations do not accord any leader that sort of authority.

The Eastern Orthodox Christians don't believe any person can unilaterally amend the traditions and scriptures of their Church, which they take to be sources of authority far greater than that ever accorded to any human being, however mighty a priest he may be.

Protestants don't believe in an intermediary like the Pope between God and Man but leave it to their individual adherents to communicate with God through their own individual and less authoritative minds.

I expect the Pope will not deign to explain to other mortals how he gets to gain special access to God beginning somehow with his election to the Papacy and has

become the supreme living articulation of God's will on Earth. So, as I don't expect him to be very helpful in this respect during his visit to Britain, nor indeed at any time, let me show – as a commemoration of his visit to Britain, my country – how logically fallacious his doctrine and indeed those of lesser religious gurus, and actually all religions, are.

In *The Six Ways Of Atheism* one of the arguments I use why people should not believe in God is my "Man And God Comprehension Gulf Argument" describing the unbridgeable gulf in comprehension (and identification) for a mortal with any supposedly immortal entity. Yet religions add an extra unbridgeable comprehension gulf to that argument because of the necessity for religions (in contrast to mere deists) to have some point of contact between their God and people so that people can discover that their particular religion is indeed correct.

In the case of Roman Catholics, the main point of contact is apparently the divinely inspired Pope who leads their Church. It is a strange doctrine. Unlike the generality of prophets, the Pope becomes the ultimate divinely inspired prophet, not at his birth nor upon some particular revelation but upon the death of the previous Pope and his election by other people to the papacy.

Until then he, like every other faithful Catholic, just follows a previous Pope's policies. The doctrine is strange but it is, in accordance with Catholic tradition, intended to magnify the Church as an institution. For many centuries the Catholic Church presented itself not merely as a necessary intermediary between Man and God but even as an intermediary between ordinary people and the supposedly holy scriptures of their religion. These scriptures were kept exclusively in a foreign language (Latin) which very few people outside the Church understood, so

that Catholic priests were necessary even to explain the scriptures, let alone God's current will to Roman Catholics.

However, the insuperable problem with the Pope (or indeed anything else) as a point of contact between God and people is that nobody, no mortal human, can be sure that the contact with a supposedly unique and certainly supposedly immortal God is genuine.

No human, be it Moses, Mohammed, Guru Nanak, Christ or the current Pope, can properly as a mortal person of limited intellect be sure his supposed communication is with an immortal, unlimited entity that is genuinely the God of the whole Universe. Nobody can rationally be sure that his supposed messages from God are not coming from aberrations within his own mind, or mental delusions. This is even before one considers whether the supernatural entity he is supposedly in communication with is genuinely immortal and genuinely God rather than some demonic pretender to be God. This is an identification which would necessarily be far beyond the scope and abilities of any mortal human to make.

So I think we should be closely questioning the Pope (or Mr Joseph Alois Ratzinger to be more precise) as to how he copes with the problems of identifying and verifying the supposed God whose will he and his followers claim he expresses.

The fact is that there is no rational method by which any point of divine contact, the Pope's included, can rationally or logically be confirmed. In essence it is all irrational and therefore a confidence trick or delusion, maybe usually a self-delusion.

Let me, for the benefit of the Pope and others, translate what I have written above into logical terms and a logical argument. I set it out in a similar manner to my arguments against the existence of God



(or sometimes just belief in God) that I have set out logically in *The Six Ways Of Atheism*.

So expressed it is:

#### Proof Of The Fallacy Of Human Belief In Theistic Religions

1. All theistic religions (and there are many differing theistic religions) necessarily depend upon God making itself known to mankind and humans being able to identify God.

2. God making itself known to humans must necessarily be done through points of contact between any supposed God and humanity at large, or at least the religion's adherents (this may be via scriptures, prophets, individual revelation etc).

3. However, it is impossible for any mortal and limited person to be sure of identifying any immortal or unlimited entity (people do not live long enough to have any means of being justifiably sure of any other entity's future immortality).

4. Therefore no person can be justifiably sure that any alleged point of contact between God and humanity is actually from God rather than produced subconsciously by his own mind or by an impostor (such as the kind of powerful daemon Rene Descartes envisaged in his *Meditations*) who just happens to be more powerful than humans.



A wave of demonstrations is planned against Ratzinger's UK visit

5. Therefore no mortal human has any reliable means of identifying God (even if God were to exist). So nobody can be sure that any alleged point of contact between any hypothesised God and humans is actually with a genuine, immortal God.

6. Therefore humans cannot rationally believe in any particular God or in any religion.

So how has this fallacy of the Pope entering into a unique relationship with an identifiable God upon becoming Pope gained credibility and widespread respect?

Well, religions seem to operate like debt. There is a similar quirky effect about them both. There is an old and true saying that if you owe a bank a thousand pounds

you have a problem (as the debt threatens your financial viability). But if you owe a bank a million pounds the bank has a problem (as the debt threatens the bank's financial viability). Likewise with religions – if a religion only has relatively few believers, its believers have a problem (and it is nowadays pejoratively called “a cult”). However, if a religion has many millions of believers (such as Islam or Christianity) it is somehow considered very respectable, and its non-believers, the rest of the world, have a problem. Yet the intrinsic merits, or rather demerits, with both debt and religion, whether it be a relatively small amount or a very substantial amount, are just the same!

## ‘Don’t embarrass the Pope’, warns Lord Patten

GROUPS threatening to protest during the Pope's official visit to Scotland and England have been warned they risk sparking outrage among the wider public.

Lord Patten, the Conservative peer helping to organise the four-day state visit, said protesters would be condemned if they sought to embarrass the pontiff or prevent worshippers attending events planned for the historic visit.

Lord Patten told the Scottish *Herald* that he was confident protests against the Pope's visit would not overshadow the event.

He also defended the non-policing costs of the visit, previously estimated at £8 million but now put at between £10-m and £12-m.

The National Secular Society, which plans to demonstrate against the visit, denounced the increase as disgraceful, while the Taxpayers' Alliance said: “No visitor should cost UK taxpayers such a huge sum of money.”

The 66-year-old Patten said he agreed to take on his new role because it was important for Britain that the visit went well and “because all the faith communities have



Ian Paisley, left, is against the Pope's visit, but Lord Patten has the job of defending it

to assert with confidence they deserve to be listened to in a world that is sometimes intolerantly secular.” He added: “The reputation issue for the UK is considerable. This will be watched by the 30 percent of Americans who are Catholic, the 40 percent in Canada who are Catholic, the 25 percent in Australia who are Catholic, as well as every European country.”

Patten added: “This a free society. If people want to protest they will, but there will be many more who will want to welcome the Pope. The overwhelming majority of the population, while it would support

people's right to protest, would be outraged if anything was done specifically aimed at embarrassment or preventing those people who belong to faith groups from attending and taking part in the sort of things which the Pope will be doing.”

Some groups want to arrest the Pope because of the sex abuse scandal involving the Catholic Church.

But Patten said: “That is absurd and could only be argued by people who suffered from the most profound ignorance about the position of someone who has sovereign immunity as head of state.”

He insisted that the climate of economic restraint does not mean “we throw out of the window all the normal courtesies of a nation state ... our pride or aspirations”.

Earlier, Protestant preacher Ian Paisley said it was a mistake to have invited Pope Benedict to Britain and criticised the Catholic Church's response to the child sex abuse scandal, accusing it of having failed to “take a strong stand.”

“I think it is a mistake,” Paisley said, when asked what he thought of the visit. “I think he should not be invited to the country.”



# Will 'genuine' Christians please stand up

Prior to his death last year, **NEIL BLEWITT** had been trying – with scant success – to distinguish 'pukka' Christianity from counterfeit or aberrant brands

**A**long with many freethinkers, I am quite unable to distinguish genuine Christianity from extremes, superstitions and cults. But my failure in this respect is not for want of application to the problem, however unavailing ultimately.

I have listened to people seemingly well-qualified to speak on the subject at Roman Catholic and Evangelical churches, Nonconformist chapels, Quaker meeting-houses, Kingdom Halls, Salvation Army citadels, spiritualist demonstrations, revivalist rallies and many other religious assemblies. My difficulty has been that I couldn't find a common, definitive view of what is genuine Christianity. Not all of the groups were prepared to swear that their variety was more genuine than everybody else's, although many did, but none admitted that theirs was less so.

Now, if Christians themselves can't decide which of their denominations may be re-

garded as representing genuine Christianity and which are extremes, superstitions and cults, what chance does an atheist have? But the dilemma gave me an idea on how the matter may be resolved once and for all.

I have heard Christians ask what secular humanists would do if they were to "gain power". Well, I can't speak for all of them, but there are certain things I would do and certain things I would not do in such a situation. First, I don't think I would torture, burn at the stake, garrotte, behead, drown, crush to death or exile those who disagreed with me; nor would I have the desire to enact laws which prescribed that those Christians who denied the existence of certain ancient humanists, or who simply wanted to ridicule them, should be incarcerated or worse.

I wouldn't even stop local papers from publishing little Scriptural texts each day although, personally, I have no taste for the Bible's brutalities, crudities and obscurantism, nor do I care to see the attention of unsuspecting people – particularly children – directed to it; but, to be fair, the texts are usually so brief, bland, and vague as to have

all the significance and intellectual stimulus of the horoscopes published in many organs of the press.

What I would do, first of all, would be to encourage church newspapers to give the occasional column to an atheist in the interests of fair play ("A Freethinker Takes A Squint at The Church", perhaps). Second, I would gather together representatives of varying shades of Christian opinion in an attempt to discover what was genuine Christianity and what could be dismissed as mere extremes, superstitions and cults; and I would suggest, if power were obtained tomorrow, a panel comprising Ian Paisley, John Selwyn Gummer, Vincent Nichols (Archbishop of Westminster), John Sentamu (Archbishop of York), a senior Baptist, the Chaplain-General to the Armed Forces, Pat Robertson, an anchorite, a Salvationist, a Unitarian, a Swedenborgian – and, to make up a round dozen, one of the army of old ladies who are always knocking at my door to dispense copies of *Awake!*

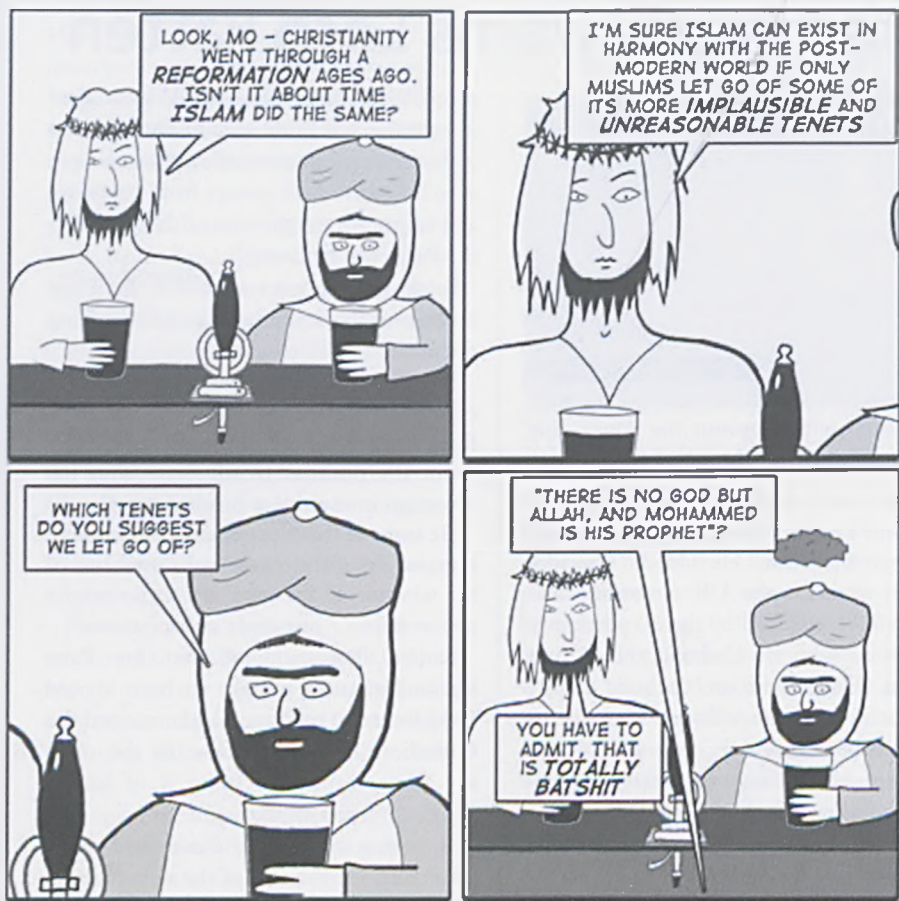
(I would have included the clergyman who told me when I was in hospital with tuberculosis that my suffering had been sent to refine my personality and thus fit me for heaven, but he died suddenly, leaving, alas, his own personality in its raw state).

The members of the panel would be seated in a redundant church, but not within throttling distance of each other, and their remit would be quite simply that they, or their descendants or nominees, depending on the time taken, decide what is genuine Christianity and what are extremes, superstitions and cults.

I would install a top-class spiritualist as chairman so that a good line of communication could be maintained throughout the discussion. Once a conclusion had been reached, I would require it to be published, using intelligible language and concepts, in not more than one issue of the *Freethinker*. Then I and other readers who, at present, lack the power to discriminate would, in future, recognise genuine Christianity when we came across it without any difficulty and we could refer to it, confident that we would not excite any comment from any quarter.

But I should have to stipulate that the panel reach a conclusion before the Last Trump, although – reasonable man that I am – I could make no concession to any member of the panel who refused to believe such a thing would ever be sounded.

## Jesus & Mo





# Why multiculturalism is bad for Britain and its ethnic communities

Ex-Muslim Dr Romy Hasan passionately believes that ethnic ghettos lead to a 'psychic detachment' from British society among large numbers in ethnic and religious communities. He explains his thinking to **PETER BRIETBART**.

**R**omy Hasan was born into an Islamic family, and grew up in Scotland and the north of England. Exposed to British cultural influences from an early age, Hasan quickly renounced Islam and realised his atheism. Now a senior lecturer at Sussex University, Hasan has recently published *Multiculturalism: Some Inconvenient Truths*, a devastating leftist critique of multiculturalism. (A report of his book launch in Brighton appeared in the August issue of the *Freethinker*.)

Hasan argues that multicultural policies unintentionally promote cultural segregation, resulting in mono-faith, mono-cultural ghettos that leaves little chance for escape.

Peter Brietbart caught up with Hasan to ask about the problems multicultural thinking produces, and how we might resolve them.

**PB:** What sorts of problems arise in the so-called "ghettoised" areas of the UK?

**RH:** First, it's not good that we have people from ethnic minorities completely detached from wider society. It starts in schooling with people of their own type, often speaking a different language. History shows that these ghettos are never a good idea. We can understand how they form, but they tend to be problematic.

What I argue is that progressive ideas are completely shut out. Any ideas that challenge the thinking of a religious minority or faith community are shot down. They're self-proclaimed Sikhs or Muslims, and that's the end of it, and critical thinking is invariably stifled. The power of the elders in these communities, usually men, is intensified through religious authority. So they have the power to shut down dissent and debate, and a sort of tribalism arises.

The people who suffer the most are the women and children. Women become *de facto* second-class citizens, and they tend to



internalise their oppression, which I discuss in the book, especially in regard to the veil.

In sum, they become proud of an oppressive practice. This has been the reality, and it has affected the political terrain. When an MP or city or town council member needs to relate to these groups, they have to do so via male elders, often very powerful religious figures. From my perspective, modern, secular ideas are squeezed out, resulting in what I call a mono-faith, mono-cultural ghetto. Children grow up in these, with very closed mindsets, and high levels of what I call 'psychic detachment'. By this I mean the segregation of the mind, cut off from the outside world. It's as if they are growing up in a little patch of Pakistan, say, on English soil. It's a disservice to the people growing up in these segregated neighborhoods. We're doing them harm, and in this way so many oppressive practices are hidden.

There's a wall of silence, and the police don't like going into these areas. That's why, with, for example, honour killings, police don't like to poke their noses in too much. There's a very high incidence of suicides amongst teenage Asian girls, as well as self harm – almost three times the average. This, too, is kept quiet. All kinds of problems are

kept hidden, and more power is given to reactionaries.

**PB:** It seems to be increasingly common that the left will oppose criticism of Islam even against other liberals. Where do you think this defensiveness comes from?

**RH:** This is one of the obstacles in the path of desegregation and social cohesion. I refer to it as the phenomenon of white, liberal, post-colonial guilt. I've had to try to work out why it is that people who ordinarily would campaign for equality, who are against racism, who are against oppression, and who have proud records, keep quiet when it comes to oppressive practices within ethnic minority communities, or resort to apologetics.

I try to go through the history, and discover its roots in what could be called "post-colonial thinking". Empire building and colonisation were wrong, often rooted in racism and deep hostility to the people who were colonised. Those who were or are opposed to empire building feel they have to be very, very careful when discussing peoples from the former colonies, who happened to be, in the main, non-white. In essence, they are saying "We feel guilty about the crimes of our ancestors."

I think that's where the impulse comes from. So when people come to settle in this country and experience racism or discrimination, there's a strong urge to fight on their behalf, against the racist oppression that they're suffering. In the early days, this was to be expected, but there was never much discussion over immigrants' cultural practices because they were already suffering so badly.

There's evidence to suggest that racism and discrimination have declined in Britain and Europe to an enormous degree. That's a good achievement. We've just seen the World Cup go by, and we see how many ethnic minorities there are in the national teams. A lot of the England players are black,

(Continued on p12)



# Multiculturalism: bad for Britain

and it's a visible advance.

Ethnic minorities are now in all sections of society. The chairperson of the Conservatives is an Asian woman from an Islamic background, Baroness Warsi. These sorts of things were unthinkable 40 years ago.

Although a lot of people on the left won't like it, I mention that in the post-9/11 era there's been an alliance of sorts amongst leftists and Muslims against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. So we have the phenomena of "my enemy's enemy is my friend". The leftists and liberals thought that, since Muslims opposed the wars just as they did, they must be viewed as friends. But I would say "Hold on now, what about seeing what they get up to, and casting a critical eye over all their oppressive practices?" But no, they keep silent about that.

**PB:** "Islamophobia" has become a very powerful term, capable of shutting down all rational debate. What is it, and why do you reject it?

**RH:** This has been troubling me for a long time, in fact even before 9/11. This is the idea that criticism of Islam, and by extension, Muslims, is a kind of phobia. That means an "irrational fear of Islam". In the book I write that its origins are found in the Rushdie affair, because this was the first time Muslims became politically assertive during 1989/90, after the fatwa against Rushdie was issued. The argument went that the refusal to ban Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* was because of Islamophobia in society. That's where I found, at least in this country, the origins of the term.

Then ten years later there was the Runymede Report on "Islamophobia", which gave the term a semi-official stamp. It became a conflation between an attack on a belief, and an attack on an ethnic minority. What liberal-minded people and feminists used to think was that this minority was also one of the most oppressed in society because their socio-economic indicators were on the whole below average, and so we have to be very careful with them.

The idea was that we mustn't criticise them, and to do so is to generate unwarranted hostility to a people who were already suffering.

I argue that Islamists find this very useful. If you criticise their religion, there are two responses. First they say: "You don't know. You're not from the religion. You haven't been brought up in it. You don't understand it." It's a guilt-tripping tactic. Second they say that you're an Islamophobe, that you

have a phobia, and that it's irrational because you don't understand it.

When this is added to white, liberal, post-colonial guilt, the impulse is to just keep quiet.

Sikhs used this tactic in December 2004, when there was a play called *Behzti* being staged in Birmingham that had been written by a Sikh woman about the shenanigans in a gurudwara. The theatre had actually discussed the play previously with the local Sikh community and had even sought the green light from them. What happened was that hundreds of Sikh men smashed the theatre, and shut down the play. They said that their faith was being misunderstood, that the play was deeply insulting, that it was abusive.

‘In the book I argue that we don't end up ossifying cultures when we mix them. On the contrary, they're constantly evolving. I discuss the idea of creolisation, the mixing of cultures, and show that this is going on right now, particularly in London’

They might as well have said that the play was an expression of Sikhophobia.

Guilt coupled with the threat of violence shuts down debate. People then self-censor. I've sought out the different strands of what I call an "unholy alliance" between leftists, liberals, feminists and Islamists. There's a sort of truce between them. The leftists, liberals and feminists say, "Don't you worry, we won't question your belief system. You're on our side." The funny thing is that in mainstream society it just becomes a norm.

Six years ago the French were debating outlawing religious symbols in schools including the hijab. I was outraged when on *Newsnight* they wouldn't have an honest debate about what was going on, they simply accused the French of Islamophobia.

**PB:** What is your take on the burqa? Is France right to ban it from public spaces?

**RH:** France is absolutely justified in banning it from public spaces. I have an entire chapter on the veil, and I take a very strong stance in defence of women's rights and equality. I make it very clear that the Islamic veil is oppressive. I go through the key Islamic texts which suggest why women should veil, although how they should is not made clear. I'm not getting into religious

interpretation – that's pointless. But there does seem to be a requirement for women to veil, and not for men. The reason given is that women are sexual temptresses. I find this idea extremely troubling, even oppressive. If you're interested in tackling women's oppression, you have to take that stance.

Only recently are other European countries realising this, and then only in regard to the burqa. This is ridiculous, really. If we look at Turkey, which is overwhelmingly Muslim, all forms of veiling in public institutions have been outlawed since about 1925. The first President, Mustafa Kamal Atatürk, had a very principled stance against the veil. As the founding father of Turkey, he wanted to modernise the country. He was clear that the veil was oppressing women. In western Europe we talk about women's liberation, and about fighting oppression, but there's a wall of silence around these oppressed women, one that makes me angry. I know I'll be attacked for it, but I'm trying to make an important contribution here.

The burqa shuts out the woman altogether, and that is intolerable, so it should be banned. People often reply that it is the woman's choice to dress in that fashion.

I would ask, "What is your view on clitorodectomy? or 'female circumcision', as it's politely called?" What it should be called is female genital mutilation. I know of Sudanese women here in Brighton who travel to Sudan to have a clitorodectomy, because it has been outlawed in this country. Why? Because it is harmful and oppressive to woman. But a woman can reply, "Hold on, this is my body, it is my choice, my faith. I'm not harming anybody else. I can't flower as a woman unless I have my clitoris circumcised." So what is the difference between that and the veiling?

Sometimes society has to say no. We say that we will protect you, even from yourself. There are no arguments as to why someone who would oppose a clitorodectomy, would not equally oppose the veil. Both are oppressive, and harmful, socially and medically. But nobody wants to talk about it. Slowly, however, people are beginning to get it. In Belgium they passed the anti-burqa bill unopposed; and in France there was only one vote against. They discussed how the burqa is an absolutely oppressive garment. Now in other western European countries they're beginning to think of the full veil as being oppressive. There has to be a campaign to show that it is oppressive, we have to open up the debate.



# tain and its ethnic communities

But it's the sort of thing that no-one wants to talk about in this country, because they want to be seen as good, liberal multiculturalists, who are all about *laissez faire* living, freedom of choice and so on, but they switch their brains off.

**PB:** Your suggested replacement for multiculturalism is "egalitarian universalism". What is it, and how does it work?

**RH:** It means that we have equality for all, without viewing people through the prism of a religious, cultural, or even an ethnic identity. We know that we have natural divisions, such as race and ethnicity, but cultural and religious divisions are artificial. Egalitarian universalism does not allow for these artificial distinctions. It says we must treat people equally. So when a child goes into a school, it leaves behind it any religious identity. So he or she won't say, "I'm a Sikh", or "I'm a Muslim". They are simply individuals.

And cultural homogenisation isn't an inevitability. In the book I argue that we don't end up ossifying cultures when we mix them. On the contrary, they're constantly evolving. I discuss the idea of creolisation, the mixing of cultures, and show that this is going on right now, particularly in London.

London is one of the most globalised, creolised cities in the world, with people from all kinds of backgrounds. The people there often do mix in reasonable harmony, if they're not in these segregated communities. It's multiculturalism that ossifies these cultures and faiths. People within these mono-faith, mono-culture societies have no choice. They're trapped within them. It would be fine if a Muslim girl could go out with a non-Muslim boy, but that's unacceptable, it's against their culture.

But again, it's never talked about. If she had a choice, she'd be able to have relationships and friendships with whomsoever she wanted, and in that sense she'd be influenced by ideas from outside her mono-culture. Her ideas could then evolve, she could influence others, and we'd have the flowering of new cultural norms and forms. This happens anyway, usually. Just exposure to TV or music influences one's ideas.

I don't take a cultural relativist stance, because I'm critical of any culture or any religion which is oppressive. We can define what that means: unduly restrictive of people's freedoms, and often on the grounds of faith and religion. They say, "This is what our holy book tells us", and we're supposed



Professor Hasan regards London as 'one of the most globalised, creolised cities in the world'.

to be content with that. If we think that the preservation of a religion or culture is more important than individual autonomy, or freedom to break free of these, then that's when faith and culture trump liberty. But the individual must have the right to break free.

Brian Barry, in his book *Culture and Equality*, talks about "exit costs". These are costs attached when a person wishes to break free from their community.

They tend to be very high. When a Muslim girl takes off with a boy from a different background, the "exit cost" could be an honour killing. She might be murdered.

Usually in these strict communities, the "exist cost" is being shunned or abandoned by the family and wider community. One

has to be extremely strong to leave, and yet people manage it, but the pressures are enormous. By and large, though, people just stick to it, even if they don't want to. On top of these pressures, they're often policed. It's like being in a goldfish bowl, where every movement, from school upwards, is known to your family members or community leaders. It's as if there are spies all over the place.

If you do something your family doesn't want you to do, you'll be caught out and probably punished.

This is the reality here and now. This *laissez faire* culturalism means that these people are abandoned. They're prisoners in their own communities, particularly the women and children.

We should be doing better than that.

## Young Germans shun Catholic priesthood

A STRING of sex abuse scandals in the German Catholic church has led to a dramatic fall in the number of young men wanting to become priests, Germany's top Catholic bishop said last month.

Speaking to the German Press Agency dpa, Archbishop of Freiburg Robert Zollitsch, who is the Chairman of the German Episcopal Conference and thus spokesman for the church, said that the church was now suffering from a serious lack of manpower.

"We are living through a great trauma, indeed the deepest crisis of the Catholic church in Germany since 1945," Zollitsch said.

Sexual abuse scandals have rocked the church in Germany since January, when dozens of cases emerged involving sexual molestation of minors by priests and other clergy over a period of 50 years at church-run schools.

Zollitsch said that new applications to join the priesthood across Germany had fallen to 150 this year, a record low.

The archbishop himself had been under investigation earlier this year over claims that he had failed to sack a priest in his diocese accused of abuse.

"The whole profession has been damaged by these scandals," he said. "The sinful and abhorrent behaviour of a few priests has come to represent the whole profession in the eyes of the public." Zollitsch said that the rate of intake of applying priests had also fallen because the church was now selecting candidates more carefully than ever before.



# points of view...

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## MORE ON GRAYLING AND FREEWILL

SURELY one reason AC Grayling finds the free-will question so “hard” (*FT* June) is that it has two distinct meanings – (1) the primary, libertarian and (2) the secondary but more common meaning, which are not clearly demarcated. Meaning (1) is the claim that we all have a special faculty, the will, which can always initiate any course of action independently of our current brain state – we could always have *done otherwise* (given the identical brain state). Both the law and religion champion this meaning of freewill.

If such a supernatural will is posited, we must ask how its decisions are arrived at – are they the necessary product of the mind at that time, the inevitable result of its particular history (determinism) or are they merely arbitrary? No third alternative exists even for a faculty having supernatural power. Meaning (1) then, which denies both determinism and indeterminism, is just not logically possible.

However, I suspect it is meaning (2) that Grayling values, the familiar experience of choosing, voluntarily (ie without external compulsion), from the options before one. This is consistent with determinism, properly understood. Although chains of causes start in the distant past, throughout our lives their effects funnel together in our heads to form our unique decision-making identity. Determinism does not mean we are impervious to influences from our immediate past – there are no pre-determined actions we are fated to perform. We *can* “change ourselves through reflection”.

Grayling therefore has no need to say “all our thinking about human nature... and human life... is wrong.” He bemoans the idea that we might be automata. Yes, we are conscious automata (TH Huxley, 1874), which simply means *we are self-acting agents in the world*. But we do indeed need “to think again about ... punishment”: here

is a great opportunity for freethinkers to seize the moral high ground from legal and religious obscurantism.

Responding to the objection raised by John Gibson last month public outrage at paedophile priests can at least affect the way they are dealt with in future.

**Norman Bacrac**  
London

I WISH people who claim to exercise free-will would disclose how they do it, because it's a mystery to me.

“Left or right?” “Tea or coffee?” “South-end or Blackpool?” Being faced with a choice causes me to become aware of related thoughts. Then a decision thought may appear but not by some choosing process exercised by me (“me” being just another thought that crops up sometimes). “I” am just a spectator of this process. Introspection reveals only an uncontrollable succession of awareness episodes. So where lurks the free will?

David James and John Gibson (*Freethinker*, August) give examples of people supposedly acting by freewill in response to experiences. But mechanical robots can do that. James and Gibson provide no reason to suppose that the cited reactions are not deterministic.

Gibson also believes that determinism is incompatible with morality. Not so. There is no reason why moralistic memes should not flourish whether they influence action deterministically or by freewill.

This is a problem that matters only in the context of *Freethinker* or similar discussion. An idea that presents itself at other times is that one can act as though one has free will, as when I “decided” whether or not to write this letter.

It's a shame it is all an illusion.

**Peter Gatenby**  
Warwick

## HISTORICITY OF JESUS

STEUART Campbell (*Freethinker*, August) refers to me as appearing to be confused when stating I had found no reference to the crucifixion of Jesus in any Roman or Jewish records, yet then goes on to refer to references mentioned in his *The Rise and Fall of Jesus* to works by Tacitus and Josephus. A fair enough comment: I should have clarified my statement by prefacing it with the word “contemporary”.

He rejects my contention that Tacitus's knowledge of Christian beliefs was based on hearsay, writing that this has been “overruled by many learned authorities”. Well, unnamed “learned authorities” do not impress me, and even if they were identified they would not. Tacitus, as well as being a politician and historian, was also a lawyer, and in the course of his duties as governor of the province of Asia from 112-13 (he had jointly with Pliny the Younger prosecuted a previous governor of that province), he is likely, as the senior magistrate, to have presided over trials of Christians there depending on the individuals' social status, or if not, to have read as part of his duties transcripts of their trials, for Christian beliefs were considered to have a detrimental impact on the political and social stability of the empire.

The information that emerged during these trials will have given Tacitus all the information he required about the cult. In addition, his friend Pliny was for part of the time serving as legatus Augusti (he died on the job, so to speak) in the neighbouring senatorial province of Bithynia/Pontus, where he had been sent specifically to look into charges that Christian activities were undermining the province's economy, so it would not be unreasonable to assume that the two friends would have exchanged





information on the cult. Hearsay, I submit, is the more probable source of Tacitus's knowledge of Christianity.

Mr Campbell also states that "messianic fervour in the names (*sic*) of Christ had reached Rome about 49 CE", citing as evidence a somewhat ambiguous passage in Suetonius's *Life of Claudius* which refers to disturbances amongst the Jews in the city, occasioned by the activities of an individual named Chrestus, but he has nothing to say regarding the reasons for the disturbances. Mr Campbell, though, is better informed and asserts that they were caused by Christian activities, basing this, it seems, on the arbitrary assumption that the name Chrestus equates with that of Christus, a title, incidentally, not a proper name, but Chrestus was a common name amongst slaves and Greek tradesmen of the period. I would have assumed that Mr. Campbell would have known this, but apparently not.

I am then told by him that I should have explained how the real story of Jesus came to be replaced by the one we now have. I had sought to do this, albeit all too briefly, in an article published in the *Freethinker* in February 2008, so I see no point in repeating what was said there or to expand on it. Instead I refer him, and anyone else interested, to the hypothesis advanced by Dr Neil Faulkner, with which I fully concur, that the Nazarene faction led by Jesus before his demise and then by James, whom Saul, as he then was, had tried without success to murder (*The Writings of Tatian and Theophilus and the Clementine Recognitions*. Trans By B P Pratten, Marcus Dodds & T Smith. Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1875. pp188-189), was destroyed in the fighting during the widespread popular revolt against Roman rule that broke out in 66 and ended in 70 with the capture of the city and the destruction of the temple. This left the field wide open to Paul's successors to strip Jesus of his national identity and sanitise his revolutionary message and represent him as a saviour god dispensing opiate (*Apocalypse, The Great Jewish Revolt Against Rome, AD 66-73*. Stroud, Tempus, 2002. pp 276-8).

**Robert Morrell**  
Nottingham

IN discussing the historicity of Jesus, I had thought I'd be on pretty safe ground in claiming "When considering the existence of Jesus or anything else, *the burden of proof lies with the one who alleges*". However, Stuart Campbell (*Points of View*, August), disagreed: "Not quite; in an argument the burden of proof lies with those who make unconventional claims". In saying this, Campbell appears to have confused practice with principle.

In practice there's clearly no need to win

over hearts and minds if people already agree with you, and evidence is only required to justify unorthodox claims. In principle however, one should ideally come at a problem with an open mind, justify all assumptions, and then adopt the conclusion that is least contrived. All assumptions should be up for review, regardless of their orthodoxy. Appeal to orthodoxy reduces the risk of people thinking that you are wrong, but that's not the same as reducing the risk of actually being wrong.

One problem with the appeal to orthodoxy is that orthodoxy is in the eye of the audience. The divinity of Jesus is orthodox from a Christian perspective, yet unorthodox (indeed highly blasphemous) from an Islamic one. Mr. Campbell's letter was written to the *Freethinker*, and given the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of the term will likely fall on deaf ears: "Free-thinker - A person who professes to or is known for *independence of thought*, especially one who *withholds assent to widely held beliefs or ideas*".

**Robert Stovold**  
Brighton

## PRINCE CHARLES

DENIS Watkins (August) is right to expose the appalling consequences of monarchy and the existence of a Royal Family.

Giving influence and status to individuals because of their bloodline is crazy, particularly when we simply can't get rid of them easily. Monarchy is an assault on democracy and a constraint on the ambitions of ordinary people to lead.

Fortunately, the answer is at hand: it's called electing our Head of State. We need a republic to enable the able to take the 'top' constitutional position, if they have a mandate from UK voters. We don't need anyone taking the position just because his or her parents did the job.

When the Queen passes on, I would challenge Charles to put his career choice to the popular vote.

**Graeme Kemp**  
Shropshire

## NO PLACE FOR ANIMOSITY

MUCH as I enjoy robust debates, I do think *Freethinker* correspondents should try to limit themselves to rational, fact-based arguments rather than indulge their personal animosities in print.

As far as I can see, Bill McIlroy's letter in the August issue just resorts to the kind of petty mud-slinging that gets atheists a bad name. In my experience, people who resort to such behaviour are unable to admit they have lost the argument.

Personally, I was in favour of the proposed

burqa ban too, until quite recently, but have retreated from this position after reading some of the arguments rehearsed in the pages of this magazine and elsewhere, which have persuaded me otherwise. Let's have more rational argument and fewer personal arguments please.

**Graham Moore**  
Sutton

## JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

THE excellent article on the Jehovah's Witnesses in the August issue of the *Freethinker* mentioned Charles Taze Russell as founder of the sect. Russell was not only a false prophet who lived two years beyond his predicted date for the end of the world, but also a fraud who perpetrated various scams.

He claimed to have discovered a miracle high-yielding type of wheat which he sold for \$65 a bushel from his Brooklyn Tabernacle. Regular wheat retailed at \$1 a bushel. When his scam was exposed by the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Russell sued the paper for \$100,000 and lost.

Another scam was his sponsoring of a "cancer cure". On analysis it turned out to be a caustic paste of chloride of zinc. Not only was the cure useless, it was decidedly harmful and some sufferers may have had their end hastened by its application.

In 1909 Russell's wife Maria sued for divorce, alleging his undue familiarity with the women of his congregation. The divorce was granted and she was awarded a settlement of over \$6,000. To stop her getting the money he transferred his property to the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.

Christianity and Masonry are traditional enemies, yet Russell was a Knights Templar Mason and a Rosicrucian. He thought there were messages from God about the last days in the Great Pyramid at Giza and when he died his tomb was decorated with Masonic symbols.

Russell is hardly known among today's Witnesses and his books are out of print. But the sect carries on his tradition. Vulnerable, poorly educated people are emotionally exploited, members suffer premature death because of the doctrine on blood transfusions, children are made miserable because they are forbidden to celebrate their birthdays and Christmas, apostates are ostracised, verbally abused and threatened with violence. Witnesses are extreme homophobes and deny proven scientific fact.

Russell needs to be exposed for the charlatan he was as part of a greater project of liberating Witnesses from a theocratic tyranny.

**Terry Liddle**  
London



# the freethinker

## EVENTS & CONTACTS

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

### **Birmingham Humanists:**

**w** [www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk](http://www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk). 0845 2015135.

Friends Meeting House, St James's Road, Edgbaston. Tues, Oct 5, 7.45pm. Adrian Bailey: *Scientology: A Humanist Cult?*

### **Brighton & Hove Humanist Society:**

**i** 01273 227549/461404. The Lord Nelson Inn, Trafalgar St, Brighton. Wed, Oct 6, 8pm. Peter Vlachos: *Town Hall Religion – Another Religious Intrusion*.

**w** <http://homepage.nflworld.com/robert.stovold/humanist.html>.

**Bromley Humanists:** Meetings on the second Tuesday of the month, 8 pm, at Friends Meeting House, Ravensbourne Road, Bromley. **i** 01959 574691.

**w** [www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com](http://www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com)

### **Central London Humanist Group:**

**i** Chair: Alan Palmer.

Sec: Josh Kutichinsky. **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 Pintel 01298 815575.

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

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

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

**w** [www.farnham-humanists.org.uk](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.

Sept 8 Andrew Copson: *Objections to Humanism*.

**Hampstead Humanist Society:** **i** N I Barnes, 10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 0HP. Tel: 0207 328 4431 **w** [www.hampstead.humanist.org.uk](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. September 8th: *Bringing up a Family without God*. Speaker: Ann Hunter, Brent councillor and former BBC journalist.

**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.

### **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, Wavcrest, 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. Sept 16, 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@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk) **w** [www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk](http://www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk)

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

**w** [www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk](http://www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk)

### **North Yorkshire Humanist Group:**

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

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

**e** [jdwhite@talk21.com](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 Gwinnell on 01935 473263 or **e** [edward.gwinnell@talktalk.net](mailto:edward.gwinnell@talktalk.net)

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

**e** [library@ethicalsoc.org.uk](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.wmhumanists.co.uk](http://www.wmhumanists.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 or preferably by email to [barry@freethinker.co.uk](mailto:barry@freethinker.co.uk) Notices must be received by the 15th of the month preceding publication.